Leeds Studies in English

THE AWNTYRS OFF ARTHURE: DIALECT AND AUTHORSHIP.

In the *Review of English Studies* v, 12-21, appeared an article by S. O. Andrew on the dialect and authorship of the poems " Morte Arthure " (=MA), " Awntyrs off Arthure " (=AA) and " Pistill of Susan " (=P). He concluded that the three poems were written in a Northwest Midland dialect, and all by one and the same author, i.e. Huchown of the Awle Ryale, assuming that the poem P we know must be " þe Pistil . . . of Suet Susane " mentioned by Wyntoun[1] as Huchown's, since it is unlikely that there were two of that name.

I shall try to show that AA at least was not written originally in a Northwest Midland dialect but in a Northern one, and that marked differences in style make it improbable that one and the same man wrote all three poems.

There are four MSS. of AA; the Thornton (=T) is a Northern copy, the Ireland (=I) a West Midland copy, the Douce (=D) also one which must have been copied at some time in the West Midlands, and the Lambeth (=L) a Southern copy[2] hitherto little known and not mentioned by Andrew.

We have the following evidence of the original dialect of the poem:—

1.   The local knowledge displayed by the author: the scene is in the neighbourhood of Carlisle. Tarn Wadling, Inglewood Forest and Plumpton all seem well known to the author, who may therefore have been a native of Cumberland or Westmoreland. He also shows a knowledge of Southwestern Scotland whilst, on the other hand, his idea of the South of England is vague.

2.   Alliteration, which (a) is notable for the use of the exclusively Northern combination of OE. *cw-* and OE. *hw-* in v. 144 " Qwene was I whilome . . . " and (b) possibly confirms

---

[1] Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, v, 4312, in F. J. Amour's Scottish Text Society edition.

[2] See *LSE.* iii, 38 ff.

" salle," the Northern form of the auxiliary: see e.g. vv. 135 and 406.

3. The rhymes. Typically Northern are:—

(a) OE. and ON. *ā* as *a*—as in vv. 43, hare: bare: care: fare; 403, are (ON.): fare *etc.*

(b) Present indicative plural in *-es/-is*—as in vv. 124 hydes: bydis (3rd sg.): sydes (subst): glydis (3rd sg.); 211, 321.

(c) Present indicative singular in *-es/-is*—as in vv. 2, 13 ledis: wedys (subst); 26, 27 *etc.*

(d) OE. *ō* as *u* possibly in vv. 712-14 in T.

4. The following points either do not conflict with the supposition of Northern origin or support it:—

(a) OE. *y*, *ȳ*, as *i*—as in v. 124 hydes (pres. ind. pl. < OE. *hȳdan*): bydis (pres. ind. sg. < OE. *bīdan*).

(b) No ending on verb immediately preceded by a pronoun—as in vv. 572 þei fighte: brighte; 596 þei make: sir Lake: sake—L; 60 etc.

(c) Use of Scandinavianisms—e.g. " tille " in rhyme in vv. 360, 409, 626; " ille " in v. 630; " carpe " in v. 409, confirmed by alliteration.

(d) Use of " salle," possibly confirmed by alliteration, in vv. 135 and 406.

5. Appearance in MSS. other than T (in which the Northern dialect is best preserved) of typically Northern forms especially within the line (a) in I and D, and (b) especially in the Southern copy L where D and I have Midland forms.

(a) I. vv. 4 dukys; 8 fermesones (beside the common *-us*).

          32 scho; 538, 575, 661 þayre.

          653 þay lepe; 592 bannes (*3rd pl.*).

          122 brand; 107 woman.

D. vv. 4 dukes and dussiperes (*-es* usual in D).

          26 she; 575 þaire.

          129 þei skryke; 57 þei halowe; 463 kestes (*imper. pl.*).

(b) L. vv. 187 They hurle; þay hurlun (in I).
       61 They go; þei gone (in D).
      124 hyes (*3rd pl.*); hiȝene (in D).
      129 shrikys (*3rd pl.*); þay scryken (in I).
      136 þou walkes; walkest (in D).
      41 bankis; bonkes (in I and D).
      205 takyn; token (in D and I).

There are in all some forty instances in which the rhymes offer conclusive evidence as to the original dialect, and they point almost exclusively to Northern origin (for examples see above). In four sets of rhymes, however, the word " gold " appears (vv. 147, 371, 381, 664, e.g. : holde), and there is also in stanza XLVI a set of rhymes which in I appear in *-en*, apparently establishing Midland origin. These rhymes will be discussed later.

To support his theory of Northwest Midland origin Andrew claims to find traces not only of Midland but of West Midland characteristics among the Northern, then making the common assumption that the author must have lived on the edge of two dialectal areas and used a border dialect which was westerly but admitted northern forms.

It is true that there are a few established forms which are generally regarded as characteristically Midland, though not West Midland, e.g. the " gold " rhymes.

It seems very reasonable to suppose either that the " gold " rhymes—possibly but not probably—represent a licence typical only of this one author, or, more probably, that the poets of this northwestern section of the country, in which alliterative poetry flourished, knew many other works in the same tradition, as our author must have known MA, and did not hesitate to use commonly recurring words, phrases and rhymes which had become the common stock of this particular tradition.

Such a supposition does not invalidate linguistic evidence in the alliterative poems, but does explain the occasional usage of forms or rhymes generally regarded as Midland in a poem which is predominantly Northern in language.

Of the rhymes mentioned by Andrew the " gold " rhymes, the tags " to sayne " v. 208, and " to sene " v. 65 are phrases of this kind which the poet might well know from other alliterative works, and use to help out in his intricate system (it might be noted that D and T have no infinitive in v. 208; cf. also the infinitive " say " in rhyme in vv. 21 and 94).

In the case of the rhymes in stanza XLVI (vv. 586-8-90-2), Andrew points out that there are two past participles and two third person plurals, and that a set of rhymes in either -*e* or -*en* is fatal to the supposition of Northern origin. First of all it must be pointed out that the whole stanza is full of doubtful readings, e.g. D, I and L all have even different rhyme-schemes in the last five lines (this stanza is unfortunately one of some half-dozen missing in T: a leaf has been lost from the MS.). Secondly, Andrew has based his remarks solely on the reading of I (þai heuen: strauen *pp.* : þay shewen: bruen *pp.*). L and D both have, for example, an infinitive " to shewe " in v. 588, the construction of which has been changed in I as the result of its transposition with v. 590. Both L and D have also a Northern third plural in v. 590 " þey strenkel and strewe," and of course " hewe " in v. 586. All three, however, have now in v. 592 a past participle which appears as " brewe " in D and L, and " bruen " in I. It is only necessary to emend " was brewe " of L and D to " þei brewe " to complete a normal set of Northern rhymes in -*e* which L and D have otherwise preserved; whereas we know that I's copyist midlandised verb-endings on occasions even in rhyme; cf., e.g., v. 572.

The rhyme in stanza XIII turns on the word " rone " (" rayne " in T; L is corrupt). It is significant that the spelling of this word with an *a* required to establish a consistent Northern dialect is found in MA. v. 923, which NED. says is erroneous, the form " rone " being regarded as from ON. *runnr*, though the *a* spelling may here be confirmed in rhyme.

Of the lines Andrew quotes as notable for their alliteration and rhythm, v. 271 including the word " whele " (in T and I

only) is probably not original, since " whele " makes the line
too long, and is merely an insertion to make clear the reference
to the Wheel of Fortune here and in v. 266.   Attention is
drawn to v. 179 in D where there is apparently an instance of
alliteration on ʒ (verb " yeues ").   This line is also doubtful,
and alliteration on the verb " yeues " is found in this line only
in D: the other three texts each have a different verb.   In
addition, *g* forms of the verb " give " and the noun " giftes "
appear elsewhere, e.g. for the verb vv. 59, 228, 232, 422, and
for the noun vv. 253 and 697, except in vv. 232, 253, 422 in the
Southern copy L where ʒ forms have been substituted, although
it is clear from the alliteration in each case that initial *g* is
necessary.   v. 589 in D is brought to our notice for the Midland
plural " þei failene."   There is no evidence to justify a belief
that this represents the original any more closely than I's
" failis " (this stanza is missing in T: L has the Southern
" faylith "), and none to make it more likely that the copyist
of T had northernised a midland original than that the copyist
of D had midlandised a northern original: on the other
hand L, the only copy made in neither North nor Midlands,
reveals traces of an original dialect which must have been
predominantly Northern; cf. e.g. section 5 at the beginning of
this article.   This is again the doubtful stanza XLVI, and it is
instructive to note that in the next line but one in D, v. 591,
appears the Northern " þey strike," and, more important, in
v. 587, e.g. in L " þei bete " where D has " þei betene " and I
" betun."   In v. 331 the reading of I and D, " þei flokkene,"
is not in itself superior to that of T, which in addition
is supported by L with " flokkis " (and similarly in v. 319).

It must be admitted that v. 135 of I with alliteration on *w*
(:*wh*) seems less likely to be a copyist's invention than the
readings of the other three MSS., which agree against it and
alliterate on *s*, which, however, may confirm the Northern form
" salle " of T (cf. also v. 406).

On the other hand, however, the appearance in v. 572 in I
of " þai foʒtun," where " fighte " is necessary for rhyme, seems

clear evidence that the copyist of I changed his original and substituted Midland forms on some occasions; and if he could do it in rhyme there is no reason to suppose that he did not do it elsewhere.

Andrew's evidence of western influence in the original dialect is dependent then on a doubtful instance of *w*: *wh* alliteration, and on equally doubtful emendations, e.g. in vv. 488 and 693, supplying the western forms of the third person plural pronoun " hor " and " hom." In v. 488 I quite naturally has " hor." D also, clearly having been copied at some time in the west, equally naturally has " hour " which Andrew says " certifies *hor*." L has " her " and T " þaire," both as expected. Since an *h* form is not necessary for alliteration it seems impossible in an isolated case to decide with certainty which was original. The same remark applies to the suggested emendation to " hom " in v. 693. Andrew would also emend v. 61 in T and I, and regards " þei gone " as original: L however, though a Southern copy, keeps the northerly " they go " as in T and I. In fact, L does nothing to confirm westerly origin; and in I and D, both admittedly western copies, we find, e.g. the unrounded forms " woman(e) " in rhyme in v. 107, " lemmane " in D in vv. 536 and 619, " brand " so written constantly in I (e.g. vv. 122, 567-8, 577, 645, 659 in rhyme), and " changed " in D v. 123, and Northern pronominal forms " þaire " in vv 575 in both I and D, and in 538, 661 in I, and " scho " in I v. 32 and " she " in D v. 26.

Andrew assumes that I and D represent most accurately an original written in the Northwest Midlands in a dialect principally West Midland but admitting many Northern forms, and that T's copyist merely northernised the text. This theory does not accord with all the foregoing evidence, e.g. the Northern forms in L where D and I have Midland ones, the forms " þaire," " scho " and " she " abovementioned, and " foʒtun " in I v. 572. The general evidence points to a Northern original of which several copies were made south of the place of composition. D and I represent two of these

copies.   The version which served for T may well have been
a Midland transcription, which T's copyist turned back to a
Northern form, leaving, however, a few Midland spellings
(e.g. $\bar{o}$: $\bar{a}$ in rhymes, and the infinitives in *-en* in vv. 198, 278,
280, 287 which are not found in D and I, and are probably
not original), either overlooking them or allowing them because
he was familiar with them.

In short then, whereas Andrew claims that the poem was
written in a dialect chiefly West Midland which permitted
many Northern characteristics, I should postulate an original
in a dialect essentially Northern which, however, included the
very occasional use of one or two familiar Midland forms
(not West Midland), a licence found, e.g. in the rhymes including
" gold," a word which must have been well known to the author
as one frequently used by poets of this area in rhyme, e.g. with
" bolde," " holde," and in the tags " to sene " in v. 65 and
" to sayne " in v. 208.

Finally, the intimate knowledge the author shows of the
district around Carlisle where the scene of the action is laid,
and the accurate geographical reference to Southwest Scotland
seem at least to confirm the theory of Northern origin, even if
they are not enough in themselves to establish it.   In conjunc-
tion with a dialect found to be predominantly Northern they
are enough to outweigh the scanty linguistic evidence brought
forward by Andrew.

After having concluded that the three poems MA, AA and P
were all written in a Northwest Midland dialect, Andrew looked
for evidence of common authorship, and based his claims
(i) on the fact that MA must be the source of various statements
in AA, e.g. many particulars of the prophecy of the ghost in
the first part of AA are not to be found anywhere but in MA,
(ii) a list of rare words found in the three poems, and (iii) certain
similarities in the versification of AA and P.   He concludes
therefrom that the works are either by the same hand, or the
writer of AA must have been a clever imitator—which latter
he admits is unlikely, since AA has the freshness and vigour
of an original work.

Too much stress has been laid hitherto on the apparent similarity in form of these two poems. They are both written in thirteen-line alliterative stanzas and have the same rhyme-scheme,[3] but the ninth line in AA is a long one like the preceding eight, whereas in P it is a short one usually of only two syllables; the medial iteration of AA is entirely lacking in P, and the final iteration of AA appears only once in P (between stanzas VI and VII) where it may be quite accidental.

To claim that AA and MA are by one and the same author merely because MA is the probable source of certain statements in AA seems rather bold. After all, borrowing is at least as likely an explanation. Indeed it seems much more reasonable to suppose that the author of AA knew MA and borrowed mere passing references to a familiar story—and did so without decreasing in any way the originality of his own work.

Of the list of eleven rare words only three appear in AA: the difficult word " rone " which is found in all three poems, " barn " used of Christ in AA v. 222 and of Daniel in P v. 328, and " stotay." NED. gives three examples of " stotay " from MA (vv. 1435, 3467, 4271), and one from P (v. 285). The verb in AA (v. 109: it occurs only in T, though the other MSS. are probably corrupt) is listed under " stote " with several other examples from several other works. Andrew brings forward only three words which involve AA, and of these only " rone " seems of any significance. Surely the inefficacy of word-lists must be established by now, and must have been realised by Andrew himself, for in the same volume (*RES.* v, 267-72) he has another article—on the " Wars of Alexander " and the " Destruction of Troy "—in which he discusses the test-value of lists of rare " words found nowhere else or at least not in the same sense." He says at p. 270: " The evidence (of such words) proves no more than a common dialect or a common literary tradition." " That *Alexander* and *D.T.* are not by the same author is proved quite definitely to my mind

<hr/>

[3] They are therefore just as similar in form to the " Buke of the Howlat," " Rauf Coilȝear " and " Golagros and Gawayne."

by certain mannerisms or tricks of style . . . Such marked
idiosyncrasies could hardly fail to leave a trace in any other
work by the same author."

This was the idea behind C. Reicke's method of investigation.[4]
He took five poems of similar content and examined particularly
the second half-lines, believing that these were often merely
of an accessory nature, sometimes tags, sometimes a filling out
of the line with a fuller statement of the first half, and thinking,
justifiably it seems, that there he would find indications of
authorship.   For if a word or expression occurs several times
in the same poem, it is not unnatural to assume a preference
on the part of the poet for that word or expression which may
well appear in any other similar work by his hand.

This method may be applied at least to AA and MA, and
probably with justification to all three poems, though it may
be claimed that since P has so different a subject the results
may not be as trustworthy as in a comparison of the other two.

Reicke divides the half-lines into several types, number V for
example being " Hinweisen auf die Quelle."   Of the various
expressions (e.g. " as cronycles tellys " vv. 3218, 274; " as
gestes us tellis " v. 2876) which he quotes from MA, none
appears either in AA or P.   The only reference of this kind in
P is in v. 363: " þe pistel witnesseþ wel."   In AA we find:
" als the buke tellis " v. 2; " als it was me taulde " T: " as
true men me tolde " D v. 383.

Of those expressions quoted under VI (Versicherungen der
Wahrheit des Erzählten) from MA, one of which appears four
times, none are to be found in AA and P.   P has " soþely to
say " vv. 13, 57; " I dar undertake " v. 208; " þis word we
witnesse for ay " v. 220; " Nouht layne " v. 282.   AA has
" (fulle) sothely to saye: vv. 21, 308, 693; " trewely to telle "
v. 34; " I herde a clerke saye " v. 94; " takis witnes by mee "
vv. 165, 170; " takes witnes by Fraunce " v. 273; " als

prophetis haue talde " v. 239; " with owttene any fabille "
v. 300; " in lede/londe not to layne " v. 83. The only one of
these expressions used in both AA and P is the common
" sothely to say."

A similar state of affairs will be found to obtain if an examina-
tion is made of other expressions under the different headings
made by Reicke, e.g. under VII and VIII (Oaths, Blessings
and Imprecations) both AA and P use formulas of a very
different kind from those to be found in MA,[5] whilst neither
has any of the " Verwünschungen " from MA given by Reicke.
Under IX (Expressions of Sorrow) MA has the following
phrases occurring several times: " my sorowe es the more,"
" and dole es the more," " rewthe es the more," and " harme es
the more " (once). Again, none of these is to be found in
AA and P, and indeed the words " sorowe, rewthe, harme "
(as noun) do not even appear in AA, and " sorowe " only once
in P. On the other hand the phrase " kele . . . of care "
occurs twice (vv. 43, 201) in AA and in neither of the other two;
and similarly the word " grille " appears three times in AA
(vv. 422, 632; as adj. in v. 620) and in neither of the other two.

Under X are listed a number of imperatives with the verb
" likes," all of which occur frequently in MA, e.g. " be ware
yif þe likes," " fraiste when the likes." There are no phrases
of this sort in either AA or P: the verb " like " does not occur
in P, and only twice (vv. 538, 615) in AA, and only in v. 615
is it used impersonally. Indeed in P there are no examples of
rhyme in " -ikes." Further P for example uses twice the verb
" let," and in each case immediately followed by an infinitive
and omitting a pronoun: " Let senden aftur Susan " v. 185,
and " Lat twinne hem in two " v. 296, a construction which
does not occur in MA, and in AA only in the exclamatory
" Let go " v. 471, the only other appearance of the verb being
in conjunction with a pronoun (v. 155 D). AA, however, uses
the phrase " takis witnes by . . . " in vv. 165, 170, 273:

---

[5] Cf. vv. 30, 97, 134, 549, 640 in AA, and 164, 221, 263, 315, 317 in P.

neither the phrase nor the substantive appears in MA or in P. Indeed, the substantive occurs only once more in the poems edited by Amours (in the " Buke of the Howlat " v. 395), whilst P uses " witnes " twice as a verb (vv. 220, 363) which is unknown to MA, AA and the other poems in Amours' edition.

Under XI, Reicke finds only one example in MA: " better ne werse " v. 3082. There appear to be none in AA, but there are several in P: " in elde ne in ȝouþe " v. 251, " bi se nor bi sande " v. 254, " þe wrong and þe riht " v. 265, " bi norþ ne bi souþ " v. 255.

Illustrations might be multiplied under other heads, e.g. under I (Ortsbestimmungen) where MA again uses the impersonal " likes," and whilst the difference in subject-matter is enough to decrease the significance of the non-appearance in AA and P of such a word as " strandes," very common in MA, there is sufficient evidence to support the general conclusion.

Let us now turn to the rhymes in AA and P. There are in AA eight instances of rhymes in " -alle " (vv. 66, 131, 295, 309, 335, 404, 439, 443), eight in " -ode " (vv. 222, 231, 313, 490, 535, 542, 547, 638), five in " -ydis/-ides " (vv. 22, 27, 118, 321, 326), five in " -ille " (vv. 360, 405, 574, 620, 626), five in " -ing " (vv. 236, 249, 288, 660, 704), four in " -edis " (vv. 14, 113, 347, 495), three in " -ayne " (vv. 79, 478, 582, though it must be admitted that two of these include the name Gawayne), two in " -ellis " (vv. 2, 49), and two in " -ikes " (vv. 534, 613). There are no examples in P of the rhyme in " -alle," " -ides," " -ille," " -edis," " -ayne," " -ellis," " -ikes "; and only one of " -ing " (v. 101), and of " -ode " (v. 283). Twice in P occurs a rhyme in " -outhe," which is not found at all in AA. Twice in AA occurs a rhyme in " -ound " in each of which appears the word " stound." This word appears once as " stont " in rhyme in P: " shont: stont: wont." If these two poems were written by the same author it is strange that there should be these differences, for it seems not unreasonable to expect in poems of such a difficult and complicated form that a rhyme

of which the poet was obviously fond in one poem would be used again in another.

But let us now examine the alliteration also in the three poems. In MA the aa/ax type of line is the most frequent, occurring in 3297 lines, i.e. 75.9%. There are, further, 136 lines of the aa/xa type. But in AA and P the tendency to excessive alliteration is notable, the most common type of line being the aa/aa, 48.6% in AA and 46% in P being of this type. On the other hand, there are in MA only 68 lines, i.e. 1.6% of the aa/aa type; and in AA and P there are respectively 22.4% and 33% of the aa/ax and aa/xa types. There is, again, a difference in the use of extended half-lines, of which type (aaa/ . . .) AA has 9.3%, P 6.2% and MA 4.2%. Double alliteration (aa/bb, ab/ab, ab/ba) appears in MA in only 1.4% of its lines, and in 1% of P's, whilst the author of AA has used this licence in 7.2% of his lines.

After the aa/ax type, the most common in MA are two others frequent in Old English, the ax/ax (287 lines) and the xa/ax (257 lines) which, together with 16 instances of xa/xa and 14 of ax/xa, represent 13.2% of the whole. On the other hand AA has only 2.6% of these types, and P 4.9%.

It is significant that the types continuing Old English tradition, which are most common in MA (representing 75.9% and 13.2% of the whole), not only do not approach the same high percentage in AA and P (22.4% and 2.6% in AA, and 33% and 4.9% in P), but are not even the most frequent.

But, to look for further peculiarities in the use of alliteration in these three poems, it will be found that in each the author has added " grouping," i.e. he has groups of two or more lines alliterating on the same letter. This system of grouping is most common in MA, in which, for instance, there occurs a group of ten lines alliterating on f (vv. 2483-92), another six consecutive lines on h (vv. 1082-7), and six with vocalic alliteration (vv. 1591-6). The author of AA has employed the same device, though to a lesser extent, in his more intricate system. In addition to his use of medial and final repetition he commonly

introduces a stànza with a couplet; indeed 28 of the 55 stanzas of AA begin in this way, 12 with two couplets, 3 with three couplets, and one with four couplets. There are in all some 91 couplets, 7 ' threes ' and 2 ' fours,' i.e. 42.6% of the long lines are so linked—though it must be remembered that medial repetition is responsible for 31 instances. On the other hand, a striking difference is to be seen in P, in which groups are found only infrequently, and stanzas introduced by a couplet only occasionally (eight out of twenty-eight stanzas are thus begun). There are some 27 couplets and 3 ' threes,' i.e. some 17.3% of the total lines are thus linked.

Vocalic alliteration is commonest in MA also, and as above-mentioned there are six consecutive lines with vocalic alliteration. 5.9% (i.e. 257 lines) of the total lines are of this kind. Of these lines 158 have " all-different " alliterating vowels, 87 have two vowels the same, and 12 have three similar vowels. In AA there are only six lines in all with vocalic alliteration (i.e. 0.8%), and these are equally divided, there being two lines " all different," two " twos " and two " threes." P has nine lines with vocalic alliteration, i.e. 2.5%, with four " all different," three " twos " and two " threes."

Finally, alliteration between v and w is common in MA, yet there is only one doubtful example in AA (v. 408—D), and there are none in P.

The foregoing collection of evidence seems sufficient to establish the belief that the three poems were composed by different authors, though each may have known of the work of another, and must have known of many other works in the same tradition. It naturally follows that if Huchown was the author of P as we know it—as he may well have been, since it is improbable that there was more than one poem of that name—he did not write AA and MA, whose authors must remain anonymous.

A. G. HOOPER.

University of the Witwatersrand.