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Poetic Style and Poetic Affiliation in the *Castle of Perseverance*

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I

Although the *Castle of Perseverance* is a long play, it is so distinctively written that it easily holds the attention on the page. The principal medium is tightly-rhymed 13-line stanzas, symmetrically arranged and frequently ornamented with alliteration, resulting in a 'poetic amplitude' which no doubt 'slows the expression' from the point of view of onward dramatic action.[1] The poet, however, varies his stanza form, metre, line length and rhyme scheme to match the changing situation within the play,[2] and the speaking styles of the good and bad characters are sharply differentiated.[3] As in the mystery cycles, the latter's boasts and threats are expressed in exclamatory, extravagant language, laced with colloquialism and physical coarseness.[4]

> 3a, go forthe and lete þe qwenys cakle!
> Þer wymmen arn are many wordys.
> Lete hem gon hoppyn wyth here hakle!
> Þer ges syttyn are many tordys (2648-51).[5]

Above all the verbal detail is exciting, to the extent that, for long stretches of the play, the engaged reader anticipates each new stanza eagerly: what, in terms of vocabulary and phrasing, will this writer come up with next? The majority of scholars and critics have concerned themselves with matters of theme and action, and with the staging of the play, so that little attention has been paid to its remarkable linguistic inventiveness.[6] The present essay sets out to illuminate this area of the author's achievement, particularly with reference to his figurative use of language, and to show further that with regard to poetic style the play can be associated with a corpus of stanzaic religious poems in which imagery and argument are similarly pervasive.

The editor of the *Castle*, Mark Eccles, remarks appreciatively that 'the author has at his command a vigorous vocabulary', but gives no examples other than quoting from what he calls 'an unusually large number of proverbial comparisons' and listing numerous alliterative phrases with *be*.[7] Such phrases indeed recur frequently and undoubtedly become repetitive: Eccles's list ends '*be strete and stalle, be strete and stronde, be strete and stye, be strete and style, by stye and strete, be stye nor strete*, and *be sty or be strete*'. One of the practical effects of the demanding 13- or 9-line stanza forms, which normally rhyme *ababababcdddc* or *ababcdddc*, is a recourse to formulae,[8] especially when alliteration is the main ornamental device and when the poet is, as here, operating at an essentially local level, with each stanza a self-contained unit. Just as the stanza form falls into two parts, a longer-lined body and a shorter-lined wheel, so the sense commonly divides between statement and conclusion, and the verbal patterning follows suit, with the result that each unit looks inward rather than outward. The point is strongly made by Michael Kelley:

> This complex arrangement of meaning, syntax, rhyme, meter, and alliteration in each stanza is typical flamboyant ornamentation. The repetitive pattern of each stanza retards the flow of ideas, the decorative sound structure draws attention to itself, and neither serves any apparent rhetorical purpose. Clearly the decoration is introduced for its own sake, because the poet and his audience enjoy it.[9]

In these conditions of composition it does not matter poetically if similar verbal effects recur elsewhere (or if the whole play becomes unwieldy, a charge often levelled at the *Castle).* The achievement lies instead in each succeeding moment of linguistic invention.

One result of this mode of writing is that it is the flow of words that creates a meaning – general, resonant meaning – rather than that each single word bears precise meaning as it goes by.[10] Michael Peterson, discussing the morality plays in general and drawing on linguistic theory, argues in particular that 'the stream of abuse, nonsense, and deceit generated by the Vices serves, as Belsey notes, "to draw attention to the signifier at the expense of meaning"', and that such discourse, 'lacking any ultimate guarantee of meaning . . . becomes highly self-interested'.[11] Nevertheless, inventing memorable signifiers is still a form of creativity, and for this the author of the *Castle* deserves credit. The twin pressures of rhyme-scheme and alliteration squeeze out of him, at his best, a string of lexical successes which take full advantage of the

aural potential of the great range of Middle English vocabulary available to a writer eager to utilize colloquial language.

II

Michael Kelley, quoted above, further describes the play's stylistic flamboyance as combining 'decorative rhetorical figuration with vivid bourgeois realism', by which he means the 'homely proverbs, highly perceptual similes (often drawn from domestic life), and vulgar, even gross, epithets' typical of medieval fabliaux, though he admits that the 'speeches of the virtuous characters also include realistic and homely similes, proverbs, and metaphors'.[12] His list of examples, however, mingles truly imaginative language (e.g. 'Whanne [Christ's] blod strayed in þe strete', 2305) with merely vulgar idiom (e.g. 'I am no day wel [. . .] Tyl I haue wel fyllyd my mawe', 1163-64), and it is hard to agree with him that the Devil's initial speech of self-description ('Bothe þe bak and þe buttoke brestyth al on brenne', 203) really uses 'specific visual images from daily life'.[13]

What needs to be distinguished when discussing the poet's 'realistic' language are his references to the countryside and evocations of contemporary life, on the one hand, and his figurative use of concrete language on the other. The conjuring up of woods, rivers, fields, which occurs throughout the play, is typically in the form of the tags already mentioned; it is a pleasing effect but an automatic poetic response that this writer scarcely has to think about. Thus the Devil's opening stanza, just cited, ends with 'But Mankynd be stroyed / Be dykys and be denne' (208), while Anger's speech to Mankind at 1088-1100 contains all of 'be dalys derne', 'be fen or flode' and 'be feldys ferne'. The succession of stanzas in which Pride, Anger and Envy answer Covetousness's summons ('Dryuyth downne ouyr dalys drye . . . Ouyr hyll and holtys ȝe ȝou hyȝe', 897, 899) is especially striking in this respect. Each in turn describes his reaction to the call, so that we get a vivid impression of them hastening through varying terrain:

> Be doun, dalys, nor dennys no duke I dowt,
> Also fast for to fogge, be flodys and be fenne [. . .]
> Þanne must I, wod wreche, walkyn and wend
> Hyȝe ouyr holtys, as hound aftyr hare.
> If I lette and were þe last, he schuld me sore schend.
> I buske my bold baston, be bankys ful bare [. . .]

Whanne Wrath gynneth walke in ony wyde wonys,
Envye flet as a fox and folwyth on faste.
Whanne þou steryste or staryste or stumble upon stonys,
I lepe as a lyon; me is loth to be þe laste
(912-13, 920-23, 932-35).

This is also one of the most alliterative sections of the play, with noticeably longer lines and, in Gluttony's case, a sustained sequence in which the alliterating letter changes in classic fashion once every two lines:

A grom gan gredyn gayly on grounde.
Of me, gay Glotoun, gan al hys gale.
I stampe and I styrte and stynt upon stounde,
To a staunche deth I stakyr and stale [. . .] (958-61).

Gluttony, Lust and Sloth, no doubt appropriately, do not have to travel from distant parts. They announce themselves in tough, boastful language that places more emphasis on sound and rhythm than on exact meaning ('Mans florchynge flesch, / Fayre, frele, and fresch, / I rape to rewle in a rese / To kloye in my kynde', 967-70). Later, when the sins advise Mankind on his behaviour, their speech is 'realistic' in the sense of succinctly evoking images of contemporary secular life, as in:

Loke þou blowe mekyl boste
Wyth longe crakows on þi schos.
Jagge þi clothis in euery cost,
And ell man schul lete þe but a goos (Pride, 1058-61),

and:

Whanne þe messe-belle goth
Lye stylle, man, and take non hede.
Lappe þyne hed þanne in a cloth
And take a swet, I þe rede (Sloth, 1212-15).[14]

As with the lines given to the World, the Devil and Flesh at the beginning of the play, this language is bold and strongly concrete without being figurative (unless we except 'blowe mekyl bost'). And when it comes to actual battle between the vices and

virtues, the combatants' speech is again outspokenly direct:

> Out, I deye! ley on watyr!
> I swone, I swete, I feynt, I drulle!
> 3ene qwene wyth hyr pytyr-patyr
> Hath al to-dayschyd my skallyd skulle (Sloth, 2396-99).

This extravagant, non-metaphoric 'realism' can be seen as a necessary and successful counterweight to the fact that the *Castle of Perseverance* is largely peopled by allegorical characters.

Nevertheless there are a large number of examples of true figurative language in the play, most of them occasional (in this author's fashion) but some that are more sustained; and it is here that his linguistic originality is most apparent. His similes are not particularly special. The opening speeches by the Sins, quoted above, include 'as hound aftyr hare' (921) and 'flet as a fox' (933), and elsewhere, too, it is the natural world that supplies most of the comparisons. The Devil anticipates binding Mankind 'as catte dothe þe mows' (952). Mankind, at the point of death, laments that 'as a flour fadyth my face' (3000). God the Father welcomes his Four Daughters as 'Brythere þanne blossum on brere' (3246). Rather more vividly, World, boasting of his status, declares that 'As a hawke I hoppe in my hende hale' (458),[15] but at 353-54 ('Werldys wele, be strete and stye, / Faylyth and fadyth as fysch in flode') the success of the simile is adversely affected by the presence of yet another adverbial tag. At 2598 'Werldys wele' is compared again, with striking plausibility, to a 'thre-fotyd stole' ('It faylyt a man at hys most nede').[16]

Straight after 353-54 occurs a simile of a different order of imagination. Contrasted with the transience of worldly wealth is the security of Heaven, 'Per Criste syttyth bryth as blode' (356). The comparison has resonance because blood can not only be seen as bright but is appropriate to Christ for quite other reasons. And in comparison with 353-54 it also aptly demonstrates that the day-to-day world surrounding the dramatist is not often, in itself, his prime poetic stimulus. Instead it is death, and events in the life of Christ central to mankind's salvation, which most often inspire this writer to express himself figuratively, and which reveal him to be not only an accomplished dramatist but a true religious poet.

In some instances metaphor is provoked by other themes. World happily announces 'Wyth fayre folke in þe felde freschly I am fadde' (187). Lust begins memorably with 'In mans kyth [i.e. loins] I cast me a castle to kepe' (971). Mankind, embracing Gluttony, declares that 'Fastynge is fellyd vndyr fete' (1165), and later

defends his sins as no different from anyone else's with the vulgar retort 'We haue etyn garlek euerychone' (1369).[17] The Devil, anticipating defeating the Virtues in battle, says that 'In woful watyrs I schal hem wasche' (1921), while Bad Angel, consigning Mankind to Covetousness, orders him to 'hange þyne hert upon hys hordys' (2653). Especially fine, because a complex double metaphor, is Good Angel's warning to Mankind about his evil counterpart: 'Of cursydnesse he kepyth þe key / To bakyn þe a byttyr bred' (1589-90). Wickedness, that is, is an oven in which, once unlocked, the bread of damnation will be baked. It is a grotesque inversion of the idea, found elsewhere, that the Eucharistic bread was baked in the pure womb of the Virgin Mary.[18]

The image of 'a byttyr bred' is of course associated with death, and the lines in question occur in the context of explicit metaphoric references to the subject:

> He wolde þe lede ouyr londys lay
> In dale of dros tyl þou were ded.
> Of cursydnesse he kepyth þe key
> To bakyn þe a byttyr bred.
> In dale of dol tyl þou schudyst dey
> He wolde drawe þe to cursydhed (1587-92).

The concept of death as a valley is far from original (though approaching it across *londys lay* 'fallow land' decidedly more so), and occurs so frequently in the play that it would be wrong to suggest that there is great poetic pressure behind it. In particular, 'dale of dros' is repeated on three other occasions, at 756, 1658 and 1759, suggesting a ready-made phrase (and yet the *Middle English Dictionary* records it in the *Castle of Perseverance* alone).[19] The common use of 'clay' to denote the grave (as here at 408, 2638, 2717, 2874 and 2894) is in itself scarcely metaphoric, but in 2874 it is linked succinctly with the idea of the grave as a prison – 'In colde clay schal be þy cage' – while at 2638 the idea, striking enough, of the corpse in effect eating clay prompts the poet to go so far as to imagine death as 'dough':

> Tyl hys mowthe be ful of clay.
> Whanne he is closyd in dethis dow (2638-39).[20]

Though the subject-matter is death there is a liveliness, almost a gaiety about such vocabulary, as if the pleasure in playing with language (like faith in the Resurrection) transcends the reality of dying. 'Whanne Mankynde is castyn undyr clourys to crepe'

(977), says Lust – the image's freshness deriving from the unexpected *crepe* as much as from the rare *clourys* 'sods'[21] – and Justice's stern appeal to God for Mankind to be punished is lightened by 'Tyl Deth trypte hym on hys daunce' (3425). Some death-related images recur too frequently, for example 'To his sowle brewyth a byttyr jous' (950, cf. 3019, 3075). It is instead the once-only creations about dying and the suffering to come which impress us with the power of this poet's imagination: 'Whanne al hys lyfe is lytyd upon a lytyl pynne / At þe laste' (112-13); 'Cold care schal ben hys crust' (1043); 'I schal fonde þe to greue / And putte þe in peynnys plow' (3113).

Unconventional application of 'inappropriate' vocabulary to serious subjects is evident also in the play's references to events in the life of Mary and Christ. Chastity is praising the Virgin unremarkably when suddenly the word 'trussed' appears:

> Þat curteys qwene, what dyd sche?
> Kepte hyre clene and stedfastly,
> And in here was trussyd þe Trinite (1632-34).

The poet rises to the challenge of having to find a word to alliterate with 'Trinite' by successfully evoking a sense of the miracle that Mary could have so much of significance packed into her. Further on in the play Patience, answering the insults hurled at her by Anger, asserts that when Christ, during his Passion, 'stod meker þanne a chylde / And lete boyes hym beten and bynde' (2127-28), he in effect 'Rent þe up, rote and rynde' (2126). 'Root and rind' is a well-attested Middle English idiom for 'completely',[22] but we cannot help being forcibly reminded of the phrase's concrete meaning when it is applied, as here, to such a strong physical action (even though this is metaphorical and the victim a personified vice).

Language of the same kind occurs elsewhere in this section of the play, during which repeated allusion is made to Christ's Passion. After the Virtues have achieved temporary victory over their enemies by hurling roses at them – pretend battle with symbolic weapons – Anger complains that he is 'al betyn blak and blo / Wyth a rose þat on rode was rent' (2219-20). The image of the rose, which on stage can do no more than be thrown, ineffectually, comes to violent paradoxical life in words: the rose *was* Christ, a flower torn on the Cross, and *is* now a metaphorical club (and yet it is Patience that does the damage). Shortly afterwards it is Chastity's turn to face down Lechery:

> Oure Lord God mad þe no space

Whanne his blod strayed in þe strete.
Fro þis castel he dyd þe chase
Whanne he was crounyd wyth þornys grete
And grene (2304-08).

The image is of a vigorous Christ, crowned with thorns, his blood spilling out on the street, bursting from the castle and seeing Lechery off, giving him no room to operate. This time the surprising word is *strayed*. Earlier in the play Humility says of the deadly sins, 'Hys [i.e. Mankind's] enmys strayen in þe strete' (2051), i.e. roam about, showing that the alliterative phrase was part of this writer's repertoire. But here the subject, remarkably, is Christ's blood. We might have expected a passive '*was* strayed', i.e. was strewn, but under the pressure of poetic creativity strewing and straying, the blood and the pursuer, have become one.

III

W. A. Davenport chooses to compare the comprehensive scope of the *Castle of Perseverance* with the encyclopaedic didacticism exhibited in the contemporary writings of Lydgate, and the former's 'verbal amplitude' with the latter's 'expansive, decorative and rhetorical expression of moral ideas'.[23] He argues later, however, that in the matter of elevated style Lydgate's example has profited *Mankind* rather than the author of the *Castle*, 'whose main tools of heightened expression are insistent alliteration and complex stanza forms'.[24] Nowhere does he consider the imagistic features of the *Castle*'s poetic style explored above, which align it not at all with Lydgate but instead with a number of later fourteenth-century stanzaic religious poems.

One point of comparison is Richard Maidstone's *Penitential Psalms*, a long series of self-contained stanzas in which, in every case, a paraphrase of the biblical verse is followed by appropriate didactic meditation, all within eight lines rhyming *abababab*.[25] This discipline, a restrained use of alliteration and the influence of the Psalmist's imagery together result in poetry which is concentrated in language as well as thought. As with the *Castle* the unit of poetic activity is the individual stanza, and, as there, free-ranging imagination and informal concrete vocabulary combine to produce a succession of isolated memorable phrases, especially when the subject-matter is related to death or events in the life of Christ.[26]

Maidstone's quiet, controlled verses are of course very different from the often

extravagantly ambitious morality play, but it is evident that the two works are able to draw on the same poetic mode.[27] Thus we may compare 'Whanne Mankynde is castyn undyr clourys to crepe' (*Castle*, 977); 'But whenne my cors is [caste] in creke / And deed is doluen vndur þe stoones' (*Psalms*, 21-22); 'Whanne he is doluen al to dust' and 'Now schal I in a dale be delue' (*Castle*, 2679, 2948); 'Or I be brouȝte wiþinne shippes bord / To sayle into þe dale of duste (*Psalms*, 815-16); 'In dale of dros whanne þou schalt droue' (*Castle*, 1658); 'Þou dryue me doun to chese a chaunce' (*Psalms*, 631). A longer parallel links Christ's incarnation and suffering with the defeat of the sin of pride:

> Ageyns þi baner of pride and bost
> A baner of meknes and mercy
> I putte ageyns pride, wel þou wost . . .
> Þis meke kynge is knowyn in euery cost
> Þat was croysyd on Caluary (*Castle*, 2082-84, 2086-87);
>
> A blisful bridde was brouȝte in cage,
> Couþ and kidde in euery coost,
> When [þou were] drawen in tendre age
> To dryue adoun þe fendes boost (*Psalms*, 477-80).

And the concept of the well of mercy is expressed almost identically in the two works, each time in connection with an appeal from mankind for help:

> Whanne man crieth mercy, and wyl not ses,
> Mercy schal be hys waschynge-well (*Castle*, 3144-45);
>
> But whenne we ceese & con saye "hoo!",
> Þi mercy is oure wasshynge well (*Psalms*, 511-12).

There are similarities also with a group of discursive yet boldly imagistic religious poems, attributable to a single author, of which the best known is the *Dispute between Mary and the Cross*.[28] Of great significance is that these four poems all use a thirteen-line stanza enhanced by ornamental alliteration, two of them employing the rhyme-scheme $ababababb_4c_3ddd_4c_3$, found in the great majority of the stanzas in the *Castle of Perseverance*, and two the even tighter $ababababb_4b_3ccc_4b_3$, which occurs in seven stanzas of the *Castle* (and, with this stress pattern, seemingly

nowhere else).[29] Their likely area of composition is East Anglia, possibly Norfolk; the language of the *Castle* has been localized in central southern Norfolk.[30]

Events in the Life of Christ are central to the discursive meditations of the *Dispute* group of poems, inspiring their author to remarkable acts of linguistic creativity, bolder and more sustained than anything in the *Castle*. Direct verbal parallels between the poems and the play are few, but a similar poetic style is often in evidence: strong discourse enlivened by striking imagery, stimulated by a challenging rhyme-scheme and an inventive attitude to language, not least a desire to exploit the opportunities offered by alliteration.

Two small parallels may first be noted, one of them no more than a similar phrase, in typical language, to describe the fate of the body in the grave: 'Whanne he is beryed in bankys brymmne' (*Castle*, 1638) and 'Wen þis body is beryd vndyr brym' (*Alle ȝe mowyn be blyth and glade*, 203).[31] The second example is a shared metaphoric use of *crust* in the sense of something to chew on, quite different in its two instances but together representing the only figurative uses of this word recorded in *MED*. In the play it occurs in the phrase 'Colde care schal ben hys crust' (*Castle*, 1043, said of Mankind's future corpse); in *Whon grein of whete is cast to grounde* it is used as part of an extended figure playing with the idea of bread, applied first to Christ's life and then, through the Eucharist, becoming the moral of which man must eat: 'Þe neoþur croste mai þe fulle / Cheuȝ þeron and ofte þenke [. . .]' (151-52).[32]

Features of the *Dispute* group of poems not so evident in the *Castle of Perseverance* (or in Maidstone's *Penitential Psalms*) are the pervasive re-use of images and the rapidity with which ideas and poetic modes succeed one another. However, two stanzas in the play stand out as approaching this style, and the present essay will conclude by examining them. They are lines 2261-86, Abstinence's riposte to Gluttony during the principal battle between the virtues and vices, close in position to passages already quoted but altogether quieter and more reflective in tone. The second of the two stanzas is one of the seven that use the *abababababbcccb* rhyme scheme, and the closest tonal parallels are indeed with *Alle ȝe mowyn be blyth and glade*, one of the poems that uses this demanding mode.[33] The first stanza also employs an unusual rhyme-scheme, and Avril Henry points out the emphasis given to the speech by these means.[34]

Abstinence begins by pointing out the damaging effects of the immoderate eating and drinking recommended by Gluttony:

> Þi metys and drynkys arn vnthende
> Whanne þei are out of mesure take.

Þei makyn men mad and out of mende
And werkyn hem bothe wo and wrake (2261-64).

She will, she says, put out the fire (both physical and moral) that Gluttony has been threatening to light,

Wyth bred þat browth us out of hell
And on þe croys sufferyd wrake:
I mene þe sacrament.
Þat iche blysful bred
Þat hounge on hyl tyl he was ded (2267-71).

Christ, in these lines, does not have to be named. He is transformed immediately into bread – wholesome food, unlike Gluttony's – with the result that it is the Eucharist that already hangs on the cross and harrows hell.[35]

The second stanza, which I quote in full, continues with the same image but returns first to Christ's incarnation:[36]

In abstynens þis bred was browth,
Certys, Mankynde, and al for þe.
Of fourty dayes ete he nowth
And þanne was naylyd to a tre.
Example us was betawth,
In sobyrnesse he bad us be.
Þerfor Mankynd schal not be cawth,
Glotony, wyth þy degre.
Þe sothe þou schalt se.
To norysch fayre þou þou be fawe,
Abstynens it schal wythdrawe
Tyl þou be schet vndyr schawe
And fayn for to fle (2274-86).

In the opening quatrain Christ's life is vividly compressed, events leaping from the Fasting to the Crucifixion in language of great simplicity. The speaker, Abstinence, has stepped aside from haranguing Gluttony, and is here addressing mankind – not just the Mankind of the play but all of us, as is made clear by the didactic moralizing and sudden plural reference of the next two lines. Then the poetic mode shifts again, as

Abstinence, having established the virtue of sobriety by drawing on Christ's example, returns to the dramatic action and the attack on her opponent (though the didacticism remains in the finger-wagging 'Þe sothe þou schalt se'). The sense now becomes difficult as the stanza begins to run out, but the intention of 2283-84 is presumably, 'Even though you're eager to feed [him] pleasurably, Abstinence will remove [the temptation]'. It ends with what appears to be one of this author's typical alliterative euphemisms for death – 'shut beneath the thicket' – but the manuscript's *schet* may disguise an original *schent* 'disgraced', 'confounded', as at 221 'schent vndyr schawe', and certainly 2286 suggests that a still living Gluttony will instead be put to flight.

The technique and cadences of these stanzas recall passages from *Alle ȝe mowyn be blyth and glade*, of which only a small sample can be given here:

> Þe bred of lyf fro heuene he spad;
> Yntyll a maydyn he toke þe wey.
> Yn a cake þe kyng ys clad,
> Chastly closyd wyth kyngys keye.
> Ete blyssyd bred of Godys bord:
> Þan schall þou leuyn and neuer more dye,
> Lappyd in lofys beye (29-35);[37]
>
> An angelys dent Adam gan dryf
> Þe blysful blisse þat hym forbed,
> Till Godys son ystarfe wyth stryf;
> Fyrst he made hys body in forme of bred,
> Yrent he was ful red (44-48);
>
> Þat holy leche þe sek hawyt fete,
> And leyd plastyrs to many sor;
> Feferows drynkys hym forbete
> And gotows metys myne and mor (153-56);
>
> Man, fle folye and ful fondyng,
> [And] gayn glotonye fram [þi] gost,
> Take louesse and loue lykynge,
> And put vt pryd and wraþis bost (166-69).

The poetic style of the *Castle of Perseverance* has more affinity with tough, quick-

moving, imaginative and assertive verse such as this than with the sort of verbal amplitude associated with Lydgate; and in this way it stands at the end rather than the beginning of a tradition. For a combination of alliteration and the new fashion of aureation we may look instead at the work of Richard Spalding, writing in south-east Lincolnshire later in the fifteenth century:[38]

> Katereyn with hyre resons þat rwd þus sche rent,
> sche rowht not of his rialte, hir rewle was so rihte,
> and qwen þat bostful belamy þat beerd so <had> bent,
> þat neþer bewte ne bonchif abode in þis b<r>yhte (15-18).

We may be glad that the author of the *Castle of Perseverance* still had a vigorous fourteenth-century poetic tradition to inspire him.

NOTES

[1] W. A. Davenport, *Fifteenth-Century English Drama: The Early Moral Plays and their Literary Relations* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), p. 106.

[2] See *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*, ed. by Mark Eccles, EETS, os 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. xv-xvii, and Avril Henry, 'The Dramatic Function of Rhyme and Stanza Patterns in *The Castle of Perseverance*', in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. by O. S. Pickering (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 147-83. The different styles observed by some scholars in the opening Banns (1-156) and the concluding debate of the Four Daughters of God (3121-649) are likely to be further instances of deliberate variation and not evidence for separate authorship. For the latter interpretation see Jacob Bennett, '*The Castle of Perseverance*: Redactions, Place and Date', *Mediaeval Studies*, 24 (1962), 141-52.

[3] Richard Proudfoot, 'The Virtue of Perseverance', in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. by Paula Neuss (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 92-109 (p. 102).

[4] Michael T. Peterson, '*Fragmina verborum*: The Vices' Use of Language in the Macro Plays', *Florilegium*, 9 (1987), 155-67. His note 22 (p. 166) presents the results of a partial analysis of the play, showing that the speeches of Mankind's enemies have by far the highest degree of alliteration.

[5] I quote throughout from Eccles, *Macro Plays*.

[6] Thus two recent histories of medieval English drama quite fail to mention the play's language: see Pamela M. King, 'Morality Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 240-64 (243-47), and the piecemeal discussion in A. C. Cawley and others, *The Revels History of Drama in English*, I, *Medieval Drama* (London: Methuen, 1983).

[7] Eccles, *The Macro Plays*, pp. xxiv, xx-xxi, xix.

[8] Cf. Proudfoot, 'Virtues of Perseverance', p. 102.

[9] Michael R. Kelley, *Flamboyant Drama: A Study of the Castle of Perseverance, Mankind and Wisdom* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), p. 42: see also the analysis on p. 39.

[10] Cf. Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 162, describing the techniques of secular alliterative verse.

[11] Peterson, 'Fragmina verborum', p. 163, quoting Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 60, n. 18.

[12] Kelley, *Flamboyant Drama*, pp. 32, 37-38.

[13] Kelley, *Flamboyant Drama*, pp. 37, 32-33.

[14] It may be noted that these passages function strictly as evocative rhetoric appropriate to the immediate dramatic situation. They are not, as spoken, didactic, and do not amount to social comment on the part of the playwright (and are thus quite different from the sustained passages of social realism characteristic of the Wakefield Master). As noted earlier, continuity of detail or effect beyond the bounds of a single stanza is not a feature of this writer's style.

[15] But cf. *Pearl* 184, 'I stod as hende as hawk in halle', the most striking of the phrasal similarities adduced in Karl Hammerle, 'The *Castle of Perseverance* und *Pearl*', *Anglia*, 60 (1936), 401-02.

[16] The phrase is item S795 in B. J. and H. W. Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings mainly before 1500* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1968), but this is the only citation.

[17] Eccles, *Macro Plays*, pp. xx, 192, takes the phrase to be proverbial, but it is recorded nowhere else. For the association of garlic with lechery see D. Biggins, 'Chaucer's Summoner: "Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes", C.T. I, 634', *Notes and Queries*, 209 (1964), 48.

[18] Cf. 'In virgyne Mary this brede was Bake' from the Eucharistic carol by James Ryman printed in *The Early English Carols*, ed. by R. L. Greene, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 194.

[19] See *MED* (as it is henceforth abbreviated), *dale* n., 3. Cf. also 'Tyl þei be dyth in dethys delle' (3041), rhyming with the highly unusual 'He [Covetousness] hathe þe schapyn a schameful schelle' (3039). Eccles, *Macro Plays*, glosses 'schelle' as '? covering', but it is more likely to be the rare *shele* n. (a), 'hut or hovel' (*MED*), used figuratively.

[20] The phrase 'dethys dow' is however also used at 811. I follow Eccles, *Macro Plays*, in interpreting the word as 'dough'. *MED*, however, aligns it with the word 'day', and gives it its own headword *dow* n. where the *Castle*'s 'in dethis dow' – there are no other citations – is glossed as 'at the time of one's death' by analogy with 'dethes dai'. But *MED deth* n., 9, reveals only one similar expression, with a different preposition ('to dethis dawes'), and the *Castle*'s rhyming of *dow* with *inowe*, on both occasions, is sufficient evidence that *MED* is mistaken.

[21] Cf. 241, 'Þou I be clay and clad [i.e. clod], clappyd vndir clowrys'. Elsewhere the corpse's fate is a deep lake ('Tyl Deth comyth foul dolfully and loggyth hym in a lake / Ful lowe', 99-100), while hell is 'balys bowre', a bower of suffering (1541, 3042).

[22] See *MED, rote* n. (4), 8.

[23] Davenport, *Fifteenth-Century English Drama*, p.106.

[24] Davenport, *Fifteenth-Century English Drama*, p.135.

[25] For the text see *Richard Maidstone's Penitential Psalms, ed. from Bodl. MS*

Rawlinson A 389, ed. by Valerie Edden, Middle English Texts, 22 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990), from where I quote.

[26] See the discussion of Maidstone's *Psalms* in O. S. Pickering, 'Middle English Metaphysical Verse? Imagery and Style in Some Fourteenth-Century Religious Poems', in *Individuality and Achievement*, ed. by Pickering, pp. 85-104 (96-100).

[27] A further point of similarity is their inclusion of Latin lines, which occur in the *Psalms* at the head of every stanza (as source text) and in the *Castle* as frequent, usually extra-metrical source-quotations within stanzas. Eccles, *Macro Plays*, p. xx, notes that 'fourteen Latin texts come from the Psalms, nine from other books of the Old Testament, ten from the Gospels, and nine from other books of the New Testament'.

[28] See the discussions in O. S. Pickering, 'A Middle English Poem on the Eucharist and Other Poems by the Same Author', *Archiv für das Geschichte der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 215 (1978), 281-310, and in Pickering, 'Middle English Metaphysical Verse?', especially pp. 85-88.

[29] Henry, 'Dramatic Function of Rhyme and Stanza Patterns', pp. 151-52, counts three examples of *abababababbcccb* in the play, but the stanzas beginning at lines 157, 209, 841 and 2804 apparently also use this rhyme-scheme.

[30] See Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and Michael Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Later Mediaeval English*, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), in which the language of the Macro Plays manuscript (Washington, Folger Library, MS V.a.354) is Linguistic Profile 58.

[31] *Alle ȝe mowyn be blyth and glade* is edited in Pickering, 'A Middle English Poem on the Eucharist', pp. 299-306. Other death-related phrases reminiscent of the *Castle* (and Maidstone) include 'From þe dale of dred' (52), 'He is cast in a cledis clyfen, / Mercly in moldys meyne' (138-39), and 'Tyll clay closyd in clom' (314).

[32] The poem is printed in C. Horstmann, 'Proprium Sanctorum: Zusatz-Homilien des Ms. Vernon fol. CCXV ff. zur nördlichen Sammlung der Dominica Evangelia', *Archiv für das Geschichte der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 81 (1888), 83-114, 299-326 (pp. 83-5)

[33] The other – and the fourth poem of the *Dispute* group – is the *Festivals of the Church*, fragmentary in its only manuscript.

[34] The stanzas are printed and discussed in Henry, 'Dramatic Function of Rhyme and Stanza Patterns', pp. 164-66.

[35] Cf., more expansively, *Whon grein of whete*, 112-15: 'On longe laddres vp þei trede, / Þe Jewes þat weore wylde and wode, / Berien vre bred aȝeyn pe brede / Til al his bac to-brast on blode'.

[36] With *browth* in 2274 compare *forth browth* in 326, where the meaning is quite

clearly 'born'. After 2277 there is an extra-metrical Latin line, 'Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et cetera', in effect glossing 2276. Henry, 'Dramatic Function of Rhyme and Stanza Patterns', p. 152, n. 22, makes it clear that the stanza is to be regarded as *abababababbcccb*, pointing out that 'browth' and 'nowth' rhyme with what is written as 'betawth' and 'cawth'.

[37] With 31-32 cf. *Castle* 1589-90, 'Of cursydnesse he kepyth þe key / To bakyn þe a byttyr bred', quoted and discussed above.

[38] I quote from F. Holthausen, 'Ein mittelenglischer Katharinenhymnus von Richard Spalding', *Anglia*, 60 (1936), 150-64 (p. 152). The language of the poem is localized in the Spalding area of Lincolnshire in McIntosh, Samuels and Benskin, *Linguistic Atlas*, where the manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rolls 22) is analysed as Linguistic Profile 912.