

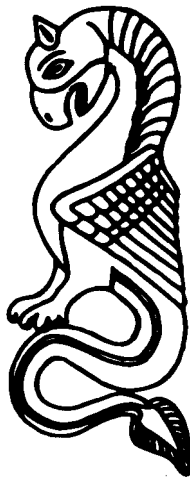
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SCOTTISH FIELD: ALLITERATIVE VERSE AND STANLEY ENCOMIUM
IN THE PERCY FOLIO

By DAVID A. LAWTON

It has long been recognised as singular and significant that a taste for Middle English alliterative verse survived into the sixteenth century in Lancashire and Cheshire. The major evidence for the survival is the composition of the last English unrhymed long line alliterative poem, *Scottish Field*, by a gentleman from Baguley, Cheshire, to celebrate the English victory at Flodden in 1513.

But this is not the sole piece of evidence. There is evidence of copying. In an important article published in 1958, C.A. Luttrell demonstrated that the only extant copy of the *Destruction of Troy* (Hunterian MS V 2.8) was made c.1540 by Thomas Chetham of Nuthurst, S. Lancs.¹ Another gentleman, Humfrey Newton of Pownall, Cheshire (1466-1536) copied among his own autograph poems in Bodl. MS Lat. Misc. c. 66 a transcript of what R.H. Robbins called a "*Gawain-epigone*".² The poem is, I think, a burlesque; but it is certainly, as Robbins said, "a conscious imitation of the alliterative style of a hundred years earlier" and shows "an intimate acquaintance with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*". Robbins concluded:

If this view is accepted it follows that the alliterative tradition was long kept alive in the general area in which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the poems relating to it were written.³

There is also evidence of ownership. Luttrell discussed BL MS Harley 2250, which contains the sole extant copy of *St. Erkenwald*, and its ownership c.1530 by Thomas Bowker, cantarist in the chantry of the Booths of Barton at Eccles, Lancs. Marginalia on f.75v establish a connection with Elizabeth Booth of Dunham Massey, Cheshire,⁴ and, in another pen-trial, with one William Barton.⁵ To a list of Lancashire and Cheshire gentry of the first half of the sixteenth century with access to Middle English alliterative texts, we may add the name of Thomas Ireland of Hale: his signature appears on f.48 of the Ireland Blackburne manuscript, which contains one of the four extant texts of the *Awntyrs off Arthure*.⁶

There is, then, no shortage of manuscript evidence for alliterative tastes among Lancashire and Cheshire gentry in the first half of the sixteenth century. In this respect, the early sixteenth-century situation may be seen as a chronological point of reference. It looks back to the composition of *St. Erkenwald* and the poems of the *Gawain*-manuscript, BL MS Cotton Nero A x: the dialect of all five

of these poems has been localised by Professor McIntosh near Holmes Chapel in East Cheshire.⁷ It looks forward to the contents of the Percy Folio manuscript, BL MS Additional 27879, including *Scottish Field* and the unique text of *Death and Life*. This manuscript has long been held to be the work of a seventeenth century copyist from either Lancashire or Cheshire.⁸ Percy's own theory, recorded on f.lv of the manuscript, was that the scribe was the seventeenth-century Cheshire author, Thomas Blount. Humphrey Pitt, in whose house the Folio was found, told Percy that he had bought the library of a descendant of Blount who was an apothecary in Shifnal. Percy's suggestion is frequently overlooked by those more interested in the circumstantial anecdote about Pitt's parlourmaid. It may be that Percy's explanations regarding the condition of the manuscript are not to be trusted, especially in view of his tacit apology for his own early failure to "reverence" it. But his suggestion about the manuscript's provenance is more mundane and claims the support of Pitt. From any other source than Percy, it would long have been accepted.

The purpose of this article is to highlight evidence for continuity of audience, and to a lesser extent of taste, between the poems of Cotton Nero A x and the Percy Folio. The point of departure for such an argument is *Scottish Field*, one of the two unrhymed alliterative poems in the Percy Folio.

Scottish Field, perhaps as a result of its low quality, has received insufficient attention from literary scholars. The poem is in fact of prime importance as a document for the literary historian - in view of its date, its form, and the fact that we may reconstruct its literary and social milieu more accurately than is the case with any other long-line unrhymed alliterative poem.

It is a reasonable expectation that *Scottish Field* should prove heavily indebted in style and phraseology to earlier alliterative poems. In the last published edition of the poem, J.P. Oakden notes close parallels between *Scottish Field* and its companion in the Percy Folio, *Death and Life*, and a general similarity among the endings of these two poems, *Gawain* and the *Destruction of Troy*: more particularly, there is a strong case for specific indebtedness on the part of the poet of *Scottish Field* to the *Destruction of Troy*.⁹ However, I avoid here any attempts to map particular resemblances of phrase between *Scottish Field* and earlier works in the same form: particular points of resemblance are almost always inconclusive. They resolve themselves not into neat formulations of specific sources but into a sense on the reader's part of the poet's familiarity with alliterative tradition and conventions. Oakden came to the justifiable conclusion that *Scottish Field* "leaves the impression of a mosaic derived from older alliterative works".¹⁰ The reasonable, and important, inference is that the poet of *Scottish Field* had access to texts of earlier alliterative poems, which were available in the Lancashire and Cheshire area.

The date of *Scottish Field* is generally accepted as 1515 or 1516, since the poem contains an elegaic tribute to James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, who died in 1515 (lines 280-92); but its unreliability as an account of the battle, and its clear confusion of Lord Home

with Lord Maxwell (lines 140, 191), may militate in favour of a date a decade or two later than this. The name *Maxwell* is bound into the alliteration of the lines, which reduces the possibility of scribal alteration. The poem may conceivably refer to the fourth Lord Maxwell, who was killed at Flodden. However, the Lord Maxwell notorious for border raids (the context of the reference in *Scottish Field*) was the fifth of that title, who was active in the period from the mid-1520s to the early 1540s; this Maxwell gained power and estates from the forfeiture of Lord Home in 1516 (*DNB* 13.132), and here we have the probable source of the error in *Scottish Field*.

The poet himself gives an unusually full statement of his identity. Its historical hyperbole, the self-conscious arrogation of a Saxon pedigree, may provide a clue to his use of the unrhymed alliterative long-line form - it looks like an equally self-conscious archaism, an atavistic gesture:

He was a gentleman by Iesu that this iest made . . .
Att Bagily that bearne his bidding place had
& his ancetors of old time have yearded their longe
Before William Conqueror this cuntry did inhabitt
(11.416, 418-20)¹¹

It is possible, judging from this, that the author was one of the two sons of Sir John Legh of Baguley alive at the time of the Battle of Flodden - either Henry or Richard Legh. It may be significant that the Leghs were closely connected with the Booths of Dunham Massey: the mother of Henry and Richard was Ellen Booth, whose father George (d.1483) named Sir John Legh his executor, and both Baguley Hall and Dunham Massey were in the parish of St. Mary's, Bowden, in the deanery of Frodsham.¹² The tribute which the poem provides to Sir John Booth of Barton, who was killed at Flodden, has a warmth which may confirm the importance of the Booth connection:

Sir John Booth of Barton was brought from his liffe,
A more bolder bearne was never borne of woman. (11.338-9)

The poem also includes a generous eulogy of Sir John Byron of Clayton, who was co-patron with the Booths of Dunham Massey of the chantry of the Booths of Barton at Eccles:¹³

Sir John Biron was neuer afrayd for no burne liuinge -
A more manfull man was not of this mold maked. (11.21-2)

But the overwhelming impulse behind *Scottish Field* is to glorify the Stanley family. Possibly because the Earl of Derby took no part in the Battle of Flodden, being engaged in the French wars at the time, the poem commences with a summary narrative of the Battle of Bosworth, referring to

Derby that deare earle that doughty hath beene euer, (1.10)

his brother Sir William Stanley of Holt, Chamberlain of Wales, and to his cousin, Sir John Savage of Clifton:

Sauage, his sisters sonne, a sege that was able. (1.12)

The Stanley interest united both Lancashire and Cheshire, and the poet makes full play of the success of the left wing under Sir Edward Stanley, created Lord Mounteagle after the battle:

The left wing to the rereward was my Lord Mounteagle
With many leeds of Lancashire that to himselfe longed,
Which foughten full freshly while the feild lasted.
(11.296-8)

He even contrives to salvage from the rout of the Cheshire contingent, who were not under Stanley command at Flodden, an oblique encomium:

When their captaine was keered away, there comfort was
gone;
They were wont in all warrs to wayt on the Stanleys;
They neuer fayled at noe forward that time that they were.
(11.333-5)

The part played in the Battle of Flodden by James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, and his natural son, Sir John Stanley of Handforth, receives almost disproportionate attention. This is particularly pointed in the only other manuscript of the poem, the Lyme MS. This manuscript has been deposited by its owner, Lord Newton, in the University of Manchester John Rylands Library, but two of the five parchment strips are now missing: a facsimile of the whole, made at a time when the manuscript was in considerably better condition, is found in Bodl. MS 2a Bodl. Dep. c. 129-30. In this manuscript, the name *Honforde* (line 345) is written in large letters: William Handforth was killed at Flodden, and his son-in-law, Sir John Stanley, thus came into possession of the Handforth estate.¹⁴ As well as displaying interest in Sir John Stanley's fortunes, the attention to the name of Handforth may indicate that the manuscript was originally made for the Brereton family (of Malpas, Cheshire), who came into possession of Handforth by the marriage of Sir John's divorced wife Margaret to Urian Brereton.¹⁵ If this is so, it would serve to establish an unusual and distinct familial connection between the older manuscript of *Scottish Field* and one of the poems of Stanley eulogy in the Percy Folio, *Lady Bessy*, which is a Brereton "ancestral romance".

This connection may be taken further. The real *raison d'être* of *Scottish Field* is Stanley eulogy: this is enough to associate it immediately with *Lady Bessy* and with two other poems found in the Percy Folio. All three related poems are written in ballad stanzas. All three are heavily alliterated,¹⁶ but not abnormally so for rough-hewn verse of the early sixteenth century. Phrasal parallels may be found between them and the two late alliterative poems of the Percy Folio: but I have eschewed evidence of such uncertain weight and quality. In any case, I do not seek to argue that the three ballad poems are linked in form to Middle English alliterative poetry. My argument is rather that, since the Percy Folio contains so much poetry of Stanley eulogy (including *Scottish Field*), we may deduce

that the sixteenth century survival of unrhymed alliterative poetry in the Lancashire and Cheshire area is connected with the taste of an audience that read and enjoyed the Stanley encomia. It may be helpful in establishing this connection to remember that Thomas Chetham, copyist of the *Destruction of Troy*, served as bailiff to the Earl of Derby,¹⁷ and that the mother of Thomas Ireland, owner of the *Awntyrs off Arthure*, "is said to have been the illegitimate daughter of James Stanley, Bishop of Ely".¹⁸ It is generally helpful to remember that

the House of Stanley was . . . the head of a great feudal clan in Lancashire and Cheshire, and most of the families in those counties were either directly or indirectly dependent on it.¹⁹

This judgement is confirmed by the report from the Visitation of Lancashire, conducted in 1533, of the response from Sir John Towneley of Towneley:

I soght hym all day Rydinge in the wyld cuntrye and his reward was ijs, wh^h the guyde hadd the moste parte and I had as evill a jorney as ever I hadd . . . I wote not what his wifes name is, nor I made no greate inquisition, for he would have no noate taken of hym, saying that ther was no more Gentilmen in Lancashire But my Lord of Derby and Mountegle.²⁰

The poetry of Stanley eulogy, to which *Scottish Field* is related, has never received adequate tabulation and classification in one place. I have thought it proper to offer here a summary tabulation which discusses relations between texts, date, if possible authorship, and manuscript location. The classification is divided into the two major Stanley victories described in *Scottish Field*, Bosworth and Flodden.

A. THE BATTLE OF BOSWORTH

(i) *Lady Bessy*²¹

This poem is found in three manuscripts:

- (a) the Percy Folio, BL MS Addit. 27879 (ff.231r-238v)
- (b) a manuscript formerly in the possession of Thomas Bateman of Youlgreave, Derbyshire, which I have been unable to trace. The copy was discussed twice by J.O. Halliwell (- Phillips), who assigned it to the reign of King Charles II.²²
- (c) BL MS Harley 367 (ff.89r-100v). The copy is in a good Secretary hand of c.1560-80. This hand appears in only one other part of this manuscript, in the copy of *Flodden Field* (ff.120r-127r). The manuscript is a miscellany containing the hands of John Stow and Ralph Starkey, and it is noteworthy that *Lady Bessy* and *Flodden Field*, although in the same hand, were originally separate manuscripts.²³

The heroine is the Princess Elizabeth, later wife of Henry VII, who is made to appeal for help to Lord Stanley. The poem (1082 lines in the Percy Folio) is a heavily romanticised account of the events leading up to Bosworth, and the battle itself.²⁴ The poem has been ascribed to Humphrey Brereton of Malpas, Cheshire, who plays a major, and probably fictional, part in the poem as messenger on behalf of the Princess and Lord Stanley (who is wrongly described as the Earl of Derby, an honour conferred upon him only after the victory).²⁵ This ascription cannot be regarded as particularly reliable, although the poet obviously had close connections with the Brereton family. The spirit of the poem in this respect is similar to the ancestral romances of the thirteenth century, and it is worth remarking that the inventory of a later Brereton, Richard Brereton of Ley, taken on February 24th, 1557, reveals him to have collected an extensive library including many English poems and two copies of *Piers Plowman*.²⁶ Brereton, who had been Escheator of Chester, was the great-grandson of Sir William Stanley of Holt, whose activities are celebrated in the poem, and of Sir Geoffrey Massey of Tatton, who founded a chantry at Eccles in 1498. Brereton was also the brother-in-law of John Booth of Barton.²⁷ The poem, which may safely be dated only to the first part of the sixteenth century, announces its interest in its introductory lines describing the reign of Richard III:

that time the Stanleys without doubt
were dread ouer England ffarr & neere (ll.9-10)

The poem alludes to James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, in his capacity as Warden of the Collegiate Church of Manchester (1485-1509). The College was lavishly endowed in 1422 as the centre of devotional and ecclesiastical activity over a large part of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield - an area which included the churches and chantries of Lancashire and East Cheshire. The history of the College in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries demonstrates an extraordinary coincidence of the major families of the area. The attention paid to the College in a poem written for the Breretons may be a result of their kinship with the Booths of Barton: John Booth of Barton, later Bishop of Exeter, was Warden of the College from 1459 to 1465. More likely, it is a homage to Bishop Stanley, who was buried in his own chantry within the Church.²⁸

(ii) *Bosworth Field*

This poem of 656 lines exists only in the Percy Folio manuscript (ff.216r-220v). In its account of the battle it is virtually identical in substance and phraseology with the closing portion of *Lady Bessy*. Although there is no sure means of determining an order of indebtedness, it seems probable that an earlier copy of *Bosworth Field* was incorporated by a Brereton into his ancestral ballad-romance, and this would argue for a date some time in the first three decades of the sixteenth century for the original of this poem. Its historical accuracy is considerable: lines 225-336 contain a list of the aristocracy and gentry arrayed on King Richard's side, and the poem is often straightforward propaganda directed at

justifying the rôle of the Stanleys and enhancing the part played by Lancashire and Cheshire:

had wee not need to Iesu to pray,
that made the world, the day & night,
to keep vs out of bale and woe?

2 shires against all England to ffight. (11.337-40)

Although the last line of the Percy Folio copy refers to King James I, the editors believed that the "original composition may well belong to an earlier period". That they were justified in this belief is established by

(iii) *Richard þe third his deathe by þ^e Lord Stanley*

This is the heading of a prose item in BL MS Harley 542 (ff. 31r-33v). The item is in the hand of John Stow (1525-1605) and represents a careful prose précis of *Bosworth Field* following the order of that poem from a point prior to the portions identical to *Lady Bessy*. Under the heading Stow notes "borowyd of Henry Savyll", which is a reference probably to the father of Henry Savile of Banke whose library contained Cotton Nero A x.²⁹ Stow's friendship with Savile was well-established by 1575³⁰ and the transcript was probably made in the last three decades of the sixteenth century. The following comparison of the two versions will serve to establish the flavour of the précis made or copied by Stow:

Bosworth Field

there dyed many a doughtye Knight,
there vnder ffoot can the thringe;
thus they ffought with main & might
that was on HENERYES part, our King.

then to King Richard there came a Knight,
& said, "I hold itt time ffor to fflee;
ffor yonder stanleys dints they be soe
wight,
against them no man may dree.

"heere is thy horsse att thy hand readye;
another day thou may thy worshipp win,
& ffor to raigne with royaltie,
to weare the crowne, and be our King".

he said, "give me my battell axe in my
hand,
sett the crowne of England on my head
soe hye!
ffor by him that shope both sea and land,
King of England this day I will dye!

"one ffoote will I neuer fflee
whilst the breath is my brest within!"
as he said, soe did itt bee,
if hee lost his liffe, if he were King.

(11.581-600)

Stow's transcript

then dyed many a
dowghty Knyght. Then
to Kyng Richard ther
cam a Knyght and sayd
I hold it tyme for ye
to flye, yondar
Stanley his dynts be
so sore agaynst them
may no man stand, her
is thy hors for to
ryde, an other day ye
may worshipe wyne. /
he sayd bryng me my
battayll axe in my
hand, and set þe
crowne of gold on my
hed so hye, for by
hym þt. shope bothe
se and sand, Kyng of
england this day will
I dye, one foote away
I will not fle while
brette wyll byde my
brest w^t in / as he
sayd so dyd he. he
lost his lyffe.

(f.33r)

Stow's transcript indicates that the copy of *Bosworth Field* belonging to Henry Savile (or, if that was itself a précis, the base text underlying the précis) was different from, and more alliterated than, the Percy Folio copy. For example, Stow's transcript contains the phrase "*and boldly on bere they dyd hym brynge*", which has no parallel in the Percy Folio copy.

The *Bosworth* poems have many alliterative phrases in common with *Scottish Field*, and there is a strong similarity in content behind the report of the historical facts of the battle between *Scottish Field* and *Bosworth Field*. The lines describing Richard's death in *Scottish Field*

Then was he dungen to death with many derfe strokes,
Cast him on a capull & carryed him to Liester,
& naked into Newarke . . . (ll.32-34a)

read like a drastic précis of *Lady Bessy* (1039-55) and *Bosworth Field* (641-5). The summary nature of the narrative of *Bosworth* in *Scottish Field* and the resemblances indicated lead me to suspect that the poet of *Scottish Field* was exercising the art of précis in a manner analogous to Stow, and alluding to verse composed about the Stanleys' triumph at *Bosworth* which would have been well-known to his audience, and of which the three copies discussed above may be seen as variants.

B. THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN

(i) *Flodden Field* I (Ballad)

This poem is found in three manuscripts:

- (a) The Percy Folio
- (b) BL MS Harley 367 (ff.120r-127r). For this manuscript, see above p. 46.
- (c) BL MS Harley 293 (ff.55v-61r). This is another miscellany from the Library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes containing the hands of John Stow and Ralph Starkey (d.1628). The copy of *Flodden Field* is in the hand of Ralph Starkey.³¹

The poem begins with only a cursory invocation,

Now lette vs talke of the Mounte of Floddene (l.1)

as if it were originally part of an extensive ballad literature on the Stanleys which was loosely conceived as one, albeit an elastic, poem. The poem is of 428 lines, except the Percy Folio copy which contains 80 extra lines representing the addition of a fabulous "ancestral romance" ending in the second half of the sixteenth century to associate the poem with the pedigree of the Egertons of Ridley. The poem has little historical value, and dwells on the predicament of the Earl of Derby alongside King Henry in France as false reports of the failure of the Stanley contingent at *Flodden* are sent by the Duke of Norfolk. The mood of the poem is romantic, sentimental and sensationalist. The Earl is given a long, elegiac speech (lines 145-238 in all copies) in which he reflects with

nostalgia upon his possessions, retainers and friends in Lancashire and Cheshire. Since the poem takes pleasure in exploiting the hostility between the Stanleys and the Howards, it may be dated as pre-1528 and is therefore approximately contemporary with *Scottish Field*.³²

(ii) *Flodden Field II*

This poem (the only one in this table not included in the Percy Folio) is found in BL MS Harley 3526 (ff.100v-133r), and is in two hands, one of which has the characteristics of c.1560-80 and the other of the early seventeenth century. Since the hands interchange freely, on three occasions in the middle of a folio, it is clear that two scribes of different generations worked together on the text in the early seventeenth century. I have been unable to establish identification of either scribe. Folios 99r-135v of this manuscript were originally an independent fascicule, or booklet.³³

It would be difficult to improve upon Henry Weber's comment as to the poet's purpose:

His object was certainly not posthumous reputation, but to procure his fellow-countrymen of the North of England, particularly those attached like him to the noble house of Stanley, an accurate and minute account of a victory, in which they had gained so much renown.³⁴

The poem shows a certain energy, but it is energy akin to that of the artisans' play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Weber's dating of the poem as mid-sixteenth century is perhaps early, in view of the poet's classicising proclivities shown in an address to the Muses and references to Virgil and Livy. I should prefer to ascribe the poem tentatively to the second half of the sixteenth century, probably c.1560-90. Weber was influenced in his dating by the poem's very strong and obvious alliteration, but this is not necessarily an argument for an early date.

The poem also appears to have been part of a longer Stanley epic: it commences

Now will I cease for to recyte
Kinge Henries affayres in ffrance soo wyde
And of domesticke warrs Ile writte
wch. in his abcence did betyd. (f.100v)

Its intention and impact as glorification and propoganda is no less forcefully conveyed than that of the other works here listed:

All Lancashire for the most parte
the lusty Standley stout con lead;
a stock of striplings stronge of heart,
brough vp from babes with beefe and bread (f.119v)

With children chosen from Cheshire,
in Armor bold for battle drest (f.120r)

There is no direct debt on this poet's part to *Scottish Field*. Nor, in the case of the Flodden literature generally, are there closer connections of the type proposed for the Bosworth material above. But the affinities of diction, style and intention make all these poems components in a picture of the literature concerning the Stanleys composed and read by their admirers in Lancashire and Cheshire during the sixteenth century.

Four more local components may be added from the contents of the Percy Folio. They are the mad song, which for the usual "Tom à Bedlam" substitutes "John à Bagilie";³⁵ the *Earls of Chester*, which displays an exhaustive interest in Cheshire pedigrees;³⁶ the cryptic Cheshire ballad, *Sir John Butler*;³⁷ and *The Turk and Gowin*, in which the Turk, freed from a necromantic spell, returns to his shape as a true Christian Knight, Sir Gowther, and assumes in fiction the position held in reality by every senior Stanley of Latham after 1405 - King of the Isle of Man.

The Percy Folio is the main repository of the verse of Stanley eulogy. However, sixteenth-century literature glorifying the Stanleys extends beyond the poems of the Folio. One of the Stanleys themselves contributed to this literature. Thomas Stanley, pluralist cleric and absentee Bishop of Sodor and Man (1502-c.1568), composed a *Metrical Chronicle* of the House of Stanley which again concentrated on the battles of Bosworth and Flodden. The Chronicle paid particular attention to the exploits of Edward Stanley, Lord Mouteagle: the Bishop was Mouteagle's illegitimate son.³⁸ The Chronicle is of no literary or historical value, but was nonetheless evidently prized by the region's Stanley acolytes. It was reworked c.1619 by one R.G., clergyman of Chester, and retitled "*The Honour of Cheshire and Lancashire* . . . now renewed by an old servant of the same coate and Family". The Dedication refers to Stanley's original as "that ancient Rundelay of your Ancestors, which is esteemed as a relique among your Countrymen . . .".³⁹

The only value of these works is as sociological documents testifying to the Stanley hegemony in the area and the intricate inter-connections of a gentry community around them. This community was real, not an artefact of literary sentimentality. In 1514, four of the heroes named in the Flodden literature - Sir Thomas Gerard of Brynn, Sir Thomas Butler of Bewsey, Sir Henry Bold and James Stanley, Bishop of Ely - relaxed by meeting together for cockfights at Winwick, near Wigan.⁴⁰ The community was one of property, business interests, religious observance, kinship and local pride. It was disturbed on occasion by conflicts of interest, acrimonious litigation, even by outbursts of violence; but the disturbances were themselves not infrequently resolved by an expedient treaty of marriage.⁴¹ Over at least two centuries, from 1400 onwards, intermarriage among the thirty or so leading Cheshire and Lancashire families achieved a high degree of consanguinity. In describing the Battle of Blore Heath (1459), Drayton could devise no more potent image of internecine

strife than the following stanza, which uses the names of prominent members of the "Stanley circle":

There Dutton Dutton kills, a Done doth kill a Done;
 A Booth a Booth, and Leigh by Leigh is overthrown;
 A Venables against a Venables doth stand;
 A Troutbeck fighteth with a Troutbeck hand to hand;
 There Molineux doth make Molineux to die,
 And Egerton the strength of Egerton doth try.
 (Poly-Olbion, Song XXII)⁴²

The community antedated Stanley domination, which begins with the dramatic rise of the first Stanley of Latham, Sir John Stanley, at the end of the fourteenth century. It persisted for over two hundred years, in no small part as a result of the Stanleys' policy of assiduous trimming throughout the Wars of the Roses.⁴³ That such a social group should have been so cohesive, so anchored within one region, and so long-enduring makes it a phenomenon exceptional in the history of medieval and Tudor England. It is surely for this social group, many of whose members are identified by name in poems of the Percy Folio, that these poems were written.

The Percy Folio, then, bears many signs of a strong local taste that must have been narrow in its appeal; and from these many signs we can reconstruct, in some detail, an audience. But this is not the only unusual characteristic of the Percy Folio. As well as the poems of Stanley glorification and regional patriotism, it contains the later Gawain poems, including the mediocre but unmistakable recycling of *Sir Gawain, The Grene Knight*. Moreover, Stow's note in BL MS Harley 542 (above, p. 48) establishes that Henry Savile had access to the later Stanley literature. It may be a significant connection that the *Gawain*-manuscript is found in the library list of his son, Henry Savile of Banke.

A characterisation of the audience for the poems of the Percy Folio discussed in this article might well provide us with a sound basis for hypothesis about the original audience for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and other fourteenth century alliterative poems apparently composed in the Lancashire and Cheshire area. Luttrell concluded his article on N.W. Midland manuscripts by arguing the significance of

. . . the intimate connection shown in this region between gentlemen and alliterative poetry, as illustrated by the composition of *Scottish Field* and the copying of the *Destruction of Troy*. This may perhaps reflect an earlier state when some of the authors of alliterative poems might be the sons of good family; one thinks particularly of those who sought their fortunes away from home as clerks, squires, or administrators. The well-bred flavour of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* shows how far back this state of affairs may be traceable, and perhaps we should imagine the picture we have of Chaucer transferred to a provincial setting and to a different mode of poetry, including the partly alliterative, such as *Pearl*.⁴⁴

Luttrell's hypothesis is attractive, and if his construct is anything like correct, we may supplement it with the evidence of this article for the existence of a uniquely cohesive social grouping in exactly the right area and with a demonstrable taste for, and access to, Middle English alliterative verse in later generations.

If we wished to explore further the historical circumstances of this community in the later fourteenth century, we would do well to remember that Stanley hegemony was not at this time established.⁴⁵ We might look closely at the career and affiliations of a man like Thomas de la Warr, from 1398 twelfth Lord of Manchester (1342-c. 1427). As second son, Thomas took holy orders, was Rector of Manchester from 1382 to 1422, and founder of the Manchester College mentioned in *Lady Bessy* (see above, p.47). Thomas was a friend of John of Gaunt, and was closely related to Sir Lewis Clifford and Sir Thomas Latimer. These are two of the Chamber Knights examined by K.B. McFarlane: they were courtiers of exceptional literacy, almost certainly friends of Chaucer, and their wills, written in English, testify to their positive commitment to the vernacular.⁴⁶ If it is proper to look for an aristocratic patron for alliterative verse, we might at least note that Thomas de la Warr's position as priest and baron is not inconsistent with the special qualities of the poems collected in the *Gawain*-manuscript.

NOTES

- 1 C.A. Luttrell, "Three North-West Midland Manuscripts", *Neophilologus*, 42 (1958), 38-50.
- 2 R.H. Robbins, "The Poems of Humfrey Newton, Esquire, 1466-1536", *PMLA*, 65 (1950), 249-81; this largely supersedes the same author's "A Gawain Epigone", *MLN*, 58 (1943), 361-6.
- 3 Robbins, "Humfrey Newton", 259.
- 4 Luttrell, 40-1, identifies this Elizabeth Booth with the widow of George Booth of Durham (d.1531), rather than with her daughter and namesake.
- 5 Luttrell, 39, transcribes the surname correctly; earlier editors of *St. Erkenwald* transcribe what is actually *Wellyā Barton* as *Nellpo Norton*. Ruth Morse, ed., *St. Erkenwald* (Cambridge, 1975), p.12, offers Luttrell's version as an alternative to the "Norton" reading. Identification of William Barton, on the strength of this pen-trial, would hardly be reputable. The signature of *Thomas Masse Esquier* appears on f. 13r and f. 64v of this MS.
- 6 For a description of the Ireland Blackburne MS and further references see Ralph Hanna III, ed., *The Awntyrs off Arthure* (Manchester, 1974), pp.6-7.
- 7 For further references see Clifford Peterson, "The Pearl-Poet and John Massey, of Cotton, Cheshire", *RES*, 25 (1974), 57-66. Peterson's attempt to identify the poet is answered by T. Turville-Petre and E. Wilson, "Hoccleve 'Maister Massy' and the Pearl-Poet: Two Notes", *RES*, 26 (1975), 129-43.
- 8 See F.J. Furnivall and J.W. Hales, ed., *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript* (1868), I, p.xiii.
- 9 J.P. Oakden, ed., "*Scotish Ffeilde*", *Chetham Miscellanies*, Chetham Soc. NS 94 (1935), pp.ix-x and pp.14-23.
- 10 *ibid.*, p.ix.
- 11 Throughout this article I follow the readings of the Percy Folio rather than those of published editions.
- 12 George Ormerod, *Cheshire* (1882), I, pp.523-4, 551-3; *Chetham Soc.* OS 8 (1845), p.313, and OS 51 (1860), p.2.
- 13 *Chetham Soc.* OS 59 (1857), p.138, and OS 98 (1876), pp.55-6.
- 14 For Sir John Stanley, see Ormerod, III, pp.641-2; William Beamont, *Notes on the Lancashire Stanleys* (1869), pp.8-12; J.P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire* (1877-80), I, pp.244-51; and *Record Society* 30 (1896), pp.46-61.
- 15 Ormerod, II, pp.686-9 and III, pp.642-3.
- 16 See *Percy Folio*, ed. Hales and Furnivall, III, p.233.
- 17 Luttrell, 46-7.

- 18 *Victoria County History of Lancashire*, III, p.146.
- 19 A.W. Moore, *History of the Isle of Man* (London, 1900), II, p.220; see also *VCH Lancs.*, II, p.33.
- 20 BL MS Harley 2076, f.12v.
- 21 The poem is edited by Hales and Furnivall, *Percy Folio*, III, pp.318-63, and twice by J.O. Halliwell (-Phillipps), *Percy Society* 20 (1847), IV, pp.1-79 and *Palatine Anthology* (1850), pp.1-105.
- 22 *Palatine Anthology*, pp.3-4; *Percy Society* 20, p.vi.
- 23 A.G. Watson, *The Library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes* (British Museum, 1966), p.157, p.164. I am greatly indebted to Mr Watson for his generous help during the preparation of this article: all identification of hands in British Library manuscripts has been confirmed by him.
- 24 See Agnes G. Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England* (1851-2), II, pp.394-457, esp. pp.401-7.
- 25 For Humphrey Brereton, see Ormerod, II, p.687, and for a discussion of the poem *Chetham Soc.* OS 29 (1853), pp.4-6.
- 26 For will and Library List, see *Chetham Soc.* OS 33 (1857), pp.168-77.
- 27 Ormerod, I, pp.77-8 and 443; *VCH Lancs.*, IV, p.367.
- 28 S. Hibbert (-Ware), *The Foundations of Manchester* (1848), I, *passim*, II, pp.325-8; *Chetham Soc.* OS 19 (1849), pp.57-66 and NS 5 (1885), *passim*.
- 29 A.G. Watson, *The Manuscripts of Henry Savile of Banke* (London, 1969), p.68.
- 30 Henry Savile addressed Stow in correspondence of 1575 as "good old friend": C.L. Kingsford, *A Survey of London by John Stow* (London, 1908), I, p.xx.
- 31 This coincidence of the names of Stow, Starkey and D'Ewes need not occasion surprise. D'Ewes acquired many of the manuscripts and papers of both men for his library. Stow's interest in this material was that of "a collector of cronycles" (Kingsford, I, p.xvi), while Starkey himself was a Cheshire man, from Oundle Hall, and his first wife was a Dutton: see C.E. Wright, *Fontes Harleiani* (London, 1972), p.314, and *DNB*.
- 32 The Stanley-Howard rivalry was resolved by marriage in 1528: *VCH Lancs.*, III, p.167.
- 33 The hands interchange at the top of a leaf f.113r, f.115v, f.128r, and in the middle of a page f.119v, f.124r, f.129r. The only edition of the poem, by Henry Weber, *Flodden Feild* (Edinburgh, 1808) is unreliable. I quote my own transcription.
- 34 Weber, p.x.
- 35 *Percy Folio*, I, pp.241-5.

- 36 *Percy Folio*, I, pp.273ff. There is another copy of the poem in BL MS Addit. 3830, where it is attributed to a Cheshire gentleman, Richard Bostock of Tattenhall (f.101r).
- 37 *Percy Folio*, III, pp.209-14. Allegations of Stanley complicity in murder made in the ballad may reflect not upon events of 1430 but on the Butler-Stanley quarrel of 1516: *Chetham Soc.* OS 87 (1873), pp.392-5.
- 38 For an edition of Stanley's Chronicle, see *Palatine Anthology*, pp.208-71. There is no reliable account of Stanley's career. The account by A.B. Emden, *Biographical Register of the University of Oxford AD 1501 to 1540* (Oxford, 1974), pp.535-6, follows P.B. Gams, *Series Episcoporum* (1873), and Gams in turn follows Le Neve, *Fasti* (1716), pp.356-7, who notes considerable difficulty and engages in considerable speculation. Stanley is unaccountably omitted from the list of Bishops of Sodor and Man in C.R. Cheney's *Handbook of British Chronology*, p.255. For Stanley's absenteeism from his diocese, see *Parker Correspondence*, Parker Soc., p.222 and *VCH Lancs.*, IV, p.65.
- 39 BL MS Addit. 5860, ff.164r-195v: R.G. states, f.166v, "I have no language but plaine Lancashier".
- 40 *VCH Lancs.*, II, p.502.
- 41 Stanley and other Lancashire pedigrees may be found in *VCH Lancs.*, *passim*, and Edward Baines, *History of the County Palatine and Duchy of Lancaster* (1836), esp. III, pp.113-14 (Booth of Barton) and IV, pp.10-37 (Stanley). For Booth of Dunham Massey see *Earwaker, East Cheshire*, I, pp.52-61; for the various branches of the Legh family, *Earwaker II*, pp.293-306, and *Chetham Soc.* OS 97 (1876), pp.115-21. For other Cheshire pedigrees, see Ormerod, *passim*.
- 42 *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. J.W. Hebel (Oxford, 1961), IV, pp.440-1; K. Tillotson and B.H. Newdigate (*ibid.*, V, p.241) indicate that Holinshed is Drayton's major source for Song XXII.
- 43 *VCH Lancs.*, II, p.234. For Stanley property see *Chetham Soc.* NS 19 (1890), p.77 and *Public Records*, Deputy Keeper's 39th. Report (1878), Appendix I, pp.95-6, 244-5; and for Sir John Stanley as founder of the family's fortunes, see *DNB*, *VCH Lancs.*, III, p.158, and *History of the House of Stanley* (Manchester, 1840), p.30. See Gervase Mathew, *The Court of Richard II* (London, 1968), p.166, for the suggestion that Sir John Stanley was patron of the *Gawain*-poet. The evidence adduced by Mathew is, however, flimsy.
- 44 Luttrell, 49.
- 45 *VCH Lancs.*, III, p.159.
- 46 For Thomas' life and career see A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500* (Oxford, 1957-9), II, p.1111; Hibbert (-Ware), *Foundations*, I, p.35, III, pp.99-180; *VCH Lancs.*, IV, pp.194ff.; *DNB*; *Chetham Soc.* OS 58 (1862), *passim*. For the Knights of the Chamber, see K.B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (London, 1972).

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