

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

This is the first full-scale history of medieval English literature for nearly a century. Thirty-three distinguished contributors offer a collaborative account of literature composed or transmitted in England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland between the Norman Conquest and the death of Henry VIII. The volume has five sections: 'After the Norman Conquest', 'Writing in the British Isles', 'Institutional Productions', 'After the Black Death' and 'Before the Reformation'. It provides information on a vast range of literary texts and the conditions of their production and reception, which will serve both specialists and general readers, and also contains a chronology, full bibliography and a detailed index. This book offers the most extensive and vibrant account available of the medieval literatures so drastically reconfigured in Tudor England. It will thus prove essential reading for scholars of the Renaissance as well as medievalists, for historians as well as literary specialists.

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The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature

EDITED BY DAVID WALLACE

Also in preparation

The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature

EDITED BY DAVID LOEWENSTEIN

AND JANEL MUELLER

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MEDIEVAL ENGLISH
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DAVID WALLACE



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General preface

This volume offers a collaborative account of literature composed or transmitted in the British Isles between 1066 and 1547. It may be read selectively (from the Index), but it is designed as a continuous narrative, extending through thirty-one chapters in five Parts: 'After the Norman Conquest', 'Writing in the British Isles', 'Institutional productions', 'After the Black Death' and 'Before the Reformation'. Our framing dates, 1066 and 1547, acknowledge the death of kings – Harold I and Henry VIII – by way of denoting periods of profound, far-reaching and long-lasting change for literary cultures. William of Normandy's conquest, extended and regularized through documentary Latin, erodes the authority of one prestigious vernacular – Old English – encourages another – French – and initiates hybridizations, movements between dialects and experimental orthographies that make for highly complex manuscript pages. Henry VIII, in making himself head of the Church of England, inevitably assumes close and controlling interest in all writings on religion in English, past and present. The suppression of monasteries, carried out in two waves between 1525 and 1539, destroys the single most important institutional framing for the collection, copying and preservation of medieval texts. Our account of such texts therefore extends forward to the sixteenth century: to their disassembly, obliteration or reconfiguration within new cultures of religion, print and nationalism.

This volume is a history, not a handbook: it does not replicate the function of Severs and Hartung, eds., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*. It does, however, provide basic information on a vast range of literary texts while developing particular lines of argument. Contributors sometimes have occasion to question the terms that they have been asked to work with – early Middle English, romance, mystics, alliterative poetry – but particular critical and theoretical orientations remain, for the most part, implicit in the choosing and arrangement (*inventio* and *dispositio*) of the medieval texts discussed. Such an approach hopes to secure a reasonable shelf-life for this volume, although it can scarcely hope to outlast its immediate predecessor: *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, initiated by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller in 1907, completed twenty years later, and in print until the 1970s. But it should, we hope, encourage new

work in neglected areas and on neglected, or still unedited, texts; many discussions in this volume, necessarily abbreviated, suggest or hope for new lines of research.

One immediate effect of this 500-year history may be to help ease the bottleneck that has formed, in literary criticism and in curricular design, around late fourteenth-century England. This was certainly a brilliant phase of literary composition. But in dwelling on the literature of those few decades, to the exclusion of all else, we cannot best serve the understanding even of those decades: longer perspectives are required rightly to assess a particular moment's achievement. And the gestation, composition and transmission of medieval texts is typically not a matter of decades, but of centuries: a historical process that radically alters, with time and place, what texts might come to mean. It is always perilous to isolate details from modern editions of medieval texts, worked loose from their institutional and manuscript contexts, that supposedly 'illustrate' what happened (say) in 1394. Our ideal reader, then, will know that details of particular compositions must be set within longer accounts of historical/textual before and after; such a reader will read the whole book.

Characteristic emphases of this *Cambridge History* may more readily be grasped by considering some of its forebears. *The Cambridge History of the British Empire* gets underway in 1929 (completing its work, in eight volumes, some thirty years later) with resonant words from Thomas Babington Macaulay's celebrated *History of England* (1848–61): 'nothing in the early existence of Britain indicated the greatness which she was destined to attain' (p. v). Having effectively dismissed medieval Britain in its first sentence, however, the *Empire* preface is moved to rehabilitation in its second, acknowledging that 'the seed of England's later imperial power may be found in the unity, the law, the institutions, and the sea instinct, of which she became possessed in the Middle Ages'. None the less (the third sentence declares) it is 'with the Tudor period that this History opens'. Such figuring of the Middle Ages as an origin to be repudiated, commemorated and forgotten again is a characteristic gambit of this and other contemporary histories. One clue to the embarrassments posed by the English Middle Ages to the kind of teleological structure pursued by the *Empire* volumes may be deduced from the striking omission in that second sentence of that most potent of imperial tools: the English language itself, later standardized as the King's English, with its attendant literary cultures. To admit to a plurality of languages in England's medieval centuries is to suggest a culture more colonized than colonizing: not a secure point of origin for imperial history.

Such awkwardness is clearly shared by the editors of the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. The first volume, published in 1907, moves rapidly from ‘The Beginnings’ in chapter 1 (with the retreat of the Romans) to ‘Runes and Manuscripts’ in chapter 2 to ‘Early National Poetry’ in chapter 3. Posited origins of a national poetry are thus planted absurdly early, long before any line of verse actually appears on the page. Citations of Old English verse are in fact given from Stopford Brooke’s verse translations, which exert a comfortably dealienating effect. Authors of these early chapters, who comprise something of a philological hall of fame, offer generalized accounts of development and transition that keep philology – sensitive to clashes of linguistic difference, hybridization, creolization – strangely at bay. But if the future comes too early, in this account of national development, the past hangs on remarkably late: volume after volume, in this *History*, returns to capture medieval points of origin. Medieval education is discussed in ‘English and Scottish Education. Universities and Public Schools to the Time of Colet’ in volume 2, chapter 15. ‘Canute Song’ (c. 1200) also appears after 2.13, the watershed chapter on printing, along with discussion of outlaw ballads, Robin Hood, and the *Hardycanute* of Lady Wardlaw, ‘that famous forgery’ (2.17, p. 417). Discussion of John Scotus Erigena, Scotus and Ockham is deferred until 4.14, ‘The Beginnings of English Philosophy’; Walter of Henly and other medieval estates managers must wait until the following chapter, ‘Early Writings on Politics and Economics’, which is described as an essay on ‘national life as reflected in literature’.

The most striking forward transfer of medieval material in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* comes in volume 5, where three chapters on medieval drama (5.1–3) preface five chapters on Shakespeare (5.8–12). University plays track medieval origins in 6.12, medieval classrooms are briefly glimpsed in an account of ‘English Grammar Schools’ (7.14) and legal literature moves back to Ethelbert of Kent before moving forward again through Glanvil, Bracton and Fortescue (8.13). Such recursive movement finds its most sustained expression as late as 10.10, a chapter by W. P. Ker on ‘The Literary Influence of the Middle Ages’. Earlier chapters, however, also highlight the carrying forward of medieval textual fragments through accounts of antiquarianism (3.15, 7.10, 9.13). Medieval monastic and cathedral libraries are also sighted late, in 4.19, ‘The Foundation of Libraries’. The crucial role of these institutions in the housing and ordering of medieval writing is thus downplayed in favour of a developmental narrative leading inexorably to Archbishop Parker and Sir Thomas Bodley. The result of such systematic forward movement of early material, this

archaeologizing of medieval text, is that the Middle Ages becomes something of an emptied or elided space. Linguistic and cultural conflicts that play out through medieval manuscripts – including many moments of polyvocal unintelligibility and scribal confusion – are rendered mute or smoothed away; selective realignments of material lead, through discrete teleological trajectories, to unified accounts of English law, nationhood, education or Shakespeare.

The present volume, by contrast, resists this impulse to stabilize and homogenize medieval textuality through selective forward transfer. Part 1, in particular, evokes cultural, linguistic and orthographic conditions of dizzying complexity: but later Parts, too, refuse to settle. Compositions after the Black Death, many of them in an English far from Chancery standard, generate meanings that will be changed through the collecting and anthologizing impulses of the fifteenth century, the impact of print, and institutional relocation. Such changes are duly noted: this volume pushes forward *from* the study of medieval textuality as insistently as the earlier volume reaches back. The aim here is to defamiliarize the present, including present accounts of medieval and Renaissance culture, by achieving some sense of the strangeness, the unlikeliness, the historical peculiarity, of medieval compositional processes. Such an approach might be summarized as a challenge to current English Heritage paradigms – clearly derived from teleological proclivities informing the old *Cambridge History* – that would seek to find in the past, first and foremost, a single pathway to the present.

A second striking feature of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* is the generous promotion of writing in Scotland and the neglect or submerision of Ireland and Wales. As early as 2.4 we have a chapter on ‘The Scottish Language’; this considers ‘southern’ (i.e. English), Latin and French contributions to Middle Scots while dismissing Scandinavian influences entirely and minimizing ‘alleged contributions from Celtic’ (p. 99). The same volume also includes chapters entitled ‘The Earliest Scottish Literature’ (2.5), ‘The Scottish Chaucerians’ (2.10) and ‘The Middle Scots Anthologies’ (2.11); ‘English and Scottish Education’, we have noted, is the joint subject of 2.15. ‘Sir David Lyndsay and the Later Scottish “Makaris”’ are the subject of 3.6; the chapter following is devoted to ‘Reformation and Renaissance in Scotland’. Ireland and Wales are nowhere accorded such independent or free-standing status. Some account of medieval Welsh writing, with heavy emphasis upon the bardic and vatic, may be found in 1.12. The centrality of writing in Wales to this chapter is disguised both by its title, ‘The Arthurian Legend’, and (disquietingly,

from the perspective of colonial history) by its first running head: 'International Property' (p. 271). Ireland is largely neglected until the sixteenth century. The first indexed reference to Ireland is defective; the second directs us to the notorious colonizing plans of the *Libelle of Englyshe Polycye* (1436–41). The city of Dublin makes its first indexed appearance in 4.8: we are told that Thomas Campion did *not* secure a medical degree there 'some time between 1602 and 1606' (p. 142).

Even if our current volume were to exclude any medieval vernacular that could not in some way be construed as, or adjacent to, 'English', Dublin could not be ignored: for Dublin emerges as a site of considerable importance for the commissioning and copying of Middle English manuscripts (chapter 8). Wales, similarly, cannot be overlooked even from a strictly Anglocentric perspective. England is not an island; writers of Middle English north and south – at Chester and at Berkeley Castle – wrote with an awareness of the differing cultures, linguistic and otherwise, immediately to their west. This volume, however, offers 'free-standing' accounts of writing in Wales, Ireland and Scotland that are written, so to speak, from the inside out; outsiders from England are sometimes resisted as invaders, sometimes glimpsed on a far horizon, sometimes simply not part of a local culture. These chapters lead off our second Part, which addresses the problematics of 'Britain' as an organizational term; Wales comes first, since 'Britain' was originally a Welsh idea, not an English one. There is an awkward gap between the title of this volume, which speaks of 'Medieval English Literature', and that of the second Part ('Writing in the British Isles'). No attempt to bridge or elide this division is offered here; the torque and tension between general and Part titles is surely more instructive, more historically responsible, than any attempted harmonization. The history of medieval English literature cannot be told without reference to Wales, Ireland and Scotland; writings in these territories have histories of their own.

The 'Britain' emerging from this volume will appear far different from the 'Great Britain' conjured into existence by the 1707 Act of Union. Eighteenth-century Britons, Linda Colley has argued, were encouraged to overlook (but not forget) British interregional differences in order to resist the fundamental Otherness of European Catholic cultures. Today, British Protestant isolationism continues to lose historical relevance as common European markets bridge long-standing territorial divides. The concept of 'Great Britain' is thus losing its power to cohere and constrain disparate regional cultures; the looser imagining of 'Britain' typical of the Middle Ages seems, in many respects, more apt for the future than that developed over the last 300 years.

The fourth chapter of Part II ‘Writing history in England’, reminds us that history – as it informed the medieval English about the Welsh, Irish, Scots and English – is the written product of particular times and spaces. The chapter which follows, on London, furthers this investigation of specific locales. This chapter must stand in, methodologically, for accounts of other places that have yet to be written, cannot yet be written, or have found no space for inclusion here: Cornwall, East Anglia, York and Yorkshire . . . Such accounts will restore neglected or forgotten texts: for example, the writings and public inscriptions of Jews – excavated from places such as Bristol, Cambridge and Norwich – that formed part of cultural experience in Britain up to and after the expulsions of 1290.

In one important respect, the earlier *Cambridge History* proves prescient of our own concerns and predilections: it takes a broad and inclusive view of what ‘literature’ might mean. Penitential manuals, Latin chronicles, administrative handbooks, narratives of travel and seafaring, economic treatises and religious tracts, map-making and topography, letters and broadsides all find a place among and between accounts of canonical plays and poems. Such breadth of emphasis narrowed considerably with the advent of New Criticism (in the USA) and Practical Criticism (UK) as medievalists sought to demonstrate that certain early texts met criteria of literary and aesthetic excellence exemplified by later works of genius. Some medieval texts survived such demonstrations and others – most notably edited collections of lyrics – achieved new (albeit short-lived) prominence in print. However, much medieval writing – found lacking in qualities newly defined as constitutive of ‘literature’ – fell into deeper neglect.

It was during the latter days of such highly formalist approaches that Derek Pearsall wrote the first volume of the Routledge History of English Poetry. *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (1977) marks the most important contribution to the literary history of Middle English since the 1907–27 *Cambridge History*. It is characteristic of the period that Pearsall was asked to write a history of English *poetry*. Pearsall early signals his intention to treat poetry ‘as a social phenomenon as well as an artistic one’ (p. xi), a dual commitment that extends to duelling Appendices: ‘Technical terms, mainly metrical’ (pp. 284–90); ‘Chronological table’ (pp. 291–302). The second Appendix opens out into a pan-European framework of reference (as space allows) while maintaining the crucial distinction between a poem’s putative date of composition and its earliest surviving appearance in manuscript. Such concern with the materialities of textual production, preservation and circulation – a determination to ‘return poems from the

antiseptic conditions of the modern critical edition to their original contexts in manuscript books' (p. xi) – represents one of Pearsall's most important contributions to the present undertaking. Our Part III, 'Institutional Productions', extends the logic of this enterprise by returning (to invent a prototypical example) a lyric from its modern edition to the medieval manuscript sermon or miscellany from which it was lifted; attempts may then be made to situate this text within the social system that produced it (and which it, in turn, produced). Friaries and monasteries, courts of law, classrooms and sites of confession may thus be studied as knowledge-producing systems with designs on particular human subjects; anti-systemic resistance may also be sought in those who would speak for the 'true commons', English the Bible, embroider narratives of sinful doings or misbehave in class.

The last two Parts of our *History* are organized by explicit divisions of time (1348–99; 1399–1547). This does not imply that concern with temporality is activated only by the approach of 'Renaissance' paradigms; the repertoires of medieval textuality, on the evidence of earlier chapters, are not essentially unchanging. It does imply, or simply recognize, that the density of surviving material in the later period makes it easier to read changes in the greater public sphere, from decade to decade, in association with shifting strategies of writing: from the 1370s to 1380s, 1390s to 1400s, 1530s to 1540s. At the same time (and this is a phenomenon of peculiar importance for studies of literary culture before the Henrician revolution) the accumulated textual corpus of past centuries – recopied, reconfigured, stored and recirculated – continues to exert shaping influence. To say this is not to argue for a *grand* and glacial *récit* of medieval textuality, bearing down to bury the *actualité* of any medieval moment beneath an authoritative weight of prior meaning. It is to acknowledge, rather, that in the transmission of medieval literature much indeed gets lost, but much survives (in new textual configurations, generative of meanings undreamed of at the moment of first composition). All of our first three Parts, then, actively subtend, and often extend into, our last two.

Distaste for *grand récit* is a distinctive trait of New Historicism, a critical movement originating in the USA which essayed a return to historical study cognizant of developments in literary theory (particularly deconstruction). Renaissance practitioners, most famously Stephen Greenblatt, have preferred thick elaborations of *petites histoires* to the claims of grand narrative. Similar preferences inform *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (1989). This volume, the most radically innovative literary history of recent years, ostensibly offers the all-inclusive simplicity of a

medieval chronicle. Chapters are organized by dates: '1095. The Epic'; '1123? Manuscripts'; '1127. The Old Provençal Lyric', and so on. The steady, 1000-page, 1200-year march of these chapters – from '778' to '27 September, 1985' – parodies traditional commitment to historical teleology by affecting to retrace it. Through this single act of unfolding, all possibilities for historical differentiation – that is, periodization – are lost. (Hollier retreats from the logic of his own organization somewhat by arguing for a *fragmentation* of periodicity, conducted by individual chapters, that favours brief time-spans and 'nodal points, coincidences, returns, resurgences', p. xx.) Authors undergo analogous (p. xx) fragmentation through dispersal to different temporal moments: Proust, for example, is glimpsed in many different dateline chapters, but has no single-author chapter, no homepage, of his own.

One of the achievements of this remarkable history – which seems affiliated with computer rather than with codex technologies – is to activate its intended audience, 'the general reader' (p. xix). Such a reader, searching in the Index for specific topics, may find his or her way to a number of different sites. Each reader may thus customize his or her own personal literary history by navigating from one site to the next. This *New History* has its limits: it will not be immediately clear to the general reader, for example, why early medieval Frenchmen suddenly take such an interest in England. But many of its strategies – such as the fragmenting of authorly identity – offer correctives to traditional accounts that prove especially salutary for medievalists. Our own literary history contains just four single-author chapters. One of these authors, Langland, is no more than a name (and a messy manuscript afterlife); another was a mercer and printer who spent much of his life in Flanders. Medieval theories of authorship were, of course, immensely sophisticated and of great cultural moment: but they do not coincide with modern ideas of the literary author *as* personality.

The procedures of Hollier's *New History*, according to David Perkins, drown literary history as we know it in seas of irony and whimsy. But in *Is Literary History Possible?* (1992), Perkins finds no way back to conventional literary history since its totalizing claims cannot any longer be sustained. He thus falls back on appeals to the immanent value of particular works of art (pp. 59, 129). Such an impasse may be avoided, I would suggest, by distinguishing multiple accounts of *longue durée* from a single, totalizing narrative of *grand récit*. It is possible to narrate change over time without believing such a narrative to be the only account possible. It is possible, further, to narrate one history while recognizing trajectories moving, through the same set of occurrences, in opposite directions: the rise of uni-

versities, for example, diminished educational opportunities for women (of a certain social rank) while expanding them for men. The possibilities of such multiple diachronic narration – exploited, we have noted, by the old *Cambridge Histories* under the sheltering canopy of its one big story, the triumph of Britain – are lost to Hollier's *New History* (where each new capsule-chapter can but bang on the windows of its designated timebite). But such possibilities are fully exploited here: indeed, they represent one of the most distinctive features of this volume. Chapters are located where they find their centre of gravity (although, to vex the metaphor, such centres often multiply). Latinitas, for example, comes early by way of recognizing extraordinary achievements in the twelfth century (that establish vital linkages with continental writing). It could have been placed (or be read) later; it might also find a home among 'Institutional Productions'. Similar scenarios may be imagined for other multi-centred, long-reaching chapters: which is to say, for most contributions to this book.

One heading in Hollier's *New History* suggests a striking difference between his volume and ours: '1215, November. The Impact of Christian Doctrine on Medieval Literature' (p. 82). Such a clean distinction between Christian doctrine on the one hand and medieval literature on the other implies a separation of conceptual spheres that, in this volume, proves hard to find. Attempts are made to distinguish, say, saints' lives from secular romances, but such distinctions continually founder as would-be 'genres' bleed into one another. It is possible to separate out specific issues and questions, considered to be of pre-eminent concern for today's readers, from the religion-mindedness pervading the greater medieval textual corpus: such a procedure is articulated by Norman Kretzmann in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (1982). Contributions to our volume are certainly coloured by personal interests: but there is little sense here of a medieval textuality that can withhold itself from, or even pre-exist, the impress of religious consciousness. (There is little sense, conversely, that religious consciousness holds itself wholly apart from 'secular' concern with social hierarchy, degrees of precedence, territorial ambition or commercial calculation.) The jibe that medieval clergy concerned themselves too narrowly with the abstruse and abstract, 'thyngys invysyble', needs to be evaluated as part of sixteenth-century anti-Catholic propaganda (chapter 29). Medieval professional religious, following the broadest imperatives of canon law, show extraordinary ingenuity in entering every imaginative nook and cranny of everyday life. Layfolks are thus interpellated as Christian believers by every textual means available: song, lyric, anecdote, romance, history or epistle.

There is no single chapter on religious writing in this volume, then, because religion is everywhere at work. So too with women. A single chapter on medieval women writers might be disproportionately brief, since nothing by a female mendicant or nun (so far as we know for sure) survives in Middle English. The influence and experience of women, none the less, may be discerned throughout the corpus of medieval English writing. Nuns and female disciples often supplied the strongest rationales for the Englishing of religious works (chapters 12, 20). Women often become visible through the commissioning, owning and reading – if not the writing – of particular books; female reading communities, real and imagined, are considered in many chapters here (most intensively, perhaps, in chapter 4). Female figures, such as Albina and her sisters (chapter 4) and Scota (chapters 9, 26) feature prominently in myths of national foundation; female lives are adumbrated through reflections on women's work (chapter 19) or conduct (chapter 11). Feminine aspirations to literacy may be deduced from negative (masculine) prescriptions. Female would-be readers are equated with children (chapter 14) or with husbandmen and labourers (chapter 31); only noblewomen and gentlewomen are permitted, by a 1543 Act of Parliament, to read (and then only to themselves, avoiding all company).

The cross-hatching of gender with class suggested by this last example recurs throughout this volume. Literacy was a masculine near-monopoly from which agricultural workers, the great majority of men, were excluded. And not all men who were literate shared in the powers and privileges that literacy might confer: 80 per cent of medieval clerics were unbeneficed (chapter 19). At critical moments, as in 1381, such men might align with peasants rather than with aristocrats; and even men plainly terrified by the spectacle of a militant peasantry might still critique violent or anti-feminist aspects of knightly schooling (chapters 16, 22). Some men found common cause with women through support of oppositional literacies: Margery Baxter, tried for heresy at Norwich in 1428–9, carried a Lollard preacher's books from Yarmouth to her home village of Martham; Hawisia Mone of Loddon, also tried at Norwich, often opened her house to 'scoles of heresie' (chapters 16, 25).

It is perhaps through resisting the divorce of literature from history in literary history – a divorce implied by tired organizational binomes such as text and context, writer and background – that this volume makes its most distinctive contribution. *The Well Wrought Urn* of Cleanth Brooks (1947, 1968) famously envisioned the literary text as a self-sufficient artefact miraculously riding the currents of history to wash up at our feet. But

medieval compositions, we have noted, do not maintain urn-like integrity in entering the ocean of textual transmission. Medieval literature cannot be understood (does not survive) except as part of transmissive processes – moving through the hands of copyists, owners, readers and institutional authorities – that form part of other and greater histories (social, political, religious and economic).

Divorced from their greater human histories, medieval writings may seem outlandish or deficient when judged by the aesthetic criteria of later centuries; such judgements must understand the social or institutional functioning of medieval textualities. Recourse to poetry, in medieval schoolrooms and pulpits, often served pre-eminently *practical* objectives; even Chaucer, in the course of a *balade* by his fellow-poet Eustache Deschamps, is acclaimed as a master of *pratique* (chapters 14, 21). Bad poetry (bad by post-medieval standards) was written in the interests of biblical paraphrase; poetical tags and fillers fleshed out metres primed for ready memorization. (Artistically brilliant biblical paraphrase, such as that produced by the *Cleanness*-poet, would of course fulfil this practical mandate all the more efficiently, chapter 17.) Romance, to us a purely fictional form, was thought capable of chronicling vital understandings of the past; prose histories and verse romances, sometimes conflated, often shared space in the same manuscript (chapters 10, 26).

Movements out and away from questions of literary form, narrowly conceived, often facilitate enlightening returns to literary texts hitherto regarded as dull or inert. New historical accounts of fifteenth-century England, for example, accentuate a desperateness in struggles for legitimation – as religious and secular spheres increasingly interpenetrate – that seems *not* to disturb the placid surface of fifteenth-century poetics. But once knowledge of such struggles floods a reading of the fiction – supplies, in rhetorical terms, the circumstances of its social and political performance – such writing seems altogether more compelling, poignant and complex (chapters 24, 26). Irresolvable conflicts that trouble Lancastrian writing (in its struggles to legitimate the illegitimate) eerily portend troubles to come in long and bloody passages of civil war (chapter 24).

This volume amply confirms that 1066 and 1547 represent moments in political history that exert revolutionary effects on all aspects of English writing. But it also argues that the gap between our last two, time-specific Parts – the turn of the fifteenth century – should be re-evaluated as a historiographical watershed of prime importance; it further suggests ways in which literary criticism might participate in such re-evaluation. 1348–99, viewed down the longest retrospect of literary history, emerges as a period

of quite exceptional compositional freedom, formal innovation and speculative audacity. Much of this ends abruptly after 1400; the suddenness of this change has much less to do with the demoralizing effects of the death of Chaucer than was once imagined. Amendments to literary practice symptomatize, intuit, or sometimes effect changes in the greater political realm. Much energy after 1400 is dedicated to the collection and ordering of that which has already been written; new religious writing accentuates affect while downplaying intellect; romance settles into familiar and stabilized forms of narration (chapters 11, 20, 26). Striking shifts occur within the *longue durée* of literary history: ambitious monastic writers repudiate their own literary past; King Arthur makes a comeback; romance reorients itself to please masculine, rather than feminine, readers (chapters 12, 26). All this suggests that unprecedented political initiatives essayed by the new Lancastrian regime, spearheaded by *De Heretico Comburendo* (1401) and Arundel's *Constitutiones* of 1407/9, exert profound cultural effects.

In *The Great Arch*, their excellent account of English state formation, Corrigan and Sayer characterize the reign of Elizabeth I – long celebrated as a revolutionizing, golden age of literary history – as a phase of steady but unspectacular consolidation; true revolution, in the long history of state forms, must be traced back to the time of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII. This Henrician revolution, we have noted, certainly effects radical reordering of the medieval textual cultures that are the subject of this book. And yet, as chapters here subtly suggest, radical shifts sealed under the two later Henrys, VII and VIII, might themselves be seen as consolidating initiatives adumbrated under Henrys IV and V. Royal championing of religion, which was to make Henry VIII first Defender of the Faith (1521) and later head of the Church of England (1534), makes powerful headway under Henry V; royal interest in all things English, oral and especially written, might similarly be traced back from Tudors to Lancastrians (an interest sharpened through neo-imperialist expansion into foreign domains). And if Lollardy is to be considered a premature Reformation, the hereticating apparatus newly developed by the Lancastrians might be viewed as a premature, or prototypical, form of the state machinery perfected under Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell.

There is, of course, no end to the backward and forward tracings facilitated by a genuinely diachronic approach, a historicism that considers developments over centuries as well as shifting sideways from archival fragment (for example, *c.* 1381) or parliamentary Act (of 1381) to isolated moments of literary composition. Such an approach ensures that later literary histories in this series, as yet unwritten, will continue to extend and

amend the meaning of what is written here. Conversely, we hope that developments recorded here remain in view of later accounts of writing in Britain. Finally, we trust that things written of in this book – unfamiliar voices from medieval texts – will carry forward to trouble and delight our own unfolding present.

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Abbreviations

ANTS	Anglo-Norman Text Society
CFMA	Classiques français du Moyen Age
<i>EHD</i>	<i>English Historical Documents</i> , vol. II: 1042–1189, ed. David C. Douglas and George W. Greenaway; vol. III: 1189–1327, ed. Harry Rothwell; vol. IV: 1327–1485, ed. A. R. Myers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953–69
EETS	Early English Text Society OS (Original Series) SS (Supplementary Series) ES (Extra Series)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae: Cursus Completus Series Latina</i> . Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris, 1844–73
SATF	Société des Anciens Textes Français
STS	Scottish Text Society

Chapter 1

OLD ENGLISH AND ITS
AFTERLIFE

—
SETH LERER

England has become the dwelling place of foreigners
and the property of strangers.¹

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY

Our forefathers could not build as we do . . . but their
lives were examples to their flocks. We, neglecting
men's souls, care only to pile up stones.²

WULFSTAN OF WORCESTER

The afterlife of Old English may be evoked in two remarkably disparate poems from the first fifty years of Norman rule. The first – the verses on the death of William the Conqueror from the Peterborough *Chronicle* entry of 1087 (known to modern scholars as *The Rime of King William*) – seems like a garbled attempt at rhyming poetry: a poem without regular metre, formalized lineation or coherent imagery. So far is it in language, diction and form from the lineage of *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* poems (from the finely nuanced *Battle of Brunanburh* of 937 to the looser verses on the deaths of Prince Alfred of 1036 and of King Edward of 1065), that this poem has rarely been considered part of the Old English canon. It was not edited by Krapp and Dobbie in their authoritative six-volume *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, and, when it has been critically considered at all, it has been dismissed as an example of the ‘rough and ready verse’ of popular encomium, arrestingly inept when compared to the rhetorical sweep and homiletic power of the prose account of William’s reign that contains it.³

The second of these poems is the supple vernacular *encomium urbis*

1. Stubbs, ed., *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis*, vol. 1, p. 278, quoted and translated in Brehe, ‘Reassembling the *First Worcester Fragment*’, p. 535.

2. Wulfstan of Worcester, quoted by William of Malmesbury in *De gestis pontificum Anglorum*, ed. Hamilton, p. 283; quoted and translated in Brehe, ‘Reassembling the *First Worcester Fragment*’, p. 535.

3. Clark, ed., *Peterborough Chronicle*, pp. 13–14. The only modern critical discussion of the poem is Whiting, ‘The Rime of King William’.

known as *Durham*. Perhaps composed to celebrate the translation of St Cuthbert's remains to Durham Cathedral in 1104, this poem more than competently reproduces the traditional alliterative half-lines of Old English prosody. Its commanding use of interlace and ring structure, together with its own elaborate word plays, puns and final macaronic lines, makes *Durham* something of a paradox in Anglo-Saxon verse. While it has, in fact, been included in the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (as the 'latest of the extant Anglo-Saxon poems in the regular alliterative meter'), it has been appreciated in two contrasting and mutually exclusive ways. On the one hand, it has been studied as an eloquent survival of traditional techniques of verse-making two generations after the Norman Conquest – a way-station in the history of English metrics from *Beowulf* to *Laȝamon*. On the other hand, it has been understood as an antiquarian *tour de force* re-creating for a literate audience the older forms of poetry for purposes politically and culturally nostalgic, an act of artificial eloquence conjured out of the remains of a nearly lost tradition.⁴

The *Rime of King William* and *Durham*, together with the poetry transmitted by the so-called Tremulous Hand of Worcester and the *Brut* of *Laȝamon*, illustrates the fluidity and flux of English verse-making in the first century-and-a-half of Norman rule. From a linguistic standpoint, this is the period in which Middle English is supposed to have begun, when the elaborate case structure of Old English began to level out, when grammatical gender began to disappear, and when the crystallization of prepositional structures and a Subject–Verb–Object word-order pattern produced texts that, to the modern eye, look for the first time like recognizable English.⁵ From a literary standpoint, the period is marked by minor forms. No single, long, sustained narrative survives from the time of the *Beowulf* manuscript (c. 1000) to that of *Laȝamon* (c. 1189–1200) and the *Ormulum* (c. 1200). The great elegies of the Exeter Book seem to give way to political eulogies; the lyric voice of Old English personal poetry disappears into curiosities modelled on Latin schoolroom exercises.

And yet, from a codicological standpoint, this period is one of the most productive for the dissemination of Old English writing. Such canonical

4. Dobbie, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. xliii. For the poem as part of the continuum of Old English versification, see Kendall, 'Let Us Now Praise a Famous City'; as an *encomium urbis*, see Schlauch, 'An Old English *Encomium Urbis*'; as an act of scholarly antiquarianism, see Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, pp. 199–206.

5. For the linguistic issues summarized here, see Bennett and Smithers, eds., *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, pp. xxi–lxi. For the specifics of spelling, vocabulary, morphology, syntax and accentuation that demarcate Old from Middle English, see Mossé, *Handbook of Middle English*, pp. 1–130.

prose texts as the translations produced under the aegis of Alfred the Great were copied, with what appears to be a fair degree of accuracy, until well into the late twelfth century. Texts that originated in the Anglo-Saxon period were still in use at Rochester a century after the Norman Conquest; mid-twelfth-century manuscripts from Canterbury monasteries (such as British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.xv) preserve much of the visual layout of pre-Conquest books, while the glossings, marginalia, and brief transcriptions in many texts (ranging from, for example, the English glosses to the Eadwine Psalter to the entries in the Winchester *Chronicle* as late as 1183) illustrate the survival of a trained scribal ability with both the language and the literary forms of Anglo-Saxon England.⁶

The period surveyed in this chapter is thus a time of paradoxes. It is a period of apparent linguistic indeterminacy in which seemingly advanced and retrograde texts exist side-by-side. It is, as well, a period of formal indeterminacy. Traditional Germanic verse had always been, without exception, written out as continuous prose by English and European scribes, whereas Latin poetry and verse in the Romance languages is always lineated (an excellent example of this phenomenon is the Valenciennes, Bibliothèque Municipales, MS 150, the so-called ‘Ludwigslied’ manuscript, in which the Old High German alliterative version of the life of St Eulalia is written out as prose, while the Old French version appears lineated as verse). This issue, central to the scholarly assessment of the nature of Old English poetry in general, takes on a new importance for the transitional period surveyed by this chapter. How verse appeared *as verse* becomes a process that involves scribal and editorial decisions that go to the heart of what will constitute the literary forms of early Middle English.⁷

Finally, this is a period of political indeterminacy. The Norman Conquest was not the first incursion onto English soil. The invasion of the Danish Cnut in 1016 had established a paradigm of eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon life under alien rulers. And after William’s Conquest, as well, the problems of dynastic control and security were not fully resolved, as witnessed, for example, during the reign of King Stephen

6. For the details of material summarized here, see Ker, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, pp. 275–6, and James, ed., *The Canterbury Psalter*. General discussions of the survival of Old English linguistic and bibliographical skills into the Middle English period are Ker, *English Manuscripts in the Century After the Norman Conquest*; Cameron, ‘Middle English in Old English Manuscripts’; Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*.

7. See Blake, ‘Rhythmical Alliteration’, and Donoghue, ‘Laȝamon’s Ambivalence’, especially pp. 358–9. For a discussion of the Valenciennes 150 manuscript and its implications for early medieval conceptions of vernacularity, see Rossi, ‘Vernacular Authority in the Late Ninth Century’.

(a time of brutality and famine memorably recorded in the Peterborough *Chronicle* entry of 1137).⁸

This chapter's theme, then, is the relationship of literary form to social change. Its goal is to define some of the ways in which the writings of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries explored the resources of genre, metre, diction, and at times even grammar to respond to and comment on the cultural and political conditions of the time. While it does not make claims either for the unappreciated quality of the writings of this time or for a controlling unity to their seeming formal and linguistic diversity, it does hope to restore some critically neglected texts to the canons of current literary debate and, at the same time, to understand the cultural significance of writings long considered purely for their linguistic or palaeographical interest. In brief, the chapter hopes to re-evaluate what might be labelled the vernacular self-consciousness of writing in English during the period that preceded such masterworks of Early Middle English literature as *The Owl and the Nightingale*.

Much of what survives of Old English writing in this century-and-a-half, and, in turn, much of what characterizes the literary culture of the period, is the result of certain kinds of antiquarianism or, at the very least, of a certain self-consciousness about writing in a language and in literary forms that are no longer current.⁹ The products of this age need not be seen as the markings of sad failures and a decline in the standards of an Anglo-Saxon practice, but instead, may be appreciated as creative attempts to reinvent the modes of Old English writing and imagine anew the world of Anglo-Saxon life. This chapter's selection of texts, therefore, while aiming to offer a representative review of writing in the period, will focus on distinctive ways of reworking and responding to the pre-Conquest literary inheritance. In particular, it shows how the choices of metre, diction and genre thematize the problems of social control, political conquest and scholarly nostalgia. Throughout these texts, scenes of enclosure and demarcation, of architectural display and human craft become the *loci* for imposing a new literary order on a fragmented and newly alien world.

8. For the Danish invasion and the establishment of Cnut as king in 1016, see Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 386–94. For arguments about the possible literary responses and contexts for this period, see Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*. For aspects of the political instability of the post-Conquest world, see Davis, *King Stephen*.

9. For the antiquarian sentiments pervading much of the historiography, poetry and scholarship of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Stanley, 'La3amon's Antiquarian Sentiments'; Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past'; Donoghue, 'La3amon's Ambivalence'; Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*.

This is the period when ‘writing in England’ becomes not just a social practice but a literary theme and a cultural concern. From the 1087 Peterborough *Chronicle* annal (with its anxieties about the textually transmitted nature of history and the written quality of its poem) to the *Owl and the Nightingale* a century-and-a-half or so later (with its constant appeals to book lore and to literate authority), the literary culture of the first post-Conquest centuries sees both the act and issue of writing as constitutive of English life. In their appeals to the great scholars of the Anglo-Saxon age or their avowals of book learning, the writers of the afterlife of Old English voice a vernacular identity in the face of external political challenge and internal linguistic change.¹⁰

I

The Peterborough *Chronicle* annal of 1087 has long been appreciated for its powerful personal voice and its creative use of the rhetorical devices inherited from Old English homiletic and historical discourse.¹¹ Its treatment of the life and death of William, in both prose and verse, rises to an emotional pitch seen nowhere else in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, save perhaps in the occasional laments of the 1137 entry on the famine under King Stephen. These rhetorical features of the annal, together with the annalist’s own claim that he had ‘looked on him [i.e., the Conqueror] and once dwelt at his court’, have led most scholars to approach the entry as a piece of unique personal response and a document valuable for its eye-witness historiography.

But in its rich command of the linguistic and the literary resources of Old English prose, this annal says as much about the conventions of the vernacular traditions as it does about the individuality of the annalist. Its phrasings offer echoes of the pulpit voice of Wulfstan, of the historian’s caveats of the Old English Bede, and of the philosophical laments of the Alfredian Boethius. Its prose offers an excellent example of how the building blocks of Old English writing could be rebuilt into a personal account of Norman rule. Its verse, however, offers an intriguing case of metrical

10. There is a vigorous debate on the nature of vernacular literacy in the Anglo-Saxon and early Norman periods, the various positions of which may be found in Wormald, ‘*Lex Scripta* and *Verbum Regis*: Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut’; Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’*; Kelly, ‘Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word’. Arguments for the impact of the social practice of vernacular literacy on the Anglo-Saxon literary imagination have been made by Lerer, *Literacy and Power*; O’Keefe, *Visible Song*; and Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*. For the origins of the ‘literate mentality’ in post-Conquest politics and society, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*.

11. See the discussion in Clark, ed., *Peterborough Chronicle*, pp. lxxv–lxxix.

experimentation. It differs markedly from other cases of rhyme in Old English: for example, the loose internal assonances of the *Chronicle* poem on the death of Prince Alfred (1036) or the sustained *tour de force* of the so-called *Rhyming Poem* of the Exeter Book.¹² Though admittedly rough in metre and in end-rhyme, the poem on William does evoke the short couplets of continental verse – the patterns, drawn from Latin liturgy and popular song that, by the turn of the twelfth century, would crystallize into the first rhymed poetry in Middle English. In its apposition to the deep vernacularisms of its surrounding prose annal – a veritable chrestomathy of Old English discourses – the *Rime of King William* makes social criticism out of formal patterns. An elegy for an age as much as for a king, this entry as a whole constitutes a powerfully literary, and literate, response to the legacies of pre-Conquest English writing.

From its opening words, the 1087 entry sets a different tone from that of its annalistic predecessors. Instead of the mere ‘her’ or the phrase ‘on þisum gear’ that had announced the reports of previous entries, the annal grounds its earthly events in what is nothing less than incarnational time:¹³

Æfter ure Drihtnes Hælendes Cristes gebyrtide an þusend wintra 7 seofan 7 hundehtatig wintra, on þam an 7 twentigan geare þæs þe Willelm weolde 7 stihte Engleland swa him God uðe, gewearð swiðe hefelic and swiðe wolberendlic gear on þissum lande. (p. 10)

[After one-thousand-eighty-seven winters had passed since the birth of our Lord the holy Christ, in the twenty-first year that William ruled and led England, as God had permitted him, there transpired a terribly difficult and grievous year in this land.]

The year is set in the calendars of both the spiritual and the political. It is a year of pain and suffering, of disease and famine, and its difficulties take on an almost allegorical significance within this opening calendrical framing. Its pains provoke the annalist to lament ‘Eala’, again and again. Nowhere else in the *Chronicle* does this word appear, and nowhere else do the terms of pain concatenate with such frequency: *earnlice*, *reowlic*, *wreccæ*, *scearþa*, *earnian*, *heardheort*, *wepan*, *wependlic*. Rhetorical questions pepper the prose, attesting not just to the drama of the Conqueror’s last year but to the inabilities of the annalist to describe it in detail.¹⁴ ‘Hwæt mæg ic

12. See Earl, ‘Hisperic Style’; Stanley, ‘Rhymes in English Medieval Verse’; and Wert, ‘The Poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*’.

13. See Clemoes, ‘Language in Context’, and Horvath, ‘History, Narrative, and the Ideological Mode of *The Peterborough Chronicle*’. 14. Clark, ed., *Peterborough Chronicle*, pp. lxxv–lxxix.

teollan?’ (p. 11) – but, of course, he does, as he details the avarice that governed William’s minions.

This is the language not of history but of the pulpit, and Cecily Clark, in her edition of the Peterborough *Chronicle*, has called attention to the resonances of Wulfstanian homiletics in the language of lament. ‘[H]ad some of the passages survived only as fragments’, she notes, ‘they would scarcely have been identifiable as parts of the *Chronicle*.’¹⁵ What Clark identifies in both the annalist and Wulfstan as the ‘insistence that misfortune is punishment for sin’ informs the *Chronicle*’s account of William’s death: in spite of all his power, when he died he only had a seven-foot of earth; though he was buried garbed in gold and gems, he lay covered in earth.

Eala, hu leas 7 hu unwrest is þysse middaneardes wela! Se þe wæs ærur
rice cyng 7 maniges landes hlaforð, he næfde þa ealles landes buton seofon
foftmæl; 7 se þe wæs hwilon gescrið mid golde 7 mid gimnum, he læg þa
oferwroge mid moldan. (p. 11)

[Lo, how transitory and insecure is the wealth of this world! He who was once a powerful king and the lord of many lands, received (in death) no other land but seven feet of it; and he who was once clothed in gold and gems lay then covered with earth.]

Such phrasings would have been familiar to an Anglo-Saxon reader not just from the homilists but from the poets. *Beowulf*, for example, is replete with homiletic and elegiac moments, as when the poet comments on the burial mound of the dead hero:

forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan,
gold on greote, þær hit nu gen lifað
eldum swa unnyt, swa hit æror wæs. (3166–8)¹⁶

[They let the earth hold the wealth of noblemen,
the gold in the dust, where it now still remains,
as useless to men as it ever had been before.]

So, too, is the Exeter Book filled with those inclinations to reflect on the pervasive transitoriness of earthly things that have led modern readers to dub a class of poems it contains ‘elegies’ and to find in them the tropes of loss and longing that define, for many, the distinctive Anglo-Saxon poetic experience.

These are, of course, the commonplaces of *contemptus mundi*, and the Peterborough annalist’s frequent associations of wealth with the earth,

15. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxv–lxxvi. 16. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*; translation mine.

together with his alliterative pairings ('mid golde 7 mid gimum', or in the more complex phrasing, 'Se cyng 7 þa heafodmen lufedon swiðe 7 ofer-swiðe gitsunge on golde 7 on seolfre') and his lists ('... on golde 7 on seolfre 7 on faton 7 on pællan 7 on gimman') may bespeak no single source but may look back to the traditions of the wisdom literature of the Germanic peoples whose resources had been deployed by both popular versifier and learned cleric alike.¹⁷

If there is, however, a controlling tone to the 1087 annal it is Boethian, and there are some striking verbal resonances between the *Chronicle* and the Alfredian translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* that suggest a self-consciousness of allusion to this important and widely disseminated Old English prose text.¹⁸ Compare, for example, the annalist's cry on the instability of earthly life and the transitoriness of goods with Wisdom's similar announcements in the Alfredian Boethius:

Sintþ werilice welan þisses middangeardes, þon hi nan mon fullice habban ne mæg, ne hie nanne mon gewelegian ne magon, buton hie oðerne gedon to wædlan. Hwæþer nu gimma wite eowre eagan to him getio hiora to wundriganne?¹⁹

Æala, hwæt se forma gitsere wære, þe ærest þa eorþan ongan delfan æfter golde, 7 æfter gimmu[m], 7 þa frecnan deorwyrðnesse funde þe ær behyd wæs 7 behelod mid ðære eorþan.²⁰

[The riches of this earth are meaningless things, because no man can have enough of them, nor can he be enriched by them, without making someone else poor. But does the beauty of gems none the less entice your eyes to wonder at them?

Woe to that original greedy man who was the first to dig in the earth for gold and gems and brought forth precious items that, until that time, were hidden and covered with earth.]

The key terms of the annalist's account – the emphasis on *gitsung* (greed, avarice, covetousness), on *welan* (earthly goods), on the condition of this

17. See Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, and Howe, *Old English Catalogue Poetry*.

18. On the intellectual backgrounds and wide circulation of the Alfredian translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, see Bolton, 'The Study of the *Consolation of Philosophy* in Anglo-Saxon England'; Godden, 'King Alfred's Boethius'; and Wittig, 'King Alfred's Boethius and Its Latin Sources'. For the study of Alfred's translation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*, pp. 77–9, 107–8.

19. Sedgefield, ed., *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius' 'De Consolatione Philosophiae'*, p. 28; translation mine. Space does not permit a full analysis of the parallels between Alfred's translation and the 1087 annal, but I believe that the entire discussion from sections XIII to XV (Sedgefield's edition, pp. 27–34, corresponding to Boethius' *Consolation*, Book II prose 5 and metrum 5) is relevant to the annalist's depiction of the Conqueror.

20. Sedgefield, ed., *King Alfred's Old English Version*, p. 34; translation mine.

life in the *middangeard*, and on the rhetorical devices of exhortation and question ('Eala, hu . . .') – all find their echoes in Alfred's Boethius. They grant the annalist the force of a Boethian *Philosophia*, a voice charged with an authority drawn not only from pulpit or historiography but from the key text of Anglo-Saxon moral and political philosophy.

In one sense, then, the afterlife of Old English survives in the Boethian phrasings and the homiletic diction of the Peterborough annalist. By drawing on the specifics of vernacular discourses, he grounds his essay on the Conqueror's last year in both the formal and interpretative paradigms of Old English moral prose. The power of his statement lies not just in the personality of tone or vividness of detail, but in the familiarities of form and style – in the Old Englishness of his account. As such, the commentary on the Conqueror becomes a profound political statement about relationships between the foreign and the native played out, here, not on the soil of England but in the vocabulary of the page.

In his poem, however, he attempts something different. Here is a narrative of foreign imposition told through the tensions of loan-words and the pressures of imported metre.

Castelas he let wyrcean, 7 earne men swiðe swencean. Se cyng wæs swa swiðe stearc, 7 benam of his underþeodan manig marc goldes 7 ma hundred punda seolfres.	[He had castles built and poor men terribly oppressed. The king was very severe and he took many marks of gold and hundreds of pounds of silver from his underlings.
Ðet he nam be wihte 7 mid mycelan unrihte of his landleode, for littelre neode. He wæs on gitsunge befeallan, 7 grædinæsse he lufode mid ealle	All this he took from the people, and with great injustice from his subjects, out of trivial desire. He had fallen into avarice and he loved greediness above everything else.
He sætte mycel deorfrið 7 he lægde laga þærwið	He established many deer preserves and he set up many laws concerning them,
þet swa hwa swa sloge heort oððe hinde, þet hine man sceolde blendian. He forbead þa heortas, swylce eac þa baras. Swa swiðe he lufode þa headeor	such that whoever killed a hart or a hind should be blinded. He forbade (hunting of) harts and also of boars. He loved the wild deer

swilce he wære heora fæder.	as if he were their father.
Eac he sætte be þam haran	And he also decreed that the hares
þet hi mosten freo faran.	should be allowed to run free.
His rice men hit mændon,	His great men complained of it,
7 þa earne men hit beceorodan;	and his poor men lamented it;
ac he wæs swa stið	but he was so severe
þet he ne rohte heora eallra nið.	that he ignored all their needs.
Ac hi moston mid ealle	But they had to follow above all else
þes cynges wille folgian,	the king's will,
gif he woldon libban,	if they wanted to live
oððe land habban,	or hold on to land,
land oððe eahta,	land or property (or esteem)
oððe wel his sehta.	or have his good favour.
Walawa, þet ænig man	Woe, that any man
sceolde modigan swa,	should be so proud
hine sylfupp ahebban	as to raise himself up
7 ofer ealle men tellan.	and reckon himself above all men.
Se ælmihtiga God cyþæ his saule	May almighty God show mercy on
mildheortnisse,	his soul
7 do him his synna forgifenesse! ²¹	and forgive him his sins.]

The poem constitutes a critique, as well as a record, of William's actions, and its remarks on the forest, on hunting, and on building projects offer up a cultural obituary for the Anglo-Saxon landscape in the guise of a formal obituary for the Conqueror. 'Castelas he let wyrcean', he had castles built. From these first words, the poem signals a new architectural, political and linguistic order in the land. Castles were foreign to the Anglo-Saxons, who did not build monumentally in dressed stone but in timber or flint.²² The word itself, a loan from Norman French, makes clear the immediate impress of Norman life on English soil, as if the very vocabulary of institutional rule had changed with the Conqueror's coming.²³ Such architectural metonymics had informed, too, the laments of Wulfstan of

21. This text from Clark, ed., *Peterborough Chronicle*, pp. 13–14. For a different edition, with different lineation, see Whiting, 'Rime of King William'. The translation is mine. All subsequent quotations from Clark's edition will be cited by page number in the text.

22. For details of and attitudes towards Norman building projects in the immediate post-Conquest period, see Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, pp. 231–4.

23. Though Old English writers used the word *castel*, they borrowed it from the Latin *castellum*, meaning a town, village or fortified encampment (Bosworth and Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. *castel*). It appears from the lexica that the word *castel*, when used in the *Chronicle*, refers specifically to the French importation of dressed-stone castle building. See, for example, the telling entry from 1052, 'þa Frencyscan þe on þan castelle wæron', cited in Toller, ed., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Supplement*, s.v. *castel*, which identifies the use of the word here and elsewhere in the *Chronicle* as from Norman French. See, too, Kurath and Kuhn, eds., *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. *castel*.

Worcester, the last Anglo-Saxon bishop, on the Norman incursion: ‘Nos e contra nitimur, ut animarum negligentes accumulamus lapides’ (We, neglecting men’s souls, care only to pile up stones). Such a remark contrasts the monumentalism of Norman stone architecture with the relatively small scale of the Anglo-Saxon buildings.²⁴ But, more generally, it voices the controlling equation for post-Conquest writing: that changes in the built environment manifest both cultural displacement and spiritual loss.

In these terms, William’s moral condition (his avarice, again signalled by the Boethian key word *gitsung*) lives itself out in the landscape. His control of the forests matches his control of the populace, and his establishment of hunting laws displays a curious dissonance between his ostensible love of the animals and his contempt for people. His severe punishments grow out of such love, for as the poem states, ‘He loved the wild deer as if he were their father’. Of course, this couplet implies not so much a feeling for the creatures but a contempt for the subjects; that he loved the stags like a father implies that he did not love his people like a father. Finally, the poem draws out its thematic apposition of the moral and the topographical in verbal pairings. *Wille* and *land* become the two poles of the Conqueror’s rule. In the end, he is a man *modig* – in all the resonances of the Old English poetic term, bold and courageous to the point of arrogance²⁵ – who raised himself and accounted himself above all others: again, in the double meanings of the word *tellan*, not just to reckon himself but to impose a system of reckoning, the *Domesday Book*, on his conquered populace. Indeed, these final lines, together with the poem’s cataloguings of the animals under William’s new purview, echo the laments of the 1086 annal, where the *Domesday Book* had been described as something ‘sceama to tellanne’, and which had ‘gesætet on his gewrite’ every ox, cow and pig held by his populace (p. 11). In what may be an ironic twist on the Conqueror’s need to set everything ‘on his gewrit’ (p. 12), the 1087 annalist avows after this poem that ‘Das þing we habbað be him gewritene’, and furthermore that ‘Fela þinga we magon writan’ (p. 13). More than simply affirming that this is a written text, the annalist recalls here the Conqueror’s own distinctive use of writing to control his conquered lands and people. He constructs an obituary that deploys the Conqueror’s own tools against him.²⁶

24. Brehe, ‘Reassembling the First Worcester Fragment’, p. 535.

25. Bosworth and Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. *modig*.

26. For the impact of William’s penchant for record-making on Anglo-Saxon culture, and the uses of writing in his administration, see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 11–28.

Finally, this is a poem that rhymes, and rhyme here, unlike in classical Old English verse, is not an ornament but an organizing principle. It brings lines without regular alliteration into formal coherence; indeed, this is the first poem in rhymed couplets in the English language, and its prosodic novelty may have a thematic purpose, too. If this is the work of someone who had dwelled at the Conqueror's court, then its author would have no doubt heard the couplets of French verse and the stanzas of the Latin hymns and antiphons. Rhyme, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, was taking over in both Latin and vernaculars as the constructive principle of verse-making.²⁷ Its use in the *Rime of King William* may thus dovetail with the poem's emphases of diction and of theme. In sum, the 1087 annal as a whole draws on the verbal and thematic legacies of Anglo-Saxon literature only to juxtapose them with the formal challenges of European verse and Norman vocabulary. The annal mimes the imposition of a Norman verbal world on the English linguistic landscape.

II

Though probably composed a generation after the *Rime of King William*, the poem known as *Durham* seems both more compellingly Old English and assuredly classical than the *Chronicle* poem.²⁸ With its debts to the alliterative elegiac tradition and the Latin schoolroom paradigm of the *encomium urbis*, *Durham* appears a product of the kind of learning long associated with the Anglo-Saxon monasteries. Indeed, it has recently been posited that *Durham* is a product of a self-conscious monastic revival in the north – one calibrated along the lines of the life of St Cuthbert himself and one, furthermore, accompanied by a new interest in the texts of Cuthbertine devotion. Among the books that may have been produced after the revival came to Durham in 1083 was an illustrated manuscript of Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert*. Malcolm Baker has argued that the text of this work, together with later versions of the pictorial cycle, point to an exemplar from the period c. 1083–90 when the community at Durham could 'have supported an active scriptorium'.²⁹ As Baker summarizes the historical materials:

27. For the history and function of rhyme in European Latin and vernacular poetry during this period, together with reviews of scholarship, see Martin, 'Classicism and Style in Latin Literature'; Cunnar, 'Typological Rhyme in a Sequence by Adam of St Victor'; and the general remarks throughout Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*.

28. The following discussion of *Durham* is adapted from my *Literacy and Power*, pp. 199–204, with some changes in emphasis and corrections of detail.

29. Baker, 'Medieval Illustrations of Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert*', p. 29.

The revival of monasticism in the north, first at Jarrow in 1073–74, then at Wearmouth about 1076–78 and finally at Durham, was accomplished with the achievements of earlier Northumbrian monasticism and the tradition of Bede and St Cuthbert very much in mind. It would not be surprising therefore if, soon after the foundation of their monastic house, the Durham monks produced a copy of the *Vita prosaica* [i.e., Bede's *Life*], illustrated in an exceptionally extensive manner, to form part of the equipment of the shrine and serve as an affirmation of the continuity between the newly founded community and monastic life at Lindisfarne.³⁰

Here, in the decades after the Conquest, distinctively Anglo-Saxon religious foundations sought to revive traditions through the making and remaking of texts. Much like the period two centuries earlier, described famously in King Alfred's *Preface* to his translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, this time at Durham was a time of renewal. Much like the king himself, the chronicler of that renewal also felt the need to stress the gap between the failures of the past and the successes of the present. Writing in the second decade of the twelfth century, Symeon of Durham lamented the state of monastic observance before the renewal. In words strikingly reminiscent of King Alfred's, he wrote:

Clerici vocabantur, sed nec habitu nec conversatione clericatum praetendebant. Ordinem psalmodiarum in canendis horis secundum regulam Sancti Benedicti institutum tenuerunt, hoc solum a primis institutoribus monachorum per paternam traditionem sibi transmissam servantes.³¹

[They were called clerics, but they pretended neither to the actions nor the speech of clerics. They kept the order of the psalms, instituted in the (canonical) hours which should be sung, according to the rule of St Benedict, keeping only this through the paternal tradition transmitted to them from the first institutors of the monks.]

Symeon's point that these were called clerics ('clerici vocabantur') recalls Alfred's remark that the Englishmen of previous generations were Christian in name only, performing very few of the practices of the Christian faith; and both writers may ultimately imitate Augustine's well-known injunction, 'Let him not boast himself a Christian who has the name but

³⁰. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³¹. *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae*, in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. Arnold, p. 8; quoted in Baker, 'Medieval Illustrations', p. 29 n. 76; translation mine.

does not have the deeds'.³² As in the case of Alfred – whose polemics have been challenged by more recent scholarship – Symeon presents less a historical than a rhetorical picture of the past: a picture shaped, perhaps like Alfred's, by the concerns of English intellectuals on recently invaded soil.

Symeon's history, together with the information on monastic intellectual and literary life garnered from recent historical research, provide the cultural milieu in which the poem *Durham* can articulate the traditions of holy and political life from Oswin to Cuthbert. It claims title to the progenitor of English letters, Bede himself, while its conclusion defers to his authority for a history of miracles. Its final appeal to what 'ðe writ seggeð' recognizes that the source of a monastic – and, consequently, of a literary – revival will not only be the memory of a public but the transcription of texts.

Behind this appeal to a tradition of learned scholarship is a legacy of vernacular poetics, and the formal structures of the poem, much like those of the seemingly dissimilar *Rime of King William*, enact its thematic concerns with social order and political control.

Is ðeos burch breome geond Breotenrice,
 steppa gestaðolad, stanas ymbutan
 wundrum gewæxen. Weor ymbeornad,
 ea yðum stronge, and ðer inne wunað
 feola fisca kyn on floda gemonge.
 And ðær gewexen is wudafæstern micel;
 wuniad in ðem wycum wilda deor monige,
 in deope dalum deora ungerim.
 Is in ðere byri eac bearnum gecyðed
 ðe arfesta eadig Cudberch
 and ðes clene cyninges heafud,
 Osuualdes, Engle leo, and Aidan biscop,
 Eadberch and Eadfrið, æðele geferes.
 Is ðer inne midd heom Æðelwold biscop
 and breoma bocera Beda, and Boisil abbot,
 ðe clene Cudberte on gecheðe
 lerde lustum, and he his lara wel genom.
 Eardiað æt ðem eadige in in ðem minstre
 unarimede reliquia,

32. See the remarks in King Alfred's *Preface to the Pastoral Care*, 'ðone naman ænne we hæfdon ðætte we Cristne wæron, ond swiðe feawa ða ðeawas'. From the text in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 20, printed in Whitelock, ed., *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, p. 5. Augustine's Latin reads: 'non se autem gloriatur Christianum, qui nomen habet et facta non habet' (from Cassidy and Ringer, *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader*, p. 181).

ðær monia wundrum gewurðað, ðes ðe write seggeð,
midd ðene drihnes wer domes bideð.³³

[This city is famous throughout Britain,
steeply founded, the stones around it
wondrously grown. The Wear runs around it,
the river strong in waves, and there in it dwell
many different kinds of fish in the mingling of the water.
And there has also grown up a secure enclosing woods;
in that place dwell many wild animals,
countless animals in deep dales.
There is also in the city, as it is known to men,
the righteous blessed Cuthbert
and the head of the pure king –
Oswald, lion of the English – and Bishop Aidan,
Eadbert and Eadfrith, the noble companions.
Inside with them is Bishop Æthelwold
and the famous scholar Bede, and Abbot Boisil,
who vigorously taught the pure Cuthbert in his youth,
and he (i.e., Cuthbert) learned his lessons well.
Along with the blessed one, there remain in the minster
countless relics
where many miracles occur, as it is said in writing,
awaiting the Judgement with the man of God.]

Durham seeks to catalogue the scope of human and divine creation, and its distinctive verbal echoes call attention to the mirroring of this bounty inside and outside the monastic walls. In the centre of the poem, just as in the centre of the church, are the remains of the great teachers. Cuthbert's name brackets the list of bishops, kings and scholars, much as the coffin that contains his bones stands as a symbol for the whole tradition of monastic learning which his 'clene' example set for later followers. Around the edges of the city flows the river Wear; around the *burch* itself ring stone walls. The words *wundrum* (3a) and *wundrum* (20a) set off the entire text, much as the river or the wall encircle the foundation. So, too, does the opening phrase *burch breome* (1a) appear again in the epithet for Bede, *breoma bocera* (15a); and the repetitions of the words *wunað/wuniad* (4b, 7a), *biscop/biscop* (12b, 14b), and the elaborate sequence *eadig Cudberch . . . clene cyninges heafud . . . clene Cudberte . . . eadige* (10, 11, 16, 18), all display those patterns of echo and interlace that mark the most sophisticated of Old English poetry. Paired with the countless creatures that surround the

33. Text from Dobbie, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, p. 27; translation mine.

monastery (*deora ungerim*, 8b) are the equally countless relics enclosed within it (*unarimeda reliquia*, 19), and this echo (together with the many others that control the poem's verbal unity) demonstrates the ways in which this text deploys the formal resources of vernacular poetics to affirm the harmony between the human and the natural worlds. In sharp contrast to the *Rime of King William* – which had deployed a similar catenulate structure in a nonnative verbal form to highlight the tensions between Norman rule and English landscape – *Durham* reveals an architecture of the mind that brings inhabitant and landscape into peaceful, if not paradisaic, coexistence. Enacting verbally that governing monastic ideology of the *hortus conclusus* or the terrestrial paradise, *Durham* reaffirms the nativeness of Anglo-Saxon literary and religious practice. Even the macaronics of its closing lines may be said to yoke together the English and the Latin into a formally controlled affiliation of the realms of *deor*, *drihen* and *wer*.

III

The question remains whether *Durham* – for all of its displays of craft and all its resonances to the literary, intellectual and cultural inheritances of the Anglo-Saxon world – represents the survival of a practice or the self-conscious evocation of a tradition. Is it, to use the distinction established by E. G. Stanley, 'archaic' or 'archaistic', the former, characterized by the preservation of old forms, the latter, 'merely imitative of the archaic, [deriving] from it by a deliberate act of recreation'?³⁴ Recent scholarship tends to evade the question, often coming down on the ambivalences that have characterized one representative assessment of the poem as 'composed by a poet who *had inherited or was familiar with* the old Anglo-Saxon poetic techniques'.³⁵ The former intuition yields the archaic, the latter the archaistic.

Rather than seek an answer to this question solely in the models of past practice, it may be equally instructive to illustrate it in future performances. *Durham* bears as much similarity to the poetry that came before it as it does to the verse that was attempted after it. It may thus be profitably compared with a text of a century or so later, the verses on learning and the English literary legacy transcribed by the so-called Tremulous Hand of Worcester and now known as the *First Worcester Fragment*.

34. Stanley, 'Lazamon's Antiquarian Sentiments', p. 27. Quoted and discussed in Donoghue, 'Lazamon's Ambivalence', p. 544.

35. Kendall, *The Metrical Grammar of Beowulf*, p. 217. While Kendall sees *Durham* as sustaining the metrical traditions of Old English verse, Thomas Cable argues that the author of the poem, while possibly familiar with those traditions, 'misunderstood their metrical principles' (*English Alliterative Tradition*, p. 54).

Sanctus Beda was iboren her on Breotene mid us,
 And he wisliche bec awende
 þæt þeo Englise leoden þurh weren ilerde.
 And he þeo cnotten unwreih, þe questiuns hoteþ,
 þa derne diȝelnesse þe deorwurþe is.
 Ælfric abbod, þe we Alquin hoteþ,
 he was bocare, and þe fif bec wende:
 Genesis, Exodus, Leuiticus, Numerus, Vtronomius.
 þurh þeos weren ilærde ure leoden on Englisc.
 þæt weren þeos biscopes þe bodeden Cristendom,
 Wilfrid of Ripum, Ioan of Beoferlai,
 Curbert of Dunholme, Oswald of Wireceastre,
 Egwin of Heoueshame, Ældelm of Malmesburi,
 Swiþþun, Æþelwold, Aidan, Biern of Wincæstre,
 Paulin of Rofecæestre, Dunston and Ælfeih of Cantoreburi.
 þeos lærden ure leodan on Englisc, næs deorc heore liht, ac hit fæire glod.
 Nu is þeo leore foreleten, and þet folc is forloren.
 Nu beoþ oþre leoden þeo læreþ ure folc,
 And feole of þen lorþeines losiaþ and þet folc forþ mid.
 Nu sæiþ ure Drihten þus, *Sicut aquila prouocat pullos suos
 ad uolandum. et super eos uolitat.*
 This beoþ Godes word to worlde asende,
 þæt we sceolen fæier feþ festen to Him.³⁶

[Saint Bede was born here in Britain with us,
 And wisely he translated books
 So that the English people were taught by them.
 And he unravelled the problems, called the Quæstiones,
 That obscure enigma which is precious.
 Abbot Ælfric, whom we call Alcuin,
 Was a writer and translated the five books:
 Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
 With these our people were taught in English.
 There were these bishops who preached the Christian faith,
 Wilfrid of Ripon, John of Beverly,
 Cuthbert of Durham, Oswald of Worcester,
 Egwin of Evesham, Aldhelm of Malmesbury,
 Swithun, Ethelwold, Aidan, Birinus of Winchester,
 Paulinus of Rochester, Dunstan and Alphege of Canterbury.

36. Text and translation from Brehe, 'Reassembling the *First Worcester Fragment*', pp. 530–1. Brehe's entire discussion, pp. 521–36, reviews the bibliographical, critical and textual problems surrounding the *Fragment*, and my treatment here is indebted to his researches.

These taught our people in English. Their light was not dim, but shone
 brightly.
 Now that teaching is forsaken, and the folk are lost.
 Now there is another people which teaches our folk,
 And many of our teachers are damned, and our folk with them.
 Now our Lord speaks thus, 'As an eagle stirs up her young
 To fly, and hovers over them'.
 This is the word of God, sent to the world
 That we shall fix a beautiful faith upon them.]

Thematically and structurally, the poem has much in common with *Durham*. Both locate the geographical and spiritual side of understanding in a *Breoten* populated by the saints and scholars of the Anglo-Saxon monasteries. Both offer up a Bede as a member of the class of *boceras* who, as the *Fragment* states, 'lærden ure leodan on Englisc' (16). Both deploy patterns of echo and interlace to enclose a catenulate account of English saints. And both conclude by bringing the Latin language of the Church into the vernacular discourse of the elegy. 'Nu sæiþ ure Drihten þus', the *Fragment* affirms at its close, much as *Durham* appeals to 'ðes ðe writ seggeð'.

Like *Durham*, and to a certain extent like the *Rime of King William*, *The First Worcester Fragment* seeks to resolve thematic issues by formal means, and in the process, skirts the line between convention and innovation. On the one hand, the *Fragment* deliberately looks backwards. Its patterns of alliteration and interlace, its inherited epithets, its nostalgia for a past time of English learning and control – all secure it in the archaizing world of vernacular monastic enquiry. Its repetitions, though certainly not as deft or intricate as *Durham*'s, none the less rely on the old ring-structures drawn from Anglo-Saxon prosody. Its understanding of the wisdom of book learning, too, looks back to the traditions of the gnomic in Old English, as the line 'þa derne diþelnesse þe deorwurþe is' recalls the equation between that which is *degol* and *dyrne* (dark, deeply hidden) and that which is dear in Anglo-Saxon wisdom literature.³⁷ Its sensibilities, too, are perhaps as backward looking as *Durham*'s. The community that produced and received this poem may have been, much like Symeon's Durham monastery, acutely aware of the Alfredian resonances to their own experience. Indeed, the *Fragment*'s lines lamenting the loss of English *leore* recall pointedly Alfred's lament in the *Preface* to the *Pastoral Care* that 'we have now lost [*forlæten*] the wealth and the wisdom' of an earlier English age.

37. On the vocabulary of hiddenness and darkness in the Old English wisdom literature, see Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, pp. 97–125.

It is no accident that the *First Worcester Fragment* has about it the patina of Alfredian nostalgia. King Alfred's own copy of the *Pastoral Care* that he had sent to Bishop Wærferð of Worcester (now Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 20) continued to be part of the intellectual life of the cathedral community in the years after its receipt in the last decades of the ninth century. 'It received much attention from Worcester correctors and glossators, including Archbishop Wulfstan, throughout the centuries',³⁸ and it was read and glossed by the Tremulous Hand himself. Alfred's *Preface* has forty-four surviving glosses, all the mature (M state) hand of the glossator – a hand Christine Franzen considers 'nearly contemporary with D', the hand of the Worcester Cathedral Library MS F.174 volume containing the *First Worcester Fragment*. The glossator has marked with a *nota*, the only one in this copy of *Preface*, this passage on the decay of learning: 'hie he wendon ðætt æfre menn sceolden. swæ re-ce-lease [glossator's dashes] weorðan. and sio lar swæ oðfeallan; for ðære wilnunga hy hit forleton, ond woldon ðæt her ðe mara wisdom on londe wære ðy we ma geðeoda cuðon'.³⁹

The Alfredianisms of the Tremulous Hand, however, are not confined to local verbal echoes. In his overall project of glossing, transcribing, and lexicographically studying the core texts of the Old English prose tradition (the translations of Alfred, the homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan, etc.), the Tremulous Hand glossator has, in effect, re-created the Alfredian project of vernacular educational renewal. His work puts into practice both the elegiacs and the polemics of the *Preface* to the *Pastoral Care*. It culls not only a canon of 'those books worthy for all men to know', but re-creates, as well, King Alfred's nostalgia for a past golden age of English learning. Alfred's *Preface* provides the model for constructing a vernacular literary culture in the aftermath of foreign invasions and linguistic change. What the King says about ninth-century Wessex – its learning stripped by Danish invaders and neglected by surviving ecclesiasts – might well be voiced for post-Conquest Worcester. For the author of the *Fragment*, such nostalgias motivate the lament that 'Nu is þeo leore forleten, and þet folc is forloren'. Worcester culture is thus not so much nostalgic as it is

38. Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*, pp. 61–2.

39. 'They did not think that men would ever become so careless and that learning would so decline; they let it go [i.e. permitted learning to decay by not making translations] out of the conviction that the more languages we knew the greater would be the wisdom in his land.' My translation. Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*, p. 60, quoting the Hatton 20 text originally edited by Sweet. For the study of Alfred's *Preface* to the *Pastoral Care* in post-Anglo-Saxon England, especially in the light of annotations to its manuscripts, see Page, 'The Sixteenth-Century Reception of Alfred the Great's Letter to His Bishops'.

metanostalgic: a culture preoccupied with evoking a past already aware of the loss of previous achievements, a past already conscious of the pastness of its history.

This elegiac sensibility informs the generic affiliations of much of the poetry composed and transcribed in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Such texts as the *Soul's Address to the Body* (a collection of now fragmentary passages, bound up with the *First Worcester Fragment* and a copy of Ælfric's *Grammar* and *Glossary*, all in the Tremulous Hand, in what is now Worcester Cathedral Library, MS F.174), *The Grave* and *Latemest Day*, all offer up laments not simply for the dead but for the passing of the riches and the power of the body.⁴⁰ They share preoccupations with the structure of burial, with the architecture of death, whether it be the grave itself, the reliquaries of the saints, the churches that house their bones or the unshaped earth that conceals the body. The speaker of *The Grave* addresses the buried body in these terms:

Ne bið no þin hus healice itinbred;
hit bið unheh and lah þonne þu list þerinne.
ðe helewaʒes beoð laʒe, sidwaʒes unhʒe,
þe rof bið ibyld þire broste ful neh
Swa ðu scealt on molde wunien ful calde.
Dimme and deorcæ þet den fulæt on honde
Dureleas is þæt hus and dearc hit is wiðinnen.
Ðær þu bist feste bidytt and ðæð hefð þa cæʒe.⁴¹

[And now your house is not built high;
it is short and low, when you lie within it.
The end-walls are low, the side-walls not high,
the roof is built very near to your breast
so that you will remain in the earth, very cold.
Dim and dark, that den will quickly become foul.
Doorless is the house and dark inside,
where you are shut fast and death has the key.]

So, too, does the soul in the *Soul's Address to the Body*, in lines that have led some scholars to construe a literary or a textual relationship between these lines and those of *The Grave*.

Nu þu hauest neowe hus, inne beþrunge;
lowe beoþ þe helewewes, unheʒe beoþ þe sidwoves,

40. For discussion of the possible relationships between these texts, see Moffat, ed., *The Soul's Address to the Body*, pp. 39–51. 41. Text from Schröder, 'The Grave'; translation mine.

þin roflīiþ on þine breoste ful neih;
colde is þe ibedded, cloþes bideled, . . .⁴²

[Now you have a new house, narrow inside;
the end-walls are low, the side-walls not high,
your roof lies very close to your breast;
You are bedded down cold, deprived of clothes.]

Such episodes have long been seen as part of a distinctive ‘body and soul’ literature that flourished in the Latin and vernacular schools throughout the Middle Ages. The fascinations with the fragile nature of the body, and the penchant for anthropomorphizing *disputationes* (soul vs. body, wine vs. water, summer vs. winter, etc.), contribute much to the tone and tenor of these works. The trope of the grave, and of the body, as a house; the uses of the *ubi sunt* device; and the predilection for listing possessions lost, beauties decayed or torments suffered – all find their English voice in poetry of the first century-and-a-half of post-Conquest life.⁴³ And yet, such predilections are themselves a form of cultural commentary. The interest in the genre may well be as much a statement of social life as evidence of literary popularity. Indeed, after the Alfredian laments of the *First Worcester Fragment*, a line like that of *The Grave*’s ‘Dureleas is pæt hus and dearc hit is wiðinnen’ seems more a commentary on the experience of the living rather than on the condition of the dead. This is a world far from that of a learned past, where, as the *First Worcester Fragment* had put it, ‘næs deorc heore liht, at hit fæire glod’.

If all seems dark and dim in this verse, if all seems tonally nostalgic and generically retrograde, it is not so. In addition to their backward-looking elegiacs, these texts evidence, at least to modern readers, a progressive-seeming prosody in their long, loose alliterative lines, the increasing use of end-rhyme, and their occasional lyric moments of intense feeling. The rhymed passage of the place names in the *First Worcester Fragment* (11–15), for example, has much in common with Laȝamon’s practice of rhyming lists of locales, and in general there is a curiously Laȝamonian feel to the *Fragment*’s prosody. The long, alliterative lines, the parallelism of names and places, even the manipulations of English syntax to enable the *Fragment*’s macaronic rhyme on *þus* and *suos* – all are features found with great frequency in

42. Text from Moffat, ed., *Soul’s Address*, fragment c 29–32, p. 68. All further quotations from this text will be from this edition, cited by fragment letter and line number in my text. Relations between these sections of the *Soul’s Address* and *The Grave* are discussed in Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*, pp. 9–11.

43. See the review of scholarship and criticism in Moffat, ed., *Soul’s Address*, pp. 39–51.

the *Brut*.⁴⁴ Similarly, the long alliterative lines of the *Soul's Address to the Body* occasionally evoke the *Brut*, though they may also be designed to recall the rhythmical prose of Ælfric and Wulfstan.⁴⁵ At times, however, the prosodic omnivorousness of the *Soul's Address* offers up brief passages of lyricism sustained through short rhymed half-lines and a diction drawn from devotional writing. The following passage from fragment D of the poem reveals something of a lyric sensibility controlling much popular verse-making during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and relineating it as couplets enhances its lyric feel.

Forloren þu hauest þeo ece blisse,
 binumen þu hauest þe paradís;
 binumen þe is þet holi lond,
 þen deofle þu bist isold on hond,
 for noldest þu nefre habben inouh
 buten þu hefdest unifouh;
 nu is þet swete al agon,
 þet bittere þe biþ fornon;
 þet bittere ilest þe efre,
 þet gode ne cumeþ þe nefre;
 þus ageþ nu þin siþ
 æfter þin wrecce lif. (fragment D, 37–42)

[You have lost the eternal bliss,
 you have been stripped of paradise;
 taken away is the holy land,
 you have been delivered into the hand of the devil,
 for you never would have had enough,
 unless you had it in excess;
 now the sweetness is all gone,
 the bitter is all that is left for you;
 the bitter lasts forever for you,
 the good will never return to you;
 thus your fate comes to pass
 after your wretched life.]

Presented in this way, these lines now have the look and feel of *cantica rustica*, of the stanzas of the hymns of St Godric (c. 1100–1170), for example, with their rough rhymed couplets and their loose four-stress lines.⁴⁶

44. Relationships between the prosody of the *First Worcester Fragment* and L₃₃amon's *Brut* are discussed in detail by Brehe, 'Reassembling the *First Worcester Fragment*'.

45. Such is the argument of Moffat, ed., *Soul's Address*, pp. 25–33.

46. See Rankin, 'The Hymns of St Godric'; Zupitza, 'Cantus Beati Godrici'; and the brief discussion in Brehe, 'Reassembling the *First Worcester Fragment*', p. 527.

Godric's verse, like that of *The Grave* and of the poems copied by the Tremulous Hand, also deploys an architecture of the spiritual, here not to confine the dead but to assure the living:

Sainte Nicholas, godes drup,
 tymbre us faire scone hus,
 at þi burth, at þi bare;
 Sainte Nicholas, bring us wel þare.⁴⁷

[Saint Nicholas, beloved of God,
 build us a beautiful, fair house,
 (we swear) by your birth and by your bier,
 Saint Nicholas, bring us there safely.]

It is a shorter step than might be thought from this versifying to the lyric poignancy of the poem found preserved in pencilled marginalia, perhaps by the Tremulous Hand himself, in British Library MS Royal 8.D.xiii.⁴⁸ Written as continuous prose, the lines when scanned and edited produce what Carleton Brown saw long ago as the 'earliest example of the secular lyric' in Middle English.⁴⁹

ic an witles fuli wis
 of worldles blisse nabbe ic nout
 for a lafdi þet is pris
 of alle þet in bure goð
 sepen furst þe heo was his
 iloken in castel wal of stan
 nes ic hol ne bliþe iwis
 ne þriuiinde mon
 lifþ mon non bildes me
 abiden 7 bliþe for to bee
 ned efter mi deað me longgeþ
 I mai siggen wel by me
 herde þet wo honggeþ⁵⁰

[I am completely without sense,
 I experience nothing of the world's bliss,

47. Text from Rankin, 'Hymns of St. Godric', p. 701; translation mine, based on interpretations in Zupitza, 'Cantus Beati Godrici', pp. 429–31. 48. See Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*, pp. 72–3.

49. Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, p. xii.

50. The text is from Peter Dronke's reconstruction and revision of Brown's (n. 49 above) in *The Medieval Lyric*, pp. 280–1; translation mine. Dronke relies on, but occasionally revises, the edition presented in Stemmler, 'Textologische Probleme mittelenglischer Dichtung', who publishes a photograph of the manuscript that, as Dronke recognizes, is 'in several places more legible than the MS itself' (p. 280).

on account of a lady who is valued
 above all others that walk in the bower.
 From the very first that she was his,
 locked up in a castle wall of stone,
 I have been neither whole nor happy,
 or a thriving man.
 There is not a man alive who does not advise me
 to wait and just be happy,
 but it is downward to my death that I long;
 I can say truthfully that on me,
 woes hang terribly.]

Read in the context of the history of Middle English lyrics, as it has been universally read by modern scholars since its discovery, this little poem appears to anticipate the individual voiced feelings of the Harley Lyrics or the gnomic verities of such familiar anthology pieces as 'Foweles in the frith'.⁵¹ But read in the environment of Worcester antiquarianism and prosodic experimentation, this poem speaks directly to the problematics of an English poetry seeking to find a space for a vernacular feeling in a conquered world. It personalizes the communal sense of loss shared by the late Old English poems of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. It invests in the architectural imagery of confinement and control, as its brief reference to the lady 'iloken in castel wal of stan' recalls both the impregnability and the alien nature of the Norman castle stretching back to the 1087 Peterborough annal. And like *The Grave* and the poems in the Tremulous Hand, its speaker looks downwards to death, presenting to the reader now a senseless body stripped of bliss.

Approaching this brief poem as a product of the afterlife of late Old English, rather than as the precursor to the flourishing of Middle English, grants a new perspective on both the poem and its contexts. It illustrates the lyric's formal and thematic debts to a tradition of English elegiac verse, as the short lines and end-rhymes come together to produce a verse that, while far more poignant and sophisticated than the hymns of St Godric or the laments of the *Worcester Fragments*, conjures a voice out of the building blocks of elegy. It also illustrates the possibilities of lyric expression in the Old English poems, providing something of a lens through which the modern reader may find in the *Soul's Address* a memorable lilt little appreciated by those who have found in them simply the garblings of a tradition or the barely controlled experimentations of the antiquary.

⁵¹ See Dronke, *Medieval Lyric*, pp. 144–5, and Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, pp. xii–xiii.

IV

It has long been suspected that the antiquarian environment of Worcester informed Laȝamon's sentiments in his *Brut*. The poet lived and worked in Arley Kings, barely a dozen miles from Worcester Cathedral, and the probable period of his poem's composition (1189–1200) corresponds roughly to the scholarly activities of the Tremulous Hand.⁵² It is quite possible that he knew or at least knew of the scholarly activities at Worcester, and he may have had access to the Old English manuscripts preserved and annotated there. At the very least, the metrics and the matter of the *Brut* share in that blend of prosodical experimentation and nationalist sentiment that shaped much of the vernacular literary action in the century-and-a-half after the Conquest. And, at a more local level, there are echoes throughout Laȝamon's work of Ælfric's homilies (texts widely read throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, not just at Worcester) and a sustained appropriation of such traditional Old English diction as the language of the boast. Whatever his precise sources, and whatever he meant by the 'Englisca boc' in the Preface to the *Brut*, Laȝamon clearly sought to evoke the texture of Old English verse. The archaisms of his language, especially in scenes of heroic speechifying and martial clash, reveal a poet who, together with the Tremulous Hand, may be considered one of the first serious students of Old English literature in the post-Conquest period.⁵³

Much has been made of the paradoxes of Laȝamon's antiquarianism: his choice of English alliterative verse for a poem celebrating the conquerors of the Saxons; his putative reliance on sources from French, Latin and English; and his fascinations with Arthurian heroics in a time of political stress and dynastic insecurity. One may well query how Laȝamon could make Anglo-Saxons villains of the piece while at the same time writing verses like these:⁵⁴

Helmes þer gullen beornes þer ueollen.
 sceldes gunnen scenen scalkes gunnen swelten.
 at þan forme rese fifti þusende.
 baldere beornen heore beot was þæ lasse. (15590–3)

52. See Franzen, *Tremulous Hand*, pp. 106–7. On Laȝamon's possible knowledge of materials at Worcester, and of Old English literature in general, see Stanley, 'Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments'; and Donoghue, 'Laȝamon's Ambivalence'.

53. Donoghue, 'Laȝamon's Ambivalence', pp. 550–4.

54. This example, together with the translation of Frederic Madden, is from Donoghue, 'Laȝamon's Ambivalence', p. 552. The text of the *Brut* is from Brook and Leslie, eds., *Laȝamon: 'Brut'*.

[Helms resounded there, knights fell there,
shields shivered, warriors perished,
at the first assault fifty thousand
brave men – their threatening was less.]

In fact, the tensions between this kind of verbal archaism and the anti-Saxon tone of the poem may have affected one of the *Brut*'s earliest readers, the so-called Otho Reviser who recast and cut down much of the poem in the second of its two mid-thirteenth-century manuscripts, British Library, MS Cotton Otho c.xiii. As E. G. Stanley has described these revisions, 'The Otho Reviser cleansed the poem of its poeticisms . . . because he was out of sympathy with the antiquarian modulation of the poet'.⁵⁵ In developing this observation, Daniel Donoghue has pinpointed the Otho Reviser's work in his eliminations of the word *beot*, the classical Old English boast word, and concludes: 'If one wished to pinpoint when the Old English heroic tradition gave way to something else, a good choice for the terminus ante quem would be Brut, where *beot* has only the faintest echoes of the old ethos. It is convincing evidence that for Laȝamon the heroic tradition was a faltering memory.'⁵⁶

If the heroic tradition had given way to something else, one may well ask to what. Preserved in the other manuscript of Laȝamon's *Brut*, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.ix, is *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Compared with the *Brut*, this poem seems a witness to another world: instead of the long alliterative lines, it offers short rhymed octosyllabic couplets; instead of an archaizing Anglo-Saxon diction, it displays a knowledge of both French and Latin literary terms; and instead of the heroic solemnities of Laȝamon's epic, *The Owl and the Nightingale* revels in an urbane wit that bespeaks a familiarity with the courtier poetry of Marie de France and the humanism of John of Salisbury.⁵⁷

But what distinguishes *The Owl and the Nightingale*, both in the Cotton Caligula manuscript and in its other mid-thirteenth-century manuscript, Oxford, Jesus College, MS 29, is the fact that the text is written out in lineated couplets. Unlike the *Brut* – which, in spite of its scribes' pointing of its half-lines, remains written out as continuous prose – *The Owl and the Nightingale* appears, visually, indistinguishable from verse in Latin or the

55. Stanley, 'Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments', p. 29.

56. Donoghue, 'Laȝamon's Ambivalence', p. 554.

57. Stanley, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, for discussion of date, transmissions, prosody and stylistic features. The manuscripts are described and discussed in the facsimile edition, Ker, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*. For reviews of scholarship and criticism, see Hume, *The 'Owl and the Nightingale': The Poem and Its Critics*.

Romance vernaculars. Both of its manuscripts offer short lines in double columns, and both punctuate the poem's line-endings. In the Jesus College manuscript, the poem comes equipped with a Latin title (*Incipit altercacio inter filomenam et bubonem*) and with each line's initial letter set off from the others. In Cotton Caligula, the text is written in a 'professional' gothic hand, one more usual for works of the learned Latin tradition, such as the *Historia scholastica* in British Library, MS Royal 3 D.vi (c. 1283–1300).⁵⁸ In these texts, *The Owl and the Nightingale* looks for all the world more like a European than an English poem, and it may have been as striking to a reader of the mid-thirteenth century as to one of the late twentieth.

Perhaps that is precisely what the poem is: not a translation in the narrow sense, but a formally and generically continental work. Throughout the poems surveyed in this chapter, it has been apparent that the Englishness of English verse is less a function of vocabulary, theme or genre than it is a product of the scribes. The Englishness of poetry lies in its appearance on the written page. Regardless of its metrical form or subject matter – be it the heroics of the *Brut*, the lyric voicings of the poem in Royal 8 D.xii, the homiletics of *The Soul's Address*, *The Grave* or the *First Worcester Fragment*, or the encomia of *Durham* or the *Rime of King William* – all are inscribed as continuous prose. The manuscripts of *The Owl and the Nightingale* thus announce a vernacularity more continental than insular, a *métier* more in tune with Latin schooling and the Ile de France than with the cloisters of Worcester.

And yet, this is an English poem. The Proverbs of Alfred stand alongside material drawn from the *Fables* of Marie de France. The *altercacio* transpires in a landscape unique to the British Isles.

Ich was in one sumere dale;
In one suþe diȝele hale
Iherde ich holde grete tale
An Hule and one Niȝtingale. (1–4)

Though written in precise octosyllabics, and with perfect rhyme, all the words here are English. And if this *locus amoenus* seems universally familiar from a range of disputations, the bird's setting should remind the reader that this is still England.

þe Niȝtingale bigon þe spece
In one hurne of one breche, (13–14).

⁵⁸ Ker, ed., *Owl and the Nightingale*, p. xvi.

The Nightingale sings in the corner of a *breche*, a field broken up for cultivation and now fallow.⁵⁹ In the Introduction to their anthology, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, Bennett and Smithers remark on this detail in terms that may help place this poem's opening in the landscapes, both local and imaginative, that it has been the purpose of this chapter to trace:

This line should remind us not merely of the delight in nature that characterizes early English song but also of the conquest of the forest that had been going on ever since the Normans came. With the clearing of the forest came new settlements, new parishes, new churches – the towns, parishes, and churches that for the most part still survive, however deformed or transformed, peopled still by the descendants of those men and women for whose benefit and whose delight the texts presented here were first composed.⁶⁰

The opening words of this unmistakably urbane Middle English poem take us back, then, to the rough couplets of the *Rime of King William* and their ironic condemnations of the Conqueror who would impose a foreign architecture and a foreign language on the English, whose castles and forest laws were alien as much in spirit as they were in shape to Anglo-Saxon life. For all its delicacies of diction and its easy wit, *The Owl and the Nightingale* may offer tensions as deep as those of the other poems written in the first centuries of Norman rule. By seeking formal answers to cultural questions, by thematizing the topography of intellectual experience, it shares in the afterlife of the Old English language and its literature.⁶¹

59. See Stanley's note to line 14, p. 105, and his glossary entry for the word.

60. Bennett and Smithers, *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*, p. xix.

61. For development of this chapter in different contexts, see Lerer, 'The Genre of The Grave and the Origins of the Middle English Lyric'.