

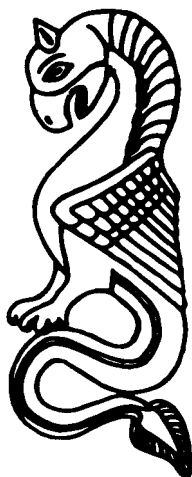
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*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
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## The Diversity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry

David A. Lawton

### I

For medievalists, interest in audience and public is all the stronger when we are confronted by literary movements, forms or traditions, if only we knew what to call them, that are historically finite, yet whose boundaries remain for the most part unknown. We know that Chaucer invented the iambic pentameter in English; we know that Surrey first devised its blank verse form, and that this occurred nearly one and a half centuries after its continuous use in rhymed form; we are ourselves one generation in its unbroken though complex continuity. Taking a radically contrary case, Middle English alliterative poetry as composed between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, we know neither its origins nor (in the main) its writers, nor the reasons for its demise; we are uncertain of the relations between the several rhymed and unrhymed forms; and we interrogate all available evidence to do with where such poetry was written and for whom: who copied it, who read it, when, where and, not least, how (in what sort of manuscript, and with what sort of understanding)? It is an impeccable scholarly activity. But if it is not merely a form of medieval market research, what is its value? I think it worthwhile to distinguish several types of value in this research. I shall suggest the greatest value of all that it forces us to redefine many other questions we have been in the habit of asking.

One value is that it provides a critical focus, though here we are dealing with what Anne Middleton calls a work's public — that is, the readers it seeks as opposed to those, if any, it actually got.<sup>1</sup> Such criticism is not thereby unhistorical. Indeed, when Elizabeth Salter answered J. R. Hulbert's pseudo-historical thesis that the rise of unrhymed alliterative poetry in the second half of the fourteenth century was an expression of baronial opposition to a centralizing kingship (neither the dates nor the political circumstances fit), she opened up a truly historical consideration of the sort of milieu that might have produced such poems;<sup>2</sup> a milieu of the type that C. A. Luttrell was thinking of in 1958 when he made an entirely

sensible link between the provincial court of Hautdesert in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the provincial courts of fourteenth-century England that produced aristocratic clerks capable of writing, for example, *Gawain*.<sup>3</sup> Derek Pearsall's reconsideration of major monastic houses as possible milieux for the preservation and early dissemination of unrhymed *aa/ax* poems is equally historical, even though conclusive evidence is lacking.<sup>4</sup> For all the historical care taken in such study, those of us who practise it can never entirely free ourselves of the charge, literally, of speculation: looking in a mirror and describing the reader we see there. That danger, however, is offset by an obvious advantage. Such work separates alliterative poems, as only historically-informed critical reading can, according to the sorts of audiences they appear to envisage. In the diverse and seemingly ill-assorted genres of *Piers Plowman*, we find the construction of impossible readers: or at least readers who cannot possibly have cohered as a social grouping, except perhaps as readers of *Piers Plowman*. On a smaller scale of difficulty, *The Parliament of the Three Ages* is barely less perplexing; and we find the poet of *Winner and Waster*, admittedly in the hope of flattering stray readers, declaring that no audience for his sort of poetry any longer exists.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, we find poems that address themselves to what seems to be a specific, or at least a clearly visualized audience: *The Wars of Alexander*, *William of Palerne*, and possibly religious audiences for *Cleanness* and *Patience* (which contrast strikingly in their sense of an inbuilt audience with, say, *Pearl*). We find in the *Morte Arthure* some appeal to a socially elevated audience that is expected to be capable of understanding diplomatic niceties, and other poems like *St Erkenwald* that at least hint at a specific occasion of composition, or a family connexion: the Stanleys for *Scottish Field* and the Bohuns for *William of Palerne* and perhaps *Chevalere Assigne*.<sup>6</sup> We can also distinguish poems that belong on grounds of genre far more with works composed in other modes — *Richard the Redeless*, *The Crowned King*, and perhaps for all its Langlandian dependence, *Death and Life* — than with other alliterative works. We might distinguish poems that present themselves textually as social performances (such as *Gawain*) from those which are unequivocally intended to be read, not heard (*The Destruction of Troy*). All these are critical tasks and give a second sort of value to the study of audience and public. In the cases where indications of audiences are particularly strong, and arguments for sharp differentiation between audience and public apparently weak, critics lay the groundwork for directed historical work on the realities of literary production, here at the level of composition.

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A third value maintains contact with those realities, but at the immediate level of copying. Luttrell's pioneer article on four North-Western Midland manuscripts dealt mainly with fifteenth-century evidence, and evidence of several different orders (such as the ownership of the manuscript of *St Erkenwald* by a chantry priest in Eccles c. 1470, the sixteenth-century bequest as an heirloom by Thomas Stanley of Nuthurst of the sole manuscript of *The Destruction of Troy*), but came close to establishing a North-West Midland milieu for the poems of the *Gawain* manuscript, *St Erkenwald*, and perhaps even *The Destruction of Troy*. Circumstances of copying and those of composition may be vastly removed from each other, but we cannot afford to ignore the possibility that they are not. Here copying may provide a retrospect on composition. The milieu depicted by Luttrell persists in the composition of *Scottish Field* not long after 1513, and I have argued that we can probably extrapolate from this milieu, and its Stanley connexions, a close-knit audience that may well reflect the first audience for *Gawain*. The fact that Henry Savile, father of the first-known owner of the *Gawain* manuscript itself, Cotton Nero A. x, had access to manuscripts containing several of these later poems, bears repetition: it seems strong support for a continuous and regional audience for these poems between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> As Michael Bennett suggests, *Gawain* may have travelled to London with Richard II's Cheshire archers.<sup>8</sup> This may help explain its probable influence on other poems, such as *The Awntyrs of Arthur* or *The Wars of Alexander*, perhaps not composed within quite the same region. But there is nothing in the available evidence to disturb the view that *Gawain* had no metropolitan vogue or was not dismissed from the metropolis, along with the said Cheshire archers, back to the one region where it had some chance of being understood, its dialectal region. The third value of audience research, then, is to relate linguistic evidence, mainly that of dialect (and scribal spelling systems), to known literary, historical and palaeographical facts. It is an interdisciplinary activity that needs to be practised far more widely and systematically than it is, a project that the publication of the Edinburgh Dialect Survey now invites. We are able to localize the dialect of scribes, and sometimes that of writers. We are able, sometimes, to characterize the type of audience to which a work is addressed. Surely literary scholars need to collaborate more with historians, for logic dictates that, say, socially-elevated audiences in the North-West Midlands would not be infinite in number. At times it may be possible, productive, and not overly speculative, to overlay a mapping of possible audiences on the Edinburgh dialect maps. However, there is a major conceptual difficulty, which I shall outline.

To a well-based North-West Midland nexus of copying, composition, and audience, we can add a more broadly-based South-West Midland complex, covering the counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Worcestershire: the milieu that produced, for instance, most of the English lyrics of Harley 2253, *William of Palerne*, *Piers Plowman*, *Joseph of Arimathea*, and probably *Mum and the Sothsegger*. This is the region of the great monastic libraries in which Anglo-Saxon verse manuscripts awaited rediscovery, and of great scriptoria, monastic or lay, that produced such major manuscripts as Vernon and Simeon. The monastic influence in the region is central to Pearsall's theory on origins, but caution is surely in order: given, for example, our lack of knowledge as to the nature of the Vernon/Simeon workshop, and Carter Revard's discovery that the hand of Harley 2253 is not that of a canon or friar, or a monk of Leominster (as was long surmised), but that of a notary in Ludlow.<sup>9</sup> It is an area, however, where monastic activity produced the first major alliterative poetic writing in Middle English — Lazamon's *Brut* — in which unrhymed alliterative lines are admixed with long passages of rhymed poetry. It is the area of Trevisa. It at least overlaps the area in which *The South English Legendary* was produced, and Manfred Görlach's study of the textual transmission of *The South English Legendary* thus becomes a primary document for students of alliterative milieux. *William of Palerne*, after all, is bound with a contemporary *South English Legendary* manuscript at least closely related in production, and I have presented elsewhere arguments for stressing links between *The South English Legendary* and Middle English alliterative poetry.<sup>10</sup> Above all, Dr Doyle has noted a strong resemblance between the earliest manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*, such as Digby 171, and those of *The South English Legendary* (as well as *The Prick of Conscience* and the *Speculum Vitae*).<sup>11</sup> Here, at once, is a relatively mild form of the conceptual difficulty facing researchers into the audience and milieux of Middle English alliterative poetry. As far as the South-West Midland connexion is concerned, their enterprise is probably more fruitfully conducted by looking at other kinds of texts altogether.

And the moment that one has established at least two centres of copying, composition, and taste, one is faced with questions of circulation well outside them — the ones that got away: not only most *Piers Plowman* manuscripts, but *Alexander B* (to a de luxe fifteenth-century London manuscript, Bodley 264), *The Wars of Alexander* (probably as far as Durham), the *Morte Arthure* (to South-East Lincolnshire, wherever it was composed), and most of the other unrhymed alliterative texts copied by Robert Thornton. The greatest enigma of all, at present,

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is *The Siege of Jerusalem*, whose manuscripts were copied in Oxfordshire (Laud Misc. 656), Yorkshire (the Taylor manuscript at Princeton and the Thornton copy), London (Cambridge University Library Mm. 5. 14, by Richard Frampton), the Central Midlands (Cotton Caligula A. ii), Essex (Lambeth 491), the North Midlands (Vespasian E. xvi), and in South Warwickshire (Huntington, Hm. 128) — everywhere, in fact, but the West Midlands, to which its dialect may perhaps too easily be assigned on grounds of corporate solidarity.<sup>12</sup> To mention the circulation of manuscripts containing *Piers Plowman* or *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and to have introduced non-alliterative texts such as *The South English Legendary*, is to have made a crucial transition to the fourth value of research into the audience and readership of Middle English unrhymed alliterative poetry: the level, in fact, at which it begins to contribute to a larger history of production — both composition and copying — and the reception of English literary works in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Again, I define English literature as literature in three languages, often found together in the manuscript under study, such as Harley 2253.

This is a nascent enterprise, a wholly timely one,<sup>13</sup> and it is engaging the energies of a fine new generation of palaeographers who owe a direct and incalculable debt to precursors such as the late N. R. Ker, and the happily active M. B. Parkes and A. I. Doyle. It is with Dr Doyle's work that I will be occupied here, since he has written two major articles specifically on manuscripts containing alliterative poetry. His is a substantial contribution, and I cannot do justice here either to its detail or to his wholly salutary reluctance to draw conclusions from evidence that is so often incomplete, fragmentary, and based on a series of random survivals. Doyle's work in this context demonstrates the very great value of research into the readership of alliterative poetry: methodologically, the best way into a cosmic subject remains a narrow point of entry, and this one has proved to be anything but a black hole. But I think it also fair to Doyle's exposition to assert that this state of greatest value is also, potentially, the point of breakdown, where the initial question is shown to be inadequate and in a vital sense misleading.

Although to paraphrase Doyle's dense and compressed essays is impossible, I will try to draw a few inferences mainly but not exclusively from his work. The transmission of alliterative poems demands inter-regional communication, not always through London, both of texts and people — readers, writers, patrons, scribes — who moved between two or more milieux. The transmission of *Piers Plowman* manuscripts leads Doyle initially to wonder whether 'the circulation of *Piers Plowman* may have been from or through more than one centre at various times', and in his later essay he writes more confidently that the manuscripts imply

the need to postulate several other centres.<sup>14</sup> The same inference must certainly apply to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, to stanzaic rhymed alliterative poems in several manuscripts, especially *Susannah* and *The Awntyrs of Arthur*, in all probability to *The Wars of Alexander*, *The Parliament of the Three Ages*, and perhaps to most if not all other alliterative poems that travelled from the region of their composition (though since most survive in one manuscript the extension of the inference is often academic). But where were these other centres? Of the two areas I have mentioned, the North-West Midlands may have had nothing that qualified as a centre at all (hence the paucity of surviving copies and their frequent appearance of amateurism), and the South-West Midlands clearly had several active ones — as we know from Görlach and others, possibly both monastic and lay: at least Gloucester (perhaps with a commercial trading outlet in Bristol), Hereford, Worcester itself, and wherever in North Worcestershire Vernon and Simeon were produced. Oxford is of crucial importance: Bodley 851, the so-called Z-manuscript of *Piers Plowman*, was probably copied there, though in Langland's own Malvern dialect.<sup>15</sup> It may be that Oxford is the provenance of more manuscripts than we now suspect with 'Central Midland' characteristics, though Derby may also repay examination where the forms are more northerly. Durham is another likely centre, an ecclesiastical one (Trinity College, Dublin MS 213, *The Wars of Alexander* preceded by the *Piers Plowman* A-text), as is Lincoln (at some stage a lost copy of the *Morte Arthure*, copies of *Piers Plowman* such as Pierpont Morgan M. 818), and we have almost certainly under-rated the book trade in York, with its archiepiscopal and market links between West and East, especially the seaports of Lincolnshire: there is a growing suspicion that the major CUL manuscript Dd. 1. 17, the so-called *Liber Glastoniensis*, is a York production, as are the main Register copy of *The Lay-Folks' Catechism* and the fragments of *Wit and Will*. Much remains uncertain but at least provides a direction for research, bearing in mind that we are speaking of centres of circulation at least as much as, or rather than, production. Alliterative poetry certainly circulated well into East Anglia, probably not merely through London: for instance, *The Satire on Blacksmiths* (and burlesque on alliterative poetry) was added to BL Arundel 292, a Norwich Cathedral priory manuscript. Religious houses clearly remained important: the strongest indications point to Benedictines and to Austin canons, but major ecclesiastical cities had their secular scribes and notaries, the beginnings at least of a commercial book trade. The production of books actually features in *Mum and the Sothsegger*, with the advice to the narrator to continue his book-making activity.<sup>16</sup> Mention of the commercial book trade of course highlights London, and Doyle traces the many London

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connexions (of various types) in the circulation of alliterative poems: for example, CUL Mm. 5. 14, referred to above, and Trinity College, Cambridge, B. 15. 17, a major *Piers Plowman* B-manuscript, produced in a London or Westminster bookshop, and perhaps Hm. 143. Doyle also notes that much London copying may have been done to order in different dialects, just as Bodley 851 was copied in a different dialect at Oxford: Bodleian MS Douce 324 is probably a South-East Midland production, but its copy of *The Awntyrs of Arthur* is in the dialect of North-East Derbyshire. This testifies to one of the most common and least quantifiable factors in the circulation of texts, the circulation of readers. London's major importance, however, lies in the period before about 1425, by which time we are able to speak of a dominant taste there that at the least sidelined alliterative texts.

I have said that the fourth value of this enquiry, as exemplified by Doyle, also marks its breakdown into larger questions. In the first place, of course, we need identification of the other centres that the study postulates, and this will begin to provide a further profile of the circulation of texts in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, a question of far greater consequence than the audience for Middle English alliterative poetry. In the second place, we return to the conceptual difficulty raised earlier in this essay, here in its most implacable form. At least before 1425, there is no reason to assume an audience for Middle English alliterative poetry distinct from that for all other English literary works. With the sole (and partial) exception of Cotton Nero A. x, there is no manuscript (larger than a pamphlet) containing alliterative poetry that does not contain other items, prose or verse, of many different genres and types, and not always in English, especially before 1400 — so that we cannot separate readers of Latin and Anglo-Norman from any research we carry out, let alone readers in the English language of devotional treatises, romances, lyrics, and so on. Many of the manuscripts they read, especially in the fourteenth century, resemble the Anglo-Norman miscellanies read by their parents and grandparents, with a progressive substitution of English language items for comparable Anglo-Norman ones. In the last resort, our research is not into medieval English readers of alliterative poetry but into medieval English readers.

And this conclusion is the fifth value of the enquiry. It helps us to discover, rather like exhausted readers of *Piers Plowman*, what questions we ought to have been asking in the first place. Particularly, if readers of alliterative poetry are not a homogeneous or distinct group, are neither a regional block antipathetic to works from other areas and in other forms nor a textual community, may not something



similar apply to the alliterative poetry that they were reading? Is not diversity, rather than unity, the keynote?

This does not mean, of course, that there is no such thing as alliterative poetry. But it raises in a new form the awkward question of how we define it and where we think it came from. Questions of audience, questions of 'origins', and questions of metre are interlinked. The second part of my essay provides one example to clarify this statement and to draw out its implications. My starting point is one of Doyle's few tentative conclusions. While Dr Doyle and I concur, albeit broadly, in seeing significant links in the collation of some alliterative items and *The South English Legendary*, I share in general his caution in the pursuit of connexions between items that happen to occur together in otherwise apparently unrelated manuscripts: so often work of this type establishes an absence of significance in such collation, other than possibly the relative popularity of shared items, or their fortuitous availability through one or many centres of circulation. Dr Doyle tentatively departs from his usual caution when considering manuscripts containing two or more of the following four poems: *Piers Plowman*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, *Susannah*, and *The Awntyrs of Arthur*: 'that all these poems are found together and alternatively in some manuscripts along with matter of (as time goes on, increasingly) diverse kinds and origins is, I think, significant, though they can be only not-quite-random examples of the whole history of their distribution.'<sup>17</sup> Given the almost entirely random nature of the evidence that we must normally negotiate in research of this kind, I too am content to place a little significance in the 'not-quite-random'. This one significant conjunction in readers' tastes happens to throw into stark relief a major source of confusion in modern studies of alliterative poetry.

What do we mean when we refer to 'Middle English Alliterative Poetry'? The focus of most study has long been on unrhymed *aa/ax* poems, though by no means to the exclusion of rhymed forms. Such a focus is surely defensible on critical grounds: the unrhymed poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries would dominate a history of Middle English literature had Chaucer never been born. It is defensible on metrical grounds, if we accept the justice of Pearsall's comment that the defining characteristic of the *aa/ax* poems as a metrical corpus is the absence of rhyme; and it is defensible on historical grounds. One can hardly dissent from the justice of Pearsall's view that the efflorescence of *aa/ax* poetry after *c.* 1350 is 'a phenomenon needing to be explained'.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the focus has had an unfortunate side-effect: despite an increasing recognition of the multiplicity of alliterative contexts, the intricate relationships between rhymed and unrhymed

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forms, of (plural) 'alliterative modes and affiliations',<sup>19</sup> scholars have not, on the whole, ceased to speak as if we were dealing with a single phenomenon — of the 'alliterative revival' and of its 'origins'. In recent years this orthodox stance has been roundly challenged — by Angus McIntosh, and by A. T. E. Matonis, who would expand the term 'Middle English alliterative poetry' to include a large quantity of rhymed and lyric poetry. Matonis and McIntosh share an example, 'The Four Foes of Mankind', in their advocacy of this counter-position: not only is the rhythmical structure of the line similar to lines or verses from unrhymed poetry, especially the shorter lines from *Gawain*, but also the use in rhymed poems of phonological devices, especially but not exclusively alliteration, is indispensable to understanding the structure of long-line unrhymed poems.<sup>20</sup> There are difficulties with the metrical and terminological presentation of this position, but Matonis shrewdly locates the most vulnerable point in the logic of the standard view: 'Pearsall, curiously enough, does not regard *Pearl* as an alliterative poem. This judgment raises a fundamental question: by what criteria do we accept a poem as alliterative?' (p. 354).

The most vulnerable point in her own case is the singlemindedness with which she conflates all the complexity of her evidence into a unitary argument when she demands that the *Harley Lyrics* be seen in a 'shared place' at 'the center' of 'the alliterative tradition' (p. 342) — somewhat like a young reformist calling for the rehabilitation of a long disgraced Party member. The plain fact is that Pearsall (and others including myself) on the one hand, and McIntosh and Matonis on the other, are addressing different phenomena and a variety of alliterative traditions. The reason why the issue has become confused is that we tend to deal with these different traditions under one name and this prejudices relations among them. It is as if the terminology insists on a unitary phenomenon, a 'continuum' or 'tradition', whereas all the hard evidence — the evidence we review when looking at texts and their readers — points towards a bewildering plurality and diversity: the conjunction in different manuscripts of different texts from different places at different times. Who is to say, and with what meaning, that they add up to one tradition?

There is surprisingly little literary historical work on the relation between *aa/ax* poetry and poems in the relatively rare thirteen-line stanza — a relation posed as a question by Dr Doyle's observation. The most valuable study is that by Thorlac Turville-Petre in 1974, and he concentrated on what he took to be a subgroup of three poems, *Summer Sunday*, *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*, *The Awntyrs of Arthur*, arguing that all were of late-fourteenth century date and 'appear to be the work of a "school" of poets using the thirteen-line stanza to express similar

themes', didactic and penitential themes exploiting motifs of hunting, death, and kingship.<sup>21</sup> Much depends on the dating of *Summer Sunday*, and Turville-Petre's case, though it seems to me to be plausible, has not won universal assent. Whether it is correct or not, however, I see no reason to follow him in passing from similarities of style and theme to a 'school of poets'. Turville-Petre is intent on showing a direct debt on the part of such a 'school' to *aa/ax* poetry, especially to *Gawain*. If such a relation exists, whether direct or indirect, it may do no more than confirm what we already know from the use of the bob-and-wheel in *Gawain* itself, that different alliterative traditions rarely remained entirely separate; but its foregrounding in Turville-Petre's essay suggests a uniform relation between *aa/ax* poetry and thirteen-line stanza poems that is at odds with his listing of extant thirteen-line stanza poems at the end of the article. This listing shows enormous range and diversity — of date, of style and use, and of dialect and place of composition. The problem is compounded in 1977, when Turville-Petre rightly notes a similarity between these poems and certain of the *Harley Lyrics* and hints that the latter may be the source, via *aa/ax* poems, of the presence of the bob-and-wheel in the former.<sup>22</sup> At least three different traditions seem to be compressed here. Moreover, if Turville-Petre's dating is correct, then *Susannah* cannot belong to any 'school' that produced *The Awntyrs*.

Chronologically, the thirteen-line stanza form is unlikely to be an offshoot of *aa/ax* poetry. This is particularly evident in the cases of *The Disputation between Mary and the Cross* and *Susannah*, which stand side by side in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts. The two manuscripts are of course closely related; I shall concentrate on Vernon in this discussion.<sup>23</sup> The three poems examined by Turville-Petre, had they been available, would have fitted well into a manuscript that contains, for example, *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*, *The Trental of Saint Gregory*, and *Joseph of Arimathea*. Moreover, Vernon is an anthology of items from which scholars have tried to assemble 'the origins of the alliterative revival': texts such as *The South English Legendary*, *A Talking of the Love of God*, and the Vernon Lyrics, which include among twelve-line stanza poems the closest stylistic relative extant of *Pearl*, 'Maiden Mary and her Fleur-de-Lys'. Vernon provides a uniquely full picture of the literary culture in which Middle English alliterative poetry grew and was appreciated. The manuscript finds room not only for unrhymed alliterative poetry — *Piers Plowman* and, with qualification, *Joseph of Arimathea* — but for rhymed alliterative poetry in *Susannah*, which is associated with *Piers* in two other manuscripts. The Vernon text of *Susannah* is less good than its copy of the *Piers Plowman* A-text; both poems as they stand in Vernon are

at several removes from their archetypes. Nonetheless, Vernon (c. 1390–1400) is the earliest datable copy of *Susannah* and among the earliest datable A-text manuscripts. That such a relatively early manuscript containing unrhymed alliterative poetry also contains *The Disputation* and *Susannah* makes it extremely improbable that in the late fourteenth century we are dealing with one alliterative tradition, however loosely we try to define it. Moreover, in looking at Doyle's grouping of four texts we are not dealing with merely two traditions. On grounds of both dating and dialect, the two thirteen-line stanza poems that occur in the Doyle grouping — *Susannah* and *The Awntyrs* — themselves belong to quite different traditions.

## II

In the second part of this essay, then, I wish to document further the relations between some of the texts highlighted in the first part, and I do so in order to extend the enquiry into readers of alliterative works and the diverse patterns of literary connexions that it has already begun to reveal. This adds evidence, and further complexity, to the grouping of texts whose recurrence in manuscripts Dr Doyle judged to be significant (though I shall make no further reference to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, which will receive separate treatment elsewhere); and it adds considerable detail to our first mapping of those uses of the thirteen-line stanza that were not placed in context by Turville-Petre: not only *Susannah* and *The Disputation*, but *The Quatrefoil of Love*, York Plays, 36 (*Mortificacio Christi*) and 45 (*The Assumption of the Virgin*), and poems written or collected by John Audelay. I begin with *The Disputation* on probable grounds of date (it appears in Vernon and has an early Anglo-Norman equivalent), and because it helps to profile a taste that characterizes much that succeeded it. I do not rely, however, merely on critical or thematic parallels: the bases of the argument are metre and style, dialect and palaeography.

### *I The Disputation between Mary and the Cross*

*The Disputation between Mary and the Cross*<sup>24</sup> employs almost the same form as *Susannah*. The octave of each consists of mainly four-stress lines rhyming *abababab*; while *Susannah* then has a true bob-and-wheel, *c1dddc2*, *The*

*Disputation* has the same rhyme-scheme with longer lines (the outer lines typically three-stress and the three inner *d*-lines four-stress). The poem is barer in diction than *Susannah*, which it may antedate; and according to Turville-Petre (p. 2) it 'is in fact not alliterative'. His judgment obscures an interesting relationship. *The Disputation* shows no influence from *aa/ax* poems, one good reason for this being that it probably antedates them; but the poem does use alliteration frequently, insistently, and systematically:

Foules fellen out of heore fliht;  
Beestes gan belwe in eueri binne.  
Cros, whon Crist on þe was cliht,  
Whi noldestou not of mournyng minne? (ll. 400-03)

Furthermore, a comparison with the other extant copy of the poem, the mid-fifteenth century BL MS Royal 18. A. x (fols 126v–130v), suggests that the poem may originally have used more alliteration than occurs in any one extant copy. We might, for example, compare the Royal and Vernon versions of the following:

|                                      |                  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Hou wo him was may no mon wite       | (Vernon, l. 186) |
| How woo he was no wigt may wyte      | (Royal, l. 194)  |
| Mi fayre fruit þou berest fro blisse | (Vernon, l. 97)  |
| My bloody brid þou berest fro blysse | (Royal, l. 110)  |
| Cros, þou dost no troupe             | (Vernon, l. 5)   |
| Tre, þou dost no treupe              | (Royal, l. 26)   |
| Mi fayre fruit þou hast bigyled      | (Vernon, l. 11)  |
| My gode fruyt þou has bigyled        | (Royal, l. 32)   |

On the other hand Vernon stanzas 9 and 10 are more alliterated throughout than the comparable stanzas in Royal. The alliteration is used consistently for poetic — that is, semantic and emotional — heightening, and its use encourages a highly independent approach to translating a rhetorically complex and intellectually difficult Latin source. The source is made the point of departure for original rhapsodic amplification in a style that almost deserves to be called metaphysical.

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The source is the poem *O Crux de te volo conqueri* by Phillip de Greve, Chancellor of the University of Paris from c. 1218 to c. 1237.<sup>25</sup> The poem as edited by Dreves consists of ten nine-line stanzas rhyming *aabaabaab*, four of which represent the Virgin's complaint and the last six the response by the Cross. It is a dialogue rather than a debate, and the conceitful effect of the imagery depends upon the disciplined association of a few familiar concepts: the Cross as tree and *torcular* (winepress), Jesus as flower and grape, and the Virgin as vine. The English poem is a marked contrast. It is a genuine debate: in Royal, the participants have two speeches each, in Vernon three. The imagery works not by disciplined association but by dazzling succession and artful repetition. Thus the Latin imagery of fruit is subordinated in the shorter Royal version to that of Christ as lamb and the Cross as platter, and to the familiar motif of Christ's flayed body as pardon or charter.<sup>26</sup> In its second speech, the Cross claims that God shaped him as a shield for man; that he gives Christ a second birth; and looks forward to his and the Virgin's role in the doomsday parliament. Mary's complaints are dilated with much affective material on the Passion: the Cross is the evil stepmother; Christ is the rose; and a single line in the Latin recalling the nativity is expanded into an effective and painful contrast between that and her unsuccessful attempts to kiss Christ on his high cross. The longer Vernon version expands further on the motif of Christ's charter and his blood. The pseudo-Bonaventurean motif of the sword of love or grief passing through Mary's heart, the portrayal of Mary as both mother and Christ's earthly father, and the Bernardine notion of the holy stairs, Mary's role as the sinner's ladder, are also introduced,<sup>27</sup> while the Cross presents its role in the imagery of pillar, bridge, knife, and platter, again in greater detail than in Royal, and alludes to the harrowing of hell in the imagery (derived from Isaiah and Psalm 91) of Christ as lamb lying down with the lion rampant, Satan, buying back with his blood man's way to salvation through baptism. None of this is in the Latin, the translation of which effectively stops after Vernon, line 132. The Latin requires no formal ending, the conceits having worked themselves out; the true debate structure of the English, on the other hand, and the concentration on Mary's agony have produced so personal a confrontation that the author has to add a formal accord between the Virgin and the Cross, and a clumsy extra stanza to point out that this was all an instructive fiction:

þou Clerk þat fourmed þis figour  
Of Maries wo to wite som,  
He saiþ himself þat harde stour

Whon godes armus weore rent aroun.  
Ðat Cros is a cold Creatour  
And euere 3it haþ ben def and dom.  
Ðei3 þis tale beo florissshed with faire flour,  
I preue hit on Apocrafum,  
For witesse was neuer foundet  
Ðat euere cristes cros spak;  
Oure ladi leide on him no lak;  
Bot to pulte þe deuel abak  
We speke hou crist was woundet. (Vernon, ll. 491–503)

The English poem is indebted to no one known source for its freehand amplification of the Latin. Reference has sometimes been made to Jacob van Maerlant's Middle Dutch translation of de Greve's poem, *Ene Disputacie van onser Vrouwen ende van den heiligen Cruce*, on the grounds that it, too, has a thirteen-line stanza;<sup>28</sup> but there is in fact no resemblance. Of far more interest is the Anglo-Norman dialogue between Mary and the Cross in BL Additional 46919 (*olim*, Phillipps 8336). This poem has received several notices, but its relation to the English *Disputation* remains to be worked out.<sup>29</sup> It occurs in the earlier portion of the manuscript (fols 79r–80r), in which Friar William Herebert (d. 1333) copied his English translations of such lyrics as the *Ave Maris Stella* (fol. 205), and it is separated by only one item from the French debate of the body and the soul (fols 7r–77v). This is significant in itself, for it appears to testify to a close connexion between the soul-body debate and the Mary-Cross dialogue; the three manuscripts of the English *Disputation* discussed here all contain the Middle English *Debate between the Body and the Soul*, 'Als i lay in a winteris nyt'. Herebert, a Franciscan who studied at both Paris and Oxford, wrote his manuscript in the priory of Hereford, and his stiffly competent translations use a number of different metres, though never markedly alliterated or as complex as the thirteen-line stanza of *The Disputation*. Yet one might conjecture from Herebert's manuscript that the English *Disputation* was written in a context similar to Herebert's and represented an attempt at freehand imitation of the Anglo-Norman poem and others like it in Additional 46919. Nor would a date towards the end of Herebert's life be inapposite, given a context of friars' Englishing, though this too is conjectural. To set the Anglo-Norman and the Middle English *Disputation* side by side, however, is to see not close translation such as Herebert's but rather a common topic handled in a similar way: a genuine debate in which intellectual consistency is less important

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than a bravura succession of images and conceits. In both cases the poem lasts as long as the poet's inventiveness: a new theme is introduced, delayed, and developed, generally across two or more stanzas in the English. The genre is that of the *tour de force*, eclectic in range and rhapsodic in utterance.

Here is clear proof, if we needed it, that we cannot omit Anglo-Norman models from any consideration of the development of devotional styles in English. One must draw a distinction between the mode of amplification, which is common to Anglo-Norman and Middle English, and the frequent recourse in the English alone to alliteration for affective purposes. It is the combination of the two in *The Disputation* that brings to mind Rolle, or even more, the *Wooing*-group (which appears in a new form in Vernon as *A Talking of the Love of God*). This point cannot be established by short, selective quotation: the whole structure of the English *Disputation* owes its development to an idea of impassioned, undogmatic vernacular meditation that inspired Rolle and the *Talking* compiler. The debt approaches the explicit. In the Royal manuscript, *The Disputation* is followed immediately and in the same quire by the unique copy of another thirteen-line stanza poem on *The Festivals of the Church*.<sup>30</sup> It is a poem on just the kind of topic that Audelay might have enjoyed reading, and it has much in common with *The Disputation*: similarly conceitful and rapid imagery of Christ's charter, Christ as tender flower, and so on, and a similar devotion to Christ's blood. Like Audelay, the poet interrupts his thirteen-line stanzas with occasional four-line comments, *abab3*, and in the first of these he shows himself to be expressing a pleasure very like that of Rolle: 'I haue ioye forto gest | Of þe lambe of love without oþe . . .' (ll. 29–30).

The most important quality of the English *Disputation*, however, is the fullness of the debate structure. It is possible that this was a slow development, with several layers of accretion behind the resultant texts now extant. This is not to propose a law of generic evolution by which monologues grow into dialogues, but simply to note a major difference between Vernon and Royal. Admittedly, Royal is a mid-fifteenth century manuscript written in a London dialect, with underlying Essex features — a dialect more southern than the probable original dialect of the poem.<sup>31</sup> Some of its readings are nevertheless superior to those of Vernon and Simeon, as Holthausen judged long ago;<sup>32</sup> and Royal gives both participants in the debate only two speeches to Vernon's three. A problem here is that Royal's authority is undermined by its omission of Vernon, stanza 11, which is a fairly close translation of the Latin and must therefore have been part of the first English version of *The Disputation*. Royal must be presumed to be an edited version of its



archetype. Even so, the many differences in reading, and the fact that Royal also contains five plausibly original lines (52–56) not found in Vernon, demonstrate that Vernon and Royal were copied from substantially different texts of the poem; and Royal's copy may represent an earlier version in which there were only two speeches on each side. If this is so, we may conjecture a gradual expansion of the poem similar to that sometimes proposed for *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not this is so, it is significant that copies of *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*, the earliest, most popular, and most influential of all Middle English debates, occur in all three manuscripts under discussion — Vernon, Simeon, and Royal. (*The Debate* is also associated with *Piers Plowman* and *The South English Legendary*.)

## 2 Four Stanzaic Poems from Yorkshire

For the critic, *Susannah* seems to have little in common with *The Disputation* in spite of the manuscript association. This is because the English poet does not try to allegorize his narrative which, gracefully and ornamentally, follows the lines of the Vulgate closely. One would have a different impression had the English poet spelt out the theme of justice and punishment in the way of the Latin poems edited by Mozley: the judges as false priests and hypocrites, *hi meruere crucem*; the conversion of *animalis homo* by chaste purity; the garden as the *locus amoenus* of *The Song of Songs*; Susannah herself as *castitatis lilium*, *Feminei sexus Susanna fit unica fenix*.<sup>34</sup> Yet the typology of Susannah was fixed from the time of Augustine: etymologically, the lily, hence the purity of Christ; figurally, the Virgin Mary.<sup>35</sup> It does not require authorial editorializing to see Susannah as a figure of the Virgin, and, like the Virgin in *The Disputation*, she is assailed by the oppression of unjust judges. The theme of the English narrative is the triumph of Christ-like innocence over Jewish injustice — as is that of *The Disputation*. It is possible, then, that *Susannah* owes its place in Vernon and Simeon to the fact that it can be read as a cryptic Marian laud, a lyric narrative of Christ-like innocence, and a poem on the meaning of Old Law and New Law, justice and redemption.

There is a considerable difference in style and perhaps in date between *Susannah* and *The Disputation*, but the stanza form differs very little. Without knowing how many thirteen-line stanza poems have failed to survive, one cannot claim that the metre of *Susannah* is derived from *The Disputation*; but there is at least a strong possibility. The dialect of *Susannah*, North-East Midland or, more

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precisely, South-West Yorkshire, is also that of *The Quatrefoil of Love*, a poem, in exactly the same metre as *Susannah*, which occurs in two manuscripts, the more important of which is the BL Thornton MS, Additional 31042.<sup>36</sup> *The Quatrefoil* is not a debate but an address, by a turtledove to a griefstricken girl: its content spans the fall of man (stanza 8), the annunciation (stanzas 9, 10), the nativity and the visit of the three kings of Cologne (l. 151), the baptism, betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of Christ (stanzas 15, 16), Mary's anguish (stanza 17), the harrowing of hell (stanzas 19–21), the resurrection, with a stanza devoted to St Thomas of India (23), the assumption of Christ and Mary (stanza 24), an examination of Mary's role as mediatrix (stanza 27), a *memento mori* that is almost a quotation from *The Debate between the Body and the Soul* ('when oure bare body es broghte one a bere', l. 358; see also ll. 365–66), followed by the pains of hell (stanza 30) and the last judgment (stanzas 31–39), the poem ending on a note of Marian prayer. The relatively plain style of *The Quatrefoil* places it midway, stylistically, between *The Disputation* and *Susannah*. It may also be relevant that Robert Thornton had access to some of the same material as the compilers of Vernon<sup>37</sup> and that immediately following *The Disputation* and *Susannah* in Vernon is a version of the couplet poem on the Charter of Christ, 'Testamentum Christi', in which Christ asks mankind only for 'a four-leued gras':

'O lef is soþfast schrifte,  
De toþur is for synne herte-smerte,  
De þridde is I wol no more do so,  
De feorþe is drede god euermo;  
Whon þeose foure leues togeder ben set,  
A trewe loue men clepen hit.'<sup>38</sup>

*The Quatrefoil of Love* is a Marian penitential poem which adapts the image of the four-leaved 'trewe loue' to incorporate the Virgin Mary with the Trinity. The adaptation is not handled confidently and appears to be original. Something like the Vernon *Testamentum* is a very likely source.

The relationships so far traced are those of metre, manuscript, and theme. There are no manuscript connexions to link the poems examined above with York Plays 36 and 45, but there is a close dialectal proximity and regional provenance as well as the stanza-form to support a striking similarity of theme and interest, which enables us to speak of the York Master's conscious choice of the thirteen-line stanza. The stanza used is slightly different in form, using the interlinking quatrains

ababbcbcddeed of, say, *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis* rather than the octave of *Susannah* or *Summer Sunday*. Play 36, *Mortificatio Christi*, begins with Pilate's disclaiming responsibility for Christ's crucifixion and laying it onto the false Jewish judges, Annas and Caiaphas. Scene 2 opens with Christ's complaint to mankind from the Cross (also stanza 15), moves in the second stanza to a *planctus Mariae*, and develops into a dialogue between Christ and Mary (the sword of sorrow smites Mary in l. 159) and then between Christ and the two thieves. Christ's words from the Cross, and death, are followed by the healing of Longinus and the entombment by Joseph of Arimathea and Nichodemus. In Play 45, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, there are three sequences of equal length, eight stanzas each, two lyric and one dramatic. In the first, Thomas mourns Christ's death and reviews his life and crucifixion in language reminiscent of Rolle:

Vndewly þei demed hym,  
þei dusshed hym, þei dassed hym,  
þei lussed hym, þei lasshed hym,  
þei pushed hym, þei passhed hym,  
All sorowe þei saide þat it semed hym. (ll. 35–39)<sup>39</sup>

Thomas then speaks of the resurrection and of his groping Christ's wounds (stanza 7; compare *Quatrefoil*, stanza 23) and finds himself in the Vale of Jehoshophat, where he lies down to sleep. The second sequence shows Thomas's vision of the dead Mary being assumed into heaven. It contains three extensive musical passages which evoke, appropriately, the lyric gloss on *The Song of Songs*: Mary is the causer of song. Twelve angels salute Mary by her titles as maiden, mother, lily, rose, dove, turtle, and so on, much in the manner of Rolle's *Canticum Amoris*, and Mary identifies herself to Thomas who then (stanza 11) responds with an *Ave* salutation for which there are several lyric and other parallels. Thomas sorrows that his fellow apostles will not believe his report, whereupon Mary comforts him and gives him her girdle as a token of his truth. Thomas thanks her in an anaphoric succession of images:

'I thanke þe as reuerent rote of oure reste,  
I thanke þe as stedfast stokke 'for to stande,  
I thanke þe as tristy tre for to treste,  
I thanke þe as buxsom bough to þe bande,  
I thanke þe as leeffe þe lustiest in lande,

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I thanke þe as bewteuous braunche for to bere,  
I thanke þe as floure þat neuere is fadande,  
I thanke þe as frewte þat has fedde vs in fere.' (ll. 170–77)

The style, highly wrought and extremely unusual in the plays, is repeated in Thomas's closing speech of thanks in stanza 16. The third sequence contains the dialogue between Thomas and the incredulous apostles in which his report is vindicated by their inspecting Mary's empty tomb. The mood is dramatic, not lyric, and the careful stanza-linking of the two preceding sequences is dropped. Both the second scene of Play 36 and the second sequence of Play 45 have close lyric analogues, and it is tempting to see the York Master's use of the thirteen-line stanza as an act of lyric rather than dramatic decorum. The two plays together express a content similar to that of the poems I have already examined, also in thirteen-line stanza form: the cult of Mary, both as mediatrix and *mater dolorosa*, the blood, wounds, and passion of Christ, and penitence and the meaning of justice and redemption. They do so in lyric modes with pronounced elements of debate and, in Play 45, a rhapsodic style similar to that of *The Disputation*.

Why do such themes keep occurring in thirteen-line stanzas? The reason is almost certainly numerological: thirteen is the number of epiphany and was regarded for that reason as suitable for expressing the joys and sorrows of the Virgin.<sup>40</sup> The normal numerological treatment of numbers greater than nine involves the addition of digits: thus 13 becomes 4, a number closely associated with the Virgin as earthly matrix of the New Law. The *Quatrefoil* uses 40 (=4) 13 (=4)-line stanzas to express the concept of quaternity, a peculiar decorum which it would be absurd to dismiss as coincidental. There are signs of some numerological consciousness elsewhere in these poems. The Vernon *Disputation* runs for 40 stanzas, and *Susannah* contains the Marian number of 28 stanzas.<sup>41</sup> For *Susannah* there is a more obvious connexion: the story is contained in the thirteenth chapter of the Vulgate Book of Daniel. Indeed, if the best of Professor Miskimin's conjectural emendations is to be believed, the English poet regarded Daniel himself as being thirteen years old at the time the story is set.<sup>42</sup> Numerology offers no insight into the metrical invention of thirteen-line stanza forms, but it may shed some light on its use for certain subjects.

### 3 'Memento Mori' Poems

There are other demonstrable relationships among thirteen-line stanza poems. I drew attention above to the importance of *The Debate between the Body and the Soul* as an influence on *The Disputation* (occurring in all three manuscripts containing *The Disputation*) and on *The Quatrefoil*. It is worth recalling that the three thirteen-line stanza poems examined by Turville-Petre are *memento mori* poems closely in the Body and Soul tradition, with their immediate focus on the all too literal corruption awaiting the knight in his eternal hunt. *Summer Sunday*, indeed, explicitly ends where one would expect *The Debate between the Body and the Soul* to begin:

Beth I say soriere likyng ful sare  
A bare body in a bed a bere ibrouth him by  
A duk drawe to þe dep wip drouping & dare.  
(*Summer Sunday*, ll. 121–23)<sup>43</sup>

Als ich lay in winteres niht  
In a droupnyng tofore þe day  
Me þhouzte i seih a selly siht  
A bodi þer hit on beere lay.  
(*Debate*, ll. 1–4, Vernon, fol. 285v)

It is at least a remarkable coincidence that the sole copy of *Summer Sunday* should have been copied into the oldest extant manuscript of *The Debate*, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 108.

Four out of the seven manuscripts of *The Debate* carry poems in the thirteen-line stanza; of the remaining three, only Auchinleck appears somewhat out of pattern<sup>44</sup> — for Digby 102 has a text of *Piers Plowman* and lyrics, two in the yet rarer fourteen-line stanza, which have been seen as within an alliterative tradition,<sup>45</sup> and BL Additional 37787, written by John Northwood, canon of Bordesley, is related to Vernon and Simeon and contains, in Latin, material that hints at further common interests.<sup>46</sup> To remain for a moment, however, with Turville-Petre's group of three poems: the most ornate of all, *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*,<sup>47</sup> was copied into Audelay's manuscript, presumably at his dictation. Elsewhere, Audelay uses a rather muted variant of the thirteen-line stanza in his own compositions. Of particular note is Poem 16 and his long Poem 2, *ababbcbc4eee2j3d2*, the style of

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which is about as alliterative as *The Festivals of the Church*. The poem, written in answer to Lollards, is clearly indebted to *Piers Plowman* — a connexion between *Piers* and thirteen-line stanza poems first seen in the case of *Susannah*. Poem 16 is Audelay's version of the Middle English couplet *Visio Pauli* (which may itself be a redaction of a lost Middle English prose version), a work which is connected with *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*. The *Visio* occurs in Vernon, and its presence in Audelay's manuscript, together with salutations to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Poems 19, 20, and 46), is proof that Audelay had access at least to some of the kinds of text that went into Vernon. What is of most interest is that, faced with this work, whose subject is the terrors of hell and the release of the damned for an outing on Saturday nights (the *mise-en-scène* of the Body and Soul debate), Audelay saw fit to transpose it — for him, quite skilfully — into thirteen-line stanzas. In the last stanza of all, Audelay disclaims authorship of the piece ('Meruel 3e not of þis makynge, | Y me excuse, hit is not I'), but by his usual signature seems to accept responsibility for the particular versification, as for the penitential advice with which he concludes: 'þus counsels 3oue þe blynd Audlay' (l. 365). We can again speak of a deliberate choice of metre, an act inspired by the attachment of the thirteen-line stanza to Body and Soul material as demonstrated elsewhere in Vernon, Simeon, Royal, and Laud Misc. 108.

Audelay's evidence is unique, for his manuscript represents the only point at which at least two alliterative traditions come together: that is, a Marian and mainly North-East Midland thirteen-line stanza tradition, whose poems have no demonstrable debt to any unrhymed alliterative poem except perhaps *Piers Plowman*; and a North-West Midland group proposed by Turville-Petre, whose works in the thirteen-line stanza may be of a slightly later date, and may be indebted to *aa/ax* poems of the later fourteenth century. *Summer Sunday*, *The Awntyrs*, and *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis* are one possible meeting place between *aa/ax* poetry and the thirteen-line stanza. Dr Doyle's grouping provides a second. Less directly, the *Pearl* manuscript, BL Cotton Nero A. x, may be a third: there is the bob-and-wheel of *Gawain*, and one may recall that in 1904 Schofield discerned the influence in *Pearl* of *The Disputation between Mary and the Cross* and *The Debate between the Body and the Soul*.<sup>48</sup> The relation of the thirteen-line stanza with the Body and Soul debate might indeed affect our understanding of broader issues of continuity than those concerning alliterative poetry, for there is something of a cultural continuity from Old English in the literary importance and influence of the Body and Soul theme, albeit completely reworked and redefined in rhymed verse form.

If there is any merit in the hypothesis that there was at least one mainly East Midland tradition which was separate in composition from *aa/ax* poetry and whatever produced it, then we have much remapping to do. This might explain the use of an alliterative thirteen-line stanza not only in two York plays but also in morality plays, particularly *The Castle of Perseverance*, which it has always seemed hard to relate to *aa/ax* poetry or to an 'alliterative revival'. The antecedent development in the thirteen-line stanza of topics to do with Marian devotion and the fact and meaning of justice and redemption elucidates the choice of metre in *The Castle*.

It may seem that this essay lacks the tidiness to merit a conclusion. In fact, however, it has remained with its original question: where was alliterative poetry written, and for whom? Who copied it, who read it, when, where, and how? True, the essay records work in progress, not just by its writer but by many of those who show active interest in the topic, rather than anything approaching provisional answers. But that is itself the major value I have claimed for research into audience and milieu: it reformulates its own subject, in this case our notions of Middle English alliterative poetic tradition(s). The essay has examined plural traditions, in multiple texts passing through multiple centres and revealing diverse and variant patterns of composition and circulation. It has attempted to do some justice to the true complexity of the topic — to what is unknown as well as the little that is known. The complexity is that of later medieval literary culture(s) in England.

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### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Anne Middleton, 'The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*', in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background*, edited by David Lawton (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 101–23 (pp. 101–02).
- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Salter, 'The Alliterative Revival', *Modern Philology*, 64 (1966–67), 146–50, 233–37; J. R. Hulbert, 'A Hypothesis concerning the Alliterative Revival', *Modern Philology*, 28 (1930–31), 405–22.
- <sup>3</sup> C. A. Luttrell, 'Four North-West Midlands Manuscripts', *Neophilologus*, 42 (1958), 38–50.
- <sup>4</sup> Derek Pearsall, 'The Origins of the Alliterative Revival', in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, edited by B. S. Levy and P. E. Szarmach (Kent, Ohio, 1981), pp. 1–24. Anne Middleton's detection in *Piers Plowman* (see note 1, above) of a distinctive blend of didactic and penitential concerns, historical thematizing, and narrative transformation of lyric modes, and my similar argument about the unrhymed alliterative corpus generally ('The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry', *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 72–94), were critical re-readings in the light of manuscript evidence and the historical and social circumstances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and looked at the English culture of the period as trilingual.
- <sup>5</sup> See the recent discussion by Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Prologue of *Wynnere and Wastoure*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 18 (1987), 19–29.
- <sup>6</sup> For other references, see Lawton, 'The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry', and 'Middle English Alliterative Poetry: An Introduction', in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, pp. 1–19.
- <sup>7</sup> David Lawton, 'Scottish Field: Alliterative Verse and Stanley Encomium in the Percy Folio', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 10 (1978), 42–57.
- <sup>8</sup> Michael Bennett, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Literary Achievement of the North-West Midlands: the Historical Background', *Journal of Medieval History*, 5 (1979), 63–88.



<sup>9</sup> Carter Revard, 'Richard Hurd and MS Harley 2253', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 26 (1979), 199–202.

<sup>10</sup> Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s. 6 (Leeds, 1974); David Lawton, 'Middle English Unrhymed Alliterative Poetry and the *South English Legendary*', *English Studies*, 61 (1980), 390–96; see also Annie Samson, 'The *South English Legendary*: Constructing a Context', in *Thirteenth Century England, I*, edited by P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 185–95.

<sup>11</sup> A. I. Doyle, 'Remarks on Surviving Manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*', in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of George Russell*, edited by G. Kratzmann and J. Simpson (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 35–48 (p. 47).

<sup>12</sup> A. I. Doyle, 'The Manuscripts', in Lawton, *Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, pp. 88–100. More recently Ralph Hanna has commenced a series of close studies of *Siege* manuscripts in preparation for a forthcoming edition.

<sup>13</sup> I particularly welcome what may seem an alternative to the kind of work discussed here, long-term general projects of regional mapping and study such as is being undertaken by Ralph Hanna for Berkeley Castle and its area of influence, and by Thorlac Turville-Petre for an area of the NE Midlands, in 'The Lament for Sir John Berkeley', *Speculum*, 57 (1982), 332–39, and 'Some Medieval English Manuscripts in the NE Midlands', in *Manuscripts and Readers in Fifteenth Century England: The Literary Implications of Manuscript Study*, edited by Derek Pearsall (Woodbridge, 1983), pp. 125–41. Such work demands to be done and is greatly facilitated by publication of the invaluable atlas of Middle English dialects, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, edited by A. McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, and M. Benskin, 4 vols and Supplement (Aberdeen, 1986–87); and the quality of the investigators guarantees much new and exciting information. Clearly, however, work that is regionally based and work based on a text, or a canon or corpus of texts, are interdependent and complementary, and both face the conceptual difficulties raised in this essay. How in either case do we establish the distinctive nature of the sample?

<sup>14</sup> Respectively, 'The Manuscripts', p. 90; 'Remarks on Surviving Manuscripts', p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> See M. L. Samuels, 'Langland's Dialect', *Medium Ævum*, 54 (1985), 232–47; 'Dialect and Grammar', in *A Companion to 'Piers Plowman'*, edited by J. A. Alford (Berkeley and London, 1988), pp. 201–21. This collection also contains George Kane's essay 'The Text', pp. 175–200.

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- 16 *Mum and the Sothsegger*, edited by M. Day and R. Steele, EETS, OS 199 (London, 1936), fragment M, ll. 1280–87.
- 17 Doyle, 'The Manuscripts', p. 96.
- 18 Derek Pearsall, 'The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds', in Lawton, *Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, pp. 34–53 (p. 37).
- 19 Elizabeth Salter, 'Alliterative Modes and Affiliations in the Fourteenth Century', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 79 (1978), 25–35.
- 20 Angus McIntosh, 'Early Middle English Alliterative Verse', in Lawton, *Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, pp. 20–23, (p. 23); A. T. E. Matonis, 'Middle English Alliterative Poetry', in *So many people longages and tonges: philological essays in Scots and mediaeval English presented to Angus McIntosh*, edited by Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 341–54. Subsequent references to Matonis appear in text.
- 21 Thorlac Turville-Petre, '*Summer Sunday*, *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis*, and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*: Three Poems in the Thirteen-Line Stanza', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 25 (1974), 1–14 (p. 12).
- 22 Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 62. All further references to 'Turville-Petre' appearing in text are to the essay cited in note 21.
- 23 See A. I. Doyle, 'The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, edited by Beryl Rowland (London, 1974), pp. 323–41; K. Sajavaara, 'The Relationship of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 68 (1967), 428–40; *Joseph of Arimathea*, edited by David Lawton (New York, 1983), pp. xiv–xxii; for the fullest description of the manuscript's contents, see Mary S. Serjeantson, 'The Index of the Vernon Manuscript', *Modern Language Review*, 23 (1937), 223–61; and for a more recent notice, Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts containing Middle English Romances* (Munich, 1976), pp. 269–79.
- 24 The poem has been edited twice from Vernon (fol. 315v) by F. J. Furnivall, *Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, EETS, OS 117 (London, 1901), pp. 612–27; and by Richard Morris, in *Legends of the Holy Rood*, EETS, OS 46 (London, 1871). I have retranscribed Vernon from the manuscript, and owe a debt of thanks to the Librarian of Bodley. I adopt Furnivall's line

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numeration throughout. The text of Royal (fols 126v–130v) is from my own transcription, for which I am obliged to the Director of the British Library; I have adopted the numeration of Morris's edition, pp. 197–209. The Royal manuscript is noted by C. Horstmann in *The Three Kings of Cologne*, EETS, OS 85 (London, 1886), p. vi. See also the account of this manuscript by G. F. Warner and J. P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Royal Manuscripts*, II (London, 1921).

25 The poem is edited by G. M. Drevés in *Analecta Hymnica*, 21 (Leipzig, 1895), 20–22. For Chancellor Phillip, see F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Medieval Latin Secular Poetry*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1957), II, 227–35; and for comments on the quality of the English translation, see Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Lyric* (London, 1972), p. 69, and Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 252–54.

26 See Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, pp. 210–14; M. C. Spalding, *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr, 1914).

27 Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 118; *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, edited by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, 1961), p. 340: the source of the sword iconography is Luke 2. 35. For an account of the English poem, see the contribution by F. L. Utleý to *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, edited by Albert H. Hartung, III (New Haven, 1972), 684–85; and see the bibliography, pp. 841–42.

28 See Turville-Petre, 'Three Poems', p. 2, note 4; Utleý, *Manual*, p. 685: 'The Dutch is in the same stanza form as the English'. This is misleading. The observation was originally made by F. L. Holthausen, 'Disput zwischen Maria und dem Kreuze', *Anglia*, 15 (1893), 504–05. The Dutch poem is edited by Johannes Franck, *Mittelniederländische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1910), pp. 217–25. Maerlant's thirteen-line stanza is a direct imitation of the rhyme scheme of the Latin, *aabaabaab*, with an added cauda rhyming *aabb*. It has absolutely nothing in common with the English stanza. The first 182 lines of the Dutch are a close and full translation of the Latin, into which by contrast the English makes sporadic raids. On the few occasions where the English is close enough to the Latin to be compared to the faithful Dutch, it is clear that the English poet is consulting the Latin rather than the Dutch. For example, Maerlant makes an attempt to translate the whole of the Latin poem's opening stanza:

Crux, de te volo conqueri  
quid est quod in te repperi  
fructum tibi non debitum?  
fructus quem virgo peperit

Cruce, dijns beclaghic mi,  
Twi eist dat ic vinde an di  
Die vrucht, die me toehoorde?  
Die vrucht die ic droech maget vri,

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|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| nil debet Adae veteri                | Wats dat soe Adame sculdich si,          |
| fructum gustanti vetitum.            | Dien de viant verdoorde?                 |
| intacti fructus uteri                | Mijns reinen lichamen vrucht, o wi!      |
| tuus non debet fieri,                | Ne soude an di niet hanghen bedi,        |
| culpaē non habens meritum. (ll. 1–9) | Wantene noit sonde becoorde. (ll. 14–22) |

The English makes no such attempt and merely paraphrases the salient details:

Heo seid, 'on þe, þe fruit of me, is wo bigon;  
Mi fruit I seo, in blodi bleo, among his fon;  
Serwe I seo, þe veines fleo, from blodi bon.  
Cros, þou dost no troupe  
On a pillori my fruit to pinne.  
Be hap no spot of Adam sinne . . .' (ll. 2–7)

The translation is continued in the next stanza, which begins by dealing with Mary's virginity ('Mi wombe is feir, founden vnfuyled', l. 13). In the little detail that is taken, there is evidence that the English poet is working from the Latin, which, unlike the Dutch (l. 19), does not try to excuse Adam's original sin by mentioning that the fiend duped him. The fifteenth stanza of Maerlant's poem contains the accord between Mary and the Cross, as does Vernon, stanza 38, but there are no close verbal parallels. There are a few other general similarities with the English, in the emphasis laid on the apple of the earthly paradise (stanza 38; see Vernon, ll. 115, 410–12), on the cult of Christ's blood (Dutch, ll. 537–39; compare Vernon, ll. 243, 305–18, 426–38), and the image of divine judgment over the sinful as 'een parlement' (l. 456, compare Vernon, l. 465). But there is no case for influence here.

29 For the first notice and only published extract of this poem, see Paul Meyer, 'Notices et extraits du MS 8336 de la bibliothèque de Sir Thomas Phillipps à Cheltenham', *Romania*, 13 (1884), 497–541 (pp. 521–22). See also *Religious Lyrics of the XIV Century*, edited by Carleton Brown, second edition (Oxford, 1956), Items 12–25; and the British Library's *Catalogue of Additions to Manuscripts 1946–50, Part I, Descriptions* (London, 1979), pp. 197–206.

30 Turville-Petre, 'Three Poems', p. 3; *The Festivals* is edited by Morris in *Legends*, pp. 210–21. The text begins on fol. 130v of Royal, immediately following the conclusion of *The Disputation*, and breaks off at the foot of fol. 134v (the end of a quire).

- 31 The dialect of Royal 18 A. x is basically London area, with marked underlying Essex features; that of Vernon is SW Midland — for this information I am grateful to Professors M. L. Samuels and A. McIntosh. The rhymes of *The Disputation* are better preserved in Royal, but the language of the poem suggests a more northern provenance.
- 32 F. Holthausen, 'Der mittelenglische Disput zwischen Maria und dem Kreuze', *Archiv für das Neuere Sprache und Wissenschaft*, 105 (1900), 22–29. This article has not been superseded.
- 33 I refer by this title to the East Midland poem 'Als i lay in a winteris nyt', Utley, *Manual*, p. 693, piece (e), edited by Wilhelm Linow in *Erlanger Beiträge zur englischen Philologie*, I, edited by Hermann Varnhagen (Leipzig, 1889) as *De Desputoun bitwen þe Bodi and þe Soule*; by Varnhagen, 'Zu mittelenglischen Gedichten', *Anglia*, 2 (1879), 225–49; and by Thomas Wright, *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes* (London, 1841), pp. 334–46. See Utley, p. 691; Th. Batiouchkof, 'Le débat de l'âme et du corps', *Romania*, 20 (1891), 1–55, 513–78; Rudolph Willard, 'The Address of the Soul to the Body', *PMLA*, 50 (1935), 957–83; Eleanor K. Heningham, *An Early Latin Debate of the Body and Soul: Preserved in MS Royal 7 A III in the British Museum* (New York, 1939), p. 7.
- 34 J. H. Mozley, 'Susanna and the Elders: Three Medieval Poems', *Studi Medievali*, n.s. 2–3 (1929–30), 27–52.
- 35 *Susannah*, edited by Alice Miskimin (New Haven, 1969), pp. 195–96; Augustine, Sermo CCCXLIII, 'De Susanna et Joseph: cum exhortatione ad castitatem', *PL*, 39, cols 1505–11.
- 36 *The Quatrefoil of Love*, edited by Sir Israel Gollancz and Magdalene M. Weale, EETS, OS 195 (London, 1935); the other manuscript is Bodleian Additional MS A. 106. On the dialect of this poem and *Susannah*, see E. J. Dobson's hostile review of Miskimin's edition, *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 18 (1971), 110.
- 37 See, for example, the lyric 'Mercy Passes All Things', in *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, edited by Carleton Brown, second edition, revised by G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1957), No. 95; see p. 276.
- 38 Vernon, fol. 317v; Furnivall, *Minor Poems*, p. 637. For illustrations of the quaternity, see C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (London, 1957), pp. 421–22.

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39 *The York Plays*, edited by Richard Beadle (London, 1982), pp. 323–33 (Play 36); and for 'The Assumption of the Virgin', pp. 392–99 (Play 45). There is a note on the music by John Stevens, pp. 465–74. See also *York Plays*, edited by Lucy Toulmin Smith (Oxford, 1885); see pp. 523–27 for the music. Toulmin Smith numbers Play 45 (Beadle's 'The Assumption of the Virgin') as Play 46 ('The Appearance of Our Lady to Thomas'). On lyric elements in the two plays see G. C. Taylor, 'The English *Planctus Mariae*', *Modern Philology*, 4 (1906-07), 1–33 (especially p. 8). On Play 45/46, see Carolyn Wall, 'The Apochryphal and Historical Backgrounds of "The Appearance of Our Lady to Thomas" (Play XLVI of the York Cycle)', *Mediaeval Studies*, 32 (1970), 172–92, and Anna J. Mill, 'The York Plays of the Dying, Assumption, and Coronation of Our Lady', *PMLA*, 65 (1950), 866–76. On the stanza, see J. B. Reese, 'Alliterative Verse in the York Cycle', *Studies in Philology*, 48 (1951), 639–86.

40 V. F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (New York, 1938), p. 131.

41 Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poésie médiévale* (Paris, 1972), p. 36: 'L'archaïque *Quant li solleiz*, beau poème hymnique glosant quelques versets du *Cantique des Cantiques*, est construit comme une multiplication de 7 par 4, soit 28, désignant (comme le ferait un mot composé) la virginité de Marie.'

42 Miskimin, *Susannah*, line 281: the emendation is discussed and defended, pp. 167–68. For the Vernon reading, '3it failed hit a fourteniht ful of þe zere' — which makes no sense whatever — Miskimin proposed '3ett fayled [hyn of fourteen ful of] a zere', and cites *St. Cuthbert*, 'Before he was of zeres fortene', for her comment that 'as with many a saint, the traditional age associated with the beginning of his insight is thirteen.'

43 Edited by Carleton Brown, in *Studies in English Philology in Honor of Frederick Klaeber*, edited by Kemp Malone and M. B. Rund (Minneapolis, 1929), pp. 362–74. My transcription is from the manuscript.

44 Auchinleck, however, contains the ME verse *Harrowing of Hell*, which is associated in Digby 86 and Harley 2253 with 'In a pestri stude', Utley's type (f) of debates between body and soul (*Manual*, p. 693).

45 *Twenty-Six Political and other Poems*, edited by J. Kail, EETS, OS 124 (London, 1904), Poems 10 and 16. The major 14-line stanza poems are 'St. John the Evangelist', in *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse from the Thornton Manuscript*, edited by G. Perry, EETS, OS 26 (London, 1889), pp. 88–95; 'St. John the Baptist', in *The Wheatley Manuscript*, edited by

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Mabel Day, EETS, OS 155 (London, 1921), pp. 15–19; and 'St. Katherine of Siena', edited by F. Holthausen, *Anglia*, 60 (1945), 152–61. Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*, p. 66, has a useful brief discussion.

<sup>46</sup> See Item 12 (Festivals of the Church), Items 74 (John the Baptist) and 91 (John the Evangelist), and much Marian material. The numeration of items is that of the catalogue of BL Additional Manuscripts. For detailed study of ME texts in the manuscript, see Nita S. Baugh, *A Worcestershire Miscellany: Compiled by John Northwood c. 1400* (Philadelphia, 1956).

<sup>47</sup> *The Poems of John Audelay*, edited by E. K. Whiting, EETS, OS 184 (London, 1931); *De Tribus Regibus Mortuis* is Poem 54 (p. 217).

<sup>48</sup> W. H. Schofield, 'The Nature and Fabric of the *Pearl*', *PMLA*, 19 (1904), 154–215 (p. 200). There is an unrecognized quotation from the *Debate* in *Piers Plowman* B, XII, 254–59, on the subject of cheating executors.