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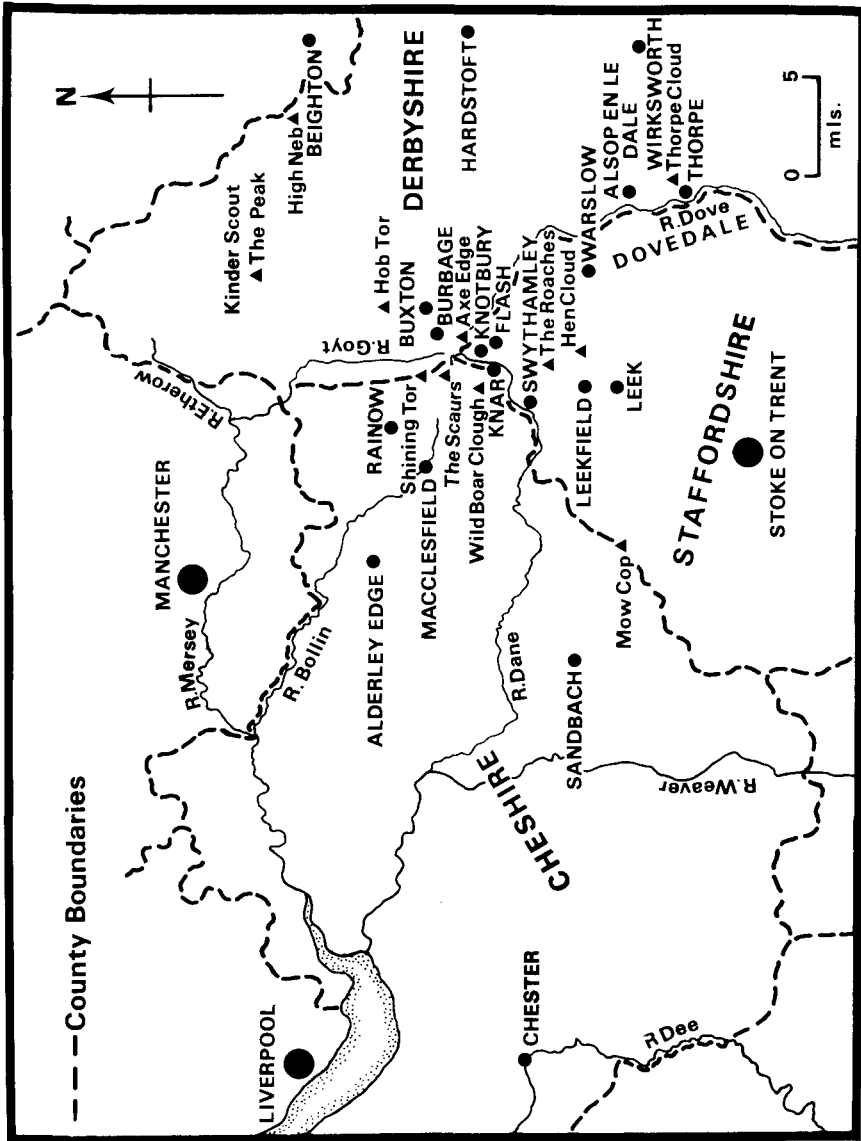
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Place-names of "The Gawain Country"

## HILLS AND VALLEYS IN THE GAWAIN COUNTRY<sup>1</sup>

By RALPH W.V. ELLIOTT

"The *Gawain* country" is a convenient term to describe two types of landscape, whose connection this essay seeks to explore: on the one hand the fictional settings of the Middle English alliterative poems, and on the other hand the real landscapes of the west and north-west midlands and of northern England where most of these poems originated. To distinguish between the two types, I refer to the latter as the "real" *Gawain* country, whenever the distinction is of importance to my argument.

The fictional landscapes provide settings in a variety of poems, of which the following are most frequently cited in this essay: the Arthurian romances *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, and the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; the "verse novel", as it has been called, *William of Palerne*; the "classical chronicles" *The 'Gest Hystoriale' of the Destruction of Troy*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and *The Wars of Alexander*; the dream visions *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, *Piers Plowman*, and *Pearl*; the verse homilies *Patience* and *Cleanness*; and the poems dealing with contemporary social questions *Winner and Waster* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*.

Yet for all their fictitiousness, the landscapes of these poems have some noteworthy lexical parallels with the toponymy of north-west midland and northern England, and some of them bear the imprint of genuine English landscapes. Thus the names of identifiable English places occur in *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Langland points unmistakably to the Malvern hills. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* such accurate localization of at least one of the episodes in the poem has led a number of critics to believe that the poet is speaking of a region well-known to him and was drawing upon real and familiar landscapes and landmarks in describing not only the crossing of the Dee but other scenes as well. This region lies at the heart of what I call the real *Gawain* country, in that part of the north-west midlands where Cheshire, Staffordshire, and Derbyshire meet.

In this essay, one of several such studies,<sup>2</sup> I shall confine myself to a discussion of terms denoting hills and valleys in alliterative poetry mainly of the fourteenth century in order to clarify the meanings and connotations of some of the words used; to bring out stylistic differences between various alliterative poets; to explore parallels between such terms and their occurrence in place-names;

and thus possibly to assign some words, and perhaps the poems in which they occur, to more specific regions.

Hills and valleys are permanent features of a landscape, at least within the relatively short time-span that separates the fourteenth century from the twentieth; they are thus likely to be very much the same as they were at the time when the alliterative poems were composed, and because of this permanence it may prove possible to establish occasional links between a poet's vocabulary and actual place-names.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the fictional Gawain country is particularly distinguished by its hilly character: there is hardly an alliterative poem in which at least some of the action does not take place in hilly or mountainous terrain appropriately described.

Of course, much topographical description in the alliterative poems is of the vaguest, and formulas of the type "by hylle ne be vale" (*Gaw* 2271)<sup>4</sup> or "ouer dales & downes" (*Wm Pal* 2715)<sup>5</sup> are very common. The formula represents one extreme of topographical description; as a rule, what it refers to can be neither sharply visualized nor identified as an actual locale. To accuse the hero, as the Green Knight does in line 2271 of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, of not being the genuine Gawain who was never afraid of any army by hill nor by vale, is clearly not intended to evoke a picture of Sir Gawain actually charging the enemy up specific hills or down particular valleys. Yet at the other extreme of topographical description this is precisely what we are invited to do, whether it be to follow Sir Gawain across several fords and low-lying reaches to the bank of the Dee and thence to the other side, or whether it be to look to the left with Sir Gawain after reaching the bottom of the valley near the Green Chapel towards those rough rugged crags with gnarled stones which form such a distinctive and unexpected landmark in that neighbourhood.

In between these extremes are descriptions of places which allow a fairly precise image within the context, like the subdued opening setting in the garden of *Pearl* or the quarry where the fugitives hide in *William of Palerne*, but which no map of the north-west midlands will help us to pinpoint.

The topographical formula, frequently alliterating, plays variations on the theme "up hill and down dale" in all those many narratives where there is frequent movement of individuals or whole armies. Yet even material so unpromising can reveal a few stylistic idiosyncrasies. The poet of *William of Palerne*, for example, whose story entails a considerable amount of cross-country running, strongly favours a vague topographical impressionism conveyed by such phrases as "ouer dales & downes", "ouer dales and helles", "ouer mountaynes & mires & oper wicked weiges", "ouer mures & mountaynes & many faire pleynes". By contrast, the poet of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* prefers formulas of a more descriptive or emotive type, like "in bonkes so bare", "in cliffes so colde", "in cleues so clene", not confined to hills and valleys, or else he ends his lines with prepositional phrases like "in þe dymme skuwes"; yet he too uses the familiar collocation of two nouns, as in "in frithes and felles".<sup>6</sup> The *Gawain*-poet has his share of topographical clichés, but he is more selective than his fellow-poets in the words he uses in formulas

and those which he reserves for more specific descriptions. Some words denoting hills and valleys are used for all purposes, like *bonke*, *clyffe*, *hille*; one or two, like *doune* or *mount*, occur in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* only in formulas, although their use may be more specific in the other poems ascribed to the *Gawain*-poet; yet others again, like *cragge*, *scowte*, *valay*, are used by this poet only in specific topographical contexts.

*bonke*, *clyffe*, *hille*

Among words denoting hills in alliterative poetry the most common are *bonke*, *clyffe*, and *hille*. Of these only *bonke* belongs more particularly to the real *Gawain* country: as a topographical term it derives from Scandinavian, like several other hill-words, and is common in place-names and dialects in the Danelaw and north country.<sup>7</sup> It is widely used in the alliterative poems in the sense of "river bank or sea shore"; it is common as a tag, as in "bi bonk" (*Gaw* 511); but it can also form part of a closely envisaged scene, as in *Sir Gawain's* crossing of the *Dee* (700) or in the final moments of the boar hunt in the same poem when the doomed beast turns his back on "þe bonk" (1571), a definite feature in a clearly realized terrain.

The word *clyffe* has a similar range of meanings and uses. Its initial sound favours strongly resonant alliteration with words like *clamberande* or *clatered* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or with the visually and symbolically appropriate *crystal* in *Pearl* 74, 159, *The Siege of Jerusalem* 102, or *The Wars of Alexander* 4825.<sup>8</sup> The association of the word with "climbing" is inevitable, both literally and, occasionally and effectively, in figurative use:

Wen a mon is at myght, & most of astate,  
Clombyn all the Clif to þe clene top.  
(*Destr Troy* 13676-7)<sup>9</sup>

The same poet also introduces what look like topographical subtleties into the basic meaning of *clyffe* by using different prepositions: "comyn into þe cliffe", "clymbe at a clyffe", "kild on þe cliffe".

Like *bonke* and *clyffe*, *hille* is a common word. It is often conjoined with the adjective *high* - an alliterative convenience - and its uses range from the simple tag "on hille" to specific locations like "þat hy3e hil" above the Green Chapel where *Sir Gawain* hears the tumult heralding the Green Knight's approach (*Gaw* 2199), or "þe hyl of Syon" in *Pearl* 789.

*mount*, *mountayne*, *doune*

The *hyl* of *Pearl* 789 is varied to "þe *mount* of Syon" in line 866, a word which is not common in alliterative poems except in *Morte Arthure* whose poet evinces some fondness for *mountes*, especially in vague phrases at the end of lines where alliteration does not apply: "ouere the mounttes", "to the mowntes", "entre the mountes".<sup>10</sup>

Nor is *mountayne* a common word except, understandably, in the fifteenth-century Scottish alliterative poems. Chaucer uses *mount*

only in verse, whereas *mountain* occurs ten times in his prose but only five times in his verse.<sup>11</sup> In *The House of Fame* he distinguishes, from his aerial vantage point, between hills and mountains, a contrast also to be found in the juxtaposition of "mounteyns, & . . . mayn hylles" in *The Destruction of Troy* 5477. In the latter poem there are several instances in which mountains are associated with nightfall, possibly merely an alliterative accident (*merkenes*), possibly a more deliberate evocation of the awesome grandeur of mountains at night. The magnitude of mountains is also made explicit by the Gawain-poet's only use of the word:

þe moste mountayne3 on mor þenne were no more dry3e.  
(*Cleanness* 385)<sup>12</sup>

Place-names containing *mount* or *mountayne* are mostly of French origin and are not confined to those parts of England where alliterative poetry flourished.

The word *doune*, "a down or hill", also has wide distribution in English place-names, and occurs more frequently in non-alliterative poems than in alliterative ones, despite the obviously useful pairing of *dales* with *dounes*. Rather surprisingly, Kane and Donaldson prefer "[*dounes*] and *hulles*" in *Piers Plowman* B IX, 142,<sup>13</sup> where some dozen manuscripts read *dales*, a word rather more typical of Langland than *dounes* and more likely to be paired with *hilles*, as in *William of Palerne* 2432.

#### *lawe, felle, cragge*

Rather more characteristic of the Gawain country are the words *lawe*, *felle* and *cragge*. In Old English the word *hlāw* generally refers to an artificial mount, a burial mound or tumulus, and the majority of Old English place-names combining this element with a personal name refer to burial mounds dating from the heathen period (AHS I, 249). But, as A.H. Smith points out, the simple meaning "hill" or "a conical hill resembling a tumulus" is also found in Old English "and local topography establishes this meaning as a common one in place-names and dialects in certain parts of the country", notably in Durham and Northumberland where it survives in the form *law*, and in the north-west midlands where it survives as *low*. The *English Dialect Dictionary* cites under *law*, sb.2, a late eighteenth-century reference to the North Staffordshire moorlands as the "Low Country" and in the heart of the real Gawain country the element is very common in names denoting hills and places, like Shuttlingsloe in north-east Cheshire and Warslow in the North Staffordshire moorlands, and in personal names like Joh.de la Stonilowe, recorded in Staffordshire at the beginning of the fourteenth century.<sup>14</sup> In alliterative poetry *lawe* usually means simply "hill", without any burial associations, as in its three occurrences in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (one referring to the situation of the castle, two to the locale of the Green Chapel), or in *Cleanness* 992 where the city of Zoar is spared because of its situation "on a lawe", also called "a rounde hil" in line 927. Contextual meanings are occasionally found for *lawe*, as in *The Wars of Alexander* 5485 where to be enclosed "in a straitte lawe" suggests

either a pass between hills or a narrow hill top where the kings could be surrounded. A similar usage occurs in the words "loken by a lawe the lengthe of a myle" in *Winner and Waster* 49 which may refer to a circular earthwork if *loken* is rendered as "enclosed".<sup>15</sup>

The word *felle* is even more restricted in both literary and topographical usage. The *Gawain*-poet uses it only once, in the reference to giants pursuing Sir Gawain from "þe heze felle" (*Gaw* 723) as he braves the hazards of the journey from the Dee to Bertilak's castle. Here, as well as in a couple of alliterating occurrences in *Morte Arthure* (2489, 2502), the word could conceivably connote the sense of "moorland", recorded by both the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *English Dialect Dictionary*. In *The Wars of Alexander* the word occurs once in the Dublin MS (1211) where the Ashmole MS reads *hillis*, although the latter does read *fellis* in 4046, where the meaning "an upland pasture", also recorded by the *Middle English Dictionary*, fits the context particularly well. There are some instances of the formula "in frithes and felles", and variants thereof, in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and in several of the Scottish alliterative poems. In both place-names and personal names the word belongs mainly to the mountainous regions of the northern Pennines, northwards from Lancashire, and the Lake District.

Whereas *felle* is yet another word of Scandinavian origin, representing both Old Norse *fell* "a single mountain" and *fjall* "mountains, mountainous country", *cragge* is of Celtic origin and was probably introduced into north-west England by Norwegian vikings (AHS I, p.111). In place-names it occurs chiefly in the north-west. The basic meaning is "a precipitous rock, cliff, or promontory" and on such *cragge*; the Ark settles in *Cleanness* 449; but crags were often associated with secret lairs or hiding places both in topography and in alliterative poetry, and this sense probably derives from the geological fact that crags often project or lean almost horizontally from their hillsides. There is a Wolfhole Crag in Lancashire, and Miss M. Dominica Legge has kindly drawn my attention to the similarly named, sharply jutting Wolf Crags in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh. In the parish of Wildboardclough at the heart of the real *Gawain* country the word "crag" occurs in several names, and only a short walk to the south is an example of an almost horizontally projecting crag, the Hanging Stone near Swythamley Park in the North Staffordshire moorlands, such as could aptly be described in the *Gawain*-poet's words as "a foo cragge" (*Gaw* 1430). Both the primary meaning of "a precipitous rock" and the connotations of concealment in some hidden retreat are appropriately combined in the repeated references to St Michael's Mount, the lair of the giant slain by Arthur, as a *cragge* in *Morte Arthure*, a word not applied to any other place in that poem. In *William of Palerne* the werewolf "kouchid him vnder a kragge" (2240), and then guided his charges "vnder" the same crag, where they eventually "vnder þe castel in a crag cau3t here rest" (2867). Similarly, the wounded hart in *The Parlement of The Thre Ages* "crepyde in-to a kragge and crouschede to þe erthe" (64),<sup>16</sup> and the same connotations are present in the description of pearls growing in the sea concealed "in graynes & in cragis" in *The Wars of Alexander* 3375, and in line 4025 of the same poem,

Bot crepis in-to creuisse & craggis on hillis,

which associates the same words, and their connotations, as the Gawain-poet's

Or a creuisse of an olde cragge, he coupe hit no3t deme  
with spelle.

(Gaw 2183-4)

Such consistent usage suggests that *cragge* is one of those topographical terms whose connotations the alliterative poets exploited with some care.

*ber3*

Very rare in alliterative poetry is *ber3*, which Langland uses to describe his "Bergh, bere-no-fals witnesse" in *Piers Plowman B V*, 580, where it appears to have puzzled some of the scribes into writing variously *burgh*, *beech*, *brugge*, et al. The word occurs twice within half a dozen lines in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

A bal3 ber3 bi a bonke þe brymme bysyde; (2172)

þenne he bo3ez to þe ber3e, aboute hit he walkez. (2178)

The basic meaning of the word is "hill, mound" both in Old English and in Old Norse, and it is in this sense that it mostly occurs in place-names throughout the country. Where archaeological evidence suggests an old tumulus the word can denote an artificial or burial mound in place-names, but such cases are less common. In Derbyshire, for example, one of the four certain instances of the Old English element *beorg* is the name of a burial mound.<sup>16</sup> The Gawain-poet's *ber3* is not likely to be a "smooth-surfaced barrow on a slope", as A.C. Cawley and Brian Stone, for example, render these words, but more simply "a rounded hill", as A.H. Smith suggests on the evidence of toponymy: "In place-names the topographical reference is usually to 'a rounded hill', as in M.E. a *balze ber3*" (AHS I, p.18). Like *lawe* in the same context *ber3* should be freed of any burial connotations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; the poet's systematic topography at this point rules out a smooth-surfaced, thrice-holed funereal barrow halfway up the hillside.

*knarre, knot*

Several of the more distinctive hill and valley words found in the alliterative poems are still familiar to living dialect speakers in those parts of the north-west midlands where dialectal and graphemic evidence places the composition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and some of the other alliterative poems. One seventy-year-old Cheshire craftsman, son of a stone cutter, who like his father and grandfather has lived all his life at the foot of Alderley Edge in the north-east corner of the county, responded readily to *bonke*, *clyffe*, *cragge*, *felle*, *lawe*, and several other hill-words, but he did not know *ber3*.<sup>18</sup> Nor did he know two other unusual words, *knarre* and *knot*, both of which are conjoined alliteratively and topographically in the description of the boar hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The only literary occurrence of *knarre* outside this poem appears to be its nonce use as a deliberate northernism in line 1001 of the thirteenth-century poem *The Owl and the Nnghtingale*, where "knarres and cludes" are singled out along with



snow and hail as characteristic of the "grislich", wild, and inhospitable north country.<sup>19</sup> The etymology of *knarre* is somewhat obscure. There are Dutch and Low German cognates meaning "stump, knob" suggesting an Old English \**cnearr*, which survives in northern and some midland dialects, according to the *English Dialect Dictionary*, as *gnar(r)* meaning "a hard knot in wood, or knob". Its contextual meaning of "rugged or twisted rock" is clear from the resonant line describing those queer gnarled rock formations in the vicinity of the Green Chapel:

And ruze knobled knarrez with knorned stonez.  
(Gaw 2166)

Elsewhere in the poem we are told that wild men of the woods lived in "þe knarrez" (721), appropriately "grislich" dwellings for a characteristic conflation in this poem of the wild, half-human forest dwellers of romance with the marauders and freebooters who so notoriously infested Cheshire in the later fourteenth century.

The third occurrence of *knarre* links it with the equally rare word *knot* which in alliterative poetry only the *Gawain*-poet uses in a topographical sense. He does so three times, twice within four lines and with reference to the same feature in the description of the boar hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where, in line 1434, the hunters are said to "vmbekesten þe knarre and þe knot boþe", and once in *Pearl* 788, where it is usually rendered "throng". But there is less warrant for "throng" than for the topographical sense "rocky hill, hillock, rocky eminence" found in north-west midland and north-western place-names and in this sense probably derived ultimately from Old Norse *knotttr* "a ball". In *Pearl* the reference is to St John's vision of the Lamb and his 144,000 spotless followers "supra montem Sion" (*Revelation* XIV, 1). He sees them, according to the poet,

al in a knot,  
On þe hyl of Syon, þat semly clot;  
þe apostel hem segh in gostly drem  
Arayed to þe weddyng in þat hyl-coppe,  
þe nwe cyté o Jerusalem.

(*Pearl* 788-92)

As we know from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and from topography, *knot* means much the same thing as the other hill-words in this passage. The repetition of the same idea in different words is characteristic of *Pearl*, partly due no doubt to the intricate verse patterns employed, and the use of *in* with *knot* is exactly paralleled by *in* with *hyl-coppe*. Although the Lamb's numerous followers unquestionably constitute a throng, there is no specific reference to a throng in *Revelation*; on the other hand, the topographical meaning is sufficiently attested and contextually appropriate for us to regard *knot* in *Pearl* as the same word which occurs in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the latter poem it is certainly one of the most esoteric of topographical terms and may well have been taken from the poet's own landscape. There is a rocky plateau called Knotbury in the North Staffordshire moorlands which, like Knott End

in Lancashire or the personal name Emma del Knot, recorded in Cumberland in the fourteenth century (Kristensson, p.33), contain the same element. If, moreover, we note the occurrence of a place called The Knar or Knar (Farm) at the edge of Cutthorn Hill facing Knotbury across the river Dane, the Gawain-poet's linking of the two words becomes even more interesting. The name Knar is not recorded before the nineteenth century, but the history of the farm in the possession of the Slack family (now settled in Australia) goes back several generations further. The name Knotbury was sufficiently established to figure in William Yates's map of Staffordshire of 1775 along with other place-names for which earlier records exist.<sup>20</sup> It must be stressed that documentation for many names in the moorlands is often scanty, as the published volumes of the English Place-Name Society make evident, and as Dr J.P. Oakden, the editor of the forthcoming Staffordshire volumes, has informed me regarding that county. Thus, even as late as the mid-nineteenth century Tithe Awards only twelve of the thirty-one parishes in North Totmonslow hundred, the northernmost part of Staffordshire, had Awards.

*clude, hyl-coppe, clot*

The word *clude*, which the poet of *The Owl and the Nightingale* links, as we saw, with *knarre*, derives from Old English *clūd* "rock, rocky hill", and occurs in south-western place-names and personal names (cp. Löfvenberg, p.39) as well as in west midland place-names like the Staffordshire Hen Cloud and the Five Clouds of the Roaches near Leek or the Derbyshire Foxcloud in Wirksworth hundred. In the alliterative poems it is very difficult to identify any unequivocal instances of *clude* meaning "rocky hill" rather than "cloud", although there are one or two doubtful cases.

The word *coppe*, as in *hyl-coppe* (Pearl 791), from Old English *copp* "peak, summit", occurs in place-names mainly in the midlands and north country and is found in dialects as far south as Staffordshire and Derbyshire. A well-known example is the conspicuous hill on the Cheshire-Staffordshire border at the edge of the moorlands, Mow Cop, crowned by a mock ruin, which saw the birth of primitive methodism. The Derbyshire Cop Low combines the elements *coppe* and *lawe*. The word is rare in the alliterative poems but was used by Chaucer a couple of times. It occurs twice in *The Wars of Alexander* and once in *Mum and the Sothsegger* 883,<sup>21</sup> and in all three instances the meaning of "hill top" is clear and the word is made to alliterate.

Although there is little evidence for the topographical meaning "hill" for *clot* (Pearl 789), which in Old English meant "clod, clay", there are three occurrences, two from the fourteenth century, of the interesting designation Thorp(e) in the Clottes for the Derbyshire village of Thorpe in Wirksworth hundred, a mile from the Staffordshire border. This is presumably a reference to the several hills surrounding the village, among which the most conspicuous is Thorpe Cloud guarding the entrance to the most picturesque stretch of Dovedale. Once again the Gawain-poet appears to be using a rare topographical term from his own countryside.

egge, torre

A common element in the place-names of the southern Pennine moorlands to describe hill tops as well as the often precipitous slopes is *egge*. Names like Axe Edge, Turn Edge, Wolf Edge occur within a few miles of each other in the vicinity of Knotbury, and the personal name Joh. del Stonyegge, recorded in Staffordshire in 1332 (Kristensson, p.88), contains the same element. The poet of *The Wars of Alexander* (4876) uses *egge* as a synonym for *clyffe*. In *Cleanness* 383 "þe bonke3 egge3" describes the water level reached by the Flood, while in the same poem "þe hy3est of þe egge3" (451) are the first signs of solid ground to be revealed as the waters begin to recede. The literal meaning is not far to seek in these instances. In place-names and personal names the word occurs also in other parts of England, mainly in western counties. The Derbyshire place-name Heage in Appletree hundred, recorded as Hehege in 1379, closely resembles the Gawain-poet's phrase in *Cleanness* 451.

Another hill-word of the real Gawain country that finds its way into alliterative poetry is *torre*. It denotes "a rocky outcrop or rocky peak", and is used thus, either literally or figuratively, in several alliterative poems. To two of the poets *torres* aptly conveys the towering heights of waves in a storm (*Siege Jer* 65, *Destr Troy* 1983), while the Gawain-poet associates the word in both *Pearl* and *Cleanness* with masses of clouds in a thunderstorm:

And as þunder þrowe3 in torre3 blo.

(*Pearl* 875)

Clowde3 clustered bytwene, kesten vp torres,  
bat þe þik þunder-prast þirled hem ofte.

(*Cleanness* 951-2)

The poet of *The Wars of Alexander*, who shares some of the Gawain-poet's response to mountainous landscapes, has the striking phrase "the clynterand torres" (4863) to describe "tors rugged with ledges and precipices". The word is of Celtic origin, probably from Old Welsh *torr* "bulge, belly, boss". Its distribution in place-names and dialect is sufficiently odd to have produced two contrasting explanations. The word is concentrated both in the extreme south-west of England, in Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall, with a few instances in southern counties, and in Derbyshire and adjoining parts of North Staffordshire and East Cheshire. The earlier view that the word originated in Cornwall and was carried north by migrating Cornish miners<sup>22</sup> has more recently been challenged by K. Cameron, who can find no evidence for such northward migration. On the contrary, he adduces evidence that throughout the fourteenth century Derbyshire miners were impressed to work in the royal stannaries in the south-west, and therefore the element *torr*, Cameron concludes, was probably native to Derbyshire.<sup>23</sup> Its early occurrence in the High Peak and later frequency in place-names and field-names in Derbyshire and in neighbouring Staffordshire, as well as its occurrence in the north-western alliterative poetry seem to confirm this conclusion. There is, for example, Gib Torr in the moorlands north of Leek or a few miles further north Shining Tor, halfway between Macclesfield and Buxton.

*clynt, nabb, sckerre, pike*

The stormy sea passage in *The Destruction of Troy*, which mentions *torres* (1983), contains several other hill-words and some expressive adjectives, one of them *clent* "steep" in the phrase "a clent hille", cognate with *clynt* which denotes "a rocky cliff, ledge of rock, or steep bank", a word confined almost wholly to northern England and Scotland. My Cheshire informant does not know the word, but the poet of *The Wars of Alexander* did and used it in a passage which creates admirably the impression of almost totally unnegotiable mountains:

Till he was comen till a cliffe at to þe cloudis semed,  
 þat was so staire & so stepe, þe stori me tellis,  
 Miȝt þar no wee bot with wyngis win to þe topp.  
 3it fand he clouen þurȝe þe clynt twa crasid gatis.

(*Wars Alex* 4827-30)

Another northern, non-alliterative poem, *Cursor Mundi*, uses the word in the alliterating phrase "in to clinttes and in to clous", in line 17590 of the Cotton text, but it is certainly very rare.<sup>24</sup> The other published versions of the poem read respectively *clyffe*, *cliftes*, and *clif*.

*Clynt* is one of a further group of uncommon words, nearly all of Scandinavian origin, which occur in only one or two of the alliterative poems and are also found in the toponymy of the real Gawain country. The poet of *The Wars of Alexander* is the only one to use *nabb*, *sckerre*, and *pike*; *how* also occurs in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*; Langland uses *toft* in the sense of "a hillock in flat country"; and the *Gawain*-poet alone uses *scowte* and *slente*. *Nabb* (Old Norse *nabbi*, *nabbr*) denotes "a projecting peak or point of a hill" and is used once in *The Wars of Alexander* 5494 in the same contextual manner as the word *lawe* in line 5485 to describe the place where the twenty-two kings are "enclosed". In Lancashire it occurs as the element *Nab* in a personal name of 1324 (Kristensson, p.37) and it is found in place-names, chiefly minor names, in several counties of Scandinavian settlement. The combination *Nab Scar*, which occurs in North Yorkshire and in Cumbria, combines *nabb* with *sckerre* (Old Norse *sker*) "a rock, scar, scaur", also used once in *The Wars of Alexander*, in a very hilly passage, in the powerfully sonorous line,

Scutis to þe scharpe schew sckerres a hundreth.

(*Wars Alex* 4865)

The dialectal meaning of *scar* as "a bed of rough gravel" (AHS II, p.124) has a not improbable parallel in the response "a mine hole, same as the Devil's Grave" offered to this word by my elderly dialect informant from Alderley Edge. The word occurs in a few late place-names in north-west Derbyshire and in north-east Cheshire, as in the rocky escarpment called The Scaurs east of Macclesfield, and there are other instances to the north, as in the personal name *Tho. del Skerr* recorded in Yorkshire c. 1346 (Kristensson, p.40). The Scottish usage of "skerry" retains the Old Norse meaning of "an

isolated rock in the sea".

The word *pike* derives from Old English *pīc* "a point", which is not recorded in any topographical sense but is cognate with *pēac* "knoll, hill, peak" which occurs in the Derbyshire Peak. *Pike* developed the common north-country meaning "a pointed or conical hill" or simply "a hill". It may also have been influenced by a Scandinavian cognate which survives as Norwegian dialectal *pik* with a similar meaning (AHS II, p.63). The word also occurs in the place-names of counties, like Essex and Kent, which are at some remove from Scandinavian influence. The *English Dialect Dictionary* records the topographical meanings in Gloucestershire and West Derbyshire and thence northwards. In *The Wars of Alexander* 4818 the word occurs once as an alliterating hill-word in the rather nondescript line

pan past þai doun fra þat pike into a playn launde.

*howe, toft, scowte, slente*

The same poem shares with *The Awntyrs off Arthure* the word *howe* which in areas of Scandinavian settlement probably represents Old Norse *haugr* rather than Old English *hōh*. The latter is used variously in topography to denote "a promontory, a projecting piece of land in the bend of a river or in more level ground, a ridge" and in north-country dialects "a steep glen, a deep cleft in the rocks" (AHS I, pp.256f.). The former generally denotes "a natural or an artificial mound, a hillock, knoll, or tumulus" as in the Derbyshire Ramshaw or the Cheshire place-name Rainow, "raven's hill". There is no indication that either of the two poets who used this word was thinking of any particular kind of mound or hill; indeed, the opposite meaning "glen" would serve as well:

Be hize hillis & howis & be holu3e dounes.

(*Wars Alex* 3486)

The huntis þei halowe in hurstes and huwes.

(*Awnt Arth* 57)

The only occurrence of *toft* in alliterative poetry in the sense of "a hillock in flat country" is Langland's description of "a tour on a toft" early in *Piers Plowman* (B Prol 14 and B I, 12). The word, whose original meaning is "a building plot, a curtilage" or "a homestead" as in the Derbyshire name Hardstoft, Hert's homestead, in Scarsdale hundred, probably acquired the secondary sense of "a low hill" wherever raised ground offered the most suitable building sites in marshy or similar terrain (cp. AHS II, pp.181ff.). Langland's tower on a *toft*, contrasted with "a deep dale bynepe", is designed to drive home a spiritual truth, however, rather than create an accurate scenic effect.<sup>25</sup>

The *Gawain*-poet uses *scowte* (Old Norse *skúti*) once in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 2167, in a resonant line,

þe skwez of þe scowtes skayned hym þo3t,

which recalls line 4865 of *The Wars of Alexander*, quoted earlier, but there *scutis* is a verb, "to project". The word *scowte* survives in the Derbyshire Kinder Scout, of which there are only late forms, but is apparently as uncommon in place-names as in poetry. There is sufficient evidence, however, to determine its meaning as "a high or projecting rock, hill, or ridge". It seems to belong particularly to the north-west and north-west midlands. A parallel similar to that between *scowtes* and *scutis* is provided by the *Gawain*-poet's phrase "slentyng of arwes" (*Gaw* 1160) and his line

Bygonde þe broke, by slente oper slade,

in *Pearl* 141, where *slente* means "a hill-side or gentle hill-slope" and could be either of Old English or of Old Norse derivation (cf. Old Swedish *slind* "side"). Although alliteration may have determined the use of both *scowtes* and *slente* by this poet, the former appears to possess more likely local associations, whereas the latter word, in its dialect form *slent* "slope", belongs rather to eastern England and Scotland. I have found no other instance of *slente* in alliterative poetry.

*rokke, roche, rocher*

Among words meaning more specifically "rock, rocky hill", the group *rokke, roche, rocher* is of interest. The first two appear to be treated as largely synonymous by many of the alliterative poets and place-names do not help in differentiating them. *The Wars of Alexander*, for example, juxtaposes them as apparent synonyms in "rochis & rogh stanes, rokkis vnfaire" (4864). Yet it may be possible to attempt some differentiation. When the poet of *The Destruction of Troy*, for example, draws his picture of King Nauplius's kingdom at the beginning of Book XXXII, he seems to denote by *roches* the rocky and rugged edges or ridges of hills, whereas *rokkes* are the coastal outcrops that show above the water until covered by the high tide:

After a syde of the sea, sothely to telle,  
Was a-party a prounse, pight full of hilles,  
With roches full rogh, ragget with stones,  
At the full of the flode flet all aboue,  
By the bourdurs aboute, bret full of rokkes.

(*Destr Troy* 12557-61)

All occurrences of *rokke* in this poem are associated with the sea, and the *Gawain*-poet similarly uses the word for the mountain top of Ararat on which the Ark comes to rest above the waters of the Flood in *Cleanness* 446, and to denote the submarine rocks negotiated by the whale in *Patience* 254.<sup>26</sup> In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and in *Pearl*, on the other hand, the word *rokke* denotes inland features, of which the guide's directive to Sir Gawain to ride "doun þis ilke rake bi 3on rokke syde" (2144) is the most specific. In the phrase "renkkes in þat ryche rok" in *Cleanness* 1514 *rok* is probably a different word. As the poet had earlier placed Babylon "on a plat playn" (1379), *rok* is unlikely to have its topographical meaning in

line 1514, and J.J. Anderson's rendering "that splendid company", following most previous editors, makes acceptable sense.<sup>27</sup>

*Roche* appears to be more readily associated with adjectives denoting hardness and ruggedness, not necessarily alliterating, and with the idea of shelter. Three of the manuscripts of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* read at line 81

They ranne faste to the roches for reddoure of þe raynne,

as the equivalent of Douce's reading "to reset þei ronne", and the reading *roches* could well be suspect were it not for corroboration of the connotation of shelter or resting place from other poems. Thus in *William of Palerne* there are two clear instances (2367, 2724), and in *The Destruction of Troy* Pyrrhus has gone to "þe rocis to rest hym a qwyle" (13587). The words "he in þe roche stoppis" are applied to the incident in *The Wars of Alexander* (5496) in which twenty-two kings are "enclosed" on a mountain top or in a pass, also referred to, as we noted earlier, as "a straite lawe" and "þe nabb"; hence the suggested connotations of *roche* as some kind of sheltered spot in a rocky locale may here have been extended to the two other hill-words as well. The association with hardness is borne out by the *Gawain*-poet's adjective "in roché grounde" (*Gaw* 2294) which E.M. Wright explained as equivalent to the Cheshire and Shropshire word *rochy*, meaning "hard, gravelly",<sup>28</sup> as well as by such epithets as "harde" and "ragged" in several of the poems.

The third word in this group is *rocher* and it is quite uncommon. A.H. Smith does not list it as a place-name element and in alliterative poetry it occurs only in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, once in the singular and twice in the plural. The only other occurrences known to me, in the plural *rochers*, are in two consecutive lines (7081, 7082) of the metrical romance *Kyng Alisaunder*.<sup>29</sup> In the plural the most likely meaning is that of "a series of rocky cliffs forming an escarpment", as Mrs Wright first suggested in the same article, on the strength of dialect usage in Derbyshire and Yorkshire; while in the singular the only occurrence of the word in the line "þer as þe rogh rocher vnrydely watz fallen" (*Gaw* 1432) suggests a definite landmark. The definite article and the unusual word combine to point to some particular tumbled mass of rock such as it to be found in various places in the North Staffordshire moorlands close to the Roaches, a steep rocky bank or escarpment of nearly two miles in length above the valley of Leekfrith, which answers strikingly to the poet's echoing *rocherez* (*Gaw* 1427, 1698) at the heart of the real *Gawain* country. That the poet used the uncommon word *rocheres* rather than *roches* may indicate local usage which has not survived in the name Roaches, or may have been intended as a signal to alert the audience to a local feature which would have been familiar but might have been overlooked under a more common appellation. The word *rocher* occurs occasionally in later works from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. In French, whence it originates, it is attested in the Middle Ages, but cited as a variant of *rochier* and simply glossed "Fels" in Tobler-Lommatzsch.<sup>30</sup>

*bache, clough, gille, hope*

Valley-words are fewer in number. One of the most distinctive midland words is *bache* (*beche* in the east midlands), from Old English *bece*, *bæce* "stream valley". The word worried the reviser of the original version of Layamon's *Brut* who in three passages (381, 1299, 10866) substituted other words for it or removed it.<sup>31</sup> Langland was familiar with *bache*, and the new editions of the A and B texts of *Piers Plowman* have rightly turned Skeat's "valays and hilles" (A VI, 2; B V, 514) into the more characteristic "baches and hilles". The meanings of *bache* range from "a valley" to "a stream in a valley", to "a field or piece of flat ground near a stream in a valley", and even to "a tract of moorland". The Derbyshire Beighton at the northern tip of Scarsdale hundred is the *tun* "farm" by the stream (*bache*) and at Rainow near Macclesfield the name Patch may represent *bache*, as the *English Dialect Dictionary* suggests, and similarly the name Patch Head near Dove Head Spring north-east of Flash by the Staffordshire-Derbyshire boundary may contain the same element. The sense of "stream" is intended in the mention of "baches woxen ablode a-boute in þe vale" in *The Siege of Jerusalem* 559. This use and Langland's are the only instances I have found in the alliterative poems. In place-names the word is most common in the midlands, as in Sandbach in Cheshire, Hawkbach in Staffordshire, or Burbage in Derbyshire. The personal name Will. de la Bache is cited by the *Middle English Dictionary* from Cheshire A.D. 1296 and Löfvenberg (p.5) cites other examples from Worcestershire. The word survives in the dialect of my Cheshire informant with the meaning of "a piece of land, flatter than a vale".

Three other characteristic valley-words of the *Gawain* country are *clough*, *gille*, and *hope*. *Clough* "deep valley, ravine, clough", probably of Old English origin, is common in dialects and place-names northwards from Staffordshire and Derbyshire (AHS I, p.99), and is found in fourteenth-century personal names like Henr. del Fayreclogh from Lancashire (Kristensson, p.60). At the heart of the real *Gawain* country are numerous ravines and smaller valleys with names like Deepclough, Oaken Clough, Tagsclough, and Wildboardclough. Alliteration of *cloughes* (also *clowes*, *clewez*) with *clyffes* occurs in *Morte Arthure* 2013, 2019, and with *cragges* in line 941, as well as in line 150 of *The Awntyrs off Arthure*. The Thornton manuscript of the latter poem reads "in cleues so clene", at line 67 where Douce has "within schaghes [woods] schene", and in line 129 Thornton's "in the clewes" appears as "in þe skowes [woods]" in Douce: in both cases unfamiliarity with the word appears to have caused Thornton's cloughs to become Douce's woods. *Cursor Mundi*, as we noted earlier, alliterates it with the rare word *clinttes*, and it occurs occasionally in other northern texts. In *Morte Arthure* 2396 occurs the phrase "in theis kleuys encloside with hilles", which the *Middle English Dictionary* cites as the only (queried) instance of the meaning "a narrow valley" produced by a formal blend of Old English *clif* "cliff" and *clifa* "cleft, chasm". It is more likely that the word is yet another variant spelling of *cloughes*.

*Gille* also denotes "a narrow rocky valley or ravine". It derives from Old West Scandinavian *gil* and is common especially "in the mountainous regions of the Yorkshire Pennines and the Lake



District settled by Norwegian Vikings" (AHS I, p.200). It occurs in place-names and personal names from Derbyshire northwards and the rare south-eastern forms may be, as the *Middle English Dictionary* suggests, borrowings from the north or derive from a hypothetical Old English \**gyll*. In dialect usage the word generally refers to a wooded valley, a sense borne out by the poet of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* associating "greues and gylles" (418). As there are no "glens" in the alliterative poems, although the element is found in place-names, *gille* provided occasionally useful *g*-alliteration, as in "he glode thurgh the gille by a gate syde" (*Destr Troy* 13529).

Alliteration may also account for the two instances found of *hope* "a hollow among hills, a small enclosed valley, especially one overhanging the main valley", a sense of Old English *hop* not in evidence before the Middle English period and found with this meaning especially in the midlands and north (AHS I, p.260). Old Norse *hóp* "a small inlet or bay" may be the root in these cases, rather than Old English *hop* which denotes "a plot of enclosed land, especially in marshes or fens" and is found thus in some eastern place-names and recorded in personal names from Sussex (Löfvenberg, p.107). The sense of "valley" is found in place-names and field-names in various midland and northern counties, including Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Derbyshire, and in personal names like Rob. de la Fonhope, Herefordshire A.D. 1279 (Kristensson, p.61). In *The Wars of Alexander* occurs the phrase "be-twene twa hillis in a hope" (5390), and the poet of *Morte Arthure* employs the word similarly for alliteration with *hymlande* "border-lands" and *hillys*:

Thorowe hopes and hymlande, hillys and other.

(*Morte Arth* 2503)

*coue, dene, cumbe, slake, dell*

At line 5422 of *The Wars of Alexander* the hero and his company enter "a vale full of vermyne" which is also referred to as "a deyne" (5421) and "þe coue" (5427), both of them very rare words in alliterative poetry. Indeed, *coue* occurs only here, as a synonym for valley, although as an element with various related meanings, "shelter, a narrow valley, a cove", it is found in place-names in Cheshire and Staffordshire and other, mainly more southerly, counties. The usual Old English word for valley was *denu*, whence Middle English *dene*, found on the map wherever valleys exist, although in the Danelaw it was frequently replaced by Scandinavian *dalr* (AHS I, p.130), and in some areas more local words were often used instead, like *clough* in north-east Cheshire and north-west Derbyshire. The poet of *The Wars of Alexander* (5421) uses *dene* for alliteration; the *Gawain*-poet uses it for rhyme in *Pearl* 295:

þou says þou traweȝ me in þis dene.

In none of these instances does either *coue* or *dene* suggest any special connotations.

On the other hand, the poet of *Mum and the Sothsegger* may deliberately have chosen a west-country word, *cumbe*, as he leads up

to the most elaborate scenic description in the poem, of which the editors remark that "the prospect is a typical view of the West Country" (Day and Steele, p.121). The poet's line (878),

Yn a cumbe cressing on a creste wise,

as he climbs steadily and "myrily to maistrie þe hilles" suggests with particular fitness one of the dialectal meanings of *cumbe*, "the head of a valley", in this instance clearly visualized with a sense of topographical precision. The word is common in south-western and south-west midland counties and occurs in Cheshire and Derbyshire place-names. It is rare in Yorkshire and the east midlands.

Another word rarely found in poetry is *slake*, from Old West Scandinavian *slakki*, which combines the meanings of "a hollow in the ground, a shallow depression" with that of "a small shallow valley". My Cheshire informant knows the word as current in his dialect with the meaning of "a boggy valley", a conflation of the dialectal *slake* and *slack* recorded in the *English Dialect Dictionary*. In *Morte Arthure* 3719,

Thane was it slyke a slowde in slakkes fulle hugge,

the picture is one of numerous watery hollows on the sea-shore after the tide has receded, and it is here that Sir Gawain meets his death. The word was most probably adopted from this passage by the poet of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* who predicts the knight's death thus:

Gete þe, Sir Gawayn,  
The boldest of Bretayne;  
In a slake þou shal be slayne.

(Awnt Arth 296-8)

The word occurs in north-midland and northern place-names and minor names, quite frequently in north-west Derbyshire, for example, and in personal names like Henr. del Slake, recorded in fourteenth-century Lancashire (Kristensson, p.40).

A valley-word of pure convenience is *dell*, found in place-names almost wholly in the south, but known in northern dialects as "a little dale, a narrow valley" and also as "a pit". The latter sense well fits the phrase "deuelys delle" in *The Castle of Perseverance* 3125. In *The Awntyrs off Arthure* "þe (depe) delles" twice provides an easy rhyme for the formulaic "frithes and felles" (6, 51) and similar mechanical instances occur in the Scottish alliterative poems.

*slade, dale, vale, valay*

Finally, there is a group of four valley-words, all of which occur in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: *slade, dale, vale, and valay*. Of these the least common is *slade*, generally glossed simply "valley", although A.H. Smith admits that the word may have possessed "some more particular application which has not yet been determined". In Cheshire the *English Dialect Dictionary* notes the dialectal

meaning "a hollow with wooded banks" and this occurs as an element in occasional minor names in various parts of the country. So does the sense of "a broad strip of greensward between two woods", both of which meanings connote wooded slopes. The word is known to my informant from Alderley Edge only as an element in place-names and field-names. The sense of "a slope or bank" is suggested by the phrase "by slente oþer slade" in *Pearl* 141, where *slente*, as we noted earlier, means "a hill-side or gentle hill-slope". A similar meaning attaches to *slade* in *Morte Arthure* 2978 where it is equated with *slope* "hill-side" in the previous line. Despite the demands of four lines of alliteration on *sl-*, the poet presumably felt that such semantic equating was permissible. At the same time, the phrase "sixty slongene in a slade" (*Morte Arth* 2978) illustrates the ready association of *slade* with "slaughter" for purposes of alliteration, a combination exploited to the full in *The Destruction of Troy* where all nine occurrences of *slade* can be thus accounted for.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the guide is made to point almost in the same breath, in succeeding lines (2146-7) to "þe launde" and "þat slade" where connotations of woodland are appropriate, and when earlier in the poem does are "dryuen with gret dyn to þe depe sladez" (1159) woodland is again mentioned ("vnder wande", 1161). Only the bare "in sclade" in *Pearl* appears to be purely formulaic. Chaucer, incidentally, does not use *slade* at all. The evidence is slender, but dialectal usage, the occasional combination of *slade* in place-names with words denoting trees or wood, and the handful of instances in the alliterative poems suggest that the word may have denoted "a slope or bank" as well as "a valley" and that it may have possessed connotations of woodland.

Chaucer does use the word *dale*, however, mainly in rhyme, and in *Sir Thopas* in the form of the familiar clichés to which other poets, alliterative and rhyming, were only too prone. The association of *dale* with "deep", inherited from Old English, was alliteratively inevitable and was probably topographically justified. There is frequent alliteration also with *dounes* and the verb *dryue*, and many occurrences of *dale* can be thus explained, as in the case of the *Gawain*-poet, who conjoins *drof* with *dale* twice (*Gaw* 1151, 2005), with *doun* once (*Pearl* 121), and with *depe* once (*Cleanness* 384). Only from the non-alliterating "ryȝt to þe dale" at the end of line 2162 in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as Sir Gawain descends towards the locale of the Green Chapel, can a more deliberate topographical intention in the use of the word be gleaned. Here the emphasis is on ruggedness and wildness, and on the steep descent. If *slade* connoted wooded valley slopes, *dale* suggests depth and downward descent into it. The contrast between the depth of the dale and the heights above is similarly pointed in *Morte Arthure* 3250-1:

Than discendis in the dale, down fra the clowddez,  
A duches . . . ,

where it is tempting to take *clowddez* as meaning "lofty hills", and in *Mum and the Sothsegger* 932-3, where the speaker, having surveyed that "typical West Country prospect",

moued dovne fro þe mote to þe midwardz  
And so a-dovne to þe dale.

Langland, as we noted earlier, similarly juxtaposes the conspicuous tower on a *toft* with "a deep dale byneþe" (*Piers Plowman* B Prol 15), but in view of the normal meaning of *toft* the contrast here is less a topographical one between a high hill and a deep valley than the symbolic one between tower and dungeon. In place-names *dale* is a common element and where it is topographically appropriate, in more northern parts, it may represent Old Norse *dalr* rather than its Old English cognate. In Old Norse literature, as in Old English, the alliterating combination "deep dales", *djúpir dalir*, is to be found, as in *Hárbarðsljóð* 18,<sup>32</sup> and the word is common in compounds and local names. We may thus regard *dale* as possessing a high alliterative rating in Middle English, as being ready to hand for formulaic phrases, and as connoting primarily the depth of a valley.

*Vale* and *valay* both derive from Old French. Chaucer uses *valay* half a dozen times, but *vale* only once, with a proper name in "the vale of Galgopheye" in *The Knight's Tale*. But there is no discernible system with proper names: we find both the vale and the valley of Jehoshaphat, and the vale of Viterbo and the valley of Jordan and so forth in Middle English literature. What is certain is that contrary to Chaucer's usage *vale* is common in alliterative poetry and *valay* is rare. Several poets seem to regard *vale* as an appropriate non-alliterating word with which to end a line: for example, nearly half the occurrences of the word in *The Wars of Alexander* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*, three out of the *Gawain*-poet's four uses, and all five instances in *The Destruction of Troy* are of this sort. The poet of *Morte Arthure* uses *vale* three times as often as *dale* but restricts its application almost entirely to two locations and here the word alliterates in most of its occurrences. In place-names both words are uncommon, but *vale* is a little less so than *valay* and it usually denotes a wide valley, like Vale Royal in Cheshire or the Vale of Evesham in Worcestershire. My Cheshire informant grades *vale* as "not as steep as a valley", while *dale* is presumably steeper than either. The *Gawain*-poet reserves *valay* for two specific references to the locale of the Green Chapel, neither of them at all formulaic:

Til þou be brogt to þe bopem of þe brem valay,  
(Gaw 2145)

And we ar in þis valay verayly oure one.  
(Gaw 2245)

Apparently this was as distinctive a word for him as *rocherez* or *knot* or *knarre*, or words drawn from other topographical categories not discussed in this paper. Such words look like lexical signals pointing to topographical landmarks, in the case of *valay* to some very particular valley. Moreover, as the word *valay* appears doomed in the new texts of *Piers Plowman*, probably correctly so, its rarity increases. It makes a nonce alliterating appearance in *Mum and the Sothsegger* II, 150, and occurs once in the Scottish poem *The Pistill of Susan* in rhyme at the end of line 215<sup>33</sup> where it is not so much

suspect (all the versions agree) as inappropriate in introducing a *valay* into an enclosed *pomeri* or fruit-garden.

In conclusion, the following points emerge from the preceding discussion. There is an impressive range and variety in the Middle English topographical vocabulary, of which the hill and valley words provide a representative specimen. Not surprisingly, because much of alliterative poetry deals with "aunters" and because mountains are as a rule more striking, more difficult, more hazardous than valleys, there are roughly twice as many words for hill as for valley. Alliteration and, where appropriate, rhyme play an important part in the range of these words, in their often formulaic patterning, and in the choice of a particular word made by a poet in any given line. This choice is often prosodic and not contextual, but there are sufficient instances where it is not and where other reasons must be sought. These may be stylistic reasons, like the sound of a word, as in the line

Scutis to þe scharpe schew sckerres a hundreth  
(Wars Alex 4865)

with its unique choice of *sckerres*. Or else, a word may be used because the poet and possibly his audience knew it as an intimately familiar part of their local speech and in local place-names and personal names. Of this kind are words like *coppe*, *egge*, and *torre*, which figure in Dr Plot's interesting list of typical Staffordshire hill words,<sup>34</sup> as well as valley words like *bache*, *hope*, and *slake*, and some words of this type, as we have seen, are still familiar in local north-east Cheshire dialect. Or again, a word may have definite local reference for poet and audience: in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* this is obviously true of the place-names mentioned in the poem - *Norþe Wales*, *Anglesay*, *Wyrle* - and may be true also of some of the more esoteric terms used in this poem, words like *knot* and *knarre* and possibly *valay*.

Correlation between some of the less common topographical terms used in the alliterative poems and their occurrence in place-names within reasonably definable limits of the north-west and the west and north-west midlands may be possible in some cases. The word *gille*, for example, belongs to regions settled by Norwegian vikings and occurs in only two of the poems where it accords with the dialectal characteristics of the surviving texts. Somewhat less narrowly, the word *clough* is a northern and north-west midland term and would most likely have been used by poets familiar with such features in their countryside.

The widest range of hill and valley words in the alliterative poetry is in *The Wars of Alexander* and several distinctive topographical terms are unique to it, for example, *nabb*, *pike*, *sckerres*, while some others, like *howe* and *hope* are shared by only one other poem. The poet responds vividly to mountainous scenery, but he clearly did not care for it. He talks of hideous hills, villainous vales, and dreary dales, no doubt infusing the alliterating epithets with some personal feeling. The words he employs point unmistakably

to the region whose dialect he uses, but his landscapes, tracing adventures in foreign parts, are nowhere so sharply visualized that they can be regarded as drawn, as it were, from the map. This is true also, albeit to a lesser extent, of the poet of *Morte Arthure* who creates some vivid landscapes with the help of an interesting topographical vocabulary some of which is undoubtedly western despite the suggested north-east midland provenance of the surviving text. And it is true also of the celebrated prospect in *Mum and the Sothsegger* which, despite an occasional local touch like the use of *cumbe*, describes the vista opening before the poet-narrator very much in the enumerative manner of a traditional *descriptio loci*. Even Langland's landscapes, localized though they are by his reference to the Malvern hills and by his use of some characteristic west-midland terms like *bache*, are spiritual rather than actual places.

Only the *Gawain*-poet, as one critic has put it, "achieves scenic effects such as are quite rare in Middle English literature",<sup>35</sup> despite the fact that his topographical vocabulary is not as rich as that of the man who composed *The Wars of Alexander*. He too has his share of unusual terms, distributed among his four poems, but he used these with much greater skill and subtlety to create in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* landscapes which generations of readers have somehow felt to be "real". There can be little doubt that the region to which his words, his sharply visualized landscapes, and toponymy all point can be narrowed down to quite a small area at the heart of the real *Gawain* country. It is here, in the moorlands of the southern Pennines where the counties of Cheshire, Staffordshire, and Derbyshire adjoin, where northern as well as more southerly and south-western words co-exist, that the poet's hill and valley words, as well as other topographical terms, fit in with local place-names and with specific, indeed still identifiable features of the local landscape.<sup>36</sup>

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this paper was read to the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature at Merton College, Oxford, on 12 March 1977.
- <sup>2</sup> Cp. "Woods and Forests in the Gawain country", forthcoming in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*. Others are in preparation.
- <sup>3</sup> I have attempted to do this in "Staffordshire and Cheshire landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", forthcoming in *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*.
- <sup>4</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, 2nd ed. revised by N. Davis (Oxford, 1967).
- <sup>5</sup> *William of Palerne*, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS, ES 1 (1867).
- <sup>6</sup> *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, ed. R. Hanna III (Manchester, 1974). The Douce manuscript which forms the base text of this edition represents the dialect of the region where Derbyshire, Staffordshire and East Cheshire meet (p.149). Practically all the topographical terms occur in the first part (A) of this poem.
- <sup>7</sup> See A.H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, E.P.N.S. XXV and XXVI (Cambridge, 1956 repr. 1970), I, p.19, hereafter abbreviated in the text as AHS.
- <sup>8</sup> *Pearl*, ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953); *The Siege of Jerusalem*, ed. E. Kölbing and M. Day, EETS, OS 188 (1932); *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS, ES 47 (1886).
- <sup>9</sup> *The 'Gest Hystoriale' of the Destruction of Troy*, ed. G.A. Panton and D. Donaldson, EETS, OS 39 and 56 (1869 and 1873).
- <sup>10</sup> *Morte Arthure*, ed. J. Finlayson (London, 1967). Passages not included in Finlayson's shortened version are quoted from the edition by E. Brock, EETS, OS 8 (1871).
- <sup>11</sup> For Chaucer references see the *Concordance* of J.S.P. Tatlock and A.G. Kennedy (Washington, 1927).
- <sup>12</sup> Ed. J.J. Anderson (Manchester, 1977).
- <sup>13</sup> *Piers Plowman, The B Version*, ed. G. Kane and E.T. Donaldson (London, 1975).
- <sup>14</sup> G. Kristensson, *Studies on Middle English Topographical Terms* (Lund, 1970), p.88, hereafter cited in the text as Kristensson. Cp. also M.T. Löfvenberg, *Studies on Middle English Local Surnames* (Lund, 1942), cited as Löfvenberg.
- <sup>15</sup> *A Good Short Debate between Winner and Waster*, ed. I. Gollancz (London, 1920; repr. Cambridge, 1974). I have discussed this use of *lawe* in the poem in "The Topography of *Wynnere and Wastoure*", *English Studies* 48 (1967), 135-6.

- 16 Ed. M.Y. Offord, *EETS*, OS 246 (1959).
- 17 K. Cameron, *The Place-Names of Derbyshire*, EPNS XXVII-XXIX (Cambridge, 1959), III, p.701.
- 18 I am grateful to Mr Alan Garner for recording these responses, more especially as *The Survey of English Dialects*, ed. H. Orton and E. Dieth (Leeds, 1962 et seq.), does not include hill and valley words, except for the question IV, 1, 10: "If the land is not level, what do you call a part that goes up gently?", to which the responses were *slope* and *bonk* in north-east Cheshire and North Staffordshire, and *slope* in north-west Derbyshire.
- 19 Ed. E.G. Stanley (London, 1960).
- 20 The historical value of Yates's map is stressed by S.A.H. Burne, 'Early Staffordshire Maps', *North Staffordshire Field Club Transactions* 54 (1919-20), 81-2.
- 21 *Mum and the Sothsegger*, ed. M. Day and R. Steele, *EETS*, OS 199 (1936).
- 22 A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Sussex*, EPNS VI and VII (Cambridge, 1929), I, p.37n.
- 23 K. Cameron, *Place-Names of Derbyshire*, III, pp.709-10.
- 24 *Cursor Mundi*, ed. R. Morris, *EETS*, OS 62 (1876).
- 25 Langland's use of topographical terms is discussed in my "The Langland Country" in *Piers Plowman, Critical Approaches*, ed. S.S. Hussey (London, 1969), pp.226-44.
- 26 *Patience*, ed. J.J. Anderson (Manchester, 1969).
- 27 The word is presumably the same as in 'all the Remnond and Roke' in *The Destruction of Troy* 7149, and may be related to *ruck*, common in midland, north-western, and northern dialects with the meaning 'heap, mass, throng'.
- 28 E.M. Wright, "Notes on 'Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight'", *Englische Studien* 36 (1906), 218.
- 29 Ed. G.V. Smithers, *EETS*, OS 227 (1952).
- 30 Tobler-Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, VIII (Wiesbaden, 1971), s.v. *rochier*.
- 31 Lažamon: *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie, 2 vols., *EETS* 250 and 277 (1963 and 1978).
- 32 *Edda*, ed. G. Neckel, 3rd ed. rev. H. Kuhn (Heidelberg, 1962).
- 33 *Scottish Alliterative Poems*, ed. F.J. Amours, Scottish Text Society 27 and 28 (Edinburgh and London, 1892 and 1897).
- 34 Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (Oxford, 1686), p.110.



<sup>35</sup> D. Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London, 1968), p.204.

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