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## The Origins and Stanza Form Tradition of the Vernon/Simeon Lyrics

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The tradition of studying and carefully describing the verse-forms of Middle English poetry is a long-standing and well-established one.<sup>1</sup> Recently, scholars, such as Susanna Fein, C. B. McCully, J. J. Anderson, and Oliver Pickering have gone one step further: they have, in different ways, attempted to link a particular poetry-format to a specific area, period of time or even author.<sup>2</sup> As such, they validate the idea that a careful enquiry into the origin and transmission of one verse-form can elucidate some of the circumstances under which a particular type of poetry was produced.

In the light of this observation, this paper examines the stanza form of the Vernon-Simeon lyrics. The Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Eng. Poet. a.1) is a large compilation of a great variety of religious and secular texts.<sup>3</sup> Dialectal evidence, especially such as is found in the compilation's original 'index', shows that the manuscript must have been compiled in the West Midlands, and scholars have argued that its place of origin may have been Bordesley Abbey, in Worcestershire.<sup>4</sup> Compiled at roughly the same time was

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my doctoral thesis, 'The Stanza Form of the Vernon/Simeon Lyrics, and its Relation to Earlier Middle English, Anglo-Norman, and Continental French Models' [hereafter referred to as 'Vernon/Simeon'] (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds, 2002), which was supervised by Dr Oliver Pickering together with Dr Catherine Batt.

<sup>2</sup> Susanna Fein, 'Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of *Pearl*', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 367–98, and 'The Early Thirteen-Line Stanza: Style And Metrics Reconsidered', *Parergon*, n.s. 18 (2000), 97–126; O. S. Pickering, 'Middle English Metaphysical Verse? Imagery and Style in Some Fourteenth-Century Religious Poems', in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1997), ed. by O. S. Pickering, pp. 85–104 (pp. 88–89); and *English Historical Metrics*, ed. by C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> For a facsimile of the manuscript, see A. I. Doyle, *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Poet. a. 1* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987). A digital facsimile edition with complete transcription and scholarly essays is forthcoming in 2011: Wendy Scase, *A Facsimile Edition of the Vernon Manuscript* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, *MS Eng. poet. a. 1*, Bodleian Digital Texts, 3 (Oxford: Bodleian Library, forthcoming); see also 'The Vernon Manuscript Project', <http://www.medievalenglish.bham.ac.uk/vernon>. For a collection of essays on this compilation, see *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Relationship of the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts', in Pearsall *Vernon*, 29–44 (pp. 42–43). See also Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 140; and Kari Sajavaara, 'The Relationship of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 68 (1967), 428–39 (p. 438).

its almost as large sister-volume Simeon (London, British Library, Additional 22283). Their overall production is thought to have taken at least ten years to complete, and scholars have dated this to the last two decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Inevitably, several of the texts included are earlier, with some going back to the thirteenth century, for example, a version of the *South English Legendary*.<sup>6</sup>

There are twenty-seven Middle English lyrics in the last quire of the Vernon manuscript (fols 407r–412v), and the same group is extant in Simeon (fols 128v–134r), with the addition of two more.<sup>7</sup> Scholars have usually considered these a compilation of material derived from more than one source.<sup>8</sup> The exact dating of the individual items is therefore difficult, although it can be assumed that they were relatively ‘new’ at the time of compilation. On the basis of their reference to contemporary affairs, ‘But Thou Say Sooth, Thou Shalt Be Shent’ (*NIMEV* 3420), ‘Seldom Seen Is Soon Forgot’ (*NIMEV* 5), and ‘A Warning to Be Ware’ (*NIMEV* 4268) can, with some caution, be dated in the late 1370s and early 1380s.<sup>9</sup> The principal concern of these poems is one of edification: they instruct their audience, mostly on matters of religion and morality, for example, ‘Ay, Mercy, God’ (*NIMEV* 374), ‘Keep Well Christ’s Commandments’ (*NIMEV* 1379), and ‘Mercy Passes All Things’ (*NIMEV* 583). At the same time there is also a very clear sense of secular opportunism — a pragmatic concentration on the consequences

<sup>5</sup> A. I. Doyle, ‘The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts’, in Pearsall, *Vernon*, pp. 1–14. For dating the Simeon manuscript, see A. I. Doyle, ‘The Manuscripts’, in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background: Seven Essays* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), ed. by David Lawton, pp. 88–100 (pp. 91–92). Doyle does not date Vernon in his facsimile edition, but situates a few individual items between 1380 and 1390; Doyle, *Facsimile*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> N. F. Blake, ‘Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organisation’, in Pearsall, *Vernon*, pp. 45–60 (pp. 47–48).

<sup>7</sup> For the Vernon lyrics, see *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript, Part Two*, ed. by F. J. Furnivall, EETS o.s. 117 (1901), pp. 658–740, and, twenty-three only, in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown, 2nd edn, rev. by G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 125–205. Furthermore, Varnhagen publishes the first thirteen lyrics of the sequence, with the exception of the eighth lyric; Hermann Varnhagen, ‘Die kleineren Gedichte der Vernon- und Simeon Handschrift’, *Anglia*, 7 (1884), 280–315. A more recent edition of all twenty-seven poems is provided by Kenneth Hunter, ‘The Vernon Lyrics’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1977). For corrections, see De Wilde, ‘Vernon/Simeon’ pp. 40–41. A new transcription is forthcoming in Wendy Scase, *Facsimile*. The two additional poems in Simeon are published in Furnivall, *Minor Poems*, pp. 740–46. Brown publishes only the first of these two poems; Brown, *Lyrics*, pp. 205–08. Six Simeon texts are printed in F. J. Furnivall, *Early English Poems and Lives of Saints* (Berlin: Asher, 1862; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1974), pp. 118–38. Varnhagen provides Simeon variants for lyrics one to seven and nine to thirteen in a critical apparatus to his edition of the Vernon texts; Varnhagen, ‘Gedichte’, pp. 280–315. Thomas Wright publishes the Simeon texts of lyrics 19 and 20; Thomas Wright, *Political Poems and Songs relating to English History Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edward III to that of Richard III*, 2 vols, Rolls Series, 14 (1859–61), I (1859), 215–18 and 250–52.

<sup>8</sup> Brown claims that, despite a superficial uniformity, the lyrics reflect ‘the most diverse and contradictory points of view’, and concludes that single authorship is impossible (Brown, *Lyrics*, p. xx). Later scholars have, in general, confirmed this scepticism (Ronald Waldron, ‘The Vernon Refrain Poems: Didacticism into Art’, *Unisa English Studies*, 31:2 (1993), 1–10 (p. 1); and Takami Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry* (Woodbridge and Rochester: Brewer, 1997), p. 206), but at the same time have posited a less ‘centrifugal’ view of the lyrics than Brown’s, suggesting common authorship, at least, for specific poems. For example, Bennett argues that ‘Each Man Ought Himself to Know’ and ‘This World Fares as a Fantasy’ probably came from the same pen; J. A. W. Bennett, ‘*Nosce te ipsum*: Some Medieval and Modern Interpretations’, in *The Humane Medievalist and Other Essays in English Literature and Learning, from Chaucer to Elliot*, ed. by Piero Boitani (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1982), pp. 135–72 (p. 150). See also Waldron, ‘Didacticism’, p. 1, and Thompson, ‘The Textual Background and Reputation of the Lyrics’, in Pearsall, *Vernon*, pp. 201–24 (p. 202).

<sup>9</sup> Reference is made to Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index Of Middle English Verse* (London: British Library, 2005). For dating of ‘Who Says the Sooth He Shall Be Shent’, see John Burrow, ‘The Shape of the Vernon Refrain Lyrics’, in Pearsall, *Vernon*, pp. 187–99 (p. 188, n. 4); for ‘Seldom Seen Is Soon Forgot’, see Hunter, ‘Lyrics’, p. xviii; and Burrow, ‘Shape’, p. 188, n. 4; for ‘A Warning to Be Ware’, see Blake, ‘Contents’, p. 57 and Burrow, ‘Shape’, pp. 195–96.

*Vernon/Simeon Lyrics*

of one's actions in this world rather than in the after-life. For example, the second stanza of 'Try to Say the Best' (*NIMEV* 2790) gives merchants the advice not to use any fraud in their business arrangements. The poem then goes on to warn servants against gossiping about their employees:

Wiþ eny mon 3if þou have ben eke  
In his servyse bi niht oþer day,  
Alle þe good þat þou may, speke (ll. 41–43)

One lyric, 'Seldom Seen Is Soon Forgot', is mainly political, and laments the death of Edward III and his son while expressing uncertainty about young Richard II:

And þerfore, gode sires, takeþ reward  
Of 3or douhti kyng þat dyzede in age,  
And to his sone Prince Edward,  
Pat welle was of alle corage:  
Suche two lordes of hei3 paragage  
In not in eorþe whon we schal gete (ll. 105–10)

Not only is there thematic continuity, but these poems also have a similar concern for formal and stanzaic intricacies, and it is possible that this too was elemental in bringing them together.<sup>10</sup> First, most remarkable is the predominance of a particular rhyme scheme: in its eight-line form, *ababbcbc*, it features in eighteen of the lyrics, and in its twelve-line form, *ababababbcbc*, in another eight. I will refer to this as the Type-A rhyme scheme. The remaining three lyrics use a more straightforward rhyme scheme (Type-B), two of which are in eight-line stanzas, *abababab*, and one again in twelve-line stanzas, *ababababcdcd*. All of the later attestations of the Vernon/Simeon lyrics are of the Type-A rhymed poems, which may suggest that the Type-B rhyme scheme lost currency at a time when the Type-A rhyme scheme was gaining popularity.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, twenty-three lyrics have a refrain, that is, a recurring line or half-line at the end of every stanza. Only in four of these does the refrain remain more or less constant throughout, whereas in the others it appears with significant grammatical variations or creative semantic shifts (for example, in 'This World Fares as a Fantasy' (*NIMEV* 1402): 'For þis world fareþ as a fantasy', 'And fareþ but as a fantasye' and 'Þe more we falle in fantasye'). A third distinctive feature of the Vernon/Simeon lyrics' stanza is its use of alliteration, which in most cases is 'ornamental', given its non-pervasive and non-structural character: 'I wolde witen of sum wys wiht | Witterly what þis world were' ('This World Fares as a Fantasy', ll. 1–2). Leaving aside the issue of whether this ties in with a possible 'revival' of alliterative verse, it appears that from the early-fourteenth century onwards there was a poetic trend to have rhymed compositions use alliteration as a secondary trait.<sup>12</sup> Finally, twenty-six lyrics use some form of stanza-linking through the repetition of one or more words from the

<sup>10</sup> Waldron, 'Didacticism', p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of later attestations of the Vernon/Simeon lyrics, see De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', pp. 41–44.

<sup>12</sup> Angus McIntosh, 'Early Middle English Alliterative Verse', in Lawton, *Alliterative Poetry*, pp. 20–33 (p. 21). The term 'alliterative revival', in reference to an apparent resurgence in the fourteenth century of alliterative verse of an Old English type, was probably introduced by Ker in 1907; W. P. Ker, 'Metrical Romances, 1200–1500', in *Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, 15 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907–27), I (1907), 277–300 (pp. 291–92). However, the concept of a 'revival' has for some time been seen as dubious, as several scholars have pointed out the continuous transmission and production of alliterative writing throughout the preceding centuries. See also David Lawton, 'Middle English Alliterative Poetry: An Introduction', in Lawton, *Alliterative Poetry*, pp. 1–19.

end of one stanza in the opening lines of the following stanza.<sup>13</sup> The practice of inter-stanzaic *concatenatio* appears in Middle English literature from the late-thirteenth century onwards, and apparently always in association with alliterated poems.<sup>14</sup> Only three Vernon/Simeon lyrics have no *concatenatio* at all. The combination of these factors produces a stanza form, the complexity of which seems remarkable for late-fourteenth-century Midlands literature. The questions I would now like to pose are: where does this intricate stanza form come from? What older material with a similar format is extant and may have inspired — directly or indirectly — these lyrics which were brought together in these two manuscripts?

In 1997 Susanna Fein suggested a paradigm for the Vernon/Simeon stanza, by categorizing those using the twelve-line Type-A rhyme scheme together with a refrain as ‘pseudo-ballades’.<sup>15</sup> The term ‘pseudo-ballade’ had been introduced by Albert Friedman to refer to those Middle English compositions which borrow from the Continental French *ballade* and transform it into a variety of hybrid stanza forms.<sup>16</sup> By labelling them as such, Fein implicitly assumes a Continental French model to be of primary influence for the stanza form of the Vernon/Simeon lyrics. The question this inevitably leads to is: how familiar was the French *ballade* to late-fourteenth-century Middle English poets in the Midlands?

James Wimsatt has studied in depth the thematic and phraseological parallels between specifically the French *ballade* writers, such as Guillaume de Machaut and Eustache Deschamps, on the one hand, and Geoffrey Chaucer on the other, and he reveals a substantial availability of continental French lyrics in the London area during the last four decades of the fourteenth century, which created an environment which was extremely favourable for the borrowing from French models.<sup>17</sup> Some of Chaucer’s shorter poems, like ‘Etas Primas’, ‘Truth’, or the ‘Complaint of Venus’, all dated to the 1380s and therefore more or less contemporary with the Vernon/Simeon lyrics, employ stanza forms that follow French *ballade* models.<sup>18</sup> The ‘Complaint of Venus’, for example, has an eight-line *ababbccb* rhyme, a refrain, and uses the format of a triple *ballade* plus a ten-line *envoy*. In the *envoy* Chaucer names Oton de Granson, the French knight/poet, whose ‘Cinq balades ensievans’ served as a source of inspiration for this poem:

And eke to me it ys a gret penaunce,  
Syth rym in Englissh hath such skarseté,  
To folowe word by word the curiosité  
Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce (ll. 79–82)

The eight-line Type-A rhyme scheme is used by Chaucer in ‘An ABC for the Virgin Mary’ (*NIMEV* 239), ‘To Rosemounde’ (*NIMEV* 2031), ‘Etas Primas’ (*NIMEV* 28), ‘Fortune’ (*NIMEV* 3661), ‘Envoy de Chaucer à Bukton’ (*NIMEV* 2262) and in the ‘Monk’s Tale’ in the

<sup>13</sup> Margaret P. Medary, ‘Stanza-Linking in Middle English Verse’, *Romanic Review*, 7 (1916), 243–70 (p. 243). See also Helen Fulton, ‘The Theory of Celtic Influences on the Harley Lyrics’, *Modern Philology*, 82 (1984–85), 239–54 (pp. 240–41).

<sup>14</sup> *The Poems of Laurence Minot, 1333–52*, ed. by Richard H. Osberg (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University for TEAMS, 1996), pp. 23–24.

<sup>15</sup> Fein, ‘Twelve-Line’, pp. 382–90. The term had already been associated with the Vernon/Simeon lyrics in Burrow, ‘Shape’, p. 188.

<sup>16</sup> Albert B. Friedman, ‘The Late Mediaeval Ballade and the Origin of Broadside Balladry’, *Medium Ævum*, 27 (1958), 95–110 (p. 102).

<sup>17</sup> James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and his French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Published in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 650–51, 653 and 648–49.

*Canterbury Tales* (NIMEV 4019).<sup>19</sup> With the exception of perhaps *ABC for the Virgin Mary* and the longer *Monk's Tale*, it is clear that Chaucer's direct inspiration was the Continental French *ballade*. Wimsatt argues that Chaucer probably also wrote straightforward *ballades* in French, and suggests that some of the specimens found in Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Library, MS French 15 and ascribed to an anonymous 'Ch' in the manuscript (alongside material by Guillaume de Machaut and Oton de Granson), if not written by him, at least 'show what Chaucer's French verse might have been like'.<sup>20</sup>

More unequivocally attested are John Gower's imitations of the *Ballade*. His *Cinkante balades* is a collection of fifty-four lyrics written in French using both *rhyme royal* (*ababbcc*) and the eight-line Type-A rhyme scheme.<sup>21</sup> They are preserved in a single manuscript (London, British Library, Additional 59495), which, from its reference to the coronation of Henry IV, can be dated to 1399 or later.<sup>22</sup> However, John Fisher has argued that most of these lyrics were probably early works, and he dates them before 1374, slightly earlier, it seems, than the Vernon/Simeon lyrics.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to contemporary Continental French *ballades* that circulated in England, my research has shown that the eight-line Type-A rhyme scheme features only in a small number of *ballades* by Machaut but more so in Froissart's and Granson's lyrics, and to an even larger extent in Deschamps's works, with this particular format featuring in 495 of his 1,017 extant *ballades*.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, the popularity of the Continental French *ballade* in England was indeed substantial, and occurred roughly around the time when the Vernon/Simeon lyrics are believed to have been composed.

On the basis of her research on twelve-line stanzas, Susanna Fein goes so far as to situate the Midlands Vernon/Simeon lyrics at the beginning of the 'pseudo-ballade' tradition. However, how likely is it that Midlands authors based themselves on a 'foreign' type of poetry, fashionable mainly in and around the royal court, to instigate what was to become a national vogue? In other words, do Chaucer's or Gower's 'pseudo-ballades' (or even 'proper' *ballades*) and the Vernon/Simeon lyrics really stem from the same sources? A first indicator that these lyrics are not merely imitating a *ballade* format is that the twelve-line option of the Type-A rhyme scheme, with the doubled up first quatrain (*ababababbcbc*), does not occur in Chaucer's or Gower's writings, nor does it in the extant works of any French *ballade* writer. Although the French twelve-line *ballade* does exist, I have noted that its 'extension' always seems to occur in the second half of the stanza, rather than in the first. The result is rhyme schemes like, for example, *ababbccddede* or *ababbccddefef*.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, it is remarkable that the method

<sup>19</sup> Published in *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson, pp. 637–40, 649, 650–51, 652, 655–56 and 241–52.

<sup>20</sup> *Chaucer and the Poems of 'Ch' in University of Pennsylvania MS French 15*, ed. by James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer Studies*, 9 (Cambridge: Brewer, and Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Published in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by George C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902), I (1899), 335–78. As many as twenty-seven *ballades* use the *ababbcbc* rhyme scheme.

<sup>22</sup> Fisher describes the manuscript's remarkable dedication to the king, which originally read 'Edward ye fourth at his coronation', with 'Edward' corrected to 'Henry', and 'or before' inserted above 'at', after which 'at' and 'or' were struck through; John H. Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> Fisher, *Gower*, pp. x and 72–73. See also Winthrop Wetherbee, 'John Gower', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 589–609 (p. 590); and William P. Marvin, 'Chronological Outline of Historical Events in Britain, 1050–1550', in *Medieval Literature*, ed. by Wallace pp. 852–80 (p. 868).

<sup>24</sup> De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', pp. 18–26.

<sup>25</sup> De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', p. 119.

of doubling up the first quatrain to extend any kind of rhyme scheme is common in Middle English formats: a considerable number of Middle English poems exists which have a stanza form based on an octet (*abababab*) followed by a quatrain (*cdcd*). Examples of this can be found in the lyrics collection in London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 (for example ‘A Song of the Husbandman’ and ‘The Poet’s Repentance’), dated between 1315 and 1340.<sup>26</sup>

One Middle English poem which questions the probability of a French *ballade* influence on the Vernon/Simeon lyrics even more is *Pearl*.<sup>27</sup> This well-known composition offers a remarkable parallel to the Vernon/Simeon lyrics (as has already been pointed out by Susanna Fein), in that it not only employs the twelve-line Type-A rhyme scheme but also shares all of the afore-mentioned stanzaic features (variable refrain, *concatenatio* and ornamental alliteration) with the Vernon/Simeon lyrics.<sup>28</sup> It uses the format with even a higher degree of complexity because of the numerological value it attaches to it.<sup>29</sup> The perfect accomplishment of the poem’s stanza-arrangement leaves Fein stopping short of identifying *Pearl* as an imitation of a *ballade*. The origins of *Pearl* have been placed in the West Midlands, and dated to 1360–1400 (which Fein has narrowed down to between 1375 and 1385).<sup>30</sup> Because of their geographical and chronological concurrence, I argue that it is improbable that the stanza forms of *Pearl* and of the Vernon/Simeon lyrics shaped themselves completely independently. Unfortunately, the lack of any circumstantial information on these compositions make it very difficult with any certainty to say whether *Pearl* with its 101 stanzas is to be considered the innovator which prompted the composition of shorter lyrics, such as the Vernon/Simeon lyrics, or alternatively, whether *Pearl* is the culmination of a style which had already been experimented with in shorter lyrics.

I have found only three Middle English poems with comparable stanza forms, which unquestionably antedate both the Vernon/Simeon lyrics and *Pearl*. The first two of these can be found in a sequence of eleven lyrics by Laurence Minot which eulogize the military campaigns of Edward III.<sup>31</sup> These are extant in a fifteenth-century manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Galba E IX), but internal evidence suggests that they were written between 1333 and 1352.<sup>32</sup> They employ a remarkable diversity of sometimes intricate stanza forms, which

<sup>26</sup> Published in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Rosell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 7–9; and *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS Harley 2253*, ed. by George Leslie Brook, Publications of the University of Manchester, 302 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1948), pp. 35–36.

<sup>27</sup> Published in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: ‘Pearl’, ‘Cleanness’, ‘Patience’, ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’*, ed. by Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (London: Arnold, 1979; repr. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 53–110. A more recent edition by Sarah Stanbury emends the poem from the perspective that deviations from metrical regularity represent scribal editing rather than authorial intent; *Pearl*, ed. by Sarah Stanbury (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University for TEAMS, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Fein, ‘Twelve-Line’, p. 368. The existence of such a link has previously been implied, without the provision of any corroborative evidence in *Pearl*, ed. by E. V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), p. 87; Pearsall, *Poetry*, p. 172; Hunter, ‘Lyrics’, p. xxxi; and Lawton, *Alliterative Poetry*, p. 8. Marie P. Hamilton assumes the pre-existence of a West-Midland tradition in ‘The Pearl Poet’, in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, ed. by Albert E. Hartung, J. Burke Severs, and others, 10 vols (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967–98), II (1970), 339–53 (p. 342).

<sup>29</sup> See D. W. Fritz, ‘The Pearl: A Sacredness of Number’, *American Benedictine Review*, 31 (1980), 314–34.

<sup>30</sup> For a suggested Cheshire origin, see John M. Bowers, *The Politics of ‘Pearl’: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), p. 1. For a dating of the poem, see Doyle, *Facsimile*, p. 92; and Fein, ‘Twelve-Line’, pp. 393 and 395.

<sup>31</sup> Edited in Osberg, *Minot*, 51–58. See also online: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/osberg.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> *The Poems of Laurence Minot, 1333–1352*, ed. by Thomas Beaumont James and John Simons (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1989), p. 13.

frequently combine rhyme with alliteration. For the present purpose, the seventh and the eighth poem in this sequence, ‘The Battle of Crécy’ (NIMEV 2149) and ‘The Siege of Calais’ (NIMEV 585) are crucial: they are both early attestations of the eight-line Type-A rhyme scheme (*ababbcbc*), already in combination with non-structural alliteration. Additionally, they use *concatenatio* almost throughout. Interestingly, their subject matter and preoccupation with national and international politics, as well as the state of the monarchy, are comparable to that of Vernon/Simeon lyric ‘Seldom Seen is Soon Forgot’. What sets them apart from the stanza of the Vernon/Simeon lyrics or *Pearl*, however, is that they have no refrain, the absence of which makes any association with the Continental *ballade* particularly unlikely (where the use of a refrain was considered one of the genre’s essential features at that time).<sup>33</sup> Altogether, these two poems, written again in a northern dialect, have a stanza form similar enough to that of *Pearl* and the Vernon/Simeon lyrics so as to point towards perhaps an older tradition.<sup>34</sup> Not only do they predate the Vernon/Simeon lyrics by a good thirty years (because of the military campaigns they bear witness to, they must have been composed soon after 1347), but they were also composed almost a decade before the battle of Poitiers, which is believed to be the catalyst event in the importation of Continental French *ballades* into England.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, as Wimsatt has demonstrated, the French *ballade* genre was already popular at the English court before 1356, and he considers the works of Jean de le Mote, originally from Hainault or from Ghent, but living at the English court from 1343 onwards, as having some influence on contemporary Middle English poetry.<sup>36</sup> De le Mote’s two long poems, *Le Regret Guillaume* and *Le Parfait du Paon*, both of them intercalated with short *ballades*, were completed in 1339 and 1340, which is almost a decade before Minot is believed to have written his two poems.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, purely from a chronological point of view it is still possible that de le Mote’s forty-two *ballades* may have functioned as a model to Minot. In de le Mote’s writings, the *ballade* still had a remarkable flexibility of rhyme scheme and stanza length, and the eight-line *ababbcbc* rhyme scheme is already attested in seven of his poems. However, that which seems to be fundamental to the French *ballade* already in de le Mote’s poems (the invariable refrain, the three stanza format, and the amorous subject matter) is not present in Minot’s two poems.

The earliest Middle English attestation of the Type-A rhyme scheme can be found in the anonymous ‘Lament for the Death of Edward I’ (NIMEV 205), which is extant among lyrics of a similar stanzaic complexity in the famous Harley 2253 manuscript (fol. 73r-v).<sup>38</sup> It is clear that this elegy, with a subject matter again very similar to that of Vernon/Simeon lyric ‘Seldom Seen Is Soon Forgot’, was written soon after the coronation of Edward II (1308),

<sup>33</sup> For indications of a rudimentary chorus in one of the other Minot poems, see De Wilde, ‘Vernon/Simeon’, p. 172.

<sup>34</sup> The dialect of Minot’s poetry has been localized to Yorkshire (Thomas G. Duncan, *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 242) or possibly Norfolk and Lincolnshire (Carolyn P. Collette, ‘The Poems of Laurence Minot’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1971), p. cxc).

<sup>35</sup> Wimsatt, *Contemporaries*, p. 43. See also Ardis Butterfield, ‘French Culture and the Ricardian Court’, in *Essays on Ricardian Literature in Honour of John Burrow*, ed. by A. J. Minnis, Charlotte C. Morse, and Thorlac Turville-Petre (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 82–120 (pp. 93–95).

<sup>36</sup> Wimsatt, *Contemporaries*, pp. 43–76.

<sup>37</sup> Published in *Li Regret Guillaume Comte de Hainaut*, ed. by Auguste Scheler (Louvain: Lefever, 1882); and Friedrich Gennrich, ‘Der Gesangwettbewerb im Parfait du Paon’, *Romanische Forschungen*, 58–59 (1947), 208–32.

<sup>38</sup> Published in *Historical Poems*, ed. by Robbins, pp. 21–24 and in *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, ed. by Isabel S. T. Aspin, ANTS, 11 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), pp. 79–92. For the fragments in Cambridge, University Library, Additional 4407, Art. 19 see Walter W. Skeat, ‘Elegy of the Death of King Edward, From a New Manuscript’, *Modern Language Review*, 7 (1912), 149–52.



about forty years earlier than the two Minot poems. The place of production of Harley 2253 has been localized in the Ludlow area, and the dialect of the poem confirms a North-Midlands or perhaps even Northern origin.<sup>39</sup> The eight-line Type-A rhyme scheme is used, with a few anomalies and the eleventh stanza is extended to eleven lines (*ababbcbded*), whereas all other features of the Vernon/Simeon stanza (alliteration, stanza-linking, and the use of a refrain) are absent.<sup>40</sup> Around 1308 the *ballade* in France was still very much a song, accompanied by music and consisting of three short stanzas and a refrain — very much unlike the *forme fixe* it was to become, or the rhyme scheme as we already have it in this Middle English elegy.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the earliest use of the Type-A rhyme scheme in Middle English predates not only the earliest circulation of French *ballade* models in England that we know of, but even the actual formation of the *ballade* in France.

Interestingly, this *Lament* also survives in an Anglo-Norman version (Dean 85) which uses the exact same rhyme scheme.<sup>42</sup> In a detailed analysis of contents and form, I have already demonstrated that this version, extant in the early-fourteenth-century manuscript Cambridge, University Library, Gg.1.1 (fol. 489r–v), must be the original text, which was then translated, re-arranged, and somewhat simplified in Middle English.<sup>43</sup> Does this indicate that the source for this rhyme scheme should be looked for in Anglo-Norman poetry? As part of my doctoral thesis, I compiled a corpus of all extant Anglo-Norman lyrics and stanzaic compositions, mainly on the basis of Dean's reference work, but drawing also on a number of partially overlapping studies on the medieval French lyric by Raynaud, Sonet, Rézeau, and Sinclair.<sup>44</sup> This produced a database of almost six hundred items, dating from the twelfth to the

<sup>39</sup> Frances McSparran, 'The Language of the English Poems: The Harley Scribe and his Exemplars', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents and Social Context of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: TEAMS, 2000), 391–426 (pp. 419–20).

<sup>40</sup> For an interpretation of the anomalies in the rhyme scheme, and how they are probably the result of scribal intervention, see Geert De Wilde, 'The Stanza Form of the Middle English *Lament for the Death of Edward I: A Reconstruction*', *Anglia*, 123 (2005), 230–45.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Mullally, 'The *Balade* before Machaut', *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Literatur*, 104 (1994), 252–68.

<sup>42</sup> Published in *Political Songs*, ed. by Aspin, pp. 79–92. Reference is made to Ruth J. Dean and Maureen B. M. Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, Anglo-Norman Text Society, Occasional Publications Series, 3 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999), hereafter Dean.

<sup>43</sup> De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', pp. 200–08. See also Thorlac Turville Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 203. This goes back to the original assumption by *Altenglische Dichtungen des MS. Harley 2253*, ed. by K. Böldeker (Berlin: Weidmann, 1878), p. 139, and Aspin, *Political Songs*, p. 81. Aspin argues that the Anglo-Norman version, which appears in the manuscript as a 'pendant' to a prose version of *Le Brute d'Engleterre abregé* (Dean 43), may be the remnant of a lost metrical version of the *Brut*.

<sup>44</sup> Gaston Raynaud, *Bibliographie des chansonniers français des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, 2 vols (Paris: Vieweg, 1884), which in 1955 was reworked by Hans Spanke, *G. Raynauds Bibliographie des altfranzösischen Liedes, neu bearbeitet und ergänzt*, *Musicologica*, 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1955). Separate from this is Jean Sonet, *Répertoire d'incipit de prières en ancien français*, Société de publications romanes et françaises, 54 (Geneva: Droz, 1956), which has been revised on two occasions by Keith Sinclair: Keith V. Sinclair, *Prières en ancien français: Nouvelles références, renseignements complémentaires, indications bibliographiques, corrections et tables des articles du Répertoire de Sonet* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1978); and Keith V. Sinclair, *Prières en ancien français, supplément: Additions et corrections aux articles 1–2374 du Répertoire de Sonet*, *Capricornia*, 7 (Townsville: Department of Modern Languages, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1987). Sinclair also provided a large number of new entries in three further publications: Keith V. Sinclair, *French Devotional Texts of the Middle Ages: A Bibliographical Manuscript Guide* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979); Keith V. Sinclair, *French Devotional Texts of the Middle Ages: A Bibliographical Manuscript Guide, First Supplement* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982); and Keith V. Sinclair, *French Devotional Texts of the Middle Ages: A Bibliographical Manuscript Guide, Second Supplement* (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988). Finally,

fifteenth century and preserved in more than two hundred and fifty different manuscripts.<sup>45</sup> Further attestations of the Type-A rhyme scheme in Anglo-Norman are rare and only the eight-line type (*ababbcbc*) is attested. It is used in twenty-seven lyrics among John Gower's *Cinkante Balades*, which, as mentioned earlier, are obvious imitations of the Continental French *ballade*. They were, however, composed later than the *Lament*, the Minot poems and probably the Vernon/Simeon lyrics too.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, one poem among those ascribed to the anonymous 'Ch' uses the *ababbcbc* rhyme scheme, not only as a true example of the Continental French *ballade* from the second half of the fourteenth century at the earliest, but also with its Anglo-Norman character remaining questionable. Finally, the format is attested in the two 'Desmond Proverbs' (Dean 271).<sup>47</sup> These unusual one-stanza poems are preserved uniquely and in sequence in the early-fourteenth-century manuscript, London, British Library, Harley 913 (fol. 15v), and their composition must be dated before 1330.<sup>48</sup> They are both highly formalized creations, starting almost every word with the same consonant, which results in a very condensed type of alliteration:

Folie fet qe en force s'afie  
 Fortune fet force failire  
 Fiaux funt fort folie  
 Fere en fauelons flatire [...]

Ultimately they seem to be intended as formal curiosities and perhaps served as word puzzles. Furthermore, the rhyme scheme has some anomalies, such as words rhyming with themselves, and assonances, so that, despite some thematic similarities, they can hardly be considered true witnesses to a possible tradition leading to the Vernon/Simeon lyrics.<sup>49</sup>

It must be noted that the quantity of Anglo-Norman lyric poetry surviving is comparatively small, and we are, even more so than in Middle English, left with merely a sample of what must have once existed. Specimens found, for example, in Harley 2253 or in the works of Nicholas de Bozon, bear witness to what must have been an accomplished lyric-writing

Pierre Rézeau published another revision and augmentation of Sonet's *Répertoire*, which overlaps only partially with Sinclair's revisions, and which uses a different numeration; Pierre Rézeau, *Répertoire d'Incipit des prières françaises à la fin du moyen âge: Addenda et corrigenda aux répertoires de Sonet et Sinclair, nouveaux incipit*, Société de publications romanes et françaises, 174 (Geneva: Droz, 1986).

<sup>45</sup> This database remains unpublished, but for a discussion of the results, see De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', pp. 228–42.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion regarding the dating of Gower's *ballades*, see R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), p. 72, note 74. See also *Gower*, ed. by Macaulay, p. lxxii.

<sup>47</sup> Dean misinterprets the Latin rubric *Proverbia comitis Desmoniae* as 'Proverbs of Countess Desmonia', whereas I have argued that it should be translated as 'Proverbs of the Earl of Desmond'; see De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', pp. 220–21. For an edition and attempted Modern English translation, see John D. Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature, 1200–1582* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 91–92.

<sup>48</sup> Wilhelm Heuser dates the main sections of the manuscript 'zwischen 1308 und der Zeit des schottischen Einfalls (1315–18)', with the shorter vernacular poems added 'bis an das Ende des dritten Jahrzehnts'; *Die Kildare-Gedichte: Die ältesten mitttelenglischen Denkmäler in anglo-irischer Überlieferung*, Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik, 14 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1904), p. 19. Bliss and Long state that 'the manuscript cannot have been complete until about 1330'; Alan Bliss and Joseph Long, 'Literature in Norman French and English to 1534', in *A New History of Ireland, Vol. 2, Medieval Ireland, 1169–1534*, ed. by Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 708–36 (pp. 721). Michael Benskin suggests that the manuscript was written 'ca. 1330 A.D.'; see 'The Style and Authorship of the Kildare Poems: *Pers of Bermingham*', in *In Other Words: Transcultural Studies in Philology, Translation and Lexicology, Presented to Hans Heinrich Meier on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by J. Lachlan Mackenzie and Richard Todd (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1989), pp. 57–75 (p. 57).

<sup>49</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the anomalies in the rhyme scheme, see De Wilde, 'Vernon/Simeon', pp. 222–23.

tradition in Anglo-Norman, still flourishing by the early fourteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Is it possible to derive more from the data that is available? In terms of the stanza formats, tail-rhyme (for example, *aabccbddb* et cetera) appears to be the most popular in Anglo-Norman poetry.<sup>51</sup> However, there also seems to be a tendency to experiment with a great variety of rhyme schemes, some of which are quite complex, and, in some cases, interesting tendencies can be detected.<sup>52</sup> First, the use of compound rhyme schemes (that is, the stanza can be divided into segments) is attested from the early thirteenth century in Anglo-Norman. This is also what is found in the Type-A rhyme scheme, which combines a cross-rhymed quatrain or octet (*abab* or *abababab*) with another quatrain (*bcbc*). Secondly, rhyme continuation (that is, the carry-over of a rhyme sound to link the segments of a stanza) is well attested in these compound rhyme schemes. Most poems with rhyme continuation can be dated to the last decades of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century. Thirdly, chiasmic rhyme continuation (whereby the linking rhyme sound changes position from one segment to the other) is again mainly an early-fourteenth-century feature (see, for example, Dean 104, 113, 114, 125.3, 142, and 982), although it has a few thirteenth-century attestations as well (Dean 118, 126.2, 126.7, and 804). In conclusion, the prevailing tendencies in the production of compound rhyme schemes in Anglo-Norman show that the combination of the above three characteristics, all essential for the Type-A rhyme scheme, is most likely to have occurred in the late thirteenth century or in the first half of the fourteenth century, at the time when the ‘Lament’ was written.

On the basis of the above evidence, some conclusions can be drawn. It is clear that the Type-A rhyme scheme, as we find it in the Vernon/Simeon lyrics and in *Pearl*, has earlier attestations, not only in Middle English, but also in Anglo-Norman poetry from as early as the first decade of the fourteenth century. The earliest specimen can be found in Anglo-Norman, and, as I have demonstrated, the format, albeit not widely attested, fits in with the type of formal experimentation that seemed to be typical of the Anglo-Norman poetry of that time. As a result, labelling the Vernon/Simeon lyrics (and consequently the later poetic creations that use the same eight-line or twelve-line stanza form) as ‘pseudo-ballades’ is incorrect, for the simple reason that the continental French *ballade* cannot be the source or the inspiration of the stanza form used in this type of Middle English poetry.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> For examples, see *The Anglo-Norman Lyric: An Anthology*, ed. by David L. Jeffrey and Brian J. Levy, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts, 93 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> See also *Lyric*, ed. by Jeffrey and Levy, pp. 20–24.

<sup>52</sup> In my thesis, I distinguish eighty-five different stanza forms extant in Anglo-Norman poetry, several of which occur with a number of variations. Interestingly, sixty-five of these are unique to the poem in which they occur. See De Wilde ‘Vernon/Simeon’, pp. 228–42.

<sup>53</sup> For lists of all extant Middle English poems using the twelve-line Type-A rhyme scheme, see Fein, ‘Twelve-Line’, pp. 395–97, and for those using the eight-line Type-A rhyme scheme, see De Wilde, ‘Vernon/Simeon’, Appendix 3, pp. 320–26.