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STYLE AND STEREOTYPE IN EARLY ENGLISH LETTERS

By NORMAN DAVIS

In his preface to the first edition of the Paston Letters in 1787, John Fenn wrote: "The artless writers of these letters here communicate their private affairs, or relate the reports of the day; they tell their tale in the plain and uncouth phrase of the time; they aim not at shining by art or eloquence, and bespeak credit by total carelessness of correction and ornament."¹ The same view of these and other medieval letters has been expressed by nearly all later critics; thus for example H. S. Bennett: "Their only endeavour was to state their ideas in a straightforward fashion, almost as simply as if they were talking."² But that it is an excessively sweeping judgement may be seen even from the opening and closing passages of many letters. "Total carelessness of ornament" can hardly be attributed to a young man who writes to his mother in these terms: "Aftyр humbyll and most dew recomendacyon, in as humbyll wyse as I can I beseche yow of your blyssyng, preying God to reward yow wyth as myche plesyer and hertys ease as I have latward causyd you to have trowbyll and thowght"; and concludes: "And if it plesе yow to have knowlage of our royall person, I thank God I am hole of my syknesse, and trust to be clene hole of all my hurttys wythin a sevensyght at the ferthest, by wyche tym I trust to have othyr tydyngys; and those tydyngys onys had, I tryst not to be longe owght of Norffolk, wyth Godys grace, whom I beseche preserve you and your for my part."³

These paragraphs, of course, depend heavily upon well-established and widespread conventions of epistolary composition, some literary applications of which I have discussed elsewhere.⁴ Such parts of a letter are clearly somewhat distantly related to colloquial usage; and between the "tops and tails" the style is often much less formal and patterned. But, detached to some extent as they are, they are an important element in the linguistic repertory of most letter-writers and they invite the question how far they may have influenced the forms in which the other parts of letters were couched. They suggest, too, that there were probably other more or less conventional locutions of written rather than spoken origin which were exploited by writers of letters as well as of other "sub-literary" prose.

To consider first how familiar epistolary forms may have influenced style more generally, it appears that the effects are most often seen in the transitions between one part of a letter and another, and in rhythm. The more formal the letter, the more closely the body of it is likely to follow the tone and the pattern of opening and closing formulas. Lord Grey wrote to John Paston I in 1454, "Trusty and welebelovyd frend, I comaund me to yow, certifying yow that, and your sustyr be not yit married, y trust to God y know that where she may be married to a gentyman of iij c. marc of lyvelod,

the which is a grete gentylman born, and of gode blode." Paston ended a respectful but cool reply thus: "For in gode feyth, my lord, it were to me grette joy that my seyde pore suster were, acording to her pore degre, mariid be yowre avyse, trustyng thanne that ye wold be here gode lord."⁵ Grey's use of the present participle *certifying* to lead from the "salutation" and "recommendation" to the "narration" of the letter exemplifies much the commonest means of making this transition; but Paston's similar use of *trustyng* to introduce the "conclusion" has the authority of manuals of *dictamen* such as that by Thomas Sampson (c. 1355) in B.M. MS. Harley 4971: "Et si vous le puissés bonement faire, adunques auisés vous de faire subtilement la comencement de vostre Narratione issint que vous puissés comprendre la Narratione et Petitione en une clause, et sa Conclusionne ou un Participle."⁶ Some writers were unaware, or careless, of these refinements: in some of the earliest of English letters, written in 1402, Lady Zouche used a series of clauses joined by *and* where most writers of the next generation at any rate nearly always used participles: "Ryghth wel byloved friend, I grete yow wel, and thonke yow hertelych of your grete besynesse the wych that ye han had; and alwey I pray yow that ye wolen holde on."⁷ But even in quite informal family letters the characteristic type of opening is rather this: "Ryth reverent and worscheful husbond, I recomaunde me to yow, desyryng hertyly to here of yowre wyfare, thankyng yow for the tokyn that ye sent me be Edmunde Perys, preyng yow to wete . . ." (Margaret Paston, probably 1441).⁸ A comparable use of participles, not only in these positions but in the course of narrative or request, came to be a favourite device of many writers. One of the most conspicuous exploiters of them was John Shillingford in 1447: "Wherapon y consideryng the rule and commaundement of the lordes, . . . y sende to yow at this tyme praying yow . . ."; and, in a variety of functions, "Y . . . am right mery and fare right well, ever thankyng God and myn awne purse; and y liyng on my bedde atte wrytyn of this right yerly, myrly syngyng a myry song."⁹ Other examples from various collections are these:—Margaret Paston, 1465: "I sent Richard Calle on Tusday to Knevett, dysyryng hym that he woulde sende to hys baley and tenantys at Mendlesham that thei choulde be redy to come to John Paston whan he sent for them; and he sent a man of hys forthwyth, charging them in aney wyse that they choulde do so"; Richard Calle, 1469: "After that he brought hym a ryng, seyng that ye sent it hym, comaundyng hym that he schulde delyver the letter or token to hym";¹⁰ William Harleston, about 1474: "The cause of my wrytyn unto yow at this tyme is for this cause, mervelyng me gretly that ye send me nat my money";¹¹ Richard Cely, 1479: "Y have ressavyd from you a letter wrytten at Bregys apon Aulhalhouday, wherby y wnderstond of your grehyt seckenys, thankyng God of your amendment, trystyng the wharste be passed"¹² (cf. Margaret Paston, 1443: "thanckyng God of your amendyng of the grete dysese that ye have hade" (no. 5)); William Cely, 1483: "Hytt is soo that my lord lefftenaunte of the town of Callez as thys day sent for my master lefftenaunte of the Stap-pull, schewyng unto hym in thys wyse . . ."¹³

Constructions of this kind can be found in early Middle English and slowly become commoner; in the Wycliffite Bible they are frequent.¹⁴ But they are so much more numerous in the fifteenth-century letters than anywhere else that they may fairly be attributed to the epistolary tradition in

particular, and so ultimately to the example of the *dictatores*. It is perhaps surprising, in view of the frequency of these appositive participles, that the "progressive" forms of verbs remain rare throughout the century. There are a few examples, e.g. John Paston III, 1472: "Ser Jamys is evyr chopping at me"; 1475: "As I was wryghtyng thys letter"; Richard Cely, 1482: "I and Wylliam Bretten wher seyng mattens when thay com in to chyrche";¹⁵ but they are uncommon enough to be noticeable.

Another construction which must surely depend on written usage rather than unpremeditated speech is the use of absolute participial phrases such as "those tydyngys onys had" in John Paston III's letter quoted above. Other examples of it are by John Paston II, 1475: "thatt jorney, wyth Goddys grace, onys doon," and Margaret Paston, 1469: "wech wele considered, she were wurthy to recompense you."¹⁶

Less prominent than the participle as an introductory device, but of some importance as one of a group of impersonal constructions, is the usually otiose "It is so that . . .," exemplified in the quotation from William Cely above. The Cely brothers were particularly given to this, but it appears in all the collections. Even the comparatively sophisticated John Paston II used it sometimes: "It was soo that I was ysterdaye wyth myn oncle Mautebyes wyffe" (1479).¹⁷ Conditional forms of the expression were also favoured; indeed they had long been, as in Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, II, 11-12:

Forthi, my Sone, if it be so
Thou art or hast ben on of tho . . .

So Margaret Paston, 1465: "If so were that the Deuk wolde maynten that hathe be done to us by hys servauntys"; John Paston II, 1475: "Iff it be soo that ye be mysse-servyd there"; William Paston III, 1479: "And as for hyr bewte, juge yow that when ye see hyr, yf so be that ye take the laubore."¹⁸ A comparably set phrase, though of fuller meaning, is "It were well done," which *OED* places under *well(-)done*, ppl. a., and illustrates from *Cely Papers* no. 22, written by Richard Cely in 1479: "Hyt wher whelldoyn to enqwer and ondyrstonde of hys frendys ther how he mythet be payd." It was used in the previous year by George Cely (no. 6), by Margaret Paston in 1465: "It were wele do that ye shold speke wyth the justicys or they com here" (and at least two other examples), and by Richard Calle in the same year: "Me semethe it were wele don to meve my lord in it."¹⁹ Other impersonal turns of phrase such as "It is told me," "It is done me to understand," "It is let me weet" are still more widespread.

It seems as certain as such things can be that grammatical forms of all these kinds are not colloquial in origin but developed in written use. There are many other patterns of language less easy to place than these, but scarcely less influential in giving many of the letters an air distinctly stylized. For example, the word-order of John Paston I's remark to Lord Grey, quoted above, "it were to me grette joy," is matched by "yt were to me great comforth" in a letter from Thomas Betanson to Sir Robert Plumpton in 1486.²⁰ In the same letter to Grey, "that ye wold be here gode lord" embodies a common idiom susceptible of many variations. An early letter by John Paston II, in 1461, reported to his father an appeal made on his behalf by a friend at

court to the King (and embellished it with a pair of participles): "He answeryd me that he hadde felte and mevyd the Kyng therein, rehersyng the Kyngys answer therin: how that, when he had mevyd the Kyng in the seyde maner of Dedham, besechyng hym *to be yowre good lord* therein, konsyderyng the servyse and trewe hart that ye have done and owthg to hym, . . . he seyde he wold be yowre good lord therein as he wold be to the porest man in Ingland."²¹ William Cely wrote from Calais in 1484, of the Lord Lieutenant, "and soo my lordd ys owre goode lordde yn all matters."²² The same pattern appears with other nouns than *lord*: Thomas Betson in 1478 asked Sir William Stonor, "And also, syr, I beseche you to be my good mayster"; Margaret Paston told her husband in 1461, "Sche prayythe yow in the reverence of God ye wolle be hyr good maister"; Elisabeth Clere, writing to John Paston I about his sister, not later than 1449, said, "Sche . . . preyeth me that I wold send to yow a letter of hir hevynes, and prey yow to be hir good brothir, as hir trost is in yow"; Elisabeth Paston asked her mother Agnes, in 1459, "that ye wil be my tendre and gode moder"; and the negative of the picture appears in John Paston II, in 1476: "It is demyd that my lady wolde hereafftre be the rather myn hevy lady ffor that delyng."²³ The nouns in these expressions may variously denote superior position or patronage, the adjectives favour or disfavour, but the pattern of the phrase is constant.

These quotations happen also to have brought up other expressions more or less set in their form. Margaret's "in the reverence of God," more usually "at the reverence," was not simply a pious cliché; the phrase could still have wider application, as when William Paston I wrote "atte reverence of your right worthy persone,"²⁴ much as Chaucer had said "At reverence of hem that serven the Whos clerik I am" (*Troilus*, III, 40). Elisabeth Clere's "as hir trost is in yow" is even commoner; it happens to recur in a Plumpton letter of 1503 together with both the "reverence" and the "good lord" patterns: "I will besech you for the reverence of Jesu to be so gud father unto me and my wyfe as to mayntayne it that is my ryght, and to se a remedy for it, as my speciall trust is in you above all other creatures livinge."²⁵

Pious exclamations and blessings are naturally very frequent in all the letters, especially those of anxious mothers such as Margaret Paston — she wrote, for example, to John II in 1463, "God have you in hys kepyng, and make yow a good man, and yyf yow grace to do as well as I wold ye shuld do." But one variant of this type stands out. Margaret wrote to John II in 1469, of the deaths of two family servants: "God wysythyth yow as yt plesythe hym in sundery wyses . . . And fore Goddys love, remembre yt rythe welle, and *take yt pacyently*, and thanke God of hys *vysitacyon*." She wrote again in 1475: "Yff God wol nowt suffyr yow to have helth, thank hym theroff and *tak yt passhently*, and com hom ageyn to me, and we shall lyve togeddyr as God will geve us grase to do."²⁶ John Dalton, writing to George Cely on the death of his father in 1482, said: "Syn yt ys soo as it is [a noteworthy application of this formula] of my mayster your fayder, in the reverence of God *take it pacyently* and hurt nott yoursell, for that God will have done no mane may begense."²⁷ There are echoes of all these in Sir Thomas More's letter to his wife in 1529, when his barns had been burnt down with heavy loss: "Albeit (savyng Goddis pleasuer) it wer greate pytie of so myche good corne loste, yet sythe it hathe lyked hym to sende us suche

a chaunce, we muste and ar bounden not onely to be content but also to be glade of his *visitacion*."²⁸

This further recalls Agnes Paston's most remarkable letter, not firmly datable but probably of 1465. After an opening blessing she wrote, to her son John: "Be my counseyle, dyspose youre selfe as myche as ye may to have lesse to do in the worlde. Youre fadyr sayde, 'In lityl bysynes lyeth myche reste.' This worlde is but a thoroughfare, and ful of woo; and whan we departe therfro, righth noughght bere wyth us but oure good dedys and ylle. And ther knoweth no man how soon God woll clepe hym, and therfor it is good for every creature to be redy. Qhom God vysyteth, him he lovyth."²⁹ This is surely a notable piece of writing, in its management of vocabulary and its rhythms. Much of it must rest ultimately on scriptural texts, though it does not directly translate. "Whan we departe therfro . . ." cannot be independent of I Timothy vi. 7 (part of the Burial Service), which in the Authorized Version is, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (Vulgate, "nihil enim intulimus in hunc mundum, haut dubium quia nec auferre quid possumus"). The Wycliffite versions, and the version edited by Anna Paues (Cambridge, 1904), have *bear*, as Agnes Paston has, instead of *carry*; but otherwise there is no special resemblance. The rhetorical prominence given to "righth noughght" strongly suggests that if an exact model can be found it will be in a sermon. In the same way "ther knoweth no man how soon God woll clepe hym . . ." looks like a recollection of a sermon on a text such as Matt. xxiv. 44 or Luke xii. 40, "Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not"; and "Qhom God vysyteth, him he lovyth" is a change of emphasis, which again looks rhetorical, from Prov. iii. 12 or Hebrews xii. 6, "For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth/chasteneth," in the Wycliffite version "For the Lord chastisith hym that he loveth" ("quem enim diligit dominus, corripit/castigat"). Agnes Paston would doubtless have heard many sermons that might treat of such texts, perhaps from the family chaplain James Gloys or the friar John Brackley, "minorum minimus" as he called himself, who is a prominent figure in the letters. However that may be, the language of these passages fits with no incongruity into the rest of her letter. Where can she have found "This worlde is but a thoroughfare, and ful of woo"? Chaucer had said it in the Knight's Tale (I. 2847-8):

This world nis but a thurghfare ful of wo,
And we ben pilgrimes passing to and fro.

A generation later John Lydgate wrote a poem of 24 eight-line stanzas using this maxim as a refrain, and he attributed it to Chaucer:

O ye maysters, that cast shal yowre looke
Vpon this dyte made in wordis playne,
Remembre sothly that I the refreyn tooke
Of hym that was in makyng souerayne,
My mayster Chaucier, chief poete of Bretayne;
Whiche in his tragedyes made ful yore agoo
Declared triewly and list nat for to feyne,
How this world is a thurghfare ful of woo.³⁰

Lydgate evidently knew no other source. The other gnomic sentence that Agnes used, and attributed to her husband, "In lityl bysynes lyeth myche reste," is certainly proverbial. Again Chaucer had used it, in *Truth* (l.10): "Gret reste stant in litel besynesse." Tilley records later uses in *The Prouerbis of Wysdom* and Skelton.³¹ The question then arises whether it was by accident that Chaucer, and William and Agnes Paston, hit upon the same proverbs, or whether the Pastons had been reading Chaucer, or perhaps Lydgate.

Dame Elizabeth Brews, mother-in-law of John Paston III, comes into the same question. She liked a proverb, all the better for being in rhyme — "It is but a sympill oke that [is] cut down at the firste stroke," she wrote of the marriage negotiations in 1477.³² The first record of this, using the same rhyme, is in the *Romaunt of the Rose* (3687-8):

For no man at the first stroke
Ne maye nat fel downe an oke,

translating the French, which does not rhyme within the proverb. Lydgate has a variant in the *Fall of Princes*, without rhyme. Though the structure of Dame Elizabeth's form of it is most closely matched in Hill's *Commonplace Book* of the early sixteenth century ("Hit is a febill tre that fallith at the first strok"), the rhyme is not recorded again until 1631.³³ It was Dame Elizabeth again who wrote, in the same letter, "And, cosyn, uppon Fryday is Sent Volentynes Day, and every brydde chesyth hym a make." Chaucer, in the *Parlement of Foules* (309-10), had written:

For this was on Seynt Valentynes Day,
Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make,

and the last stanza of the *Complaynt d'Amours*, printed among poems doubtfully attributed to Chaucer, begins (85-86):

This compleynte on Seint Valentynes Day,
Whan every foughel chesen shal his make.

We may remember that John Paston II had in his library "the Parlement of Byrdys" (both he and Dame Elizabeth have "bird" for the Chaucerian "fowl").³⁴ His sister Anne, too, had a copy of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*,³⁵ which suggests that some at least of the women could read for pleasure even if they did not write their own letters.

But it would be wrong to press the literary associations of such proverbs and phrases, which could easily have been current in purely oral use. Many familiar references and vogue-words we doubtless fail to recognize, and the dictionaries are not infallible. A minor instance of this commonplace may be seen in a letter written by Thomas Betson on 22 December, 1477 (the year of the Paston-Brews match): "Madame, I beseche the blissid Trenyte to send you a Mery Cristymas to your hartes ease."³⁶ *OED* does not record the collocation "merry Christmas" until 1617, and in a wish of this kind not until 1667. (The Stonor Letters were published ten years later than the *M* volume.) Among the detectable vogue-words is *queasy*, as applied to "the world" in the sense of "the state of things." Friar Brackley wrote to John Paston I in 1459, "Be my feyth, here is a coysy werd."³⁷ This is the first recorded use of *queasy*, which is of uncertain etymology and inherited meaning. At first sight it looks like a fairly obvious metaphor, effective but

by no means beyond the wit of the ingenious Brackley. But when we find John Paston II writing in 1471, after the battle of Barnet in which he had fought on the losing side, "The worlde, I ensure yow, is ryght qwesyse, as ye schall knowe wythin thys monythe — the peple heere feerythe it soore," and in 1473, "I comand me to yow, letyng yow weet that the worlde semyth qwesyse heer, fore the most part that be abowt the Kyng have sende hyddre for ther harneys";³⁸ and Richard Cely writing, probably in 1481, "howr father . . . thynke the whorllde qwheesy,"³⁹ it becomes clear that the phrase was a popular cliché and not to be credited to Brackley after all.

An apparently still more popular turn of phrase seems to deserve looking into — the common way of appraising anything by declaring, usually in terms of money, how much it is worth *not* to have it, or to how much it is to be preferred. The dictionaries take general comparisons back to the fourteenth century, such as Chaucer's "I durste noht, For al this world, telle hir my thought" (*Book of the Duchess*, 1150). In the letters the value is generally more limited, and more closely assessed. William Paston II, probably in 1479, "wold nat be in the case that I was in to dayes, tyl I knw the mater, nat for xx *li*."⁴⁰ Margaret Paston, in 1448, "wold not that he were hurt, ner non man that longyth to yow, in your absens for xx pund."⁴¹ A slightly more usual figure seems to be forty — sometimes only in shillings, as Margaret Paston, 1449: "Barow swor to me be his trowth that he had lever than xls. and xl that his lord had not commawndyd hym to com";⁴² but usually pounds, as when Margaret "wolde not for xl *li*. have suyche another trouble" (1448), and John III "had lever then xl *li*. ye koud with your playdepart hym and hys peyne" (after 1486).⁴³ In an early letter, probably of 1443, Margaret "wolde ye wern at home . . . lever than a new gounne, thow it were of scarlette."⁴⁴

Such things ring much more colloquially than the phrases noticed earlier. One other striking expression seems to be of a similar kind. Margaret Paston wrote to her husband in 1460, "Ther be bawt for yow iij horse at Seynt Feythys feyr, and all be trotterys, ryth fayir horse, God save hem."⁴⁵ One of Thomas Stonor's correspondents in 1467 wrote (from Ascot!), "I send yow yowr hors by the brynger of thys letter, yowr servant; he wyll not be in pleyte as I wold have hyme, but he ys both herty and hoole, God save hyme."⁴⁶ John Dalton wrote to George Cely in 1481, "Syr, your horson doyth weell, God sawe them," and essentially the same sentence four months later; and William Cely, again in 1482, wrote, "Grett Sorell ys in good plyght, God sawe hym."⁴⁷ Here is a widely attested habit of adding a blessing to a report of a horse in good condition. ("Good plight" was evidently the accepted phrase — it occurs again in Richard Cely in 1488: "Yowr horse farys well and ys in good plyte."⁴⁸) John Paston II in 1472 extended its use to a hawk, and that not in good condition: "As for the hawke that I sende yow, thanke me for it; God save it, for I trow she woll never be nowght as Cromer seythe. Nevertheless it is the best that I can geet, wherffor prenes en gree, ther is noon other remedee."⁴⁹ The most striking form of this odd saying was used by Richard Cely in 1479: "The horse ys fayer, God save hym and Send Loye."⁵⁰ Why St. Loy? Though he is best known as the subject of the Prioress's greatest oath, he appears also in the Friar's Tale (III. 1563-4) in apparently significant circumstances: the carter shouts to his horses,

That was wel twight, myn owene lyard boy.
I pray God save thee, and Seinte Loy!

St. Eligius (Loy) was the patron saint of smiths and carriers, and so is in place in this story. Can the usual "God save him" have been simply an abbreviation of the longer benediction?

One or two patterns of wider scope seem also to be recognizable. In the second of Margery Brews's Valentine letters to John Paston III in 1477, she wrote: "Yf that ye cowde be content wyth that good, and my por persone, I wold be the meryest mayden on grounde. And yf ye thynke not yowr selfe so satsfyed, or that ye myght hafe mech more good, as I hafe undyrstonde be yowe afor, good, trewe, and lovyng Volentyne, that ye take no such labure uppon yowe as to com more for that mater; but let it passe, and never more to be spokyn of, as I may be yowr trewe lover and bedewoman duryng my lyfe."⁵¹ (Thomas Mull, one of the Stonors' legal advisers, wrote to William Stonor in 1472, also about a marriage negotiation: "And ye in your mynde conceyve that shee hath yoven you an utter nay, then shall ye by myn assent never speke more of the mater, but lette yt goo";⁵² it almost looks as if there had been a recognized form of words for abandoning a suit.) This last passage of Margery Brews's letter has something to contribute to a much larger question. It may be set beside this: "I requyre the and beseche the hartily, for all the love that ever was betwyxt us, that thou never se me no more in the visayge; . . . for as well as I have loved the heretofore, myne harte woll nat serve now to se the."⁵³ The direct construction of this passage, with its qualifications introduced by both phrase and clause, but not so as to distract attention from the main course, is on the same level of writing as Margery's letter — though rather better handled because she let the qualifications get a little out of control. There is much in common, too, in the simple yet slightly redundant vocabulary — "let it passe, and never more to be spokyn of," "trewe lover and bedewoman," and "requyre the and beseche the," "se me no more in the visayge" — and in the regular, grave rhythm. The only significant difference in the tone of the two passages, admittedly a striking one, is that Margery Brews uses *ye* but Guenever says *thou*; but even that is not a general distinction between them; Guenever also mostly says *ye*, in equally queenly and equally solemn places, as in her very next speech, "But I may never beleve you but that ye woll turne to the worlde agayne."⁵⁴

One last comparison. John Paston III in 1472 wrote to his brother: "I prey yow to recomand me in my most humbyll wyse onto the good lordshepe of the most corteys, gentylest, wysest, kyndest, most compenabyll, freest, largeest, and most bowntefous knyght, my lord the Erle of Arran, whych hath maryed the Kyngys sustyr of Scotlon. Herto, he is on the lyghtest, delyverst, best spokyn, fayrest archer, devowghtest, most perfyght, and trewest to hys lady of all the knyghtys that ever I was aqweyntyd with."⁵⁵ Beside this may stand: "Thou were never matched of erthely knyghtes hande. And thou were the curtest knyght that ever bare shelde. And thou were the truest frende to thy lovar that ever bestrade hors, and thou were the trewest lover of a synful man that ever loved woman, and thou were the kyndest man that ever strake wyth swerde. And thou were godelyest persone that ever cam emonge prees of knyghtes, and thou was the mekest man and

NOTES

- 1 *Original Letters, Written during the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III*, By various Persons of Rank or Consequence (London, 1787), I, xv.
- 2 *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1947), p. 180.
- 3 John Paston III, 1471; *Paston Letters*, ed. N. Davis (Oxford, 1958), no. 62.
- 4 "The *Litera Troili* and English Letters," *Review of English Studies*, N.S. XVI (1965), 233-44; "A Note on Pearl," *ibid.*, XVII (1966), 403-5.
- 5 *The Paston Letters*, ed. J. Gairdner (4 vols., Westminster, 1901; 6 vols., London, 1904), nos. 209/250, 210/252 (spelling modified to match that of other quotations).
- 6 Printed by W. Uerkvitz, *Tractate zur Unterweisung in der anglo-normannischen Briefschreibekunst* (Greifswald, 1898), p. 32.
- 7 E. Rickert, "Some English Personal Letters of 1402," *Review of English Studies*, VIII (1932), 257-63, esp. 261 (spelling accommodated).
- 8 Ed. Davis, no. 4.
- 9 *Letters and Papers of John Shillingford*, ed. S. A. Moore (Camden Soc., 1871), pp. 24, 16. The last clause is especially noteworthy in view of R. J. Menner's comment that "an absolute construction attached to the sentence by means of *and*" is "a syntactical peculiarity . . . not found, I believe, outside the works of the Gawain-poet in any of the alliterative poems except the late *Death and Life*"; *Purity* (New Haven, 1920), p. xviii. But it is not particularly uncommon in fifteenth-century prose.
- 10 *Paston Letters*, ed. Davis, nos. 41, 54.
- 11 *The Stonor Letters and Papers*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Camden Soc., 1919), no. 135.
- 12 L. Lyell, *A Mediaeval Post-Bag* (London, 1934), no. 116 (spelling accommodated).
- 13 *The Cely Papers*, ed. H. E. Malden (Camden Soc., 1900), no. 120.
- 14 See T. F. Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax*, Part I (Helsinki, 1960), pp. 554-6.
- 15 *Paston Letters*, ed. Gairdner, nos. 702/810, 763/876; *Cely Papers*, no. 89.
- 16 Ed. Gairdner, nos. 754/865, LXXX/701.
- 17 Ed. Davis, no. 89.
- 18 *Ibid.*, nos. 38, 75, 88.
- 19 *Ibid.*, nos. 38, 37.
- 20 *Plumpton Correspondence*, ed. T. Stapleton (Camden Soc., 1839), p. 54.
- 21 Ed. Davis, no. 27.
- 22 No. 121.
- 23 *Stonor Letters*, no. 212 (again 218); *Paston Letters*, ed. Gairdner, nos. 396/462, 71/94, 322/374, 771/884 (second and third also ed. Davis, nos. 12, 22).
- 24 Ed. Gairdner, no. 5b.
- 25 Ed. Stapleton, p. 179.
- 26 Ed. Davis, nos. 30, 60, 74.
- 27 Ed. Malden, no. 74.
- 28 *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E. F. Rogers (Princeton, 1947), no. 174.
- 29 Ed. Davis, no. 44. It is uncertain whether the absence of a subject pronoun in the third sentence is due to author or scribe.
- 30 *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. H. N. MacCracken (E.E.T.S. 192, 1934), II, 828.
- 31 M. P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950), B 751.
- 32 Ed. Davis, no. 78.
- 33 *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (2nd ed., 1948), p. 466; Tilley, T 496.
- 34 Ed. Gairdner, no. 869/987 (wrongly attributed to John III).
- 36 *Stonor Letters*, no. 185.
- 37 Ed. Gairdner, no. 341/395.
- 38 *Ibid.*, nos. 668/774, 731/841.
- 39 No. 72.
- 40 *H.M.C. Twelfth Report*, Appendix Part IV (Belvoir Castle), p. 11.

- 41 Letter abstracted in Gairdner, no. 59/77; transcript in New Palaeographical Soc. *Facsimiles*, 2nd ser. ii, pl. 133; ed. in modern spelling by Davis, *The Paston Letters* (World's Classics, 1963), no. 6.
- 42 Ed. Gairdner, no. 78/103 (dated 1450).
- 43 Ed. Davis, no. 7; ed. Gairdner, no. 898/1019.
- 44 Ed. Davis, no. 5.
- 45 Ed. Gairdner, no. 361/423.
- 46 No. 89.
- 47 Nos. 61, 74, 94.
- 48 Lyell, no. 118.
- 49 From the unprinted part of Gairdner no. 704/813. The jingle in the last sentence is shown by the abnormal spelling of *remedee* to be intentional. The writing of rhyming doggerel was another occasional habit of the time. Cf. John Paston I's twenty lines to Margaret, Margery Brews's eight lines to John III (ed. Davis, nos. 40, 79), and Lord Grey of Ruthyn's seven lines to Griffith ap David ap Griffith in 1400: "But we hoope we shalle do the a pryve thyng, a roope, a ladder, and a ring . . ."; *Letters of the Reign of Henry IV*, ed. F. C. Hingeston (Rolls Ser., 1860), pp. xxiii, 38. Cf. also the alleged proclamation posted up in the parish of All Saints, Barking, in 1412:
- And therfor it is the best, be Goddis ore,
your oune worship for to save;
loke that no man pleyne hym more,
but holde that he have.
- (*London English 1384-1425*, ed. R. W. Chambers and M. Daunt (Oxford, 1931), p. 119).
- 50 No. 17.
- 51 Ed. Davis, no. 80.
- 52 *Stonor Letters*, no. 123.
- 53 *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. E. Vinaver (Oxford, 1947), p. 1252.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 1253.
- 55 Ed. Davis, no. 66.
- 56 *Works of Malory*, p. 1259.
- 57 I am obliged to Professor Cawley for the observation that a number of John Paston's words appear in the description of the Knight and the Squire in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*: *trouthe*, *fredom*, and *curteisie* in 1.46, *wys* 68, *parfit* and *gentil* 72, *delyvere* 84. The qualities are of course conventionally chivalric, and various combinations of them occur in many texts concerned with knighthood; e.g. Caxton's *Book of the Ordre of Chyualry* (ed. A.T.P. Byles, E.E.T.S. 168, 1926), p.113: "loyalte and trouthe / hardynesse / largesse / honeste / humylyte / pyte / and the other thynges semblable to these apperteyne to Chyualry." But I know of no texts other than the three cited here in which a eulogy of a knight is built up of superlative adjectives.
- 58 Ed. Davis, no. 50.
- 59 *Ibid.*, nos. 7, 16, 17; *Shillingford Letters*, nos. 3, 4, 26, &c.; *Cely Papers*, no. 89.
- 60 *Paston Letters*, ed. Davis, no. 72 n.