MIDDLE ENGLISH ALLITERATIVE POETRY AND ITS LITERARY BACKGROUND

Seven Essays

Edited by David Lawton

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Preface

The seven essays that make up this volume are new and were specially commissioned. While not seeking to be comprehensive or quite a collaborative history, the volume is designed to be coherent. Its title is intended accurately to reflect its purpose: which is to bring into focus Middle English alliterative poetry, more sharply than would be possible by any one author, in its several contexts. I have believed that such a volume is necessary ever since I began work in this field as a graduate student in 1971. This is the kind of book I would like to have been able to read then.

I have incurred many debts during the course of devising and editing this book, not least to the contributors who have been generous and patient, and to other scholars whom, had there been space, I should like to have included. I must acknowledge a particular debt to Leslie Rogers for his encouragement and much good advice, and a particular inspiration in the conversation and example of the late Elizabeth Salter. I must also thank the University of Sydney, which helped me find time and means to see this project through. The dedication of this book, however, as befits a common endeavour, is meant to express a common debt.

David Lawton

I

Middle English Alliterative Poetry: An Introduction

DAVID LAWTON

The number of extant Middle English unrhymed alliterative poems is small, and only two, *Piers Plowman* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, survive in more than two manuscripts. Yet the significance of a corpus that contains two of the greatest Middle English poems, *Piers Plowman* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is no smaller than the problems to which it gives rise. This volume is an attempt to consider some of these, which are to a considerable extent problems of context. Is it proper to talk of an 'alliterative revival', a phrase echoing George Saintsbury's judgement that the writing of all alliterative poetry in the fourteenth century was 'a sort of atavistic revival',[1] or of an 'alliterative survival'[2] by some process of continuity of Old English metre spanning nearly three centuries? (I avoid both terms in this essay.) What were the metrical origins, and indeed the social and cultural origins, of the alliterative forms in Middle English? On what multilingual literary background, of sources and other influences less direct but perhaps more important, did the fourteenth century poets draw? What was the nature of their audience and in what circumstances were their poems copied? Was the writing of, and taste for, unrhymed alliterative poems in the fourteenth century a regional or a national phenomenon? What, given prominent shared features of alliterative style (syntactic, lexical and formulaic), constituted different poets' stylistic understanding, and what were the relations of one poet to another? What are the connections between unrhymed and rhymed poetic traditions, to say nothing of prose? Not least, is it critically justifiable to examine Middle English alliterative poetry as a corpus defined by metrical form?[3]

In this introduction I shall chart the ground, beginning with the poems themselves, as a preliminary to the specialist essays that follow. I shall concentrate on the unrhymed alliterative corpus, not its stanzaic counterpart or other rhymed relations, and this only in part for reasons of space. The links between rhymed and unrhymed alliterative poems are close, complex and multiform; but the unrhymed alliterative poems form an isolable group by virtue of their agreement on the *aa/ax* staple pattern[4] and

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by the apparently deliberate choice of their authors, except for the bob-and-wheels of *Gawain*, to exclude rhyme. The enterprise of this volume obviously presupposes that such a grouping for study is worthwhile, so long as it is conceived not as absolute but as a means to a better understanding of Middle English literature generally. Although the unrhymed alliterative poems do not constitute half so monolithic a corpus in style and metrical practice as may appear on first impression, they invite comparison, not just initially, more with one another than with literature in other forms. I believe it possible, critically, to speak of a 'unity of temper' among unrhymed alliterative poems;[5] but many who would dissent from this would still accept that the choice of metre in these poems is a valid reason to examine them as a corpus for the purpose, as in this volume, of literary history. And this of course is not an introspective purpose: the emphasis of this volume is on the relationships of alliterative poems, unrhymed and rhymed, with other forms of writing.

The first problem is undoubtedly how to classify the poems. As with much medieval literature, genre offers no reliable criterion, and there is insufficient evidence for a fully chronological arrangement. I have therefore supplemented a very broad chronological outline with a division in terms of style between the highly ornate, 'formal' style of, mainly, alliterative romances which utilize, within the bounds of any one poet's talent, the extensive resources of ingenious and sometimes archaic diction, and the plainer or 'informal' style of Langland and the poems of the *Piers Plowman* tradition. This useful tool is itself less than exact. Certain poems exhibit features of both formal and informal groups. Even in the *Morte Arthure*, a model of alliterative formality, one does not find only alliterative tours-de-force such as the following sequence:

> *The schafte schoderede and schotte in the schire beryn,*
> *That the schadande blode ouer his schanke rynnys,*
> *And schewede one his schyn bawde, that was schire burneste.*
> *And so they schyfte and schove, he schotte to the erthe.* (3844–7)

One also finds here, in more subdued moments, sequences which, except for the generous use of consecutive alliteration, resemble the poetry of the informal group:

> *But I wille passe in pilgremages þis pas vnto Rome,*
> *To purchese me pardone of the pape selfen*
> *And of paynes of purgatorie be plenerly assoyllede.* (3496–8)

There is a decorum in good alliterative poets' adaptation of style to content: the creation of tone.

The characteristics of formal alliterative poetry did not reach immediate maturity: they are remarkably absent from the first datable unrhymed

poem of the fourteenth century, *William of Palerne*. The poet gives us his name, William, and, uniquely in alliterative poetry, that of his patron Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford and probably the ninth of that name, who succeeded to the title in 1350 and died in 1361. The date itself provides the first context for the efflorescence of Middle English alliterative poetry, that of the general revival of vernacular literature in the second half of the fourteenth century. The work is a translation of the late twelfth-century *Guillaume de Palerne*, a romance distinguished by casting a werwolf in the rôle of the eponymous hero's loyal friend. Both the original and its translation are essays on the theme of *gentilesse*. The poem's structural repetition, doubling and interweaving the motif of return from exile; the numerous and sometimes touching metamorphoses of the characters into animal shapes, and the fine treatment in English of the werwolf's disenchantment: these elements combine in the English with the plain, competent yet diffident alliterative style to leave an abiding image of naivety. Humphrey de Bohun in some qualified sense commissioned the translation (he 'gart þis do make'), not for himself but 'for hem þat knowe no frensche ne neuer vnderston' (5533); yet Derek Pearsall's playful suggestion that it was intended for the 'kitchen staff' is unkind.[6] Neither the thematic courtliness adequately captured in the English translation nor the immensely convoluted plotting supports a view that the English poem was popular by destination; an audience of noble children, ladies or local gentry was perhaps envisaged, and the poem, like many others, may have been composed for recitation on a specific occasion. The dialect of the sole copy (in King's College, Cambridge, MS 13) seems to be West Midland, and Thorlac Turville-Petre has proposed that the translator was an Augustinian canon of Llanthony.[7] Some corroboration comes from the later Shropshire connections of the manuscript, which is of late fourteenth-century date. Yet de Bohun himself lived as an invalid in Essex, and it is not impossible that the alliterative form of the poem has connections with East Midland writing. This may help to explain the bareness of its style and its failure to influence later alliterative romances; but the form and early date of *William of Palerne* present a special conundrum. What can have provoked the poet to choose a rare metre of which, to judge from his performance, he lacked good models?

In my view, the ornate refinement of the formal group may be a somewhat later development, for I question Goilancz's dating of 1352–3 for *Winner and Waster* and I certainly do not accept his judgement that this poem is 'a topical pamphlet . . . on the social and economic problems of the hour'.[8] But this is a controversial matter, and it is not for this reason that I postpone a consideration of this poem; I do so because it falls conveniently into a small group of poems showing affinities with both formal and informal alliterative poetry. It is worth noting here that critics

who do accept Gollancz's dating face the problem that the poem's stylistic sophistication can hardly have sprung *ex nihilo*, and so – since the style of Laȝamon's *Brut* provides a rather remote model – are virtually committed to postulating some antecedent tradition, now lost, of unrhymed alliterative poetry in Middle English. No other poem of formal style presents these real difficulties: none has a strong claim to be as early as *William of Palerne*, and most can be dated in the last three decades of the fourteenth century. It is true that Skeat originally dated *Alexander A* c.1340 and called it 'the oldest example of English alliterative verse unmixed with rhyme since the Conquest', but as his understanding of unrhymed alliterative verse increased over the years of energetic editing, he came to retract this opinion.[9] The fact is that the poet of *Alexander A*, to judge at least from the sole manuscript evidence (the sixteenth century antiquarian Nicholas Grimald's second attempt to copy the poem after the sheer nonsense of his first),[10] is at best thoroughly pedestrian and at worst incompetent.

The formal corpus consists of works on three romance 'matirs', Alexander, Troy and Britain; *The Siege of Jerusalem*; and the poems of BL MS Cotton Nero A x. There are three *Alexander* poems, sometimes labelled *A*, *B* and *C*: *The Gests of Alexander*, *Alexander and Dindimus* and *The Wars of Alexander* respectively. *A* and *B* are generally seen as fragments, almost certainly not by one author and probably not of the same poem. *A* draws material concerning Philip of Macedon's conquests from Orosius, and then proceeds to translate from the I² redaction of the *Historia de Preliis* the portion to do with Alexander's conception and childhood. *B* is inserted, with the ostensible reason in the scribe's (spurious) claim that his French text is defective, into one of the most lavish of fifteenth century English manuscripts (Bodley 264), and dignified with several illuminations. It deals almost exclusively with the correspondence between Alexander and Dindimus, King of the Brahmins, and it shapes the exchange into a debate in which Alexander stands for worldly glory and the Brahmins for austere otherworldliness. The literary form of the debate is imposed by the English author on the rather shapeless I² material, and in accordance with its conventions neither contestant is permitted a decisive victory. Despite the inclusion of a preliminary episode drawn, perhaps significantly, out of order from a later point of the source, the poem has the unity of polemic symmetry. As a literary exercise, it is all but self-sufficient, an extrapolation from the *Historia* which would require for its completion little more than an adequate conclusion. It lacks the bravura of *Alexander C*, but it has both energy and gentle humour. It does little service merely to label one of the most interesting of all Middle English debates a 'fragment'.

If *Alexander B* has been underestimated, *The Wars of Alexander*, which is based on the I³ redaction of the *Historia*, has been the subject of much favourable assessment. The alliterative translator has a most impressive

verbal dexterity and he transmutes the dull Latin of his source into an imaginative, often enthralling account that is further enhanced by his wit and his magical response to both the monstrous and the marvellous. His is a sustained and alive performance. Yet it cannot be said that he has the structural grip of the much less ambitious *B*-poet, or that he imposes on his material more than 'a commonplace tragedy of fortune'.[11] He is, within subtle and perverse limits, a 'grant translateur'; but he is not, on the level of design, a great artist.

A peculiarity of the formal alliterative corpus is that it contains, most unusually, several poems translated from Latin prose sources. The fourth and last of these is the enormous *Destruction of Troy*, a steady and mostly competent translation of Guido's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, one of the most popular Latin works of the later Middle Ages. The very survival of the *Destruction* in a single manuscript is fortunate: we have only the copy made in the sixteenth century as a labour of love by Thomas Chetham of Nuthurst, South Lancashire, steward to the Stanley family.[12] Yet it must have been an important work, as a translation of Guido's (to modern eyes overrated) 'history', and there is reason for thinking that it was an influential one which provided a model for amplification (in structure Guido's – the English poet is content to follow his prestigious source) and diction. For example, N. Jacobs has shown that the topos of seastorms much worked by alliterative poets is derived from Guido either directly or indirectly through the *Destruction*; it is only a misapprehension about the 'accepted chronology' that prevents Jacobs from stating firmly what his evidence indicates, that the *Destruction* is the source of the borrowing for *Patience* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, as it is for Lydgate.[13] For several of the many verbal parallels between *The Destruction of Troy* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and for at least two of the storm parallels there is no source in Guido. In the remaining cases, the *Siege*-poet is consistently closer to the *Destruction* than to Guido, thus establishing himself as the borrower. In the same way, the *Destruction* is demonstrably a model book, and perhaps the single most important source, for the war-language of other formal alliterative poems. The date of the poem is uncertain, but the borrowing from it in *The Siege of Jerusalem* means that it cannot be later than 1390.

The availability of the Latin sources of these four poems, and the fidelity with which the poets follow them, make them the ideal ground to study the process of alliterative verse composition in the detailed execution of style and metre.[14] Such study is made complex by the need to entertain hypotheses advanced, for example, by Hoyt N. Duggan in an essay on the rôle of formulas in the dissemination of *Alexander C*. Duggan, working on an edition, argues that the variants of the two manuscripts are the result of performance variants; that the manuscripts were copied by their oral performers after, not before, they had memorized the text; and further,

that 'the appearance of performers' variants . . . suggests at least the possibility that other highly formulaic alliterative poems . . . are similarly the product of collaboration between the poet, and a line, long or short, of anonymous performer scribes'.[15] But for this gloss on minstrel improvisation to hold up, one would have to show that it alone can explain the observed facts. Duggan, however, does not consider the number of possible other hypotheses: verbal variation; textual contamination; an unknown number of possible other stemmata; or the assumption that the poet made two editions himself, each of which was copied and recopied. Moreover, one would have to explain why larger features, of narrative, characterization and so on, are so little changed between the two manuscripts. One would also have to square up to the question of formulaic 'memory' in a literate context (in quite what circumstances would literate performers take pains to memorize a poem poem of nearly six thousand long lines?), and the weakness of the 'syntactic frame' argument without reference to 'habitual collocations'.[16] As an editorial principle, the proposition that 'the variant that corresponds to a well-attested formula or formula system is more probably original than a reading that fails to fit within the system' is inhospitably self-certifying.[17] A scribe or director with a good grasp of conventional diction may of course depart from 'original' readings; he may in fact improve on them (which is to say that, to modern editors, they look · better). There are many verifiable examples of this in Robert Thornton's copy of the *Siege of Jerusalem*; enough, let it be admitted, to cast a shadow over his copy of the *Morte Arthure*. I have discussed Duggan's article at some length because it illustrates certain dangers inherent in the common view that because an alliterative poem uses formulas and is written with an eye to oral recitation, it is in some sense 'oral-formulaic' in its composition and therefore susceptible to an adapted version of the theories of Parry and Lord. Nor does the model proposed by Joseph J. Duggan for the *Chanson de Roland*[18] adapt any better to this context, which involves word-by-word translation. There is no corpus of Middle English poetry more clerkly, literate and essentially bookish than the alliterative.

In another sense, however, Duggan's essay is exemplary: it presents a detailed model of how he believes one alliterative poem reached its extant form. I suspect that many apparent disagreements about the style and origins of unrhymed alliterative poems would be clarified if those who write on the subject were to offer, as editors coming after Kane and Donaldson will feel bound to do,[19] their account of how the poetry was composed. I venture briefly and tentatively to offer such a model, based in the first place on studies of alliterative poems as translation from Latin prose, on my experience of editing *Joseph of Arimathea*, and on Derek Pearsall's suggestion about the 'Ilchester' manuscript of *Piers Plowman*;[20] and in the second place on an experiment that I would invite the reader to

repeat. I took a paragraph of modern descriptive prose writing and attempted to turn it into four different verse forms: tetrameter and pentameter rhyming couplets (more adept readers might try, for example, tail-rhyme), blank verse and unrhymed alliterative verse. My first draft in the first three cases looked like bad poetry: even where blank spaces testified to my frequent failure to find rhyme words, the very discipline of the chosen metre had embedded a scansion of sorts into the remaining feet. Only in the case of unrhymed alliterative verse did my first draft look like bad prose, occasionally with a good *aa/ax* line but more often defective in alliteration and both loose and variable in rhythm. This may not shed much light on the poems of the *Gawain* manuscript, but I would not disqualify my efforts from comparison with *Joseph of Arimathea*, *Alexander A* or *William of Palerne*. For this, I think, is how these poets proceeded, by means of a first draft into a kind of loosely rhythmical prose which, except for the *Joseph* poet, they then revised until the correct alliterative patterns were achieved, often with considerable syntactic readjustment, addition of conventional diction (some of it shared with poetry in other forms) and rhythmical tightening, sometimes with the addition of whole lines when, say, a key noun refused to accept the quarters assigned; until, that is, the alliteration became – *post hoc* – structural. Such a first draft need not always, at least by an expert, be written out; but the process remains similar. It follows that I do not find invitations to receive the Harley lyrics into the same corpus for study as the unrhymed alliterative poems irresistible; for I do not believe that an unrhymed poetry can develop directly out of a rhymed poetry, though the taste for it surely can, and so can an impetus to write it. In Laȝamon as in *Gawain* the two systems stand apart: I am speaking here not of lexis but of metre. Unrhymed poetry will, however, especially in first draft, be affected by the rhythms of rhymed poetry that one carries among one's unconscious metrical baggage: hence the occasional rhyme in unrhymed poems and the resemblance of some lines to the loose native septenaries or alexandrines found in such works as the *South English Legendary* or *Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle*.[21] The final draft will aspire to full alliteration (not always on the stressed syllables) and at least to the condition of good rhythmical prose; but that is not to say that much more loosely rhythmical prose, with much less alliteration, may not have been a crucial influence on that first draft. It may also follow that the formula becomes a very difficult editorial touchstone. All poetry is in some sense formulaic, in the eighteenth century no less than in the eighth or the fourteenth, as indeed is all language; but I would suggest, tentatively, that some formulas and some tags may sometimes be conveniences introduced to facilitate first draft but intended to be removed in revision. It does seem to me that unrhymed alliterative poetry in Middle English is less densely formulaic than some have claimed; and it

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also seems to me that the deployment of formulas in Middle English is often rhetorical.

Much work remains to be done on questions of style, and its progress will depend largely on future concordances and new editions. A poem in need of re-editing is *The Siege of Jerusalem*, a bloodthirsty account of the victory of Titus and Vespasian over the Jews, composed around 1400 and based on a number of sources: the Latin *Vindicta Salvatoris* and Higden's *Polychronicon*, and the French Bible of Roger d'Argenteuil. This poem is of literary-historical rather than literary-critical value. Not least, it survives in eight manuscripts none of which appears to bear a direct relation to any other; a modern edition would need to scrutinize very carefully the editorial challenge thrown down by George Kane and E. T. Donaldson in their version of the B version of *Piers Plowman*, and to produce a plausible set of hypotheses about the relation between manuscript variants and authorial procedures in diction and syntax.

The remaining poems of the final corpus are of the highest literary value, and are sufficiently well-known not to demand detailed comment here. The *Morte Arthure* is both muscular and reflective, its lexical richness and rhetorical skill quite justifying Pearsall's appreciative comment (p. 163): 'Only again in Shakespeare's time, one would think, was the language so hospitable'. Both the poem's narrative handling and its intellectual content are deeply satisfying. The divergence in critical interpretation of the poem admits and is based upon the poem's ambivalence towards Arthur's heroism in military conquest in the light of its emphasis on prayer and penance and 'vertous lywynge'. Underlying the use of didactic iconography in the poem, in Arthur's dream of Fortune's Wheel and in the motif of the Nine Worthies, is an identification with a kind of poetry that weighs glory against goodness, courtliness against death, the *ubi sunt* topos: 'Uuere beþ þay biforen vs weren?' The religious earnestness of the work adds moral depth to the pseudo-historical narrative derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth or Wace. There also appear to be teasing contemporary allusions in the work, but these have been disencoded in radically conflicting readings[22] and until these are resolved the poem must still be set within a broad period, c.1375–c.1410.

The poems of BL MS Cotton Nero A x offer the richest delights and the most compelling problems. *Pearl*, as a rhymed 'syllabic' poem using heavy alliteration, is most closely related to the lyrics of Harley 2253 and Vernon, and to two alliterated debate poems, the *Debate between the Body and the Soul* from the thirteenth century and the *Disputation between Mary and the Cross* from the first half of the fourteenth. *Pearl* must be classified as, among other things, an alliterative poem, and it demonstrates the intimate links between the unrhymed poetry and other metrical modes. It shares a heavy reliance on, and imaginatively free handling of, the Vulgate with the

two unrhymed homilies of the manuscript, *Patience* and *Cleanness*. Of these, *Patience* is perhaps better defined as a quasi-confession centred on the *exemplum* of Jonah; it is more accessible, less harsh and less memorable than the grander *Cleanness*, in which a virtuoso linguistic performance and freedom with sources paradoxically counterpoint the austere severity of the theme. *Cleanness* lacks neither comedy nor humanity; indeed, its treatment of the Flood comes perilously near to exacting the nobility of doomed man and questioning the extreme revenge of a wrathful God:

> *Luf lokez to luf and his leue takez,*
> *For to ende alle at onez & foreuer twynne.* (401–2)

Yet it contrasts in mood both with the magnificently tender didacticism of *Pearl* and with the wry, philosophic maturity of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Are these four poems, then, the compositions of one author? Most critics have thought so, but one generally meets the statement cast in intuitive terms or in frank appeals to critical convenience.[23] The compilation of these four poems in the same manuscript – in the same dialect, but this may be scribal, or it may be a literary rather than a spoken dialect – may or may not indicate a common author. The kind of literary evidence normally adduced is hardly strong, although of course if one writes criticism with the premise of a common author one will end with critical insights that seem to justify it. Parallels of phraseology are inconclusive: the use of this kind of evidence, not underwritten by any known literary source, would turn the '*Gawain*-poet' into another Huchown of the Awle Ryale, especially when it has to do with commonplaces such as pearl-imagery.[24] Attempts to name the poet by means of cryptograms have predictably foundered under their own ingenuity. The most detailed work on the language of the collection is that done by J. W. Clark and Göran Kjellmer,[25] both of whom express scepticism about common authorship. The debate on common authorship in the poems of Cotton Nero A x arrives not at a conclusion but at a series of cruces, of style, language and treatment of theme, which sum up the whole problem of the nature of Middle English alliterative poetry; and that is why for the moment the debate should be kept open.

The informal corpus is easier to delineate, since it consists of a *Piers Plowman* tradition. I have dealt elsewhere with aspects of this tradition and the Lollard affiliations of at least one of its members, *Piers the Plowman's Creed*.[26] The two fragments, *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*, which may or may not be part of the one poem, remind one of Gower's *Chronica Tripertita* and *Vox Clamantis* respectively; the former dealing with the downfall of Richard II and the latter a spirited attempt to identify the evils of contemporary society. The last member of this group is the bland and mercifully brief *Crowned King*, in which *speculum regale*

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barely rises into sense through unintelligent Langlandian pastiche. It is no surprise that *Piers Plowman* should have spawned such diverse yet essentially unrepresentative offspring, all of which fail to transmit the transcendental concerns of their model.

For *Piers Plowman* is a maverick masterpiece which creates its own unique genre out of the very compendiousness, negatively of its satire and positively of its concerns: for salvation through penance, for social and ecclesiastical regeneration, and for a defensible Christian vernacular poetry. It is the only alliterative poem that seems to have gained nationwide popularity, being extant in over fifty manuscripts, and part of that popularity may be to do with the fact that Langland's orthodoxy of content appears hard-won. His poem is, as it were, heterodox in manner. From its dreamland which, in a deceptively modern idiom, stands at the intersection of the representational and the abstract, it seems to speak to, and to grapple with, popular misconceptions or what might even be called peasant beliefs (such as the question of salvation through poverty, the apostolic life and the interest in justification by faith); these transplanted with a temper both antifraternal and anticlerical into an urban context of apocalyptic dread. In his ambition to write at once a great vernacular poem and a spiritual masterpiece, Langland is the closest English analogy to Dante, but a Dante more homely, less ethereal and more urgent, whose natural landscape is purgatory. There is space for little more comment here, except to add that the question of Langland's authorship of all three versions, particularly C, looks more settled than in the past but is still not absolutely determined.

Piers Plowman is greater as an example than as a model. Since the A text was composed in the 1360s, and B in the 1370s, both are of sufficiently early date to influence much formal alliterative poetry, not least in the moral grandeur of their concerns. Certain poems, *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, *Death and Life* and *St Erkenwald*, overtly show that influence. The *Parliament*, as Gollancz noted, resembles a pastiche of late fourteenth century alliterative poetry, both formal and informal;[27] and there is little doubt that it is to be dated c.1390–1400. But for all its near-quotation from other works, it is also a fine poem in its own right, with the same *ubi sunt* theme as the *Morte Arthure* grafted onto a debate structure in which Youth speaks with the style of the formal poems and Old Age in the stern style of Langlandian homily:

> Whare es now Dame Dido was qwene of Cartage?
> Dame Cand[ac]e the comly was called quene of Babyloyne?
> Penelopie that was price and pas[sed] alle othere,
> And Dame Gaynore the gaye, nowe grauen are thay bothen;
> And othere moo than I may mene, or any man elles. (626–30)

A hunting frame, indebted to Fitt III of *Sir Gawain*, reinforces the poem's

moral in its dramatic reversal: the carefree huntsman of the opening, who has brought death to a deer, realizes in the poem's sombre dusk the implications of his own mortality. The poem survives in two manuscripts, the better of which is the British Library's Thornton manuscript, Additional 31042, where it stands next to the sole extant copy of *Winner and Waster*. This is also a debate, on the morality of economic and social practices, set in a landscape that is courtly, military and identifiably English. The date, as I said above, is a matter of dispute; I have argued that the commonly accepted relation between *Winner and Waster* and *Piers Plowman* should be reversed, as in the last generation was that between *Piers Plowman* and the *Parliament*, and that *Winner and Waster* is a poem influenced directly by the *Piers Plowman* A-text in its literary topography and in the issues it raises.[28] Be this as it may, the poem is a sophisticated blend of the two major styles of alliterative poetry, with an attractive presentation of social, political and ethical questions which, however, it resolves inconclusively.

Death and Life, surviving only in the seventeenth century Percy Folio manuscript, is also a debate, inspired by *Piers Plowman* B xx, drawing upon material from Alain de Lille of a kind much commended in rhetorical handbooks, and effectively linking its spiritual combat with an excellent narrative cast in courtly and formal style. The most unusual of all formal poems showing a debt to *Piers Plowman* is *St Erkenwald*, a short poem (352 lines) of such brilliance that it too was once ascribed to the '*Gawain*-poet' (both poem and manuscript, Harley 2250, have Lancashire and Cheshire connections).[29] Set in Anglo-Saxon London amid the original building of St Paul's Cathedral on the site of a pagan 'synagogue', it tells of the discovery of the corpse of a righteous pagan judge, miraculously uncorrupt, who is redeemed by the compassionate intervention of Bishop Erkenwald. The poem appears to take up Langland's treatment of the salvation of the righteous heathen in the Trajan episode (B XI, 140) and implicitly corrects it: the judge, unlike Trajan, is saved not primarily by his own excellence but by clerical intercession. The poem's quality can be gauged from its unmannered treatment of theme; what could easily have been no more than macabre is made indelibly poignant.

There are only two later unrhymed and fully alliterative poems outside the traditions already described: Dunbar's *Tretis of the Twa Meriit Wemen and the Wedo*, which self-consciously pits the courtliness of alliterative formality against the gross lewdness of his ladies in an exercise, a little like Auden's experiments this century with alliterative metre, both whimsical and faintly archaising; and *Scottish Field*, written by a member of the Cheshire Leigh family to celebrate the Stanleys' victory at Flodden in 1513, and a testimony to the regional survival of alliterative poetry in sixteenth century Lancashire and Cheshire. This poem survives, like *Death and Life*, only in the Percy Folio (BL Additional 27879), a manuscript with several Stanley connections.[30]

Only two other longer works make a bid for inclusion into the corpus of Middle English unrhymed alliterative poetry, *Joseph of Arimathea* (Vernon manuscript) and *Chevalere Assigne*, both of which, while unrhymed, lack consistent alliteration and do not exhibit the *aa/ax* staple pattern. *Joseph* is a completed redaction from the Vulgate *Estoire del Saint Graal*, structurally defined by a brief passage in the slightly later *Queste*; it makes no mention of Joseph as protevangelist of Britain, and it seems to owe its place in Vernon to an interest in *merveilles* and to Marian devotion. *Chevalere Assigne* narrates a version of the story of the Swan knight from an immediate source in the Godfrey de Bouillon cycle; like *Joseph*, it emphasizes the sensational and providentially marvellous, and like *William of Palerne* it deals with metamorphosis and the return from unjustly plotted exile of royal children. Both have been pressed into service to demonstrate the existence of looser and older traditions of alliterative verse composition, but the date of both is probably of the late fourteenth century and the status of neither is really ambiguous: in all probability both were intended by their authors to be *aa/ax* alliterative poems. In my edition of *Joseph* I have argued that it is 'a half-alliterated poem, a first draft of an alliterative poem in the process of being written, awaiting revision and final embellishment' (p. xxii). The sole surviving copy of *Chevalere Assigne* is in British Library MS Cotton Caligula A ii, of the second half of the fifteenth century and SE Midland provenance. The scribe of this manuscript is interested in the content of alliterative poems but not at all in their metre: in his text of *The Siege of Jerusalem* he destroys alliteration so completely and frequently, by omission and lexical substitution, that if only his copy of this poem had survived its form would look very like that of the extant text of *Chevalere Assigne*.

This completes a review of the unrhymed corpus.[31] A sketch of the rhymed thirteen-line stanza alliterative poems would be more complex: as well as a group of late fourteenth century poems derived from the unrhymed corpus (*Summer Sunday*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*),[32] there are Scots poems of the fifteenth century (*Golagrus and Gawain* – which shows some influence from *The Awntyrs off Arthure* – *Rauf Coilʒear* and *The Buke of the Howlat*), and other English poems of the fourteenth century, probably earlier in date than the group to which *Summer Sunday* belongs, which appear unrelated to unrhymed alliterative poetry of the formal group (*Susannah*, *The Quatrefoil of Love*), and which are related to one or two heavily alliterated poems, particularly *The Disputation between Mary and the Cross*. This last poem probably antedates all surviving Middle English unrhymed alliterative poems and is itself indebted to *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*. Both of these were perhaps known to the poet of *Pearl*, as were some of the earlier Vernon lyrics; the *Debate*, the *Disputation* and *Susannah* all appear in Vernon. It may be that valuable evidence has here been neglected: the latter group of poems seems

to have East Midland, not West Midland, affinities, and may reveal that a mainly East Midland tradition remained to some extent separate from the unrhymed movement, thus explaining the otherwise problematic use of an alliterative thirteen-line stanza in the drama, for example in the York plays and in *The Castell of Perseverance*. It is the rhymed tradition, now affected by unrhymed works, that appears to have travelled far northwards after 1400. Dunbar's *Tretis* is the only sign, and it is at best equivocal, that Scots poets were much interested in unrhymed composition.

The history of alliterative poetry in fifteenth century England is hard to write: the evidence is enigmatic, but it seems to point to a distinction that must be made between the history of its composition and that of its reception. On the one hand, the majority of extant manuscripts containing Middle English alliterative poetry in rhymed or unrhymed form are of fifteenth century date and of diverse regional provenance. From these manuscripts, we should scarcely be tempted to characterize the writing of unrhymed alliterative poems as a West Midland phenomenon; other regions supply more copies, not least the South East. It seems that many compilers of fifteenth century manuscripts in many places found alliterative poems acceptable, without in most cases (with exceptions like Robert Thornton) a particular interest in their metre. More close study of individual manuscripts is required before we can assess confidently the nature of the interest that such compilers took in the alliterative poems they copied or caused to be copied, and our conclusions are unlikely to be uniform. But this is a topic best left to Dr Doyle. On the other hand, it would appear that by the beginning of the fifteenth century the greatest of the unrhymed alliterative poems had been written; and by the end of the century there are no indications of continuing composition outside the Lancashire and Cheshire area that produced *Scottish Field*.[33] A preliminary judgement on the basis of tenuous evidence would be that during the fifteenth century there were readers willing to read poetry in this form but very few poets willing to write it. A possible corollary is that these poems were being copied at this time in areas from which, on the whole, they did not originate; and it is here that the low survival rate of manuscripts from the North-West of England may be significant.

The apparent collapse of writing in the alliterative form in fifteenth century England is surprising given the artistic accomplishment of alliterative works in the second half of the fourteenth century. We should look for an explanation, but it is barely possible to supply one. I have wondered whether Chaucer's influence was heavily detrimental to the taste for alliterative poetry. His Parson, after all, is 'a Southren man' who 'kan nat geeste "rum, ram, ruf" by lettre'; but when this is read in context we find only that a fictional character rejects some or all styles of rhymed verse and all alliterative writing in order to preach his prose manual.[34] Passages

in the *Knight's Tale* and the *Legend of Good Women* establish that Chaucer was aware of some alliterative lexis and *topoi*, but they are isolated instances not incompatible in style with some rhymed romances. Clearly, however, Chaucer was not interested in writing alliterative poetry, and where he led most of his successors at least tried to follow. Caxton, for example, printed no alliterative poetry and excised much alliterative vocabulary from Malory's Book V, direct from the *Morte Arthure*.[35] Yet there is conflicting evidence in de Worde's printing of the *Quatrefoil of Love* or in the high incidence and amount of alliteration in some 'Chaucerian' poetry of the fifteenth century which is rhetorically and metrically somewhat at odds with Chaucer's precedent, though both these examples indicate the persistence of rhymed rather than unrhymed alliterative habits. There is also some evidence of a genuine 'alliterative revival' among some sixteenth century poets, seen in some poems in Tottel's Miscellany, and in the Blage manuscript, which 'contains the sort of poem that Wyatt and his friends composed and enjoyed',[36] among them a late alliterative poem (to be dated not earlier than the late fifteenth century) of possible Southern provenance. The discovery of this poem is interesting in relation to Wyatt's own prosody, which shows signs of an older, accentual system. It is also conceivable, according to Luttrell, that Spenser may have read all or some of the poems of Cotton Nero A x while on a visit to the NW Mersey area.

In fact, there are no sure means of assessing the popularity attained by unrhymed alliterative verse in the second half of the fourteenth century. The count of surviving manuscripts is fallible – very few alliterative poems exist in more than one or two manuscripts, and of the sum of these manuscripts very few are of a fourteenth century date. We cannot be sure that the taste for unrhymed alliterative verse, except for *Piers Plowman*, was not always a mainly local or regional phenomenon, in composition and in appeal. *St Erkenwald* is set in London, and reveals considerable knowledge of the city. This may indicate only that, say, a Lancastrian audience would have been familiar with London, and it does not establish that a London audience would have wanted to read *St Erkenwald*. Yet a Lancastrian audience might, in part, have been a London audience. Another scrap of favourable evidence lies in the copying of *Alexander B* in Bodley 264, a sumptuous manuscript with verifiable London connections. There is, however, as yet little reliable evidence for identifying fourteenth century patrons or audiences, and little alternative to historical speculation of more or less plausible orders.[37] Uncertainty about milieu grows out of uncertainty in other fields. For example, very few alliterative texts may safely be localized; and if a poet is, on the one hand, fashioning a complex style to extend the literary language of his day, or, on the other, if he is taking great care to write within the framework of an established style with conventional diction, in either case his scribes may have been baffled and

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modern dialectal tests, however subtle, are likely to fail.

The need for the present volume arises out of these problems and uncertainties. Its aim is to provide a more complete perspective for understanding the efflorescence of alliterative poetry in the second half of the fourteenth century. For the place of alliterative poetry in the literary culture of medieval England has never been investigated systematically, probably because it would require a panel of collaborating scholars, as here, to do it. The areas of inquiry singled out in the last paragraph relate to three essays: A. I. Doyle's examination of the manuscripts containing Middle English alliterative verse, Anne Middleton's model critical attempt to depict the public of *Piers Plowman*, and Derek Pearsall's sketch of the historical and cultural milieu from which alliterative writing grew in the fourteenth century. The second essay, by Angus McIntosh, deals with early Middle English alliterative verse in the context of versification and its relation to alliterative prose. The essays by McIntosh and Pearsall together form an unusual and complete survey of the origins of Middle English alliterative poetry, metrical, social and literary; and they represent well the complexity of the situation. The other two essays, by W. R. J. Barron and Rosalind Field, are much-needed discussions respectively of the French and Anglo-Norman backgrounds (sources, influences and literary relations) to Middle English alliterative poetry. I have not sought to direct the judgement of contributors. There would be something wrong with a collaborative work on this subject which failed to articulate disagreements, and what small overlap I have let stand among essays serves just this purpose.

A deliberate omission in the volume is a separate treatment of the medieval Latin background to Middle English alliterative poetry. One reason for this is that such a study would have to include detailed examination of an entire educational syllabus: given alliterative poets' most striking shared habit of style, for example, we should be mindful that the teaching of grammar even on a fairly rudimentary level in schools placed great stress on competence with synonyms. It is also worth noting, in view of the strange Latin style of Rolle and the curious Middle English alliterative work, *The ABC of Aristotle*, that the use of alliteration in grammatical treatises tends to be abecedary:

> *Bello, belligero, bombizo, bauloque, balo,*
> *Et barbarizo, boo, bito, buccino, bunso,*
> *Cum notat inclino datur activum tibi ballo*
> *Pro vacillare neutri generis valet esse,*
> *Bombino cum blatero, bombicino, bombilo iungo,*

Brumeo consocies et bruteo, balbeo iunges,
Bilbo cum bibere potes istis consociare,
Barrio, balbutio cum bilbio, billio iungo.[38]

This kind of work, however, is better pursued at some length in a more general context. Another reason for the omission is that I have already pointed to the relevant major Latin sources in this introduction, and dealt elsewhere with their handling in the Alexander poems and *The Destruction of Troy*. The only other major work requiring mention is the ubiquitous *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth; for this triggers a thirteenth century vernacular tradition of unrhymed rhythmical (but not, initially, alliterative) prophecy which attains a literary place in *Piers Plowman* and is one of many minor antecedents of Middle English alliterative poetry.[39]

I have also raised elsewhere the quite different question of Latin influence on the form of Middle English alliterative poetry, in the rhythmical formalization of the *ars dictaminis* and the *ars rithmica*.[40] There exist, at either end of the high period of *aa/ax* unrhymed poetry, works which are not apparently poetic in intention or structure, which are sometimes written in manuscript in prose format and punctuated in such a way as to enhance their rhythmical structure: Gaytryge's Sermon of 1357 and Friar Daw's Reply to Jack Upland from the early fifteenth century. Gaytryge's Sermon was in all probability known to Langland and furnishes an excellent model of rhythmical formalization in something very close to a four-stress line; a model indistinct, in fact, from the unalliterated Ophni and Phineas passage in the C-text Prologue. This is a matter that affects consideration of form and origins, and I have not desired to trespass on the essays of two other contributors. I would only restate my view that the style of Gaytryge's Sermon, which is in structure a letter to parish clergy, is constructed of *cursus* patterns and is derived from the *ars dictaminis*, the Latin art of epistolary rhetoric. Much the same, I think, can be said of Friar Daw's open letter to Upland, which is not on any conscious level a poem and applies alliteration only inconsistently. The manuscript's colophon to the Reply is at least highly suggestive: 'Explicit *dictamen* Fratris Daw Topias . . . contra questiones Iohannis Vplond'.[41] Therefore there seems to be some evidence for a vernacular tradition of rhythmical composition adapting the style of the *ars dictaminis*, which antedates the period of *aa/ax* composition and continues more or less imperviously throughout it. If it is plausible to believe that clerkly alliterative writers supplemented native ingenuity and traditions with some recourse to Latin models, they would have encountered no shortage of dictaminal treatises in England. Some of these, such as the numerous condensed versions of Guido Faba, or perhaps even more important, the much abbreviated dictaminal digests such as that

in Cotton Cleopatra B vi, would have been convenient places for them to find, in briefer compass than the rhetorical handbooks, extensive listing of rhetorical figures together with precepts and Latin models for rhythmical formalization.[42]

A wider and looser source of influence may have been the *ars rithmica*, which stressed the need for sentence-skill, ornamentation, careful balance and rhythmical formalization without prescribing the *cursus*.[43] The interaction between the vernacular genius for alliteration and rhythmical Latin models may have begun with Ælfric and Wulfstan, and appears perhaps in such late Old English works as *The Description of Durham*, which is described in the manuscript rubric as '*carmen compositum*'.[44] '*Carmen*' in medieval Latin means anything from 'song' to 'rhapsody', a carefully wrought composition that may be verse, prose, or specifically neither. The past participle, *compositum*, has a close affinity with the noun *compositio*, which is a usual term for prose rhythm. Its closest Middle English translation is the word 'cadence', prominent for example in *A Talking of the Love of God* and frequently associated with 'colours'[45] (a translation of '*colores*', by which, for Matthew of Vendôme, *elegantia* is achieved).[46] Chaucer alludes precisely to a rhetorically conceived *dictamen* ('Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write') when he has the Host press the Clerk to abandon his terms, figures and 'colours'.[47] There is some apparent overlap, then, between the two *artes*, but it is better to try to keep them distinct in considering their possible effect on Middle English traditions. When John of Garland speaks of *ars rithmica*, the prime association of *rithmus* is with the verse of the hymns as opposed to *metrum*, quantitative verse; in other words, *rithmus* is implicitly an accentual art, and so of some relevance to alliterative authors.[48] It may, depending on the predilections and response of an English author to Latin antecedents, emphasize alliteration or rhyme or both: one would like to see a careful study of differences between the *Wooing*-group and *A Talking of the Love of God* to discover whether they are to some extent explicable in these terms. The influence of the *ars rithmica* on Middle English literature should not be discounted, and its major manifestations, of course, are in the vernacular homilies of literate (that is, Latinate) churchmen.

This influence comes into sharp focus for students of Middle English alliterative traditions when considering the styles of Richard Rolle. Rolle wrote in Latin before he wrote in English, and his Latin is more sustainedly and intricately alliterative than his own English work or anyone else's Latin:

O paruulorum pater, qui punis potentes,
Pactum pepigi properare pacifice
Ad panem paradisi.

> *Tu pastum pretende, ne peream pergendo.*
> *Porta pingatur, ut pareat perpure,*
> *Quia puto quod paries pie perdurabit.*

I have reproduced these lines from the *Carmen Prosaicum* as they appear in the edition by Gabriel M. Liegey, who states that Rolle's Latin is 'arranged in a verse pattern which I believe is modelled upon English rather than Latin habits of versification'. He further specifies, after noting parallels with Aldhelm and John of Hoveden, that Rolle's 'verse pattern' is an adaptation of 'the rhythm of Middle English alliterative verse'.⁴⁹ The trouble with this, apart from its presumption of lost alliterative poetry (Rolle died in 1349), is that the *Carmen*, a later medieval edition of key extracts from the *Melos Amoris*, is not verse of any kind but a rhapsodic and extravagantly rhetorical prose composition, avoiding rhyme, that belongs to the category of *sermo solutus* and binds by alliteration two or more two-stress (or sometimes three-stress) phrases. This practice is carried over into Rolle's English compositions, which mix fairly plain prose with large tracts of rhyme and a more formal, cadenced alliterative style. Although Rolle's rhymed passages are best seen as verse for modern editorial purposes, the irregularity of stanzaic pattern and arrangement, of rhyme-pattern and of line-length shown in Allen's edition display a marked resemblance to the rhymed cadence of *A Talking of the Love of God*. Rolle manuscripts do not support the clear-cut distinction between verse and prose made in modern editions: in the *Ego Dormio*, for instance, all the passages edited by Allen as poetry are written by the scribe of her base manuscript (Cambridge University Library Dd 5. 64, iii) in prose format, though the punctuation (as again in *A Talking*) consistently marks the rhyme. The manuscript distinguishes between these rhapsodic utterances and the lyric 'Unkynde mon, ʒif kepe to me' (*Index* 3826), which is copied in verse format; the same lyric receives the same treatment in the Simeon manuscript (f. 146ᵛ) from the same scribe who sets down rhymed passages in *A Talking* in prose format. Two points emerge from this: the first, a scribal recognition of this kind of mixed rhythmic composition as *sui generis*; the second, a fascinating and almost inextricable authorial interweaving of native and Latin elements in rhythmic composition.

Alliteration was imported into the high style of medieval Latin from Irish monasteries during the dark ages, but the extraordinary degree to which the device is utilized in the Latin writings of Rolle and other English authors surely has the force of a patriotic gesture. At the same time Rolle learns from Latin models, as well as from earlier English imitations of Latin models, the pot-pourri of forms and devices that is the *ars rithmica*. It is an immensely fruitful cross-fertilization well beyond our academic

powers to uproot; and it carries the seed of something very like alliterative verse composition:

104 Alle perisches and passes þat we with eghe see,
     It wanes into wrechednes, þe welth of þis worlde.
106 Robes and ritches rotes in dike,
     Prowde payntyng slakes into sorow,
108 Delites and drewryse stynk sal ful sone,
     Pair golde and þaire tresoure drawes þam til dede.
110 Al þe wikked of þis worlde drawes til a dale,
     Pat þai mai se þare sorowyng, whare waa es ever stabel.
112 Bot he may syng of solace, þat lufes Jhesu Criste.
     Pe wretchesse fra wele falles into hell.

Again I have reproduced these lines from the *Ego Dormio* as they appear in the standard edition;[30] and again, the verse form imposed by the editor is not entirely corroborated by the prose format of the manuscript (Dd 5. 64, iii, f. 24ᵛ). The lines are generally seen as a fragment of unrhymed alliterative verse quoted, not composed, by Rolle. Yet of the ten long lines in Allen's edition, one (105) scans *aa/aa* and a second (106) *aa/ax*. The two halves of 111 may link on *se, sorowyng* and *stabel*, but the link with *stabel* appears fortuitous, and in any case the line as it stands reads more like a septenary (and lines 110 and 112 like Alexandrines) than an alliterative verse line. Line 113 hints at a medial rhyme. The six remaining lines fall into alliteratively unconnected two stress phrases. Even with the striking syntactic inversions of 104, 105 and 112, there is less than conclusive evidence here of the interpolation of an alliterative verse fragment. The passage may not be original, but it arises nevertheless, I think, from the interaction of native modes and the linguistic and rhythmical heightening of the *ars rithmica*. What is needed now to further research in this interesting direction is not an essay in this volume by a specialist in Middle English literature but an exhaustive general study by a medieval Latinist of the dictaminal and rhythmic arts in medieval England.

II

Early Middle English Alliterative Verse

ANGUS McINTOSH

i

A study of the alliterative verse of the Early Middle English period presents difficult initial problems of terminology and taxonomy and the failure to face them is in part responsible for the serious lack of agreement even about what the term 'alliterative verse' may properly be held to cover in and around the period under consideration. When we study what has come down to us from the Old English period, it is natural that we should be specially preoccupied with the formal characteristics of that large body of 'classical'[1] verse which, though of course not entirely without variation and modification, is the vehicle for by far the most Anglo-Saxon poetry that has survived. But towards the end of the Old English period we begin to encounter much evidence for the currency of various prosodic conventions that differ in important ways from those followed in any of the classical verse. It is here that our taxonomic problems become really severe and we have much too readily accepted a terminological framework which is ill-suited to the handling of the complex of material that we encounter in that long period between the late tenth century and the end of the thirteenth.

To begin with, the phrase 'alliterative verse', though it appears in the title of this paper, is itself unsatisfactory because it has long shown itself to be open to far too wide a range of interpretations. Besides, it tends, misleadingly, to accord to the term 'alliterative' the status of somehow seeming to define rhythmical characteristics that are in many respects quite independent of alliteration. Thus Laȝamon and the authors of the *Proverbs of Alfred* and the *Bestiary* feel entirely free to link pairs of 'half lines' solely by means of rhyme instead of alliteration. Yet such lines, though they are not totally unaffected prosodically by constraints which the use of rhymes imposes, have very much the same rhythmical texture as those in which the alternative more traditional and time-honoured 'native' device of alliteration is used. So if we say (as we habitually do) of the *Brut*

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as a whole that it is composed in alliterative verse, it should be (as it frequently is not) with the fullest awareness that this verse is in part exemplified or represented by thousands of lines which, quite intentionally and 'legitimately', altogether lack alliteration. In contrary fashion, much verse survives, especially from the fourteenth century and after, in which alliteration is a frequent and indeed quite often an evidently obligatory ingredient,[2] but which is not 'alliterative verse' at all in any generally accepted sense of that term and belongs rhythmically to that quite different mode with which we would associate the *Owl and the Nightingale* or *Havelok*. Early examples of alliteration in such verse may conveniently be examined in Carleton Brown's *English Lyrics of the XIII Century*.[3] One has the impression, however, that alliteration becomes a much stronger ingredient in verse of this kind written after 1300 than before.[4] The way it is used in such verse differs of course from its use in verse of the traditional alliterating kind. But it is of some interest that its apparent resurgence in rhyming verse in the early fourteenth century would seem to precede (and hence perhaps have had something to do with) the revival of alliterative verse proper, for which there is little evidence before the second half of that century.

A second terminological difficulty is this: even a casual study of the early (as of the late) Middle English period makes one aware of the existence of numerous works the rhythmical structures of which are, in one way or another, highly organized. For the most part it is possible to assign these structures to one of the two rhythmical modes just mentioned. The all too common habit of labelling the first mode (that of the *Brut* for example) 'accentual' and the second (that of say *Havelok*) 'syllabic' is seriously confusing. The use of the term 'accentual' for the first serves little purpose because in *both* modes the number and position of accented syllables are of prime functional importance. 'Syllabic' as applied to the second is of equally dubious value unless it self-evidently implies (which it scarcely does) the regular use in this mode, unlike the other, of feet whose accented syllables are normally separated by a fixed number of less highly accented syllables. The two terms, in other words, like 'alliterative' as discussed earlier, have very weak entitlement to use for the designation of defining characteristics.

Clarification of this labelling problem is important because there has been so much confusion about it and, since I know of no current terms which are perfectly suited to the needs in question, I venture to propose two new terms which might help to eliminate the confusion. Following what I have already said, I shall use *heteromorphic* to designate rhythmical material in which the basic 'foot' units have a number of different forms (in a manner brought out for Old English by the various classifications from Sievers onwards) and in which it is usual for these to succeed one another

in no fixed order. *Homomorphic* will designate material where there is only one basic foot-unit and in which (apart from reasonably well defined minor deviations) lines and larger entities are made up of a continuous succession of examples of this unit. I suggest in the Appendix a procedure for setting down the main rhythmical characteristics of verse in each of these modes.

A third difficulty has to do with our often slack use of the word 'verse' and the vague ways in which we tend to employ the terms 'poetry' (and 'poem') and 'prose' (and 'piece of prose'). It is evident that we feel free to oppose the term 'prose' both to 'poetry' and to 'verse'. Yet while we recognize that not all work in verse is poetry we are by no means always clear whether this implies that such work must therefore be prose or even perhaps something that is neither poetry nor prose.[5] In considering the material relevant to this paper it soon becomes evident that we must attach some significance to various kinds of similarity between the rhythmical structure (and in some cases other formal characteristics) of certain pieces some of which are normally regarded as poems and others normally regarded as prose. In just this way, for example, we must later consider some of Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints* (e.g. his *St Edmund*) side by side with Laʒamon's *Brut*. For from the point of view of such formal characteristics as rhythm, the *Brut* is closer to *St Edmund* than to *Maldon*. Yet *St Edmund*, in whatever form it may be presented typographically, is not normally regarded as a poem at all. So any study of such affinities as these must be prepared to straddle without hesitation the boundary implied, however imprecisely, by the terms 'poem' and 'prose work'.

If we deny to Ælfric's *St Edmund* the status of 'poem', we obviously cannot deny to it certain formal attributes that we would expect to find more commonly in poems than in prose and which we might be tempted to label as verse-like in character. But we may, I think, be wise to eschew for the most part the use of the term 'verse' in contexts like this present one; it will serve my purposes better to use the term 'metrical system' to describe those formal characteristics of a work which give it this verse-like character. One part of the metrical system of the work will be its 'rhythmical system'; the broader term will embrace such further possible attributes as alliteration and rhyme and assonance, stanzaic pattern and so forth. In this paper we shall be concerned in the main with works which, whatever other metrical properties they manifest, have quite highly organized rhythmical systems. But we should recognize that the term 'rhythmical structure' would in no way be out of place in a study of 'everyday' prose even though in such prose the structuring might well be much less highly organized and constrained. As for metrical structure, however, the more 'everyday' the prose, the less relevance would this broader term have to the description of it. The possession of metrical structure therefore implies the presence of a

range of formal characteristics of a rather special kind. To possess them, material need not perhaps be verse, but the more marked their presence the more we should probably be tempted to describe it as verse-like.

These introductory remarks have been devoted to some matters fundamental to the treatment of the subject of this paper. In pursuing it, we shall be drawn into a consideration of the interrelationship between the rhythmical, and in some cases, the entire metrical, structures of both prose works and poems. We shall also have to note the special importance of the co-existence of alliterative and rhyme schemes of various kinds both in works where the two devices are kept firmly apart and where they have formed a pact of alliance within one and the same metrical system. In what we have to say about the different rhythmical systems available for use, it will be necessary to touch upon the significance of the heteromorphic and homomorphic modes in their various forms and the consequences of their quite long history of co-existence and interaction.[6]

ii

The title of this paper should be taken to imply a primary preoccupation with works which, in some clearly systematic way of one kind or another, both observe alliterating conventions and manifest those distinctive rhythmical characteristics which set them off on the one hand from examples of 'ordinary prose' and on the other from examples of rhythmical systems of the homomorphic kind. These latter usually stand out by being committed in some fashion to the use of rhyme as the main device, sometimes to the total exclusion of alliteration, for welding smaller metrical units of various dimensions into larger ones; they become more and more common as the Middle English period advances.

As we have noted, there also survives a good deal of verse in this mode in which alliteration continues to be integral to the formal metrical structure. In general, thirteenth and fourteenth century examples of material of this kind have not received from students of 'fully' alliterative verse the attention they deserve, partly perhaps because of a nostalgic feeling that they have departed deplorably from the true principles of a venerable native tradition; for no doubt similar reasons one can detect here and there a certain sentimental regret at Laȝamon's partial desertion of alliteration and hints of an implication that *Patience* or the *Siege of Jerusalem*, like old-fashioned tea roses, are more unreservedly to be admired.

Another reason for the comparative neglect of the kind of verse in question may be that it has not seemed to throw light in any obvious and direct way on the genesis of the allegedly more traditional 'fully' alliterative verse of the revival period. This is much to be regretted on two counts. First,

verse of this 'hybrid' kind exists in sufficient quantity from dates prior to that period to supplement valuably – as I have already suggested – our scanty knowledge of almost all aspects of the history of the alliterative tradition over a large part of the early Middle English era. Secondly, this relative neglect has produced a general underevaluation of the extent to which, in Middle English times, the alliterative tradition proper left important and interesting metrical marks on much subsequent verse whose purely rhythmical characteristics are in the main of the homomorphic type.

We must now return to a consideration of various works which observe rhythmical conventions of the heteromorphic type, the kind that are characteristic of alliterative verse proper but are to be found in texts where alliteration plays no structural part at all. Most important of all is the inheritance in the Early Middle English period of various forms of a rhythmical system consisting of the stringing together of successive phrases each having a two-stress or (a good deal more rarely) a three-stress structure. One such form provided the framework of what in the metrics of Old English classical verse are called 'half-lines'. But phrase-units of a rather similar kind had a wider currency; they are employed for example by Wulfstan with striking regularity. In his prose there is no formal welding by alliteration or otherwise of pairs of these units into a larger entity and there is little to suggest that his rhythmical conventions derive from those of classical Old English verse. Besides, there are few signs in his work of any familiarity with the special lexical and grammatical characteristics of that verse. It is more probable that he developed his own strictly controlled rhythmical conventions from what he found in the already stylized prose of some of the earlier laws and in some of the homiletic literature. In his work, as in its antecedents, the rhythmical characteristics we encounter would seem to derive easily and simply from patterns natural to the ordinary spoken language but of course with severe restrictions as to which patterns were rhythmically legitimate. It is not unreasonable to connect the development of this style with the special demands of oratory and declamation. At least one tradition of early Middle English prose displays quite similar characteristics;[7] if it does not descend (rhythmically speaking) specifically from Wulfstan, it must derive from similar and perhaps mainly homiletic material in the same native tradition to which his own rhythmical style belonged and which must have continued to flourish long after his time.

A case for a somewhat closer relationship with that of classical verse might be made for the metrical (and not merely the rhythmical) system with which Ælfric experimented.[8] Ælfric's work of this kind has the further interest that, unlike Wulfstan, he has also left an abundance of 'ordinary' prose: we may therefore observe him at work in two very different styles. Nothing survives from before his time which bears any marked resemblance

to his 'metrical' prose and though this reflects in some degree the basic alliterative and rhythmical structure of the classical verse, it scarcely does so in such a way as to suggest direct metrical indebtedness to that verse. It is rather as if it might have derived from some 'looser' parallel tradition; but since there is no clear evidence for any such tradition, it is perhaps safer to assume that this style was largely of his own creation.

His work is quite unlike that of the classical verse in important respects. It differs very considerably in metrical detail; his half-lines and lines have a rhythmical looseness and a casual and almost chatty flavour which give an impression quite different from that of even a late poem like *Maldon*. Besides, his diction departs in no marked way from that of ordinary prose. But though his metrical conventions are unparalleled in Old English, they have, like those of Wulfstan, the special interest that they quite closely resemble conventions followed in some works of the Early Middle English period which we shall shortly discuss.

Much further study could profitably be devoted specifically to the links which the metrical systems of both Wulfstan and Ælfric have with works composed in Early Middle English times. But these systems and their history have another interest about which little is ever said. Whatever their antecedents, it is almost certain that each received much of its distinctive character from these two men themselves.[9] If this really is so, it may lend a certain weight to the hypothesis that the main metrical peculiarities of alliterative verse of the revival period, such as make it markedly different from almost everything surviving from early Middle English times, may in turn owe a great deal to the innovatory work of a single individual.[10] This would not be to deny important links of various kinds with specific features characteristic of earlier systems but simply to suggest that – on such a hypothesis – we should perhaps not *expect* to find in the thirteenth century very close metrical parallels to works like *Patience* or *Piers Plowman*, any more than to find before their own time anything metrically very similar to the prose of either Wulfstan or Ælfric.

iii

The survival in the early Middle English period of rhythmical conventions closely akin to those of Wulfstan is of interest in the history of both the prose and the verse of that time and thus extends far beyond what happens in alliterative verse itself. Conversely, any attempt to elucidate the problems raised by that verse demands some consideration of the conventions of metrical systems in late Old English such as are manifested in the classical verse and in the kind of 'numerous' prose written by Ælfric which has already been alluded to.

It would be unsafe to maintain that the metrical system of Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints* leads simply and directly to anything which survives in early Middle English, but it must be said that such texts as the *Worcester Fragments* and Laȝamon's *Brut* are far closer in various metrical respects to Ælfric than they are to classical Old English verse.[11] This is perhaps surprising, for the *Brut* at least preserves many features of diction and sentence-structure which are much closer to those found in that verse than to anything in Ælfric. Accordingly, we might have expected its metrical conventions to resemble those of *Maldon* rather than the *Lives*. Instead there appears to have been – at least in the one tradition for which there is much evidence – a reshaping of the metrical system judged proper for e.g. narrative poetry, in which certain of the elements that are new have been drawn from conventions which probably originated in a very different genre – that of one kind of homiletic prose.[12] Something very like this same reshaped system comes not infrequently, in the same Early Middle English period, to be favoured for other purposes also, as is well exemplified by parts of the *Proverbs of Alfred* and of the *Bestiary*.[13]

The currency of this 'alternative' alliterative medium is the more surprising because it does not in any obvious or clear way prefigure the kind of metrical system that we associate, in varying forms, with the works of the alliterative revival. For these later poems not only manifest certain conventions which would seem to owe rather more to the classical verse of Old English times, but the system they manifest seems well before the end of the fourteenth century to have almost entirely ousted that which (as displayed in the four poems mentioned above) must have maintained a strong hold through most of the thirteenth century. It is clear enough that the poems of the revival are in a tradition different from that of these poems because (apart from marked rhythmical differences) they all reject the earlier convention of freely allowing rhyme to replace alliteration as the welding element between half-lines and only use it, if they do at all, for quite different purposes. This would indicate that even if the verse of the revival is – as was suggested earlier – in some sense a new creation, whatever in it stems from the past comes from elsewhere than the kind of alliterative verse which the thirteenth century has bequeathed to us.

Something should be said at this point about the use of rhyme, and the functions it has, within verse which in other respects (e.g. adherence to the heteromorphic mode) belongs firmly within the alliterative tradition proper. There is enough evidence in Old English (as indeed elsewhere in the Germanic languages) to show that the use of rhyme in such verse is by no means a mere early Middle English innovation and that its use in that period is partially rooted in an earlier native tradition. At the same time, of course, the use of rhyme was increasingly common as a normal feature of

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the metrical systems of the various new homomorphic measures which became well established in the course of the thirteenth century, if not even a little earlier; this doubtless contributed to its frequent use in that century side by side with alliteration in the heteromorphic measures of works like the *Brut*.[14]

But we should note that these works allow, and indeed make quite liberal and evidently natural use of, a type of rhyme which we may loosely call 'imperfect'. Though this sort of rhyme persists to this day in certain kinds of popular verse (it is common in the ballad and in nursery rhymes) it is almost entirely absent, even in medieval times, from the more sophisticated of the verse composed in the homomorphic mode; here the requirement of 'full' rhyme seems to have been fairly consistently imposed, not only in poets like Chaucer and Gower but in the work of others very much earlier. The early Middle English tradition of alliterative verse seems at first only to have countenanced rhyme as an alternative to alliteration rather reluctantly. But it certainly imposed no ban on the kind which by long native tradition makes no demand for absolute phonetic identity between the ends of the rhyming words. In particular, it is clearly entirely legitimate and quite common for homorganic consonants, even when preceded by non-identical vowels, to constitute a rhyme. Thus, already in the *Worcester Fragments*, we have not only perfect rhymes like *fuse : huse* and *blode : rode* but also *lif : sip* and *bedde : libbe*. This same convention operates in the *Brut* where, of course, the attested number of instances and therefore the inventory of various kinds of homorganic consonants is very much larger.

The interest of these early Middle English examples of 'imperfect' rhyme is considerable. For we must see them not only as phenomena which have obvious antecedents in Old English but as richly illustrating a convention that was to spread far beyond the confines of the alliterative verse of that period. A proper understanding of the subsequent history of this kind of rhyme, reaching right down to our own time, calls for a fuller knowledge than we have at present of the bounds and conditions within which it operated in (and up until) early Middle English times. I pass over the obvious importance of such knowledge to a textual critic working on, say, the *Brut*, or indeed on any later poem which follows rhyming conventions of this kind. But I would note in passing as a striking fact that in the examples of later alliterative verse where rhyme is used at all, 'imperfect' rhyme does not figure with anything like comparable frequency to that of its incidence in the *Brut*; in this respect the later poems are subject for the most part to the same constraints as those in the metrical tradition of Chaucer. It is also very noticeable that in this later verse rhyme, when it does occur, no longer performs the thirteenth-century function of linking half-lines.

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iv

I turn now briefly to a different but related matter. To what extent do the *rhythmical* conventions characteristic of the heteromorphic mode in early Middle English times affect verse in which alliteration as a systematic linking device has been quite given up in favour of rhyme? This is another question which takes us beyond the consideration of alliterative verse. There is one kind of non-alliterating verse in which successive pairs of short couplets are regularly joined by rhyme and about the rhythmical structure of which prosodists seem to hold widely divergent views. A good example is provided by *King Horn*, which was probably composed not very long after the *Brut* and of which the earliest surviving manuscript is probably of late thirteenth century origin. *King Horn*, not unnaturally, is always printed in the form of short couplets. But this presentation tends to obscure a certain similarity between the pair of lines which make up each couplet and the pairs of half-lines which, joined *either* by alliteration *or* rhyme, constitute one of Laȝamon's long lines. Moreover, we encounter in *King Horn* unmistakeable examples of the same kind of 'imperfect' rhymes as have already been noted as being characteristic of the *Brut*; they are not very numerous, to be sure, but they are frequent enough to indicate that in this detail the metrical system of the poem is linked with that of the 'native' rhyming tradition so characteristic of early Middle English alliterative verse.

More significantly, perhaps, the lines of *King Horn* resist any attempt to scan them in the sort of way which works perfectly well for verse in the homomorphic mode, whether this be of the kind encountered in early poems like *Genesis and Exodus* and The *Owl and the Nightingale* or in later ones like the *Book of the Duchess* or the *Confessio Amantis*. It is beyond the scope of this paper (as well as my own competence) to offer a satisfactory detailed interpretation of the metrical system of *King Horn*. But it would seem reasonable to suggest that this poem is in a kind of verse that owes its couplet shape to the total replacement of alliteration by rhyme as a formal device for linking pairs of what, in the older verse, we know as 'half lines' but which, in the newer kind, are naturally thought of as short lines grouped in couplets.

In *King Horn* some of these lines would appear to have two and some three salient stresses and their rhythmical shape is still distinctly of the heteromorphic kind. These characteristics, together with the tolerance of imperfect rhyme, strongly suggest a derivation, in the main, from something like the kind of verse found in the *Brut* even though alliteration in that and similar poems is still functional and even though the option of

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having three stresses rather than two is much more common in its first than in its second half-lines.[15] I believe that there is a parallel to this convention in *King Horn* of allowing either two or three stresses in a somewhat later poem which, though it is in rhyme and stanzaic in form, is distinctly heteromorphic in its rhythms. This is *The Four Foes of Mankind*, an originally northern poem which survives uniquely in the Auchinleck Manuscript.[16] Its metrical characteristics reinforce my contention that the problems of the alliterative revival cannot be tackled without due consideration of such 'bastard' or 'transitional' verse as that of the *Four Foes*.

It is perhaps relevant here to cite another, earlier, poem showing a similar tolerance of both two-stress and three-stress half-line units. This is the poem *On Serving Christ* in MS Jesus College, Oxford 29, which has the added interest that in it the rhymes (this time 'perfect' rhymes only) are used to link not half-line units but 'long' lines.[17] At first sight the metrical structure of this poem might seem to be that of the rhyming septenarius. But the rhythms seem to me to be of the old 'native' type and each of its 'long' lines divides into two parts in a grammatically natural way. Most interesting of all, however, is that the majority of the pairs of half-lines formed by this division are linked by alliteration in the traditional manner. There are also other early Middle English poems which make it clear that the intermediate stages linking the two rhythmical modes, heteromorphic and homomorphic, are numerous and complex. So also must be the influences, foreign as well as native, that contributed to so much metrical innovation in the long and for the most part poorly documented period between the late tenth and the fourteenth centuries. Altogether we run a grave risk of oversimplifying the metrical history of English verse (and prose) in those times and of believing that we understand it far better than we do.

Appendix

Material illustrating aspects of the alliterative tradition in the late Old English and earlier Middle English periods.

In presenting the following material I regard the texts as breaking naturally into a succession of small rhythmical units each having approximately the same weight and duration. These may therefore be regarded as resembling bars of music and I mark the onset of each 'bar' with a vertical stroke.

The rhythmical form of successive units or 'feet' may vary considerably

(as is characteristic of the heteromorphic mode) or relatively little (as is characteristic of the homomorphic mode). But in either case they will be taken to begin only with a salient syllable; this will be defined as having a greater degree of prominence than any other syllable in the foot and will be marked by an acute accent. A foot is therefore that stretch of text running from the onset of one salient syllable to the point immediately before the next salient syllable. Feet are flanked by vertical bars. All syllables other than the first in a foot, whatever degree of lower prominence each may have, can be marked by a superscript 'x'. Thus:

> All the | guards and all the | porters and the | stationmaster's | daughters
> They are searching | high and | low . . .

In the examples that follow, only the salient stresses have been marked and the absence of an acute accent over any syllable signifies that it is one of lesser prominence. I have not attempted to mark elided syllables.

It will be evident that this two-term system makes no attempt to bring out various details, e.g. that not all salient syllables are equally prominent or 'heavy' and that not all syllables of lower prominence are of the same 'lightness'. Nor does it try to tell anything about the relative duration of syllables within a foot.

The term 'prominence' is used here in preference to 'stress' to bring out the fact that the labels 'stress' and 'stressed' are quite inadequate to characterize the complex of features that may each play a part, in a given instance, in producing the effect of prominence or of the contrary. This complex includes: the pitch of a syllable in relation to that of those around it; the duration of a syllable in relation to that of its neighbours; the effect that different tempos may have on the rhythmic structure of a passage as, for example, when one changes from a quite fast to a quite slow delivery. One must also bear in mind that the particular semantic objective that a given passage is intended to obtain may demand the selection of one out of two or more theoretically possible rhythmical performances. There is, of course, room for doubt about some of my scansions.

1. Wulfstan, *Sermo ad Anglos*. Printed from BL Cotton Nero A i by Henry Sweet, revised D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Reader* (1967), p. 87, line 49 ff.

For |þám hit is on us |éallum
|swútol and ge|séne
þæt we |ǽr |þýsan
oftor |brǽcan þonne we |béttan

and |þý is þysse |þéode
|féla|ónsæge.
Ne |dóhte hit nu |lánge
|ínne ne |úte

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ac wæs |hére and |húnger |stríc and |stéorfa
|brýne and |blódgyte |órfcwealm and |úncoþu
on ge|wélhwylcan |énde |hól and |héte
|óft and ge|lóme; and |rýpera |réaftac
and us |stálu and |cwálu |dérede swyþe |þearle...

2. *Sawles Warde.* Printed from Bodley 34 by R. M. Wilson, *Sawles Warde* (1938), p. 12, line 99 ff.

& i|téilede |dráken as ha |éar |wéren.
|grísliche ase |déoflen ant ful |wél he i|séoð ham
þe for|swólheð ham i|hál to |grísle & to |grúre
& |spéoweð ham eft |út & to |échen hare |píne
bi|uóren & bi|hínden, þe |láðe |hélle-wurmes
|óðer hwile to|réndeð ham |tádden & |fróggen
& to-|chéoweð ham euch|gréot þe |fréoteð ham us te |éhnen
and heo eft i|wúrðeð |hál & te |néase |grístles...
to a swuche |bále bute |bóte

3. *Ælfric. Life of Saint Edmund.* Printed from BL Cotton Julius E vii by H. Sweet, revised N. Davis, *Anglo-Saxon Primer* (1953), p. 85, line 166 ff.

|Súm |slóg mid |slécge |swíþe þa |hǽpsan,
|súm hiera mid |féolan |féolode ymb|útan,
sum |éac under|déalf þa |dúru mid |spáde,
|súm hiera mid |hlǽdre wolde on|lúcan þæt |éagþyrel.
Ac hie |swúncon on |ídel and |éarmlice |férdon,
swa þæt se |hálga |wér hie |wúndorlice ge|bánd,
|ǽlcne swa he |stód |strútiende mid |tóle
þæt hiera |nán ne |míhte þæt |mórþ ge|frémman

4. *Worcester Fragment B.* Printed from Worcester Cathedral Library MS 174 by J. Hall, *Selections from Early Middle English*, Part I, p. 2, line 10 ff.

Forþon hit |cúmeþ |wéopinde & |wóniende i|wíteþ
[swo |D]éaþ mid his |prícke |píneþ þene |lícame
he |wálkeþ & |wéndeþ & |wóneþ [|óftes]iþes
he |sǽiþ on his |bédde |wó me þ ic |líbbe
þ |ǽffre mine |líf-dawes þus |[lón]ge me i|lésteþ
for |héui is his |gréoning & |séorhful is his |wóaning
& |ál [biþ] his |síþ mid |séorwe bi|wúnden.

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5. Laȝamon's *Brut*. Printed from BL Cotton Caligula A ix by J. Hall, p. 100, line 287 ff.

|Róuwenne þe |hénde |sát bi þan |kínge;
þe |kíng heo |ȝéorne bi|héold   heo was him an |héorte |léof
|ófte he heo |cúste |ófte he heo |clúpte.
Al his |mód and his |máin |hǽlde to þan |mǽidene.
þe |wúrse wes |þér ful |néh   þe in |ǽlche |gómene is ful |rǽh,
þe |wúrse ne dude |nǽuere |gód   he |mǽingde þas |kínges |mód.
He |múrnede ful |swíðe   to habben þat |mǽiden to |wíue;
þat wes swide |ládlic |þíng   þat þe |crístine |kíng
|lúuede þat |háðene |máide |léoden to |hǽrme.

6. *On Serving Christ*. Printed from Jesus College Oxford MS 29 by R. Morris, EETS 49 (1872), p. 90, line 1 ff. The last half-line is perhaps corrupt.

|Hwí ne |sérue we |Críst   and |séche his |sáuht?
Seoþþe |ýs wes at þe |fónt |fúlluht by-|táuht,
ne beo we |síker of þe |lífe |ón-lepy |náuht.
|Críst |kúndeliche |kýng |cúþ þu þi |máyht.
|ríhtwise |lóuerd   on |róde wes |ráuht.
yef |wé habbeþ |wérkes   yeynes þi |wílle |wraúht
|Lóuerd haue |mérci of vs   þat |néuer ne |fáht.

7. In what follows I present some metrical parallels between *The Four Foes of Mankind*, Edinburgh, Advocates Library 19.2.1, printed Carleton Brown, *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, No. 27, p. 32, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. On the left I print the first stanza of the *Four Foes*. The 'tail lines' (4, 8, 12, 16) seem to have two salient stresses, no more, no less. Though there is room for doubt about some lines, most of the other twelve have three such stresses. But later stanzas show that non-tail-lines with only two stresses are also permitted. Opposite this stanza I print, line for line, fairly close metrical parallels from *Sir Gawain*, with the appropriate line references. Since the tail lines 4, 8, 12, 16 seem in 'weight' to resemble *second* half-lines in the later alliterative poetry, my parallels to these are intentionally taken from second half-lines in *Sir Gawain* and these necessarily lack two alliterating letters, only one being allowed; they are therefore rhythmical parallels only. Parallels to the other (i.e. 'non-tail') lines (1, 2, 3; 5, 6, 7; etc.) are from *first* half-lines in *Sir Gawain* since only these have comparable weight; I aim in them to display alliterative as well as rhythmical similarity.

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The Four Foes

þe |síker |sóþe who-so |séys,
Wiþ |díol |dréye we our |dáys
& |wálk mani |wíl |wáys
As |wándrand |wíʒtes.
|Ál our |gámes ous a|gás,
So |máni |ténes ou[s] |tás
þurch |fónding of |féle |fás
þat |fást wiþ ous |fíʒtes.
Our |flésche is |fóuled wiþ þe |fénde
þer we |fínde a |fáls |frénde –
þer þai |héuen vp her |hénde
þai no |hóld nouʒt her |híʒtes.
|þís er |þré þat er |þrá,
ðete þe |férþ is our |fá,
|Déþ þat |dérieþ ous |swá
& |díolely ous |díʒtes.

Parallels from Sir Gawain

With |blýþe |bláunner ful |brýʒt	155a
þe |bórʒ |bríttened and |brént	2a
þe |stéle of a |stíf |stáf	214a
ful |fíften |dáyes	44b
|Sýþen |þráwen wyth a |þwóng	194a
Wyth |móny |báner ful |brýʒt	117a
To |bíde a |blýsful |blusch	520a
I |áttle to |sháwe	27b
And |píte þat |pásses alle |póyntez	654a
þat þe |fýr of þe |flýnt |fláʒe	459a
Such a |fóle vpon |fólde	196a
were |wórthily |smále	144b
|Dére |dýn vpon |dáy	47a
þenne þe |bést of þe |búrʒ	550a
|Dáyntes |drýuen þer|wýth	121a
in |fórme þat he |háde	145b

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III

The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds

DEREK PEARSALL

No discussion of the alliterative revival can begin without some preliminary recognition that its subject-matter is, to some extent, a matter of hypothesis. It is difficult to be certain when the term 'revival' was first used, but W. P. Ker introduces it in an apparently spontaneous way in his essay on the romances in Volume I of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* in 1907:

> Alliterative blank verse came up in the middle of the fourteenth century. . . . It must have been hidden away somewhere underground . . . till at last there is a striking revival in the reign of Edward III. (pp. 291–2)

The word is also used in Samuel Moore's article on 'Patrons of Letters in Norfolk and Suffolk' in 1913 (the work which provided the hint for J. R. Hulbert's influential 'Hypothesis concerning the Alliterative Revival' in 1931), and the whole phrase, 'the alliterative revival', undignified by capitals, is in Sir Israel Gollancz's edition of *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* in 1915.[1] By the early 1930's, in the work of Hulbert and Oakden, capitalization was systematic practice, and so it has tended to remain.

A counter-current, however, has more recently set in and grown stronger, which has made writers more hesitant about using the term 'revival', without at least the addition of some qualifying epithet such as 'so-called', and hesitant too about allowing much in the way of significant or exclusive identity to 'alliterative verse' as such. So D. J. Williams, in 1970, at the beginning of a commissioned survey of alliterative poetry in Middle English, expresses an initial wariness about the task that lies before him:

> There are some difficulties about treating all the poems of the movement together in a brief space. . . . They cover . . . such a wide variety of styles and subjects that the integrity of the category assumed in this chapter is threatened.[2]

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Thorlac Turville-Petre found it possible to resist such threats in his valuable book on 'The Alliterative Revival' in 1977 but there were some among his reviewers who doubted whether such a book could be or should have been written. Norman Blake (1979) pointed to the dangers of creating an artificial corpus of 'classical' alliterative poems by dismissing as aberrations those that did not fit the category, while Elizabeth Salter, in an admonition which the present writer needs especially to take to heart, commented thus:

> In fact, the full restoration of alliterative verse to its 'literary context' is likely to be an exercise of great complexity, for it must surely demand the investigation of an immense variety of social, devotional, and literary backgrounds, and must concern itself with a number of different literary models in Latin, French, Anglo-French, and English.[3]

Professor Salter's own writing, after the earlier and very influential notes on 'The Alliterative Revival' (1966-7), in which she had accepted Hulbert's subject-matter, but modified his hypothesis, moved steadily, in a series of essays (which will be noticed later), towards a radical questioning of the existence of an alliterative movement or revival in the fourteenth century, and she perfected her attack on the 'integrationists' in an impressive lecture, 'The Myth of the Alliterative Revival', so far unpublished.

These warnings need to be heeded, at the same time that the pattern of events over the past eighty or ninety years or so needs to be seen in a larger context. It is not uncommon for the preliminary information on a matter of literary history to be prematurely categorized, and for the categories so created to harden, so that it becomes difficult to revise or adjust them in the light of new information as it becomes available. In this respect, it is interesting to note that the emergence of the hypothesis of the revival coincided with the demise of the myth of Scottish origin, which had been the original inspiration of Sir Frederick Madden's edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and related poems in 1839. Madden's first approaches had been to Sir Walter Scott in 1829, and when that plan fell through it was the Bannatyne Club that published his composite volume. The whole early interest in medieval alliterative verse was carried forward on a wave of fervent Scotticism, culminating in a hypothesis of common Scottish authorship for virtually the whole body of unrhymed alliterative verse, even though Richard Morris had demonstrated as early as 1864 that many of the poems, including those of MS Cotton Nero A x, were of West Midland provenance.[4] Such is the tenacity of a favoured myth, and it may be that a writer today should be more than usually sceptical about the current hypothesis of 'the revival', recognizing that the validity of a hypothesis concerning literary history has solely to do with its effectiveness in making sense of the evidence, and nothing to do with the number of years it has been in existence. The

present essay should be seen, therefore, as an attempt to secure a number of footholds in the shifting quicksands of an exceptionally fragmentary and enigmatic body of evidence.

The Evidence of Formal Identity

In attempting to determine whether there is any coherent body of writing to which the appellation 'The Alliterative Revival' may be appropriated, it is important to remember at the outset that alliteration is ubiquitous in English writing, both prose and verse (and possible intermediate varieties), of the Middle Ages.[5] The Old English tradition of rhythmical alliterative prose maintained a vigorous life throughout the period, most notably in the West Midlands, as in the 'Katherine group' of texts. The addition of rhyme to the unrhymed alliterative long line of Old English produced a whole range of poetic forms, many of them exceptionally advanced and complex, such as the long-line stanzaic poems of MS Harley 2253, the 13-line stanza poems (e.g. *Summer Sunday, The Awntyrs off Arthure*), or the great variety of stanzas in the Northern play-cycles. Most are of Western or Northern provenance. The addition of rhyme to the halves of the broken alliterative long line produces a short alliterative couplet of a peculiarly English variety, which is to be found early in Laȝamon and *King Horn*, late in certain tail-rhyme romances such as *Sir Degrevaunt*, and which is never completely obliterated by the octosyllabic couplet of French provenance. Meanwhile, alliteration invades many of the metrical forms of non-native provenance, so that the septenary/alexandrine is always liable to fall back into a loose four-stress alliterative line, and short-line stanza-forms, such as those of *Pearl* and of many poems of MS Harley 2253, are so heavily invested with alliteration as to take on a fully alliterative character. Alliterative phrases of a stock type, such as are endemic in the English language, occur frequently in all the poetry of the period, without exception. Nearly everywhere, alliteration is likely to break out: for a stirring battle-passage, in Chaucer or in *The Sege off Melayne*, or in otherwise feebly alliterative poems like *The Song of Roland* and *Joseph of Arimathea*; to raise the imaginative temperature generally, in a non-alliterative poem, as in Thomas of Hales's *Luve-Ron* or the *Laud Troy-Book*;[6] or because a prose writer cannot resist the clarion-call of an alliterative battle-poem that he is working over from his sources, or the grandeur and elevation that is given to his peroration by the sonority of alliteration.[7]

There is much else that one might cite, all of it evidence of a vigorous and developing and varied 'continuum' of alliterative writing in English – so much so, in fact, that it seems unnecessary to call into play influences from non-native traditions. Alliteration is employed as a stylistic device in Celtic

verse, and there may be connections between Welsh poetry and the alliterative poetry of the West Midlands; there are examples of alliterative writing in Anglo-Norman, including one frenetic example printed in *Reliquiae Antiquae*; and of course alliteration is extensively employed in medieval Latin prose and poetry, including that of Richard Rolle.[8] But these usages seem on the whole to be part of the rhetorical and stylistic practice of their own linguistic tradition, or else directly imitative (in the case of Anglo-Norman) of English, and the most that could be said is that the example of Latin may have enhanced the acceptability of alliteration in English, especially in devotional prose, as a means of rhetorical elevation.

In all the developments of alliterative writing in English up to about 1350, the one casualty seems to be the unrhymed alliterative line itself, the staple form of Old English verse. There are a few survivals in early Middle English, and Laȝamon of course uses the unrhymed long line, especially in battle-passages and other set-pieces, as one of a number of metrical expedients. But between 1250, which is the latest possible date for the completion of Laȝamon's *Brut*, and 1350, when poems in the unrhymed alliterative line begin to appear again, there is a blank in the history of alliterative verse. During this period one could cite only the irregular lines of *Thomas of Erceldoune's Prophecy* in MS Harley 2253, and the few lines of verse embedded in Rolle's *Ego Dormio* ('Alle perisches and passes . . .') as examples of the survival of the unrhymed alliterative line.[9] Yet in the sixty or seventy years after 1350 there is a flood of such writing both formal and informal. There seems no way in which this exceptionally large and important body of writing, identified through its absence of rhyme (I take this to be a striking formal characteristic), emerging suddenly and in spate, can be regarded as anything but a phenomenon needing to be explained.

The Evidence of Regional Identity

The traditions of alliterative writing, in prose and verse, are predominantly, though not exclusively, northern and western.[10] A line drawn from the Wash to the Bristol Channel would serve as rough demarcation. It is probably sufficient to see in this a natural consequence of the greater tenacity of native traditions of writing in those areas of the country most remote from metropolitan and therefore French influence. There are, in addition, par-ticular cultural reasons for the preservation of English traditions in the West Midlands, which is where the 'Katherine' group, Laȝamon and many of the poems of MS Harley 2253 come from. In the area to the south and east of the demarcation line, alliteration is widely used, in the metrical romances and in poems of complaint like *The Simonie*, for instance, but principally as a form of occasional enhancement and as a source of stock phrases: it is not the

dominant tendency. Within the body of alliterative writing, the poems in the unrhymed alliterative line may, with some exceptions, be localized more specifically. The earlier poems tend to be from the South West Midlands, and those of the middle period from the North West Midlands, with *Troy* and the *Wars of Alexander* from somewhat further north. The stanzaic alliterative poems of the fifteenth century, such as *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagrus and Gawain*, are from still further north and form a link with the Scots alliterative poems of the later part of the century. It is difficult to resist the impression that alliterative poetry retreated northwards under pressure from London English and the Chaucerian tradition.

This said, some important qualifications need to be made. In the first place, the evidence for dialectal localization is in many cases very difficult to interpret, and some of the interpretations habitually accepted are hoary with age. Late texts (*Troy* and *Alexander A* survive only in sixteenth-century copies, *Winner and Waster*, the *Parliament*, and *Morte Arthure* only in copies of the mid-fifteenth century), unreliable copyists and the absence of rhyme make the identification of the original dialect of the poems an unusually complicated business. When the more sophisticated techniques of modern dialectological analysis are applied, the results do not always confirm earlier localizations. The *Morte Arthure*, for instance, is from Yorkshire, not from the North West Midlands.[11] The poems of MS Cotton Nero A x, on the other hand, are securely located at the heart of the North West Midland area, 'a very small area either in SE Cheshire or just over the border in NE Staffordshire'.[12] Even here, though, where the language of author and scribe are happily close, it must be remembered that localization may be distorted by a number of factors, such as the influence of a 'literary' dialect or of a local writing centre, and that the analysis rests upon a deduction derived from the overlapping of exclusion zones, which place a poem in a theoretical location where in fact nobody may live. But these are comparatively minor quibbles, and it is highly unlikely that future work on localization will do other than confirm a northern and western, and predominantly West Midland, provenance for the poems of the revival.

This is not to say, of course, that they exist in regional isolation, that they are not open to the influences exerted upon London poets, or that they were unknown to those poets. They may be regional in origin, but they are not 'provincial' in outlook. The poet of *Winner and Waster* may make his playful remarks about the fate of the son of a 'westren wy' if he is sent south to the wicked metropolis, but the orientation of his poem is towards London and the court. The poet of *St Erkenwald* writes about a London saint, and expects his audience to pick up unpointed allusions to a London environment. The *Gawain*-poet is as widely read in French and Italian poetry as anyone but Chaucer, and the author of *The Destruction of Troy* certainly seems to know of Chaucer's *Troilus*.[13] There is no mystery in this: England is

a small country, and there was plenty of movement within it of the better-off and the better-educated, not only the nobility and their retinues, whose mobility was sufficiently emphasized by Elizabeth Salter (1966–7), but also clerics, and officers of the government, such as the clerks in the King's service, who would be recruited from and visit all parts of the country. In fact, what is surprising is that the regional identity of the poems of the revival should be as marked as it is. The relation between the 'London school' and the 'alliterative school' may not be, as John Burrow calls it, quite 'the chief mystery of the age', but it is certainly odd that they 'present themselves to us as largely unconscious of each other'.[14]

Chaucer's own attitude is, as usual, difficult to decipher. Taken dramatically, the point of the Parson's comment (*Canterbury Tales* X 42–4; see above, p. 13) would be lost if it were not clearly intended to be understood that alliterative verse is non-southern in origin. This does not mean that people in the south did not know of it – how else could the Parson be understood to speak of it? – but that it was recognized that the practice of writing alliterative verse was to be regarded as a non-southern phenomenon. Whether it was to be regarded also as a comic phenomenon it is harder to say, and the Parson's sense of humour is an unknown quantity. But there must be some suspicion that the literary establishment of London and the south-east found it difficult to take alliterative verse entirely seriously. Where independent alliterative writing is undertaken in the south and east, it tends towards the bravura and the burlesque, as in the comic pieces printed in *Reliquiae Antiquae*, or the two poems added in the Norwich priory MS Arundel 292 (the *Complaint against Blacksmiths* and the *Chorister's Lament*), or the recently discovered alliterative poem on plant-names by a Bristol man.[15] Chaucer's own use of alliteration, in the passages describing the tournament in the Knight's Tale and the battle of Actium in the Legend of Cleopatra, demonstrates his recognition of the suitability of alliterative clangour for battle-descriptions, but it does not demonstrate an extensive knowledge of unrhymed alliterative verse, since all the phrases he uses could have been picked up from alliterative passages in the metrical romances. The descriptions are superbly done, with some panache, but they are dramatically distanced, and convey more the connoisseur's relish in the mastery of an alien stylistic technique than an interest in fighting. As Basil Cottle says, 'Chaucer had no alliteration at the heart of him'.[16] His supposed knowledge of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and allusion to it in the Squire's Tale,[17] is surely a myth, and a product of that well-known tendency to assume that two writers we happen to know about must have been known to each other.

There are a few minor qualifications that need to be made to the argument concerning regional identity. Nearly all the unrhymed alliterative poems occur in unique manuscripts, several of them very late and one or two

of them fortuitous in the extreme. It is clear that they were never marketable in London, the major area of scribal production, and it may be assumed that they had no general appeal outside the northern and western circles in which they had their origin. An exception has to be made for *The Siege of Jerusalem*, which appears in eight manuscripts, several of them of East Midland and south-eastern provenance. Its popular religious subject-matter seems to have allowed it a wider circulation, though it was still a specialized kind of circulation, and the poem does not occur in manuscript in conjunction with verse of the 'Chaucerian school'. The insertion of the alliterative text of *Alexander B* into a copy of the French *Roman d'Alisandre* in MS Bodley 264 is an oddity, but it does demonstrate again that copies of alliterative poems might be floating about in London, and that a sense of regional identity does not imply geographical isolation.

The great exception to all that has been said, however, and one that may seem to invalidate it, is *Piers Plowman*. The author of this poem originated in the West Midlands, and his language has a western flavour, but his poem is a London poem, and circulated very widely (there are over fifty manuscripts) in London and the surrounding areas and indeed throughout the country (Samuels, 1963). The poems that it inspired, with the exception of *Death and Life*, all come from outside the traditional northern and western home of alliterative verse. The thesis of regional identity seems to founder on such a massive aberration. Yet, more would be lost to understanding by abandoning the thesis than by the attempt, however tentative, to make some necessary distinctions. The distinctions, indeed, make themselves, for it is the experience of every reader that he has to make a conscious effort to remind himself that *Piers Plowman* is written in the same verse-form as, say, *Sir Gawain*. The handling of alliteration and metre is more informal, the characteristic patterns of syntax and phrasing more subdued, the distinctive alliterative vocabulary conspicuous almost by its absence. Whether we assume that this is because Langland deliberately modified the extravagance of the regional alliterative style in order to cater for a wider audience,[18] or that he was the inheritor of an alliterative technique at an early stage in its redevelopment, before it was wrought up to high sophistication by the poets of the North West Midlands,[19] the distinction is there, and a very present part of our experience of reading the different poems. It may be that Langland was additionally influenced by other kinds of writing, such as the loosely alliterative complaint poem of *The Simonie*. It is here too that the arguments concerning the influence of alliterative and semi-alliterative prose have some force.[20] The connection between *Gaytryge's Sermon* and the alliterative poems of the North West Midlands is difficult for most of us to see, but in reading a work like the *Sermon* or, better, the sermons of British Library MS Add. 41321, one has the sense of inhabiting the same world as Langland, albeit a shabby corner of it. Perhaps what is

needed, to compass this complex network of relationships and distinctions in our understanding, is a recognition of the existence, not of a monolithic alliterative revival which needs to be explained in terms of a systematically conceived social and cultural background, but of movements within a broad continuum, some of them developing without intermission through-out the period, some of them the product of new influences and circum-stances, some of them the product of adjustment and modification. A '*Piers Plowman* group' makes sense in the context of such an analysis, as does a '13-line stanza group'. The existence, in the tenth century, of a continuing tradition (or even 'revival') of classical alliterative poetry, side by side with more popular and informal alliterative verse and more and less highly wrought forms of alliterative prose for homiletic purposes provides a partial precedent for such a rich diversity of practice.

Continuity and Transmission

A West Midland and North West Midland group of unrhymed alliterative poems remains substantially intact after an investigation of regional identity, but the means by which they came into being are still somewhat puzzling. This is how W. P. Ker posed and answered the question:

> What is the explanation of this revival, and this sudden great vogue of alliterative poetry? It cannot have been a new invention, or a recon-struction. . . . The only reasonable explanation is that somewhere in England there was a tradition of alliterative verse, keeping in the main to the old rules of rhythm as it kept something of the old vocabulary, and escaping the disease which afflicted the old verse elsewhere.[21]

R. W. Chambers developed Ker's answer in a more emphatic way:

> There can be few stranger things in the history of literature than this sudden disappearance and reappearance of a school of poetry. It was kept alive by oral tradition through nine generations, appearing in writing very rarely, and then usually in a corrupt form, till it suddenly came forth, correct, vigorous, and bearing with it a whole tide of national feeling.[22]

The patriotic tone of this now seems to belong to an older era of English history, but the explanation offered by Ker and Chambers has remained on the whole, with or without emphasis on the part played by oral tradition, the received explanation of the revival. Some have attached special import-ance to the loss of written texts;[23] others have emphasized the vital role that must have been played by a single influential writer in the early days of the revival in receiving, transmuting and transmitting the essentials of the

alliterative verse tradition to later poets.[24] The problem here is that the earliest extant poems, such as *William of Palerne* and *Winner and Waster*, which can both be dated to the 1350s,[25] will not readily bear weight as inceptors of a great tradition.

It is difficult to explain the mysterious hiatus of which Ker and Chambers speak, but it will hardly do to deny its existence. Elizabeth Salter tended to dismiss the thesis of continuity as a piece of romantic mystification, but the varieties of alliterative and semi-alliterative verse and prose to which she draws attention[26] as possible antecedents for the poetry of the revival do not readily explain the sudden emergence of a traditionally authentic versification and style in that poetry. The absence or abandonment of rhyme, and the almost unanimous observance of or reversion to the pattern of alliteration in which the fourth stressed syllable does not alliterate (*aa/ax*), seem initially resistant to such an explanation. Turville-Petre (1977) who also abhors a vacuum, has attempted to explain the apparently traditional character of fourteenth-century alliterative verse in terms of conscious artistic decisions by the early poets of the revival:

> The fourteenth-century poets did not inherit a tradition of 'correct' verse miraculously preserved, but instead they consciously – and by gradual stages – remodelled a written tradition of alliterative composition that led back only by rather tortuous routes to Old English verse. (p. 17)

There is much that is persuasive in this argument, and of course literary scholars must have a preference for explanations that do not involve mysterious missing links. In particular, it is entirely feasible that poets, in adopting unrhymed alliterative verse as their medium, would rediscover the metrical imperative by which alliteration had to be thrown off the last stress. If this process were gradual, it would explain why a possibly early poem like *Joseph of Arimathea* is so erratic in its procedures (it might also force some redating of poems to suit the thesis). Even if this problem were regarded as solved, however, there remain others, of a knotty kind. The alliterative poems of the revival embody, in their prosodic and stylistic practices, just those metrical changes and adjustments in syntactical and formulaic technique which would have taken place, as a result of linguistic change, in a continuous process of development from Old English.[27] A single extraordinary poet might have brought this about, and after all Chaucer was responsible for an equally unprecedented range of innovatory practices: but there is no Chaucer around to do it. And there is one thing that even a genius could hardly have done, and that is to resurrect a whole body of alliterative vocabulary, evidenced in Old English but virtually exclusive in Middle English to the poetry of the revival. Turville-Petre (1977) suggests that such words may have been picked up from local dialect

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(p. 79), but this would leave unexplained why they are projected into exclusively high-ranking alliterative positions: 265 of the 267 occurrences of the ten famous words for 'man, warrior' in *Sir Gawain* are in alliterative positions.[28] The conclusion seems inescapable that the fourteenth-century alliterative poets inherited a traditional stylistic apparatus. As Marie Borroff says, speaking of the traditional vocabulary:

> The suggestion of a continuity between the two traditions [Old English and Middle English] is irresistible, though the documentary evidence for it has been lost, if indeed it ever existed. (p. 58)

She adds later, more emphatically:

> These characteristic features of style [vocabulary, phrases, syntax, etc.] are historically determined: the *Gawain*-poet was born into the tradition in which he wrote. (p. 90)

There is some obligation, therefore, to re-examine the arguments for oral tradition as the medium of continuous transmission. This is a distasteful subject, since there is, in the nature of things, very little evidence, and what there is does not speak highly for oral transmission as a means of preservation of a high poetic style. Internal references, too, have tended to be over-interpreted. The promise made by the narrator of *Sir Gawain*, that he will tell his 'laye',

> *As hit is stad and stoken*
> *In stori stif and stronge,*
> *With lel letteres loken,*
> *In londe so hatg ben longe* (lines 33–6)

has often been taken to be a reference to the antiquity of the tradition of alliterative writing, but this is not the latest editor's first choice of interpretation, and it must be admitted that it would be more usual for the narrator to be referring, conventionally, to the veracity and antiquity of his story.[29] A similar reference in the prologue to *The Destruction of Troy* can carry little weight, since it is imitated from the prologue of Guido's *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, the Latin source of the poem. The comments at the beginning of *Winner and Waster*, about how the old traditions of verse-making have given way to the trivial entertainments of jesters and buffoons, have often been interpreted as allusions to the lost oral tradition of alliterative verse, but again there is no escaping the fact that the comments are themselves part of a literary convention. To the parallels cited by Elizabeth Salter (1978)[2] from the *Life of the Black Prince*, Jean de Condé and Froissart, may be added a string of similar remarks by Wace, Chrétien de Troyes, and others.[30] At the same time, it should be recognized that literary conventions usually have some basis in the realities of literary production

and its relationship to its audience, and the above allusions cannot be dismissed out of hand. It is a fact, furthermore, that there are many well-documented examples in the Middle Ages of respectable traditions of verse-making being sustained on the basis of oral tradition (by which I mean, of course, the oral transmission of written texts and not 'oral composition'). The extant texts of *King Horn* and other English metrical romances betray some sort of sojourn in oral tradition,[31] and similar variations in the texts of French romances must be attributed to oral transmission.[32] The current fashion for asserting the exclusive primacy of extant written texts as evidence for literary activity[33] should be seen not only as a natural inclination of scholars who have only books to work with, but also as a temporary reaction against the fantasies of the theorists of oral-formulaic composition.

Oral tradition may, therefore, explain something of the background to the revival, but it can only act as a supplement to the major hypothesis, which must be of some significant loss of written texts from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. If we reckon with the fortuitous and often bizarre circumstances in which the alliterative poems that do survive have come down to us, and with the fact that 12 of the 15 poems of the western and northern revival survive in unique manuscripts, it may seem only too likely that poems from the earlier period may have been lost. Their vulnerability would have been increased by their presumably secular subject-matter, by their regional affiliation, and by the additionally disadvantaged status of English during this period. It was the contention of the present writer (1981)[1] that the monasteries of the South West Midlands provided one environment in which these lost written texts may once have been preserved and copied, the evidence being in the employment of a written text of Laʒamon's *Brut* in the making of a continuation to the *Chronicle* of Robert of Gloucester in the 1320's. There is some fragmentary evidence to support a limited hypothesis on these lines, which may in its turn contribute something to our understanding of the cultural background of the poetry of the revival, but it should be stressed that this is only one way in which the lost literature of medieval England may be invoked to supplement the fragmentary picture we get from the extant evidence.

Social Background: Authors and Audiences

Whatever debate may be entertained concerning the means by which the alliterative poetic tradition was transmitted to or developed in the second half of the fourteenth century, there can be little doubt concerning the circumstances that prompted the surge of alliterative writing in the West Midlands at that time. The decline of Anglo-Norman – not so much of Anglo-Norman as a vernacular, since that had been going on for some time,

but of Anglo-Norman as a fashionable literary language – created a vacuum amongst the provincial upper classes who had been the principal patrons and audiences of Anglo-Norman literature. English flooded back, and in this particular part of the country, with its more tenacious tradition of English as a high-caste language, and with an equally tenacious traditional poetic form at hand, it flooded back as unrhymed alliterative verse. These historical circumstances need no gloss, and certainly the movement embodied no national or anti-French feeling such as Hulbert (1930–1) postulated in his thesis of the alliterative revival as the poetry of baronial opposition. The same movement towards English as the dominant literary language was taking place elsewhere in the country, though the poetic forms in which it was promoted – the short couplet, the tail-rhyme stanza, the septenary/alexandrine – lacked the strength, elevation and versatility of alliterative verse, and it was only when Chaucer introduced anglicized versions of European poetic forms that the commanding heights of metropolitan and court culture were finally annexed.

Indeed, it may be argued that alliterative verse had a special capability to take over the role of the Anglo-Norman long line in *laisses* in extended historical works and long quasi-historical or ancestral romances.[34] Particularly intriguing is the evidence that the Anglo-Norman ancestral romance of *Fulk Fitzwarin*, written in the early fourteenth century, was translated at one point into alliterative verse. The evidence is contained in Leland's summary of 'an old Englisch boke yn Ryme of the Gestes of Guarine, and his Sunnes', in which many traces of an original alliterative poem can be detected (e.g. 'a Castelle caullid Cayhome, where Cay hadd be Lorde', 'Fulco and his Brethern fore weried with fighting fledde to an Abbay').[35] Such a poem, if it had survived, might strengthen some of the links that we see tentatively established between the Anglo-Norman poetry of provincial upper-class households and the poetry of the revival.

At this point, it may be worth recurring to the argument concerning the part played by the West Midland monasteries in the preservation and dissemination of alliterative verse. There is much in poetry of the revival that seems to reflect the serious and didactic and, above all, historical concerns which are a traditional preoccupation of English monastic literature. The association of Robert of Gloucester and Laȝamon is a particular reminder of the prominent role of monks in the writing of history and chronicle. Several of the alliterative historical poems, particularly *Alexander A* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, show their writers moving familiarly among Latin historical works, and weaving together material from different learned sources, in a way that suggests the use of the kind of resources that would have been most readily available in a monastic library. The range of those resources, and their capacity to include not only Latin historical works but also French *chansons de geste* and romances, such as provided part of the

essential reading background for the alliterative poets, is vividly illustrated, in the monastic houses of the West Midlands, by chance survivals such as the list of books given to the Cistercian abbey at Bordesley by Guy Beauchamp in 1305, and by the list of books left by Prior Nicholas Herford to his own abbey of Evesham in 1394.[36] The Beauchamp gift is evidence of the close links that existed between monasteries and the surrounding society of local magnates and gentry: the Anglo-Norman ancestral romance of *Fulk Fitzwarin*, for instance, mentioned above, was written for the current head of the family by a monk of the Benedictine New Abbey at Alderbury in Shropshire. The career of John Lydgate should warn us against isolating monastic literary activity from the wider world of secular patronage, and there are other arguments too that can be brought to bear as part of a claim for the monastic affiliations of alliterative verse: the persistent interest of alliterative poets in British history and the legend of Trojan descent, which reflects a concern for national history characteristic of monastic writers; the fact that Langland himself may have received his early education in a West Midland monastery; and finally, the existence of the great monasteries as the 'hotels' of the period, and as staging posts for royal and aristocratic progresses, which would have brought them into contact with the life of the court and aristocracy and nation at large, and even provided occasions for respectably secular literary entertainments.

No more is being claimed here than an affiliation, and one that is readily compatible with the thesis of provincial upper-class patronage, but it may seem that the interests of the alliterative poets are being over-narrowly defined, and that the warning mentioned at the beginning of this essay – against creating an artificially coherent corpus of poems by stripping away those that are elected to be aberrant – is not being heeded. The most influential statements concerning the consistency of theme and outlook among the alliterative poets have been made by Geoffrey Shepherd (1972), who lays repeated stress on their serious, didactic, historical interests. He sees the poets representing themselves as clerkly, wise, experienced, full of years: 'As a group, whatever may have been their social status, they take themselves rather seriously' (p. 69). He concludes:

> Alliterative poems in theme and treatment of theme stand in a continuum: the terms in this continuum are moral insight and historical truth. (p. 72).

Considerable weight is placed upon *Piers Plowman* and its associated poems in the demonstration of this proposition, and these we have already discarded from the provincial group, but the long historical 'romances' of that group are clearly an integral part of Professor Shepherd's argument. His views have frequently found support, and not merely amongst those who used to try to find some continuity from Old English heroic tradition:

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both S. S. Hussey and A. C. Spearing, generalizing, it is true, on the basis of their estimate of the *Gawain*-poet, speak of a serious moral concern as characteristic of the poets of the revival.[37] On the other hand, there are writers who find nothing specially distinctive in the moral preoccupations and interests of the alliterative poets. John Burrow argues that Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the *Gawain*-poet have a great deal in common, including a general sobriety of outlook, while Janet Coleman sees the literature of the second half of the century characterized as a whole by a common interest in formulating and examining questions of theological, political and ethical interest.[38] In such large perspectives, much depends on the eye of the viewer, and on the level of generalization that is reckoned to be tolerable, but no-one could deny that Chaucer and Gower are as 'serious', in their way, as the alliterative poets of the west and north.

It is difficult, though, to abandon completely the sense of 'differentness' that clings to these poets. It is doubtless the product of a complex of factors, one of which may well be the habit of looking for differences, but it cannot be easily dismissed as a mere illusion created by the distinctive metre. One thing has already been mentioned, and that is the prominence of serious historical writing in the poetry of the revival, and the prevalence of interest in British history and in Arthur. All this is unthinkable in Chaucer or Gower. Another factor has not been mentioned: the total absence of the theme of love, which is the central matter of nearly all Chaucer's poetry before the *Canterbury Tales*, and to which even moral Gower makes profound if wry obeisance. Love appears in the alliterative poems as a minor incident in predominantly historical poems (*Alexander A*, the *Wars of Alexander, Troy*), as a snare (*Gawain*), or as a divinely sanctioned biological imperative (*Cleanness*), but there are no poems about love, or poems in which love acts as the principal motive and preoccupation of life. The writing and reading and discussion of such poems is of course the activity, *par excellence*, of courtly society, in which women may be presumed always to play a prominent part, and a requisite of courtly culture. The absence of such interest in the poetry of the revival is surely important in reinforcing the suggestion of a provincial household culture, inheriting the conservative and old-fashioned tastes of provincial Anglo-Norman society and closely associated with the local clergy and local religious houses.

It must be admitted that *William of Palerne* is an exception to all these generalizations. The French original is a courtly romance, full of love and love-speeches and love-sentiment; the English poem is by no means squalid, but it aligns itself with the popular metrical romances in its un-cultured reflection of courtly life. It is the one alliterative poem for which there is definite evidence of patronage and cultural milieu, and this evidence explains why it is an exception. The author tells us that it was

done at the request of Humphrey de Bohun for the benefit of those who know no French. It clearly, therefore, cannot be for Humphrey, and Turville-Petre (p. 41) argues convincingly that it was commissioned by Humphrey as a benevolent gesture towards the poet, 'William', and towards the household servants of one of his estates in Gloucestershire, who would be expected to enjoy the innocently told story and profit from the good breeding the English poet takes care to expound.

The evidence of *William of Palerne* is thus misleading if it is used as an example of the milieu that produced alliterative poetry, but if it is recognized as exceptional the evidence it provides may be helpful in defining that milieu by contrast. For the sophistication that *William of Palerne* lacks is the very quality which has been recognized by literary historians in the poetry of the revival, and which has forced them to an explanation of the circumstances in which such sophistication – in the representation of courtly life, in outlook and attitude, in style and language, in the expectations implied of an audience – could be united so happily with an out-of-the-way dialect and metre. Elizabeth Salter (1966–7) is emphatic that the quality of the best poems demands an aristocratic milieu, and she explains how the vast estates of a great magnate like Gaunt would have taken him continually, with his household and retinue, to these northern and western parts:

> The social and cultural situation which these facts suggest must have been responsible in part for encouraging a form of literature with a strongly regional ground base, but with a live knowledge of affairs in the capital, and a desire to cater to tastes no less subtle than those for which Chaucer provided. (p. 233)

She mentions also other magnates with large western estates, the Mortimers, Beauchamps and Bohuns, as further possible candidates to act as patrons of alliterative poetry. She paints a brilliant picture of her chosen aristocratic milieu, and her arguments have been extremely influential, though some more guarded observers have preferred to offer additional candidates further down the social scale: local knights, and 'families of some substance'.[39] Turville-Petre has argued, however, that the interests of the great magnates would have been predominantly metropolitan, their literary tastes mostly French, and the manuscripts of alliterative poems, if they had been associated in any way with aristocratic patronage, grander by far than the workaday copies that survive. He concludes that the milieu of the poetry of the revival was not the higher nobility, but a wide-ranging group of gentry, knights, franklins and clergy.[40] Elizabeth Salter accepted the substance of those arguments in her review of Turville-Petre, already cited, and her own subsequent investigations of the background to *Winner and Waster* took her to the knightly family of the Wingfields.

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The wider the group proposed, probably, the better, for the evidence is scrappy and inconclusive, and Richard Green has warned us that distinguishing between the literary tastes of contiguous groups in the social scale will be 'a little like trying to distinguish between the reading habits of majors and lieutenant-colonels'.[41] The audience implied may not be the audience addressed; the circumstances of manuscript survival may be no guide at all to the circumstances of production; and sophistication is a difficult thing to quantify. Elaborate descriptions of courtly life and ceremonial, of feasts and hunting, may seem to be appropriate to an aristocratic poem; but if they are done too elaborately they may begin to look like lessons from an etiquette book. The bravura stylistic display, the self-conscious artifice, which has often been noted as characteristic of alliterative poems,[42] may seem the hallmark of an elite literary culture; but such striving, it might equally be argued, lacks the urbanity of 'truly' sophisticated art. There is no easy way out of these dilemmas, and interpretation of such evidence as there is has been frequently distorted by the tendency to concentrate on the poetry and poetic environment of the *Gawain*-poet, and to generalize about the poetry of the revival on that basis.

Some of the most interesting external or 'hard' evidence comes from the early sixteenth century, where we find a group of gentlemen in the North West Midlands engaged in the composition, copying and preservation of alliterative verse. About 1516 a gentleman of Baguley, in Cheshire, wrote the last alliterative poem, *Scottish Field*, celebrating particularly the exploits of the Stanleys at Flodden. About 1530 the unique manuscript of *St Erkenwald* (BL MS Harley 2250) was in the possession of a Chantry-priest serving the Booth family at Eccles.[43] In the late 1530s, Thomas Chetham of Nuthurst, a minor landowner, was making a copy of *The Destruction of Troy* (the only surviving copy, Glasgow University Library, Hunterian MS 388), which was regarded as 'an heyrelome' by his son. He copied into the table of contents the tantalizing promise that the last book would end 'with the nome of the knight that causet it to be made, and the nome of hym that translated it out of latyn into englysshe',[44] but there is a blank in the text where this should appear. A little earlier, in 1536, there died Humfrey Newton, another minor landowner of the area, who included in his commonplace book two short poems of his own composition which clearly show knowledge of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. They are in short rhymed lines with heavy alliteration, the first about a fortress on a fearsome crag (an unusual piece of landscape writing), the second, rather saucy, about the pleasures of spring-time assignations in country meadows.[45] The social context of these various activities may give a clue to the situation 150 years and more before, and Luttrell (1958) suggests that poetry-writing 'gentlemen', 'sons of good family . . . who sought their fortunes away from home as clerks, squires or administrators', may have been responsible for

'the well-bred flavour' of poems like *Gawain* (p. 49). There is also something suggestive in the evidence of the patronage of families like the Stanleys,[46] and in the mysterious knight who commissioned the *Destruction*, a man whom one would give almost as much to know of as the 'gode cnihte' who encouraged Laȝamon.[47]

But the retrospective use of late evidence of this kind can only be very tentative, and for the period with which we are most concerned, 1350–1425, it is necessary to rely mostly on internal evidence, where, as we have seen, diagnosis of the prospective audience of a poem on the basis of the perceived level of sophistication in that poem is a very subjective business indeed. The content of a poem and its manner of address are equally fallible as indicators. *Patience* has much to do with the necessity of preaching, but that does not mean it is designed for an audience of preachers,[48] any more than *Pearl* is designed for an audience of bereaved fathers. *Alexander A* addresses an audience of noble warriors, but, as Turville-Petre (1977) says:

> If in reality they are gouty bailiffs – or even students of Middle English – it is not the duty of the poet to remind them of it. (p. 38)

The audience, in a sense, is created by the poet for the purposes of his poem:

> If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on. . . .[49]

It is true, nevertheless, that the alliterative poems are characterized fairly consistently, though not aggressively, by the patter and transitions of the oral style – the marked pause, the promise to continue, the request for attention[50] – and we may presume that they were designed and accustomed to be read aloud. The manner of address is as to a general and dispersed audience, and in this respect rather different from the intimate tone of address, as to a closed group, that is adopted by Chaucer in *Troilus*. Chaucer and Gower, too, show at other times a marked consciousness of their poems as works to be read privately, and they divide them into books accordingly, where the alliterative poems adhere to the kind of fitt-division that is associated with oral delivery.[51] In other words, the alliterative poets retain more of the traditional narrative postures, and align themselves with the old-fashioned minstrel or *disour* rather than with the new man of letters or the household poet. The picture we are frequently given, of the provincial household, or castle of a magnate on his travels, gathered to listen to the reading aloud of a poem by its author, is probably not in

essentials inaccurate.[52] *Gawain* would have made an excellent entertainment, in every respect, for a Christmas and New Year 'house party' in such an environment.[53] It should be made clear, though, that what is being identified here is not a social context and audience exclusive to alliterative poetry, but a regional version of a general provincial audience, receptive, as a regional audience, to poetry written in a particular language and metre, and perhaps, in some limited way, reflecting particular interests. It would be hard to say more than this, given the difficulty of discriminating between the implied social context of, say, the opening of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the opening of the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, written about the same time in the North Midlands, or between *The Destruction of Troy* and the *Laud Troy Book*, also from the same general area.

Much the same needs to be said about the picture we have been given of the authors of the alliterative poems of the revival:

> The typical alliterative poet may be imagined as an educated man, clergyman or layman, in the service of one of the great nobles or of a lesser knight in his provincial estates.[54]

It would be difficult to argue with such a blurred and composite picture. The authors need to know their way about books, and to know something of high life, but beyond this, except in the case of the *Gawain*-poet, who must be a cleric of some depth of training, it is hard to go. There is no special regional identity to be given to such authors. It has been convincingly argued, for instance, that the author of the *Morte Arthure*, judging from his technical knowledge of law and diplomacy, must at some point in his life have been an officer in the royal administration, and he would thus be allied with that important group of writers who had careers as civil servants, including Chaucer and Hoccleve.[55] 'Huchown of the Awle Ryale', whose claims to have written two or three alliterative poems have been rather neglected since his claim to have written all of them was dismissed, may have been, if his appellation is understood to be a translation of *aula regis*, a king's clerk.[56] Another named alliterative poet from the later Scottish period is Richard Holland, the author of the *Buke of the Howlat*, who was secretary to the Douglas family, and a representative of another group of literate and educated men, with access to patronage, who may have contributed to the making of earlier alliterative poetry.[57] Chaplains have been favoured candidates, since they are assumed to be serious-minded as well as well-educated. 'The unbeneficed chaplain, ready to take payment for casual duty, was a familiar figure in medieval society', we are told, by Hamilton Thompson,[58] who points out further that from the beginning of the fourteenth century more and more nobles established chantries of several priests in their chapels. Guy Beauchamp founded one of eight priests at Elmley castle in 1308, and Gaunt and his brothers made

similar foundations later in the century.[59] Such chaplains would be obvious candidates for literary patronage,[60] and there are one or two whose names we know whose careers are suggestive in the context of the present enquiry. John Trevisa was chaplain to the Berkeley family of Gloucestershire, and did a mass of commissioned translation for his patrons, while John Audelay was chaplain to the Strange family of Shropshire. He retired sick to Haghmond abbey, where he spent his declining years composing and collecting poetry for a volume of spiritual comfort and exhortation. One of the poems he composed is strongly alliterative, and much influenced by *Piers Plowman*, while one of those he collected is the stanzaic alliterative poem, *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*.[61] There is a further reminder here of the close connections between the provincial upper classes, clerics, and local religious houses and a particular mention might be made of the likely literary activities of corrodars, government pensioners who were billeted in monasteries, at the monks' expense, and who seem in many ways ideally qualified to fill the ranks of our unnamed poets: 'It was these corrodars who in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did much to maintain the tradition of literary activity among retired civil servants.'[62]

Concerning the *Gawain*-poet, finally, there has been an exuberance of speculation: never has so much been written about someone of whom so little is known. He has been identified, on the basis of his authorship of *Pearl*, as John Donne, a clerk in the service of John Hastings, earl of Pembroke, or John of Erghome, author of the *Prophecy* attributed to John of Bridlington; and, on the basis of his authorship of *Gawain*, as Huchown, Strode, John Prat (another Pembroke clerk), Hugh Mascy, John de Massey of Dunham Massey, and as various retainers of appropriate regional origins in the household of John of Gaunt, including Simon Newton, John Massey of Cotton, and an unnamed member of staff at Clitheroe castle. These attributions are based on such naive and improbable assumptions concerning what constitutes evidence as to bring the study of attribution into disrepute.[63] A most ingenious case has been put forward by Michael Bennett (1979) that *Gawain* was written for the Cheshire retainers of Richard II, which brings the poem for the first time into the purlieus of the royal court. The weakest part of his argument is the attempt at an individual attribution – to one Richard Newton, whose family documents show him to be the author of some doggerel which Bennett unfortunately asserts (p. 69) to have 'definite stylistic affinities' with *Gawain*. There is a pointer here to the real value of such studies as his, not in making attributions of authorship that must ultimately be speculative, but in giving depth and colour to our picture of a regional society and some understanding of the cultural environment in which the poets of the North West Midlands may have flourished. Less value will attach to those studies which lack this kind of concentrated attention on a specific regional environment,

such as the attempt by Savage to associate *Gawain* with the career of Enguerrand de Coucy, John of Gaunt's brother-in-law, or D'Ardenne's extended fantasy on the theme of the *le comte vert* (Amadeus VI, count of Savoy), first announced by Hulbert.[64] Meanwhile, the hills and dales of the Pennines are alive with *Gawain*-scholars, seeking a 'foo cragge' here, an 'olde cave' there, in their quest to find the real *Gawain*-country.[65]

Detective work on the identity of the *Gawain*-poet and the location of Castle Hautdesert, though occasionally enlightening in unexpected ways, has been on the whole a distraction. One might wish that a fraction of the time spent on such entertainments had been devoted to proving that the *Gawain*-poet is one person, for surely this is a matter capable of demonstration beyond reasonable doubt. On a wider front, more needs to be done on the dialect and date of the other poems of the revival, and on their internal affiliations, if our sense of the literary and social background of the revival is to be more than a fragmentary series of impressions. Meanwhile, it is wise that our understanding of the nature of the revival should remain flexible and capacious, and not harden yet again into rigidity.

The Anglo-Norman Background to Alliterative Romance

ROSALIND FIELD

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Piers Plowman, Morte Arthure are some of the greatest works of the fourteenth century, unequalled by any poetry outside the works of Chaucer, and the alliterative revival[1] that produced them also produced a number of second-rate works that would be outstanding in any other company. But the milieu that supported such literature, that encouraged poetic skill and confidence, and that provided a discerning and identifiable audience, is elusive, in the main because it is non-metropolitan. Most attempts to solve the problem have led increasingly to the view that nothing in any hypothetical lost oral tradition, nor in the extant alliterative verse or even prose from earlier Middle English, accounts for the sustained literary quality of the works of the late fourteenth century.[2]

It therefore seems worth adopting a different perspective, and approaching the alliterative revival through earlier provincial literature of similar quality – and that means, for the period preceding the revival, in the other vernacular of medieval England, Anglo-Norman. In looking for the relationship which may exist between works of two literary periods, it seems necessary in the first instance to limit the enquiry to works of the same genre, and of a genre that is fully represented in both. The present discussion is therefore concerned with the romances of the Anglo-Norman period and of the alliterative revival, as the romance genre is consistently represented throughout the medieval period.[3] Even within such limits the range and quantity of alliterative poetry is considerable, and includes works of a historical and legendary nature that do not fit comfortably into the romance category as delineated by the chivalric romances of France. There are the three somewhat isolated poems taken directly from French romance, *William of Palerne*, *Chevalere Assigne*, *Joseph of Arimathea*, four Arthurian poems ranging from the chronicle-type *Morte Arthure* to the classic romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and its successors, the rhymed stanzaic poems *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagrus and*

Gawain, and a number of works drawing on Latin sources, the three Alexander romances, *The Destruction of Troy* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*. These poems constitute a group which allows us to make direct comparison with the surviving romances of the Anglo-Norman period. There are resemblances of literary type and attitude revealed by such a comparison which may in turn indicate a similarity of audience. It is a comparison which may also shed light on the poets' use of the alliterative form and identify some of the influences from the earlier period still at work in the poems of the alliterative revival.

The complex relationship between the literatures of the two vernaculars of medieval England has often been treated with misleading simplification. The assumption that French-language works are courtly, and that English-language works are popular, glosses over areas of significant duplication and change. Many of the earliest Anglo-Norman writers were bilingual, at least to the extent that they used English oral and written material; so, inevitably, were many of the authors of Middle English romance. The evidence of manuscripts and wills indicates that the copying and circulation of Anglo-Norman literature continued well into the Middle English period.[4] Moreover, the written narrative of the type under consideration here is the literature written for the entertainment of the middle and upper classes of society, precisely that part of late medieval society in which the divisions between the French- and English-speaking communities would be most fluid. In this situation, with some degree of bilingualism among authors and audience, and the simultaneous circulation of literature in both languages, it seems likely that the earlier tradition of insular – i.e. English but not necessarily English-language – romance may explain much about the later one in Middle English. The history of Anglo-Norman romance, the kind of literature it produced and the timing and condition of its decline, should be therefore taken into account in any investigation into the flowering of alliterative narrative poetry.

About a dozen full-length romances survive from the Anglo-Norman period. Some questions of provenance and especially of dating remain in dispute, but a reasonably clear picture emerges from the existing evidence. Two early works – the *Brut* of Wace (a Norman chronicle rather than an Anglo-Norman romance, but one with ubiquitous influence on Anglo-Norman narrative) and the fragmentary *Tristan* of Thomas of Britain – can be convincingly associated with royal patronage, that of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, prior to 1174.[5] By far the largest proportion of Anglo-Norman romance, however, is the product not of royal, but of aristocratic, patronage.

The range of subject matter reflects the interests and limitations of this patronage, with the majority of the romances falling within the category dubbed 'ancestral romance' by Professor Legge.[6] These romances are

designed to provide an ancient, preferably pre-Conquest local ancestry for the new generation of noble families: *Boeve de Haumtone* (1154–76) invents an attractive legend for the earls and castle of Arundel, *Waldef* (late twelfth/early thirteenth century) seems to do the same for the Bigod earls of Norfolk,[7] *Fergus* (c.1209) for Alan of Galloway and *Gui de Warwic* (1232–42) for the earls of Warwick. *Fouke FitzWarin* (1256–64), which survives in a prose version, while containing flights of the wildest fancy, is rooted in the biography of several generations of the FitzWarin family of Shropshire. The two finest products of this body of romance are not so easily included under the 'ancestral' label, although they share other characteristics with those romances: the *Romance of Horn* (c.1171) gives no clear indication of patronage, although its western topography seems authentic, and the *Ipomedon* of Hue de Rotelande (with its less accomplished sequel *Protheselaus*) written for Gilbert Fitz-Baderon, lord of Monmouth, between 1176–91, makes only incidental use of local material, but has the more exotic setting of the southern Norman kingdoms of Apulia and Calabria. The only romances entirely lacking the localized flavour so typical of Anglo-Norman romance are Thomas of Kent's *Roman de Toute Chevalerie* (c.1170) on Alexander the Great, and the moralistic love story of *Amadas et Ydoine* (1179–1220).[8]

The dates of these romances range from the 1170s to the second half of the thirteenth century. There is therefore a century between the productive period of Anglo-Norman romance and the romances of the alliterative revival and it is a century full of important changes. Many of the families who had set the fashion for Anglo-Norman ancestral romance were extinguished by death or royal policy virtually within a generation, and with them it seems the creative impetus behind the romances.[9] However the Anglo-Norman romances continued to be copied, circulated and popularized; with the exception of *Waldef* and *Amadas et Ydoine*, each of which survives only in one copy, they all appear in extant manuscripts as late as the fourteenth century.[10] The fame of many of their heroes spread throughout society and into works in English. But at the same time, the linguistic balance between French and English was finally shifting. When the latest Anglo-Norman romances were written English romances were hesitant, experimental and simple works; by the second half of the fourteenth century Anglo-Norman was no longer the primary literary vernacular,[11] and English could be used confidently for complex works for sophisticated audiences.

Because of this intervening century, there is no evidence of direct contact between the two groups of romances, with the possible exception of a lost version of *Fouke FitzWarin* in some kind of alliterative verse.[12] But comparable features can be identified which suggest that Anglo-Norman romance provides a context within which the revival appears as an

explicable development. Audience and literary precedent are available, as is a well-established tradition of courtly writing, independent of both the London court and the literature of France. We need to re-examine assumptions such as those that lie behind McKisack's remark that the alliterative revival sprang from regions which had been 'almost completely silent for over 500 years'.[13]

We have seen so far that Anglo-Norman romance displays two important characteristics, firstly its provinciality – taking the term in a non-pejorative sense to denote independence from the capital – and secondly its preference for subject matter dealing with the 'history' of England. The provinciality is shared by the alliterative romances and has implications we shall examine. With the exceptions of the Alexander material common to the *Roman de Toute Chevalerie* and the three alliterative Alexander romances, and the fact that *William of Palerne* shares its Calabrian setting with *Ipomedon*, Anglo-Norman and alliterative romance writers deal with different areas of subject matter. The subject matter used by the two groups of romance writers reveals a mutual interest in history and historical legend, but it differs in several important respects. The Anglo-Norman writers were content to draw on local legend or even to fabricate their plots from a mixture of traditional themes, and then to attach the finished product to a hero who added lustre to the patron's family or lands. The alliterative poets drew on more learned sources, including those in Latin, and treated them with due respect; their sense of the division between history and fiction seems to have been more fully developed, if sometimes inevitably misapplied. The list of subjects of alliterative romance reads like a programmatic elaboration of the theme of the Nine Worthies, drawing on the biblical, classical and Arthurian material that made up 'the common inheritance of fourteenth-century Englishmen'.[14] The ambitious scope of this subject matter reveals a confidence newly available to fourteenth-century poets, a sense of a newly emerging national identity and of the intrinsic value of poetry. Innovatory as all this is it is not incompatible with the nature of the earlier romances. In the Anglo-Norman 'ancestral' romances it seems that choice of historical subject matter, however discrete and localized by comparison with that of the alliterative poets, led the Anglo-Norman poets to adopt a range of attitudes and interests that gives their work a definitive character. A romance which relates the adventures of an historical figure or family ancestor as he succeeds in gaining lands, or a kingdom, and founding a dynasty, does not easily accommodate the patterns of courtly romance. The themes and the didacticism associated with *courtoisie* and *amour courtoise* are of less importance in such romances than the portrayal of feudal society, its ethics and ideals. A close affinity with chronicle manifests itself not only in subject matter but in careful details of time and place, and in the authentic treatment of war and public events. The

romances which resulted can be characterized as serious, courtly, moralistic although rarely pietistic, evocative of chronicle in presentation as well as material and in an interest in the political implications of that material, and wary of fashionable theories of love. The Anglo-Norman writers did not on the whole share the enthusiasm of their continental contemporaries for the excesses and intricacies of love and chivalry, and this independence of approach finds its resemblances in alliterative poetry. Nor does Anglo-Norman romance produce the short romance so favoured of Middle English writers; these works range from the unusually short total of 4000 lines for the fragments of *Boeve* to the mercifully rare 22,000 of the incomplete *Waldef*. With the exceptions of *Chevalere Assigne* and *Joseph of Arimathea* the same can be said of the works of alliterative poets; their best achievements are in the medium-length romance, but under the pressure of historical veracity they will produce the 14,000 lines of *The Destruction of Troy*.[15]

When we come to consider these poets, certain similarities to the Anglo-Norman period are again apparent. As is usually the case with Middle English romance, the alliterative authors are anonymous,[16] but, unlike the metrical romances, these works reveal the imprint of their authors' personalities. Although anonymous they are not reticent; like their Anglo-Norman predecessors they impose their own interpretations on their material, address their audience directly and move with confidence amid the moral and material complexity of courtly society. In both Anglo-Norman and alliterative romance the reader time and again is aware of the presence of an author who is an 'insider' by virtue of his very criticism, urbanity and benign ridicule of courtly *mores*. It is not a tone one finds commonly in other non-Chaucerian romance.

The co-existence of provinciality with courtliness is perhaps the most important feature that the Anglo-Norman and alliterative romances have in common. We know enough about the origins of Anglo-Norman romance to see that it provided a body of courtly and independent provincial literature, serving the needs and reflecting the interests of an audience which, while separate from the London court, was far from unsophisticated, and which appreciated lengthy well-structured romances with a conservative, insular and often local flavour. The localities associated with its production are in many cases close to those later associated with alliterative poetry.[17] In short, it may well be that it is to the audience we should look for the provision of continuity across the change in language, and that any resemblances between the groups of romances may be due to the character and consistency of the audience rather than to any direct literary influence.

The patronage and audience of alliterative poetry remains a controversial subject. The suggestion put forward by Salter and others that the poems of

the alliterative revival owe their genesis to the noble households of the north and west has been recently challenged but not satisfactorily refuted.[18] We must perhaps allow for a natural flexibility and merging in the provenance and circulation of such works, written primarily for entertainment. Such evidence as the alliterative poems themselves provide indicates a baronial or knightly class of patrons, if not invariably of audience. The clearest statement occurs in *William of Palerne* in which the author says that his translation was commissioned by Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford. This claim has recently been treated with scepticism by Turville-Petre and others, with the suggestion that the Earl intended the poem for the less educated, hence English-speaking, members of his provincial household.[19] It is worth noting here that the less sophisticated examples of Anglo-Norman romance – *Gui, Boeve, Fouke FitzWarin* – at least in their extant forms, indicate that an original aristocratic patronage does not necessarily guarantee or sustain literary quality.[20] In the case of *Chevalere Assigne*, the subject matter suggests that it may have originated as a late example of the fashion for ancestral romance, for by the fourteenth century the Swan Knight had been adopted as a legendary ancestor by several noble families, among them the Bohuns and the Beauchamps.[21] The index to *The Destruction of Troy* tells of a knight who caused the Latin of Guido to be translated into English, and recent studies have argued for a similarly less elevated class of patrons in general – the class exemplified by Chaucer's Franklin,[22] or the local knights and gentlemen of the northwest whose social and geographical mobility would have exposed them to the highest reaches of international courtly society.[23]

At what point would the likely patrons of alliterative verse (great lords or lesser gentry) have abandoned their preference for entertainment in the French language in favour of English? This question has been variously treated. Hulbert suggested that the revival occurred around 1350 because 'before that date the barons and ladies were entertained by French literature'.[24] Turville-Petre on the other hand, sees the lords as still conservative in their literary interests and preferring their literature in French, leaving the encouragement of literature in English to the less noble.[25] Another possibility exists, however, which is that there was a period of overlap, in which romances in both languages would have been circulating – those in French copied from earlier manuscripts, those in English appearing for the first time. Furthermore the nature of the audience for the alliterative romances would have been such that the divisive effect of the choice between languages would be less marked than is often assumed. This would seem to be borne out by the source material of alliterative romances and the way it is treated; these poets are not, for the most part, involved, as are many of the authors of the metrical romances, with a programme of simple translation from French romance. With the exceptions

of *Chevalere Assigne*, *Joseph of Arimathea* and *William of Palerne*, they are involved instead in the free reworking of French material, as in the Arthurian romances, or, most significantly, in translation from Latin, the chasm between Latin and any vernacular always being more pertinent in the medieval period than the gap between two vernaculars. The freshness of approach which distinguishes the best alliterative narrative may stem from an absence of demand for the sort of translation provided by apparently less courtly poets such as the author of *Ipomadoun A* – an absence of demand which suggests an audience still competent in French. The creation of a poem like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, after all, argues not ignorance of French so much as enthusiasm for English on the part of both author and audience.

The comparison between Anglo-Norman and alliterative romance shows that while the particular form of alliterative poetry, with its origin in native English poetics, has led scholars to seek for an explanation of the revival within the limits of works written in English, there is, at least for the romances, comparable material close at hand in the Anglo-Norman tradition. But the central question of the use by the Middle English poets of the alliterative style remains, and it seems that if evidence from the Anglo-Norman period is brought to bear on this, the possibility emerges of a deliberate exploitation of the equivalence between the *laisse* and the long alliterative line.

The classic form of the Old French epic is that of the ten- or twelve-syllable line gathered into *laisses* of varying length, linked by monorhyme or assonance. From the mid-twelfth century it gave way before the new fashion for the octosyllabic couplet, the formulaic phrases of the *chansons* being retained, fragmented and adapted for the couplet form but still unmistakable, to embellish scenes of grandeur and heroism. This process is evident in Anglo-Norman romances, most of which are written in octosyllabic couplets, but at the same time some version of the *laisse* form continued to be used for a small, but significant number of works throughout the Anglo-Norman period and into the fourteenth century. The use of *laisses* for material of a heroic or epic nature is most apparent towards the end of the reign of Henry II, when three romances, *Horn*, *Boeve*, and the *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, all use the form of the *chansons* to some effect.[26] The Old French epic is also recalled, probably deliberately, in the *Chronique* of Jordan Fantosme during the same period, and in the mid-thirteenth century the unknown author of *William Longespee* who seems to have had access to a copy of the *Chanson de Roland*, uses the style and sentiment of that poem for his account of the death of the Earl of Salisbury on crusade.[27]

Anglo-Norman writers also chose the *laisse* style for serious religious works. Guischart de Beauliu's heavily didactic *Sermon*, written in this style

in the late twelfth century, was popular enough to survive in four thirteenth-century manuscripts. Bible stories were written in *laisses*, and also some saints' lives – and here again the evocation of heroic poetry is no doubt deliberate. Strangely enough, all the saints' lives known in this form are those of English saints – two lives of Edward the Confessor, one fragmentary, the other lost, a life of Becket, and Paris's life of St Alban. An anonymous thirteenth-century allegory of a visit to the otherworld also takes this form.[28]

Such works have little in common apart from their gravity of tone, and for the most part, their independence from the literature of the court. But closer connexions are apparent in a series of chronicles from the eastern counties, beginning with that of Fantosme, which survives in two manuscripts, Durham, dating from the early thirteenth century, and Lincoln, from the end of the century. A translation from a Latin chronicle of Peterborough Abbey, the *Geste de Burch* dating from the early fourteenth century, treats the history of the Abbey from the time of Penda as a *chanson de geste* of which the institution itself is hero. Later Anglo-Norman chronicles were usually written in prose, but at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Peter Langtoft, canon of Bridlington, turned Wace's couplets into alexandrine *laisses*, possibly under the influence of Fantosme.[29]

Anglo-Norman literature therefore displays the preservation of the distinctive style of Old French heroic poetry in a few complete works and in formulaic phrases in many others. This parallels the fortunes of the alliterative style before the revival, with the many instances of alliterative formulae and fragments of poetry to be found in early Middle English literature, and one outstanding example of a sustained work, Laʒamon's *Brut*, itself a translation of Wace. Both forms are contaminated by the later fashion for stanzaic verse, several of the Anglo-Norman works being in regular monorhyme stanzas rather than true *laisses*, just as, in Middle English verse, alliteration is combined, sometimes very successfully, with stanza forms. A further parallel exists in that the types of literature for which the *laisse* in one form or another is used, are those for which the Middle English alliterative long line is used in turn. The reason for this could well be that in each language the long, sonorous form of early medieval writing was more suited to solemn or grandiose topics than the brisker rhyming couplets and stanzas with their association with secular courtly literature. In each case the use of the long line and its derivative forms marks a separate development from that of court literature, and often a conscious archaism accompanying historical material. There is, of course, a considerable difference in literary achievement when we come to consider the poetry of the alliterative revival. With the exception of the twelfth-century works, the *laisse* is used by Anglo-Norman writers who are

provincial in the worst sense of the word, and produces only minor works.

These parallel developments of the two long-line unrhymed metres of the vernaculars of medieval England may have been apparent to four-teenth-century writers. One indication of this comes not from the allitera-tive poems themselves, but from certain of the metrical ones. The generous use of alliteration in some late fourteenth-century romances has been noted as evidence of the influence of the alliterative revival, but in the case of at least one poem, *Ipomadoun A*, there is more of interest. The author is an intelligent and competent *remanieur*, reworking the original Anglo-Norman romance of Hue de Roteland into one of the best of the Middle English stanzaic romances. As a northern poet writing at the close of the fourteenth century, he is in a position to be acquainted with the revitalized alliterative style, and the occasions on which he himself uses alliteration are significant. Unlike his original he does not use alliteration for rhetorical effect or mere decoration, but to inject his courtly romance with a sudden sense of vigour and solemn heroism, as indeed Chaucer does on occasion. We can also see in *Ipomadoun A* that the author is conscious of an equivalence between the Old French *laisse* and English alliteration. Where Hue exploits the *chanson* style to embellish scenes of battle and heroic action, the Middle English translator wisely avoids direct translation and substitutes the heroic style of his own linguistic tradition by using a heavily alliterated style.[30] The same process may well be at work in another northern poem, the *Seege off Melayne*. Here the exact source has not been traced, but it clearly owes its origins to the *chansons*, and again the Middle English is heavily alliterated.

Another possible point of contact between the choice of *laisses* and that of the alliterative long line is the *Morte Arthure*. As a chronicle poem taken from vernacular sources and dealing with insular history, it is unique among the poems of the revival, and it is also of a more easterly provenance, being associated with the Lincoln area. This area, as we have seen, saw a minor but consistent tradition of chronicle writing in the *laisse* style, by clerical and monastic authors. One of these, Langtoft, has been named as a possible source for the *Morte Arthure*, and other sources for minor epi-sodes in the poem are *Fierabras* and the *Voeux de Paon* both written in *laisses*.[31] It is perhaps worth considering that the author's choice of the alliterative style, to which the poem owes its special quality and virtues, may have been prompted by the awareness of local precedents for long-line verse chronicles, and by the examples among his sources of a style which was the equivalent of the alliterative line.

The third indication of an author using the alliterative line as an equiva-lent for *laisses* is *Chevalere Assigne*. This odd little poem does not fit well into the general pattern of alliterative romance; it is pious and courtly, but

also delicate, fanciful and short, and in the extant version makes little use of the resources of the alliterative style. But behind it lies the lengthy Godfrey de Bouillon cycle, and in particular the *Chevaler au Cigne* – written in alexandrine *laisses*. Unlike most alliterative poets, the English author is a timid translator, heavily dependent on his source. Perhaps this is the reason why he chose to adopt the alliterative line, as the nearest style to the French.

The evidence, inevitably fragmented by loss, and confused by external factors, does seem to point to an awareness on the part of medieval poets of an equivalence between the long-line unrhymed forms of French and English verse which both retained their associations with heroic poetry. We are after all used to parallels being drawn between Old English and Old French epic poetry; Ker's comparison of the battles of Maldon and Roncesvalles is a classic example. If the hindsight of centuries enables us to perceive equivalents, we should perhaps be willing to allow to those bookish men of the later Middle Ages, engaged in the translating and reworking of earlier native and foreign literature, a similar perception of the equivalence of the two epic metres in French and English tradition.

It remains to be seen whether the relationship suggested here between the Anglo-Norman romances and those of the alliterative revival is evident in particular romances, and whether literary influences from the earlier period are still discernible in the poetry of the fourteenth century. The use of Arthurian subject matter which gives no less than four alliterative romances, including the two best, provides a useful point of focus for this line of enquiry. The fortunes of Arthurian material in the Anglo-Norman period may have light to shed on the alliterative Arthurian romances and contribute to our understanding of them.

Although outside the immediate area of discussion, Laȝamon's *Brut* is of interest here for the evidence it supplies as to the relationship between Anglo-Norman and Middle English alliterative poetry, and as an important example of English Arthurian literature. Working closely with the *Brut* of Wace, Laȝamon translates with a bold independence of style which disguises how rare are substantial disagreements with the original material. The subject matter, the history of Britain, is of vital importance both to the French-speaking rulers for whom Wace wrote, and to the English-speaking audience of Laȝamon. No direct relationship can be proven between Laȝamon and the poems of the fourteenth-century revival; yet similarities exist – in his serious purpose, in his historicism, above all in his deliberately archaic style. His poem would not have existed at all, however, without the interest created in British history by several generations of Anglo-Norman historians and chroniclers, working both in Latin and the vernacular, and above all, without the work of Wace, a lesser poet but a greater innovator.

Laȝamon's fame rests ultimately on his treatment of Arthur, who becomes in his version a warrior-king in whom the stature of heroic legend combines with a penumbra of the supernatural and whose very death is held in question. It is the more surprising therefore that when we come to the Arthurian poems of the alliterative revival we find that Arthur is not treated with the respect and enthusiasm he aroused in Laȝamon, but with varying degrees of critical scrutiny.[32]

There is nothing in the literature in English to explain this apparent change of attitude to Arthurian material, but there is, I suggest, in the deafening silence which obtains in the Anglo-Norman period.[33] It is generally argued that the lack of Arthurian romance in England, while the Matter of Britain develops prodigiously in France, is due to the status of the English language. The class interested in such romance, it is held, preferred its romances in French. This is true, but that same class was by no means dependent on imported French romance; it produced its own. Furthermore, the greatest single influence on the Anglo-Norman romance writers seems to have been the *Brut* of Wace; far from being ignorant of the themes of Arthurian literature, the Anglo-Norman authors plundered them. Yet in only one insular romance of the Anglo-Norman period do Arthur and his knights appear, and this scant interest is not confined to literature, for fine arts tell the same tale.[34]

The explanation for this would seem to be that Arthur, a paradigm of kingly power, had been recognized as a valuable royal symbol as early as the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and was fostered as such by kings from Henry II to Henry VIII.[35] Arthurian romance, therefore, like other manifestations of fashionable Arthuriana, archaeological or mimetic, was not, as it was on the continent, a fanciful amusement, but a deliberate expression of centralized royal power. That the cult of Arthur was encouraged by successive kings for their own purposes is generally accepted. That the converse might also hold good, that opposition to the monarchy could be one reason for the scarcity of Arthurian literature in England, has not, as far as I know, been suggested before. Yet the royal patronage is of particular importance if we consider the cool relationship between the crown and the baronage during the first half of the thirteenth century and the type of romance written in England during that period. The baronial class was a group with little to gain from adding to the renown of Arthur. When from the late twelfth century the patronage of romance fell into the hands of this class, the romance writers rejected the readily available Arthurian material in favour of that dealing with lesser heroes. The reply to the royal promotion of Arthur, forerunner of the Angevin line, is the appearance of a throng of local heroes such as Horn, Boeve, and Gui. These local heroes establish ancestries of the utmost respectability for their patrons, in some cases even supplying them with relics as tangible as those

of Glastonbury. It is probably not a coincidence that in their adventures such heroes typically provide examples of independence and individual achievement which, unlike the exploits of the knights of the Round Table, represent an undermining of royal authority.[36]

It is not until romance writing in English has become well established that the story of Arthur is again treated by insular authors. When Arthurian romances, as distinct from chronicles, do begin to appear in English, the earliest – i.e. *Arthour & Merlin, Ywain & Gawain, Sir Percyval of Galles*, the stanzaic *Morte* – are simply translations or adaptations from the French. Independent Arthurian romances are not to be found in English until the latter half of the fourteenth century, and when they do occur it is amongst the poems of the alliterative revival. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the chief example of a group that also includes the later, stanzaic, Gawain poems, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Golagros and Gawain*, while the chronicle tradition achieves its finest exposition in the *Morte Arthure*. In each of these poems, the influence of the Anglo-Norman attitude towards Arthurian material can be discerned.

It is significant that the first group of romances centres not on Arthur himself, but on Gawain. Although a major figure in French romance, more often as secondary hero and foil rather than primary hero, it is to the north of Britain that Gawain belongs as a local hero.[37] The choice of Gawain is therefore a nice compromise between the conventions of Arthurian romance and those of insular romance; there are no alliterative poems extolling Lancelot, or even Tristan.

Sir Gawain is not the earliest northern romance in which that hero figures. The romance of *Fergus*, written in the early thirteenth century for Alan of Galloway by a continental writer,[38] has Gawain as secondary hero, ousted from his position as local Gallowegian hero by the direct ancestor of the patron, a Percival-figure who painfully learns courtesy and chivalry. The locality has an important part to play; with a precise account of local topography, Fergus travels the length of Galloway,[39] and in the later poem, Gawain endures a winter journey through the Wirral. The juxtaposition of the Arthurian realm with detailed and familiar landscape gives to both romances a paradoxical sense of insecurity, lacking in the more uniformly distant world of Chrétien's romances which in every other respect dominate *Fergus*. With *Fergus* this is clearly the effect of the 'ancestral' motif and one may well suspect its influence still at work in *Sir Gawain* and from thence to the *Awntyrs*.

There is nothing to suggest a direct relationship between the two romances across the two centuries that divide them, but there is enough to show that when the northern Gawain romances are considered as a whole, *Fergus* should not be excluded. At the least, the fact remains that *Sir Gawain* is not the first romance from the north of Britain to use the

machinery and tradition of the French romances for a chivalric romance centred on a local hero, whose adventures provide for the statement and close scrutiny of the values of courtesy.

In *Fergus* the confrontation of the unkempt hero with the court of Arthur redounds to the credit of Arthurian courtesy, but this is not so in the three alliterative Gawain romances. Gawain maintains his character as exemplar of courtesy (and this alone is enough to distinguish these romances from the later French tradition in which Gawain's character has degenerated),[40] but Arthur's court itself is severely challenged by confrontation with the outside world. In the *Awntyrs* the double plot has an attack on the Arthurian court in each section; in the first, its luxurious living is denounced by the ghost of Guinevere's mother, and in the second, the tale of Galeron shows the reluctance of an independent lord to be assimilated into the scheme of centralized royal power.[41] This latter theme is close to that of the later *Golagrus*, in which Gawain's courtesy eventually overcomes, by somewhat dubious tactics, the old-fashioned feudal ethics and family pride of another independent lord. In this poem Arthur himself is so unpleasant and his behaviour so tyrannical that the likely explanation is that the romance is the work of a partisan Scot.[42]

All three poems take an especial interest in provincial courts: the court of Bertilak is echoed by those of Golagrus, of the unnamed lord at the beginning of the same poem, and of Sir Galeron in the *Awntyrs*. Is there perhaps a touch of irony in the surprise with which the knights of Arthur's court are shown to regard these oases of civilization in the desert wastes of the provinces?[43] If there is, then it is a theme taken up to even greater effect in the portrayal of character. The Green Knight in his first shape is unique among these romances for the quality of non-religious supernatural he conveys, but as Sir Bertilak he does have descendants, especially the 'grym sire' in the first episode of *Golagrus*. For Bertilak is the courtly outsider, *par excellence*, the mysterious knight from beyond the pale of civilization, who sets himself up as judge over the values of Camelot. Like the knight of *Golagrus* he challenges Arthur's court on two fronts: he is both morally superior and physically stronger. Arthurian chivalry comes under attack not only for failing to reach its own ethical standards, but also for the withering, if not of courage, then of the brute strength of a more heroic age. It is also challenged on its own ground of courtliness, the richness of the baronial setting and the dignity of its lord is established, inevitably, at the expense of the Arthurian court. Gawain's moral stature and self-knowledge increase as he moves from Camelot into the orbit of Bertilak, so that on his return he has outgrown the 'sumquat childgered' world of chivalric Camelot.

The *Gawain*-poet uses this material to an effect unequalled by his successors. The didacticism of the *Awntyrs* and the ethical complexity of

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Golagrus have proved too ephemeral to save the poems from near-extinction. The problems posed are those peculiar to a certain class and a certain place; questions of feudal propriety, of chivalry and social manners. Even the theme of anti-imperialism which Matthews constructs from the traditional distrust of Arthur, gives what must prove to be a purely temporary reprieve. But it is evident both from this romance and from *Pearl*, that the *Gawain*-poet[44] was himself aware of this superficiality of the concept of courtesy as it developed in the courtly society of the fourteenth century, and in both poems he deepens the concept to make a living spiritual virtue from a moral and social code. As in *Pearl* the ritual of courtly society becomes the harmony of the courts of heaven, so in *Sir Gawain* the ideals of late feudal society, engendered by necessity out of a violent world, become the foundations of an individual's integrity, and the battlefield in a struggle between life and death, compromise and absolute truth. Nowhere else in the poetry of medieval England, in either vernacular, is the distance provided by provinciality so richly exploited.

The *Morte Arthure* is second only to *Sir Gawain* as a major achievement in alliterative romance. There is however still some disagreement as to whether or not it can be called a romance at all,[45] and it is worth noting some of the reasons for this. The main problem is the 'heroic' quality of the work, the masculinity of the society and values it portrays, the absence of chivalry in favour of feudalism, of the adventures of a lone knight in favour of international, often inter-religious conflict, and the complete absence of love as a motive force. Because of this the poem has been seen variously as a descendant of the Old English epic and of the *Chanson de Roland*.[46] Matthews sees in the poem's realism an attempt to establish historical truth and contemporary relevance, which distinguishes it from the romance set in 'a world free from the normal restrictions of time, geography and economic necessity.' In particular he remarks on the lack of fantastic supernatural, on the 'employment of contemporary ideas on kingship, succession and war', the last of which receives an unvarnished, if not positively antagonistic treatment that he considers one of the most significant characteristics of the poem.[47] That some of these characteristics resemble those of the Anglo-Norman romances suggests that the poem may not be as isolated a work as has been claimed. The mingling of chronicle material with its political and geographical detail and realistic treatment of war, with romance episodes such as the giant of St Michael's Mount and the Gawain-Priamus encounter, can be paralleled in many Anglo-Norman romances. So can much of the 'heroic' element and the claim of historical veracity. In fact if the definition of romance is wide enough to include the *Romance of Horn, Fouke FitzWarin* and *Waldef* – as it must be – then it is wide enough to include the *Morte Arthure*.

It is only after we have recognized which aspects of the poem are

traditional in this way that its originality stands out in sharper relief. Thus the realistic treatment of historical material in romance is not remarkable; but such treatment of the story of Arthur is. The poem's ambiguous treatment of Arthur and his fall poses problems to its modern readers, but the suggestion made here as to the development of Arthurian romance in England may clarify the problems facing the author. He has to assimilate Arthur's literary personality into the conventions of provincial romance, to reconcile this symbol of royal power with a literary tradition of baronial origin and provincial circulation, and to make his material acceptable to an audience used to regarding Arthurian romance as something alien. He does this by creating a careful balance between Arthur the king and the idealized feudal institution of the Round Table.

In the first part of the poem we are shown Arthur and his knights in a closely interdependent relationship; indeed the prologue to the poem makes no mention of Arthur himself to begin with, but apparently includes him when it promises to tell of 'the ryealle renkys of the Rownde Table' (17) and *their* victory against the forces of Rome (22). Throughout the Roman War the importance of the Round Table is stressed by the frequency of its occurrence in a variety of alliterative collocations, coined by this author for the occasion. The action is presented in terms of corporate action and loyalty rather than individual prowess – and it is this that largely endows the poem with its epic quality. The high point of the poem is reached with the celebration at Viterbo of 'this roy with his ryalle mene of the Rownde Table' (3173). The downward turn to calamity is marked by Arthur's intention of becoming 'overlynge of alle that one the erthe lengez' (3211), a fatal expression of pride in which a new note of personal ambition sounds, marking a separation of the king from his followers. This is borne out by the vision of Fortune, which opens with the sight of wild beasts licking the blood of his knights, forewarning that his own fall will be preceded by the destruction of those nearest to him. The prophecy is fulfilled; the death of Gawain – in this northern poem, again a character of crucial importance – intensifies the isolation of the king, which reaches its extreme expression when Arthur gathers together the bodies of the fallen knights after the last battle against Modred. The solemn planctus which Arthur speaks over the dead repeats the theme of dependence and loss:

> *Here rystys the riche blude of the rownde table*
> *Rebukkede with a rebawde, and rewthe es the more:*
> *I may helples one hethe house by myn one*
> *Alls a wafull wedowe, that wanttes her beryn.*
> *I may werye & wepe and wrynge myn handys,*
> *For my wytt and my wyrchipe awaye es for ever.* (4281–6)

In the totally masculine world of the poem the image of the weeping widow stands out with immense force, stressing that the real tragedy lies not in the personal fall of Arthur, but in the destruction of a sustaining relationship. This passage marks the poetic close of the work; the death of Arthur remains to be told, but it is comparatively unimportant. The poem takes us beyond Arthur's death to his burial, by courtiers and prelates strangely similar to those who had attended him at the opening scene at Carlisle. We are a long way here from the romance version of a wasted Britain in which the body of the king – if he is indeed dead – is attended by lonely hermits. In no other version is the continuity of society so clearly expressed, and it is an idea fully consistent with the poet's interpretation of his material.

This summary does not do justice to the poem's scope and complexity, but it does serve to identify a major theme, that of the Round Table seen as the basis of the king's power. In this emphasis on the dependence of the king on his lords can perhaps be seen the lasting contribution of baronial influence on English Arthurian literature, through its direct influence on Malory.[48] It is an admirable compromise between contradictory inherited attitudes; on the one hand the legendary and dominant figure of Arthur the king, and on the other the independent traditions of historical romance. The *Morte Arthure* marks a brief moment in the development of the Arthurian theme in which the balance between Arthur and his knights is held steady. Previously, the legend of Arthur in England had been largely the province of chroniclers, usually monastic ones serving royal interests. In the *Morte Arthure* this legend, with claims far greater than those of Horn, Bevis or Guy of Warwick to the attention of English audiences, at last attracted the talents of a creative writer who freed it from the limitations of chronicle and rendered it acceptable to a new audience.

The Arthurian poems of the alliterative revival would seem to support the value of a reading in the perspective of earlier insular romance. The legend of Arthur never meant the same for English as for continental audiences; it had an inescapable historical relevance, which runs counter to the exotic distancing required by romance. When the alliterative poets came to treat this material they explored, in their different ways, this historical and geographical immediacy. But they did not do so in a vacuum; the use of romance to deal with just this type of material had been established by a previous generation of provincial authors, writing in a different vernacular, but under the same skies. It is a comparison which does credit to poetry in the English language – *Sir Gawain* and *Morte Arthure* at least are unequalled in Anglo-Norman romance – but it also does credit to the history of English literature to recognize a consistent tradition of serious, high quality romance maintained in the 'silent' regions of medieval England.

V

Alliterative Romance and the French Tradition

W. R. J. BARRON

Though we have made some progress in our understanding of the nature of Romance, the relationship of the English to the French examples is still commonly stated in terms which have been current since the beginning of the century:

> Whereas most English romances of the thirteenth century are derived directly from Anglo-Norman originals, the majority of fourteenth-century romances are derived, at one or two removes, from French.[1]

Though valid as generalizations, such statements have perhaps allowed us to ignore too readily the variety of source material drawn upon by the English romance writers, the varying nature of the redactive process, and the various degrees of originality achieved by the redactors. They still license us to avoid too easily the implications of such creative independence, limited and piecemeal though it may be in many cases, for those English romances of good literary quality whose sources are uncertain or unknown.

The uncritical acceptance of such generalizations has been particularly unfortunate in the case of the alliterative romances, where it is precisely those to which most critical respect has been paid whose redactive process is most obscure. Yet, despite the fact that we attribute cultural significance to the products of the Alliterative Revival as a group, the evidence of those romances whose redactive process can be closely studied has not been used to throw light on those in which it remains in doubt. Within the space available here, I propose a limited outline study with that end in view.

There is an initial problem of definition. The seemingly insoluble difficulties of defining Romance and classifying the existing examples in meaningful categories are not made any easier by introducing a sub-classification based upon the poetic medium.[2] The alliterative romances, as we shall see, are, if anything, even more disparate in subject-matter and treatment than those in other forms of English verse and prose. In

particular, the theoretic distinction between Chronicle, Epic, and Romance is gravely blurred in a number of the best examples. External criteria of medium and form having proved unhelpful in distinguishing the latter two, there may be some practical convenience in defining what are effectively consecutive and interrelated stages in the evolution of secular narrative in terms of the changing influences which shaped their themes and values:

> Epic is the treatment in literary form, and therefore in heightened terms, of the ideals of a military society, through the medium of history and pseudo-history, usually that of the society itself.

> Romance is the treatment in literary form, and therefore in heightened terms, of the ideals of a chivalric society, through the medium of pseudo-history, myth and legend, including those of other societies and other ages.

The central difficulty persists in the need to define the key terms here: 'military' implying a society organized primarily for warfare in which all male members of the ruling class were constantly engaged for the defence of faith and fatherland; 'chivalric' one whose social organization was still basically military but in which men were more often involved in the mimic warfare of the joust than in the reality, exercising one of a range of male virtues amongst which the social graces, inspired by the opposite sex, were scarcely less vital to public reputation and personal honour. However much distorted by literary idealization, these social concepts are sufficiently concrete and distinctive to be identifiable despite the similarities of form, subject-matter, and narrative convention which often blur the distinction between Epic and Romance.

In some of the alliterative texts that distinction is so blurred that exact classification is impossible and, without consideration of the source(s) and nature of the redaction, largely irrelevant. A brief survey of the sources of the commonly accepted romances may illustrate the general situation.[3]

> *Alexander A (Alisaunder of Macedoine):* Compiled from Orosius's *Historia adversum Paganos* (11. 1–451, 901–53, 1202–47) and the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni* (11. 452–900, 954–1201), Latin version of a Greek romance of Alexander. The latter has supplied material reminiscent of the *enfances* section of a heroic epic, full of exotic, romantic incident, to which the Orosius inserts add something of the sobriety of Chronicle.

> *Alexander B (Alexander and Dindimus):* Translated from a later section of the *Historia de preliis* concerned with the wonders of the East and the letters exchanged by Alexander and Dindimus, king of the

Brahmans, on their conflicting philosophies of life – material akin to medieval debate literature interpolated in some versions of the *Historia*.[4]

The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne: Composed of two episodes of moral reproof of the courtly and chivalric excesses of the Round Table; the first derived largely from the *Trentalle Sancti Gregorii*, widely current in a number of Middle English versions, with additional details from other didactic works in English; the second apparently freely composed, drawing on the alliterative *Morte Arthure* for many motifs of Arthurian arrogance and on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for verbal and, possibly, thematic suggestions.[5]

Chevalere Assigne: A fragment from the *enfances* section of the French epic cycle on the First Crusade, originally an independent folktale (see below, pp. 80–3).

The Destruction of Troy: A version, at enormous length, of Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, verbally amplified yet retaining the tone of historical truth found in Guido.[6]

Golagrus and Gawain: A free retelling of two episodes from the First Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval* which contrast the *gentilesse* of Gawain with the arrogance of Kay and the aggressiveness of Arthur (see below, pp. 83–5).

Joseph of Arimathea: An outline version of the *Estoire del Saint Graal*, opening section of the Vulgate Cycle, wholly confined to the saint's early adventures before the bringing of Christianity to Britain.[7]

Laȝamon's *Brut*: A much expanded version of Robert Wace's *Roman de Brut* (itself translated from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*), modifying its courtly bias to produce a heroic, consciously archaic, national chronicle.

Morte Arthure: A complex redaction apparently largely based on a version of Wace's *Brut* but much intermixed with other French material in the interests of a distinctive epic interpretation (see below, pp. 86–7).

Rauf Coilȝear: A satirical romance which nevertheless teaches a lesson in *gentilesse*; though a familiar type of folktale, here superficially associated with the Charlemagne legend, it has no identifiable source.

The Siege of Jerusalem: a curious fusion of chronicle elements with what is basically a religious legend describing the vengeance taken by

Titus and Vespasian for the death of Christ; compiled from the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, Higden's *Polychronicon*, the *Legenda Aurea* and Roger d'Argenteuil's *Bible en françois*, with suggestions from *The Destruction of Troy*, and possibly from other alliterative poems.[8]

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A number of French analogues have traditionally been cited for one of the twin plots; for the other only more remote and uncertain parallels have been found; no source is known for the motif which interlinks them. The redactive process by which the poem could have been produced from such materials remains a mystery (see below, p. 87).

The Wars of Alexander: Derived, like *Alexander A* and *B*, from the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, though from a different recension, to which it adheres closely, producing the effect of an historical chronicle.[9]

William of Palerne: A competent paraphrase of the French *Guillaume de Palerne*, a romance which, though rooted in folklore, lays much stress on the courtly qualities of *gentilesse* and *cortaysie* (see below, pp. 75–80).

There are obvious dangers of over-simplification inherent in this kind of outline analysis, though they are not necessarily more distorting than the conventional classification by subject-matter which ignores medium, date and area of composition.[10] It tells us, I think, comparatively little that, of these fourteen texts, five belong to the Matter of Antiquity, two (*Chevalere Assigne* and *Rauf Coilʒear*) to the Matter of France – but both adventitiously and uncharacteristically, and six to the Matter of Britain. These six illustrate the misleading nature of such conventional categories: only *Golagrus and Gawain* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* correspond to the popular conception of Arthurian romance;[11] Laʒamon's *Brut* is distinguished by its chronicle treatment of the legend of Arthur – deliberate on the part of the poet influenced, perhaps, by cultural isolation and the historical heritage of his medium, the *Morte Arthure* by its epic bias, while the Arthurian world provides a casual rather than an essential setting for *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, properly a moral tale, and for *Joseph of Arimathea* which could be mistaken for a saint's life. The prominence of the other two 'matters' predominantly associated with Epic is unexpected.

But it is apparent, even from this crude analysis of type and content, that these texts can only be grouped together under the widest terms of *both* the definitions given above. They present, with various degrees of exaggeration and idealization, the interests and values of an aristocracy, through the medium of history, pseudo-history, myth and legend. But the balance of epic and romantic elements in each has to be individually assessed, a

process inhibited by problems of definition. Yet even the widest definition cannot cover certain persistent elements. Neither Epic nor Romance distinguishes between history and legend, but a number of these texts seems concerned to present their material as Chronicle, with something of its external form as well as its factual exactitude and earnestness of tone. Laʒamon's *Brut* apart, a surprising number of them might be described as chronicles with epic overtones: *Alexander A*, *The Destruction of Troy*, *Morte Arthure*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and *The Wars of Alexander*. Yet the historicity of the Matter of France apparently made no appeal to alliterative authors, since *Chevalere Assigne* stops well short of the authentic sections of the Crusade Cycle and the role given to Charlemagne in *Rauf Coilʒear* is a purely legendary one, played by various sovereigns in other versions of the legend. It may, indeed, have been the informative and didactic element in these histories of great men which appealed to the alliterative poets. Certainly there is a moral earnestness, sometimes overt, sometimes implicit, in *Alexander B*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, *Golagrus and Gawain*, *Joseph of Arimathea*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which is not normally associated with Romance.

This didactic bias is reflected in the unexpected prominence of Latin sources: five of the alliterative romances derive, in whole or part, from 'learned' originals as against six from French sources. The bare fact, though startling, is much less significant than the nature and treatment of the originals. It can hardly be accidental that the Latin works were major compendia of classical knowledge widely available throughout Western Europe in vernacular versions. In drawing upon them the alliterative poets were merely claiming their European heritage. That they chose Latin rather than vernacular versions, though it has something to tell us about the educational and social standing of the poets, is less significant than their independent approach to the redactive process; they select, abstract, and combine with other texts, Latin and vernacular, with as much freedom as their European counterparts in an age of literary stereotypes and respect for inherited knowledge. The process by which *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, *Rauf Coilʒear*, and *Morte Arthure* have been produced from a variety of sources, learned and popular, native and European, seems to have been similar – if, so far, less well understood. In such a context, the use of French sources need not be specially significant or imply more than participation in a common European culture dominated by France. The issue of creativity or dependence must rest on the treatment of those sources, the nature of the redactive process. So far as the alliterative romances are concerned, that process has not so far been studied on any comparative basis.

The number of such texts is too limited and their representative status too uncertain to allow absolute judgements. But even on the provisional

basis which such a rudimentary survey permits it would seem that some of the generalizations commonly applied to the Middle English romances are not wholly applicable to the alliterative examples which appear less clearly classifiable, derived from more varied sources, and more independent of the French tradition. Confirmation of the distinction must await further study of the romances in general, more precise identification of sources, more numerous and detailed redaction studies. My purpose here is to suggest the importance of the latter by an outline survey of a number of redactions which may illustrate the degree and nature of the dependence of alliterative romances upon French originals.[12]

William of Palerne

One of the earliest products of the Alliterative Revival, *William of Palerne* was probably composed in the South West Midlands about 1350. The poet acknowledges a French source which has been identified as the late twelfth century verse romance *Guillaume de Palerne*.[13] The original was produced for a patroness, *la contesse Yolent*, identified as Yoland, daughter of Baldwin IV, Count of Hainault, who in 1178 married the Count of Saint-Pol. The English version was also made for a patron, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford; not for his own benefit but *For hem þat knowe no Frensche, ne never underston* (l. 5533),[14] possibly the households of his two manors near Gloucester. The redaction might be expected to reflect this contrast of audiences in fundamental alterations to the original. But in fact both versions tell essentially the same story:

> William, Prince of Apulia, is stolen in infancy by a werwolf who, to protect him from the murderous designs of his uncle, swims across the straits of Messina with the child and conceals him in a wood near Rome where he is brought up by a cowherd. As a youth, William is seen by the Emperor of Rome during a hunt and appointed page to his daughter Melior. Feeling herself attracted to William, the princess confides in her cousin Alisaundrine who brings them together in a secret betrothal. When Rome is threatened by an invasion, the emperor knights William who is largely responsible for repulsing the enemy. Then, as Melior is about to be married to the son of the Emperor of Greece, Alisaundrine helps the lovers to escape, disguised in two white bear skins. With the aid of the werwolf they cross to Sicily where William's father is now dead and his mother besieged in Palermo by the King of Spain. The lovers enter the city disguised as hart and hind, William captures the king in battle and forces his queen to disenchant the werwolf, her stepson Alphouns, whom she had

hoped to replace in the succession with her own son Braundinis. William's true parentage is revealed, he is married to Melior, his sister to Alphouns, and Alisaundrine to Braundinis. William then becomes Emperor and Alphouns King of Spain.

This mixture of elements suggests a folktale of the 'male Cinderella' type mingled with other folktale patterns of young love frustrated by social barriers fighting its way to happiness by mutual loyalty, courage and wit. Though the French version is usually classed as a *roman d'aventures* on the basis of its close-packed incident and characteristic plot-machinery of mistaken identities, disguises, enchantments and prophetic dreams, its claim to be considered as courtly literature rests rather upon the way in which these elements have been presented in conformity with the tastes of the noble patroness:

> Impregnated with the doctrines of *l'amour courtois*, it constantly analyses the emotions and emphasizes the agonies of love-sickness and the joys of lovers in one another's company. In style it is somewhat *precieuse*, verbally prolix, full of formal speeches, of interminable digressions, and marked by occasional allegorical tendencies, especially in the consideration of Love.[15]

Though the tastes of a provincial English audience might be expected to differ from those of the Countess Yolande, the alliterative version, somewhat greater in bulk than the French, reproduces every major episode in the same sequence without adding any incident of importance.[16]

The adventures which were the French poet's folklore inheritance survive, but the elements of literary sophistication superimposed upon the narrative, particularly the courtly elaboration of the love scenes (751–1782), are more cavalierly treated. When her interest in William is first aroused by hearing her ladies praise him, Melior examines her feelings in a long monologue (828–949) and confides in Alisaundrine who promises her a herb which will bring relief. Meanwhile William dreams that Melior offers herself to him, wakes in disappointment to find himself clasping a pillow and reflects on his unworthiness for such a love (1118–1270). As he haunts the garden under Melior's windows, the ladies come upon him and, questioned by Alisaundrine, he describes his sufferings (1271–1562); Melior, recognizing her own symptoms, reflects again on the nature of her feelings (1563–1626). Eventually, Alisaundrine brings them together in mutual confession of their love (1627–1782). The English redactor reproduces the classic *amour courtois* pattern, but shows his impatience with its conventions by fusing Melior's two soliloquies into one extended monologue (433–570). He patiently follows the heroine through her initial complaint that her heart has betrayed her into feelings for which others will

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blame her. Prompted perhaps by the hint of objections to her love, the redactor passes at this point (F:907 : E:476) to her own rejection of it as unworthy of her rank, clearly paraphrased from a passage in Melior's second soliloquy (F:1578–86 : E:481–6). Love now speaks in her heart, warning her that he prefers nobility of nature to noble birth, an argument which the composite English version places within a few lines of the doubts it is intended to dispel (498–520), but loosely paraphrased, the persuasive voice of Love being replaced by Melior's own deduction from the rich clothes in which the infant William had been found, her observation of his gallant behaviour and the regard in which others hold him. The effect is forthright and explicit, leading to Melior's determination to give her heart to William, allowing the redaction to return to the sequence of her first soliloquy where she reflects on the practical problem of how to inform him.

The result is more effective dramatically and more convincing in human terms than the original where Melior's first monologue, wordy but inconclusive, does nothing to forward the action, while the second shows her still unsure of her feelings immediately before she accepts William. The English fusion of the two gives point to her soul-searching by allowing her to reason away objections to the match so that the action need not be delayed when the opportunity to declare her love occurs. But, though the redactor was clearly not without artistic resource, there are occasional clumsinesses in the execution of his intention. For example, the point at which he returns to the sequence of the first soliloquy is marked in both versions by a momentary interjection of the narrator (F:908–9 : E:487–90) and a change of topic: Melior resolves not to blame her heart for something which gives her such pleasure but to obey its urgings. Having paraphrased the passage as an introduction to his eulogy of William (F:910–31 : E:491–7), the redactor uses it again as a conclusion to this phase of his united monologue, suggesting that he had difficulty in judging when he had achieved his intended effect.

His treatment of the remainder of the love-episode is more conservative, following the French with only occasional independence in matters of detail. He ignores the narrator's comments on Melior's sufferings (950–70), adequately established by her own lament, but gives a full account of the physical symptoms which attract Alisaundrine's attention (F:971–83 : E:571–89). Her role in the love intrigue has been curiously altered in one respect. In both versions she promises Melior a herb to rid her of love-longing; an offer inconsistent with her secret intention of bringing the lovers together and one never fulfilled. But it implies that she has magic powers, which is perhaps why the English poet credits her (653–8; 861–6) with causing the two dreams in which William's passion is first roused by a vision of Melior and then calmed by her gift of a rose. The redactor's apparent wish to show Alisaundrine forwarding the love-match conflicts

both with her ambiguous offer of the herb and with one of his earlier innovations. In the French poem, Melior seeks her cousin's aid in overcoming a love she judges unworthy, but as the abbreviated English version has already brought her to the point where her only concern is how to reveal her feelings to William, the herb can have no meaningful function there. The English poet patiently translated the major part of the soliloquy in which William, after his first dream, reflects on the impossibility of winning an emperor's daughter (F:1184–1240 : E:692–730), but omits the remainder (1254–70) in which he compares himself to a stricken boar. Despite this sign of impatience with the conventions of courtly love, William's sufferings as he sits day after day gazing up at Melior's window are faithfully, even repetitively, detailed (F:1271–386 : E:731–82). But in what follows the subtlety of the French is sacrificed to a natural human reaction: Alisaundrine, judging Melior's feelings by her sudden change of colour when they come upon William asleep in the garden, urges her to go to him (F:1390–436); the Melior of the English romance runs to him without urging (E:834–51). Yet, when Alisaundrine questions the hero on the state of his feelings, eliciting much that the reader already knows, the English follows the French text closely, offsetting the effect of having telescoped Melior's two soliloquies which leaves only her last diffident impulse to be dealt with here. Alisaundrine breaks the last barrier of reserve and leaves the lovers in each others arms; and the redactor, recognizing a climax in the action, translates fully (F:1627–782 : E:940–1066).

The remaining obstacles to their union are practical, providing occasion for a further sequence of secret assignations, frustrations, emotional crises and renewals of vows; but William and Melior are now companions in adventure rather than lovers, and both authors are too preoccupied with their perils to pay much attention to their emotional relationship. Here as elsewhere, the English poet is manifestly more at ease with the narrative of action, following the sequence of the original closely, without major omissions or additions, and normally at equal length. There are, however, some significant departures from this norm. The emperor's discovery of the foundling William in the forest is treated at almost double length in the English (F:341–628 : E:170–383) which underscores ideas inherent in the original: the boy's good heart and simple nature, his generosity in killing game for his playmates, in protecting his foster-parents from the emperor's enquiries and thanking them for their care on leaving for the court. When he finally recovers his patrimony, the rewards he heaps on his foster-parents are detailed at almost double length (F:9385–430 : E:5859–97). The contribution to the characterization of William is obvious; but it is as a folklore hero rather than a chivalric figure. The English poet shows a similar interest in human motivation elsewhere, particularly in reactions to

the various animal disguises used by the lovers: he doubles the description of a servant's terror on seeing the white bears escape from the palace (F:3149–66 : E:1764–85), virtually creates a scene in which the emperor is given a graphic account (F:3792–804 : E:2154–73), and turns a single speech into a lively colloquial exchange between workmen who discover the bears asleep in a quarry (F:3930–75 : E:2241–77). The redactor's only substantial invention of incident comes in a similar context: to help the lovers, disguised as deer, to land in Sicily, the werwolf creates a diversion by leaping ashore pursued by the crew (F:4561–615 : E:2713–66); the English adds a scene in which a shipboy strikes down the hind and is surprised to see her caught up and carried ashore by the hart (2767–91), an account of which he later gives to his shipmates (2805–290). By emphasizing human reactions, the redactor has lent some conviction to one of the more improbable elements in his story.

The mixture of improbable adventures and credible emotions in *Guillaume de Palerne* was clearly to the taste of the English poet. Other components, notably two long sequences dealing with warfare, apparently were not. Both are thematically necessary: in the Duke of Saxony's rebellion against the emperor (F:1784–2410 : E:1067–310), William wins his knighthood and shows himself worthy of Melior, while by breaking the King of Spain's siege of Palermo (F:5459–7035 : E:3261–934), he unknowingly wins back his own heritage. The French poet's addiction to the repeated formula has led him to duplicate a number of incidents in each; the redactor, who deals faithfully with such reduplications elsewhere, has cut the battle passages to less than half length – moderation unusual amongst alliterative poets whose exploitation of the percussive iteration of their medium often leads them to expand descriptions of combat. His abbreviation, though erratic, consistently retains passages which relate warfare to the narrative theme, briefly outlining general engagements between massed forces, but expanding passages in which William is personally involved in combat. Even then, exotic detail, such as the respect shown by the hero's horse in kneeling to him, takes precedence over necessary military matters. Towards the end of the siege of Palermo, even his wish to exalt the hero begins to flag: William's defeat and capture of the Spanish prince is greatly abbreviated (F:6150–237 : E:3600–630), and a lengthy struggle with another enemy knight merely summarized (F:6704–891 : E:3842–66). Chivalric incident and the technicalities of warfare clearly interested the English poet less than the adventurous wanderings of William and Melior.

He has not always discriminated so clearly between the conflicting claims of narration and description as in the battle scenes. Descriptions of ceremonial survive, somewhat abbreviated; descriptions of dress and armour and of feasts are radically simplified. Oddly, he pays greater

attention to the natural setting of his story, expanding the description of the garden where William and Melior meet (F:1379–86 : E:816–24), and, when the child is discovered in the werwolf's den (F:187–213 : E:3–64), the poet describes how the cowherd sits *clou3tand kyndely his schon* with his dog beside him and William is tempted into the open by the beauty of the place. His technical conduct of the redaction is competent, taking greater care than the French poet to maintain narrative continuity by adding a line or two to bridge an abrupt transition and indicating the relevance of a new character to the action at first appearance. By periodic summaries of the content of a speech or the general effect of a passage he has magnified the element of needless repetition, misplaced emphasis and unnecessary obtrusion of the narrator from which the original version is not free.

These technical features are characteristic of the redaction as a whole. Broadly speaking the whole content of *Guillaume de Palerne* has been treated with the same cautious conservatism, reproduced without marked expansion or abbreviation, without structural or thematic alteration, as a narrative of adventures linked by the familiar motif of a folktale hero's rise to power. If the alliterative poet recognized in it the basic pattern of the native Matter of England romances – *Horn, Havelok, Athelston, Guy of Warwick* – with which *William of Palerne* is still confusingly classified (*Manual,* I 34–7), then he had every reason to expect that it would appeal to his popular, provincial audience. But his original contained one element which would not have figured in such works: the presentation of what is basically a folktale in terms of Chivalry and Courtly Love. The love element is inherent in its folktale pattern, frank, natural and with legitimate marriage as its goal; the conventional expression given to it is alien and bears all the signs of having been superimposed by an author steeped in the literature of *amour courtois*. It was clearly not to the redactor's taste and his major initiative has been to restrict its scope. But neither this negative impulse nor his positive preference for incidents with a high degree of human interest overcame his conservative desire to do his duty by his source. Though it is by no means wholly passive, *William of Palerne* is as close to routine translation of a French source as any alliterative romance-writer was to come.

Chevalere Assigne

Probably made in the North West Midlands towards the end of the fourteenth century, this is a version of the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, opening section of the vast epic *Cycle de la Croisade* which, originating in the twelfth century in poetic accounts of events of the First

Crusade, accumulated during the thirteenth fictitious episodes celebrating one of its leaders, Godfrey of Bouillon, King of Jerusalem, and his legendary ancestor the Swan Knight. Of the various forms in which the folktale of the swan-children has been adapted to serve as prelude to the Crusade Cycle, the English text clearly derives from that in which their mother is called Beatrix and, amongst the four existing redactions, from the longer version in monorhymed alexandrine laisses. The eight surviving manuscripts represent the textual tradition too incompletely to establish a stemma or identify the precise source of the English redaction; but the issue is reduced in importance by the fact that they differ only in points of detail and in verbal elaboration.[17]

> Beatrice, wife of King Oriens, bore seven children at a birth, six boys and a girl, each with a chain about the neck; her jealous mother-in-law, Matabryne, concealed their birth and ordered the children to be exposed in a forest where they were rescued and brought up by a hermit. Some years later their survival becomes known to the queen-mother who sends her servant Malkedras to kill them and bring her their chains. As the chains are cut off the children become swans, but the boy Enyas, escaping the transformation, informs the king, kills Malkedras in combat, and rescues the others. One, however, whose chain has been destroyed, must remain forever a swan, accompanying Enyas upon knightly adventures.

All that has survived of the vast French epic in the English redaction is this folktale adventitiously woven into it. In cutting it free from the Crusade Cycle and omitting the jongleur's elaborate call for attention to his history of the Chevalier au Cygne (1–33), the redactor has nonetheless preserved the association by introducing Oriens as *chefe of þe kynde of Cheualere assygne* (11) even though his son does not become the Swan Knight until the next section of the Cycle. The proem itself he has replaced with a few lines (1–5) presenting the story as an instance of divine protection of His creation, a suggestion echoed in the concluding line (370), but not otherwise developed as a didactic theme.

The 370 lines of *Chevalere Assigne* correspond to 1890 lines in the original. The difference is due not to the repeated omission of lines and groups of lines, more often verbal elaboration than narrative detail, which distinguishes one verse text of the *Beatrix* from another, but to much more radical methods of abbreviation. It is the essential narrative of events which has survived at the expense of incidental and descriptive matter: ceremonies of thanksgiving (90–4), of knighting (1019–1127), descriptions of arming (1276–348) and of the preliminaries to combat (1420–67). Radical condensation favours action rather than setting or motivation, ignoring the reactions of the court to the hero's wild appearance when he comes to

rescue his mother (F:786–915 : E:219–30), his sorrow at the loss of his siblings when they are transformed into swans (F:471–505 : E:141–52) and the conflict of feeling in the servant, Markus, sent to kill the children (F:296–324 : E:92–104). So, also, Matabryne is characterized by her machinations at the birth of the children rather than by the motives attributed to her in the original (F:92–117 : E:37–45).

But though the redactor follows his source most closely where its narrative is most spare and direct, he discriminates between action vital to the plot and events of incidental interest, concentrating upon two instances of divine intervention on the hero's behalf (F:1467–570 : E:314–32) to the neglect of his armed struggle against Malkedras (1571–710). And he takes care to include descriptive detail where it bears upon the plot, as in his abbreviated version of the arming of Enyas (F:1210–75 : E:275–82) where the quality and mysterious origin of the equipment hints at the importance of his martial role and the divine protection under which he is to fight. Similarly, the retention – in part – of the naive questions which demonstrate the child's ignorance of the use of arms (F:1349–419 : E:283–313) shows awareness of their contribution to the surprise effect of his miraculous victory. The redactor clearly realized that something more than an outline of action was necessary to preserve the meaning and dramatic effect of his material.

With that intention, he has occasionally altered the narrative sequence of the original to maintain continuity of action; omitting a passage in which Markus reports to Matabryne the supposed death of the children (325–30), and an aside in which the French poet comments, without explaining why, that should they lose their chains they will become swans (338–48) so as not to interrupt a rapid outline of their early years; interrupting Malkedras' report to the old queen of the children's survival so that she can take immediate vengeance on Markus, with dramatic effect, rather than allow that episode to delay execution of her orders for the removal of their chains (F:398–470 : E:120–40). These attempts to modify the effects of rapid change of scene and frequent interruptions of narrative in a radical abbreviation suggest some sense of artistic purpose. But they are limited and not always well conceived: the episode in which Matabryne brings seven pups to her son accusing Beatrice of unnatural intercourse is unnecessarily divided into three scenes (F:200–254 : E:57–74), due perhaps to the redactor having forgotten the sequence of the original in translating a lengthy passage after a single reading. Some omissions have also had unfortunate effects: removal of the crucial scene in which Matabryne admits to Beatrice the true nature of the miraculous birth, children not pups (118–50), fundamentally weakens the narrative, a defect compounded by a later passage in which Matabryne accuses the queen of intercourse with both men and dogs (F:255–94 : E:75–91). Similarly, the

failure to complete the story of Markus, whose sight is miraculously restored (1748–76), leaves a loose thread in the narrative.

Another method of combining radical abbreviation with narrative coherence, selecting essential details from a lengthy passage and regrouping them in an effective sequence, is beneficial where the original moves rapidly from topic to topic, from one setting to another (F:786–915 : E:219–30 ; F:1467–570 : E:314–32), producing a directness and clarity which could not have been achieved by uniform abbreviation alone. Unfortunately when badly handled, as in the initial establishment of characters and situation (F:34–35 : E:5–18), it can produce just the incoherence it is intended to avoid. There is a similar inconsistency in the redactor's attempts to achieve economy of expression and descriptive compression. The lengthy dialogues of the original are sometimes effectively recast in narrative form (F:151–99 : E:46–56), but inexplicably the narration of how Matabryne ordered the children's chains to be made into a cup (F:571–603 : E:153–78) includes an invented conversation between the goldsmith and his wife in bed!

The result of such erratic, if well-intentioned, methods of redaction is uneven in outline, sometimes obscure in meaning, frequently incoherent in expression, but never passive or entirely lacking in creative spirit. The English poet's initiative was technical rather than interpretative: the fabulous and supernatural elements bulk larger, and seem even more improbable, in his version, but as the incidental consequence of abbreviation rather than design. In attempting to free a folktale from its epic context and the inflated narration of the grand literary manner, he struggles continually, if often ineptly, to take his own way with it as a story-teller not merely a translator.

Golagrus and Gawain

The relationship of *Golagrus and Gawain*, written in south-western Scotland towards the end of the fifteenth century, to its source in the First Continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval* is well established and, having published an outline analysis elsewhere, I need only characterize the redaction in general terms here.[18] As it seems improbable that the alliterative poet can have known the *Livre du Chastel Orguelleus* in isolation from the remainder of the late prose recension of the *Perceval*, his choice of two short episodes from it amongst such a compendium of adventures suggests a high degree of selectivity and a distinctive creative concept. Superficially considered, the poet might seem to be doing no more than the author of *Chevalere Assigne* in raiding a major work for narrative material of incidental interest, to the neglect of the wider thematic context in which it is

embedded. In fact the alliterative poem uses limited narrative elements from the adventure of the *Chastel Orguelleus*, restructured, radically altered in content and in the presentation of the characters, to create a theme of his own, eulogizing Gawain but in terms very different from much of the First Continuation material.

Taking up an unfinished thread of Chrétien's poem, the *Livre* follows the Round Table on a mission to free a fellow knight, Girflet, long imprisoned in the Chastel, sheltering *en route* at the house of Yder le Bel, where Gawain's courtesy gains them hospitality after a more peremptory approach by Kay has failed, encountering Bran de Lis, with whom Gawain has a long-standing feud, and gaining his help in the siege of Chastel Orguelleus. Of these three episodes, the first, with its conventional contrast of Gawain's social poise with Kay's boorishness, survives at equal length in the English (F:103^{v}b–105a : E:40–221).[19] The second (105a–113a) disappears, no doubt because it is less creditable to Gawain who had earlier seduced Bran's sister and killed his father. The third is radically reinterpreted: the siege, though conducted as a series of formal engagements has more of the grim reality of war than the jousting of the original, the numbers involved growing continually and knights being wounded and killed on both sides (F:113b–115^{v}b : E:545–1024), continuing uninterrupted to the climactic meeting between Gawain and the Riche Soudoier, lord of Chastel Orguelleus. A truce in the original (115^{v}a–116^{v}b), during which both sides go hunting, has been omitted from the English and with it the essential motivation of that final encounter. When Gawain overcomes the Riche Soudoier, Sir Golagrus in the English, he refuses to surrender since his humiliation would kill his *amie*, watching from the walls. An episode involving both, witnessed by Gawain during the hunting interlude, has convinced him of the violence of their love and his own need to respect it. Lacking this motive, Gawain's magnanimity is excited by his opponent's refusal to dishonour his ancestors, he feigns defeat when their duel is renewed and accompanies Golagrus to the castle (F:117^{r}a–118a : E:1025–1141). Once the lady has been got out of the way, Golagrus confesses his defeat to his followers, submits to Arthur and joins the Round Table in honouring Gawain (F:118a–118^{v}b : E:1142–362).

What was originally a clash of codes, one knight sacrificing his chivalric reputation in recognition of the claims which love makes upon the chivalry of another has become a conflict of character in which Gawain risks his own honour upon his personal estimate of his opponent's integrity, turning a rather artificial *roman à thèse* into an incident of genuine human interest. To make it effective, the redactor has returned to the old straightforward, valiant, courteous Gawain beloved of the English, demonstrating his courtesy in familiar contrast with Kay in the Yder le Bel incident and inverting that contrast by transferring an episode in which Kay is humiliated

in the joust (115a–115ᵛa) to a point just before Gawain enters the lists and giving him a victory (836–83) which heightens the hero's magnanimity in pretending defeat by Golagrus, who praises him before his own followers (1196–219) and the Round Table (1315–23) – material added by the redactor.

The unknown Golagrus requires much more detailed presentation and the redactor has adopted a device from the *Perceval* continuation by which Bran de Lis, having joined Arthur's mission, explains the customs of Chastel Orguelleus. The English version, having omitted Bran, gives his role to Sir Spynagros and turns the detached commentator into an ardent partisan of Golagrus who explains why he owes allegiance to no overlord, warns Arthur not to interfere with such an independent spirit (261–98) whose determination is demonstrated in his preparations to resist a siege (519–44), and advises Gawain to approach him with the greatest respect when he leads a mission to demand surrender (320–457) – an episode invented by the redactor to allow Gawain to witness the firmness and courtesy of his opponent. When they are about to meet in the field, Spynagros praises Golagrus's courage and military skill (795–833) and the redactor exploits the convention by which the prowess of a knight is reflected in the splendour of his equipment, replacing a description in the original of the arming of Gawain by one in which Golagrus prepares for combat (F:117a : E:884–902).

All this elaborate preparation makes the climax the conflict of two noble natures, with the greatest honour going to the knight whose practice of the chivalric code, and the self-sacrifice which it exacts, is most perfect. The outcome inevitably reflects upon the reputation of the loser, especially since his behaviour is dictated by concern for personal and family honour not by a conflict of duties, and the redactor has added a long speech (1161–245) in which Golagrus makes his apologia to his followers, arguing that no man can escape the decrees of fortune and citing the example of Sampson, Solomon and other great men overthrown by fate. It is such extra-narrative material, rather than manipulation of the plot, which has produced a romance, simple and organic in structure, human rather than formulaic in its concerns, as different from the original as its complex alliterative stanza of thirteen lines on only four rhymes is from the somewhat characterless French prose. The choice of medium compelled verbal independence which the redactor has exploited at many levels to produce what amounts to an original creation.

Though it would clearly be unwise to rest too much upon the representative status of these three redactions, disparate fragments of a complex tradition, they scarcely conform to the familiar generalizations on the dependence of English romances upon French originals. It is likely that those generalizations need to be modified, not merely for the alliterative examples, but for

the corpus of English romances as a whole. For that purpose, many more redaction studies are needed, and these in turn must rest upon source studies whose precision will depend on whether the textual tradition of the French original, often so much more complex than that of English works, has yet been fully established. Without wishing to pre-empt the long-term, cumulative results of such studies one might project a general distinction between alliterative and non-alliterative redactors on the basis of the degree of independence thrust upon the former by the nature of their poetic medium. The technical demands of alliterative verse, compounded by those of a closely rhymed stanza, as in *Golagrus and Gawain*, or laisses of irregular length ending in a rhymed bob and wheel, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, making any kind of literal, word for word, rendering of the French impossible, force the redactor to consider what it is in the source he wishes to reproduce, how it can best be rendered by his disparate medium, and – if he is artistically perceptive – what is lost in the process and how it might be replaced or compensated for.

Such forced liberty at the verbal level does not guarantee a corresponding artistic initiative in exploiting it, or even technical competence in rendering the sense of the original. The patient, if rather heavy-handed, efforts of the author of *William of Palerne* to reproduce the full verbal content of the original bloats it in a way which is comically appropriate to the folktale elements and grotesquely unsuited to their courtly context. In *Chevalere Assigne*, the same bloating effect, never sustained for more than a few lines before being replaced by radical abbreviation or outline paraphrase, accounts for the narrative incoherence and failure to achieve any consistent style. The impossibility of maintaining narrative continuity in the complex *Golagrus and Gawain* stanza seems to have determined the redactive process, in which its merits as a medium for elaborate description, formal speeches and expression of violent action are exploited for positive effects not aimed at in the original.

Though there may be a rough correlation between the dates of composition and the growing independence of these redactions, the sample is too small and the dating too uncertain to establish that the alliterative romances progressively matured in relation to the French tradition. More significant, perhaps, is the bearing which these examples of limited experimentation and originality in the adaptation of a single source may have upon alliterative romances of admitted excellence which imply a much more complicated creative process. As our understanding of the *Morte Arthure* grows, its thematic and artistic complexity becomes more apparent.[20] The source studies so far undertaken are not conclusive, but they suggest a complex redaction based in outline upon some version, not certainly identified, of the chronicle account of Arthur originated by Geoffrey of Monmouth into which have been inserted extensive episodes from the

French epic *Fierabras* (or its English derivative *Sir Firumbras*), and from two Alexander romances, *Li fuerres de Gadres* and *Les voeux du paon*, all freely handled and possibly mingled with memories of the continental campaigns of Edward III.[21]

Where *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is concerned, the source-problem is still unresolved and, in my conviction, likely to remain so. That the *Gawain*-poet was soaked in romance tradition, French and English, is manifest: the working method of the poem involves the ironic invocation, inversion and ambivalent combination of its conventions. An author so intimately familiar with those conventions could scarcely have avoided some form or other of the ubiquitous Beheading Test plot. That he found it united with the Temptation plot by the Exchange of Winnings motif, a form represented by none of the surviving analogues, and that his function was confined to marginal adaptation or translation seems to me inherently unlikely. The complex literary method, though it shows appreciation of Chrétien's use of structural and thematic parallels, patterns of symbol and word, has no counterpart in the French analogues usually cited; the highly organized verbal surface, if it were no more than an English skin on a French construct, would be a miracle of the translator's art.[22] Read critically rather than historically, *Sir Gawain* suggests the original work of a single organizing intelligence in control of every element in the composition. Organizational independence of a similar order, though varying degrees of achievement, is apparent in the *Morte Arthure*, *Golagrus and Gawain*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, and *The Siege of Jerusalem*.[23] Without the patient prentice work of *William of Palerne* and *Chevalere Assigne*, such independence, leaving alliterative poets free to exploit their inheritance from the French tradition without being stultified by it, might not eventually have been won.

VI

The Manuscripts[1]

A. I. DOYLE

In undertaking a commission to discuss manuscripts of later Middle English alliterative verse one is first of all faced with the fact mentioned in the Introduction to this book, that, even if the scope is extended to pieces employing rhyme too, not more than one or two copies are known of all but half a dozen compositions. Furthermore a high proportion of them are defective and many must be dated long after the periods to which their authorship has been attributed on historical, literary or linguistic grounds. And paradoxically, what is usually regarded as a predominantly fourteenth-century phenomenon survives (again apart from a handful of exceptions) overwhelmingly in manuscripts of the fifteenth century and some of the sixteenth and seventeenth. The most persuasive explanation which has been offered for such sparse, imperfect and late occurrence of most alliterative texts is the same as for the overlapping genre of romances or for the drama, namely the heavy incidence of wear and tear on manuscripts made cheaply for use in communal entertainment by a small class of practitioners. That sheer use *could* have this effect we can see from the tiny number of extant copies of early printed books of certain kinds, not only romances and plays but also the repeated editions of grammar-school books and church service-books, although we must take into account for each category, and for alliterative verse, the factors of obsolescence and revolution in fashions of learning or religion. All other things being equal, the longer a copy of a text is in use, the lower its chances of survival; but those other things, such as the length of a text, its purport, style, dialect, starting-place and ways of communication, or the competition of other compositions, can have been rarely all equal.

The mere length of a poem may be an important advantage in endurance alone, while shorter pieces can be protected in miscellanies. The existence of late copies only of a work may simply reflect late composition or be the residue of successive generations of reproduction, or a revival after long neglect. Unique or rare extant manuscripts of early date only do not, conversely, prove that recopying was subsequently slow or arrested, nor do

copies in one dialect only preclude the possibility of lost translation elsewhere, since within our small numbers we can find instances to the contrary. We need to interrogate the available evidence of all sorts in each case for thinking how long the contents of a manuscript were composed before they were incorporated in it, and if no earlier or later copies of a piece are known, why that might be, and when other copies do exist what comparative light they throw on the origins of the item in question and others found with it. Although studies and surveys of alliterative poetry have increasingly devoted attention to the significance of the actual manuscript contexts, the paucity of explicit information there, for the most part, still handicaps our getting clear enough notions of where and how this range of reading-matter circulated.

The palaeography of later medieval English manuscripts has begun to be developed quite recently and so far only broadly or patchily. Almost inevitably, as more eyes are directed towards more of the material, embracing that in Latin and French as well as English, firmer criteria for dating and for the socio-economic assessment of books will be worked out, and identifications of the hands of individual executants, or of schools, and other connections from one manuscript to another will be established. It is too early in this process yet to guess what may emerge about the most enigmatic manuscripts, and in most cases I can only try to characterize roughly the relationships that seem to me most suggestive of their *raisons d'être*. Fortunately the ability to place geographically the language of the scribes and of their sources is now more advanced, through the work of the Edinburgh Middle English Dialect Survey, though there are necessarily problems in interpreting some of the specific results, particularly with respect to the effective whereabouts of particular copyists and their employers.

If we neglect those short and medium-length rhymed poems with a strong alliterative element and satiric spirit which occur in small sets or singly within some of the major miscellanies of the fourteenth century, such as Arundel 292, Harley 2253, Auchinleck, Laud misc. 108, Vernon, Simeon and Cotton Galba E ix, for which internal allusions as well as palaeography guarantee the dating, and which critics have increasingly connected with more purely alliterative compositions, the earliest surviving manuscripts of the latter fall into two pairs, considered regionally and codicologically, West Midland and Northern. Whereas *Winner and Waster* and the *Parliament of the Three Ages* have more often than not been thought amongst the earliest efforts of the alliterative 'revival' in the West Midlands, attributed in the former case more firmly by internal allusions to the 1350s,[2] both survive only in copies 100 years and more later and distant in place: Robert Thornton's BL Add. 31042, made in Yorkshire about the second quarter of the fifteenth century and British Library

Add. 33994, probably of the last quarter. The single copy of *William of Palerne*, however, in King's College, Cambridge, MS 13, is palaeographically and linguistically not far from the original, internally localized near Gloucester and datable not after 1361. Physically it resembles both earlier West Midland copies of the *South English Legendary*, with one of which it has been long bound,[3] and the earliest separate manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*; but the latter are not copies of the A-text, generally thought to have been composed in the mid-1360s, but more probably one or two of B (put in the later 1370s) or C (of the early 1380s), i.e. of the last two decades of the century. The quantity of evidence concerning the dissemination of *Piers Plowman* is of course at the other extreme from that for *William of Palerne*, so much so that consideration of its separate copies must be excluded from the present survey, for reasons of space and because it would be premature before the publication of the critical edition of the C-text. Whatever the causes of the disappearance of very early copies of the A-text, their descendants (so far as they had any) and the larger survivals of B and C display a wide and prolonged but by no means uniform spread in other regions than the West Midlands;[4] while the author's claim in B to be by then an inhabitant of London, as a result of which diffusion there and thence could be expected, is at first sight at odds with the linguistic and circumstantial bearings of all but a few extant copies of each text. As the author chose to continue to write in a language and mode of undoubtedly provincial background, he must have hoped to be to some extent intelligible in the metropolis, unless he relied for his readership solely on compatriots there or on his home ground near the Malvern Hills. It seems likely that in London at that time, even more than a quarter of a century later when manuscripts of Trevisa, Gower and Chaucer imply it by their spelling, the degree of linguistic tolerance was large because of continual immigration from the country and the absence of an authoritative standard such as the Chancery usage eventually established in the second quarter of the fifteenth century onwards.[5] If the circulation of *Piers Plowman* may have been from or through more than one centre at various times, a hypothesis which may help to explain the complicated textual history of a number of the manuscripts, something similar was not impossible for alliterative pieces of which fewer traces remain, for chance can be too easily presumed representative.

The second pair of earliest extant alliterative manuscripts, from Yorkshire, exemplify a similar contrast in rate of survival while challenging the West Midland priority. The copy of the *Lay Folks' Catechism* in the register of Archbishop Thoresby of York can be dated firmly to 1357 and its scribe named,[6] and the unique fragments of *Wit and Will*, equally written in prose form though punctuated metrically, from a manuscript also containing at least one Latin sermon, are palaeographically of the same type of Anglicana

(i.e. from the middle or the second quarter of the fourteenth century) and linguistically of the same area (at the broadest the province of York but from details of script and subsequent provenance, more closely Yorkshire itself).[7] The manuscript of *Wit and Will* must have been a packed pocket-book very different, like the poem itself, from the generous format of *William of Palerne*. The other early copies of the *Catechism* are all northern, as are those which ascribe its authorship to a monk of York, though not before the last quarter of the century, and of utilitarian character, whether set out in verses or not. Lollard knowledge and adaptation of it in the Midlands could have come through Wycliffe's northern antecedents, but they are discernible in only some of its later manifestations, in most of which the alliterative structure is lost. Since any separate 'pamflet' copies made for its original pastoral purpose were unlikely to last independently, although presumably numerous and frequently reproduced, the *Catechism* survives almost solely within volumes containing other texts of English and Latin cathechetic, homiletic, ascetical and meditative literature, compiled as much for private reading as public use.[8]

This development, though it may have accompanied continuous currency of independent copies, demonstrates what will appear with other alliterative compositions of different kinds, the gradual assimilation of items of originally distant style and ethos into collective codices, not restricted to a single region, commencing in the fourteenth century but increasingly in the fifteenth. It goes along with a notable rise in the metropolitan production of books in English, from about the turn of the century onwards; but it is not at first conspicuous there, nor confined subsequently to it, and it may therefore rather reflect a growth of inter-regional communication which may have often passed through and been facilitated by the cultural life of the capital, but was not always dominated by it and sometimes was detached from it.

For the present investigation, with the exception of the Auchinleck MS, the first collections which exemplify this assimilation on a large scale are the Vernon and Simeon MSS, which may be dated from contents, writing and decoration to the end of the fourteenth century (probably the last decade) and attributed from the language of the scribes to West Midland (Worcestershire) workmanship, and consequently perhaps also readership, although the derivation of the sources must have reached through much of England and the promoters cannot have been of limited local status and wealth. A distinction has been made with *William of Palerne* between the homely appeal of the English poem and the courtly nature of its French source and of its generally absentee patron. In Vernon and Simeon we can see some of the same dichotomy, or, better, bipolarity, with the possible involvement of a member of the same family of Bohun in the case of the second volume.[9] Both Vernon and Simeon include the stanzaic alliterative

Pistill of Susan in the third part of each volume, amidst rhymed poems on the Passion of Christ in the one but followed by the no less pious *King of Tars* in the other, while the end of the fourth part of Vernon, in which an A-text of *Piers Plowman* is followed by the unique copy of *Joseph of Arimathea*, is not and may never have been in Simeon. That the general contents-list added to Vernon with its foliation has space but no titles after *Piers Plowman* strongly suggests that *Joseph* and the following pieces were included at a very late stage in the compilation of the volume.[10] *Joseph* is written as prose, though with line and half-line punctuation, an attempt possibly to pack it in tighter; but the format could come from the exemplar and it reflects an adaptability of the alliterative mode which for the copyist or compiler may not have been very distinct from *A Talking of the Love of God* occurring shortly before (and as the last item in Simeon), in a sequence of prose pieces, the last of which before *Piers Plowman* is the *Life of Adam and Eve* turned into prose from a verse original.[11] Thus the presence of rhyme may have affected the placing of the *Pistill*, but the exemplar, possibly more northern in language, simply may have been to hand sooner. *Piers Plowman* had a common source with Harley 875, an approximately contemporary copy by two scribes placed by the Edinburgh Survey not far away in Warwickshire, while there is no comparative point of reference for *Joseph*.

Cotton Nero A x may antedate Vernon and Simeon, for its only certain *terminus a quo* is 1348 from the Garter motto at the end of *Sir Gawain* and the volume (f.124v), the script of which, a species of Bastard Anglicana, only confirms the second half of the century, but the English couplet above the picture of the temptation of Gawayne on the next page, which is also probably by the main scribe, points rather to the last quarter of the century. The main text-hand in the majority of its forms, because they are so traditional, tells one little except that its awkwardnesses and anomalies (e.g. the final *s* and the *w* which occur in the Bastard Anglicana) reveal that the scribe was more at home in more cursive script, though parallels may be found in Anglo-Norman manuscripts,[12] appropriately with regard to the sources of *Gawain*. Parallels may also be found even further afield for the illustrations, in which the hair and dress styles tend to support a later dating and would not prohibit the early years of the fifteenth century, particularly if it is thought wise to make some allowance for time-lag in provincial representations of metropolitan fashion; and, while it would be wrong to undervalue the expressiveness of the artist, the quality and finish of the whole book is obviously unpolished.[13] Recent scholarship has stressed the many careers and close contacts at national levels of church and state in the relevant period made by men from the middle ranks of society in Cheshire and the adjoining counties to which, on the grounds of the language of Nero A x, its copyist and probably its patron (if they

were different) belonged and where *Sir Gawain* at least seems from its topographical references to have originated.[14] It ought to be noticed that Nero A x is the only known manuscript collection exclusively of alliterative poems: was this single-mindedness indeed exceptional?

I must repeat the contrast I have drawn elsewhere between Nero A x and Bodley 264, the lavishly illustrated French verse romance of Alexander made in Flanders, 1338–44, to which the unique extracts of the alliterative *Alexander and Dindimus* were added not long before or after 1400 in a fine large text-hand, with miniatures which look more like those of the Vernon MS than those of the rest of Bodley, one of the latter by Johannes and the others from his associates in the early fifteenth century metropolitan style of illumination.[15] Scribes and artists could be mobile in the employment of a rich patron or entrepreneur, but wherever they worked it is reasonable to take the presentation of the English verse, in which the West Midland spelling is only partly modified, as an instance of the gravitation of texts at the call of someone who moved between two or more milieux. Fragmented and embedded as this text was, it may have been a dead end, but other poems brought up from the country in a similar or less ambitious manner could have extensions of their public as a result. One can only speculate about the lone survivors, but the *Siege of Jerusalem*, which has more copies known than anything apart from *Piers Plowman* and the *ABC of Aristotle*, eight datable over about half a century in a variety of dialects, and which textually must be the remains of a considerably larger total,[16] affords enough evidence of how a purely alliterative poem did get treated in association with other types of literature.

It can be attributed to the fourteenth century with confidence, from the earliest-looking copy, in Bodleian Laud misc. 656 along with a C-text of *Piers Plowman* and short pieces of theological instruction in English prose by the same utilitarian Anglicana, the language of which the Edinburgh Survey puts in Oxfordshire, though in the later fifteenth century the book may have been in Kent.[17] Not much later, if at all, is one of Mr R. H. Taylor's manuscripts at Princeton University Library, contrasting with the modest Laud volume in size and its elaborate Bastard Anglicana, with the *Siege* following the rhyming *Speculum Vitae* and the prose *Privity of the Passion*, and an inscription of ownership by a church or convent probably in the West Riding of Yorkshire.[18] From the beginning of the fifteenth century is Cambridge University Library Mm.V.14, where the *Siege* follows a Latin history of Alexander the Great and Guido della Collona's *Destructio Troie* in a calligraphic Anglicana Formata of Chancery type, apparently the hand of Richard Frampton, a scribe known to have worked in Westminster or London from at least 1402 to 1416 for Henry IV and V. The material preparation of the Cambridge book is of the same high quality as in his other identified work, the illumination is of the metropolitan style and the

English of the *Siege* predominantly East Midland. Like other products of his pen it may have been made for a highly-placed cleric or layman.[19]

Huntington Library HM 128 is a complicated volume containing the rhymed *Prick of Conscience*, a B-text of *Piers Plowman*, the *Siege of Jerusalem* and the rhyming *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, with a Latin exposition of the Sarum sequences between the first two. Although Professor Kane had some doubts about the original connection of all these items, the interchange of hands makes me think that it existed before the middle of the fifteenth century, probably in the first quarter, since several of the six or seven hands show comparatively early effects of Secretary on their Anglicana.[20] The number and nature of the conspicuous alterations to *Piers Plowman* suggest that they were from pedantic rather than commercial motives, and occasioned by difficulties with the exemplar of that work only. The Edinburgh Survey puts the language of the first three poems in south Warwickshire, though its text of *Piers* is grouped with Trinity College, Cambridge, B.15.17, of which the writing and spelling are close to that of the Ellesmere Chaucer, and British Library Add. 35287 with similarities to both and a degree of minute and extensive correction comparable with HM 128, involving differing exemplars as well as notions of orthography.[21] Do these come from one centre of collaboration and, if so, clerical or lay? An answer may come through pursuit of the hands. The purposes of HM 128 look partly pedagogic. Its text of the *Siege* is grouped by Kölbing and Day with that in Lambeth Palace 491 (part I) where it occurs after the *Brut* chronicle and before the *Three Kings of Cologne*, both common items of English prose, and then the *Awntyrs off Arthure* in alliterative stanzas and the *Book of Hunting* in rhyme.[22] The copyist, who was also responsible for the first portion of BL Harley 3943 of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* along with another hand, and, in the same composite membrane and paper booklet format as Lambeth, Huntington HM 114, containing a B-text of *Piers Plowman* (heavily contaminated from C and A, and further corrupted), Mandeville's *Travels* in prose, the *Pistill of Susan* in alliterative stanzas, an extract from the *Three Kings of Cologne*, a text of *Troilus and Criseyde* closely related to that in Harley but augmented from another source, and a satirical proclamation of Lucifer.[23] Professor M. L. Samuels puts his language in Essex and from the fluent competence of his Anglicana Formata, signs of supervision of his work and the repetition of pieces, it is probable that he was an habitual paid copyist, either as a freelance or a regular employee within the book-trade: if the latter, possibly in London. His writing and the papers used suggest the second quarter of the fifteenth century. The two miscellanies made up of separable booklets may represent both some of the stock of a stationer and the selection of two purchasers. It is obvious that the alliterative pieces are parts of a general repertoire of literature of various styles and subjects, in a fairly cheap form.

Against this, or along with it, however, we must recognize that the survival of more than one miscellany, of a sectional structure, in a single competent Anglicana and with elementary decoration, is not necessarily a clue to commercial production, from the two substantial volumes signed by Robert Thornton, a North Riding gentleman. Of these Lincoln Cathedral 91 was, from its later descent, no doubt for his own family, and Add. 31042 possibly for a friend or acquaintance.[24] Mrs. K. Stern has seen a parallel between Thornton's activity and that of John Shirley in London in the same period (c.1430–60), which I would endorse so far as it emphasizes the non-commercial characteristics of most of Shirley's extant work, in the absence of good evidence of his making books for sale rather than loan; but there are significant repetitions of matter between his miscellanies, and not in Thornton's. Only two books which belonged to Shirley contain alliterative pieces, not in his own hand: Caius College Cambridge 669/646 with an extract of the C-text of *Piers Plowman* copied by his acquaintance John Cok of St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, perhaps before he became a brother there in 1421, certainly before Shirley's death in 1456;[25] and Huntington Library EL 26 A.13, with the unique copy, in a mid-fifteenth-century Textura with cadel initials (pen-work with grotesque heads, more common in liturgical manuscripts), of the rime royal *Story of Joseph and Asenath* and following lament *On the Untimely Death of a Fair Lady* (where there is an amalgamation of styles) bound with Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* and other poetry given by Shirley to his brother-in-law, inscriptions imply.[26]

Returning to the *Siege of Jerusalem* and Robert Thornton's Add. 31042, where it takes a chronological place in a series of rhymed poems on sacred history: later in the volume amidst romances and religious and moral lyrics (including one actually ascribed to Lydgate by Thornton) comes the alliterative stanzaic *Quatrefoil of Love*, and the *Parliament of the Three Ages* and *Winner and Waster* conclude (defectively) its contents. Professor McIntosh has shown that for Lincoln 91 Thornton must have got a south-west Lincolnshire exemplar, whereas the language of the Add. 31042 copies of the *Parliament* and *Winner*, together with a number of rhymed romances and other items in both of his manuscripts, belongs to the area where Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire adjoin.[27] The text of the *Siege* is said to be 'very closely connected' with that in Cotton Vespasian E xvi, where folios 38–85 are some remaining quires of a longer volume of small format including the *Three Kings* in prose, the *Siege* defective at the beginning, a Latin tract on the calandar, items of medical interest, and an introduction to physiognomy, in three or four Secretary hands of the middle of the fifteenth century, and the language of the *Siege* has been judged by the editors to be North Midland.[28] This looks like an individual selection, though the hands look more like those of clerics than Thornton's.

Very like his kind of writing and compilation, however, is Cotton Caligula A ii (part I) with what may be the latest known copy of the *Siege* followed by the unique *Chevalere Assigne* towards the end of the volume, which opens defectively with the *Pistill of Susan* and is a miscellany of romances, legends, shorter religious and secular poems (several by Lydgate), a plague tract and a form of confession in English prose and a brief Latin chronicle. Contents and paper indicate its completion in the third quarter of the century and although linguistically of the more central Midlands, it seems, Kölbing and Day thought that the scribe of the *Siege* collated his text with one like that used in Add. 31042 and Vespasian.[29]

If we also look at two other poems with more than a couple of extant copies, the *Pistill of Susan* and the *Awntyrs of Arthure*, which we have already met, the former in Vernon, Simeon, HM 114 and Caligula A ii, the latter in Lambeth 491, although their stanzaic and rhyming structure will surely have helped to maintain their texts in part from corruption or unintelligibility to which purely alliterative verse was always liable, it is not evident that their currency or contexts were very different, and, if such small totals of survival have any statistical weight, they did not have an advantage over the *Siege*, let alone *Piers*, for both of which length no doubt counted, as well as other factors of interest. That all these poems are found together and alternatively in some manuscripts along with matter of (as time goes on, increasingly) diverse kinds and origins is, I think, significant, though they can be only not-quite-random examples of the whole history of their distribution. The one copy of the *Pistill* not yet mentioned is in Pierpont Morgan Library M 818, which has been variously dated by editors from the late fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century.[30] The main hand is an Anglicana Formata of late fourteenth-century northern type, employing Secretary (one-compartment) *a* in more current passages which, in association with the use of paper, points to a period somewhat after 1400. After the *Pistill* is Rolle's *Form of Living* in prose and an unfinished A-text of *Piers Plowman*. The language, according to Professor McIntosh and the fragment of a will in the medieval wrapper, suggests south-east Lincolnshire as the area of making, the quality of which may be described as unpretentious.[31] Like the much more ambitious Vernon manuscript, within which all the same items are included, the subject-matter is entirely religious or moral, whereas the later HM 114 (Essex) and Caligula A ii (Central Midlands) have respectively some and many secular constituents.

A fourteenth-century origin for the *Awntyrs* has been reasonably doubted.[32] Lambeth 491, by the possibly commercial copyist of Essex language about the second quarter of the fifteenth century, may well be the earliest copy, rivalled perhaps by Robert Thornton's in Lincoln 91, where it may have begun a quire and section as the unique *Morte Arthure* copy does previously, in each case followed by rhymed romances, with the

Lay Folks' Catechism (ascribed to John Gaytryge) and an alliterative stanzaic poem on St John the Evangelist much later in the volume amidst devotional verse and prose pieces. The former Ireland family manuscript, now Mr R. H. Taylor's at Princeton (after a sojourn in the Bodmer collection at Geneva), has two other Arthurian romances, in rhyme, in a medieval binding with records of the manor of Hale (south-west Lancs.), presumably for household use, and dating from the mid-fifteenth century.[33] Bodleian Douce 324, now of the *Awntyrs* alone, is however one of a set of booklets from the third quarter of the century which formerly made up a dismembered miscellany of which Dr K. L. Scott was able to reconstruct half: Burgh's *Cato*, Lydgate's *Dietary*, prose Sieges of Thebes and Troy (based on Lydgate), the Court of Venus from the *Confessio Amantis*, Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, the *Book of Hunting* in verse (as in Lambeth 491 and produced by the St Albans printer in 1486), Mandeville's *Travels* and a manual of pastoral instruction.[34] This is a collection catholic enough for the missing half to have included almost anything, and if it represents, as the competence of the two (quite distinct) hands and the soiled outside pages of the booklets suggest, part of the stock of a stationer for the purchaser's selection, the *Awntyrs* must have been marketable wherever that was, although its language is apparently North-West Midland (NE Derbyshire),[35] unlike the other texts by either copyist, and could have been specially added and faithfully transcribed at the wish of a customer who supplied the exemplar. If so, other sections, and indeed the ensemble, could have been commissioned, for the booklet structure is as much a convenience of manufacture as of marketing.[36] The convergence of probability, from contents and language, is in favour of the south-eastern counties for the compilation of this volume, and Miss K. Harris has found an early London layman's name in it.[37]

It appears from these cases that, wherever and whenever a piece of pronouncedly alliterative character originated, it could have a wide dissemination, by no means all amateur or provincial, and lasting beyond the middle of the fifteenth century, outside the northern regions: Sir John Paston had several miscellanies of the same sort as Cotton Caligula A ii, one containing something 'off þe Dethe off Arthur' and another something on 'the Greene Knyght', which may not have been any more up to date in taste than other items in them.[38] That a purely alliterative mode continued to appeal in the south-eastern quarter of the country throughout the fifteenth and into the sixteenth century can be corroborated from the number (at least a dozen) of surviving copies of the *ABC of Aristotle* (so-called), of which only odd outliers come from the North-East and North-West Midlands, and the miscellaneous contexts in which they are found.[39] Admittedly alliteration had a particular mnemonic advantage for some sorts of teaching and it is apparent that always, even in the fourteenth-century West Midlands and

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North at its most flourishing, it was a special style and taste, not universally adopted nor applicable to every kind of subject.

One application, the prophetical-polemical, in the tradition of Langland, perhaps planted by his presence in London, clearly had a persistent if not very large interest there and possibly for other urban readers. The three complete copies of *Piers the Plowman's Creed* are all sixteenth-century; Royal 18 B xvii of about the second quarter, accompanying a C-text of *Piers Plowman*; the printed edition of 1553; Trinity College, Cambridge, R 3.15, a meticulous transcript of a late fourteenth or early fifteenth-century copy, motivated probably by the same mixture of antiquarian and controversial interest as the edition and perhaps the Royal manuscript.[40] The only earlier copy is an unfinished page in Harley 78, f.3r, by a prolific London scribe of Middle English texts, known chiefly from his use as exemplars of manuscripts by John Shirley (d.1456), but operating in the reign of Edward IV and probably within the structure of the book-trade.[41] The page was a reject, probably, because of an omission and other errors, and may have come from the same source as the Royal copy, but it might have been only an extract for its topographical interest, though the topicality of the remainder was far from exhausted. *Richard the Redeless* and its sequel *Mum and the Sothsegger*, from just before and after 1400, survive respectively in an unfinished copy of the second quarter of the fifteenth century after a B-text of *Piers Plowman*, Cambridge University Library Ll 4.14, placed in Cambridgeshire by the Edinburgh Survey, and in BL Add. 41666, a defective copy probably of the third quarter of the century, said by the editors to reflect more strongly the supposed Bristol origin of the poem, with abundant corrections, presumably from a second exemplar, in preparation for recopying, indeed even perhaps for printing.[42] The correcting hand (which could be the more current script of the main copyist) is of the same type as that in BL Add. 33994 which made the one copy of the *Parliament of the Three Ages* apart from Thornton's in Add. 31042, and which, not earlier than the third quarter in appearance,[43] may be of the last quarter from the paper used. Like Add. 41666 it is said to retain sufficient indications of its original dialect, in this case North Midland probably, but there is no firm localization for either of these instances of late currency or revival, while the two poems are of very different character.

To return to the topical and polemical: the Jack Upland-Daw Thopias debate, which fits best soon after 1402 and near the Oxford-London axis, the manuscripts Harley 6641 and Bodleian Digby 41 being also to my eye of the first rather than second quarter of the century, *pace* Professor Heyworth,[44] perhaps lay dead till revived in the sixteenth-century copy CUL Ff 6.2 and the printing of 1536 (like other Lollard tracts) by Lutheran or Cromwellian propagandists, in advance of Robert Crowley's personal

adoption of *Piers Plowman* and the *Creed*'s adoption by others of like mind. A tamer topicality, though complementary to *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum* in its concern with good government, is found in *Crowned King*, on Henry V's expedition to France, 1415, in which the Southampton setting is as likely to be imaginative as Bristol in *Richard* may be – especially as the only copy is in Bodleian Douce 95, a miscellany of Latin and English prose and verse with particular Westminster and London contents, compiled not before 1419, by an expert Secretary hand which also produced not before 1421, a similar volume, Trinity College, Dublin, 509 with some of the same contents, including one of the earliest copies of the *ABC of Aristotle*.[43] These may not have been the only two variations of a repetitive assortment offered to educated inhabitants, clerical or lay, of the metropolis by this scribe or others, which could have included alliterative as well as rhymed English verse.

Even if we start with unquestionably outlandish survivals, such as Thornton's unique *Morte Arthure*, it seems he must have got it from Lincolnshire[46] and Malory must have used a copy in the 1460s, wherever (or whoever) he was – even perhaps in London; and the *Quatrefoil of Love*, in the rhymed stanzaic form, found in Thornton's Add. 31042 and Bodleian Add. A 106 – the latter a miscellany of mostly medical interest except for an English rhymed Cato and a carol, by several hands of the mid-fifteenth century and also Yorkshire provenance[47] – was printed (partly modernized) by Wynkyn de Worde at London about 1510.[48] A public of some sort must have been anticipated by its promoter, there or within the reach of the London book-trade or that of York, where printing also appears to have begun (though with safer service and school books), in that year, for booksellers in alliances with Wynkyn and others. This affords us some of the first evidence of commerical distribution of books beyond London and the university towns and fairs.[49] Half a century earlier there was no equivalent movement of books in bulk. It must have been that development, when applied to books in English, which eventually eliminated most written dialect differences, and literary forms inseparable from them, but what came from the press in the capital did not at first dominate. Apart from Ashmole 44 where it occurs alone, in a paper quarto of the middle of the fifteenth century, of North-West Midland language by a proficient Anglicana with its own penwork initials,[50] the only other copy of the *Wars of Alexander* is in Trinity College, Dublin, 213, also a paper quarto in a current (legal) Anglicana with penwork initials. Here an A-text of *Piers Plowman* precedes while an extract of Alexander from Earl Rivers's *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers* follows, agreeing with Caxton's second edition, 1477; yet the language of the texts, judged by Skeat to be Northumbrian, is more closely put in South-West Durham by Professor McIntosh, and binding fragments are from Durham monastic

accounts of the early sixteenth century, although strapwork initials and Secretary specimens on one page look more like a secular clerk's work than one of the monks'.[51]

There is no need for me to rehearse what has been well explored by others, on the exceptional persistence of copying, and composition, in Cheshire and Lancashire from the later fifteenth well into the sixteenth century.[52] For that to have happened there must have been a tradition of copies that have largely vanished. As we have seen, for the first three-quarters of the fifteenth century the surviving alliterative manuscripts are mostly from elsewhere. If we do not find them in the highest rank of metropolitan products, with some copies of Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate or Trevisa, many are of a middle range of quality and cost, whether bought or home-made. Though this mode of expression cannot be said to have been positively fashionable in the south-east after the first quarter of the century, we have enough evidence that it was not excluded or segregated from the mélange of matters and styles chosen for copying, commercially and privately, not merely in the remoter provinces.

VII

The Audience and Public of 'Piers Plowman'

ANNE MIDDLETON

Among the surviving poems of the late Middle English alliterative corpus, *Piers Plowman* is anomalous in many ways, not the least remarkable of which is the breadth and character of its reception. While a few other alliterative poems of the period survive in more than two copies, the three versions of *Piers Plowman* are represented by over fifty manuscripts. Although each version may have had a different regional pattern of circulation,[1] it can fairly be said that the poem attested by all three forms achieved a virtually nationwide distribution within a generation of their production. It is the purpose of this essay to demonstrate that *Piers Plowman* was received as a work of literature by a heterogenous and attentive readership, and that this was the kind of reception it actively and consciously sought by its choices of genre and form, and by the manner in which its intentions are declared. Using an eclectic combination of literary procedures, its composer undertook an original and frequently unstable literary project, to compose in the vernacular alliterative measure 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme'. How these things were received by an audience, and designed for a public, may tell us something about 'literariness' itself in the later fourteenth century.

In treating the readership of the poem under two aspects, 'audience' and 'public', I wish at least to defer begging a question by dividing it. Specifying what I shall call the audience might appear at the outset to be a matter of 'objective' information, while determining its public will seem an exercise in 'subjective' interpretation. Yet the more closely one approaches either question in detail, the more spurious does this way of formulating the distinction between them become. They are, rather, complementary and reciprocal processes.[2] Both the audience and the public of the poem are capable of some objective specification, which in both cases requires interpretation.

By 'audience' I mean that readership actually achieved by the work. It may be attested by such evidence as the date and location of copies, their place in books and collections, their ownership and transmission by bequest,

gift, or purchase, and by comments on the text and references and allusions to it, and uses of it. Such information may be slender or plentiful; analysing it and making inferences from it yields a history of reception of the poem.

I use the term 'public' for that readership to which Father Ong refers when he says that 'the writer's audience is always a fiction'.[3] The public is the readership imagined and posited by the composer as a necessary postulate in the practical process of bringing the work into being, for a certain effect within certain perceived historical conditions.[4] It is inferred from a number of formal as well as rhetorical characteristics of the text, including features one might call its gestures of emulation as well as those of address. The properties which define this public specify what in later medieval terms would be called its *forma tractandi*, those ways of proceeding (*modi agendi*) which determine the illocutionary force of the work.[5] The *forma tractandi* is the literary form of the text considered with respect to its purpose and effects upon a user. Its surface form, its division of matter into books and the ordering of topics is specified by the *forma tractatus*. The broadly equivalent modern terms for these two aspects of literary form, describing the text as act and the text as object, are genre and structure, and it is in the former that one finds its public. The public is the composer's version of the audience, and it is a function of genre as well as voice. It is discovered in something like the same way the composer arrived at it, by comparative literary analysis. An inquiry into the public of the work is thus an effort to disclose its practical intentional design as a specific historical production.

Since both readers and writers want the text to be intelligible and useful, and since for both the means of making it so are grounded in common social practices and textual experience, both make some accommodations in order to achieve this fit between intention and reception. In this way, studies of the audience and the public of a work are complementary, in methods as well as ends. The history of its reception and transmission gives an account of its readers' accommodations; examination of the public implied by, and formally included within, the work and its revisions traces its writer's accommodations to the conditions of composition as he perceives them. Yet while these two accounts will converge, they will not fully coincide, for it is not to the purposes of either readers or writers of literary works that the controllable aspects of this transaction should match perfectly. There would be no point in making any new work unless it were in some respects to evade, as well as to fulfil, expectations already current and fully accommodated by its readership. Works both purely instrumental and 'literary' are made to fill some perceived gap in discourse, to combine wholly familiar uses in partly new ways. Some of the pleasure of the text, and a good deal of its personal and social utility, lie in this necessary and desirable 'misfit', and in the very exercise of mutual accommodation it commands. It is in this narrow space between fit and misfit that a work's

claims on its culture are negotiated; it is where its 'originality' is asserted and defined, and its 'greatness' conferred. This is not an abstract or timeless space, but a historically specific and finite one, whose boundaries undergo change, however minute, as each accommodation is made. Experience and the history of literature suggests that works whose value is both immediately perceived and enduring are not necessarily those that fit perfectly a public to an audience, but those which initially and continuously command such a space, a margin of culturally practical interpretability, around themselves.

While scholars of *Piers Plowman* have shown in increasingly persuasive detail that the poem is made of a variety of utterly traditional materials and gestures, and its textual fortunes suggest that its recipients found much in it immediately recognizable, its rich and difficult record of mutual accommodations describe the history of a 'maverick masterpiece', rooted in initially unpromising terrain. Defining that terrain, the space in which the work was received and projected, is our present concern.

In the attempt to characterize the audience of *Piers Plowman*, some few facts have often been repeated. They may bear repeating once more, if only to emphasize the difficulty of putting a useful interpretative context around them, and distinguishing what they suggest from inferences already ingrained in the critical tradition of the poem. In the best known contemporary reference to the poem – that of the dissident priest John Ball in 1381 – it is not a book but a watchword. We will consider later the broader cultural appropriation of the poem, attested in interestingly varied forms by the chroniclers of the rebellion, and for the moment pursue the narrower course of its fortunes as a book.

The poem is mentioned as a book bequeathed in three wills. The first two of these (1394, 1431) are bequests of religious, and made in Yorkshire; the third (1434) is that of a layman in London.[6] It occurs among the books of Sir Thomas Charleton, Speaker of the House of Commons, in an inventory made at his death in 1465. It appears in the inventory of books of a member of Lincoln's Inn (Thomas Stotevyle, d. 1466/7) in 1459, along with the *Canterbury Tales, Bevis of Hamtoun*, and the *Siege of Troy;*[7] one manuscript of the A-text still at Lincoln's Inn is a 'holster book' which also includes *Libeaus Desconus, Arthur and Merlin, Kyng Alisaunder*, and *The Siege or Batayle of Troye.*[8] This evidence, together with that which we shall survey shortly – the works with which *Piers* occurs in manuscript collections – is the usual basis for summary description of its audience. Two main inferences recur in these descriptions. One is that *Piers* reached 'two kinds of audience – the old audience of clerks and the new one of prosperous literate laymen'. The other is that the national readership of *Piers* is somehow different in composition from the 'local' or regional audiences achieved by other fourteenth century alliterative works, that the poem 'had

an extensive popularity among some class of the community not normally reached by alliterative poetry'.[9] While the following survey has little information to add to what has been cited before, it is meant to call into question both of these ways of stating the case. In the first instance, both internal and external evidence suggest that the clerical and lay readers of the poem formed a single audience, not two kinds, an audience interested, by virtue of social location and experience, in the foundations of Christian authority, and right relations as well as faith within the Christian community. Further, this audience appears to be but a multiplication of the local audiences achieved by other works of the 'alliterative revival'[10] and, at the same time and earlier, by shorter vernacular works which shared some of *Piers*' characteristic preoccupations and manner of treatment.

The audience of *Piers Plowman* is best characterized neither by regional peculiarities nor by 'estate' as such, but by a common social location, and range of activities and interests. Whether laymen or ecclesiastics, their customary activities involve them in counsel, policy, education, administration, pastoral care – in those tasks and offices where spiritual and temporal governance meet. Their range of practical and speculative activity is well captured by Will's first two questions of Holichurche: the ownership and use of all 'this tresour' of the earthly field, and the salvation of the soul. These two questions remain mutually implicated throughout the poem, and it traces to the same root the foundations of social virtue, of legitimate authority, and of spiritual renewal. It was for this audience that the fundamental relations between soul and world over their entire historical course were framed in a uniquely penetrating, original, comprehensive and successful way by *Piers Plowman*, as by no other contemporary work, either within or outside the alliterative corpus. They saw it as a poem at once historical and pious, and its wide circulation derives from its addressing at once the most distinctive and fundamental literate and practical interests of a mixed group whose affairs were conducted in various forms in all parts of the country.

A sense of the generic limits within which the poem was regarded is evident in its range of associations with other works in manuscript. The A version appears more frequently in manuscript among other works than do B or C – unsurprisingly, since it is a third of their length – yet all three are associated in collections with several kinds of texts, and neither alliterative verse, nor even verse generally, seems to be a principle of their assembly. If there are any such principles in its manuscripts associations, they are difficult to characterize; they are certainly not formal in any modern or medieval sense. The two kinds of content most often found with it are religious instruction and historical narration. The former has been widely observed, most notably by Burrow. The latter, however, its affinity with works of historical narration and synthesis, has not been remarked, or

related to the poem's own formal procedures; for this reason it will receive more attention here. These two kinds of content interpenetrate, in collections and in the poem, in ways that suggest the kind of imaginative application the poem had for its readers. The habit of resolving questions of present morality or meaning in historical rather than metaphysical or doctrinal terms, referring them back to their precedents and origins in Scriptural and Christian history, is pervasive in the poem, and an implicit motive for narration in many of the works that surround *Piers*. It makes the appropriation of the poem by Lollards and anti-Lollards, reformers and traditionalists, seem somewhat less eccentric, and begins to suggest the broader situation for reading within which it could achieve wide circulation.

Since the chances that affect manuscript survival have no regard for statistical propriety, all inferences from numbers are hazardous. Still, in a survey of the company *Piers* keeps in manuscripts, its most frequent companion must be rather surprising: it occurs five times with Mandeville's *Travels*. They occur together in two manuscripts datable to the first half of the fifteenth century – one C-text (F: Cambridge University Library Ff 5.35), and one A-text (H³: Harley 3954); and two assigned to the first quarter of the fifteenth century – a conflated A, B, and C version (Huntington Library HM 114), and a C-text (A: University of London Library V 17, *olim* Sterling).[11] They also occur together in an enormous collection of about 1400 (C: Cambridge University Library Dd 1.17). There the B version heads a group of English works which follow a long series of Latin works of biblical, British, 'Saracen', and oriental history and compendia, in over 400 double-columned vellum leaves.[12] This huge and interesting book – called by Skeat, following its traditional appellation, the 'Liber Glastoniensis' though its connection with Glastonbury Abbey is now discredited – is contemporary with the Vernon Manuscript, the other massive collection in which *Piers* occurs, and rivals Vernon in its sheer impressive size: its pages are about 4/5 the size of Vernon's and it contains approximately the same number of leaves as Vernon did originally. It is also comparable to Vernon in scope within its *metier*. Vernon, which contains the A-text of *Piers* from which Skeat made his edition, as well as a number of works which also occur with *Piers* in other collections, is called in its own Index *Salus Anime* or *Sowlehele*.[13] It is a comprehensive book of pious legends, devotional lyrics, homiletic romances and catechetical works in both verse and prose, probably produced in a major religious scriptorium. *Piers* occurs in its fourth section, which also contains all the prose works of the manuscript and the sole surviving text of the alliterative composition *Joseph of Arimathea*. The 'Liber Glastoniensis' is as compendiously historical as Vernon is comprehensively pious, and its contents suggest where the two interests join. It includes, besides British histories and chronicles – Gildas, Henry of Huntington, Simeon of Durham,

Florence of Worcester, Higden, and the 'history' of Geoffrey of Monmouth – and other histories of romance 'matters' – Turpin's Life of Charlemagne, Guido della Colonna's *Historia Troiana* – several works concerning eastern travels, crusades, and geographical and religious surveys: Jacques de Vitry's *Historia Hierosolimitana*, William of Tripoli, *De Statu Saracenorum*, Hayton's *Flos ystoriarum terrae orientis*, Marco Polo, *De Statu et Consuetudinibus Orientalium Regionum*, and three works on the Saracen faith and its foundations: *De Fide Saracenorum, Gesta Machometi*, and the *Ortus et processus Machometi*. These Latin works comprise the first two-thirds of the book, and give an impressively monumental setting to the English narratives that follow: *Piers*, a short work on visiting the sick, Mandeville, and the *Seven Sages of Rome*, which is then followed by Clement of Llanthony's *Concordia Evangelistarum*. Whoever caused the book to be assembled (it is, like Vernon, in a single hand throughout), and whatever his particular historiographical purposes, his conception of world history is Olympian, and has a coherent thematic interest. The book surveys the very foundations of rule in the Western kingdoms, from Troy to Britain and Charlemagne, and it looks to the east neither for wonders nor wisdom *per se*, but for its faith, government, institutions, and the prophecies and prospects of its conversion.[14] It is a book about the peoples of the Book in their temporal and spiritual establishments, and within this broad category the compiler places not only the romantic Mandeville and *Seven Sages*, but the moral and speculative austerities of *Piers*. Langland's poem in this company looks like a contemporary chronicle of an apparently genuine person, surveying the history of the faith from within his own time.

Each of these two massive books may stand for a persistent strand in the composite audience addressed by *Piers*, and for the inseparability of their pious and historical interests. The 'sowlehele' of Vernon is expressed in legend and lyric as well as in contemplative instruction and systematic pastoral discourse; the sense of history in the 'Liber Glastoniensis' coheres not around chivalry as such, or the traditional 'matters' of romance, but around the establishment of the faith in temporal power, and its manifold consequences. It is in these senses and contexts that *Piers* is perceived to be – and, as we shall see, designed as – a synthetic 'history'.

Among *Piers*' other company in manuscripts, the *Pistill of Susan* is the next most frequent – three times.[15] It occurs twice with another alliterative historical poem, the *Siege of Jerusalem*,[16] and twice with the edifying romance in couplets, *Ypotis*, 'þat noble tretys' as the Vernon index calls it.[17] It occurs twice with Chaucer's *Troilus*[18] and twice with Alexander narratives.[19] Compendious expositions of religious instruction also occur with *Piers*. It is twice accompanied by the much-copied *Pricke of Conscience*, once with the *Lay Folk's Mass Book*, and once with Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*.[20] Along with the two great collections we

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have examined, these associations suggest its main reception as, in Anne Hudson's phrase, a 'pseudo-historical romance.'[21]

Piers occurs only once each with two alliterative works clearly influenced by it, and both clearly reforming, if not Lollard, in tenor. The unique manuscript of what Skeat called Richard the Redeless also contains a B-text of Piers (Cambridge University Library L1 4.14, of the mid-fifteenth century);[22] and Piers Plowman's Crede, a clearly Lollard work of about 1394 which nevertheless survives only in much later copies (all but one from the sixteenth century), occurs with a C-text in the sixteenth century BL Royal 18 B xvii. In view of the prominent place in literary history, from at least Crowley until well into the twentieth century, given to discussion of Langland's possible Lollard 'sympathies', and the meaning of Lollard appropriation of the figure of Piers, this might seem surprising. In the period of manuscript circulation, however, the poem's relation to Lollardy is cultural rather than textual; only in the mid-sixteenth century does the poem come to be treated by copyists and commentators as itself a Reformist (capital-R) or proto-Protestant text, a treatise among other treatises in an argumentative and rhetorical programme. It is also in about this period, and in this context, that its narrative character tends to recede from audience view.

Piers occurs twice in the company of works in varying degrees anti-Lollard. Both of these manuscripts present the C version, and both are made closer in time to the composition of the poem than the Richard Redeless and Crede manuscripts. In Cotton Vespasian B xvi, of about 1400, the first five leaves and last page contain several short pieces inserted in a later hand, among them a poem in rather unsteady fourteeners against the Lollards (Index 1926).[23] This association reflects the interests of an owner or user in the mid-fifteenth century rather than the compiler. Bodleian MS 1772 (Digby 102) follows Piers C with a substantial body of pious and topical short poems of rather high quality, all in a single hand: twenty-four short stanzaic moral and devotional works, probably by a single author; a metrical paraphrase of the seven penitential psalms by Richard of Maidstone, Carmelite confessor to John of Gaunt; and a debate of the body and soul.[24] The shorter pieces are 'against' Lollardy only indirectly: they are not invective or satirical, but sober and often topical poems on matters of current ethical and general devotional significance. For example, number 23, 'Of the Sacrament of the Altar', in effect a versified Easter homily, simply restates the orthodox view of the sacrament. Its anti-Lollardy is only implicit, in its insistence that transubstantiation is not obscure or difficult doctrine, but plain and shown forth by the 'lanterne' of the priest. Other poems in the group commend auricular confession and penance, urge unity of all estates and an end to internal strife (no. 12), enjoin humility, devotion, and good conduct upon regular religious (no. 18), and

upon the knights the vigorous pursuit of the 'kynde heritage' of the king in France by force of arms rather than treaties (no. 13). The implicit audience for the latter poem is an assembled 'parlement'; its editor argues that its topics and their order associates it with the Leicester Parliament of 1414. The following piece (no. 14) Kail believed alludes to the folly and execution of Oldcastle in 1417; Robbins believes it refers to the assassination of the Duke of Burgundy in 1419. The conjectural character of these topical references, however, is precisely the point: these poems speak from among events they do not need fully to explain, as with one voice to laymen of affairs and to the ecclesiastics, regular and secular, who educated their children, counselled them and their king, and themselves held positions in which they governed and dispensed justice. The poems lack what one might call the characteristic Lollard public voice and lexicon,[25] while sharing some of the broadly ethical and devotional concerns of men of affairs, lay and ecclesiastical, at the coming of the Lancastrians, and are more accurately described as non-Lollard than anti-Lollard. There is nothing here to suggest that Langland's readers thought he had 'Lollard sympathies'. It is rather that, as David Lawton has provocatively put it, 'the Lollards had Langlandian sympathies', and so did many others.[26] The poem evidently afforded both to reformers and orthodox men of affairs a particularly powerful idiom for thought about the contemporary community in a way at once historically concrete and Scripturally universal.

A final instance of *Piers*' textual company concisely and touchingly summarizes the intellectual interests that define a significant segment of its audience. It is one of the latest manuscripts, Bodleian 1746 (Digby 145), beginning as an A-text and continued as C. Written throughout in one 'practiced cursive sixteenth century hand', it follows *Piers* with *The dyfference betweene Dominium Regale et Dominium Politicum et Regale* (*On the Governance of England*), by Sir John Fortescue, made Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1442, who was educator to Edward Prince of Wales. It is a loftily practical comparative essay on the difference between absolute and constitutional monarchy, applying the principles of Fortescue's earlier Latin treatises (*De Natura Legis Naturae* and *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*) and his observations and experience during his exile in France with the Lancastrian court party, to the end of making the monarchy both a stronger and wiser institution. After this treatise come some proverbs, perhaps of Fortescue family provenance. This manuscript is both dated (1532) and signed by its copyist: he is Sir Adrian Fortescue, grandson of the Chief Justice's younger brother, and himself a second cousin to Anne Boleyn and at the time of this transcription in favour at court. (He was executed, for reasons somewhat obscure, in 1539.) The copying of these two works together by a courtier of Henry VIII is an act of both familial and public piety, and testifies in a particularly complex and concentrated

way to the endurance of its audience's sense that *Piers Plowman* is in some fundamental way a work of historical and social vision, as well as spiritual edification.

The period from Canon Walter's bequest of 1396 to Adrian Fortescue's 1532 copying defines a consistent social and topical space within which the poem was located by readers. They evidently perceived it as a compendiously didactic work, whose literary mode is narrative or historical. The first aspect is shown by its presence among Latin pastoral *summae*, teaching and canonical compendia in a wealthy prelate's will, as well as by its manuscript proximity to English instructive summaries and treatises. Nothing, however, associates it with speculative theology, or with an academic readership before the mid-sixteenth century. Its sometimes crabbed and pedantic invocation of university learning, carefully expounded by recent scholars, does not trouble its early readers. Its devotional contexts are those accessible to laymen in the period. Its clerical readers seem on this evidence more likely to be monastic, cathedral, or secular clergy rather than mendicants. While the harvest of the mendicant systematization of theological and scriptural teaching is pervasive in the poem, and in didactic literature generally in the later middle ages, neither a specifically mendicant learnedness,[27] nor the affective meditations particularly associated with mendicant spirituality are closely associated with the poem. *Piers* handles its pagan antiquity in a characteristic way that distinguishes it from Chaucer's or Gower's usage. It shows very little interest in the interpretation of pagan mythology or acquaintance with pagan literature or history as such. Rather 'heathens' of every description figure in the poem as 'heath', figures who in their natural wisdom offer fallow ground for spiritual growth, and it is their points of meeting with the historical mission of Christianity that interests the writer. This historical thematizing, and the poem's proximity in manuscript to legendary and historical narration, further associate *Piers* with monastic houses, in whose libraries and work this had long been a special strength.[28]

In its association with history and legend, and with contemporary counsel, one may see its readers' sense of the mode of its compendiousness, and its utility. It makes particularly heavy demands on its readers' ethical reflection upon, and engagement with, contemporary communal life, on what one may call their practical historical imaginations.[29] For the 'fit audience' of *Piers*, penetrating to historical precedents and foundations of both temporal and spiritual imperatives is a habitual way of thinking, a means of resolution, and a source of deeply invested emotion; and it is a capacity which gets a good deal of exercise in the poem.

For this audience, this capacity was also exercised by historical 'romance' in most of its major late-medieval English aspects. These narratives comprise a kind of mythography of rule, a legendary for 'possessioners', lay

and ecclesiastical. Whether at the level of catechetical dialogue (between ruler and philosopher, prophet and unjust judge, Saracen or pagan king and apostle) or war between the traditional culture-bearing power of the west and the opposing culture it will in the long process of time supplant (Greece and Troy, Rome and Jerusalem), these works present in a compendious historical mirror man's confrontations with spiritual dangers, and the rationale of large communal enterprises. They do so for the benefit, and from the viewpoint, of those who are situated to reflect on these enterprises and their consequences: the nobles, knights, burgesses and clerics who advised, judged, and acted in them by virtue of 'possessioun' – their responsibilities and powers devolve from what they hold and of whom. *Piers* occurs regularly among long works which, in 'storial' form, unfold the bases of possession, and the derivation of custom and authority, as well as among shorter works whose central metaphoric device is one or another form of the written instruments by which possessions and offices were transferred and diplomatic relations sustained – charters, letters, wills: *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, 'The Devil's Letter'. These literary modes, the speculative fictions of 'possessioners', are a repertory of devices in the poem. For a significant part of its early audience whose testimony survives, *Piers* belonged among works in which the quest for salvation and the examination of the foundations of possession and authority were mutually metonymic.

This composite classification of *Piers* suggested by its early history as a literary text may show in what light its readers understood and found unproblematic the poem's parallel interests in both individual understanding and penance on the one hand, and social and historical analysis and reform on the other: it seems that neither was seen as a vehicle or allegory of the other. It offers valuable testimony about the effects of its mixed literary mode, of a kind seldom registered in full complexity by more recent critical analysis. Yet the responses of contemporary readers, and their categories of thought, cannot in themselves resolve questions of genre and form. and they pass over in silence much that one must ask of the poem itself in order to understand it as a historical act as well as a historical event. We shall find that some of the very ways in which its early audiences rationalized and assimilated the poem are among those modes whose customary explicit claims to value and authority the poem itself disavows. Not that the composer's own avowals in this matter are straightforward: it is in the absence of explicit initial declarations of intent and mode by the author in his own person that its audience supplied an *ad hoc* classification of its own, drawn from the genres from which some of its more easily identifiable parts and materials were appropriated. In modern criticism, too, this has been the favoured method of searching for a principle of composition; one of the most illuminating recently has been John Alford's

analysis of its 'method of concordance'.[30] In his view, the author proceeded by using the late medieval preacher's common lexical and encyclopedic tools of composition: commentaries, their concordances, and *distinctiones*. Yet even if we were able to identify the source within this clerical arsenal for every single verbal and ideational development in the poem, it would remain in its achieved form what Bloomfield has called it, 'a commentary on an unknown text'.[31]

The genre or intentional form of a work is not simply the sum of those of its diverse sources, or of its antecedents for habits of local development, but lies in the fundamental gestures by which all these materials are offered for use, composed for a public. In further pursuit of *Piers'* historical situation as a literary enterprise, we shall once again return to its relations with other books and compositions, this time from inside the work itself.

If we look for the poem's own account of itself and its formal identity, we meet a particulary fertile paradox: it is at once evasive and obsessive about the matter. It is around the utility and authority of all sorts of texts generally, and this one in particular, that the poem generates its most profound contradictions and puzzles, as well as many of its dramatic incidents and most of its interpretative cruces.[32] This leads one to suspect that its chosen relations to 'textualitee' will be very close to the heart of its originality as a poem. On the one hand, it wholly lacks the explicit framing apparatus that might declare its kind or intent, and locate it unmistakably among the other works with which its audience came to associate it. On the other, the fictive action reverts restlessly to questions of the value of 'making' and verbal facility among other moral activities of a Christian, of their value to the community and to the maker, of the poem's didactic efficacy in relation to other kinds of texts, of its relation to other worldly work and play. In such moments, many readers have read an admission of the composer's failure to achieve a stable form for his work, or a kind of sublime impatience with all 'mere' form. I shall argue that they constitute instead a remarkably consistent, if implicit, definition of genre, which subjects the poem to literary, rather than directly instrumental, standards of social and spiritual value. This wholly fictive containment of the poem's self-explanation renders the status of the poem and the identity of the composer enigmatic in the extreme. Before exploring the purpose of this enigmatic design, we must consider the significant absence of an explicit one.

The omission of an expository prologue by the composer *in propria persona* is unusual: most long works in English or Latin up to the period of composition, particularly those with didactic or historical claims, include one. The absence of such guidance by the author may help to account for its textual tradition. Not only do *Piers* manuscripts lack those signs of authorial supervision manifest to a remarkable degree in Gower's work,

but the poem itself seems pointedly to avoid issuing formal instructions for use, and to evade or subvert the nearest available ones. The passus divisions are constant internal formal markers, and there is a variety of devices for setting the Latin quotations apart visually, but comment on them is included within the poetic text itself, and it attracted no further systematic embellishment of the same kind from copyists or readers.

It is here that the poem makes a decisive and risky break with those very works which provided its conceptual syntax, the *compendia theologicae veritatis*. Clarity, explicit organization, and comprehensiveness of form were the entire purpose of the teaching compendia, and by Langland's time their internal order and self-explanatory prologues had achieved a high degree of articulation, both in Latin and in the vernacular. Though the existence of such works made Langland's composition possible, his poem is insouciant and enigmatic where his purported sources are systematic and explicit; they explain themselves where his work declines to do so directly. He evidently meant the manifest form of his work to be understood in some other way. He diverges here not only from Latin antecedents in this mode, but from English writers using these materials: Robert Mannyng, Dan Michel, and the author of the *Cursor Mundi*, to take only a few of many examples in which the composer introduces himself and the designs of his work openly and immediately.

A comparison with Gower further heightens the significance of Langland's procedures. Gower's prologues and containing apparatus surround his fictions and specify clearly their intentional design, both in the disposition of material (*forma tractatus*) and the deployment of fictive persons as aspects of the *modus agendi* of the work. In a similar fashion, Usk opens his *Testament of Love* with an elaborate series of prologues, modelled upon the Aristotelian 'four-cause' academic prologue, and signs his work with an acrostic, a form of self-identification favoured by commentators and writers of *artes praedicandi*.[33] Both of these writers of didactic fictions show a debt to the explicitness of design of commentaries and didactic compendia. Though they postdate Langland's invention, they illustrate how a resource deeply imbedded in Langland's own immediate material could be adapted to formal clarification.

Another possible source of models for prologues might be sought among other poems in alliterative long lines. These, whose relation to Langland's endeavour is puzzling in many ways, use a rich variety of devices for this purpose: gestures at the beginning and end of the poem, and at divisions within it, for declaring its intent, its author's name, or even its occasion, patron, sources and its superiority to other 'tales' and kinds of narration – and not one of them is used by Langland. The task of comparison here is complicated by the uncertainty of dating most poems in the group, but it is not particular sources but poetic resources we seek. The one poem which

certainly predates *Piers, William of Palerne*, lacks a beginning, but its epilogue and internal divisions offer plenty of occasion to present the composer, his source, his patron, and the act of performing, whether fictive or actual:

> þus passed is þe first pas . of þis pris tale,
> & ȝe þat louen & lyken . to listen a-ni more,
> alle wiȝth on hol hert . to þe heiȝ king of heuene
> preieth a pater noster . priuely þis time
> for þe hend erl of herford . sir humfray de bowne,
> þe king edwardes newe . at glouseter þet ligges.
> For he of frensche þis fayre tale . ferst dede translate,
> In ese of englysch men . in englysch speche;
> & god graunt hem his blis . þat godly so prayen! (161–169)

This passage offers a small anthology of these devices; only 'pas' or passus has any counterpart in Piers. There, however, it is simply a name for book divisions; it is not used in that sense, or as in this passage, within the poem.

Besides those gestures which turn the text into a social performance, two other common features of alliterative prologues are lacking: reference to the verse form itself, and a related notion, a declaration of the commemorative value and exemplary force of rehearsing former deeds. Alliterative verse as such is not mentioned in *Piers* at all, as it is in the prologue to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where 'locked letters' assure the virtuous transmission of 'matters'. Nor is it a principle of invention which enables the 'fyndyng' of edifying matters, as in *Winner and Waster* (8–21), or a technical aid in their development, as in *Patience*, where patience and poverty, 'fettled in on forme', are 'layde in teme' to permit the composer to 'play' with both. The commemorative function of narration is never honoured within *Piers*, nor is its corollary, that ancient deeds or lives stir moral emulation. The legend of Trajan's virtue causes the pagan king's salvation, but through tears, and not by fashioning a gentleman in virtuous and noble discipline. The only 'geste' worth hearing is that of Good Friday, and 'god's minstrels' who 'sing' it do so silently, in their sufferings, a *memento* of Christ's own. Neither at the beginning nor at any point in the poem does the composer present himself as managing the act of narration ('now speke we of . . .'), though the narrator purports to 'shewe' meaning (B.I.2). It is not simply that he makes no attempt to present the poem as a performance or book, but that in his declining to do so the composition as such vanishes: it becomes indistinguishable from the experiencing of it by the audience. The literary fiction is that there is no fiction, no design or 'foreconceit': the truths of the faith are simply represented in speech and scene to an indeterminately fictive person, the 'I' of the poem, whose adventures enact them for us.

It will at once be objected, and justly, that these implicit denials of design are themselves the poem's instructions for use. The poem does not lack a prologue: where other examples we have surveyed place a composer's exposition *in propria persona*, the May morning prologue and survey of the field performs that function in *Piers*. It is here, and in the transitions between episodes and visions governed by Will's wanderings, that we find the only account the composer offers of the poem's intentional literary affinities, his declarations of his own literary ambitions for the work, and its didactic genre. The mode of the explanation is identical with that of the work itself, and sustains the enigma necessary to its literary and affective function. The usual discussions of the May-morning prologue in *Piers* have been in the service of the narrower question of direct borrowing and the direction of influence among alliterative poems which use some form of it.[34] More fundamental is the question of why this formula for inception should have been interesting or useful to any composer. If it is a 'convention', why would a composer wish to convene us under these auspices?

The source form of this prologue is of course the lyric *chanson d'avanture*, of which there are dozens of English examples, both religious and secular, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; it was a fully naturalized English lyric form.[35] It offers perhaps the essential paradigm of literary fictive narration in this period. An 'I', walking or musing alone, often in some named actual place (Rybblesdale, Peterborough, 'Huntle bankkes') or on a specified feast-day or festival, hears a bird-song that carries an admonition, meets a fair lady, reads a significant message on a wall, or overhears a complaint or revelation or debate. The event of the poem may be love-longing or penance or prophecy: the force of the prologue is not to forecast any particular event or content, but to declare that this is a literary event rather than an authoritative or factual discourse. The *chanson d'avanture* prologue enacts proleptically and in miniature the mode of representation and recognition of truth in fiction: it is a mirror of reading. In presenting a speaker intent on something else – usually solitary diversion and pleasure, though sometimes a routine form of devotion – who happens upon truth or transformation unawares, in a place, time, and state of mind where it was least looked for, this formula thematizes the role of the fictive and the nugatory as the method of a specifically literary didacticism. In literary fiction, it implicitly argues, truth presents itself first to peripheral vision, as it were, and remains active and visible only so long as the adventurer defers uttering a correct verdict on its nature. This mode of fictive presentation disclaims the literal historical truth, or divine or genuinely mystical origin, for the marvel disclosed, even while it appropriates the familiar narrative details of reports which do make such claims. Unlike those testimonies with which it 'plays', however, this fictive report

knows no means of authentication except its affective success; its only truth is in its audience's recognition of it. A poem in this mode does not present authoritative truth to cognition, but represents such a transaction 'in game'; its definitive features are that its speaker has no authority, and that the 'truth' of its discourse is purely contingent. In playing upon a wide range of discourses which command belief, it offers an exercise of affective memory and recognition for *salus animae*.[36]

Langland would have known this opening gambit in English, however, only as a prologue to a short form, presenting a single brief encounter: the surviving examples through the 1350s, at any rate, are short lyric reports. An interest in adapting the premises of this short enigmatic form to a more ample and complex narration seems to have absorbed other poets as well in the second half of the century. But no English poem assimilated them more deeply, extended them on a more massive scale, or sustained a more consistent commitment to them, than does *Piers Plowman*. The way in which Langland extended the form, from a short enigmatic report of a brief encounter to a lyric history, purporting to record a lifetime given over to such *avantures* and marvels, put a great deal of stress on the delicate and uninsistent ambiguity of the original short form, and changed its capacity to carry meaning.[37] Langland applies this additional pressure to a full internal account of the purpose and consequences of such a mode, and to an examination of the social and personal value of literary didacticism. In particular, he implies that the power and efficacy of the literary, the condition of its being, lies in its deferral of instrumental and utilitarian claims, in its seeming idleness and openness to misappropriation.

Before considering the total intent and effect of this newly-forged long form, we should pause to consider the critical and historical utility of such an account of its derivation. In grounding his poem in a form that in use readily received both 'religious' and 'secular' matter, both personal and communal disclosures, Langland used one of its most fertile and attractive poetic premises. The lovely lady who suddenly appears may be a fairy mistress, the Blessed Virgin, a prophetess, or the Whore of Babylon; Lady Holichurche or Lady Meed. The mode offers not discursive but 'heart-ravishing' knowledge, and its affective force depends on deferral of full definition of the apparition in its power and origin, the deflection of systematic explanation. The poem can continue to be generated, over twenty lines or twenty *passus*, only so long as its fictive persona is capable of continued recognition, yet enigmatically unable either to explain or justify himself or to name with authority or use correctly what he has seen and heard. His wilfulness and evasiveness are not simply the moral but the formal conditions of the poem's existence, and of our benefit from it.

By regarding the poem as an extended form of the *chanson d'avanture*, we may understand the advent of new narrative and thematic developments

in the poem, which do not unfold argumentatively or expositorily, but often at an abrupt angle to what precedes. This uncanny effect has been attributed either to a passionate sincerity that scorns form (a formal analogue to Will's moral rage at mere formalism within religion), or to the poet's lack of skill at controlling ideationally complex matters. More recently, the locus of the problem has been transferred to modern readers, who supposedly lack the necessary familiarity with medieval principles of discourse. Such accounts are unnecessarily extraliterary, and none is satisfactory either historically or formally, when there is a model at hand in which such motions are basic. The progress of the adventure in the *chanson d'avanture* is by definition eccentric, in a quite strict sense: every encounter offers itself as a deflection of an intentional act, which turns aside the speaker's attention to a new centre, a disclosure he could not have known how to seek on his own, and even afterward could not reproduce fully in his own reflections, or interpret. *Avanture* in this mode presents itself as, *and remains*, a decentered and decentering experience; it can only be found, not sought (and in this, it enacts the role of poetic, as distinct from philosophical or theological, truth). It offers itself to a social being only momentarily cast back upon himself in reflection or 'play', perhaps in malaise but not in mortal danger. Its 'message' is not, as in the Boethian model, either set forth systematically or securely absorbed by the speaker as enlightening or salvific knowledge. Something is always lost in the return to the world, whose claims on the speaker never wholly vanish, as they are made to do in the *Consolation*; the *chanson d'avanture* records this loss. In Langland's hands the *chanson d'avanture* as a pretext for vision and dialogue retains its ludic aspect, and as he extends it from a single episode to the generative principle of a long episodic narrative, the revelation of one adventure is retrospectively converted to the delusion or misapprehension of the next. The 'progression' in this procedure is not systematic, nor is it to Will's profit, but is purchased to the audience's benefit, at his expense.

As this model explains some aspects of *Piers'* narrative structure, it also enables an understanding of the specific habits of the lyric speaker. It is not Will's literary function in this mode to learn, like Boethius, but simply to exhaust himself in the pursuit of 'heart-ravishing' knowledge. Our continuing recognitions are brought about by the perpetual deflection and humiliation of his ardour, and the repeated defeat of his reach for authority. His transformation is postponed for the sake of ours; his penance would stop the poem. His function is to enact an inefficacious and absurd *imitatio Christi*, for whose bad faith he is repeatedly called to account both to his interlocutors within the poem – Ymaginatif in B, Reason and Conscience in C – and implicitly to the audience: he is a hermit 'unholy of werkes', his way of life has no sanctioned 'rule', he is not authorized to teach or dispute the

theological teachings whose gestures and texts he repeatedly appropriates. His adventures and his way of life, which includes his 'makyngs', are measured against Piers' selfless labour for the commune, and Christ's sacrificial death to win eternal life: Will's role in this lyric history is parasitic on, and parodic of, both. Beside these images of efficacious making and doing, literary production is but the making of shadows, no more nourishing to the soul than a picture of food to a hungry man. At best, it can remind him in his distraction of what he needs, and perhaps stir him to seek it rather than die for lack of it. This is the only sustenance that a specifically literary didacticism has to offer. It is folly at all points until the moment it stirs those for whom it is made to recognition: that possibility is its only justification.

It is also, as Will finally admits to Reason and Conscience, always a hazardous and doubtful 'bargayn', winning nothing or everything: like Book, he is consumed, but the reader arise to live. As Will is developed from the framing pretext of a 'wonder' to a principle of narrative continuity, a structural irony arises: the fictive 'I' is made to lament not simply his folly and idleness, but what is inseparable from it, the conditions of his own literary existence. By giving Will a history, however discontinuous, the poet frames the counterpart of Gower's explicit prologues and glosses, and in Will's troublesome temporal relations he inscribes a full, if necessarily implicit, *ars poetica* of literary narration. It is also at these points that the writer signs his work.

Langland's poetic signatures occur at those points where the fictive speaker is most clearly playing the role assigned him by the author's chosen poetic mode, that of the wanderer and seeker after wonders, potential penitent and instrument of others' contrition -- just as we find Gower's signature in *Vox Clamantis* inscribed in his appeal to his namesake, St John in Patmos, with whom he shares not only a name, but a *forma tractandi.*[38] In A, Will leads the penitents at Repentance's call; he is rewarded by the merchants in gratitude 'for his writynge', his copying of the clause which put them 'in the margine' of the Pardon's provisions; he is presented by name to Wit, as one who seeks 'where þat dowel & dobet & dobest beþ in londe'. B adds a more explicit signature, playing upon both Christian name and surname, this time as 'I' presents himself and summarizes the course of his adventures to Anima, as Dowel ends and Dobet begins.

> '*I haue lyued in londe,*' quod [I], '*my name is longe wille,*
> *And fonde I neuere ful charite, bifore ne bihynde . . .*'
>
> (B XV.148–9)

The 'lond of longyng' into which the speaker falls when scorned by Scripture (B XI.8) acts as another anagram of the name, while it introduces another *locus classicus* of *avanture*, the landscape in which the wanderer sets out seeking pleasure. In C Will is named early in each adventure by

two of the figures he meets, Holichurche and Thought, thus announcing at once the artist's name and his poetic mode.³⁹ Langland signs his poem 'in the plate', so to speak, as he is using his lyric short form as a means of reproduction, to reduplicate its fundamental incident to create a new episode in his lyric history. Early scribes noted these signatures for what they were, and drew attention to them.

This account of the genesis of Langland's form, as a long narrative *aufgehoben* from a short lyric mode, may suggest a way of answering two questions implicit earlier in this inquiry, in effect resolving them into one. The first was framed explicitly by George Kane: 'What is the significance of Langland's choice of the alliterative long line, presuming him to have wanted a national audience?'⁴⁰ The second is that of the audience's classification of the poem as a 'pseudo-historical romance'. If my account of its genre and mode is persuasive – and if, as I do, one accepts Derek Pearsall's hypothesis about the social setting of the early 'revival', and Salter's account of why the alliterative long line recommends itself as a verse medium for romance narration⁴¹ – then the first virtually answers itself. Alliterative lines which also rhyme, and metrical rhymed verse adorned by alliteration, predominate in the religious, political, meditative, and commemorative lyrics which predate Langland – including most of our examples of the chanson d'avanture. In longer forms, the alliterative long line is used for historical narration and didactic legend. But why choose such a form if one wishes to address a 'national' public? Here one must be wary of the concealed assumptions of the question. One should not let a normative map of a 'national' audience projected backward from Chaucer and Lydgate distort the view of literary possibilities as they might have appeared to a poet who began his work in mid-century. From Langland's vantage point, the circulation not only of texts, but of power, influence, administrative talent and governing experience on a national scale might have appeared to flow as abundantly through great religious institutions throughout the realm – ecclesiastical courts, monastic houses, cathedrals – and in the organs of judicial administration, as through the royal court or capital alone. It seems to be those matters which move through this circulatory system, rather than city affairs as such, that interest the poet when he alludes to contemporary London and Westminster. It may be that what needs historical explanation is not Langland's success in achieving wide circulation, but the failure of other alliterative writers to attempt new narrative structures of a complexity and synthetic power comparable to Langland's. Compared to *Piers Plowman*, the traditional romance matters, and their manner of narration, were sectarian, bound, as by its very principles of formal invention Langland's poem was not, to family fortunes, interests, and patronage. In the mode of its construction, *Piers* is the first Middle English poetic fiction intentionally

capable of a national resonance and reception. In this respect, as well as in the genesis of its form, it occupies a position comparable to that of Dante's poem in its vernacular literate culture.

It is reasonable to suppose that in the 1360s, when Langland's fundamental choice of mode and verse form was made, and no Chaucer or Gower yet existed on the literary scene, the alliterative long line might well have seemed as likely as any other in English use for sustained narration to command a wide readership, no more in need of explanation in its chosen context than Chaucer's or Gower's octosyllabics were in theirs. What might be called an alliterative 'competence' in a mid-fourteenth century readership not confined to the West Midlands, particularly for religious and didactic writings, is well attested by Rolle's work and such treatises as Gaytryge's 'sermon', not to mention English homiletic practice all the way back to Ælfric. The 'choice' of the alliterative long line is, if anything, overdetermined, one of several syncretistic gestures by which the poet invited his readers to see his work in a provocative relationship to both didactic treatises and historical narration – in Salter's terms, both 'eastern' and 'western' aspects of alliterative composition – while presenting these under the auspices of a productively enigmatic literary 'game'.

Finally, by referring Langland's heterogeneous literary form to an antecedent in which the order and viewpoint of the discourse is governed by the adventures of an indeterminately fictive private person, we may understand what sorts of 'mistakes' permitted the poem's appropriation by the reformers. Indeed, such misprision becomes virtually inevitable: all the reader needs to do is ignore the possible fictiveness of the main voices in the poem, and the adventurer's fertile restlessness becomes the writer's polemic; a fictive creature who is largely the 'surrogate audience' becomes an instructor *in propria persona*. The circumstantial presentation of the speaker as our contemporary and peer positively courts such a resolution of the enigma.

What enables all the reformist readings are two specific acts of mistaken identity, category errors to which the poem must remain open if it is to succeed affectively. The first is the identification of Will and his pronouncements as the writer and his advocacies – in effect, the collapsing of literary into rhetorically instrumental discourse. The second, perhaps the same mistake repeated at a deeper level, is the identification of Will with Piers. This mistake joins the fallible subject, the elusive centre of vision and narration, with the idealized object of his vision, who is himself elusive through the endless transformations and 'raisings' of the meaning of the enterprise that defines his ideal stature. It is, however, a partly appropriate response to the core device of the *chanson d'avanture*: the wanderer is, dynamically considered, the 'surrogate audience'; what presents itself to him 'by avanture' is a fabulous projection of the beholder's undiscovered

needs and their satisfaction. It is what he sees, and not the narrator himself, that presents covertly the didactic content of the poem, both its 'message' and its power of action. In the decorum that prescribes their relations throughout the poem, Will is not simply in search of Piers, but acts as a kind of screen for him. It is therefore not wholly mistaken to consider the didactic substance of the poem Piers' own counsel.

These two errors characterize every reformist or hortative appropriation of the poem, and their occurrence seems directly related to the currency or loss of the *chanson d'avanture* as a living literary genre. Crowley, for example, the first printer of the poem, attributes the opinions in the poem to Piers. *Piers Plowman's Creed*, written within a decade of the C-text, begins as a search, but not as a solitary *avanture*. It looks as if those securely familiar with and responsive to the lyric genre rules announced by the *avanture*-prologue did not misread the poetic voice of the poem, while it was those unfamiliar with this idiom of literary language as readers or writers who could compose an 'exhortation unto the lordes, knightes and burgoysses of the parlyament house' allegedly delivered by 'Pyers plowman' (*Short Title Catalogue* 19905).

The problem of formal description and classification presented to modern criticism by Langland's poem is, I believe, essentially the one the poet presented intentionally to his original readers. He explains his intentions within the fictive action, and in so doing further courts the very confusions that his explanation resolves. At the moments when the fictive 'I' is made to confront, and fail to justify, his own temporal way of life, Langland defines the social and affective value of literary fiction. In Will's strangely undefined way of life, Langland raises the playful enigma of the adventure lyric to a purposeful crisis over the social standing and cultural authority of literary 'play'. Because the materials by which he augments his slender device are those of teaching compendia and commentaries, as well as a unique assortment of legal and learned formulaic expressions and forms, Will's adventures repeatedly raise the question of the powers of teaching, correction, advice, and even prophecy in this work, as its poetic voice incessantly mimes them. In effect, the chastisements Will repeatedly receives for his presumption are tantamount to reminders – to us, as well as to the adventurer – of the humble poetic small-holding, the adventure lyric, from which he takes his origin and identity, and warnings that he has appropriated (and we have momentarily accepted as his by right) a voice of public authority rather than private reflection to which he is not, by the literary mode of his existence, entitled.

As long as the voice of the adventure lyric presented a single 'wonder', a disclosure of 'heart-ravishing' knowledge to the solitary speaker on holiday from his social identity, its report presents no problem: the enigma bears no weight; it is a gamesome pretext. But when the adventurer speaks from

the midst of our world of communal 'wonders', or seems to 'prophesy of the peple'? Here Gower, with his more explicit system of generic announcements, evidently feels it useful to forestall charges of presumption on the authoritative limits of the fiction in the mixed mode of his long English work.[42] Since Langland's first English ventures in this literary mode predate Gower's by nearly a generation, it is the more remarkable how much further he carries its formal implications, how much more risk of fundamental misunderstanding he is prepared to undertake in the form of his work for the sake of having it construed in the way that defines the domain of the literary. The kind of 'knowledge' it confers, and its unique cultural power are indeterminable, volatile, uncontrollable. While its readability depends on its tantalizing and continued resemblance to familiar instructive, factual, authoritative kinds of social discourse, the peculiar power of the literary fiction depends on its evasion or deferral of instrumental claims, on its own insistence that it but 'plays' the part of the useful. By his choice of form, Langland makes equivocal what he received as univocal. Will is at once a maker and relentless citer of books, and a scorner of books and 'clergie' as the means to salvific knowledge. When regarded as a sign of the poem's generic commitments, Will's inconsistencies vanish, as does the need to attribute the poem's structural deformities to poetic vacillation by Langland himself. Will mimes, so that Langland can maintain, the cultural power of the literary in all its volatility. To write a work of literature is at once to use and to deform instrumental discourse, to open the way of foolish or dangerous misunderstanding of the culture's almost blunted purposes as the way to their full subjective repossession and communal renewal. To command literary understanding is, then, to an uncommon degree to court misunderstanding. The evidence is ample that Langland's poem received both.

Langland's firm commitment to his original poetic idiom may be deduced from the manner of his apparent efforts to forestall misappropriation. Our chief testimony to his response is the C revision. While many local changes in C seem to exhibit a sterner and fuller hortatory force, and a number of them appear designed to stifle any association of the poem with 'poor preachers' (the uses of the word 'poor' are revised with particular care), the most obvious and unambiguous gesture of correction seems either not to have occurred to the writer, or to have been rejected. Even in C, the poet does not add an explanatory preface *in propria persona* – as Gower does in the *Vox Clamantis*, written at about the same time as the C revision – to set forth the nature and purpose of his fictive voice and devices. His closest approximation to an account of himself and his poem added in the C revision is the 'autobiographical' encounter with Reason and Conscience, and it maintains the fertile ambiguity with which the whole poetic enterprise had begun.

The very terms in which the inquisition is framed displays Langland's analysis of the problem of literary misprision. Will is not charged with making heretical, inflammatory, or treasonable utterances, whose intent he is called to clarify, but with idleness – with making something empty of any sort of meaning or utility, either to himself or to others. Furthermore, just as in the B counterpart of this scene, the interview with Ymaginatyf, Will does not contest the charge. His response enacts at once a concession to it, and a reframing of it, that preserves the space of fiction within which the poem is situated.

Will admits at last to idleness, the fundamental trait of his literary character within the genre, conceding that he has flouted any sanctioned 'rule' of life, and misspent his time, while also suggesting that he has done so as part of the higher folly, a precarious 'bargayn', in an absurd hope of winning that which will make him ever the better. His misspent time is but a preface to the time he hopes now to begin 'that alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne' (C VI.101). This enigmatic admission implies that the 'makyngs' amid which he is caught by his accusers entail as a condition of their success the preliminary appearance of play and idleness. Will must stand guilty as charged in order to vindicate Langland's 'intente'; his work, his peculiar way of spending his time, has neither cultural authority nor assured social utility. Only here, finally, does Will resolve to change his life, to undo that endemic idleness and evasiveness out of which the poem has been generated. And it is upon his promise of change and regeneration that he is released, to lead 'the lyf that ys lowable and leel to the soule.' What life is this? It seems we are to understand it as that of prayer and penance; certainly Will understands it so. He goes immediately to church to begin it. Yet the unambiguous imperative of Reason and Conscience is itself consumed by the fiction, and thereby once more rendered equivocal. The encounter comes, after all, not at the conclusion of the poem, but between its first and second visions. The definition of the 'lowable lyf' becomes ambiguous as Will's resolution initiates yet another *avanture*: at church, he weeps and bewails his sins until once more 'ich was a slepe'. His concession of the worthlessness of his 'makyng' – if that is what is – is itself absorbed into the fictive process, as self-explanation becomes self-cancelling.

Will's promise to his interlocutors succinctly defines the intentional form of Langland's work from its inception – to turn 'alle tymes of my tyme', all parts of my life, to profit. The poet was perfectly well aware of what constituted his formal originality, and the social power of his generic hybrid: that, too, he records in his fiction. Its virtue – and its dangerous openness to misappropriation – lay in the contemporaneity and enigmatic persistence of his framing fiction, in his making 'my tyme' the rationale and shifting reference point for his affecting and compendious *speculum*

historiae christianae. It is chiefly for being a mirror in the marketplace that Will is abused, mistaken, and called to account. He is little loved by his near neighbours for making 'of tho men as reson me tauhte'. He is reminded that the capacity for penetrating analysis of his contemporaries has a corrosive as well as corrective power: it withers charity and patience in the beholder. A comprehensive vision of Christ in history as the root principle of all authority and action is framed by a fiction which runs the risk of exacerbating in its readers the very ills of the spirit whose causes it so accurately anatomizes. The risk extends through Will to the audience, for whom the comprehensive display of Christian faith and moral teaching is given, at a shifting and indeterminable angle of refraction, as to 'myselve in a mirour'.

Langland's final revision does not directly clarify the writer's 'position' on matters of public controversy, but rather defines more fully the poem's chosen situation as a didactic fiction. It is, in essence, the situation of all literature as distinct from instrumental discourse: the poem must be open to misprision if it is also to be open to its intended affective use. Its heteroclitic nature, its capacity to become a property of public discourse in several incommensurable ways at once, defines its social power and its wholly *ad hoc* authority. Langland's innovation as a poet lay in his initial insistence – and in his maintaining in the face of clear evidence of its consequences – that the moral problematic he explored for his public was fully represented and reduplicated in the literary mode of his work. He partially evades the expectations and categories of his audience, in order to fulfill the needs of the literary public as he conceives it. His poem was itself a mirror in the marketplace, for whose personal and public use every reader was made fully responsible – not only for understanding what he saw there, but for turning all of it to profit in his own time.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the notes and bibliography:

EETS	Early English Text Society (OS: Original Series; ES: Extra Series; SS: Supplementary Series).
Index	Carleton Brown and R. H. Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York, 1943).
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology.*
Manual I	*A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, I; *Romances*, ed. J. Burke Severs (New Haven, Connecticut, 1967).
MÆ	*Medium Ævum*
MLQ	*Modern Language Quarterly*
MLR	*Modern Language Review*
MP	*Modern Philology*
MS	*Mediæval Studies*
NM	*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
N&Q	*Notes and Queries*
PQ	*Philological Quarterly*
RES	*Review of English Studies*, new series
SN	*Studia Neophilologica*
SP	*Studies in Philology*

Notes

I MIDDLE ENGLISH ALLITERATIVE POETRY: AN INTRODUCTION
(David Lawton)

[1] George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day*, I (London, 1906), 100–11. An altogether more sympathetic account of a 'revival' is that by Turville-Petre (1977).

[2] R. S. Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (London, 1963), p. 147. The great spokesman for 'continuity' was Chambers (1937).

[3] This objection is raised against Turville-Petre's book by Blake (1979). A similar attack on different grounds comes from Matonis (1981) and more peremptorily in her review of Turville-Petre (1977) in *MÆ* 50 (1981), 169–70. She argues for a broader definition of the alliterative corpus that would include the Harley Lyrics as central. There is much justice in this, though it need not be associated with the same author's case for Celtic influences, Matonis (1972–3), which to my mind is built on strained interpretation of Welsh and Irish evidence. But the view does not entirely accommodate the fact, in contexts where one wishes to emphasize it, that unrhymed alliterative poetry is metrically distinctive. Grouping unrhymed alliterative poems for study as a corpus defined by metrical form is not to propose that they constitute a genre, but only to ensure that one begins by comparing like with like. Nor does this indicate any resistance to more generously inclusive views such as those proposed by Blake and Matonis, to which more limited studies make an essential contribution.

[4] Oakden I (1930), 168. This is still the most thorough tabulation of alliterative patterns.

[5] My article, 'The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry', is forthcoming in *Speculum*.

[6] Pearsall (1977), p. 157.

[7] Turville-Petre (1974)[1]; and for the manuscript, see Lawton (1980)[1].

[8] Sir Israel Gollancz, ed., *Winner and Waster* (1921; rpt. Cambridge, 1974), gathering B fol. 2[v]. See below, n.28. The only strong and unequivocal 'topical' reference that really supports Gollancz's dating is the reference to Justice

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Shareshull, who died in 1370; but in the first place this makes 1370, not 1353, a respectable *terminus ad quem*, and in the second it would not be difficult to supply examples of poems alluding to an important man after his death. The poem's reference to Edward III as having reigned for 'fyve and twenty wyntere' (206) would carry more weight if the number were supported by alliteration. In fact, 'fyve' alliterates and 'twenty' does not; and numbers are in any case notoriously subject to scribal corruption.

[9] For Skeat's initial dating, influenced by his desire to attribute *Alexander A* to the poet of *William of Palerne*, see EETS OS 1 (1867), p. xxx; for his recantation, see EETS ES 47 (1886), p. xxiii.

[10] The manuscript is Greaves 60, Bodleian Library. See Turville-Petre (1976).

[11] The phrase is Pearsall's (1977), p. 169, from his excellent account of Middle English alliterative poetry.

[12] Luttrell (1958). On Guido's work in England, see C. David Benson, *The History of Troy in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge, 1980).

[13] Jacobs (1972). The best list of parallels between the *Destruction and the Siege* is that supplied by Neilson (1900).

[14] See Turville-Petre's account of *Alexander C* and *A*, pp. 94–102; and Lawton (1980), and 'The Middle English Alliterative *Alexander A* and *C*: Form and Style in Translation from Latin Prose', *SN* 53 (1981), 259–68. I must record that in the latter essay I made a bad choice of P edition, though at the time of writing the essay no other was available to me in Sydney. The best edition is K. Steffens, *Die Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni, Rezension J³*, Beiträge zur Klassichen Philologie, heft 73 (Meisenheim, 1975). Its readings adequately account for one or two small-scale verbal elements I attributed to the *C*-poet; however, the central argument of the essay is unaffected. I am grateful to Thorlac Turville-Petre for informing me that some English mss. of P bear a still closer resemblance to the verbal detail of the alliterative poem. See Duggan (1976) for a reliable treatment of the source.

[15] Hoyt N. Duggan, 'The Role of Formulas in the Dissemination of a Middle English Romance', *Studies in Bibliography* 28 (1976), 265–88; quotation from p. 269.

[16] In short, what makes 'Marks and Spencer' in some sense formulaic is not $N + N$ alone; compare 'Marks and Mason', 'Fortnum and Spencer'. I am indebted to H. L. Rogers for this example. On the syntactic structures in this corpus, see D. A. Lawton, 'Larger Patterns of Syntax in Middle English Unrhymed Alliterative Verse', *Neophilologus* 64 (1980), 604–18, especially p. 609.

[17] Duggan goes significantly beyond other scholars, notably Lawrence (1970) and Waldron (1957), in proposing 'formulaic' technique as an editorial criterion. The extension of the studies of Milman Parry to literate composition is fraught with conceptual difficulty. See A. C. Watt, *The Lyre and the Harp: A Comparative Reconsideration of Oral Tradition in Homer and Old English Epic Poetry* (New Haven, 1969), and H. L. Rogers, 'The Crypto-Psychological Character of the Oral Formula', *English Studies* 47 (1966), 89–102.

[18] Joseph J. Duggan, *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft* (Berkeley, 1973).

[19] *Piers Plowman: the B-Version*, ed. George Kane and E. T. Donaldson (London, 1975).

[20] See n.14 above and Pearsall (1981)².

[21] For further references see Pearsall (1981)¹ and Lawton (1980)¹.

[22] See Finlayson (1967); Larry D. Benson, 'The Date of the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*', *Medieval Studies in honor of Lillian Herlands Hornstein*, ed. J. B. Bessinger Jr. and R. R. Raymo (New York, 1976), pp. 19–40; and Vale (1979). On interpretation generally see Göller (1981).

[23] For example, Everett (1955), p. 68, 'it seems easier to assume a common author', the appeal by Spearing (1970), p. 37 to 'the principle of economy, or Ockham's razor'; Williams (1970), p. 143, 'There is no proof that these poems were written by one man, but the feeling that they were dies hard among most readers of them, including myself. But in any case, since it is not impossible, it can be very illuminating to consider them together.' I would endorse this last statement, but I cannot see that its validity depends on common authorship.

[24] Compare Spearing (1970), p. 34, with E. R. Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (London, 1953), p. 210. A thorough but, to my mind, necessarily unconvincing presentation of this kind of evidence is that by Vantuono (1971). For an approach by anagrams, see Peterson (1974), and the answer by Turville-Petre and Wilson (1975).

[25] J. W. Clark, 'Observations of Certain Differences in Vocabulary between *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain*', *PQ* 28 (1949), 261–73; '"The *Gawain*-Poet" and the Substantival Adjective', *JEGP* 49 (1950), 60–6; 'Paraphrases for God in the Poems Attributed to the "*Gawain*-Poet"', *MLN* 65 (1950), 232–6; and 'On Certain "Alliterative" and "Poetic" Words in the Poems Attributed to "The *Gawain*-Poet"', *MLQ* 12 (1951), 387–98; Kjellmer (1975).

[26] Lawton (1981).

[27] See Gollancz's edition of the poem, Select Early English Poems 2 (London, 1915), gathering A, folio 4ᵛ; and Lewis (1968).

[28] David Lawton, 'Literary History and Scholarly Fancy: the Date of Two Middle English Alliterative Poems', *Parergon* 18 (Canberra; August 1977), 17–25. See also Salter (1978)² and J. R. Hulbert, 'The Problem of Authorship and the Date of *Wynnere and Wastoure*', *MP* 18 (1920), 31–20. For a reminder that the *Parliament* was once seen as a source of *Piers Plowman*, see Hussey (1965).

[29] Benson (1964), and on the manuscript, Luttrell (1958). I am bound to add that if one does accept 'the *Gawain*-Poet', the reasons for excluding this poem from his canon do not seem compelling.

[30] See Lawton (1978).

[31] I have not discussed one or two short pieces mentioned by Oakden, the most significant of which are *The ABC of Aristotle* and the *Satire on Blacksmiths*. On the latter, see the fine essay by Salter (1979).

[32] Turville-Petre (1974)². I hope to discuss other thirteen-line stanza poems in a forthcoming essay.

[33] See Luttrell (1958); Lawton (1978); and Robbins (1950).

[34] *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (London, 1957): X, 42–3; see also *Knight's Tale* 2601–18; *Legend of Good Woman* 535–48; and Blake (1969)¹.

[35] Blake (1968). The fact that Caxton increased the number of alliterating couplets in Trevisa may indicate not inconsistency but an aesthetic distinction between

pattern and decorative alliteration.

[36] Brewer (1965); and on Wyatt's metre, D. W. Harding, 'The Rhythmical Intention in Wyatt's Poetry', *Scrutiny* 14 (1946), 90–102, and Elias Schwartz, 'The Meter of Some Poems of Wyatt', *SP* 60 (1963), 155–65.

[37] For important speculation, see Hulbert (1930–1); Salter (1966–7); J. R. L. Highfield, 'The Green Squire', *MÆ* 22 (1953), 18–23; Bennett (1979) and (1980); and Pearsall (1981)'.

[38] This excerpt from the grammatical treatise of Adam Shidyard is quoted from Bodl. MS Digby 100 and E. Mus. 96 by R. W. Hunt, 'Oxford Grammar Masters', *The History of Grammar in the Middle Ages: Collected Papers of R. W. Hunt*, ed. G. L. Bursill-Hall (Amsterdam, 1980), p. 175.

[39] On prophecy, see R. Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England* (Columbia, 1911; rpt. New York, 1967), pp. 57–8; *Bernardus de Cura Rei Famuliaris*, ed. J. R. Lumby, EETS OS 42 (1870), pp. 18–31; *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, ed. J. A. H. Murray, EETS OS 61 (1875); Mabel Day, 'Fragment of an Alliterative Political Prophecy', *RES* 15 (1939), 61–6. The Latin quotations in *Piers Plowman* have been ably investigated by Alford (1977).

[40] For further references, see Lawton (1979).

[41] The manuscript is Bodleian Digby 86. The texts are edited by P. L. Heyworth, *Jack Upland, Friar Daw's Reply and Upland's Rejoinder* (Oxford, 1968), with whose introduction I am in basic disagreement.

[42] See Noel Denholm-Young, 'The *Cursus* in England', *Collected Papers on Medieval Subjects* (Cardiff, 1969), pp. 42–73. Cotton Cleopatra B vi contains several rhetorical treatises and two dictaminal treatises; I refer to the 'Tractatus de natura epistolaris dictaminis', folios 234^r–237^v.

[43] See J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 157–61, 194–268, and C. S. Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400* (1928; rpt., Gloucester, Mass., 1959), pp. 183–227. I follow Murphy's description of the *ars rithmica*, though the terminology may not be entirely satisfactory. For John of Garland (n.47 below) the phrase implied rhyme.

[44] The poem is copied in Cambridge University Library MS Ff 1. 27.

[45] *A Talking of the Love of God*, ed. M. S. Westra (The Hague, 1950), p. 2; Margery Morgan, 'A Treatise in Cadence', *MLR* 47 (1952), 156–64, and '*A Talking of the Love of God* and the Continuity of Stylistic Tradition in the Middle English Prose Meditations', *RES* NS 3 (1952), 97–116. See also *Þe Wohunge of Oure Lauerd*, ed. W. Meredith Thompson, EETS OS 241 (1955), which is an earlier version of much of the *Talking* material. A good corrective to over-emphasis on one device, the *cursus*, is provided by L. K. Smedick, 'Cursus in Middle English: *A Talking of the Love of God* Reconsidered', *MS* 37 (1975), 387–406.

[46] E. Faral, *Les Arts Poétiques du XIIᵉ et du XIIIᵉ Siècle* (Paris, 1924), pp. 106–93: e.g. p. 153.

[47] *Canterbury Tales* VI, 16–18.

[48] *The Parisiana Poetria of John of Garland*, ed. T. Lawler (New Haven, 1974); see the alternative title of the treatise adopted in the edition by G. Mari, 'Poetria magistri Johannis Anglici de Arte Prosayca, Metrica et Rithmica', *Romanische Forschungen* 13 (1902), 883–965; and see J. W. Rankin, 'Rime and Reason',

PMLA 44 (1929), 997–1004 and 'Rhythm and Rime before the Norman Conquest', *PMLA* 36 (1921), 401–28.

49 Gabriel Liegey, 'Richard Rolle's *Carmen Prosaicum*: an Edition and Commentary', *MS* 19 (1957), 15–36; quotation from pp. 16 and 21. For the view that there is no verse in the work, see E. J. F. Arnould's introduction to his edition of the *Melos Amoris* (Oxford, 1957).

50 *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, ed. Hope Emily Allen (Oxford, 1931). It is worth remarking, however, that Old English manuscripts regularly use prose format for alliterative verse, and this format is still used in the thirteenth century manuscripts of Laʒamon's *Brut*, as it is indeed for the *Complaint against Blacksmiths*. In every case the punctuation marks rhythmical units.

II EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH ALLITERATIVE VERSE
(*Angus McIntosh*)

1 The use of the term 'classical' in relation to this verse goes back, I think, to my paper on 'Wulfstan's Prose', [McIntosh (1949)].

2 As, for example, in *The Four Foes of Mankind*, cf. p. 28 below, and the excerpt from it which is printed in the Appendix, example 7.

3 Oxford, 1932.

4 E.g. op. cit., nos. 75, 77, 78, 79, 81 (all from BL Harley 2253); and in *Religious Lyrics of the XIV Century*, ed. Carleton Brown, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1957), such poems from the Vernon MS as nos. 105 and 106 (among many others).

5 On the importance of an understanding of this limbo area, see Blake (1969–70), p. 121 and Salter (1978)', p. 26.

6 The importance of a holistic approach of this kind has recently been stressed by N. F. Blake (1979).

7 For a specimen of Wulfstan's rhythmical prose see Appendix, example 1. Example 2 illustrates from *Sawles Warde* a similar rhythmical style current in at least one area in early Middle English times, cf. Bethurum (1935), p. 553. For some remarks on the prose of this text see Joseph Hall, *Selections from Early Middle English 1130–1250*, Part II, pp. 504–5.

8 See the masterly discussion by J. C. Pope (1967).

9 As for Ælfric, the likelihood of this being so is strongly supported by what we may learn from the chronology of his attempts at composition in a rhythmical mode. Pope (1967) shows (pp. 113ff.) how the rhythmical consistency of a text like the *Life of St Edmund* (see pp. 125ff.) is preceded by much earlier experimental work of which the metrical structure is in varying degrees less regular and assured.

10 I should not wish these remarks to be taken as supporting the recent view of Derek Pearsall that the beginnings of the revival are plausibly to be attributed to one man having associations with a monastery in the south west midlands; see Pearsall (1981)'. In my view, much further analytical work is necessary both on the dialectal provenance of *all* the poems of the revival and on the precise details

of the metrical characteristics of each of them before we can hope to throw further light on this question.

[11] Space does not allow a demonstration of the marked rhythmical similarity of an Ælfric text such as *St. Edmund* and the *Brut*. In both, the average number of syllables in 2-stress half-lines is much the same, and considerably higher than is usual in the classical verse. Furthermore, the relative frequency in each text of lines with the three types of ending . . x/x, . . x/xx and . . x/ is quite strikingly close. The main differences are these: Laȝamon's fairly frequent use of first half-lines with three feet is not matched by any comparable frequency in Ælfric; rhyme plays an altogether more subsidiary part in Ælfric; though Laȝamon's own use of 'C-type' half-lines is quite sparing (probably under 10%), this kind of half-line is significantly rarer still in Ælfric. For specimens of *St Edmund*, the *Worcester Fragments* and Laȝamon's *Brut*, see Appendix, examples 3, 4, and 5.

[12] The continued later use of this kind of highly rhythmical prose, usually for purposes of some solemnity, has often been commented on. I must, however, record here my opinion that the northern prose of the Sermon of Dan Jon Gaytryge (see Dr Lawton's paper) seems to me quite to lack any close rhythmical or metrical affinities with what I am talking about. One interesting example of a prose writer having recourse, albeit only very briefly, to a kind which is metrically rather more like that of the *Brut* than like either *St Katherine* and its congeners or anything in the verse of the revival occurs in the dialogue between the clerk and the lord which is prefixed to Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*. There comes a point when the clerk is forced, with considerable reluctance, to agree to undertake this arduous task. He then launches into a prayer, the opening of which runs:

> þanne God graunte grace   greyþlyche to gynne.
> wit & wisdom   wisly to werche.
> miȝt & mynd of riȝt   menynge to make.
> translacion trusty & trewe   plesynge to þe trinite

(I owe the transcription of this passage to Dr. Richard Beadle; it is taken from BL Stowe 65, fol. 218rᵃ. A modernized version, the source of which is not named, is to he found in *Fifteenth Century Prose and Verse*, ed. A. W. Pollard (London, 1903), p. 207. The piece is quoted (from the edition of Caxton, 1482) and discussed by H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 106.) The pointing in the manuscript would seem to attest the recognition of a recurring rhythmical unit answering to the dimensions of the long line. Note that there is no reluctance to allow five stresses in such units, nor to include their last stressed syllable in the alliterative scheme. The choice of the adverb *greyþlyche* is of some interest: except in the north and north midlands it seems to be recorded only in verse and there usually in alliterating passages; as far south as Trevisa it would seem to be extremely rare even in verse. See *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor) *greithli* adv. and R. Kaiser, *Zur Geographie des mittelenglischen Wortschatzes*, Palaestra 205 (1937), 210.

This brief piece bears a fairly close resemblance, metrically, to the ten alliterative long-lines in Rolle's *Ego Dormio* which are quoted in David Lawton's introductory paper. Though, as he says, 'the verse form imposed by the editor

is not entirely corroborated by the prose format' which these have in CUL Dd 5. 64, the pointing of the text clearly indicates the rhythmical intent: this is brought out by Elizabeth Salter in her printing of the last six lines (1978)', p. 28. There are also distinct metrical similarities between the Trevisa piece and the prose passages cited by her (pp. 33–4) from BL Additional 41321. I do not know on what grounds she assigned this manuscript to the Cheshire area; in fact, both hands point strongly to a scribal origin somewhere fairly far south in the central Midlands.

On Trevisa's quite frequent use of alliteration within doublets, which suggests affinities with Wulfstan and early ME texts like *St Katherine*, see Blake (1968), pp. 41–3.

13 The probably widely differing provenance of these (and such other metrically similar poems as survive) perhaps indicates that the kind of alliterative verse they exemplify was a good deal more generally familiar in early Middle English times than is often suggested. The numerous metrical experiments preserved in the *Bestiary*, in which types of homomorphic verse are used side by side with examples of the more traditional heteromorphic, serve to support my contention that any study of the medieval history of 'alliterative verse' as if it were an isolated entity has little to be said for it.

14 It is of some interest that the frequency of rhyme in the *Brut* increases in a quite marked way as the poem proceeds. My own analysis (from an unpublished monograph *Laȝamon's Rhymes* written many years ago) of the first 5000 long lines of C indicates a fairly steady rise from about 16% in the opening 500 lines to close on 50% in the last 500. On this matter see also: R. Seyger, *Beiträge zu Laȝamons Brut* (1912) and K. Brandstädter, *Stabreim und Endreim in Layamons Brut* (1912). The rarity of rhyme in the prologue (around 15%), which though placed at the beginning implies by its contents that it was written at the end, suggests that Laȝamon composed it at the start of his great task. It is also to be noted that rhyme is much more frequent in the later O recension than in C. For the textual implications of this, see Ludwig Bartels, *Die Zuverlässigkeit der Handschriften von Laȝamons Brut* (1913).

15 The metrical system of *Horn* may be compared in these respects with that of short poems like Carleton Brown, *XIII Century*, no. 21. One should also note that the verse of *Sir Tristrem* has marked rhythmical resemblances to that of *King Horn*. It differs from *Horn* in displaying alliteration (mostly *within* single lines) distinctly more often and in rejecting the use of imperfect rhymes; it is also written in stanzaic form. But the antecedents of the rhythmical structures of the two poems must be closely connected. Again it is of some interest that the kind of verse they manifest seems to have quite diverse regional origins and currency.

16 See Appendix, example 7. For a discussion of this text, and references, see McIntosh (1978).

17 See Appendix, example 6.

III THE ALLITERATIVE REVIVAL:
ORIGINS AND SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS
(Derek Pearsall)

[1] Moore's comment is in *PMLA* 28 (1913), 103–4; Hulbert (1930–1); and Gollancz's phrase in the Preface (not paginated) to his edition of the *Parlement*.

[2] Williams (1970), p. 107. There is a similar sense of embarrassment (though self-inflicted on this occasion) in the chapter on 'Alliterative Poetry' in Pearsall (1977). The ending of my MA thesis on 'The Stylistic Relationships of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*' (Birmingham, 1952), where I suggested that we should think less of 'Alliterative Poetry in Middle English' (referring to Oakden's title) and more of 'Medieval Poetry in Alliterative Verse', was perhaps more circumspect.

[3] Elizabeth Salter, in a review of Turville-Petre in *RES* 29 (1978), 462–4 (p. 463).

[4] The fullest statement of the theory of Scottish authorship is Neilson (1900). The theory was effectively dismantled by H. N. MacCracken, 'Concerning Huchown', *PMLA* 25 (1910), 507–34. For Morris's comments on dialect, see his edition of *Early English Alliterative Poems* (EETS OS 1, 1864), Introduction, p. xxv.

[5] What follows is a brief summary of what is dealt with at length in Oakden (1930–5), Turville-Petre (1977), especially pp. 6–22; and Pearsall (1981)[1].

[6] Chaucer, Knight's Tale, *Canterbury Tales*, I. 2602–16; Legend of Good Women, 635–49; *Sege off Melayne*, ed. S. J. Herrtage, EETS ES 35 (1880), e.g. 253–76; *Song of Roland*, ed. S. J. Herrtage, EETS ES 35 (1880), e.g. 336–9; *Joseph of Arimathie*, ed. W. W. Skeat, EETS OS 44 (1871), e.g. 489–517; *Luve-Ron*, ed. Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson, *Early Middle English Texts* (London, 1951), lines 92–4 (this example is given in Basil Cottle, *The Triumph of English 1350–1400* (London, 1969), p. 47); *Laud Troy-Book*, ed. J. E. Wülfing, EETS OS 121–2 (1902–3), 3243–56.

[7] The first example is of a London chronicler rehandling a poem on Agincourt ('Stedes ther stumbleyd in that stownde . . .'), the second is from Trevisa's Dialogue between a Lord and a Clerk [quoted by Professor McIntosh in his n.12]. Both are cited by H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print* (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 92, 106.

[8] See Matonis (1972–3); *Reliquiae Antiquae*, ed. T. Wright and J. O. Halliwell, 2 vols. (London, 1841), ii. 256 (see also ii. 200 for a similar extravagant Latin piece); *The Melos Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. E. J. F. Arnould (Oxford, 1957), e.g. p. 112, and see David Lawton's introduction to the present volume, pp. 17–18.

[9] These examples are cited in Pearsall (1981)[1], pp. 4–5.

[10] For generally accepted opinion on the dialect of the poems, see Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 29–36.

[11] McIntosh (1962).

[12] McIntosh (1963), p. 5.

[13] See C. David Benson, 'A Chaucerian Allusion and the Date of the Alliterative "Destruction of Troy"', *N&Q* n.s. 21 (1974), 206–7; McKay Sundwall, 'The *Destruction of Troy*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and Lydgate's *Troy Book*', *RES* 26 (1975), 313–17.

[14] Burrow (1971), pp. 3–4.

[15] *Reliquiae Antiquae*, i. 81, 85; Salter (1979); Francis Lee Utley, 'The Choristers' Lament', *Speculum* 21 (1946), 194–202; Wilson (1979).

[16] *The Triumph of English*, p. 45. See above, note 9, and Blake (1969)[1].

[17] B. J. Whiting, 'Gawain: His Reputation, His Courtesy and His Appearance in "Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*"', *MS* 9 (1947), 189–234 (pp. 230–34); C. O. Chapman, 'Chaucer and the *Gawain*-Poet', *MLN* 68 (1953), 521–4.

[18] Burrow (1957). Langland certainly reached that wider audience, including most probably Chaucer, who would have recognized Langland as an alliterative writer but not as a member of a distinctive regional school of alliterative poets. He was probably thought of as 'unliterary'; his work is never mentioned by the literary establishment of the 15th century, and Caxton ignored him.

[19] This is the argument of Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 22–5, in relation to *Joseph of Arimathea*.

[20] Salter (1978)[1], cf. Lawton (1979). For the *Simonie*, see Salter (1967).

[21] *Medieval English Literature* (1912; paperback, Oxford, 1969), p. 35.

[22] Chambers (1932), p. lxvii.

[23] E.g. Everett (1955), p. 50; Pearsall (1981)[1], p. 12.

[24] E.g. Matthews (1960), p. 151.

[25] Elizabeth Salter's essay (1978)[2] has disturbed the generally accepted date (1352–3) for the latter poem, but it cannot, given the reference to Edward III as having reigned for 25 years, be much later.

[26] Salter (1978)[1], cf. Lawton (1980)[1].

[27] See Benson (1965), pp. 112–25; Everett (1955), p. 46.

[28] Borroff (1962), pp. 52–8.

[29] *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (London, 1978), p. 208. Quotation above is from this edition. Their view is influenced by the note of P. J. Frankis, '"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", line 35: with lel letteres loken', *N&Q* 206 (1961), 329–30.

[30] See R. S. Loomis, 'The Oral Diffusion of the Arthurian Legend', in Loomis (1959), pp. 52–63 (pp. 58–63).

[31] See A. C. Baugh, 'Improvisation in the Middle English Romance', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103 (1959), 418–54; ibid., 'The Middle English Romance: Some Questions of Creation, Presentation and Preservation', *Speculum* 42 (1967), 1–31.

[32] Loomis, 'Oral Diffusion'; Chaytor, *From Script to Print*, pp. 117, 127.

[33] E.g. in Mehl (1968), and often in Pearsall (1977), e.g. p. xii.

[34] See Rosalind Field's essay in the present volume.

[35] The lost *Fulk* has been mentioned by several writers, including Hulbert (1930–1), p. 415; Salter (1966–7), p. 148. The Anglo-Norman poem is discussed in Legge (1963), pp. 171–5. For Leland's summary, see *De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. Thos. Hearne, 6 vols. (2nd ed., London, 1774), i. 230–36.

[36] See Madeleine Blaess, 'L'abbaye de Bordesley et les livres de Guy de Beauchamp', *Romania* 78 (1957), 511–18; *Documents relating to the Priory of Penwortham and other possessions in Lancashire of the Abbey of Evesham*, ed. W. A. Hulton, Chetham Society Publications, vol. 30 (Manchester, 1853), pp. 94–7. See also Madeleine Blaess, 'Les Manuscrits français dans les

Monastères anglais au Moyen Age', *Romania* 94 (1973), 321–58. It may be noted, incidentally, a propos of this article, that the author's puzzlement that Prior Nicholas should have left his books to Penwortham, a tiny cell of Evesham in Lancashire, is unnecessary. Prior Nicholas had nothing to do with Penwortham: it is only that this record, with others, happens to be engrossed with the documents surviving from Penwortham.

[37] Hussey, '*Sir Gawain* and Romance Writing', *SN* 40 (1968), 161–74; Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet. A Critical Study* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 21.

[38] Burrow (1971), e.g. pp. 52–55; Coleman (1981), p. 15. Cf. also Middleton (1978).

[39] Williams (1970), p. 111.

[40] Turville-Petre (1977), p. 46. Gervase Mathew's comments on the manuscript of the *Gawain*-poems, B.L. MS Cotton Nero A x, tend to suggest that it has more modest provenance, the pictures at best a copy of those in a de luxe manuscript: see his 'Ideals of Knighthood in late-Fourteenth-century England', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to F. M. Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin, and R. W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), pp. 354–62 (pp. 355–6), matter largely repeated in *The Court of Richard II* (London, 1968), esp. pp. 116–17.

[41] Green (1980), p. 9.

[42] E.g. Williams (1970), pp. 109–10; W. A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain-Poet* (University of London, 1978), pp. 216–18.

[43] See Luttrell (1958). Luttrell is sceptical, however, concerning the argument that the poem may have been commissioned by an earlier Booth of a different branch, Lawrence Booth, who was dean of St Paul's (scene of the poem's action) in the mid-fifteenth century. The connection is tempting, but not established.

[44] *The Destruction of Troy*, ed. G. A. Panton and D. Donaldson (EETS OS 39, 56, 1869–74), p. lxx.

[45] See R. H. Robbins, 'A Gawain Epigone', *MLN* 58 (1943), 361–6; Robbins (1950); Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 123–4.

[46] On this, see Lawton (1978). A more specific case for a Stanley connection is made by Edward Wilson, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Stanley Family of Stanley, Storeton, and Hooton', *RES* 30 (1979), 308–16.

[47] Salter (1966–7), p. 148. The evidence that is emerging concerning the commissioning of MS Harley 2253 by a local Shropshire family helps to fill in a corner of the picture (for this information I am indebted to Professor Carter Revard, of Washington University).

[48] So Ordelle G. Hill, 'The Audience of Patience', *MP* 66 (1968), 103–109.

[49] Walter J. Ong, S.J., 'The Writer's Audience is always a Fiction', *PMLA* 90 (1975), 9–21 (p. 11). Similar remarks are made about Chaucer's 'audience' by Dieter Mehl, 'The Audience of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*' in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of R. H. Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London, 1974), pp. 173–89; and his 'Chaucer's Audience', *Leeds Studies in English* 10 (1978), 58–73.

[50] E.g. *Gawain*, 30–31, 1996–7; *Patience*, 59–60; *Cleanness*, 1153; *Wars of Alexander*, 3466; *Winner and Waster*, 217, 367; *Alexander A*, 44–5, 170–71, 244–5, etc.

[51] For comments on poem-division, and the transition from 'minstrel' to 'man of letters' or household poet, see Burrow (1971), pp. 58–61; the same author's

'Bards, Minstrels, and Men of Letters', chap. 10 in *Literature and Civilization*: I, *The Mediaeval World*, ed. D. Daiches and A. Thorlby (London, 1973), pp. 347–70; Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 36–40; Green (1980), pp. 103–110.

52 For some comments on the composition of such a household, see Mathew, *The Court of Richard II*, pp. 107–10, and Coleman (1981), pp. 24–5.

53 J. R. Hulbert, 'Syr Gawayn and the Grene Knyʒt', *MP* 13 (1916), 433–62, 689–730 (p. 719).

54 Williams (1970), p. 111.

55 Vale (1979).

56 Wyntoun's reliability, especially in relation to the ascription of *Morte Arthure* to 'Huchown' is carefully assessed by J. L. N. O'Loughlin, 'The English Alliterative Romances', in Loomis (1959), pp. 520–7 (p. 522).

57 Machaut, Froissart, Chartier, Laurent de Premierfait, John Shirley, William Worcester, were all secretaries of one kind or another: see Green (1980), pp. 65–70.

58 A. Hamilton Thompson, *The English Clergy and their organisation in the later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947), p. 143.

59 Thompson, *English Clergy*, pp. 148, 150.

60 Legge (1963), p. 121.

61 For comment and references, see Pearsall (1977), pp. 249–50.

62 N. Denholm-Young, *The Country Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1969), p. 39.

63 The earlier speculations are collected by Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: An Appraisal', *PMLA* 76 (1961), 7–19 (p. 9). For later speculations, claims and refutations, see Barbara Nolan and David Farley-Hills, 'The Authorship of Pearl: Two Notes', *RES* 22 (1971), 295–302; Peterson (1974); Turville-Petre and Wilson (1975); William J. Vantuono, 'A Name in the Cotton MS. Nero A.x. Article 3', *MS* 37 (1975), 537–42; Clifford Peterson and Edward Wilson, 'Hoccleve, the Old Hall Manuscript, Cotton Nero A x, and the *Pearl*-Poet', *RES* 28 (1977), 49–56.

64 H. L. Savage, *The Gawain-Poet: Studies in his personality and background* (Chapel Hill, 1956); S.R.T.O. D'Ardenne, '"The Green Count" and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *RES* 10 (1959), 113–26; Hulbert, 'Syr Gawayn', pp. 716–18.

65 For some early identifications, see Laura Hibbard Loomis, 'Gawain and the Green Knight', in Loomis (1959), p. 529. See further, R. W. V. Elliott, 'Sir Gawain in Staffordshire: A Detective Essay in Literary Georgraphy', *The Times*, May 21, 1958 (reprinted in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Denton Fox, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968, pp. 106–109); ibid., 'Staffordshire and Cheshire Landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies* 17 (1977), 20–49; ibid., 'Hills and Valleys in the *Gawain* Country', *Leeds Studies in English* 10 (1978), 18–41; ibid., 'Woods and Forests in the *Gawain* Country', *NM* 80 (1979), 48–64; R. E. Kaske, 'Gawain's Green Chapel and the Cave at Wetton Mill', in *Medieval Literature and Folklore Studies: Essays in Honor of F. L. Utley*, ed. J. Mandel and B. A Rosenberg (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970), pp. 111–21. This is not to deny that there is much of value in investigation of the

correlation of dialect words, local place-names, and actual landscape features; nor that there is a strong sense of locale in Gawain (see Wilson (1976), pp. 113–15).

IV THE ANGLO-NORMAN BACKGROUND TO ALLITERATIVE ROMANCE
(Rosalind Field)

1 'Alliterative revival' is here used as the most convenient and widely accepted term for the movement that produced the alliterative poetry of the fourteenth century. The debate as to whether or not the poems mark a revival or survival of traditional verse is not relevant to the present discussion.

2 See, for example, Blake (1969–70); Pearsall (1977), Chapter 6; Turville-Petre (1977).

3 There are parallels to be found between individual works in other genres; see Elizabeth Salter's comparison of Henry of Lancaster's *Seyntz Medicines* with *Parliament of the Three Ages*, Salter (1966–7), p. 147 and see below note 11.

4 See M. Deanesly, 'Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *MLR* 15 (1920), 350ff.; S. L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 162–3, 248–9; R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, 2nd ed. (London, 1970), pp. 107–9, and 'More Lost Literature in Old and Middle English', *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1937), 30–49.

5 Legge (1963), Chapter IV.

6 Legge (1963), Chapter VII.

7 This is the view held by Legge (1963), p. 146. In his article on *Waldef* in *Dictionnaire des Lettres Francaises: Le Moyen Age*, ed. R. Bossuat, L. Pichard, G. de Lage (Paris, 1964), R. Anderson argues that the patrons were the Mortemers of Attleborough and that the author of the poem was Denis Pyramus.

8 *Boeve de Haumtone*, ed. A. Stimming, *Bibliotheca Normannica*, VII (Halle, 1899); *Fergus*, ed. E. Martin (Halle, 1872); *Gui de Warewic*, ed. A. Ewert, Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age (CFMA), 74–75 (Paris, 1933); *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*, ed. E. J. Hathaway, P. T. Ricketts, C. A. Robson, and A. D. Wilshere, Anglo-Norman Text Society (ANTS) 26–28 (Oxford, 1975); *The Romance of Horn*, ed. M. K. Pope and T. B. W. Reid, ANTS 9–10, 12–13 (Oxford, 1955–64); *Ipomedon*, ed. A. J. Holden (Paris, 1969); *Protheselaus*, ed. F. Kluckow (Göttingen, 1924); The Anglo-Norman *Alexander (Le Roman de Toute Chevalerie)*, ed. B. Foster, ANTS 29–31, 32–33 (London, 1976); *Amadas et Ydoine*, ed. J. R. Reinhard, CFMA 51 (Paris, 1926); I am grateful to Mr R. Anderson of the University of Durham for allowing me to consult his transcription of the unique manuscript of *Waldef*.

9 The lordship of Monmouth passed to the de Braose family on the death of Gilbert Fitz-Baderon in 1191; the earldom of Warwick passed to the Beauchamp family in 1242 on the death of Thomas of Warwick, patron of *Gui*; the title of the Earls of Arundel died out in 1243. Edward I extinguished the Bigod earldom of Norfolk as

part of a policy of absorbing the main baronial families into the royal circle: see F. M. Powicke, *Henry III and the Lord Edward* (Oxford, 1947), pp. 142ff.

[10] Extant fourteenth-century mss. include: CUL Ff6.17 (*Horn*), Paris BN n.a.f. 4532 (*Boeve*), Egerton 2515 (*Ipomedon, Protheselaus*), Paris BN Ff.1553 (*Fergus*), Arundel 27, Bodl. Rawl. D 913, Royal 8 F ix (all *Gui*), Royal 12 C xiii (*Fouke FitzWarin*), Durham C IV 27B (*Alexander*).

[11] The few important works still written in Anglo-Norman tended to be associated with the French-speaking court e.g. Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* and the Chandos Herald's Life of the Black Prince, which Elizabeth Salter (1978)², p. 59, suggests as a source for part of the prologue of *Winner and Waster*.

[12] *Fouke*, p. xxi, n.13. [See also Derek Pearsall's essay in the present volume.]

[13] M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1959), p. 525.

[14] Shepherd (1970), p. 21.

[15] Mehl (1968), pp. 36–8, argues for the importance of length in the classification of romances.

[16] Of the several Anglo-Norman authors that are named – 'Thomas' author of *Horn*, 'Thomas' author of *Tristan*, 'Thomas' author of *RTC*, 'Guillaume le clerc' author of *Fergus*, and 'Hue de Roteland' author of *Ipomedon* – only the last gives any substantial information beyond a name.

[17] *Ipomedon, Protheselaus, Fouke FitzWarin*, and probably *Horn* in the west, or Wales, *Gui* in the West Midlands, *Fergus* in Scotland. *Waldef* comes from the area that produced an important tradition of eastern and north-eastern chronicle; see below, p. 61.

[18] Salter (1966–7), which corrected Hulbert (1930–1), is in turn criticized by Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 40–7.

[19] Turville-Petre (1977), p. 41; Pearsall (1977), p. 157.

[20] Miscellanies, such as that in which *Fouke FitzWarin* survives, have been attributed to baronial chaplains for 'the amusement and edification of their patrons, and of the children to whom they acted as tutors'. *Fouke*, p. xl.

[21] See L. H. Loomis (L. A. Hibbard), *Medieval Romance in England*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1959), p. 250, and A. R. Wagner, 'The Swan Badge and the Swan Knight', *Archeologia* 97 (1959), 127–38. Thomas Beauchamp left a 'cup of the swan' in his will in 1400, and Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, a 'Histoire de Chivaler a Cigne' in 1399; see N. H. Nicolas, *Testamenta Vetusta* (London, 1826), pp. 148, 155.

[22] Turville-Petre (1977), p. 47. (It is difficult to envisage the Franklin, as characterized by Chaucer, comprehending the moral subtleties of *Sir Gawain*.)

[23] Bennett (1980).

[24] Hulbert (1930–1), p. 147.

[25] Turville-Petre (1977), p. 42.

[26] Professor Legge sees this as symptomatic of important literary changes consequent upon the downfall of Eleanor in 1174: 'The Influence of Patronage on Form in Mediaeval French Literature', *Stil- und Formprobleme in der Literatur* (Heidelberg, 1959), pp. 136–41.

[27] See my article: Rosalind Wadsworth, 'William Longespée', *Neophilologus* 56 (1972), 269–72.

[28] See Legge (1963), pp. 134, 180, 247–9, 268.

[29] See Legge (1963), pp. 81, 274, 293.

[30] Compare, for example, a typical battle scene which Hue describes thus:

> Or commence mut dur estur, / Trebuchent e murent plusur, /
> Percent e fendent ces escuz, / E fausent ces heaumes aguz; /
> As chapleiz tintent espees / E fausent ces broines safrees, /
> Ffreinte est meinte hanste freinine / E meint la boille i traine, /
> E meint la cervele i espant / E par ces rens i vunt curant /
> Meint bon cheval e meint destrer / Senz sun seignur tut estraer.
>
> 3887–98)

with a comparable passage in the Middle English, which reads:

> Barons under stedys fett / Lay hevely gronynge on the grete, /
> And many there lyvys had lorne, / Riche hawberkes all torente, /
> Barnys bledand on the bente, / There shuldurs on sownder shorne.

Ipomedon, ed. E. Kolbing (Breslau, 1899), lines 5801–6. Compare also lines 9748–54 and 9993–10002 in the Anglo-Norman with lines 7988–93 and 8255–77 in the Middle English.

[31] For a discussion of the sources of the *Morte Arthure* see the introduction to J. Finlayson's edition (London, 1967). Turville-Petre (1979) identifies *Les Voeux de Paon* as the source of a fragmentary alliterative poem.

[32] Benson (1965), p. 246, points out that 'the Arthurian court and its code are invariably subjected to moral criticism' in the major northern romances.

[33] It is a measure of this that Arthur occurs only three times in the index to Professor Legge's book – a comprehensive survey of Anglo-Norman literature from the Conquest to the fifteenth century.

[34] R. S. and L. H. Loomis, *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art* (New York, 1938), record only the Chertsey tiles, the 'ensis Tristrani', a few wood sculptures and two stained glass portraits of Arthur. T. Borenius, 'The Cycle of Images in the Palaces and Castles of Henry III', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 6 (1943), 40–50, adds the interior decorations of Dover Castle. It is perhaps worth noting that there is no vogue for Arthurian names among the nobility, although other literary influences are discernible in, for example, Roland of Galloway, and the use of Guy as a family name by the earls of Warwick.

[35] See G. H. Gerould, 'King Arthur and Politics', *Speculum* 2 (1927), 38–51; E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London, 1927); M. E. Griffin, 'Cadwalader, Arthur and Britain in the Wigmore MS', *Speculum* 16 (1941), 109–21; J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley, 1950); R. S. Loomis, 'Edward I, Arthurian Enthusiast', *Speculum* 28 (1953), 114–27 and 'Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle', in Loomis (1959), pp. 553–9.

[36] The dependence of a king on the hero is noticeable in *Horn* and *Gui*. Waldef and Boeve incur the violent enmity of the king and the London court, and the historical outlawry of Fouke FitzWarin is embellished to add to the discomfiture of King John.

[37] K. G. T. Webster, 'Galloway and the Romances', *MLN* 55 (1940), 363–5, quotes William of Malmesbury's statement that Galloway was 'The kingdom of the greatest Gawain' (*Gesta Regum*, III, 287) and reaches the conclusion that

'in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries this region was a focus of romance the embers of which are the well-known English/Scottish Gawain poems of two centuries later'.

[38] *Fergus* is the exception that proves the rule among the Anglo-Norman romances. If it was written for Alan of Galloway, the connexion between royalist sympathies and Arthurian material holds good, for Alan, unlike all other identifiable patrons of Anglo-Norman romance, was a firm royalist, and was one of King John's witnesses to Magna Carta. See *Douglas's Scots Peerage*, ed. J. B. Paul (1907), IV, 140ff.

[39] See Legge (1963), pp. 161–2 and her 'Some Notes on the *Roman de Fergus*', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 3rd series, 27 (1950), 163–72.

[40] See B. J. Whiting, 'Gawain: His Reputation, his Courtesy and his Appearance in Chaucer's Squire's Tale', *MS* 9 (1947), 189–234; D. S. Brewer, 'Courtesy and the *Gawain*-poet', in *Patterns of Love and Courtesy*, ed. J. Lawlor (London, 1966), pp. 80–4.

[41] On this point I disagree with the interpretation of the poem given by Matthews (1960), Chapter VI, and even more strongly with the misleading synopsis given in *Manual* I, 61. The poem is discussed more fully by Ralph Hanna, '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: an Interpretation', *MLQ* 31 (1970), 275–97, and Klausner (1972).

[42] See Matthews (1960), p. 170. He goes on to describe the development of a Scottish interpretation of Arthurian history in which Arthur is a usurper depriving Gawain and Mordred of their rightful inheritance. This offers further confirmation of the identification of the Arthur of romance with the royal power of England.

[43] *Rauf Coilȝear*, another northern poem in rhymed alliterative stanzas, provides an interesting comparison with these Arthurian poems. Here the contrast between the courtesy of the peasant and the courtesy of kings is more popular in attitude and less moral in intent.

[44] The question of whether the poems of Cotton Nero A x are by one poet is still open (see Introduction to the present volume). However, the poems do prove mutually illuminating if taken as the work of one poet, whose work is already disadvantaged by the accident of anonymity.

[45] Severs, *Manual* I, 45 states that the poem has usually been classified as an epic; Pearsall (1977), p. 166, sees it as an epic rather than a romance; Matthews (1960), pp. 94–114, devotes a chapter to the question of the poem's genre and concludes that it is a fortune tragedy.

[46] Everett (1955), pp. 61–5; L. D. Benson, 'The Alliterative *Morte* and Medieval Tragedy', *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 11 (1966), 75–87. George Clark, 'Gawain's Fall: The Alliterative *Morte* and Hastings', pp. 89–95 of the same volume, draws attention to similarities between the poem and the chronicles of William of Poitiers and Guy of Amiens. Finlayson, *Morte Arthure*, pp. 11–13, discusses similarities with the *chansons de geste*.

[47] Matthews (1960), pp. 95–6.

[48] The importance of the influence of the *Morte* on Malory has been stressed by Vinaver: 'That Malory's whole conception of his theme was formed under the influence of the English epic of Arthur now seems certain and it is a new and helpful sidelight on the continuity of the English tradition that by the time Malory came to

"reduce" his French books into English his attitude to Arthurian knighthood had
been fixed in his mind by his reading of native poetry'. *The Works of Sir Thomas
Malory* (Oxford, 1947), I, xli.

V ALLITERATIVE ROMANCE AND THE FRENCH TRADITION
(W. R. J. Barron)

[1] Pearsall (1977), pp. 143–4. Compare A. H. Billings, *A Guide to the Middle
English Metrical Romances*, Yale Studies in English 9 (New York, 1901), p. x: 'By
far the greater number of the verse-romances are based upon French originals',
and *A Literary History of England*, ed. A. C. Baugh (London, 1950), p. 174: 'Most
of our English romances belong to the fourteenth century and nearly all of them
are translations or adaptations from French originals.'

[2] I have discussed previous attempts and present attitudes to the problem in Barron
(1980); see pp. 2–6. The general trend away from definition of romance form by
external characteristics of length, medium, audience, subject-matter, etc. in
favour of a romance mode characterized by its essential concerns of love, honour,
valour, conflict, etc. and the conventions, motifs, images through which they are
expressed, seems to me beneficial. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism:
Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 186–203, and Pamela Gradon, *Form and Style
in Early English Literature* (London, 1971), pp. 269–70. The extent to which the
Epic shares the characteristics of the romance mode reduces the importance of the
external features on which definitions distinguishing the two forms have usually
been based.

[3] The broad characterization of the alliterative romances and outline summary of
their sources which follows reflects the scholarly consensus in such compendia as
Manual I; Pearsall (1977), and Turville-Petre (1977). It will not always be
acceptable to specialists engaged in refining and correcting our knowledge of the
field, reference to some of whose recent work is included below.

[4] See George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 13–14, 43–4.

[5] See R. Hanna, ed., *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, pp. 24–48; Matthews (1960), pp.
156–63; Klausner (1972).

[6] See Lawton (1980)².

[7] See also W. R. J. Barron, '*Joseph of Arimathie* and the *Estoire del Saint Graal*',
MÆ 33 (1964), 184–94 and V. M. Lagorio, 'The *Joseph of Arimathie*: English
Hagiography in Transition', *Medievalia et Humanistica* NS 6 (1975), 91–101.

[8] See P. Moe, 'The French Source of the Alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem*', *MÆ* 39
(1970), 147–53.

[9] See Cary, p. 57 and pp. 242–3, and Duggan (1976).

[10] The apparent concreteness of classification by subject-matter has obvious attrac-
tions while our ability to date and locate the English romances remains so
rudimentary, but it has distracted attention from distinctions which may be more
informative: prose or verse; alliterative or non-alliterative; stanzaic or unrhymed

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alliterative verse; translation, redaction, or free creation; designed for courtly or popular audience.

[11] The superficial conformity to type is undercut in both cases: by *Golagrus and Gawain*'s criticism of Arthur's intolerance and its rejection of romantic love as inspirer of chivalric action; and by *Sir Gawain*'s manipulation of romantic motifs to expose, if not to criticize, conventional chivalric morality.

[12] Limitations of length compel me to state more baldly what I would have preferred to demonstrate. Detailed discussion of the source and redaction of each of the texts, with the exception of the *Morte Arthure*, is included in my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of St Andrews, 1959.

[13] The French text survives in a single manuscript only, but there exist a number of printed texts of a prose recension made in the early sixteenth century which varies only in minor details. Where they differ, the English redaction agrees with the verse *Guillaume* which, though it cannot be shown to be the immediate source, represents that form most likely to have been available in the fourteenth century. See C. W. Dunn, *The Foundling and the Werwolf: A Literary-Historical Study of 'Guillaume de Palerne'* (Toronto, 1960), pp. 3–10.

[14] References to the English version are to the edition by Skeat, those to the French text are to the edition by H. Michaelant, Societé des Anciens textes Français (1876).

[15] L. A. Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England* (New York, 1924), pp. 214–15.

[16] *Guillaume de Palerne* is complete in 9663 octosyllabic lines, each couplet roughly equivalent to one of the long alliterative lines of *William of Palerne*, the unique manuscript of which, now lacking 4 leaves, must originally have contained some 5700 lines.

[17] See my 'Versions and Texts of the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*', *Romania* 89 (1968), 481–538, whose conclusions have been accepted by the editors of the most recent edition, E. J. Mickel Jr. and J. A. Nelson, *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, I: *La Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*, (Drawer, Alabama, 1977) to which line references given here refer. On the source of the English redaction see my '*Chevalere Assigne* and the *Naissance du Chevalier au Cygne*', *MÆ* 36 (1968), 25–37.

[18] See P. J. Ketrick, *The Relation of 'Golagros and Gawane' to the Old French 'Perceval'* (Washington D.C., 1931) and W. R. J. Barron, '*Golagrus and Gawain*: a Creative Redaction', *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* 26 (1974), 173–85.

[19] References are to the British Library copy (C.7 b.10) of the *Perceval* prose recension and the edition by Amours of *Golagrus and Gawain*. I am at present engaged on a new edition of *Golagrus and Gawain*.

[20] Witness the various studies in Göller (1981).

[21] See J. Finlayson, *The Sources, Use of Sources, and Poetic Techniques of the Fourteenth Century Alliterative 'Morte Arthure'*, unpublished dissertation (Cambridge, 1962) and the Introduction to his partial edition of the poem; Matthews (1960); V. Krishna's edition of the *Morte Arthure*.

[22] 'The theory that the *Gawain*-poet could not have had the genius to combine for himself the beheading-game with the theme of temptation, and that he must have used a now-lost French romance which made the connection for him, no longer

seems very convincing. There seems no reason whatever, when we recognize the genius of the *Gawain*-poet, to deny this aspect of his achievement when there is absolutely no evidence to the contrary.' E. Brewer, *From Cuchulainn to Gawain: Sources and Analogues of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'* (Totowa, N.J., 1973), pp. 3–4. I have discussed the structural complexity of the poem in relation to the source issue in 'French Romance and the Structure of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*' in *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages in Memory of Frederick Whitehead*, ed. Rothwell *et al.* (Manchester, 1973), pp. 7–25, and an aspect of its verbal patterning in 'The Ambivalence of Adventure: Verbal Ambiguity in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Fitt I' in *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages*, ed. Grout *et al.* (Cardiff, forthcoming).

[23] I have suggested elsewhere, Barron (1980), that the Arthurian examples inherited some thematic and stylistic elements along with their common medium.

VI   THE MANUSCRIPTS
(A. I. Doyle)

[1] An earlier version of this paper was delivered at a conference on manuscripts and Middle English literature in the University of York in July 1981.

[2] Cf Oakden II (1935), 94, I 51–2; Salter (1966–7), p. 146; Lewis, 'The Date of the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*' (1968), argues for the reign of Richard II.

[3] E. E. Foster and G. Gilman, 'The Text of *William of Palerne*', *NM* 74 (1973), 480–95; Turville-Petre (1974)'; M. Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs NS 6 (Leeds, 1974), pp. 87–88; Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 84–5.

[4] I am indebted to the Edinburgh University Middle English Dialect Survey for a copy of its map of the distribution of 39 manuscripts; cf Samuels (1963) (1981).

[5] Cf Samuels (1981).

[6] York, Borthwick Institute, R I 11, fol 295–97ʳ, followed immediately by the Latin version with the date 1357 of promulgation at the end, 298ᵛ: a separate quire of four leaves, uniform in size with the bulk of the volume, but pricked and ruled independently of what is on each side of it. Fol 112–14, ruled similarly, and again a separate quire, with the number of leaves ('iii' instead of 'iiij') at the foot of the first leaf in the same manner, has two documents written in different inks by the same hand, both including the notary's name, Thomas de Aldefeld of York diocese, the second dated 1358. Fol 27ᵛ–8ʳ, with a sewn-on piece, 1356, are also by him, more hastily and cramped, so he was directly involved in the registration in these years. Aldfield is just west of Fountains Abbey, near Ripon, but there was an earlier York notary, John de Aldefeld, who could have been a relative, settled in the city, as the toponymic may imply.

[7] Cambridge, University Library, F 150 a 4 1 (formerly Res b 162): *Missale Eboracense*, printed at Rouen for York booksellers c.1509, given to Byland Abbey (O.Cist.) by the executors of the Treasurer of York Minster who died in that year; the inscription of gift is itself obscured by the manuscript fragments patching

the edges of leaves badly worn (by use daily, in the Canon). The sermon, on sig. 01v, 03v, 04v of part I, B6r, B7r of part II, in another mid-fourteenth-century hand, has approximately the same width of text as the poem on 06rv, 07r, 08r; on the back of the B7r patch there is also a bit of a Latin sermon with an English phrase in a different ink and perhaps hand from the previous pieces. Fragments of a fourteenth-century document from an Archbishop of York, apparently, and of early sixteenth-century deeds have also been used for the repairs, which must have been done with waste membrane while the missal was still in use, at Byland up to 1539 and elsewhere in the province only up to 1549 at the latest. The ownership inscription of Richard Helmysley (Helmsley is not far away) is also found, over an erasure, in Durham University Library, Cosin MS V IV 8, medical recipes in N. Midland English, of the fifteenth century. Cf. *The Conflict of Wit and Will*, ed. B. Dickins (Kendal, 1937), pp. 5–7, 14.

8   Cf Salter (1978)¹, esp. pp. 29–30; Lawton (1979). Their accounts of the manuscript presentation and contexts could be much extended.

9   A. I. Doyle (1974); ibid., 'English Books in and out of Court from Edward III to Henry VII', in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. C. D. Ross and V. J. Scattergood (London, 1982), forthcoming.

10   M. S. Serjeantson, 'The Index of the Vernon Manuscript', *MLR* 32 (1937), 223, 251, 260.

11   M. Day, ed., *The Wheatley Manuscript*, EETS OS 155 (1921), pp. xxi–vii.

12   *Pearl, Cleanness, Patience and Sir Gawain Reproduced in Facsimile from . . . MS. Cotton Nero A.X*, intro. I. Gollancz, EETS OS 162 (1923). Cf, e.g., BL MS. Egerton 3028, of similar duct and size, early-mid-fourteenth century: R. Lejeune and J. Stiennon, *La Légende de Roland* (Brussels, 1966), I, plate XXI.

13   Cf A. Boeckler, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik* (Königstein, 1959), plates 36–7, from Freiburg i. Breisgau, 1400–06. The forked beards in Nero A x make one think of the reign of Henry IV. For pictorial appreciation, J. A. Lee, 'The Illuminating Critic: the Illustrator of Cotton Nero A x', *Studies in Iconography* 3 (1977), 17–46.

14   E.g. Bennett (1979).

15   Doyle, 'English books in and out of Court' (n.9).

16   E. Kölbing and M. Day, ed., *The Siege of Jerusalem*, EETS OS 188 (1932), pp. ix–xi. Cf J. R. Hulbert, 'The Text of *The Siege of Jerusalem*', *SP* 41 (1931), 602–12. L. H. Hornstein in *Manual* I 161, 319, misses the Taylor MS., listed in R. H. Robbins and J. L. Cutler, *Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington, 1965), no. 1583.

17   Facsimile frontispiece in Kölbing and Day; Bodleian Library, *Quarto Catalogues* II, *Laudian Manuscripts*, by H. O. Coxe, reproduced from 1858–85 edition, with corrections and additions, and introduction by R. W. Hunt (Oxford, 1973), col.477. A pen-trial of a documentary formula on fol 126v includes 'Ego Johannes cempe de parochia de ticehurst in com. kanc.'

18   Formerly Captain Robert Petre's, sold at Sotheby's 10 March 1952, lot 143; B. Quaritch catalogue 704 no. 350, cat. 716 no. 319. N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (London, 1964), p. 11, has it under the Augustinian priory of Bolton, in Craven, but he and I agree that another name than the last occurs in the defective ex-libris on fol 1, which looks to me like 'Liber beate Marie de Bolton in

Tower'; there was a chapel or college at Castle Bolton from 1396/97, but it was dedicated to St Anne: D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales* (London, 1953), p. 354.

[19] See R. Somerville, 'The Cowcher Books of the Duchy of Lancaster', *English Historical Review* 41 (1936), 598–615; *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, I (London, 1953), plates II, VII. It was Henry IV, not V, for whom he was commissioned to write a breviary: cf J. H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry IV* (London, 1884–98), III, 232–3 n.7, IV, 121. And it is Glasgow University Library, Hunterian MS 84, not 80, which is signed by Frampton on fol 126v. The first two works there are the same as in Mm V 14 but in reverse order and the Guido apparently from a different exemplar. Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 108–9, attributes each work to a different scribe, yet notes the uniformities and the appropriateness of modification for the English. The Glasgow book was given to a secular lord between 1432 and 1443 by John Stafford, Chancellor of England, who was a beneficed clerk by 1404 and D.C.L. by 1413: cf A. B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (Oxford, 1957–59) III, 1751–52. Huntington Library HM 19920, *Statuta Angliae*, Latin and French, to 1408/9, with a table of years starting with 1413, a York calendar and diocesan decrees, has the arms (also possibly added to the original contents) of John Holme of Paull-Holme, Yorks. (d.1438) and his wife, whose son was in the Exchequer. See G. Warner, *Descriptive Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts in the Library of C. W. Dyson Perrins* (Oxford, 1920), I, 62–3, II, plate XXIII; Sotheby and Co., *Catalogue* part II, 1 December 1959, lot 71, plate 21. Whether more than one scribe was capable of indistinguishable efforts in this sophisticated script is a question of importance, but, if so, the schooling and practice were likely to be linked.

[20] See *Piers Plowman: the B Version*, ed. G. Kane and E. T. Donaldson, pp. 9–10; Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 303–4. I must correct Kane, p. 10 n.67.: I had not then seen the manuscript, where 'Johannes Sarum' is in a clearly medieval hand and could refer to J. Chandeler 1417–27, only it is on pastedowns from a fourteenth-century copy of John of Salisbury's Letters!

[21] Kane and Donaldson, pp. 50–51. I owe the opinion of the spelling of Trinity to Professor M. L. Samuels.

[22] Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 226–8. K. D. Bülbring, 'Über die Handschrift Nr. 491 der Lambeth-Bibliothek', *Archiv* 86 (1891), 382–92, distinguishes the version of the *Three Kings* from those ed. C. Horstmann, EETS OS 85 (1886).

[23] R. K. Root, *The Manuscripts of Chaucer's Troilus*, Chaucer Society, 1st series 98 (London, 1914), pp. 17, 35, plates IX, XVIII; G. H. Russell and V. Nathan, 'A *Piers Plowman* Manuscript in the Huntington Library', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 26 (1963), 119–30; M. C. Seymour, 'The Scribe of Huntington MS HM 114', *MÆ* 43 (1974), 139–43. Professor Samuels told me of the identity of language in Lambeth 491 (A). In it and HM there is spreading-out of text at the end of quires suggestive of instalment working, and reckonings of numbers of quires in HM. Professor R. Hanna hopes to undertake a fuller investigation of this scribe's products.

[24] *The Thornton Manuscript*, introduction by D. S. Brewer and A. E. B. Owen (London, 1975); A. E. B. Owen, 'The Collation and Description of the Thornton

Manuscript', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 6, part iv
(1975), 218–25; G. R. Keiser, 'Lincoln Cathedral MS. 91: the life and milieu of
the scribe', *Studies in Bibliography* 32 (1979), 159–65; K. Stern, 'The London
"Thornton" miscellany: a new description of BM Add. MS 31042', *Scriptorium*
30 (1976), 26–37, 201–18, plate 13; S. M. Horrall, 'The London Thornton
Manuscript: a New Collation', *Manuscripta* 23 (1979), 99–103; Guddat-Figge
(1976), pp. 135–42, 159–63.

²⁵ A. I. Doyle, 'More Light on John Shirley', *Medium Ævum* 30 (1961), 98, n.42;
perhaps I can note here that as well as the verses in n.41 there are of course the
Proverbs (II) ascribed to Chaucer in two other copies but not so in Shirley's BL
Add. 16165.

²⁶ See Doyle, 'English Books in and out of Court' (n.9 above); it must be said that
there is no certainty that this section of the volume was there in Shirley's time. Cf
M. C. Seymour, 'The Manuscripts of Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*', *Edin-
burgh Bibliographical Society Transactions* 4, part vii (1974), 289–90; R. A.
Dwyer, 'Asenath of Egypt in Middle English', *MÆ* 39 (1970), 118–22. Allitera-
tion is most conspicuous in the prologue and the lament: *Index* 367 and 2.

²⁷ McIntosh (1962).

²⁸ Kölbing and Day, pp. xi, xiv; Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 178–9. The *Three
Kings* is a copy of the version embodying two women's names in the chapter
initials, as in Royal 18 A x. The three or four hands resemble that of Royal 17 D
xxi, a *Brut* up to 1419 with personal notes of Reynold Colyer, Prior of St
Bartholomew's, Smithfield, 1436–71, and a metropolitan schooling of the
scribes seems very possible.

²⁹ Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 169–72; Kölbing and Day, pp. xi, xiv.

³⁰ *Piers Plowman: the A Version*, ed. Kane, pp. 8–9; *Susannah*, ed. Miskimin,
plate [VII].

³¹ Membrane quire strengthening strips include two from a will in a similar hand
mentioning 'Dominus W. de Brunne supervisor', Brunne being in the right area.
Repeated documentary formulae in the margins mention Robert Whytell son of
John, 'generosus in com. Leic', but these are late fifteenth or early sixteenth
century.

³² *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, ed. Hanna, pp. 50–52.

³³ *Three Early English Metrical Romances*, ed. J. Robson, Camden Society 18
(London, 1842); B. Dickins, 'The Date of the Ireland Manuscript', *Leeds Studies
in English* 2 (1933), 62–66; A. I. Doyle, 'Date of a MS in Bibliotheca Bod-
meriana', *Book Collector* 8 (1959), 69; Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 131–2;
Princeton University Library Chronicle 38 (1977), plate V (of the binding).

³⁴ K. L. Smith, 'A Fifteenth-century Vernacular Manuscript Reconstructed',
Bodleian Library Record 7, no. 5 (July, 1966), 234–41; Guddat-Figge (1976),
pp. 292–5, while accepting the medieval association of Rawl. D 82, Douce 324
and Rawl. poet. 168, and the identity of hand in Rawl. poet. 35 and 143,
questions the connection of these two and Rawl. D 99 (Mandeville) and Rawl. D
913 fol 10–21 (and 41–2 missed by Smith and her, prefacing the manual), both
in a second hand, with the first three.

³⁵ Hanna, ed., *The Awntyrs*, pp. 149–54.

³⁶ A comment made by N. F. Blake in his review of P. Robinson's introduction to

the facsimile of Tanner 346, *English Studies* 63 (1982), 73.

[37] By ultra-violet light, on Rawl. D 82, as mentioned in her paper to the York conference, July 1981.

[38] *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. N. Davis, I (Oxford, 1971), no. 316, pp. 516–8.

[39] *Index* no. 471, 3793, 4155; Robbins and Cutler, *Supplement*, 3793, 4155. The odd outliers are BL Add. 37049, a Carthusian monk's, probably Lincolnshire or Nottinghamshire and Bod. Lat. misc. c.66, Humfrey Newton's, Cheshire, c.1500. For like alphabetical utility cf. Wilson (1979).

[40] *Index*, and *Supplement*, no. 663. Professor T. L. Kinney and I have a new edition in preparation for the EETS.

[41] A. I. Doyle, 'An Unrecognised Piece of *Piers the Ploughman's Creed* and Other Work by its Scribe', *Speculum* 34 (1959), 428–36; 'English Books in and out of Court' (n.9 above).

[42] *Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. M. Day and R. Steele, EETS OS 199 (1936); see also *British Museum Quarterly* 3 (1928–9), 100–102, plate LIII; Embree (1975), 4–12; Kane and Donaldson, p. 4, for the other contents of L1 4 14, of a similar scientific interest to those of Cotton Vesp. E xvi mentioned above, p.   .

[43] *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, ed. Gollancz (London, 1915), plate [II].

[44] P. L. Heyworth, ed., *Jack Upland . . .*, pp. 9–19, 41–44. The reviewers (e.g. M. D. Knowles, R. H. Robbins, G. L. Harriss) agreed in finding the arguments about the historical allusions unconvincing; I believe the dating of Digby 41 attributed to N. R. Ker, 'shortly after 1450' (p. 18, cf 'a little before 1450', p. 10 n.1) is a misunderstanding of the cautious 'could be as late as 1450', with respect to the Anglicana of the *Reply*.

[45] *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. R. H. Robbins (New York, 1959), pp. 227–32, 385–7 (Latin verses on fol 12v refer to the siege of Rouen, 1419, not 1439); Bodleian Library, *Catalogue of the Printed Books and Manuscripts Bequeathed by F. Douce* (Oxford, 1840), pp. 13–14. Cf T. K. Abbott, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College* (Dublin, 1900), p. 76; on the dubious authority of John Bale this may have been Robert Bale's, notary of London (d. 1461): C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1913), pp. 81, 95.

[46] McIntosh (1962).

[47] F. Madan, *Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts*, V (Oxford, 1905), 540–1, no. 29003; *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, ed. J. Evans and M. S. Serjeantson, EETS OS 190 (1933), pp. 4–8.

[48] *Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England . . . 1475–1640*, by A. W. Pollard, and G. R. Redgrave; 2nd ed. revised and enlarged by F. S. Ferguson, W. A. Jackson and K. F. Pantzer, II (Oxford, 1976), no. 15435. Blake (1969)[2] shows that the revision was to make it more readable by a southerner, yet not chiefly to remove the alliteration.

[49] E. G. Duff, *The English Provincial Printers, Stationers and Bookbinders to 1557* (Cambridge, 1912), pp. 47–54.

[50] Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 246–7.

[51] Kane, pp. 4–5; Guddat-Figge (1976), pp. 114–6; C. F. Buhler, ed., *The Dicts*, EETS OS 211 (1941), pp. 358–9. The 'ludus specialis tentus apud Petyngton'

[Pittington, near Durham, one of the Cathedral Priory's properties], 11 September 1503, by Prior Thomas Castell, Dan Robert Heryngton being steward (and perhaps scribe of the accounts), was not a dramatic but recreational event. Most of the subsequent names in the book are of Durham city and county, 16th–17th century.

⁵² Luttrell (1958); Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 123–5; Lawton (1978).

VII THE AUDIENCE AND PUBLIC OF *PIERS PLOWMAN*
(*Anne Middleton*)

¹ Samuels (1963).
² This reciprocal use of terms which categorize experience and those used to describe art and literature is used to advantage by Michael Baxandall in *Giotto and the Orators* (Oxford, 1971) and *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (London, 1972). In a similar way, I am proposing that Langland's chosen form engages the regularly employed experiential skills, as well as tastes in literary diversion and edification, of its audience.
³ Walter J. Ong, S.J., 'The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction', *PMLA* 90 (1975), 9–21.
⁴ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, tr. Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978).
⁵ A. J. Minnis, 'Discussions of "Authorial Role" and "Literary Form" in Late-Medieval Scriptural Exegesis', *Beiträge der Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* (Tübingen) 99 (1977), 37–65; pp. 53–58.
⁶ In 1396, Walter de Bruge, a canon of York Minster, bequeathed 'unum librum vocatum Pers Plewman' – as well as a vessel in a silver case, his Bible bound in red leather, and 'unum alium librum vocatum Pars Oculi, cum aliis tractatibus in uno volumine' – to Dominus Johannes Wormyngton: *Testamenta Eboracensa*, Surtees Society (London, 1836), I, 209. He was a prelate of considerable wealth and broad connections. He left money, precious vessels, and vestments to St Patrick's, Dublin, and comparably generous bequests to 'Sancte Patricii de Tyme' and to York Minster. He provided for six chaplains' continuous service for a year to pray for his soul, and for the souls of his father and mother, and of Edmund Duke of Clarence (*d* 1368) and Edmund Earl of March (*d* 1381). Both of the latter were earls of Ulster, and probably his patrons. The greater part of his bequests are of vestments, vessels of gold and silver, and sums of money; in this context, his book bequests are particularly interesting. *Piers Plowman* is the only English book mentioned. To Master John Wyke he leaves 'unum librum de Expositione Evangeliorum vocatum Unum ex Quattuor' (Clement of Llanthony's

Harmony of the Four Gospels); to Master Thomas Chaunterell, a cousin, he leaves, besides many goods, 'unam Britonam (possibly William Brito, *Vocabularium Bibliae*), unum librum vocatum Speculum Praelatorum, unum Psalmistam glosatam, et unum Catholicam (possibly John of Genoa, *Catholicon*, though other works bear the name).' To Robert Burgeys 'clerico meo', he leaves – in addition to three of his better furred gowns and 'one of my second-best horses' – 'unum librum vocatum Summa Summarum'. (The last three men are among his executors.) To William Pygott, a book 'vocatum Commune Aloquium (John of Wales, *Communiloquium*), and to Thomas Overton a set of Decretals in six books. Three of these works – the *Pars Oculi* (part or all of the *Oculus Sacerdotalis*), the *Speculum Praelatorum*, and the *Summa Summarum* – are pastoral *summae* by an English parish priest, William of Pagula, composed between 1329 and 1344. See Leonard E. Boyle, 'The *Oculis Sacerdotalis* and Some Other Works of William of Pagula', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 5 (1955), 81–110.

In 1431, John Wyndhill, rector of Arncliffe in Craven, bequeathes a copy of the 'librum anglicanum' *Piers Plowman* to John Kendale (*Testamenta Eboracensia II*, 34). Wyndhill's bequests are in every way more modest than Canon Walter's; his only other book bequests are of a great missal, to the high altar of St Michael of Alnwick, and of 'unum librum anglicanum de Expositione Evangeliorum'. Kendale, the recipient of *Piers Plowman*, was named as perpetual vicar of Grimston in a will proved in 1454. (*Test. Ebor II*, 58)

In London, Thomas Roos, in a will proved in the Commissary Court in 1434, also bequeathes a copy of this 'book' (*Fifty Earliest English Wills*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS ES 87, 1882; Additions, p. 2). Roos appears to be either the son or the brother and executor of Richard Roos of London, whose will was proved in 1406. Richard came from Beverly in Yorkshire, and made bequests both to his London parish church (unnamed) and to St Mary's and two hospitals in Beverly. We should recall that John Ball, in the 'letter' ascribed to him by Walsingham, is said to have been 'somtyme seynte Marie prest of York'.

[7] On Thomas Stotevyle's book inventory, see John M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales* (Chicago, 1940), I, 610. On Charleton's books, see K. B. McFarlane, 'The Education of the Nobility in Later Medieval England', in *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 228–247, pp. 237–8. Among Charleton's books were 'an engelische booke calde Giles de regimeie principum . . . an engelysche boke the whiche was called Troles . . . a booke w[t] prycked songe . . . j of perse plowman, a nod[r] of Caunt'bury tales'. See also Turville-Petre (1977), pp. 40–47 on the audience for alliterative poetry and conjectures on *Piers* in particular, and Burrow (1957).

[8] See George Kane, ed., *Piers Plowman: The A Version* (London, 1960), pp. 10–11, on this manuscript (L: Lincoln's Inn 150) and 'holster books' generally. Other books in this portable shape include poetry of Chaucer, books of hours, a Royal Year Book of Edward II, Richard Hill's commonplace book, and the Percy Folio manuscript. Another *Piers* manuscript of the A-class (though it begins as B, becoming A in Passus 5), which also includes Mandeville's *Travels* and a collection of short devotional treatises in English (H[3]: Harley 3954), is also a bolster book.

In the following discussion, accounts of the A manuscripts and citations of the A version refer to this text, hereafter abbreviated as K-A. The B manuscripts are

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described in George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson, eds., *Piers Plowman: The B Version* (London, 1975), and B-text citations refer to this edition, hereafter abbreviated KD-B. C manuscripts are described in W. W. Skeat, ed., *The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman: Text C*, EETS OS 54 (1873); citations of the C-text refer to this edition, abbreviated Skeat-C.

⁹ Burrow (1957) pp. 378, 374.

¹⁰ See Pearsall (1981)¹. Pearsall describes the general social, economic, and cultural configuration which could sustain the production of long alliterative poems, as well as the particular regional setting – the monastic houses of the south and west – which, he argues, supplied the ingredients and climate for their earliest development. It is this same social configuration, repeated throughout the country, that seems to have comprised the audience of *Piers* from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries. See also McFarlane, 'The Education of the Nobility'.

¹¹ These manuscripts are described by M. C. Seymour, 'The English Manuscripts of *Mandeville's Travels*', *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions*, vol. 4, part 5 (1966), 167–210 – they are his nos. 8, 14, 15 and 31 – as well as in K-A, KD-B, and Skeat C. Sigils are those of the Athlone edition of Kane and Donaldson. Harley 3954 also includes several short devotional pieces in English. HM 114 also contains the alliterative *Pistill of Susan*, in one of its three occurrences with *Piers*. The Sterling manuscript is one of three parts of a single manuscript divided some time before 1937 (see Seymour, p. 198); its Mandeville portion now belongs to Mr B. Penrose of Devon, Pennsylvania; the third portion (now Folger Shakespeare Library MS 420312), contains Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*. The Sterling portion follows Piers with a gospel history and *The Assumption of the Virgin*; see *Index*, where the last two items are nos. 3194 and 2165.

¹² Seymour, no. 3, p. 179; KD-B, pp. 2–3.

¹³ The Vernon manuscript (V: Bodl. 3938) contains an A-text. See Doyle (1974); Mary S. Serjeantson, 'The Index of the Vernon Manuscript', *MLR* 32 (1937), 222–61.

¹⁴ Lawton, in his forthcoming edition, regards these interests as governing the composition of *Joseph of Arimathea*, dictating its choice and disposition of its subject matter: 'The author's primary interest – like that of several popular romances – is the conversion of heathen potentates' (Introduction, p. xxviii).

¹⁵ With the A version (I) in Pierpont Morgan M 818 (Ingilby), of the mid-fifteenth century, which also contains the *Form of Perfect Living*; in Vernon; and, as we have noted, in HM 114.

¹⁶ The *Siege* appears with a B-text (Hm) in HM 128 (Ashburnham 130), of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, a composite volume which also includes one of the two copies of the *Pricke of Conscience* to occur with *Piers*; and with a C-text (E) in Bodl. 1059 (Laud. Misc. 656) of about 1400, which also includes a sermon on Genesis 15, and some sententious excerpts in English from the Old Testament.

¹⁷ In Vernon, and, also in the A version, in Bodl. 21897 (Douce 323), of the latter half of the fifteenth century. These two manuscripts also contain the two copies of *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* to accompany *Piers*; the latter also includes a prose *Brut*.

¹⁸ *Troilus* occurs with *Piers* in two Huntington Library manuscripts: HM 114, above; and HM 143, the base-text manuscript for George Russell's forthcoming Athlone

C *Version*. HM 143 includes some very interesting running marginal notations contemporary with the text, summarizing the action of the poem. A comparison of this kind of running commentary with those of sixteenth century readers in manuscripts and Crowley's editions of 1550 suggests what at this point can be no more than a rough impression: that from about 1400 to 1550 the poem engaged a consistent group of thematic interests, but gradually lost for its readers its coherence as narrated action, and was instead assimilated to expository *ordinationes* and ideational programmes. Crowley's 'arguments' in his second edition (*Short Title Catalogue* 19907, 19907a; the latter was produced in facsimile edition in 1976), and the remarks of Stephen Batman in Bodl. 1772 (Digby 171), an incomplete C-text of about 1400 which he purchased in 1578, exemplify the latter tendencies. There is also an inclination in the sixteenth century to remark, and isolate, 'prophetic' statements: Crowley's glosses, marginalia in copies of his editions, and those in a mid-sixteenth century C-text, BL Royal 18 B xvii, illustrate this way of reading. The interpretation of the poem, and of changes in ways of reading, through the presentation of this text and its marginalia await a fully detailed history.

[19] The alliterative *Wars of Alexander* (*Alexander C*) and a short prose life of Alexander occur with an A-text (E) in Trinity College Dublin 213, a manuscript of the last quarter of the fifteenth century, which was in Durham Priory about 1500. *King Alisaunder*, a romance in couplets, occurs with the A-text in Lincoln's Inn 150, above.

[20] It occurs with the *Pricke of Conscience* in HM 128, above; and, in an A version, in MS 687 (formerly Bright) in the Society of Antiquaries, London, a manuscript of about 1425 which also contains English prose treatises on confession, the deadly sins, and the commandments, and a Latin prose *Vision of Edward the Confessor*. The *Lay Folk's Mass Book* occurs with a B-text (Y) in the Yates-Thompson manuscript of Newnham College, Cambridge, of the first half of the fifteenth century. *Handlyng Synne* occurred with *Piers* and Mandeville in the divided Sterling manuscript (note 11 above).

[21] In a paper presented at a meeting of the Medieval Association of the Pacific (20 February 1982), 'The Legacy of Piers Plowman: A Wycliffite View', Anne Hudson noted that the communal emphasis of the poem was what was perceived consistently over the century following its production. Readers generally, as well as the Lollards who appropriate the figure of Piers as a spokesman, see in it, she added, not 'a speculative, mystical, or theological text, but a practical political and social message'. It is the common ground of these perceptions – the place where the 'practical' and the 'speculative' aspects of the poem meet to define an audience's interests and a poet's imagination of his public – that I have attempted to illustrate here. A 1980 British Academy lecture by Pamela Gradon, 'Piers Plowman and the Poetry of Dissent', forthcoming in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, also deals with the reformist reception of the poem.

[22] When the fragment called *Mum and the Sothsegger* later came to light, its editors, Day and Steele, regarded it as part of the same poem as Skeat's fragment. and the two together are now ordinarily given the latter name. Whether this view is correct or not, it seems useful in the present instance to identify which text is included in this *Piers* manuscript by calling it by its earlier name.

[23] The other poems are a 'Devil's Charter', dated 1416; a poem on the death of the Duke of Suffolk in 1450 (*Index* 1555); and one on the conciliatory meeting of Lancastrians and Yorkists in a royal visit to St Paul's in 1458 (*Index* 3929).

[24] The contents of the manuscript are described, and the poems numbered, by J. Kail in his edition of the twenty-four short poems and two others from Digby 322 in *Twenty-Six Political Poems*, EETS OS 124 (1904). In his commentary on the group of poems in the *Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, R. H. Robbins endorses Kail's detailed exposition of several of the poem's references to topics deliberated in specific parliaments. He adds that the poems, probably written over a period of years from 1401 to 1421, one or two a year, are 'a closet production and the work of one author', perhaps 'some lesser religious dignitary in one of the orders, for circulation among sober-minded laity and clergy who had a special interest in practical politics.' See the *Manual*, gen. ed. Albert E. Hartung (Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences), vol. 5 (1975), Section XIII 'Poems on Contemporary Conditions', p. 1418.

[25] On the importance of a common vocabulary and habits in the citation of texts as defining Lollardy, a trait which figures prominently in Henry Knighton's perception of the movement, see Anne Hudson, 'John Purvey: A Reconsideration of the Evidence for his Life and Writings', *Viator* 12 (1981), 355–80, pp. 379–80. It seems clear from the surviving manuscripts that the text of *Piers* had no particular association with this special discourse through the fifteenth century.

[26] Lawton (1981), p. 793.

[27] See Beryl Smalley, *The English Friars and Antiquity in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1960); K. W. Humphreys, *The Book Provisions of the Medieval Friars 1215–1400* (Amsterdam, 1964). Smalley's description of the English institutions of governance and education which made them resistant to 'classicizing' interests has some bearing on my point here, though to describe the lay components of this audience as 'legend-hungry louts' (p. 27) gives too little credit to the coherence of their interests, and the context and reasons for them.

[28] See Pearsall (1981)¹; Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1961); K. W. Humphreys, 'The Distribution of Books in the English West Midlands in the Later Middle Ages', *Libri* 17 (1967), 1–12, p. 4.

[29] See McFarlane, 'The Education of the Nobility', and Smalley, *Friars and Antiquity*, pp. 9–27.

[30] Alford (1977).

[31] Bloomfield, *Apocalypse*, p. 32.

[32] See my essay, 'Narration and the Invention of Experience: Episodic Form in Piers Plowman', in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Honor of Morton Bloomfield*, ed. Larry Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1982), pp. 91–122 and notes pp. 280–3.

[33] Gower provides for the *Confessio Amantis* prologues and a running commentary explaining the functional relation between the recreative and serious threads of his fiction, the implicated and the cosmic perspective.

Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse
amantem, varias eorum passiones variis huius libri distinccionibus per
singula scribere proponit.

Book I, 1. 60, *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, EETS, ES
81-2 (London, 1900-1)

He is similarly explicit about his use of the beast fable in *Vox Clamantis*:

Et quia res huiusmodi velut monstrum detestabilis fuit et horribilis, finget se
per sompnium vidisse diversas vulgi turmas in diuersas species bestiarum
domesticarum transmutatas . . .

The Complete Works of John Gower, ed. Macaulay, 4 vols. (London, 1899-1902),
4.3.

See A. J. Minnis, 'The Influence of Academic Prologues on the Prologues and
Literary Attitudes of Late Medieval English Writers', *MS* 43 (1981), 342-83; on
Gower, pp. 359-74; on Usk, pp. 358, 361.

[34] The use of the 'May morning' prologue in the manner of the *chanson d'avanture*
by other poets of the 'alliterative revival' needs fuller comparative treatment than
I can give it here. *Winner and Waster* offers a small anthology of poetic inception
formulas, of which the 'May morning' prologue is the third. It first refers to the
'taking of Troy', the foundation of secular or chivalric history, which, like the
similar gesture in *Sir Gawain*, hints that the ensuing work will be a historical
adventure. There follows the writer's lament that all has declined since then, both
truthful dealings and honest and edifying narration – implying that this poem, in
a traditional verse form working 'three wordes togedre', is meant to counter this
corruption. Only then does the May-morning adventure of 'I' begin: the narrator
wanders out alone in a pleasant scene; he sleeps and dreams the encounter of
Winner and Waster. There is some evidence for dating *Winner and Waster*, like
William of Palerne, before *Piers A*, though there is not universal agreement on
the matter; nearly all other surviving works are as likely to postdate as precede it.
Other poems in alliterative long lines to begin straightaway with some form of the
chanson d'avanture prologue are the *Parliament of the Three Ages* – in which the
May morning adventure of the 'I' is not simply a solitary walk but an occasion for
some successful poaching before he is overcome by sleep and 'swevynn' – and
Pearl, which uses a highly elaborated and elegaic version of the formula: the 'I' is
enigmatically bereaved rather than a wanderer seeking the lighter and more
customary solace.

The evidence is far too slender to bear much weight, but it is possible that,
whatever Langland learned from the other poets of the 'revival', what they may
have learned from him was this initial use of the prologue formula of the *chanson
d'avanture* lyric as a way to introduce a long fictive work.

[35] There are several 'secular' examples in Harley 2253, and 'religious' ones in
Vernon and Simeon. See, for example, *Index* nos. 359, 360, 371, 374, 379, 559,
560, 561, 562, 563, 583, 1446, 1447, 1448, 1449, 1451, 1456, 1505, 1506, 1532,
1548, 1555, 2207, 2359, 2366, 3221, 3963, 4177. See also Helen E. Sandison, *The
'Chanson d'Aventure' in Middle English*, Bryn Mawr College Monographs 12
(Bryn Mawr, Pa., 1913). The lyrics which occur in *Piers* manuscripts show a

rather high incidence of this *chanson d'avanture* opening: see *Index* 1555, the poem on the death of the Duke of Suffolk in Cotton Vespasian B xvi; *Index* 1475, a dialogue between a soldier and a courtier in Bodl. 1703 (Digby 102); as well as several in this mode in Vernon.

[36] It will be apparent that this notion of Langland's literary enterprise, and of the mode of its didacticism, agrees in most respects with that of A. J. Minnis, 'Langland's Ymaginatyf and Late-Medieval Theories of Imagination', *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981), 71–103, p. 91: 'The charge that another book on Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best is superfluous may be met with the argument that Langland's intention was to convey well-established doctrine in a way which, through the medium of memorable poetry and by appeal to the *virtus imaginativa*, would stir the devotion of men . . . the poem was directed primarily at the *affectus* or will and not the intellect.' Such an argument might well be made – and it is everywhere implicit in the poem – but it is not actually made anywhere in the poem in this form. It is essential to the nature of Langland's project that it *remain* implicit, and that the project remain *apparently* indefensible, even when faced, as it is here, with authoritative rebuke. Neither at this point in B, where Will is accosted by Ymaginatif, nor its counterpart in C, where he is 'arated' by Reason and Conscience, does Will make this defence when called to upon to do so; I believe Minnis has slightly misread B XII, 20–22, where Will cites Cato's maxim, not to the effect that poetry teaches and delights, but that 'making' is a salutary form of 'play' that contributes to the health of the spirit. Holy men and clerks 'interpose a little ease', 'þe parfiter to ben'. Properly rejecting the claim that the poet here proposes an original or proto-Romantic view of poetry, Minnis attributes this mistaken notion of Langlandian poetics to a 'confusion caused by Langland's attempt to do justice to both functions of the dreamer: the Dreamer as surrogate audience and the Dreamer as surrogate poet' (p. 87). His distinction is correct and heuristically useful, but I am proposing that the 'confusion' is purposeful and belongs to Langland's poetic mode, in which a non-authoritative 'I' must continue to defer, in his *persona* as 'maker', an explicit and rationally satisfying account of what he is about, in order that the affective 'play' his work brings about may have its desired effect, permitting the audience to come upon the truth as the 'surrogate audience', Will, does: in recognition, in *avanture*.

[37] On the techniques by which genre recombination gives rise to new meanings see Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 59–63. Jameson is here offering a critical account of the formalist theories of Viktor Shklovsky; particularly germane to the present argument is his notion of the development of new literary forms, neither by gradual evolution nor *ab ovo*, but as the 'canonization of something new . . . or rather the lifting to literary dignity (*aufgehoben*)' of forms heretofore minor, popular, or undignified, or by using on a massively extended scale a principle of generation familiarly used in a short or simple form. See pp. 53, 74. See also Jameson's essay, 'Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre', *New Literary History* 7 (1975), 135–63; and Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System* (Princeton, 1971).

[38] See Minnis, 'Academic Prologues', p. 359.

[39] A fuller survey of the signatures is provided in Kane (1965), pp. 52–70; see also R. W. Chambers, 'Robert or William Longland?', *London Medieval Studies* 1

(1948, for 1939), 430–62, and Kane's Chambers Memorial Lecture, *The Auto-biographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies* (London, 1965). The latter discusses in terms similar to mine the function of an intentionally indeterminate fiction.

[40] George Kane, 'Outstanding Problems of Middle English Scholarship', in *The Fourteenth Century*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard Levy (Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, *Acta* 4), 1977, p. 12.

[41] Pearsall (1981)¹; Salter (1966–7) and (1978)¹.

[42] In the *Confessio Amantis*, the speaker pursues the public good in the guise of a private persons, *in persona aliorum*, who has in a polite fiction renounced the power of correction, instead of submitting himself to the systematic correction of Love's priest. In this poem, he insists, he is not teacher but taught, and in order to speak about the proprieties of rule and governance, he will speak as from within the one subjective condition which knows no rule, where the subject ceases to be an agent and becomes a hapless adventurer in his own history (Book I, lines 1–24). In this fiction of reversal, and this polite deference, reside the didactic designs of the work. In its delicate balancing of the question of who is instructing whom within the confessional dialogue, it offers an interesting parallel to Langland's procedure.

A Note on Primary Sources

(*David Lawton*)

UNRHYMED POEMS OF THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES: FORMAL CORPUS

Both *Alexander A* and *Alexander B* (*Alexander and Dindimus*) are edited, together with a version of their sources, by F. P. Magoun Jr., *The Gests of King Alexander of Macedon* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929): they are edited separately by W. W. Skeat, in EETS ES 1 (1867) and ES 31 (1878) respectively. For the manuscript of A (Bodl. Greaves 60) and its scribe, see Turville-Petre (1976); for B (Bodley 264) see Dr Doyle's essay in this volume.

The Wars of Alexander (*Alexander C*) is edited by Skeat, EETS ES 47 (1887) and a new edition is in preparation by Hoyt N. Duggan and Thorlac Turville-Petre. There are two manuscripts, Bodl. Ashmole 44 and Trinity College Dublin 213. For the source, see Duggan (1976).

The poems of BL Cotton Nero A x are edited together by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, York Medieval Texts, second series (London, 1978), with an excellent introduction, select bibliography, and appendix of passages from the Vulgate. See also the separate editions of the (rhymed) alliterative *Pearl* by E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953); *Cleanness*, by J. J. Anderson (Manchester, 1977), by Sir Israel Gollancz (1921–33), reprinted in one volume with translation by D. S. Brewer (Cambridge, 1974), and as *Purity* by R. J. Menner, Yale Studies in English 61 (New Haven, 1920); *Patience*, by J. J. Anderson (New York, 1969); and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 2nd edition revised by Norman Davis (Oxford, 1967), and by W. R. J. Barron (Manchester, 1974).

The Destruction of Troy is edited by G. A. Panton and D. Donaldson, EETS OS 39 (1869) and 54 (1874), reprinted as one volume (1968). I understand that the Early English Text Society has a new edition in preparation. The source is Guido de Columnis, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, and is edited by N. F. Griffin, Medieval Academy of America Publication 26 (Cambridge, Mass., 1936). For the one manuscript, Hunterian 388, and its scribe Thomas Chetham, see Luttrell (1958).

The *Morte Arthure* was first edited in full by Edmund Brock, EETS OS 8 (1865). The most recent editions are by V. F. Krishna (New York, 1976), and an edition I have not yet seen by Mary Hamel (New York, 1982) which makes use of the Winchester manuscript of Malory's works as well as the extant copy of the *Morte*, made by Robert Thornton, in Lincoln Cathedral Library 91. For further references on the manuscript, see Dr Doyle's essay; and on the question of source and redaction, see the essays by Dr Barron and Dr Field.

The Parliament of the Three Ages, ed. M. Y. Offord, EETS OS 246 (1959), was also copied by Thornton in BL Additional 31042, and there is one other copy in Additional 33994.

St Erkenwald is edited by Horstmann in *Altenglischen Legenden* (Heilbronn, 1881), by Gollancz (London, 1922), by H. L. Savage, Yale Studies in English 72 (New Haven, 1926); recently by Ruth Morse (Cambridge, 1975) and more satisfactorily by Clifford J. Peterson (Philadelphia, 1977). On its authorship, see Benson (1965), and for its sole manuscript (BL Harley 2250), see Luttrell (1958).

The Siege of Jerusalem survives in eight copies, all discussed by Dr Doyle: Bodl. Laud Misc 656, one of Mr R. H. Taylor's MSS now in Princeton University Library, CUL Mm V. 14, Huntington Library HM 128, Lambeth Palace 491, BL Additional 31042, Cotton Vespasian E xvi and Cotton Caligula A ii. It is edited by E. Kölbing and M. Day, EETS OS 188 (1931); see also J. R. Hulbert, 'The Text of the *Siege of Jerusalem*', *SP* 28 (1931), 602–12. I hope to undertake a new edition. For the sources, see the EETS edition and Phyllis Moe, 'The French Source of the Alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem*', *Medium Ævum* 39 (1970), 147–53.

The most useful and accessible edition of *William of Palerne* is still that by Skeat, EETS ES 1 (1867); but see also E. E. Foster and G. Gilman, 'The text of *William of Palerne*', *NM* 74 (1973), 480–95. On the redaction, see Dr Barron's essay; on the one manuscript, King's College Cambridge 13, see Dr Doyle's.

Winner and Waster was edited by Sir Israel Gollancz in his alliterative series, Select Early English Poems (London, 1930; reprinted Cambridge, 1974). BL Additional 31042 (Thornton) is again the only extant copy.

The chronological limits adopted here would seem to exclude Laȝamon's *Brut*, ed. G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie, EETS OS 250 (1963) and 277 (1978), from BL Cotton Caligula A ix and Otho C xiii. Certainly, it does not belong to the corpus outlined above, and its place is antecedent; but there would be no less violence done by placing it elsewhere.

THE INFORMAL CORPUS

This is in large part a *Piers Plowman* tradition. *Piers* was edited in the form of three texts by W. W. Skeat between 1867 and 1873: this edition in parallel text form, two volumes (Oxford, 1886), is still available. The important Athlone edition awaits its third volume, the edition of C by G. H. Russell: the *A-Version* is edited by George Kane (London, 1960), and the *B-Version* (controversially) by George Kane and E. T. Donaldson (London, 1975). There is a useful edition of the B-text by A. V. C. Schmidt (London, 1978) and of C by Derek Pearsall from Huntington Library HM 143 (London, 1978). The poem is extant in over 50 manuscripts and early printed versions. For further reference, see the editions cited, the forthcoming *Manual* contribution by Anne Middleton, and Kane (1965).

Piers the Plowman's Creed was edited by Skeat, EETS OS 30 (1867), and a new edition is being prepared by A. I. Doyle and T. L. Kinney. There are two complete manuscripts, BL Royal 18 B xvii and Trinity College Cambridge R 3.15, one fragment, BL Harley 78, and a printed edition (1553) of this Lollard poem.

Richard the Redeless (CUL Ll 4.14) and *Mum and the Sothsegger* (BL Additional 41666) were edited as one poem by Mabel Day and R. Steele, EETS OS 199 (1934), but the combination seems implausible; see Embree (1975). *The Crowned King* is edited by R. H. Robbins in his *Historical Poems of the XIV and XV Centuries* (New York, 1959), pp. 227–32; the manuscript is Bodl. Douce 95.

Another poem influenced by *Piers* is *Death and Life*, which was edited by J. H. Hanford and J. M. Steadman in *SP* 15 (1918), 221–94, with some discussion of possible sources, and by Gollancz and Day (London, 1930). This poem survives only in the Percy Folio manuscript (BL Additional 27879), and can serve here to introduce a number of unrhymed poems that for various reasons fall into neither corpus so far outlined.

Scottish Field, the only extant unrhymed alliterative poem from sixteenth century England, also survives in the Percy Folio – and in one other manuscript, the 'Lyme', belonging to Lord Newton and deposited in John Rylands Library, Manchester. The latter manuscript is now incomplete, and best read in the facsimile (made before a loss of two out of five parchment strips) in Bodl. MS Dep. C. 129–30. The poem is edited by J. P. Oakden in *Chetham Miscellanies*, Chetham Society NS 94 (1935), and a new edition by Ian F. Baird, *Scotish Feilde and Flodden Feilde: Two Flodden Poems* (New York, 1982), is announced. Another late unrhymed poem is Dunbar's *Tretis of the Twa Meriit Wemen and the Wedo*, ed. James Kinsley, *The Poems of William Dunbar* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 42–59.

Two poems of probable late fourteenth century date with incomplete alliteration are *Joseph of Arimathea*, edited by David A. Lawton (New York, 1982), with redaction study, from the unique copy in the Vernon manuscript, Bodl. Engl. Poet. a. 1, and by Skeat, EETS OS 44 (1871); and *Chevalere Assigne*, ed. H. H. Gibbs (Lord Aldenham), EETS ES 6 (1868), from the unique copy in BL Cotton Caligula A ii (see Dr Barron's essay for the redaction).

An important early fragment, *The Conflict of Wit and Will*, is edited by Bruce Dickins, Leeds School of English Language Texts and Monographs 4 (Kendal, 1937). There are also one or two short unrhymed alliterative poems, of which the most popular is *The ABC of Aristotle*, edited by F. J. Furnivall in EETS OS 32 (1868), for which see Dr Doyle's essay and *Index* 471. 3793, 4155 (*Supplement* 3793, 4155). For the *Complaint against Blacksmiths*, extant only in BL Arundel 292, see Salter (1979), which contains the only accurate transcription.

RHYMED POEMS IN THIRTEEN-LINE STANZAS

For a list of the majority of these, see the appendix to Turville-Petre (1974)[1]. Among the most important:

The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn (4 MSS: Lincoln Cathedral 91. Lambeth 491, 'Ireland Blackburne' – now one of Mr R. H. Taylor's at Princeton – and Bodl. Douce 324) is edited by Ralph Hanna III (Manchester, 1974);

De Tribus Regibus Mortuis is edited by E. K. Whiting. *The Poems of John Audelay*, EETS OS 184 (1931), from Bodl. Douce 302;

The Disputation between Mary and the Cross is edited from Vernon by F. J.

Furnivall in *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, EETS OS 117 (1901), pp. 612–27, and also is extant in BL Royal 18 A x where it appears with another poem, *The Festivals of the Church*, in this sort of stanza. Neither poem is fully alliterated. The *Disputation* and *Susannah* appear to be the oldest poems extant in this form; *The Quatrefoil of Love*, edited by Gollancz and M. M. Weale, EETS OS 195 (1935), survives in two copies, Bodl. Additional A 106 and BL Additional 31042; *Summer Sunday* is edited by Robbins, *Historical Poems*, cited above, and by Carleton Brown, in *Studies in English Philology in Honor of Fr. Klaeber*, ed. K. Malone and M. B. Rund (Minneapolis, 1929), pp. 362–74, from Bodl. Laud Misc 108;

Susannah is edited somewhat diffidently by Alice Miskimin, Yale Studies in English 170 (New Haven, 1969), and as *The Pistill of Susan* by F. J. Amours, *Scottish Alliterative Poems in Riming Stanzas*, Scottish Text Society 27, 38 (Edinburgh, 1892) – the poem is found in Vernon and its sister Manuscript Simeon BL Additional 22283, Huntington HM 114, Pierpont Morgan LM 818 and BL Cotton Caligula A ii.

The Amours edition also contains a text of Richard Holland's *The Buke of the Howlat* (*Index* 1554), *Golagrus and Gawain* (see also Stevenson, Scottish Text Society 65), the only copy of which comes from the Chapman and Myllar print of 1508; W. R. J. Barron is preparing a new edition. *The Taill of Rauf Coilyear* is also edited by S. J. Herrtage, EETS ES 39 (1882).

RELATED MATERIAL

Work on alliterative poetry must ultimately take into full account a variety of other material, much of which is mentioned in the notes to this volume. Only a few of these works can be cited here:

Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, ed. J. C. Pope, EETS OS 259 (1967) and 260 (1968);

The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Cotton Cleopatra C vi, ed. E. J. Dobson, EETS OS 267 (1972);

Bernardus de Cura Rei Famuliaris with some Early Scottish Prophecies, ed. J. R. Lumby. EETS OS 42 (1870);

Þe Desputisoun bitwen þe Bodi and the Soule, ed. W. Linow in *Erlanger Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie* I, ed. H. Varnhagen (Leipzig, 1889);

Hali Meiðhad, ed. B. Millett, EETS OS 284 (1982);

The Harley Lyrics, ed. G. L. Brook, 2nd edition (Manchester, 1956);

Ipomedon, ed. E. Kölbing (Breslau, 1899);

Jack Upland, Friar Daw's Reply and Upland's Rejoinder, ed. P. L. Heyworth (Oxford, 1968);

King Horn, ed. J. Hall (Oxford, 1901);

The Lay Folk's Catechism, ed. T. F. Simmons and H. E. Nolloth, EETS OS 118 (1901) [Gaytryge's Sermon];

Þe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne, EETS OS 248 (1961);

English Lyrics of the XIII Century, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford, 1932);

Religious Lyrics of the XIV Century, ed. Carleton Brown, 2nd edition revised by G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1957);

Secular Lyrics of the XIV and XV Century, ed. R. H. Robbins, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1955);

Middle English Religious Prose, ed. N. F. Blake (London, 1972);

The Poems of Laurence Minot, ed. J. Hall (Oxford, 1914);

Twenty Six Political and Other Poems: From the Oxford MSS Digby 102 and Douce 322, ed. J. Kail, EETS OS 124 (1904);

The Proverbs of Alfred, ed. O. S. Anderson Arngart, 2 volumes (Lund, 1942–55);

Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse from the Thornton Manuscript, ed. G. Perry, EETS OS 26 (1867);

Robert of Gloucester's Metrical Chronicle, ed. W. A. Wright, Rolls Series 86 (London, 1887);

English Writings of Richard Rolle, ed. H. E. Allen (Oxford, 1931);

Seinte Katerine, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson, EETS SS 7 (1981);

Sawles Warde, ed. R. M. Wilson, Leeds School of English Texts and Monographs 3 (Kendal, 1938);

Seinte Marherete: þe Meiden ant Martyr, ed. F. M. Mack, EETS OS 193 (1934);

The Romance of Sir Degrevant, ed. L. F. Casson, EETS OS 221 (1949);

Sir Eglamour of Artois, ed. F. E. Richardson, EETS OS 256 (1965);

The Song of Roland, ed. S. J. Herrtage, EETS ES 35 (1880);

The South English Legendary, ed. C. D'Evelyn and A. J. Mill, EETS OS 235 (1956), 236 (1956) and 244 (1959);

A Talkyng of þe Loue of God, ed. M. S. Westra (The Hague, 1950);

The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune, ed. J. A. H. Murray, EETS OS 61 (1875);

The Wheatley Manuscript, ed. M. Day, EETS OS 155 (1921);

Þe Wohunge of Oure Lauerd, ed. W. M. Thompson, EETS OS 241 (1951).

A Select Bibliography of Secondary Sources

With the exception of a few classic studies, the selection is restricted to work of the last twenty or so years. It contains all works cited in the notes by author and date only.

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