THE SOCIOLOGY OF MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE: 
THREE LATE MEDIEVAL COMPILERS 

DISSERTATION 

Prepared in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy 
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University 

By 

Michael Robert Johnston, M.Litt. 

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Dissertation Committee: 
Richard Firth Green, Advisor 
Frank Coulson 
Lisa Kiser 
Ethan Knapp 

Advisor 
English Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

My dissertation brings a new perspective to the study of Middle English romance by demonstrating how manuscript evidence can both enrich and challenge critical assumptions about the genre. The material form in which romances were encountered in the Middle Ages gives us insight into how its original readers would have encountered the genre. Such evidence should be central to our attempts to place romance within cultural history. My dissertation synthesizes the concerns of cultural history and codicology—disciplines within medieval studies that are not often considered together—by examining four compilations of late medieval romance. In each chapter, I advance an argument about the various textual interpretations suggested by the material form of a single manuscript. In particular, I examine the thematic patterns emerging across the romances within each manuscript. The main line of investigation centers on how the romances in each manuscript are arranged, and how groupings of texts encourage readers of the manuscript to attend to certain issues in the texts. I also take into account how the other (“non-romance”) texts in each manuscript affect the interpretation of each individual romance. Finally, I consider how the romances relate to, reflect and/or refract
the specific interests of their compilers and how the social position of each compiler (e.g.,
his class identity, his regional identity, his political affiliations) shaped the ways in which
he collected and preserved his texts. Each manuscript raises a unique set of questions
with regards to the romances it contains, ranging from the clash of traditional aristocratic
values with mercantile identity (as in Chapter One) to the relationship between *largesse*
and estate management (as in Chapter Four).

Chapter One addresses London, British Library MS Harley 2252, a commonplace
book compiled by John Colyns, a merchant in early sixteenth-century London. The
romances in this collection were the product of a team of professional book producers,
and Colyns purchased these texts and included them at the center of his collection. The
rest of the pieces in this manuscript are in Colyns’s hand. Both romances in this
collection, *Ipomadon* and the Stanzaic *Morte Arthure*, give voice to a traditional social
ethic, one which connects virtue with nobility of blood. The pieces Colyns himself
copied, by contrast, exhibit a “mercantile” social ethic, based on a model of social
mobility through competition. A bibliographical analysis also bears out this contrast
between the two romances and the texts written in Colyns’s own hand: Colyns’s own
texts are the product of an amateur book producer, the product of one collecting items for
personal consumption. The two romances, on the other hand, bear the typical signs of
professionally produced books from the fifteenth century. I show, then, that contrasting
material forms of these two groups of texts complement their ideological tension.

Chapter Two is a study of Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91, an anthology of
romances compiled by Robert Thornton, a middling member of the North Yorkshire
gentry, over the period 1420-65. Thornton organizes his romances into two distinct units. When read together, the texts in the first section (the Prose Life of Alexander and the Alliterative Morte Arthure) pose challenging questions about the stability of monarchical power. As I demonstrate through a codicological analysis, the placement of these texts at the head of the manuscript was a conscious choice by Thornton with important thematic consequences for his manuscript, for he lived in a world dominated not by the king but by warring noble families in the run-up to the Wars of the Roses. Thus, these texts evincing a “cool distance” from the crown make sense, given the pressures of Thornton’s political situation. A second group of five romances is found in the next section of this manuscript. These texts are less complicated, as they triumphantly celebrate two issues at the heart of gentry life in late medieval England: father-son relationships (mediating concerns over inheritance), coupled with the desire for social mobility (particularly of the landed gentry into the ranks of the titled nobility).

Chapter Three takes up London, British Library MS Additional 31042, also compiled by Robert Thornton. To date, scholars have claimed that the romances in this manuscript intimate a form of affective piety. However, I urge a new direction in our understanding of Thornton’s religiosity by demonstrating that he reserved Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91 for more traditionally pious texts, while in the Additional Manuscript he has gathered texts that effect a different religious ethic: in particular, these texts figure forth an aggressive, militaristic Christianity that gains its strength from the suffering of Jews and Moslems.
Chapter Four investigates Princeton, University Library MS Taylor 9, compiled by the Irelands of Hale, a gentry family in fifteenth-century Lancashire. This manuscript contains only three romances, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, *Sir Amadace*, and *The Avowing of Arthur*. Taken together, these three texts attempt to define and test an aristocratic gift-giving economy, wherein one does not need to reckon costs, and one can give liberally without fear of the supplies drying up. Such attitudes were constitutive of aristocratic ideology in the later Middle Ages; however, these three texts have received scant critical attention, and no one has yet considered how they work in conjunction as a mouthpiece for such an ideology. Furthermore, the records of the manorial court of Hale, which was run by the Irelands, are bound up with these three romances. These court records show the Irelands collecting and tabulating their annual feudal dues from each of their tenants. In conjunction with the romances, which insist on an abundance that is provided by God and does not need to be counted, a significant contrast emerges. In this manuscript, then, ideology comes into contact with the real relations of production.
One of my primary debts of gratitude goes to my advisor, Richard Firth Green, whose consistent generosity has made the dissertation experience surprisingly enjoyable. By my count, I have now applied for twenty-one grants or fellowships, and through all of my requests for letters on my behalf, his support for my work has never waned. But beyond his generosity in writing letters, I have truly appreciated and benefited from his open office door. By this point in my academic career, I have spent countless hours in his office talking over ideas in progress or discussing my work in its various stages. Such conversations have been one of the highlights of my career as a graduate student.

I am also indebted to the other members of my committee. Frank Coulson first introduced me to palaeography—I can only hope that the deliberate approach to manuscripts that he urged in the classroom has rubbed off on me. He has patiently checked my Latin and even took the time to give me a private lesson in codicology at Ohio State’s Rare Books and Manuscripts Room. Lisa Kiser’s insightful comments have contributed to my project immensely. In particular, her careful and detailed attention to my prose has fostered a precision in my writing style that will benefit me greatly in the
future. Finally, Ethan Knapp has consistently challenged me to “unpack” my theoretical assumptions, and several conversations with him have sent me scurrying off to read Benjamin, Jameson, Lukács, Macherey, and Williams. I owe much of the theoretical architecture of this project to these stimulating conversations.

I must also acknowledge those professors under whom I studied before beginning this project. Their insights into literature and their patient guidance form a large part of why I chose to pursue a graduate degree in English in the first place. In particular, I have fond memories of the faculty at John Carroll University. Fr Francis Ryan, SJ, first inspired my interest in Middle English literature by encouraging me to read Disney’s *The Sword in the Stone* and Richard Harris and Vanessa Redgrave’s *Camelot* next to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Thomas Malory. In addition, I received excellent instruction from Sheila McGinn, who taught me how to write an essay longer than five pages, and Carin Ruff, who helped shepherd me through the process of selecting and applying to graduate school. I also spent a wonderful year at the University of St Andrews being introduced to the canon of Middle English literature, and I am particularly grateful to Ian Johnson for his support of my work and his infectious enthusiasm for Langland, and Rhiannon Purdie for her diligent guidance on my M.Litt. thesis.

At The Ohio State University, two courses in particular—both outside the realm of Middle English—were fundamental in shaping my dissertation. David Brewer’s course on Historicisms provided the opportunity to begin formulating thoughts on how one could bring archival work into conversation with literary criticism, and this question has continued to drive my work. John N. King’s History of the Book course first
introduced me to the theoretical works of Jerome McGann and D. F. McKenzie, and his patient encouragement of my study of Robert Crowley’s editions of *Piers Plowman* resulted in my first professional publication. In addition, courses and conversations with Alastair Minnis and Drew Jones have provided me with scholarly and pedagogical models that I will draw on for years to come.

For me, the greatest privilege of graduate school is being involved in a community of scholars passionate about the Middle Ages. Conversations about our work, whether over a few beers or in the halls of Denney, are one my greatest joys, so I thank my fellow graduate students whose insights have stimulated my own thinking in profound ways. In particular, I am indebted to Jim Bennett, Brian Chalk, Joshua Easterling, Henry Griffy, Kathleen Kennedy, Damian Love, Dana Oswald, Joey Pigg, Kim Thompson, and Michael VanDussen. I have also had conversations at several conferences which have helped my project tremendously, and for this I wish to thank Mark Arvanigian, Mary Dzon, Ralph Griffiths, Pamela King, Alex Mueller, and Tony Pollard. Furthermore, Ohio State’s History of the Book group has provided an energizing forum for discussions of theoretical issues that have been central to this dissertation. I am particularly grateful to David Brewer, Cynthia Brokaw, Alan Farmer, Harvey Graff, and Dan Hobbins for their participation in this group and for their comments on Chapter Four of the dissertation. Finally, in the early stages of this project I shared a memorable lunch with Andrew Taylor, whose *Textual Situations* first showed me what exciting and invigorating things can be done with manuscripts.
A number of grants and fellowships gave me the time to complete the dissertation, as well as the funding to travel to the U.K. for research that was essential to the completion of this project. External to Ohio State, I am indebted to the Medieval Academy of America and the Richard III Society-American Branch for their Schallek Award, and the Bibliographical Society for their Minor Grant. Within the University, I must thank the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies for their Graduate Student Travel Grant; the Graduate School for an Alumni Grant for Graduate Research and Scholarship; the College of Humanities for a Graduate Research Small Grant; and the Department of English for a Summer Fellowship, Robert Estrich Fellowship, Edward P.J. Corbett Fellowship, Two-Chapter Dissertation Fellowship, and the Corbett Research Award.

This project is largely dependent on work with original sources, and thus I am grateful to a number of rare book rooms and archival collections for opening their doors to me, and I wish to thank the following: the British Library; the Bodleian Library; the Borthwick Institute; Cambridge University Library; Gonville and Caius College Library; the Guildhall Library; Lancashire Record Office; the Lincoln Cathedral Library, particularly Dr Nicholas Bennett; the London Metropolitan Archives; the Mercers’ Hall, particularly Mr Gary Haines; the National Archives; Princeton University Library; the Rare Books and Manuscripts Room at The Ohio State University; and the York Minster Library, particularly Mr Peter Young.

Finally, my greatest debts are to my wife and to my parents. My parents patiently supported me through this process by offering a home-cooked meal or treating me to a
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VITA

2000…………………………………………………………BA in English and Religious Studies (double major), John Carroll University

2002…………………………………………………………M.Litt. in Mediaeval English, University of St Andrews

2002-present………………………………………………..Graduate Teaching Associate The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English
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In what follows, I have, when possible, chosen to cite from critical editions that use the manuscript in question as a copy text, which allows for the texts to be accessed and checked more easily. On all occasions, I have checked the manuscript reading against the original, and I have included the relevant folio numbers from the manuscript for every citation I provide. With the more ephemeral texts from each manuscript, and with a few of the romances, no critical edition exists that is based on that manuscript. On these occasions, I have provided transcriptions directly from the manuscript. My transcriptions are generally diplomatic: I retain the capitalization and orthography of the original, adding only punctuation and altering word division in order to facilitate easier reading. The rare instances in which the manuscript has been damaged and my reading is thus conjectural are indicated by square brackets around the text.

Additional information on each manuscript can be found in Appendices A-F. I have included two appendices for each of Chapters 1-3. (Chapter 4’s codicological state does not require any appendices.) The first group of appendices for each chapter (i.e. Appendix A, C, and E) contains a catalogue listing the texts in the MS, as well as additional information on each text (e.g., folio numbers, incipits and explicits, IMEV numbers, etc.). Within each chapter, the term “Item #” refers to the entries in these Appendices.
appendices. The second group of appendices for each chapter (i.e. Appendix B, D, and F) contains codicological information (e.g., collation, analysis of individual quires, etc.).

In this project, I have employed the following abbreviations, for which full bibliographical information can be found in the Bibliography:

CCR = *Calendar of the Close Rolls*

CFR = *Calendar of the Fine Rolls*

CPR = *Calendar of the Patent Rolls*

MS, MSS = Manuscript, Manuscripts

TNA: PRO = The National Archives, Public Record Office (for documents formerly held in the Public Record Office).

VCH = *Victoria History of the Counties of England*
INTRODUCTION

For a book is never simply a remarkable object. Like every other technology it is invariably the product of human agency in complex and highly volatile contexts which a responsible scholarship must seek to recover if we are to understand better the creation and communication of meaning as the defining characteristic of human societies.

~D.F. McKenzie, Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts, p. 4

The meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places, and persons.

~Jerome McGann, The Textual Condition, p. 16

Manuscript Studies and Cultural History

This study proceeds from the conviction that manuscripts provide a major insight—perhaps the greatest insight—into the culture of the later Middle Ages, one that has been largely underestimated. Witness James Simpson’s recent remarks: “In the field of Middle English, palaeographers and codicologists for the most part stick to palaeography and codicology. They provide an invaluable service industry, but themselves eschew the translation of their findings into literary criticism and cultural history” (“Rev. of London” 292). Put simply, although attempts to construct cultural histories of late medieval England often include manuscripts for evidentiary support, such inclusion is often ancillary to what is often seen as more properly literary-critical concerns. Manuscripts rarely form the evidentiary center, the starting point, of critical engagements with texts. But, as I will argue, the particular, local details of manuscript compilation and circulation offer a rich, and often surprising, body of evidence for the manifold types of cultural work literary texts could perform within their original reading communities.
One salutary example of this critical lacuna can be found in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, published in 2004. This collection is framed in polemical terms as an attempt to place medieval popular romance at the center of literary criticism, which has often dismissed the genre.\(^1\) As Nicola McDonald writes in the Introduction (which she provocatively entitles “A Polemical Introduction”):

> The purpose of this collection of essays, all specially commissioned for this volume, is to demonstrate that popular romance not only merits and rewards serious critical attention, but that we ignore it to the detriment of our understanding of the complex and conflicted world of medieval England. […] Contributors have been asked to provide relevant introductory material (including date of composition, extant manuscripts, and a plot summary) in order to make these neglected texts accessible to a non-specialist audience, but the focus of the essay is a sustained argument that demonstrates that romances invite innovative, exacting and theoretically charged analysis. (1-2)

In this formulation, the material evidence of how these romances were encountered by medieval readers is relegated to a contextual background for “innovative, exacting and theoretically charged analyses,” which are the real substance of what is to follow. The notion that details of medieval codices might be more than “relevant introductory material” and might contribute to nuanced theoretical readings is not here countenanced.

The essays of this collection take up McDonald’s call to arms, each considering how an individual romance can be read in light of the cultural history of late medieval England. Moreover, each essay adopts McDonald’s methodological criteria: most consign MS details to introductory remarks; a few, however, use such details to support readings. But in neither case does codicology centrally inform the discussion. For example, Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s essay demonstrates that *The Siege of Milan* simultaneously incarnates a Christian *communitas* while vigorously policing its borders.

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\(^1\) As Nicola McDonald writes in the introduction to this volume, critics often ignore Middle English romance because it “is fast-paced and formulaic; it markets itself unabashedly as genre fiction; it is comparatively cheap and, in performance, ephemeral; it has a sensationalist taste for sex and violence; and it seems content to reproduce the easy certainties of sexist, racist and other bigoted ideologies” (1). In a similar vein, Stephen Knight quips that romances are the “ugly ducklings of medieval English studies” (99).
At the end of this essay, she turns to consider Robert Thornton and London, British Library MS Additional 31042 (which I discuss in Chapter 3), suggesting that Thornton’s compilations affirm her findings. In another essay in this collection, Arlyn Diamond argues that *Sir Degrevant* illustrates the unstable boundaries within the medieval household between private, domestic, female space and masculine, chivalric space. After fifteen pages of literary analysis, Diamond announces, “So far in my essay I have focused on the material and symbolic context in which the action of the romance is immersed. I want to conclude by looking briefly at the two manuscripts in which the romance is found” (97). There follows a concluding paragraph that provides what Diamond promises. The details of medieval books, then, are peripheral to both Akbari’s and Diamond’s analyses. The MS history of *The Siege of Milan* and *Sir Degrevant* provides supporting evidence for their literary criticism but is in no way at the center.

A number of medievalists have argued quite persuasively that MS evidence merits a more prominent position within literary criticism. Functionally speaking, though, the discourses of bibliography and criticism are rarely integrated in sustained analyses of literary texts. As Ralph Hanna has noted, the predominant medium in studies of Middle English MSS has been not the monograph but the article, whether in journals, conference proceedings, or *Festschriften*. This state of affairs creates a disjointed reading experience. For example, if one wanted to study the MSS of Robert Thornton, the most important compiler of Middle English romance (discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), one would have to seek out various articles in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, *Medium Aevum*, and a series of conference proceedings. Hanna rightly labels this a “fragmented situation” (“Analytical” 245). Moreover, since the monograph is such an essential form for shaping criticism in Middle English studies, the lack of book-length work on MSS has contributed to a methodological divide. Since bringing together codicology and literary criticism is necessarily a capacious project, monographs are

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2 John Dagenais is the staunchest of these voices. See, in particular, *The Ethics*, “Decolonizing,” and “That Bothersome.” See also Lerer, “Medieval English”; Machan, “Editing” and *Textual*; and Hanna, “Middle English” and *Pursuing.*
needed: doing justice simultaneously to the complexities of a medieval codex, as well as of a particular body of current theory, is an undertaking for which the monograph is best suited. To this end, there have been a few important book-length studies of late medieval manuscripts and their significance to cultural history. These studies intervene in this “fragmented situation,” and in the work that follows I am deeply indebted to each of them.3

With regards to Middle English romance, the separation between MS studies and literary criticism is all the more striking.4 Surviving in an impressive corpus of ninety-nine MSS, Middle English romance was one of the most popular forms of secular entertainment in the later Middle Ages; thus, further considerations of its compilation and circulation are needed.5 As a genre, romance has in recent years shown itself to be receptive to the concerns of modern literary theory.6 But none of these recent discussions engages in any comprehensive way with the manuscripts of Middle English romance, the lone surviving physical evidence of the genre’s real medieval compilers and readers. Such studies of romance invariably proceed from the critical edition. No doubt influential critics like Susan Crane and Christine Chism are aware of, and have likely worked with, some of the manuscripts lying behind the texts which they have interpreted in such fresh and exciting ways. (I merely use Crane and Chism, whose *Insular Romance*...
and Alliterative Revivals respectively represent some of the finest work on romance in recent years, as representative of a much wider practice.) Implicit in such criticism is the assumption that our access to medieval ideology is mediated via language. That is to say, it is the words of the text—and hence not the other factors of medieval textuality, like illustrations, choice of script, accompanying texts, ownership of the manuscripts, etc.—that yield up the meanings of romances. Crane and Chism are primarily interested in the putative authors of the anonymous romances which they discuss, not the compilers and original readers. For such an approach, the critical edition is entirely adequate.

In fact, the critical edition is a necessity for most literary analyses, for we need a stable, unified text for our readings. If we are going to argue, for example, that Chaucer’s texts mediate gender ideology in a particular way, or Langland’s texts intervene in the aftermath of 1381, we need a single Chaucer and Langland. But as a number of recent critics have insisted, the critical edition of a medieval text is, in some of its essential features, anachronistic and does not adequately represent the diffuse forms of textual practice that governed the compilation and reading of vernacular texts in the later Middle Ages. On the lexical level, the medieval reading experience, one that often proceeded from wormhole to lacuna to mistranscribed line to garbled syntax, is cleaned up by the critical edition. On the conceptual level, many medieval compilers often were not constrained by modern concepts like “genre,” as they freely cobbled together disparate collections that frustrate our desire to categorize texts. Nor were compilers always constrained by “authorial intent,” as they frequently broke up the works of authors and

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7 As Robert Sturges comments, “The usual method for editing printed works is to identify a ‘copy-text,’ that is, a version of the work closest to that intended by the author for publication, usually the author’s own manuscript or the first printed edition, and then to emend the copy-text, which may contain printer’s errors or readings later revised by the author, in accordance with the author’s final intentions for the work. This method seems unsuited to the conditions of literary production and dissemination that prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, precisely because print confers an authoritative status on literary works that they did not then have. Print turns a work into a text” (111; emphasis in original). For a further discussion of textual editing and medieval textual practice, see my Conclusion. See also Machan, Textual Criticism and “Editing”; Dagenais, The Ethics, “That Bothersome Residue,” and “Decolonizing”; and Masters.
placed them into collections serving the localized, particular ends of their compilation. Yet in its attempts to create a single text that can be marketed and digested by today’s readers, the critical edition largely obscures all this, reducing the complexity and diversity of manuscript culture to single titles like *The Riverside Chaucer* or *The Middle English Breton Lays*. As John Dagenais writes:

> Tens of thousands of medieval manuscripts exist, not as “vehicles for readings” to be discarded in the process of edition-making, chopped up into little lists of variants and leaves of plates, but as living witnesses to the dynamic, chaotic, error-fraught world of medieval literary life that we have preferred to view till now through the smoked glass of critical editions. We should begin our attempts to understand the phenomenon of “medieval literature” by examining this vast body of concrete material, not by treating it as the waste product of the process of producing our chimerical authorial texts. Medievalism, as it has been practiced over the past two centuries, is the only discipline I can think of that takes as its first move the suppression of its evidence. (*The Ethics* xviii)

This study will attempt to redress this lack by examining the role Middle English romance played in four particular compilations from late medieval England.

**Strange Things Were Afoot in the Fifteenth Century**

The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries mark an important turning point in the history of literary production in England, and it is important to consider some of the changes that were inaugurated in this age. Such changes form the conditions which

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8 For further reflections on the decentered nature of MS compilation in late medieval England, see Hanna, *Pursuing* 1-17 and Lerer, “Medieval English” 1259-64. For a discussion of the compilation of Chaucer manuscripts in the fifteenth century, see Lerer, *Chaucer* 57-84.
make possible the compilations discussed in the following chapters. As H.S. Bennett notes:

We have some 84 [Middle English] romances extant which were written between 1100 and 1500, and of these no less than 65 exist only in fifteenth-century manuscripts. When every allowance has been made for the loss and destruction of medieval manuscripts, the overwhelmingly increased number of fifteenth-century copies cannot be gainsaid, and forms an important item of the evidence which makes it right to speak of the fifteenth century as an age interested in literature. (“The Production” 172)

But beyond generally being “interested in literature,” the fifteenth century in England witnessed the first great growth in the production and dissemination of Middle English literature among the laity. Of course, the nobility and upper gentry had been readers of such literature for some time; however, the evidence points to a sharp increase in demand for, and a resulting increase in, the production of literary texts in English. This is the period when vernacular literature for the laity reached a critical mass, when clerical and monastic production began to cede significant ground to commercial and private production. One source of evidence for this transition comes from the increase in commercial production of manuscripts. C. Paul Christianson’s research into the London archives has shown that 1380-89 was the first decade that saw a notable growth in the number of artisans involved in book production. He cites the following total number of artisans per decade (Directory 14):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Total Artisans</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1350-59</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1360-69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1370-79</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1380-89</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9 The best overviews of Middle English manuscript circulation are to be found in several collections of essays. See in particular Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475; the essays on manuscripts in The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. III; and The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany. For collected essays on particular Middle English MSS of significance, see Studies in the Harley Manuscript and The Ellesmere Chaucer. For a discussion of the increased demand for and production of literature in England, see Edwards and Pearsall, “The Manuscripts”; and Taylor, “Authors, Scribes.” For a discussion of the phenomenon on the Continent, see Thomas, “Manuscripts”; and Kwakkel.

10 See also Christianson, “Evidence”
Doyle and Parkes’s oft-cited essay analyzing Cambridge, Trinity College Library MS R.3.2 shows five different scribes—including Thomas Hoccleve and Adam Pinkhurst, Chaucer’s scribe11—working together on a copy of Gower’s *Confessio*. Such collaboration is typical of the copying of vernacular literary texts that professional scriveners, like Hoccleve and Pinkhurst, were undertaking in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, almost certainly done on commission. (Linne Mooney suggests that “Pinkhurst worked freelance as a scrivener in the city and was employed directly by Chaucer to prepare copies of his works from the authorial drafts” [102].) And though MSS like R.3.2 were probably written out by independent craftsmen working separately, Doyle and Parkes conclude that organized commercial scriptoria had likely arisen in London by mid-century, further evidence for the market responding to increased demand for literary texts.12

As Graham Pollard’s research shows, the first mention of the book trade in London legislation is to be found in 1357, when the Mayor and Aldermen excused professional scribes from serving on sheriffs’ inquests. By 1373 the writers of court letter, i.e. scribes who copied legal documents for a living, had formed their own guild and had separated themselves from the writers of text letter and illuminators (1-9). In 1403, the scribes involved in copying books, along with illuminators and booksellers, were amalgamated into a single guild that was recognized by the city authorities. Their petition requests recognition for a guild comprised of “les bons gentz d[e la] dicte Cite

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11 Of course, Doyle and Parkes did not give a name to their “Scribe B”—it was Linne Mooney’s recent discovery of Adam Pinkhurst that allows us to assign this name to the scribe. For the details of this discovery, see Mooney, “Chaucer’s Scribe.”

12 The so-called “Hammond Scribe,” active in the later fifteenth century, certainly benefited from this growth in literary production. For information on this scribe’s work, see Hammond; Doyle, “An Unrecognized Piece”; Green; and Mooney, “John Shirley’s Heirs.” Earlier dates for organized commercial production of literary texts have been suggested, as well. Laura Hibbard Loomis, “The Auchinleck Manuscript,” suggested that the Auchinleck MS was likely produced in a commercial scriptorium, which would date the existence of such scriptoria to the early fourteenth century. This thesis has since been largely discredited, though. Andrew Taylor, however, in “Manual to Miscellany,” has located the flowering of the commercial production of books in England as early as the mid-thirteenth century.
des Mistiers des Escrieysns de lettre text[ualis] lymenours & autres gentz de loundres usantz auxi de lyer & vendre livres” (qtd. in Christianson, Directory 23). The need for professional book producers to have their own guild, then, is further evidence for the growing market for commercially produced books in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Some of this increase can, no doubt, be attributed to the prestige which Chaucer, Gower, and Langland lent to the English language. Their texts survive in numbers that dwarf previous writers in the English language, and the fact that all three were actively writing in English at approximately the same time suggests that these authors greatly widened the cultural space in the literary market for vernacular texts. But this increase in literary activity was not seen only in London and the Home Counties, for there is a general increase in the copying of literature at this time. As A.S.G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall state:

In this history of publishing and book production in England in the hundred years before the invention of printing, the early years of the fifteenth century play a decisively significant part, introducing what seems to be a new phase in the development of routine commercial production of English vernacular literature. Even the most cursory comparison of the seventy-five years periods on either side of 1400 reveals a spectacular transformation: in broad figures, one is speaking of the difference between a rate of production that leaves extant about thirty manuscripts and one that leaves extant about six hundred. (257)

R. J. Lyall suggests four modes of initiating such book production in the later Middle Ages: commissioned work undertaken by professional scribes; commercial production completed by professional scribes on a speculative basis; copies made within religious establishments; and private production for private use (14). These last two modes facilitated the making of books in the more remote regions of England, and the last mode in particular was adopted by John Colyns, Robert Thornton, and the Ireland family, the

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13 The Pricke of Conscience survives in 114 MSS, by far the greatest number. However, The Canterbury Tales is second, surviving in 64 MSS, followed by Piers Plowman in 50 MSS, and the Confessio in 49 MSS. On the increased significance of vernacular literature in the fifteenth century, see also Brunner, “Middle English” and Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Books.”
three producers of the manuscripts studied here. Of these producers, only Colyns was located in London, while Thornton and the Irelands were several days’ journey away, in north Yorkshire and southwest Lancashire, respectively.

The increase in book production everywhere in England, then, requires an explanation beyond the growing commercialism of London. London’s production was merely another symptom—though certainly the most widely studied and well documented—of an overall growth at this period. One of the key factors contributing to this growth was the technology of booklet production. A number of surviving MSS attest to their original compilation in small groupings of quires. Rather than having to gather a number of quires into a large compilation, a few quires containing a single text or related grouping of texts often circulated in an unbound state. Thus, we do not have to imagine that an individual in the more remote regions of England would have had to borrow an entire bound codex if he wanted to copy out a particular text; rather, booklets often circulated individually, greatly increasing the mobility of texts, thereby facilitating increased access for those wishing to create their own literary compilations. Booklet production is an issue that I will return to several times, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3 (as Robert Thornton almost certainly relied on this method as he compiled his two MSS).

Moreover, the increasing use of paper is one of the primary factors underlying the growth in literary production at this time. Though paper had been introduced into Europe by the twelfth century, it was not until the second half of the fourteenth century that paper mills began to proliferate, especially throughout Italy. The popularity of paper gradually spread northward, becoming common in the northwest of Europe by the last quarter of the fourteenth century. As usual, this new trend arrived in England a bit later, but the fifteenth century saw a steady growth in the use of paper by English book compilers.

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14 The concept of booklet production was developed most significantly by Robinson. See also Hanna, Pursuing 21-34 for further comments on the technology of the booklet. Boffey and Thompson, “Anthologies and Miscellanies” 295-303, also have an extended discussion of how booklet production would facilitate easier circulation of texts in regions remote from the commercial center of London.

15 See Febvre and Martin 30-32, and Kwakkel.
R. J. Lyall estimates that by 1450 about 20% of English books were made of paper, and that by the end of the century, fully one half were (12). Paper, of course, is much cheaper than parchment and can be made available in larger quantities. Thus, the increasing use of paper is another key factor helping to make possible the rise in literary production seen in this period. It is surely no coincidence that of the four MSS studied here, only one is written on parchment.

Though it is not often that literary criticism has recourse to statistics, the findings of three recent bibliometrical studies give empirical proof for the general increase in book production at this time. The first study, compiled by Carla Bozzolo, Dominique Coq, and Ezio Ornato, indicates a sudden growth followed by a steady climb in manuscript production from 1360 until the later fifteenth century on the Continent. The detailed analyses of surviving MSS compiled by Uwe Neddermeyer also provide conclusive data, demonstrating that across Europe—and Neddermeyer’s data encompasses England—there was a sharp increase in MS production around 1360 that continued until around 1470. Finally, Buringh and van Zanden’s analysis of surviving European books concludes that the period 1360-1460 witnessed an almost tenfold increase in book production over the years immediately after the Black Death, driven primarily by a decrease in book prices (12-13). In particular, their analysis shows that in Western Europe, lay demand for books came to surpass that of the clergy and parishes combined in the fourteenth century, but in the fifteenth century lay demand had grown to comprise over 75% of the market. For all of Western Europe, they estimate the following per capita consumption of MS books per annum (per million inhabitants):

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16 In its retarded adoption of paper, England lagged well behind the Continent. See Neddermeyer 2: 644. Neddermeyer’s data suggests that by 1450, over 50% of MSS produced in modern Germany, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and France were on paper. In Germany and Austria, it was indeed over 90%, making England’s mere 20% by 1450 (according to Lyall’s estimate) pale in comparison. 
17 Bozzolo, Coq and Ornato, “La Production.” See in particular Graphique 1 and Graphique 2, appended to their article.
18 See in particular the graphs at 2: 636, 651, 657. This last graph, while showing how England saw an increase in book production at this time, also reminds us of England’s general insignificance on the scene of European culture. According to Neddermeyer’s graph, England’s MS production at this time, in terms of absolute numbers, was 1/12 of Italy’s.
19 These are my estimates based on the graph they provide at Figure 4 (56).
13th Century: 333.0
14th Century: 507.8
15th Century: 929.2

For the British Isles, in particular, they estimate:

13th Century: 466.6
14th Century: 370.3
15th Century: 485.4

Whether or not the numbers of any of the three particular studies are exact, the impression they all yield is of an increase in book consumption in the fifteenth century (though yet again we see that England’s literary production is on a much smaller scale than the Continent’s). In general, we can conclude that there was a Europe-wide growth in MS production throughout the final century before Gutenberg’s invention came to dominate the book markets of Europe.

But all too often the discovery of printing is seen as a sea-change in Western literature, as if Gutenberg (and Caxton), by bringing modern notions of standardization and reproducibility to the book, rescued the primitive textuality practiced by medieval scribes. This was the opinion of Marshal McLuhan, developed in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, who categorically states that “The difference between the man of print and the man of scribal culture is nearly as great as that between the non-literate and the literate” (90). This line was extended influentially by Elizabeth Eisenstein in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* and *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Uwe Neddermeyer describes the often incredible claims that McLuhan, Eisenstein and their followers attribute to the printing press:

> Sie setzen “Buch” und “Druckerzeugnis” meist einfach gleich und nennen als Folgen der Typographie unter anderem den Aufstieg und Niedergang des Renaissance-Humanismus, die Reformation, die Homogenisierung der Landessprachen und damit die Nationalisierung Europas, das Ende des Lateins als lebender Sprache, die “moderne” naturwissenschaftliche

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20 See Table 3 (45).
21 See also Pickford, who avers that because of the limited dissemination of texts before printing, we cannot speak of public and popular fiction in the world before Gutenberg (429).
Weltwahrnehmung und nich zultetzt den Gegensatz zwischen Individualismus und staatlichem Zentralismus. (5)

But recently, scholars working on late medieval scribal culture and early modern print culture have both offered numerous revisions to such a narrative. The former have stressed that the invention of moveable type should not be seen as a moment of revolution, but rather as one moment in the evolution of literary production.22 The latter have de-emphasized the radical newness of the printed book, insisting that the stability which the modern world ascribes to the printed text is not inherent, but rather was constructed in the early modern period.23

This emphasis on a continuity between late medieval MS culture and the world of the incunable can be seen in the titles of several recent influential collections of essays. Derek Pearsall and Jeremy Griffiths’s *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475* covers, of course, the century before Caxton brought Gutenberg’s technology to the cultural outpost of the British Isles. The essays gathered in this volume stress the growth of the public market for literary texts in the time immediately before print, suggesting that Caxton was building from a market that was already in existence. Volume Three of *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, published in 1999, covers the years 1400-1557, that is, from the death of Chaucer through the licensing of the Stationers’ Company by Mary I. This time span straddles Caxton’s supposedly epoch-defining act of printing the first book in England in 1476, pointing again towards a developing literary market throughout the fifteenth century, one which paved the way for Caxton’s commercial success. Dislodging late medieval MS culture from its ancillary position as handmaiden to the printing press and thereby treating it as a period in its own right is, then, a

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22 As Bozolo, Coq and Ornato state, “On voit donc que l’apparition de l’imprimerie, vers le milieu de siècle, coïncide […] avec une période où la production livresque est partout en ascension rapide et où, par conséquent, le marché du livre était en pleine expansion” (138). For recent revisions to the McLuhan/Eisenstein master narrative, see Rouse and Rouse 427-94; Illich 93-124; Taylor, “Authors, Scribes”; Neddermeyer 1: 1-29; Vale, “Manuscripts”; and Alexandra Gillespie 1-60. The vibrancy of the pre-Gutenberg public market for books is not, though, a new revelation: see the earlier work of Chaytor; Bühler; H.S. Bennett, “The Production”; and Febvre and Martin, who argue convincingly that the printing press did not institute changes in mentalités, but rather consolidated the changes that had taken place during the later Middle Ages. See, in particular, 248-332.

23 See Johns 1-186 and McKitterick.
necessary step in a study such as this one. To appreciate the literary endeavors of Colyns, Thornton and the Irelands, it is necessary to recognize their indebtedness to the literary ‘boom’ of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a boom that set the stage for Caxton.24

MS Compilation and the History of the Book

Reading medieval texts in a critical edition can be a misleading experience: by doing so it is all too easy to lose sight of the fact that behind the critical edition, which is founded on singularity, uniformity, stability, and reproducibility, often lies a MS history attesting to diverse circumstances of compilation and reading. One pertinent example can be found in the differences between the Hengwrt and Ellesmere MSS of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. Both were written by Chaucer’s own scribe, Adam Pinkhurst, yet both present somewhat different ‘visions’ of the Father of English Literature’s chef d’œuvre: Hengwrt is a plainer text with fewer marginal annotations, while Ellesmere contains the famous illustration sequence and has comparatively more annotations, and they both differ orthographically. Most importantly, though, both MSS have a different canon and order of Tales.25 But the modern critical edition distorts such formal variation—it is made for different purposes, after all—and thus reduces complexity to the singular vision decreed by editorial fiat:

The Riverside Chaucer, for instance, presents all Chaucer’s texts in a uniform layout. It confines manuscript information to brief notes on textual variants and places these notes in a section of their own at the back of the volume, allowing no doubts about the authority of the texts

24 As I discuss in Chapter 1, Colyns lived in the print world and thus was not directly part of this boom in publishing of the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the romances that he purchased, which became the centerpiece of his MS, were likely copied in a professional scriptorium around 1475 in London.
25 The Riverside Chaucer relies on Ellesmere as its copy-text; thus, most every student and scholar today encounters this version of Chaucer’s text. Norman Blake has been the main proponent of the Hengwrt MS, and he has argued for its textual superiority for a number of years. See “The Relationship” and “Editing.”
themselves to penetrate to the pages on which they are printed. (Taylor, “Authors, Scribes” 353)

According to Linne Mooney’s chronology, Pinkhurst was likely in Chaucer’s employ for some fifteen years before the poet’s death (98-105). If Mooney is correct, then the very person who may have known Chaucer’s texts the best was willing to copy them in two different forms.26 But a critical edition of The Canterbury Tales, while it will no doubt acknowledge the variation between the two MSS, will ultimately follow one. Readers, then, will encounter only this singular text.27

Of all types of medieval book production, though, the modern edition most distorts those books that were made by lay readers for their own (and/or their family’s) use, the very type of MSS addressed in this project. In such private compilations, individuals copied texts from any number of sources, pulling them from their previous surroundings and giving them a new home. As but one example, John Colyns, discussed in Chapter 1, purchased booklets containing the B-text of Ipomadon and the Stanzaic Morte Arthur from a London bookshop. He then added his own paper stocks around these booklets and proceeded to copy out a seemingly random assortment of texts relating to mercantile life in early Tudor London. Colyns’s MS represents the only surviving

26 It should be noted that Doyle and Parkes suggest that the arrangement and presentation of Hengwrt and Ellesmere may not have been at the scribe’s discretion but may rather reflect the decisions of the scribe’s boss, be he a patron or a stationarius who had employed the scribe (186).
27 Ralph Hanna provides a similar analysis of the apparatus criticus supplied in George B. Pace and Alfred David’s edition of Chaucer’s poem “Truth.” After reproducing Pace and David’s sigla for line 8 of the poem, Hanna comments: “Obviously enough, this is a textual display, in this case, a line of Middle English (Chaucer, Truth 8), accompanied by what is usually referred to as “all the evidence” for those readings editorially adopted. But although I would not, at some level, question such an evidentiary showing, I am intrigued by the ways such a display renders a substantial amount of ‘evidence’ about Chaucer’s work and its transmission unrecoverable. Readers will know, for example, that each letter form, each sigil, represents a manuscript (in two cases, F and R2, two copies within the same manuscript.) But from the information I supply, a collation or corpus lectionum, we find nothing about these objects (in the edition I am quoting, the editors do indicate [52-53] the folios they quote and the approximate date of the hands that wrote them). But we know nothing else about these evidentiary objects, except that they have been here rejected as valid evidence for Chaucer’s text (in the case of the first lemma, unusually—because a major crux where witnesses divide—manuscripts with the reading identified as correct do get listed). But in every case, the editors’ sigla refer to material objects, books; from this edition, we can find nothing about such objects—not their contents (either gross or immediate), nor how they were put together (in this edition, not even whether made of vellum or paper), when (script) and where (dialect), what sort of decoration (or other guides to textual consumption) they include” (Pursuing 64-65).
copy of both of these romances. Yet a critical edition of one of the romances—though it may contain some introductory comments on the MS and may contain a facsimile of a folio or two—renders opaque the complex interplay between these romances and the more workaday texts with which Colyns has surrounded them. For this particular reader, Middle English romance was not something read in abstraction from the concerns of the daily world of London trade. But the modern edition, by the very act of printing one of the romances by itself lends to that text an iconic status, one that John Colyns did not ascribe to it. For him, Ipomadon and the Stanzaic Morte were the centerpieces of a capacious and diverse textual project, not Literature with a capital –L, meant to be bound alone and placed on a library bookshelf.

By gathering romances together into particular collocations, which I examine in the chapters to follow, these compilers create unique, singular codicological environments for each text. Each act of compilation is a re-making of the text, a central point to which I will return many times throughout this project. Such compilers/readers, then, should not be construed as mere scribes, mindlessly and slavishly copying out texts.28 But the critical edition, in its quest to piece together a stable, printable and marketable version out of the extant material witnesses, relegates such copyists to the position of mere textual transcribers. In the search for the best MS from which to manufacture an edition, the editor reduces the creation of men like Colyns to a set of words on the page. These words are then accepted or rejected based on their perceived fidelity to the ideal text which that editor is seeking to recover.

28 Though St Bonaventure was commenting on Peter Lombard’s Sentences and thus his remarks do not map precisely onto the world of vernacular literature, there are some parallels to be drawn between the role of the manuscript compilers discussed in this study and his delineation of literary roles. In particular, Bonaventure draws our attention to one who copies texts word-for-word and one who joins materials into unique combinations, a compiler. The second is accorded a higher role in Bonaventure’s hierarchy: “People compose books in four different ways. One person writes material composed by other people, adding or changing nothing; and this person is said to be merely the scribe. Another one writes material composed by others, joining them together but adding nothing of his own; and this person is said to be the compiler. Another one writes both materials composed by others and his own, but the materials composed by others are the most important materials, while his own are added for the purpose of clarifying them; and this person is said to be the commentator, not the author. Another one writes both his own materials and those composed by others, but his own are the most important materials and the materials of others are included in order to confirm his own; and this person must be called the author” (Qtd in The Idea 3).
Examining the process of MS compilation—and thus going beyond a reliance on the critical edition alone—provides us with unique access to a ‘literary consciousness’ at work. By pulling together materials from various places for their own personal compilations, such men as I investigate in the chapters to follow afford us access to a role in literary production that is, for all intents and purposes, foreclosed to those of us confined to the world of print: specifically, each of these individuals combined the role of reader and compiler into one. We in the print world, with rare exceptions, have no say in the composition of our texts. For us, readership is a largely passive experience, as we are forced to accept the commodities bequeathed to us by publishing houses.29

But traditional literary histories, based as they are on the materials of the critical edition, make the roles of such compilers opaque or sometimes completely invisible. If we turn to recent theorists of the History of the Book, particularly Jerome McGann and D.F. McKenzie, we find a different critical emphasis, one that encourages us to think behind the critical edition, as it were, and to consider the material form in which texts circulated and were encountered by readers throughout history. McGann’s The Textual Condition is one of the foundational works of the modern school of ‘social bibliography,’ one seeking to transform bibliography from its traditional position as a study of technology into a mode of cultural interpretation. As McGann states, “Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other” (77). The double helix is a particularly apt analogy, for in its complexity the double helix cannot be separated. If you focus on just one strand of a piece of D.N.A., you can easily enough follow with the eye as it winds around its twin. But focusing on one strand or the other in abstraction misses the complex dance they achieve together. Analogously, you can easily enough consider the words carried by a medieval MS—as most editors and, as

29 The new technology of “print on demand” offers an analogy to the role of MS compilers like those discussed here. With this technology, which is still a few years from wide-spread implementation, one will be able to assemble a book from a variety of sources and print off a copy from a machine that would resemble a desktop printer. In this way, each individual reader could compile his own books, and each book would be numerically unique, much like the compilations of the later Middle Ages.
a result, most readers and critics do—divorced from their codicological environment. But such an act ignores the compiler’s role in selecting this text, placing it in a new codicological environment, and thereby effectively creating a new text. Focusing on the “linguistic codes” serves the needs of the reader in the world of print, one who has little role in shaping the text that comes to her. But if our scholarship aims to understand the medieval text in an historically accurate manner, then such editions cannot be our only source of access to such texts. In McGann’s terms, the traditional critical edition foregrounds the single helix of “the linguistic codes” while relegating the helix of “the bibliographical codes” to the background.

The critical edition is founded on a chain of communication that has but two nodes: author and modern reader. The idea of creating such an edition is to recover, as closely as possible, what the author wrote so as to provide today’s reader with something she can hold, read and ponder. G. Thomas Tanselle states this succinctly when he points to the difference between editing historical versus literary texts:

It is easy to see why a historian editing letters and journals in the hand of a particular statesman would think primarily of a diplomatic edition, and similarly understandable that an editor of an ancient Greek text surviving in much later manuscripts would probably wish to construct a new text attempting to restore the author’s words. But the difference between the two situations does not really rest on the different nature of the materials: there are different goals involved, the aim in the former instance being the reproduction of the content of a given document and in the latter being the reconstruction of what the author of a text intended to say. [...] Historians may more often find themselves producing diplomatic texts of particular documents (the contents of which were often not intended for publication), and scholars of literature (both ancient and modern) may more often be engaged in constructing critical texts of works (ordinarily finished pieces of writing—whether “literary” or not—intended for public dissemination). (“Classical” 27-28; emphasis in original)

But McGann calls for an expanded hermeneutic of literary texts, one that does not privilege solely the moments of putative authorship and modern reception. He insists that “the meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places, and persons” (16). Such a gnomic proclamation calls for a shift away from the traditional
view that authors bequeath texts to us, the modern critics and readers, who then do our best to interpret those texts, a view that underwrites the critical edition. As McGann insists, such a view obscures the fact that real human agents are involved in the process of creating texts at every step and moment in history, and that their involvement is constitutive of the text’s meaning at all points: “It is merely to say that textuality cannot be understood except as a phenomenal event, and that reading itself can only be understood when it has assumed specific material constitutions” (4-5).

Though McGann’s own editorial work focuses on nineteenth-century English poetry, his views have relevance when considering the compilation of MSS in late medieval England. Men like Robert Thornton used romance in particular configurations that can give us unique access to the range of potential meanings that texts could take on in the fifteenth century. But if we insist on reading the Prose Alexander or the Alliterative Morte Arthure—to take but two of Thornton’s romances—as disembodied entities that passed from their putative authors to us as modern readers, then the activities of Thornton can only appear as interference, as noise that blocks the disembodied ideas of the text from being transmitted properly. Such an approach discounts the very active role Thornton played in constructing these texts, in giving them a particular meaning within his collection. Furthermore, the Prose Alexander or the Alliterative Morte Arthure are the only surviving copies of both works, and so ignoring the role they played in Thornton’s compilation disregards our strongest potential source of evidence for recovering, in whatever way possible, a fifteenth-century understanding of the work.

Advocating an approach similar to McGann’s, D.F. McKenzie’s Panizzi Lectures from 1985, published as Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts, argue for a history of books that treats the material form of a text as consubstantial with the words the text renders—both are constitutive of how a text creates meaning at a specific place in time, in the hands of a specific user of the text. McKenzie calls such an approach the “sociology of the text.” Specifically, he asserts that bibliography “testifies to the fact that new readers of course make new texts, and that their new meanings are a function of their new forms. The claim then is no longer for their truth as one might seek to define that by
an authorial intention, but for their testimony as defined by their historical use” (29). In MS culture, though, the function of McKenzie’s “readers” who “make new texts” can also be expanded to include compilers. In many ways, the compiling activities of a John Colyns or Robert Thornton have a greater shaping effect on texts than McKenzie ascribes to agents within print culture. The activities of such compilers shape a text by the copying errors they make, the paratext (e.g., rubrication, running titles, textual divisions) they add, the other texts with which they compile a particular text, or the space left for decorated initials. This is just to name a few of the many potential ways in which MS compilers could give the text a new form, or, to use McKenzie’s phrase, could “make new texts.” But whether one studies books of the printing press or books copied by hand, McKenzie’s point remains: literary texts are constantly evolving throughout their history; thus, to make the book into a vehicle for direct communication between putative author and contemporary critic is to overlook the many forms of cultural work that texts can do in different places and times in history, in the hands of different readers (and, I would add, compilers).30

Instead of treating texts as abstract entities conveying the materials to which we apply our critical concerns, McGann and McKenzie insist on a consideration of the ways books have been used by individual people at individual moments, what McGann calls a book’s “specific material constitutions” (5). In particular, MS compilation in the later

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30 For an excellent summary of McGann and McKenzie, see Greetham 367-432. For a critique of intentionalist editing, see Greetham 26-63, 157-205. For a sharp critique of McGann and McKenzie and a trenchant defense of intentionalist editorial practice, see Tanselle, “Textual Criticism.” McGann’s and McKenzie’s insistence on locating the history of books at different points along their transmission, and not just in the author/modern reader binary, is echoed in the work of Roger Chartier, to which I am also indebted. See in particular “Texts, Printing, Readings.” In a similar vein, William St Clair has recently described what he calls the “‘parade of authors’ convention”: “The writings of the past are presented as a march-past of great names described from a commentator’s box set high above the column. In literature, we see Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth. In philosophy Hume is followed by Adam Smith, Rousseau, or whichever names the writer wishes to include. According to the parade convention, those texts of an age which have later been judged to be the best, or the most innovative, in a wide sense, are believed to catch the essence, or some of the essence, of the historical situation from which they emanated. It is a convention centred on newly written works that, for the most part, denies an active role to readers” (4-5). St Clair argues that our criticism must move beyond the words of the text to consider how the economics of publication dictated access to literary texts. As a result, he avers, we misrepresent literary history if we think solely in terms of authors’ ideas and do not consider how and when people actually read those ideas.
Middle Ages took place during a privileged moment for those members of the laity with the leisure and training to create books for their own use. The conflation between the roles of book producer and book user, which marks the MSS studied in the chapters to follow and which is one of the unique features of much late medieval book production, points towards a great communion between such readers and their books, something lost to us in the world of books as printed commodities. This communion is essential to understanding the “specific material constitutions” of the MSS taken up in the chapters to follow. To be properly attuned to the historical significance of these MSS, then, we must look beyond the words which they carry towards the multiple ways in which each of the compilations gives rise to a unique cultural artefact.

One of the key differences between the MSS considered here and the modern printed edition of a text is that the MS compiled by an individual for her own use is not, technically speaking, a commodity. It is an artefact crafted for limited distribution and private reading, with little thought given to how it would be received by those outside the immediate circle of readers. (This can be seen most clearly in John Colyns’s MS, discussed in Chapter One, where texts are often crammed into blank spaces or even, on two occasions, written parallel to the long end of the folio. The layout often seems to have been approached from an ad hoc perspective, with texts placed wherever there was room with little thought for an overall plan of organization.) As the public book trade of late medieval and early modern London grew to include speculative production, someone other than the final user of the book began to make the decisions: the printer or publisher decided what texts would go where, how they would appear, how much paratext there would be, where the illustrations would go, etc.\(^\text{31}\) As the book became a commodity, its relationship to its user changed fundamentally: no longer did the user shape the book in any direct way. The specific mode of private literary compilation, then, is one that

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\(^\text{31}\) We should, though, remember that such professionally produced MSS and incunables were usually sold unbound, and so the reader/buyer did retain some influence over the final shape of his volume for many years (until binding became standard in the sale of books).
requires those invested in literary history to imagine the books discussed in the chapters to follow outside of our current, commodified form of textual practice.\(^\text{32}\)

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**The Particularities of Class and Place**

Paying attention to the specifics of MS compilation focuses us upon the particular and the local, over against the *long durée* of history. As a result of this focus, the discussions to follow will dissent from the master narratives of literary history. In contrast to the master narrative’s concern to summarize and synthesize, I will offer distinct examples of individual and discrete uses of literature. As we will see in the chapters to follow, each MS has its own story to tell and, if each is treated as a sui generis artefact, we see that romance could perform a wide range of cultural work. Many of the master narratives of literary history, though, place later Middle English romance in relation to a growing middle class, suggesting that the genre came to serve bourgeois concerns. Janet Coleman comments that “The fifteenth century was the great age of the fourteenth-century romance, copied and, in effect, rewritten for urban burgess and rural gentry households, at first still in verse but increasingly in prose for the private reader” (279). Others, by labeling the genre as “popular,” have gone even further in viewing it as fallen from its aristocratic and courtly origins. Archibald McIntosh Trounce, in his discussion of Middle English verse romance, defines “popular” as “something arising from the people, non-aristocratic and native” (101). Derek Pearsall avers that

The traditional popular romances catered for a general audience, not an exclusively “popular” one; they provided entertainment for the households of all but the aristocratic élite; Chaucer knew them well. The gradual creaming-off of this audience by the new Chaucerian poetry and by the new prose romance, and the growth of private reading, leave the

\(^{32}\) For a further discussion of the relationship between MS culture and early printed books, see Lerer, “Medieval English” 1259-64.
traditional romance and the *disour* poised for a descent into the world of more exclusively “popular” entertainment. (“The English Romance” 64)33

Of course many modern readers sense that a text like *Sir Amadace* or *Sir Isumbras*, to name two of the romances I will address, are not as refined as the courtly products of Chrétien de Troyes or Chaucer and could thus be justly termed “popular.”

But rather than trying to define the genre with a collocation of adjectives, I will offer specific incarnations of romance (none of whose compilers are “non-aristocratic and native,” or connected to “the *disour* […] poised for a descent into the world of more exclusively ‘popular’ entertainment”). As but one particular example, what I will term the “familial romances” compiled by Robert Thornton in the Lincoln MS (discussed in Chapter Two) mediate the economic concerns of the gentry, certainly an elite matter in late medieval England. Only by reading these texts in their original context, though, do we see this theme being worked out. The concerns of these texts (e.g., the defense of a knight’s land against an overweening magnatial neighbor, attempts to find an adequate inheritance for each son) were of particular urgency to the middling and lesser members of the aristocracy, and so to group Thornton among a rising middle class or to dismiss his cultural production as a pale imitation of courtly literature is misleading.

In the chapters to follow, the specificities of geographical place and of social class will play a large role. Romances like those compiled by John Colyns, written out by this merchant alongside scribbled lists of weights and measures and decrees of his parish church, are quite a different thing from the romances appearing in an organized collection celebrating the aristocratic virtue of *largesse*, as we see in the Ireland MS. (I discuss these in Chapters One and Four, respectively.) To force the genre into a singular narrative of social class, or to ascribe some “popular” flavor to late medieval romance, ignores the diversity of MS contexts in which we encounter such texts. For there is no one, singular valence to romance in late medieval England. Each MS attests a discrete cultural significance to its texts. To return to the words of Jerome McGann, “The

33 For further discussions of later Middle English romance as bourgeois or popular, see Richmond 1-24; Pearsall, “The Development” 11-13; Hudson “Toward a Theory” and “Middle English.”
meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places, and persons” (16). Ralph Hanna, in a similar vein, has recently discussed the importance of the local and the particular to any discussion of medieval English texts, and his words bear repeating here:

Book history, then, may generate information capable of prioritizing diverse notions of local literary community. Until very near the end of the Middle Ages, distance and isolation (not to mention transportation networks) matter. In this period, English literature (better, “literature in England,” since it might be written in any of three languages) is comprised of a series of local text communities, each with its distinct parameters. As a result, there may be no such thing as a “literary history of late medieval England,” in the sense customarily pursued—that coherent straight-line narrative usual in past accounts. (“Middle English Books” 174)34

Each MS compiler I discuss inhabits what Hanna here calls a “local literary community.” To speak of the genre of romance as a whole, while often necessary for the organization of our modern literary histories and university syllabi, collapses the diversity of such communities into a homogeneity that never actually existed in the later Middle Ages.

Ultimately, romance shows itself to be a remarkably malleable genre, as the compilers considered here demonstrate a surprising willingness to press the genre into distinct forms of cultural service.35 Since we live in a print culture, dominated by the cult of the author, it is all too easy to lose sight of this potential. For us, literature is something that certain authors do, that certain publishers then turn into a commodity, and that we finally consume. When we are finished, we either put the codex on our bookshelf, where it becomes cultural capital, or we liquidate it (through amazon.com, used bookstores, etc.). In our world of commodified, printed books, the author is complete unto herself, and she issues a literary product to us. We have an almost completely passive role in shaping the product before we read it.

But such passivity was not operative in the textual practice of John Colyns, Robert Thornton, and the Ireland family. They were simultaneously the producers and

34 See also Hanna’s earlier comments in Pursuing 1-17.
35 For further reflection on the diversity of MSS and the significance of such diversity for constructing a literary history of the later Middle Ages, see Kelly and Thompson, “Imagined Histories.”
the consumers of their artefacts, and only by looking at their compilations individually
can we appreciate the complex forms of cultural work that romance could do in late
medieval England. Each compiler made his texts anew. In this regard, it is fitting to
close with the words of D.F. McKenzie:

In the pursuit of historical meanings, we move from the most minute
feature of the material form of the book to questions of authorial, literary,
and social context. These all bear in turn on the ways in which texts are
then re-read, re-edited, re-designed, re-printed, and re-published. If a
history of readings is made possible only by a comparative history of
books, it is equally true that a history of books will have no point if it fails
to account for the meanings they later come to make. (23)

John Colyns, Robert Thornton, and the Ireland family each “come to make” meanings
from their romances in unique ways.
CHAPTER 1:
LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY MS HARLEY 2252

The first MS takes us into the compiling activities of John Colyns, a London merchant at the end of the Middle Ages. London, British Library MS Harley 2252, which he compiled ca. 1509-39, is the commonplace book of a man whose interests range over romance, chronicles, records of his parish church, and political poems denouncing the Chancellor under Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey. In viewing such a compilation with the hindsight of history, we can glimpse how wide-ranging this particular collector’s compilation was. The texts Colyns copied into his book are generally conventional texts, the material one would expect of a merchant of his time and place. He has a penchant for didactic texts, catalogues (e.g., lists of London’s parish churches, lists of MPs, lists of England’s kings), and texts of topical concern to merchants (e.g., tracts on weights and measures, transcriptions of laws regulating foreign merchants in London).

With specific regard to the reception and collection of Middle English romance, we are afforded access to quite surprising circumstances of presentation: in the midst of this collection which predominantly reflects mercantile interests, we find two romances, both of which were professionally produced and only later purchased by Colyns. *Ipomadon*, a traditional Fair Unknown narrative, strains against the mercantile texts Colyns copied, while the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* nicely complements the jingoistic tone underwriting a number of his texts. It is to the relationship between these two texts and their context, and more specifically to what this can tell us about what role these romances played in the cultural practice of John Colyns, that I now turn.
1.1: John Colyns, Mercer

We know that John Colyns was a member of the Mercers’ Company, for he inscribes the following at the conclusion of the Stanzaic Morte Arthur, one of the texts in his collection: “Thys Boke belongythe to John Colyns, mercer of london, dwellyng in the parysshe of our lady of wolchyrche hav have anexid the Stockys in þe pultre yn anno domini 1517” (f. 133v). Colyns received his admission to the Mercers via apprenticeship to William Tenacres, who was himself apprenticed to William Pratte, one of Caxton’s close associates, and he was made free of the company in 1498 (Brigden 76 n.341 and Sutton, “Caxton Was a Mercer” 147). In the published records of the Mercers’ Company, he receives five mentions. In 1494 he is listed as “extra liveratura” and is recorded as having registered a vote in the company’s election of the weigher of silk (Acts of Court 241). In 1510 he is listed as present at a company meeting which declared that certain men would be placed in charge of purchasing adjacent land to enable the enlargement of the Mercers’ Hall (385). In 1516 he was one of four considered for clerkship of the company; however, the members of the company were in dowte whether any of the said parsones shulde be able to execute the said Rometh or not, therfore [sic] they agreed that there shulde sparyng be given unto the next quarter daye to thentent that knowledge myght be had if any other parsones that be more able wolde make any labour for the said office. (438-39)

A week later the same four men stood for election again, and once again the company refused to elect any of them (439-40). Finally, Colyns is mentioned in 1520, when he requested permission to pay his fee for accepting an apprentice according to the fees

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1 Pace Walker, John Skelton 117 and Scattergood, John Skelton (ed.) 453, who both claim that Colyns was a Grocer. For the fullest treatment to date of the life of Colyns, see Meale, “Social and Literary Contexts” 90-108.
2 The Acts of Court of the Mercers’ Company is divided into two volumes. The first, covering the years 1453-1527, has been printed (ed. Lyell and Watney). The second volume, covering 1527-60, is unpublished and is kept at the Mercers’ Hall in London. In this discussion, I reference both volumes.
3 Anne Sutton notes that the clerkship of the company paid £3 18s. and was usually conferred upon a “decayed” mercer. Further, the job would have required knowledge of Latin (The Mercery 179). It is not clear from the records, however, if poor language skills are what prevented Colyns’s election.
charged by the Vestment Makers. Since they were artisans and not traders, those Mercers involved in vestment making were considered to be the lesser members of the company (Sutton, *The Mercery* 204). It is not clear, however, whether Colyns is claiming actually to make vestments, or whether he is merely seeking to share some of their privileges. Whatever Colyns’s motivation, the company’s response to his request is revealing: “And in consideracion that the said John Colleyns doth nor occupieth no feat of Secrettes of the mercery but in Sellyng of Prynted bokes and other small tryffylles, wherupon it was agreed by the said assemble that Maister Wardens shall admytte his apprentis unto hym” (509).4 Several things come to the fore in this final passage. First, it is clear that Colyns occupied a rather marginal position in the company, as he “doth nor occupieth no feat of Secrettes of the mercery.” Second, Colyns’s primary trade, by 1520, was in the “Sellyng of Prynted bokes.”5

From the unpublished volumes of the Mercers’ *Acts of Court*, we can deduce that Colyns was never in his guild’s livery: in an entry for 1527, the company drafted a list of “the wardeyns, aldermen, assistentis, lyuerey, and shoppeholders of the right worshipfull felischippe of the Mercery beyng on lyue and in prosperitie at the begynnyng of this boke.” This list includes four wardens, seven aldermen, nineteen assistants, fifty-five liverymen, and fifty-nine who are “out of the lyuerey,” and Colyns falls into this last group.6 We can further conclude that Colyns did not enter the livery at any time before his death, for the *Acts of Court* lists the new members of the livery for each year through 1560. Thus, it is clear that Colyns was, at best, a middling member of his guild. In fact the only other mention Colyns receives in the *Acts of Court* dates from 31 September 1533, when he was nominated to serve as an almoner: “Wheras two romes of almesmen for Maister William Browen late Aldermanbury be nowe voyde by the deth of Robert

4 The comments of Sylvia Thrupp are relevant here: “The fact that the book trade remained largely in the hands of aliens and that as late as 1520 the mercers were classing books among the ‘tryffylles’ of their import trade does not speak well for the London merchants’ intellectual curiosity or initiative” (161).
5 Colyns is not, though, mentioned in Christianson’s *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans, 1300-1500*.
6 The opening folios of the unpublished *Acts of Court* are unpaginated. These references occur on the 6th and 7th unpaginated folios.
Haxvye and Thomas Compton, Mercers, it is ordeyned, concluded, and agreed by this worshipfull assemble that Thomas Gooderyche and John Collyns, Mercers, shall have generally unto theym the sayde twoo romes of almesmen” (f. 62v). The overall impression is that Colyns was a middling member of the company. Witness the remarks of Anne Sutton, who, in her thorough study of the history of the Mercers’ Company, affords him one brief mention, and a disparaging one at that: “Colyns was a very unsuccessful businessman, whose fame as a collector of literary texts and would-be publisher is certainly greater today than in his lifetime” (The Mercery 444).

Recent scholarship suggests that Colyns’s involvement in the London book trade brought him into contact with early printers; most germane to this discussion is Carol Meale’s demonstration that Harley 2252 served as the copy-text for Wynkyn de Worde’s edition of Ipomydon. Two fragmentary copies from two different de Worde editions survive—one as a leaf found in the Bagford Ballads in the British Library (C.40.m.9; STC 5732.5) and the other as thirty-eight leaves bound at the J.P. Morgan Library in New York (Accession number 20896; STC 5733). That the British Library fragment was printed by de Worde is suggested by a marginal note contained therein, written in an eighteenth-century hand: “From the romance of ‘Ipomydon’ pr. by W. de Worde” (qtd. in Meale, “Wynkyn de Worde’s” 157). The Morgan copy, which is missing the first gathering—and thus does not contain the title page which would likely establish the date for its printing—does contain the following colophon: “Enprynted at London in the Fletestrete / at the sygne of the Sonne by Wynkyn de Worde” (qtd. in Sánchez Martí, “Wynkyn de Worde’s” 155). The STC dates the British Library fragment ca. 1522 and the Morgan copy ca. 1527. Carol Meale has identified markings left by compositors and has identified an ink smudge on Harley 2252 on ff. 54v, 55v and 71r, potentially from de
Worde’s printing shop. In addition, through a line-by-line comparison, Meale has demonstrated the British Library copy’s reliance on Harley 2252 as a copy-text.

Since the *ex libris* that Colyns inscribed at the end of the *Morte* contains the date 1517 (as discussed above), both Meale and Jordi Sánchez Martí conclude that Colyns was the first owner and subsequently lent his copy of the *Ipomadon* quires to de Worde, who printed the text in 1522; furthermore, since the quires containing the *Morte* show less wear than those containing *Ipomadon*, they conclude that Colyns only lent his copy of *Ipomadon* to de Worde, and not his copy of the *Morte*. However, I do not see the evidence as sufficient to establish definitively that Colyns lent his copy to de Worde or even knew de Worde in any capacity. Central to their argument is the assumption that since Scribe C copied out part of each of the romances, then both texts must have been produced simultaneously, and that Colyns must have purchased them as a single unit. (For a discussion of the various scribal hands involved in the copying of the romances, see Section II, below). However, if this scribe were active in the London book trade, there is nothing to suggest that he could not have made these two texts at separate times. This possibility is further suggested by the fact that both romances exist on distinct paper stocks in distinct quires. Accepting my assumption obviates the need to assume—as Meale and Sánchez Martí do—that Colyns had both romances in his possession when he inscribed his *ex libris* in 1517. We need only assume that the Stanzaic *Morte*, on which

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7 Having examined these, I can attest that these three folios do indeed bear distinctive smudge marks in a dark, black ink which is not visible on microfilm. In particular, the mark on f. 71r matches what one would expect of a smudge left by a thumb.

8 It should be noted that Jordi Sánchez Martí has suggested that the Morgan copy of *Ipomadon* is actually the *editio princeps* and that the Bagford Ballads is a later re-printing, an emendation that the Morgan Library’s catalogue has accepted. This would mean that the Morgan copy was been set from Colyns’s MS (and not the Bagford Ballads, as Meale suggests). However, what is essential for the present discussion is that one of the two surviving de Worde editions was cast off from what survives as Colyns’s MS.

9 *Pace* Sánchez Martí’s more confident conclusions: “The adoption of the same layout pattern in the two booklets, the participation of one scribe in the copying of both items, and the containment of the romances in fascicles lead us to believe that they were professionally produced by the same team” (“The Middle English” 71 n.9).

10 For further details, see Appendix B.

11 *Pace* Sánchez Martí, who avers that “We should then understand the ex-libris as an acquisition mark inscribed at the time of purchase—as many people still do nowadays—of the two booklets, thus marking the beginning of John Colyns’s compiling effort” (“The Middle English” 73).
he recorded the date of 1517, was in his possession at this time. If the STC’s date of 1522 for the de Worde edition of *Ipomadon* is correct, it is just as plausible that the copy-text for this edition was used by de Worde and then sold at a book store, at which point Colyns could have acquired it. Thus, although it is clear from Meale’s analysis that de Worde used what survives as Harley 2252 for his copy text, it is not clear that there was ever any relationship between the printer and Colyns.\(^{12}\) Furthermore, and most significantly, the end of the quire containing *Ipomadon* (f. 85v) shows wear (i.e. the color on much of it has faded, albeit irregularly), suggesting that it lay unbound and thus was not held together with Stanzaic *Morte*.\(^{13}\)

Though Colyns was generally a marginal figure in London, we can, through archival references and a few remarks in his MS, reconstruct a good deal of his biography. The will of Sir John Graunte, proved 6 May 1517, names Colyns as an executor: “I gyve to myne executours and oversear to ech 10s. for their labours and I ordein Sir Edward Swift and John Collyns of London, mercer, my executours” (*London Consistory* 23). From this same will it becomes clear that Colyns was married by 1517, for Swift bequeaths 6s. 8d. to “the wyf of John Colyns, mercer” (23). In addition, Colyns receives mention in a pardon of 1505 forgiving staplers certain trading abuses (Meale, “Social and Literary Contexts” 100). He is also mentioned in 1508 as, along with George Trevelyan, owing a debt to Henry VII (Meale 104). Furthermore, in his MS he records that he was one of ten men elected to a position in his parish church on 26 November 1520, a position whose responsibilities included “to ordyr & sette whate every man shall

\(^{12}\) *Pace* Martí, “Reconstructing” 170-73, who argues that we can confidently conclude that Colyns and de Worde were in business together.

\(^{13}\) Ulrich Frost argues that the existence of a consistent pattern of wormholes in the romance quires suggests that these quires were purchased as a single unit: “Die sechs Lagen enthielten ursprünglich nur die Romanzentexte und existierten als handschriftliche Einheit lange Zeit selbständig und in ungebundenem Zustand. Dafür sprechen die plötzliche Veränderung in Muster und Anzahl der Wurmlöcher ab f. 54v der Hs und der auffällend schlechte Erhaltungszustand desselben Blattes, das einmal sad obere Deckblatt bildete. Stärker angegriffen als die geschützten Blätter in Lageninnern sind auch die übrigen Lagendeckblätter. Anzahl und einheitliches Muster der Würmlocher zwischen ff. 54 und 133 sind ein deutliches Indiz dafür, daß beide Romanzen in dieser Zeit nicht getrennt waren” (58). However, these quires could just as easily have developed these wormholes after Colyns purchased and brought together both texts that were originally produced separately.
pay for a knyll of every of the v belles” and “what the clerke & sexton schall have for the belles” (f. 163r.).

Colyns’s name also appears several times in cases before the Court of Chancery. For example, in a case dating from the early sixteenth century, Colyns is named as one of the defendants being sued for failure to turn over the property deeds of a certain widow, Joanna Gybson (TNA: PRO C/1/138/2). In another contemporaneous case, Colyns appealed to the Chancellor, claiming to have satisfied his debts to a certain John Seyntpole, gentleman, and Roger Thorney, Mercer, who were contending that Colyns indeed still owed them (TNA: PRO C/1/194/71). But the most humorous case can be found in the appeal of John Bayley, who had been a servant to Thomas Mason until, in the words of his plea, Colyns “repayred and came unto your sayd oratour and requyred and desyred hym to be yn servyce with hym and leave the sayd Thomas Mason, then his master, promysyng hym that yf he wold so doo he wold be as good unto hym as he wold be unto hys owne chyld.” Colyns seems to have suggested that he would treat Bayley like a son, for the plea repeats a variation of this phrase: after serving Colyns for seven years, Bayley requests his wages “or else suche reward as the sayd Colyns wolde thynke reasonable for the servyce of a chylde of his own.” Of course the fact that Bayley had to seek redress in court means he felt Colyns failed in his promise of parental affection. In the repeated mention of Colyns’s promise, one can sense some bitterness on the part of Bayley (TNA: PRO C/1/745/26).

John Colyns died around 1539. His will is dated 10 July 1538, and it was proved in 1541. The probate copy survives in the Guildhall Library, which I here transcribe:

In the name of God, amen. The xth day of July in the yeare of our lorde God 1538, I, John Colyns, Cytezen and mercer of London, beyng in good

14 Though parish fraternities provided access to a form of association denied to those in guilds who were “extra liveratura” (as was John Colyns), it does not appear that the position to which Colyns was elected was in any way associated with such a fraternity. For the role of fraternities, see Barron, “Parish Fraternities.”

15 Both of these cases likely date from the Chancellorship of William Warham (1504-15).

16 This plea most likely dates from the Chancellorship of Thomas Audley (1533-44). For further archival references to Colyns, see also TNA: PRO C/1/342/70, C/1/493/15, C/4/76/77, PRO E/210/2845, and STAC 2/19/384.
and parfytte memory, ordein and maike this my present testament in this maner and forme ffolowing: ffirste, I geue and bequeth my soul to allmyghte God, the holly trynite, our blessed ladye Saint Marye, and all the cumpanye of Heuen, and my body to be buryed in the churche yarde of my pareysshye churche at the west end of the same, wher my mother and childerne bene buryed yeuen in the alye. And I bequeth to the ryght aultuer of the same parysse xij d for my tithes negligently done. And I bequeth to the brotherheade of our Lady and Saint Anne in my parysshe churche xx d. And I bequeth to John Asbery, beyng my apprentys and kyndesman vj s viij d. Item I will þat there shall be said for my soule vij masses at scala celi þence whillstes I do lye in extremis and offer iiiij as four after my deceasse as may be done convenyentlye. And then I will that my dettys be payed. And all the rest I geue and bequeth unto Alys my wyffe, whome I make my sole executrice. And suster of the same I ordein and make [illegible] Edwarde, to whome I bequethe iiij s iiiij d for his labures in þeir behallffe. (London, Guildhall Library MS 9171/11, f. 156v.)

An understanding of Colyns’s social milieu must begin with the Mercers’ Company, who played an important role in the economy of late medieval and early modern London. Their primary economic function was the importation of a wide variety of goods—many of which were luxury items (e.g., fine fabrics, sugar, spices, wood, oil)—and they were the premier guild of their day. As Anne Sutton states, “The members of the Mercers’ Company of London included some of the richest, most influential men of the City and, by the time Caxton was a printer, they were used to their company’s name fixed at the head of any list of the companies of London” (“Caxton Was a Mercer” 120; emphasis in original). The main rivals for supremacy in the city were the Grocers: at the 1477 All Saints’ Day Mass at St Paul’s, the Grocers attempted to re-claim lost honor by taking the most prominent seats in the cathedral. When the Mercers complained to the mayor, he declared that the Mercers deserved the foremost seat (Nightingale 551-52). The economic prominence of the Mercers’ Company increased as England began exporting more finished cloth to the Netherlands in the late fourteenth century. This form of export began to surpass the export of raw wool, which had previously dominated the English economy, and exports of raw wool decreased slowly over the course of the fifteenth century (Carus-Wilson xx-xxix). Under Henry VII,
London came to dominate English exports: no longer were the traditional shipping outports (e.g., Hull, Bristol, Southampton) as central to English trade. This transition greatly benefited the Mercers—already the dominant trading company in London—who took the lead in the export of finished cloth, thus solidifying their position as an economic force in the city (Elton 3-4).

Because of their connection with the Merchant Adventurers, a corporate body of overseas traders in cloth organized to advance the collective economic interest of its members, the Mercers further played a significant part in the economy of late medieval London. The Merchant Adventurers were not a guild per se, as their membership was comprised of men from various companies, but all its members were united by a common participation in the cloth trade. The Adventurers first receive mention as a distinct corporate body around the time of the death of Edward IV (Carus-Wilson 150-58). This important union of traders was largely under the thumb of the Mercers’ Company: their headquarters were located in the Mercers’ Hall until 1527, and one of their two lieutenant governors was always drawn from the ranks of the Mercers (Imray, “Merchant Adventurers” 460). This group’s economic domination of foreign trading provides further evidence for the importance of the Mercers to late medieval and early modern London’s economy.

1.2: Codicological Description

Colyns’s MS contains eighty-four distinct items covering 167 folios, entirely in paper. It measures 278 mm x 190 mm. The gatherings of this MS, in its present binding, are at times irregular. It is collated as:

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17 See also Sutton, “Caxton Was a Mercer” 121.
18 For a detailed catalogue, see Appendix A. Note that the MS’s pagination, written in a modern hand, extends only to f. 166; however, there is an error in pagination on f. 133: the same folio number was written twice, and someone later changed the first folio marked 133 to 133*. Thus, there is one more folio than the
As discussed above, we can locate and date Colyns by the *ex libris* he provides to the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*. Based on the appearance of this identifiable autograph, it is clear that the great majority of this collection was copied by Colyns himself. Excluding the romances (discussed below) and the occasional ephemeral text scribbled in some unfilled spaces, there is only one scribe besides Colyns at work in this MS. This scribe, who has left no clues as to his name, helps Colyns intermittently throughout Items 12-44. He second scribe never copies an entire Item by himself, and thus seems to have copied sections in order to spell Colyns.

Colyns’s hand is consistent with early Tudor book hands (which often included an amalgamation of Secretary and more archaic Anglicana letter forms). He typically uses the long form of –s medially and the short form terminally; he alternates irregularly between both forms initially. His long –s often contains thick downstrokes, as is consistent with less carefully-executed Secretary forms. His long, angular descenders and ascenders are also consistent with surviving texts from the early sixteenth century. His formation of the letter –g, with its open top (like a modern –y) also concurs with the more recent varieties of Tudor hand, as well as his formation of the letter –w (which is clearly distinguishable from the Anglicana form of the letter). But Colyns also maintains some forms of Anglicana letters: for example, he alternates between the single-lobed –a typical of the Secretary hand and the double-chambered –a which survived from Anglicana script. The most distinguishing feature of his hand is the similarity in the
way he sometimes forms his –t and –c. He often prefers the standard Secretary forms of both letters, but often enough Colyns forms them in an esoteric fashion by creating a long descender connected to a continuous line transecting the ductus of the letter from left to right. They are often indistinguishable, and the reader must use context to determine which letter is intended.

The MS was definitely re-bound at a relatively recent date, for the cover and flyleaves are consistent with a modern binding. In addition, there must have been some disruption of the original order of the MS in some re-binding after Colyns’s life, as the first item on f. 17r is acephalous. It begins thus: “Secondus filius Edwardy tercii: Wylliam Hatfeld was the second son of Kyng Edward the thyrd, and he deseasyd and had none yssue of hys bodye begotyn and ys beryed at Yorke.” This text is clearly supposed to be part of the later listing the sons of Edward III, the rest of which is found in Item 46, which Colyns has titled “Cronekell.” This Item, which lists the dukes of Normandy preceding William the Bastard and then lists the kings of England up to Richard II, finishes on f. 53v; however, this Item as it stands in its current binding only lists the first son of Edward III, then proceeds to complete the chronicle with the accession of Richard II. Thus, the material on f. 17r forms the missing part of the chronicle which ends on what is now f. 53v. Since f. 53v forms the end of quire 4, and f. 17r forms the beginning of quire 2, we can deduce that these two texts were originally in sequential order, but re-binding has moved quire 2 forward in the MS. Similar evidence for re-ordering can be found in Item 25, which leaves off mid-sentence at the conclusion of f. 16v (the end of quire 1) and picks up again on f. 38r (the beginning of quire 4). Thus, what now appears as quires 1, 2, 3 and 4 were originally ordered as 1, 4, 2 and 3.

This MS was likely in Colyns’s possession until his death ca. 1539, as he records a final entry in “The Annals of London” in that year (Item 12). Evidence of subsequent ownership can also be found in the MS. On f. 162v is recorded a contract, dated 1570, between Thomas Daviston and Robert Farrer, in which Daviston agrees to serve as

here. See also the plates reproduced in Preston and Yeandle; Denholm-Young; Dawson and Kennedy-Skipton; and Judge.
gardener for one year to Farrer (Item 73). It appears that Farrer himself was a subsequent owner of Harley 2252, for two other folios bear the name “Robarti Farrer” (f. 1v, 166r). The only other potential ownership mark to appear in this MS is in a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century hand on f. 140v, which reads, “By me Henry Lucas.” There is also a note on f. 33v, in what appears to be an eighteenth-century hand, stating “This belongs to Thomas Former.” Finally, the MS was purchased by Edward Harley, Second Earl of Oxford in 1724, and subsequently entered the family collection in the British Museum (Meale 89).

The only substantial pieces not in Colyns’s hand are the romances—Ipomadon and the Stanzaic Morte Arthur—which lie in six quires at the center of the MS (quires 5-10; ff. 54r-84r and 86r-133v; Items 47 and 52, respectively). Ipomadon covers two quires of eight folios, while the Stanzaic Morte covers two quires of eight folios, a quire of six folios, and five bifolios. These fascicles, which reflect the work of three distinct scribes, are executed in relatively neat, readable Secretary hands. In all three of the letters –a, –g, and –w the scribes have preferred the more easily-written Secretary forms (though not exclusively, as they can be seen to alternate between the double-chambered –a typical of Anglicana and the single-chambered –a that came to dominate fifteenth-century scripts in England). They hands are typical of mid-fifteenth century. Scribe C copies Ipomadon from ff. 54r-83r and 84r, and he also copies the Stanzaic Morte from ff. 86r-101v. His hand is distinguishable for the squat and sprawling way in which he forms his letters, marked by unusually thick pen strokes. He clearly prefers the Secretary forms of –a, –g, and –w, each of which is a shibboleth in noting the distinction between Anglicana and Secretary hands in fifteenth-century MSS. Scribe D, who writes out only f. 83v of Ipomadon, composes in a hand distinguishable from that of Scribe C in several

21 I have not come across reference to Farrer outside of this MS. Similarly, neither Meale, “Social and Literary Context” 86-89 nor Frost 68 was able to discover information on him.
22 Again, neither Meale, “Social and Literary Context” 86 nor Frost 67 has been able to discover information on this Lucas.
23 For the palaeographical vocabulary here I rely on Parkes, English Cursive xiii-xxv. See also the plates produced in Parkes and in Wright.
ways: the most unique feature of his hand is the angularity of his ascenders and
descenders. The ascenders of his –d, for example, curve away from the following letter
at an angle just short of forty-five degrees. Additionally, many of his long –s forms
contain thick strokes due to excessive pen pressure, as we saw with Colyns. Finally,
Scribe E copies the Stanzaic Morte from ff. 102r-133v. His work is distinguishable
because he uses much less space between his letters and tends to use short ascenders and
long descenders. In addition, the ink he used is noticeably darker than that used by scribe
C, whose copying immediately precedes that of Scribe E. Like C and D, Scribe E tends
to use the Secretary forms of most letters. His writing exhibits many more otiose strokes
than the other scribes involved, and he also relies on suspensions more frequently. The
three hands can thus be easily distinguished.

These two romances are likely the product of a professional scriptorium, for
Scribe C, who copied out ff. 53r-83r and 84r of Ipomadon, also copied ff. 86r-101v of the
Stanzaic Morte. That a single scribe would be working on two distinct texts, existing in
distinct quires, on two distinct stocks of paper, suggests a division of labor, a common
condition in professional scriptoria. There are also catchwords at each of the quire
divisions of the work of Scribe C (ff. 69v and 101v). (Scribe D’s work does not cross a
quire division, and Scribe E does not use catchwords.) Colyns, by contrast, never uses
catchwords at quire divisions. 24 Furthermore, planning is evident in the layout of each
page. There is a consistent number of lines to a page, and there are clear spaces left for
historiated initials or large capital letters, spaces which were never executed. 25 In
addition, the ink in these sections was always allowed to dry fully before the page was
closed, and the ink color is remarkably consistent throughout. All these signs—often

24 Colyns does use a catchword at the bottom of f. 142r; this, however, is not at a quire division, so I can
only speculate that Colyns used this as a reminder of where he was copying when he took a break. If
Sánchez Martí is correct, and Colyns bound most of his blank leaves around the two romance fascicles
before writing, then this lack of catchwords on Colyns’s part would make sense (since an already-bound
MS obviates the need for catchwords).
25 These occur on ff. 54r, 55v, 57r, 60r, 61r, 64r, 68v, 73r, 74r, 79r, 86r, 92r, 98r, 100r, 101r, 102r, 104r,
106v, 107r, 109v, 110v, 111v, 114r, 115v, and 117r. The task of illuminating initials, carried out by an
illustrator after the scribe had completed his work, was envisioned as an optional finishing piece to the text,
absent in the texts which Colyns himself copied out—indicate a professional origin for these fascicles at the center of Harley 2252.

Beyond the professional appearance of the page, watermark evidence supports the theory that these fascicles were professionally produced. The paper comprising the three quires in which the romances are found (5-10) dates from the second half of the fifteenth century, whereas the paper for the other quires (1-4, 11-14) dates most likely from the early sixteenth century.26 There is also a noticeable difference in the thickness of paper stock: the paper in those quires on which the romances were copied is noticeably thicker than that in those quires which Colyns himself added. In all, this codicological state suggests that Colyns purchased the booklets with the romances and built his collection around them.

Evidence for dating the beginning of the composition of Colyns’s portion of the MS can be found in Item 12, “The Annals of London.” In this Item, Colyns uses four columns across the page to relate information on the history of the city of London and of England as a whole. In the left column he lists the year, followed by the name of mayor of London for that year, followed by the names of the two sheriffs, followed by a short synopsis of a few key events for the year. It was apparently quite common for individuals to record chronicles of London, for Frost lists forty-one surviving MSS that attest such chronicles and forty-eight printed editions of such chronicles, extending through the end of the sixteenth century (144-49).

The surviving London chronicles which I have examined in modern printed editions contrast with Colyns’s chronicle, primarily in the length devoted to the entry for the year’s events.27 The form of Colyns’s “Annals” (i.e. events of the kingdom placed

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26 See Appendix B.

27 I have examined the following versions of London chronicles, all recorded in MS and printed in modern editions: London, British Library Egerton MS 1995 (The Historical Collections); London, Lambeth Palace MS 306 (Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles); Wriothesley’s collection (from a private MS, A Chronicle of England); London, Guildhall MS 3313 (The Great Chronicle); London, British Library Cotton Julius MS B.II; London, British Library Cotton Cleopatra MS C.IV; and London, British Library Cotton Vitellius MS A.XVI (all three in Chronicles of London). I have also examined the following printed chronicles, which
within the regnal year alongside the names of the mayor and sheriffs for that year) is common to all of these. Such a format’s popularity is understandable, for it allowed London citizens to synthesize urban concerns with the concerns of the kingdom as a whole. Even though the changes in London’s government may not have been noted by chroniclers interested in events of more national significance, the specific efforts of Londoners at creating such chronicles ensures that both interests are represented. Just as a new king accedes to the throne in a particular year, so too does a new mayor assume his post. However, Colyns’s “Annals” contain the shortest entries of yearly events—by far—of any that I have examined. He rarely devotes more than a sentence or two to the entry for column four (i.e. the events of the kingdom). As an extreme example of how long some of the entries in these chronicles could be, the discussion of the events of 1399 (admittedly a tumultuous and significant year in English history) in London, British Library Cotton MS Julius B.II occupies 41 folios. In addition, the entries in London, British Library Cotton MS Cleopatra C.IV regularly occupy an entire folio. Colyns, though, aimed at brevity, more so than the other surviving London chronicles.

Carol Meale suggests three stages of composition for this Item. First are the entries for 1399-1486, whose neatness suggests the use of a single exemplar. The second period she notes is 1487-1525, where Colyns changes format slightly, beginning to use square brackets around the names of the mayors. To explain this shift, she posits a change in exemplar. Finally, she notes that after 1525 the ink color changes, from which she concludes that Colyns was, from this point on, adding events as he witnessed them.\(^{28}\) According to Meale, then, the chronicle begins to be Colyns’s original work in 1525. Coupled with the fact that Ipomadon was in de Worde’s possession until at least the date of its printing in 1522, Meale determines that Colyns’s compilation likely began ca. 1525 (“The Compiler at Work” 94).

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all appeared during or before Colyns’s lifetime (with the exception of the Chronicle of Years, printed in 1540): Arnold’s Chronicle (STC 782, 783); The Chronicle of Years (STC 9985.5); Fabyan’s Chronicle (STC 10659). None of these texts, however, appears to be a source for Colyns’s “Annals.”
It is clear that for much of “The Annals” Colyns is working from an exemplar and is not adding items as he experiences them, year by year. “The Annals” begin in 1399, and thus pre-date Colyns’s birth by a number of years. My conjecture (pace Meale) is that Colyns began to write out his own entries starting in 1506-09, for from this date on there are many years when, in the fourth column, no entry is provided. The years 1506-08, 1514-16, 1518-19, 1524-27, 1530-32, 1536-37 are all without entries in the fourth column. Such gaps would not likely be in any exemplar worth copying, and it does not seem likely that Colyns would omit copying the events of each year from an exemplar that was complete, so it is likely that Colyns began copying at this period. In addition, the entries in Column Four become noticeably less tidy on f. 7v, which commences with the year 1506. On previous folios, the entries in column four occupied a relatively consistent width of space, but entries from 1509 on (for there is no entry in column four for 1506-08) begin to exhibit wider variation, suggesting that Colyns was no longer working from an exemplar.

That he was not yet writing out the Annals himself in 1505 is indicated by an error in copying that he commits: a nearly identical entry occurs in column four under both 1504 and 1505. The entry for 1504 states: “The wodeoke of Powles fyll. The Kyng of Castell was landyd & cam to the Kyng to London” (f. 7r). The entry for the fourth column for 1505 states: “This yere the wethyr coke of Powlys fyll dawne in to the chyrche yerde & the Kyng of Castyll londyd in Ynglond” (f. 7r). Two possibilities here suggest themselves, both of which militate against seeing Colyns as yet being the original composer of the fourth column by 1505: either Colyns is working from two different (yet similarly worded) exemplars and has here switched exemplars without moving ahead a year; or, he is working by dictation and the person reading to him from the exemplar has

28 Meale’s argument largely rests on a change in ink color for the entries in 1525. On close examination, however, I do not detect any such noticeable change in ink color in the entries for that particular year. Rather, I find the ink color to be irregular throughout.

repeated the entry for 1504 when he should have been giving a new entry, for 1505. (The inaccuracies of the process of transcribing by dictation would explain the slight differences in wording between the two entries.) Either way, it seems that an exemplar must be to blame for the repetition between the entry for column four for the years 1504 and 1505. One recording events as they are lived would not likely confuse this year’s events for last year’s. In addition, Colyns has made a slight alteration to his format for column four starting in 1509, the first year after 1506 in which there is an entry in that column. In all previous entries, he dated column four with the regnal year, but from 1509 on, Colyns has begun to record the date with the calendrical year. This suggests that his exemplar used the regnal year but that, once he began adding the events himself, Colyns switched to using the calendrical year (which is easier to use, after all).30

This conclusion contrasts with the findings of the three previous scholars to work with this MS in detail, for Ulrich Frost, Carol Meale and Jordi Sánchez Martí all conclude that Colyns’s own additions to the MS began at a much later stage. Frost suggests that Colyns copied “The Annals” ca. 1517-39 (143); as stated above, Carol Meale concludes that Colyns’s compilation began around 1525 (“The Compiler at Work” 94); Martí suggests a date of 1526-28 (“Wynkyn de Worde’s” 157). All three scholars, however, were operating under what I have argued is a false assumption about Colyns’s compiling activities: 1517 has been accepted as a terminus a quo for his copying, since the ex libris he added to the Stanzaic Morte (f. 133v; discussed above) mentions that year. This is the earliest date provided in Colyns’s several explicits and so seems to provide a potential terminus. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that Colyns could not have begun copying “The Annals” at a date prior to his purchase of the romances. Clearly, he has dated one of the two romance fascicles at 1517, and so we can confidently conclude that that was the year in which he purchased the Stanzaic Morte. However, “The Annals” are the twelfth item in the MS, and they begin on f. 3v. Such a placement

30 None of the other London chronicles I have examined uses the calendrical year, except for isolated instances, when a scribe will occasionally record the calendrical year for one entry (as occurs for the last entry in London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.xvi). Colyns, in this practice, seems to be unique.
indicates that they were one of the earlier pieces in the MS to be composed. (This conclusion, of course, assumes that the first quire was unmoved during subsequent binding. It can be shown that this is the case, since Colyns has inscribed his name on the first and last folios of this MS, providing bookends to his entire collection and showing that these quires are in their original position.) Thus, given the abrupt change in the chronicle entry for the year 1506, it seems most logical to conclude that Colyns’s composition of the MS began between this date and the subsequent entry in column four (i.e. 1509), prior to his purchase of one of the romance fascicles in 1517. Fixing a date for the end of Colyns’s compiling activities is a much less vexed question. The final entry for “The Annals” occurs in 1539, and Colyns’s will was written up in the previous year. Thus, he passed away around this time, continuing to add to his MS until the end of his life.

1.3: John Colyns, Mercator et Compilator

Harley 2252 is best described as a “commonplace book,” but this is a term that is not so easy to define, one for which several definitions have been offered. A.G. Rigg defines medieval commonplace books as “collections of miscellaneous material assembled simply for the interest and amusement of the compiler” (161). In a similar vein, David Parker defines it as a book “with useful and various items written into it by one or several compilers with no larger purpose than to be of use and entertainment to its

31 However, see also the important qualifications to this definition in Louis 101-03. It is also important to note that the term “commonplace book,” as employed by scholars mentioned herein, contrasts with the traditional use of the term. Traditionally, a “commonplace book” was understood to be an organized compilation of “commonplaces” (i.e. quotations organized around topical headings), much like the medieval florilegia collections. For a history of the MS tradition of this type of commonplace book, see Havens. The words of Ulrich Frost about Harley 2252 should also be borne in mind: “Dabei fällt auf, daß
owner,” and he adds the qualifying assertion that “what separates a commonplace book from anthologies or miscellanies produced for a larger audience is the discernibly personal selection and combination of texts for the book” (2). Carole Meals extends the definition further by stating “that some at least may be of an ephemeral nature, to the extent that they were chosen for inclusion on the basis of their immediate relevance to the owner, with no regard being given to their potential long-term significance” (“The Social and Literary Contexts” 185). Though some surviving commonplace books attest a religious provenance (e.g., Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.9.38, the subject of Rigg’s enquiry), and some attest a provenance within rural society (e.g., Oxford, Bodleian MS Tanner 407, the subject of Cameron Louis’s enquiry), the form held a particular appeal for urban readers. Meale has identified twenty-three surviving commonplace books from late medieval London, and she notes the conspicuous absence of upper-class owners of such books. To this end, Rossell Hope Robbins states that such books “reveal the middle-class interests of the later fifteenth century” (Secular xxix).

Indeed commonplace books were even printed and sold in early modern England: *Arnold’s Chronicle* (STC 782, 783) was printed in Antwerp in 1503 and in Southwark in 1525. Its contents have much in common with Colyns’s collection, including a chronicle of London, lists of English kings, and lists of clerical benefices within the city of London. The fact that these collections entered the market of printed books suggests that the definition of commonplace book, as it enters the early modern period, should be broadened, for *Arnold’s Chronicle*, produced on a speculative basis and sold to an anonymous market, cannot be said to exhibit only “the interest and amusement of the compiler.” Rather, printed commonplace books indicate that the desire for such material—that seems so pedestrian to us—went beyond an individual’s wish to inscribe a text of personal significance. The fact that a publisher would, on a speculative basis, gather such ephemera into a collection provides evidence for a widespread desire to possess information of this type. It would seem that the publisher knew, likely from

keiner 85 Texte und Einträge persönliche Memoranda darstellen, und seien es nur Daten oder Fakten über seine Person oder Familie” (71-72).
examining commonplace books circulating in MS form, that such things as lists of the benefits in London would have a popular urban appeal.

The experience of reading a commonplace book is a disorienting one, especially if we come to such an artefact with preconceived notions of what is literature and what is not. We, in the modern world, know how comfortably to isolate our newspapers from our novels from our technical manuals. But the commonplace books of late medieval England elude such attempts at separation. In Colyns’s collection, for example, a poem lamenting the fall of England, entitled “The Ruyn of a Ream,” ends on f. 28r (Item 30); the next item, a list of all the MPs to serve in the Parliament of 1492, begins on this same folio. There is no acknowledgment of any incongruity between these texts, and no comment on the 1492 Parliament to suggest if it may be in any way connected to the lament for the kingdom that Colyns has recorded. Jerome McGann has drawn a useful distinction between what he labels “vehicular” and “poetical” texts:

Poetical texts operate to display their own practices, to put them forward as the subject of attention. [...] Poetical texts must be, in this respect, sharply distinguished from texts that have imagined themselves as informational—texts that have been constructed on a sender/receiver, or transmissional, model. [...] In a vehicular textual model, by contrast, the textual paradigm is one which does not interfere with or “distort” a message. (10-11)

Such a distinction, however, is not an operative principle in the construction of many medieval commonplace books. Colyns’s collection, in particular, yokes “vehicular” and “poetical” texts together, often on the same folio.

It is the lack of distinctions between types of texts which is most striking in such collections. As one moves across a commonplace book, the stability of the categories we like to erect to separate texts begins to erode. The experience of reading the commonplace book, of moving across the pages of Colyns’s collection, encountering, in turn, statutes against foreign traders, religious/didactic poetry, lists of England’s kings, lists of the parishes in London, and the poetry of John Skelton, leaves one with a sense of transferability between texts: any individual text could be re-located to any other position
in the MS without disrupting the overall reading experience. Indeed, the individual texts and the relationship between them become quite arbitrary. Colyns’s collection lacks catchwords or running titles, both common MS markers of planned textual divisions. There are few texts that receive titles within the MS, all of which contributes to the ephemeral impression of such a collection.\textsuperscript{32}

It is also clear from looking at this MS that Colyns worked on it in a piecemeal fashion, adding bits as he came across suitable exemplars and leaving some time between his copying efforts, often going back to add things to the texts at a later date. The most interesting example of this occurs in “The Annals of London” where, under the entry for 1490 Colyns has copied from his exemplar that Henry VII’s second son was born. In a much darker ink, and in a smaller, cramped hand—but definitely in Colyns’s hand—is appended the phrase “& a grete benevolens to the kyng.” This was likely added by Colyns \textit{ex post facto}, perhaps after the death of Prince Arthur or after the accession of Henry VIII. Either way, this is evidence of Colyns’s willingness constantly to adapt his MS to fit the needs of the moment. Further examples of this practice can be found in the ink color, which often changes quite dramatically between items, suggesting that Colyns stopped copying at certain points and added in items that would fit the left-over space at later times. The clearest example of this comes on f. 2 r, where Item 8 ends with a very light and badly faded ink, and Item 9 begins in a dark and well-preserved ink.

The general impression given by such details is of a compilation assembled over time with little thought to overall presentation. Someone—presumably Colyns—has rubricated items throughout this collection in a seemingly random manner. As but one example, Item 8 has been heavily rubricated (without any seeming pattern or plan of highlighting parts of the text), while the following item receives no rubrication at all. Colyns has even rubricated some folios in the romance fascicles. He did not, though, often wait long enough for the red ink to dry, for ff. 130v and 131r both exhibit heavy red ink offset; by contrast, the black ink on these folios—as one would expect of a

\textsuperscript{32} For complete details of those Items with and without titles, see Appendix A.
professional scribe—did not leave any off-set. In addition, the *ex libris* is also rubricated, suggesting that it was Colyns, and not the professional scribes of the romances, who was responsible for this.

Colyns’s MS is both ephemeral and largely focused on urban mercantile concerns, and these two characteristics might lead us to dismiss the cultural significance of this collection. Certainly, the inclinations of late medieval merchants towards ‘culture’ have been called into question. Based on an exhaustive study of merchant wills, Sylvia Thrupp concludes that the merchant class in general did not participate in the English aristocracy’s emphasis on education:

[Merchants] were generous in giving scholarships to theological students; but in spite of their interest in the country communities from which so many of them came, there is record of the founding of only three new country schools through their agency. When business affairs were laid aside, they could listen with interest to preaching; otherwise *they preferred convivial relaxation to intellectual discussion.* (163; emphasis mine)

Thrupp here questions the intellectual curiosity of the entire class, repeating the age-old view of the middle class as pragmatic philistines with little interest in higher culture. Among all scholars, E.F. Jacob sums up this view most directly when, speaking of the fifteenth century, he comments that “The city merchant was literate but not literary” (664). With regards to Colyns’s collection, these assessments are accurate if we construe culture in the traditional sense of, in the words of Raymond Williams, “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (*Keywords* 90). Overall, Colyns’s compilation is not, in this sense, cultured. However, appreciating the different standards of compilation governing commonplace books will help us to understand the endeavors of someone like Colyns. These are books that largely grow out of and respond to mercantile life. The primary end of the commonplace book is not to bequeath a memorial of ‘culture,’ but rather to incorporate moments of ‘culture’ into the more overtly economic—and to our modern sensibilities, more banal—forms of text: e.g., lists of mayors, chronicles of the realm, notes on weights and measures.
Being located in an urban environment, moving about in a world based on capital exchange, puts Colyns—and his commonplace book—in a different register, one which bears affinity with commodity exchange. A commodity is marked by its ability to be exchanged for any other commodity, and it thus assumes a value relative to other commodities. Commodities exist in an arbitrary string of relative values. This is, of course, the basic economic principle that would govern the daily life of a merchant. It is the *relativity* of commodities, the fact that one can just as easily be replaced by another of equivalent exchange value, that is suggestive of the principle underlying commonplace books. The ephemerality of these texts, the ease with which one could jumble the items about and not substantially alter the experience of reading Colyns’s collection, points to their relativity. There is little privileging of any particular text (beyond the number of folios it occupies), and there is certainly no sense that any text that Colyns has copied has a pre-ordained place in the larger collection.

The texts Colyns copied into his book are marked by several distinct thematic concerns. One involves a rather standard interest in texts of moral instruction and advice. Here again, we see the haphazard and arbitrary nature to this collection. Item 51, “The Sage Fool’s Testament,” concludes when the fool, who had been servant to a now-deceased lord, declares to the lord’s son, his new master, “All that money þat ye haue, & I to, wyll not Restore the wronge þat your fader hathe don, whyche ys in hell. And thedyr ye goe with-owe Amendment; & therfor I geve yow All my money” (f. 85r). The message here is similar to that of *Everyman* (without the subtlety): you can’t take it with you, and at the end of one’s life good deeds are all that remain. This sounds rather typical of late medieval literary tastes; but what is important for the present discussion is the lack of a cohesive vision for this MS. Instead of any design being placed on the cultural materials inscribed by Colyns, such short pieces of moral advice are placed between other texts with no apparent connection, and a chaotic amalgam begins to emerge. Colyns also records the poem “Consilium Domini in eternum manet” (Items 65
and 69) which exhorts its audience to live with moral virtue. The penultimate stanza best captures the didactic tone of this poem:

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Therfor Beware & presume no to long
Refrayne & do penaunce whyle thow haste space
Ffor yff þou be ponysshed thow haste no wronge.
Bee Rulyd by prudens & call for grace
& folow good councesell [sic] in eve[r]y place
& ever inclyne & obbey to Reason
Then shalte þou do all thynge in convenient season. (f. 160v)
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The most didactic text in the entire collection is Item 81, which Colyns entitles “A Specyall glase to loke in daylye”; this text, in the form of a poem, lists a series of pieces of moral advice. Rather than having end-rhyme, each line ends on an –ly adverb modifying a verb. Each line could stand as a moral lesson unto itself, but the twenty-eight lines of verse, connected by their common –ly endings, serve to drive home the moral message through rote repetition:

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Rede dystynctlye
Pray devoutlye
Syghe depelye
Suffyr pacyently
Make your-selfe lowly
Yeve no sentens hastely […] (f. 166r)
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Much of this moral instruction falls into the genre of *ars moriendi*. Item 29 begins:

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O mortall man, call to remembrance
The day shalle com þat þou moste nedys dye.
Thynke on the payne & grete turbance
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33 Colyns has copied this text twice into his MS (Items 65 and 69). For some reason, he left off copying the first version midway through (on f. 157v), and then started copying the entire poem over again on f. 160r, this time completing the entire poem. It seems that the two versions come from different exemplars. Stanzas 1 and 2 share the same readings, but the two versions invert lines 4 and 5 of stanza 3 and lines 4 and 5 of stanza 5. In addition, stanza six of Item 69 does not appear in Item 65. Since the version of the lines which have been inverted appearing in Item 69 makes more sense (suggesting that the second exemplar used is superior), my conjecture is that Colyns became dissatisfied with the exemplar used for Item 65, ceased copying, and continued again three folios later when he had found a superior exemplar. One puzzling fact remains, though: Colyns has rubricated the first, unfinished version but has not rubricated the second. If rubrication is used to draw the reader’s particular attention to a piece, then it is not clear why Colyns would choose to rubricate an unfinished text.
Þat sowlys dure in purgatory,
In þat ardente fyre & moste grevaunce,
In grete langowr and petus fyre,
How they be woundyd with dethys launce,
Callyng to god for grace & mercy.
Pray for them þat so grete woo doth cry
To crystys passyon & also unto hys blody wondys,
Whyche he suffryd, þat exelente lorde of petye,
And remembyr amonge thys psalme de profundys. (f. 23r)

Such a poem reminds the reader of Mt. 24, wherein Jesus warns the disciples: “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. […] Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (24:36, 42; cf. Mk. 13:32-37). A similar message is contained in Item 28, the item immediately preceding the aforementioned poem. In this text, a dying pope asks his chaplain to say three “pater nosters” for him once he has passed (f. 22v). Once the chaplain does as he was asked, the pope is admitted into the company of Heaven. Item 62 is an ephemeral sentence related to someone’s last words: “They seyd nothyng else, savyng desyryng the pepyll to pray for them 5 pater nosters, 5 aves, and iiij creditys, & cry Apon Ihesus as hother before. God saue the kyng. Amen. Fynis” (f. 155r). David Parker labels this “Someone’s dying words, presumably from a longer text” (94), but Frost more specifically calls it “die letzten Worte unbekannter Verurteilter unmittelbar vor ihrer Hinrichtung” (68).

In addition, much of Colyns’s MS contains texts that one would expect of a merchant: many deal overtly with issues of trade and city politics. Colyns has two texts dealing with weights and measures (Items 7 and 26); the latter seems to have been of particular importance to him, as it occupies seven pages. This text expresses particular anxiety over the lack of standardization of weights and measures. In addition, Colyns, like many Londoners in the early sixteenth century, was concerned about the influx of foreign merchants, and so he records—in Latin and in an English translation—a law from 1330 banning foreign merchants from selling anything but their native wares (Items 19 and 20). As if to suggest that this statute, nearly two hundred years old by this time, was
ineffective, he also he records a petition from the London guilds to Henry VIII and parliament which complains of the number of foreign merchants living and working in London:

That where your seyd Realme and land ys so Inhabyted with A grete Multytude, nedn pepyll, estrangers of dyuers nacions, As ffrensshemen, galymen, pycardys, flemynghys, keteryckys, Spaynyars, Scottys, Lumbar dys, & dyvers hother nacions, That your lyge pepyll, englysshemen, Cannot Imagen nor Telle wherto, nor to whate ocupacion, that they shall vse or put there chyldren to lerne, or ocupy, with-ynte your seyd Cetees, Borowys, portys, and Townys of thys your seyd Realme. (f. 15r; Item 24)

Colyns was not alone in such xenophobia; on 1 May 1517, over two thousand apprentices from throughout London ransacked the shops of foreign merchants. No lives were lost, but the king made a point of trying over three hundred of the rioters and hanging thirteen of them (Brigden 129-31). Apparently many felt that their economic success was threatened by the presence of so many foreigners in London.

Beyond texts that are overtly about economic exchange, Colyns has also copied a number of texts that evince what Lee Patterson describes as “the mental habits associated with capitalism—calculative and calibratory attitudes toward space, time, and labor, a concern with profit maximization, familiarity with financial transactions, and a general rationalization of economic life” (Chaucer 327). Such an attitude can be seen most clearly in Colyns’s penchant for cataloguing and providing numerical summations of demographic aspects of London or of England as a whole. Ulrich Frost remarks upon “Colyns’ Interesse an Zahlen und Fakten statistischer und enzyklopädischer Natur” (336). Several of these cataloguing texts are intended to record financial information about the city. For example, in Item 13 Colyns lists all the wards of London, followed by the “Sum totallys of þese taxes of xv amontys” (f. 9r). Similary, in Item 16 he lists “Whate every ward in London ys sessy whole a xv thn” and, in a separate column, “Whate every ward ys sessy whole nth merke” (f. 9v). But not all of his cataloguing impulse is intended to yield monetary data, for Colyns also tried to understand the city of London through statistics. In Item 17 he lists all of the parishes of London, divided into categories based
on the saint or feast to which the church is dedicated. For example, he lists the thirteen churches dedicated to Mary, placing the number “xiij" in the margin (f. 10r). He does the same for parishes in the suburbs, as well as for monasteries, colleges and chapels, at the end of which he provides a sum total (ff. 10r-11v). Colyns also lists all the shires of England and the MPs for each shire at the parliament held under Henry VII in 1492. At the conclusion of this list Colyns provides a total for the numbers summoned, divided into the number of knights of the shires and the number of burgesses representing towns (ff. 28r-32v; Item 31).

All of these items, which occupy quite a large amount of space in the first two quires, bespeak Colyns’s interest in knowing London through numbers. This statistical impulse to categorize both London and the entire realm is consonant with what one would expect of a merchant, based on the economic realities of his daily life. But even more than this topical relation to Colyns’s life, these texts also illuminate the level of comfort Colyns had with devoting both space in his MS and his physical labor to such ephemera. Perhaps the most interesting of all of these texts is a short piece Colyns has recorded near the end of the collection. In an ephemeral sentence on f. 166r (Item 80), Colyns notes, “The compas of the worlde from þat one syde to þat hother or over-thwarte ys Iuste by trew porsyon ys xxj Miii & vjC mylys & no more.”

As Frost notes, the idea that the circumference of the earth was approximately 21,600 miles was known in several other literary texts (336). Higden’s Polychronicon estimates 20,040 miles, while Caxton’s The Myrrour of the Worlde estimates 20,427 miles. As Cole notes, the circumference of the world was calculated by a variety of different methods, including maritime navigation, astronomical measurement, and mathematical calculation. Colyns uses this information to create a sense of the vast extent of the world, and how it can be measured and understood through numbers.

Clearly, this desire for numerical categorization was one of the primary thematic concerns of this compilation.

The last four quires of the MS are dominated by texts of prognostication, which point towards a desire to rationalize future events. Items 56, 60, 61, 67, and 68 all deal with forecasting based on the days on which certain events occur. For example, Item 60
begins, “Yf crystmas day on the monday be / A trobolys wynter ye shall see / Medlyd with waters stronge. / Were shal be good with-owte fabyll / The somer it shal/ be Resonabyll / & stormys odyr whyls Amonge” (f. 153v). These type of texts seem to be rather standard fare in Middle English compendiums, as Frost records seventeen extant English MSS which record “Volkssprachliche Prosafassungen von Neujahrsm-Bauernpraktiken” and twenty-six early printed almanacs which contain information similar to Item 56 (284-87); seven early printed almanacs containing information similar to Item 60 (297); nine MSS containing information similar to Item 61 (298-99); five MSS and thirteen printed editions containing information similar to Item 67 (310-311); and two MSS containing information similar to Item 68 (313).

1.4: John Colyns and the Nation

Colyns’s MS also attests his interest in contemporary national politics and his quite unashamed jingoism.\(^\text{36}\) Ff. 39r-48v are primarily concerned with the Battle of Flodden Field of 1513, during which the Scottish invaded England, hoping to take advantage of the fact that the English army, including the king himself, was away fighting in France. It was a bad miscalculation, as the Earl of Surrey gathered a large retinue and routed the Scots, killing the Scottish king, James IV, in the process (Elton 38-40). Apparently these events grabbed the collective English imagination, for several different poets composed verses celebrating the victory: Bernard André and Pietro Carmeliano each wrote a Latin celebratory poem, Thomas More wrote three such poems, and John Skelton wrote two English poems and one Latin poem in celebration of Flodden.

\(^{36}\) I find the conclusion of Besserman et al. 213, who claim that this MS contains an anomalous amount of anti-clerical satire, to be a mischaracterization. It seems that Colyns had very little interest in religious matters—neither in theological questions nor in the behavior of clerics. His religious interests are limited to texts of moral instruction.
This section of Colyns’s collection includes a letter from James IV to Henry VIII (Item 39), the recounting of a meeting between the Scottish herald and Henry VIII (Item 40), and a letter from Henry VIII to James IV in reply to the Scottish herald (Item 41). None of these three items yields particular information about Colyns’s interests, for the mere inclusion of these letters does not say much about his feelings towards Scotland. In the first letter, the Scottish king asks Henry VIII to cease his assault on France, and in Henry’s reply letter he states that he has no intention of yielding to Scottish demands. Thus, these letters seem to cancel one another out. However, the following two items clearly express Colyns’s ardent patriotism and anti-Scottish sentiment.

In Item 42, which Colyns has entitled “The Lamentacion of the kyng of Scottys,” a dreamer is carried off to a land where he encounters an old, miserable exile, the erstwhile King of Scotland. The rest of the text is taken up with the lament of this former king, who has been brought so low because he broke his word to the English and sided with the French:

Whom shuld I blame? I ffownd that I sowght.
Yn my awen torne I had a gret fall;
Wherfore I ffere me that now I shall
Haue payn eternall for my Inequyte.
Lord, full of mercy, yet to the I calle:
“Miserere mei deus et salve me.” (f. 44r)

This sentiment gives voice to a particularly confident belief in the moral righteousness of the English cause, for in these lines the Scottish king has resigned himself to perdition for the political act of fighting against the English. The fact that the author of this poem has affected the narrative voice of the Scottish king himself does much to increase the patriotic rhetoric here. A later hand, which appears to be a late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century script, has added a line at the bottom of the folio which is definitely in the spirit of the triumphalist nature of this poem: “He was slayne at Bramstones Hill þe yeare of our Lorde 1513” (f. 45r).
The subsequent text, Item 43, a celebration of the Battle of Flodden Field, continues with the vilification of the Scottish. The poem revels in cataloguing the names of the English nobility who led men in battle on that day, and manages to include the names of no less than thirty-nine English leaders. This poem also mentions that, at the end of the battle, “Of Scottys lythe slayne full xij thowsand / And xj Erlys, the sothe for to seye; / Xij lords and iiij Bysshoppys, as I vndyrstond / With iiij abottys whyche haue Lernyd a new playe” (f. 48r). But its statistical analysis of the dead is definitely partisan, for the author follows the numbers of the dead with the comment that the dead Scottish bishops “shold haue byn at home for peax to pray / Wherfor they were thys wyse ponysshyd by the Ryghte” (f. 48r; emphasis mine). The refrain of the poem makes its jingoistic message patently clear, as the line “By the helpe of s. george owr ladys knyghte” is repeated twenty-four times.

Colyns was also concerned to record knowledge about the national history of England. To this end he has copied out a chronicle tracing the lineage of William the Bastard back through the dukes of Normandy, and then tracing the lineage of the kings of England through Richard II (Item 46). This chronicle is rather unremarkable, as it accords each ruler a short sentence or two, merely denoting that the person in question ruled, whom he married, how many children he had, and how he died. This chronicle tends to avoid any form of political controversy; its entry for Edward II states:

Desimus [sic] Rex: In the yere of owr lorde god m\textsuperscript{11} ccc and vij\textsuperscript{e}, Edward, Son of the ffyrste Edward, was crownyd at Westmynster and had iiij\textsuperscript{e} sonnys: Edward of Wynsor and John of Eltam, the Erle of Cornewall, And dowghters Jane, the quene of Scottys, And elynowr, the Count[ess] of glowceter. And in the xxi\textsuperscript{e} yere of hys Reyne, he decesyd & ys Beryed at glowceter. (f. 53v)

This is not the stuff of sodomitical revenge. It is, rather, a sober chronicle whose interest is in establishing an unbroken list of rulers, not discussing the causes of political change. This chronicle also serves as a nice prologue to Item 12 (discussed above), the London chronicle which began with the reign of Henry IV. (The two items are not, however, located near one another in their present binding.) In a similar vein, the last item in
Harley 2252 (Item 84) states: “The nombyr of all the kyngys that ha[ve] Reyned in thys londe of breten & ynglond from Brute to kyng herry the viijth conteyn vijxx & vj kyngys” (f. 166r). This ephemeral text merely establishes that there has been a consistent line of rulers—it is not concerned with the qualities of their respective reigns.

Colyns lived through one of the most remarkable periods in English history, for the years near the end of his life witnessed England’s break with Rome and the beginnings of the English Reformation. He references this in the four folios he devotes to a list of “The actys of parliament passyd in ffeuerer & marche the xxvth yere of the Rayne of kyng heric the viijte, Anno domini 1534” (f. 34v; Item 34). The previous parliament had passed the Act in Restraint of Appeals, declaring that there was to be no theological appeal beyond England. This act had allowed Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to decree formally that Henry’s marriage to Catherine had been invalid, thus securing the long-sought royal divorce (Lehmberg 161-81). The 1534 Parliament referred to by Colyns passed the Act of Succession, declaring that the throne would pass on to any future heir of Anne Boleyn and not to Mary, Catherine’s Roman Catholic daughter (Lehmberg 182-200). Yet there is no indication from Colyns’s MS that any of those acts motivated his inclusion of this material. All entries are given an identical layout, and the only distinguishing feature of any one is the amount of space it occupies. The first three entries set the scene for the rest of this Item: “In primus an acte of Bogery / Item an acte for & Ayenste the pope / Item an acte for grasyars & bochers for befe, vele & porke” (f. 34v). In this first entry he references three widely disparate laws—one against sodomy, the second dealing with relations with Rome, and the third setting prices for the sale of food. The pressing historical questions, such as what did Colyns think about the divorce, and how did he feel about England’s relations with Rome, are nowhere to be found in this document. Within this particular Item there is no evidence that would point to what Greg Walker has recently characterized as the tumult surrounding the events of the early Henrician Reformation. Walker points to what he labels “a crisis of cultural confidence,” and he further states that “Everywhere people spoke of unprecedented divisions, of schism, and rancorous conflict within the body politic—and
even those who lived through the brief, turbulent reign of Richard III declared themselves unprepared for what they witnessed” (Writing 36). If Colyns experienced such alarum, he certainly did not record it in the place which would be most obvious.

Contrary evidence about the divorce can be found at other points in this MS. Skelton’s “Speke Parott” contains the following lines: “With Kateryne incomporabyll owr Royall quene Also / That pereles pomegarnat, Cryste saue hyr nobyll grace” (f. 134v.; Item 54). By contrast a later poem, discussed below, laments the fall of Anne Boleyn (Item 63). Where one stood on the question of the royal divorce became something of a litmus test for treason, and thus there was little room in the mid-1530s for one to maintain ambivalent sympathies for both women. Colyns’s inclusion of both pieces only provides further frustration to one seeking to know his personal position on the major political events of his life. Perhaps he was interested in this particular parliament because of the law regarding the importation of books: “Item an acte þat no bokys Be Broghte in-to ynglond Bownde from beyonde the see vppon payne of fforfeture of the same bokys” (f. 35r). Such a law could have a large effect on his income, since he dealt primarily in the “Sellyng of Prynted bokes.”

Further texts attesting Colyns’s interest in national affairs include Item 37, “A Brefe cronckell of the grete Turke” (ff. 36v-37v), which traces “the lynyall dessendynge of them from Ottoman, the laste duke & fyrste Turkysshe keyser, which cam of the Howse of Tartary, to thys Soleman the last” (f. 36v). Perhaps Colyns was interested in the Turks because they had captured Belgrade in 1521 and Rhodes in 1522; this, in turn, influenced European politics, for in 1521 England was allied with the emperor, Charles V, and Rome against France. In response to the threat from the Turks, the pope sought peace among the warring European nations. In addition, by the late 1510s there were rumors in the air about a united Christian crusade against the Turks (A. F. Pollard 135; Walker, John Skelton 79-81). Also of importance in establishing Colyns’s interest in national affairs is Item 63, a dream-vision allegory which laments the fall of Anne Boleyn (ff. 155r-155v).
1.5: John Colyns, John Skelton, and Cardinal Wolsey

A good deal of Colyns’s interest in national politics is focused on the figure of Cardinal Wolsey, who was chancellor of England under Henry VIII from 1515-29. He has copied several texts expressing a vitriolic hatred for Wolsey, and the emotional rhetoric with which these texts are invested is much stronger than anything else in this entire collection. The banality with which he presents the proceedings of the Parliament of 1534—such a momentous and seemingly controversial moment—stands in sharp contrast to the passion with which his texts denounce Wolsey. There are in total six anti-Wolsey texts in this MS.

Thomas Wolsey accrued titles while he was serving the first two Tudor kings, from chaplain to Henry VII in 1507, to Royal Almoner to Henry VIII in 1509, to Bishop of Lincoln in 1514; in 1515 he subsequently became Archbishop of York, was raised to the status of cardinal, and became Chancellor; he would go on to be given the title of papal legate a latere for life by Clement VII in 1518. At the height of his power he was wealthier than the king himself. But Wolsey was extremely unpopular among those living in London, largely for his role in creating and enforcing several new taxes.

The main justification for the dislike of Wolsey among London merchants centered on his fiscal policy, much of which was driven by England’s foreign wars (for which Wolsey was seen as largely responsible). As early as 1512, before he was even chancellor, Wolsey helped to draft the “Tudor Subsidy,” a tax on property and moveable goods (whichever one had more of), allowing the Crown to take in £170,000 to fund the

38 The most influential characterization of Wolsey remains that of one of his earliest biographers, A. F. Pollard, who depicts a power-hungry man who was the power behind the throne: “Few men have exerted greater authority than Wolsey, and still fewer have afforded so striking an illustration of the demoralising effects of irresponsible power” (317). G.R. Elton painted Wolsey in a similar manner, dubbing him “an uncomplicated activist untroubled by speculative thought or spiritual reservations” (49). More recently, scholars have moderated their views of Wolsey: see Guy, “The Henrician Age” and Walker, John Skelton. Walker suggests that the view of Wolsey as universally hated during his chancellorship is inaccurate and that, although he may have been unpopular among London merchants in the 1520s for his fiscal policies, we should not mistake the “resentment of certain groups concerning certain specific policies for proof of a more general and more enduring personal unpopularity” (181).
war with France: “The subsidy, a highly successful innovation, should almost certainly be credited to Wolsey” (Elton 37). Although peace was secured by the Treaty of London in 1518, by the early 1520s hostilities had heated up again, with England continuing to side with the Empire and Rome against France. In response, less than ten years after their defeat at Flodden Field, the Scots were again gearing up for war, seizing the opportunity to ally themselves with France. As England had no standing army and was suddenly faced by the threat of invasion, Henry had to raise funds quickly. Wolsey’s plan, known as the General Proscription, mandated that everyone with property worth greater than £20 was to lend 10% of its value to the crown. To reach this, Wolsey sent surveyors throughout the realm in March 1522, and again in July 1522 (when he was dissatisfied with the results of the initial survey). In the Spring of 1523 he exacted the “loan” he had planned, as well as a lesser loan at the rate of 10% on those with lands worthy £5-20. Finally, Wolsey enforced a loan upon the clergy at a rate of 25% of their annual income. However, in 1529 Parliament granted that the loans did not need to be re-paid; what was a loan became—*ex post facto*—a tax. It is not hard to imagine, then, why Wolsey would be unpopular: “In any apportionment of praise or blame for the success or failure of the general proscription Wolsey must take the largest share, for if any one man was its creator and maintainer it was he” (Goring 702).

Later in the 1520s, as the war on the continent heated up, the crown’s need for money became more acute still. In response, Wolsey engineered several new taxes, which no doubt exacerbated his unpopularity. He levied a tax in 1524 which he termed the “Amicable Grant,” enforced at a rate of one-sixth of the laity’s movable property and one-third of the clergy’s. Only when popular unrest in London threatened to break into rebellion did Henry called off the grant (Elton 90-91). Perhaps the greatest reason for Wolsey’s unpopularity among Londoners was the economic impact of England’s wars, for which he was largely seen as responsible. In 1528, sensing that the Empire now dominated Rome, Wolsey worked to change England’s allegiance from Charles V to France. Since Charles controlled the Netherlands, and one-half of England’s population depended on trade with the Netherlands, Wolsey’s alliance-shifting threatened the
pocketbooks of many (A. F. Pollard 159). Taking money directly out of the citizenry’s pockets—through taxation—and threatening to take out more indirectly—through disruption of trading with the Netherlands—made Wolsey an unpopular figure among the urban crowd. It would seem, then, that in collecting these anti-Wolsey poems Colyns is giving voice to a larger urban discontent.

Three items occurring near each other, 63, 64 and 66 (ff. 155r-159v), exhibit sentiments hostile to the Cardinal. Item 63, which begins “In a ffreshe mornyng among the flowrys,” laments the fall of Anne Boleyn, who was beheaded on 19 May 1536.39 This text is the unique copy of a dream-vision allegory in which the dreamer sees a lion approach and embrace a falcon, symbolizing the marriage between Henry and Anne. The poem sheds some of its allegorical integumentum when it makes a more overt political reference to Anne’s imprisonment in the Tower of London: “They dyd hyr presente to A tower of stone, / Wher as she shold lame hyr-selfe A-lon” (f. 155r). Then follows a lament for her death:

Let vs pray to god of hys mercy & blysse
Hyr to for-gyve where she ha[th] don Amys,
Þat he may be hers, & she may be hys,
& send vs good fortune. Amen. (f. 155v)

Such a sympathetic treatment of her downfall is significant because Anne was one of Wolsey’s primary political enemies. Wolsey had never worked as diligently to secure the divorce as Henry would have liked, and such a lack of will on Wolsey’s part exasperated Anne, who was Henry’s full-time mistress by the late 1520s. Wolsey’s dithering was largely seen as delaying the official union of Henry and Anne. Given that this collection nowhere else celebrates—or even mentions—Anne, and given the many references to Wolsey, it seems likely that Colyns was attracted to this piece not because it celebrates Anne Boleyn but because it celebrates an enemy of Wolsey.

39 This provides a terminus post quem for this item, indicating that Colyns was working on items in this MS besides “The Annals of London” until late in his life.
A similar celebration of Wolsey’s enemy can be found in Item 10, “Of Edward duke of Bokyngam.” Edward was executed in 1521, convicted of treason at a trial overseen by the Duke of Norfolk. He was a life-long enemy of Wolsey, whom he hated “for his base birth, his overweening ways and his authority in the land” (Scarisbrick 120). The text copied by Colyns records the complaint of Buckingham as he awaits his execution in the Tower. It is a rather unremarkable text in which he complains to Fortune, insists that he still loves the King, protests his innocence, and prays to God to be his salvation at death. In an incident recorded in Richard Fiddes’s 1724 Life of Cardinal Wolsey, Buckingham is said to have been outraged to see Wolsey, the son of a butcher, wash his hands in the same water as the king. In response, he poured out the contents of the basin at Wolsey’s feet (Scarisbrick 120). The poem recorded in Colyns’s MS thus lionizes this man who hated Wolsey for his merchant background.

Item 64, “Of the Cardnall Wolse,” levels a particularly vehement attack directly on Wolsey. This poem begins in typically sycophantic form (“God save kyng herry, owur nobyll kyng, / And all þat byn to hym lovyng” [f. 156r]), but then proceeds to lament that the king has ceded such control to Wolsey:

To sette your Realme in quyetnes,  
Þat now ys in grete hevynes  
To se A Churle, A Bochers Curre,  
To Rayne & Rule in soche honour.  
Hyt ys to hye, with-owte mesure;  
Hys pryde hathe wastyd mvche of your tresure.  (f. 156r)

This critique refers to Wolsey’s merchant background: he was the son of an Ipswich butcher. (It is interesting to speculate on the ideological implications of a merchant collecting a text criticizing another merchant for rising too high.) The MS provides no evidence that such a sentiment bothered Colyns (i.e. no protestations, no particular marks to draw attention to these passages); here we will find efforts to locate subversion of the class paradigm to be frustrated. The poem continues on to accuse Wolsey of treason: “He Blyndeth your grace with sotell Reason, / & vndyr-myndyth yow by hye treason” (f.
Such a direct attack on Wolsey’s moral character leaves the message of this piece—which certainly lacks subtlety—beyond doubt.

The next piece also to attack Wolsey directly is Item 66, “Thomas, Thomas all hayle.” “Of the cardnall Wolse” criticized Wolsey for over-stepping his bounds and hence violating contemporary ideals of kingship; this item’s critique of Wolsey begins in the same vein, comparing Wolsey to his predecessor in name:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thom} & \text{as, Thomas, all hayle. Sythe} \\
\text{Of yngland the Rule & Souerente} & \\
\text{Of Ynglond thou haste had,} & \\
\text{Remembyr on Thomas of Canterbury,} & \\
\text{Whyche made all yngland gladde & mery,} & \\
\text{And thou haste made hyt sadde. (f. 158r)}
\end{align*}
\]

But the critique soon turns to economics: the commons, claims the author, “Curse [Wolsey] bothe day & nyghte” (f. 158r); the particular complaints of merchants are put forth overtly:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{By the owte of servyce many be constraynyd} & \\
\text{And cowse of merchaundyse } & \text{hou haste re[streyned,]} & \\
\text{Wherefor men syghe and sobbe;} & \\
\text{But } & \text{they had as myche money in stor[e]} & \\
\text{As men sey } & \text{hou haste, they wold syghe no [more],} & \\
\text{But purchesse A dispensacion to Rob[be]. (f. 158v)}
\end{align*}
\]

The poem continues for four folios in the same general vein of criticism.

The final two anti-Wolsey pieces are among the most well-known texts preserved in Harley 2252: “Speke Parott” and “Collyn Clout,” both by John Skelton (Items 54 and 59). The first of these is a political allegory comprised primarily of satirical attacks on Wolsey, who in 1521 was attending peace negotiations with Charles V and Francis I in Calais.\(^{40}\) Harley 2252 attests the oldest surviving copy of “Speke Parott.” This poem’s sentiments about Wolsey are unmistakable, and one recent critic has labeled it “one of the most intriguing campaigns of character assassination ever undertaken” (Walker, *John Skelton* 1). A parrot, who speaks through much of this poem, delivers heavily-veiled

\(^{40}\) For a detailed discussion of the coded references to Wolsey in Skelton’s poem, see Brownlow.
allegories about the political state of England and about new trends in the instruction of Greek and Latin. Though the allegory often seems impenetrable (witness A.C. Spearing, who claims that it “is of approximately the same degree of difficulty as The Waste Land, and, indeed, with its polyglot style and its structure of juxtaposed fragments, its difficulty is often of much the same kind” [Medieval 265]), it seems that many of its references would unmistakably be construed by a contemporary audience as critiques of Wolsey. The way that the parrot piles clever and abstruse criticism upon criticism obviates the need to decipher every single reference. The purpose of repetition is to get the generalized critique across to the audience, and so if one catches the meaning of the majority of the references, the obloquy is clear. Some of the allusions to Wolsey include:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{With purposse & graundepose he may fede hym fatte.} \\
\text{Thowghe he pampyr not hys paunch with he grete seall} \\
\text{We have longyd and lokyd long tyme for that,} \\
\text{Whyche cawsythe pore suitors haue many A hongry mele.} \\
\text{As presydent & Regente he Rulythe every deall.} \\
\text{Now pas furthe, good parott, owr lorde be your sped} \\
\text{In bis your journey to prospere and sped.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(f. 136r; 301-07)41

These lines make reference to the fact that Wolsey, who as Chancellor controlled the Great Seal, took the seal with him to Calais, and so much of the government business ground to a halt. Later the parrot states, “Altior heu cedro crudelior heu leopardo / Hev vitulus bubali fit dominus priami” (f. 137r; 347-48). The “vitulus bubali” refers to Wolsey, often criticized for having seized an undue amount of power from the young monarch; that line of criticism is picked up here, as Skelton suggests that he has become the lord of Priam, a reference to Henry VIII. Later, Skelton brings mocks Wolsey’s middle-class background: “So Bolde A Braggyng bocher & flesshe sold so dere / So many plucte partryches & so fatte quayllys / So manye a mastyfe curre the grete grey-houndys pere” (f. 139v; 485-87) Clearly, the indecorousness of having a butcher’s son in the highest echelons of power, as “the grete grey-houndys pere” (i.e. Henry VIII’s peer)

41 Here I am citing directly from Harley 2252, and so I provide reference to the folio numbers on which each citation is located; for easy reference I also provide the line numbers from Scattergood’s edition of Skelton’s poems.
rankled Skelton. And the criticism that lays out the most vehement calumny is reserved
for the penultimate stanza:

So myche Raggyd Ryghte of A Rammys horne,
So rygorous revelynge in A prelate specially
So bold & so Braggyng & was so baselye borne,
So lordlye of hys lokys & so dysdayneslye,
So fatte a magott bred of a flesshe flye
Was nevyr suche A ffyltyr gogon nor suche an epycure
Syn dewcalyons flodde I make the faste & sure. (f. 139v; 505-11)

By this point in the poem Skelton’s rhetoric has reached a vituperative pitch—the
bravado with which he attacks such a powerful figure is quite striking. To call Wolsey,
the most powerful official in the kingdom, a “fatte magott bred of a flesshe flye” does not
leave much to the imagination.

One of the more intriguing aspects of Colyns’s use of “Speke Parott” involves
his—or his exemplar’s—redaction of the poem. In Scattergood’s edition, the poem
occupies 520 lines, and Scattergood has relied upon Harley 2252 as his copy-text for
lines 1-56 and 224-520; lines 57-223 have been supplied from Lant’s Certayne Bokes
(printed ca. 1545), as these lines do not appear in Colyns’s version. Their omission raises
an interesting question, for they form the only substantial section of this poem whose
focus is on controversies other than Wolsey. Though these lines make reference to
Wolsey, most of them are comprised of Skelton’s entry into the so-called “Grammariian’s
War,” a debate aired in the early 1520s over pedagogical theory. One side held that
instruction ought to focus on imitation of classical authors, while the traditionalists held
that students should learn the rules of grammar from traditional authorities, such as
Donatus, as had been taught since the inception of universities. Skelton, always the arch-
conservative, sided with the latter camp (Spearing, Medieval 227). Parrot comments that
“our Grekis theyr Greke so well have applied, / That they cannot say in Greke, rydynge
by the way, / ‘How, hosteler, fetche me my hors a botell of hay!’ ” (145-47). Apparently,
Skelton’s contention with the new system is that one cannot learn the practical
application of the language merely from imitating classical authors. The omission of this
section places “Speke Parott” in a more stridently anti-Wolsey light. With the digression on the Grammarians’ War omitted, the rest of the poem becomes an even more focused act of character assassination. As John Scattergood reminds us, “The London manuscript compilers had their own priorities, and they were not necessarily the same as Skelton’s” (“The London Manuscripts” 180). Though Skelton may have intended several things to fall under his satirical scrutiny, Colyns’s version cares only for the critiques of Cardinal Wolsey.

At this point in Skelton’s career, he had long been removed from any position of eminence in Tudor circles. Originally, he had been tutor to Henry as a young prince, but apparently he was not worthy of tutoring the heir apparent, for when Prince Arthur died, leaving Henry in line for the throne, Skelton was dismissed from royal service and set up as rector at Diss (Norfolk). Greg Walker suggests that “Speke Parott” is part of Skelton’s plan to re-ingratiate himself with Henry VIII, and so, in his reading, the poet is playing on rumors and anticipating a serious rupture between the King and Wolsey. As he suggests, the poem is not so much a coherent argument for reform as it is a “series of ad hoc critical statements which follow slavishly the indications of royal feelings which would have been circulating at court” (John Skelton 86). Following on this, Walker suggests that the poem likely circulated in a coterie circle surrounding the Tudor court. However, like Skelton himself, there is no indication that Colyns was privy to the inner workings of the court; thus, Walker’s theory cannot explain why a middling London Mercer would end up with a copy of the text (or why he would have the earliest surviving copy). Perhaps there was a connection between Skelton and the London guilds, for the most recent editor of Skelton’s play Magnificence, written 1520-22, suggests that it was

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42 For an examination of the MS tradition of Skelton’s works, see Jane Griffiths 217-20. There, she comments that Colyns’s exclusion of Skelton’s discussions of the Grammarians War “offers evidence to suggest that Colyns, like the compilers of the other London MSS discussed above, was less concerned with the status of the author and the integrity of his works than with shaping those works to his own needs. […] His omission is a demonstration of the final authority of the compiler, rather than the author, in manuscript transmission” (218-19).

43 It does not seem possible that Colyns copied this text from a printed version, for “Speke, Parott” was never printed in his life; in fact, it was not until 1545, in Lant’s Certayne Bokes that the poem was first set into print, and so the poem must have circulated in MS form during the 1520s and 1530s.
likely performed in guild halls (42-50). Additionally, Colyns’s activities as a bookseller (discussed above) may have introduced him to the works of Skelton, who was a well-established author by the 1520s.

The second Skelton piece recorded in this collection, “Collyn Cloute,” is a much simpler poem and requires much less decoding of allegorical clues on the part of its reader. Here, the reader versed in estates satire and complaint literature, examples of which were thick on the ground in late medieval England, would be quite familiar with the conventions into which “Collyn Cloute” is tapping. The epigraph immediately alerts its audience to its genre: “Quis resurget Ad malyngnantes, aut quis stavit mecum aduersus operantes iniquitatem? Nemo, domino [sic]” (f. 147r). Such an opening announces to its readers, through its passionate and angry tone, that the text’s narrator is motivated by the concerns of a prophet—he is the one standing on the side of right, set against the erring masses. The poem then launches into a series of general laments about the depraved state of Colyns’s society:

For as fer as I can see
Hyt ys wronge with eche degre,
For the temporalte
Accusythe the spyrtyualte,
The spiritualti agayne
Dothe groge & complayne
Vppon the temporall men;
Thys eche with hothyr blen
Þe tone ayenste þat hother.
Alas, they make me shodyr,
For in hodyr modyr
The chyrche ys put in fawte. (f. 147r; 59-70)

Such a sentiment reminds one of Will’s righteous indignation at the various social strata in Passus VI-VII of *Piers Plowman*. But there is not much evidence in this MS to suggest that any generalized lament about the decay of social morals would be attractive to Colyns. Given the amount of anti-Wolsey material contained in Harley 2252, and given that this text follows soon after “Speke Parott” (whose association with anti-
Wolsey sentiment no one denies), it seems more likely that the parts of this poem that specifically target the Cardinal were what drew Colyns to this text.

Allusions to Wolsey do not occur as frequently in this text as in “Speke Parott,” but several are unmistakable. In reference to Wolsey’s mistress, Joan Larke: “For som sey ye hunte parkys / & hawke on hoby larkys / And hopher wanton warkys / When the nyghte darkys” (f. 148r.; 192-95). Later, Skelton writes:

Byldyng Ryally
Þeyre mancions cyrowusly
With torretys & with towrys,
With hallys & with bowrys,
So Recchyng to the sterrys
With glasse wyndowys & barrys,
Hangynge Apon the wallys
Clothys of golde & pallys
Arras of Ryche Array
As fresshe as flowrys in may. […]
Þeyre chambyrs welbe sene
With tryhumphe of cesar
And of pompeus warre
Of Renowne & fame,
By them to gete A name. (f. 151r-151v; 934-43, 955-59)

As John Scattergood notes, these lines allude to the wall tapestries hanging at Wolsey’s palace, Hampton Court (477). Here, Skelton has used the pronoun “ye,” which could either function as the second person plural or as a mode of address for a singular superior. The criticism in this passage is general enough to allow him to hide behind the ambiguities afforded by the pronoun. Is he criticizing the entirety of the higher-ranking churchmen? Or is he speaking directly about one in particular? Skelton even lays overt claim to the ambiguity of the target of his satire when he writes, “For no man haue I namyd / Wherfore shuld I be blamyd?” (f. 152r; 1111-12). Soon, however, it becomes clear that much of his critique is aimed at a particular “you,” though he never mentions him by name:

For ye love to goe trym,
Browghe vp of pore estate
With pride Inordynate,

67
Sodenlye vp sterte
From the donge carte,
The mactocke & the shovyll
To Rayne & to Rule. (f. 149v.; 641-47)

Though Skelton would have the defense that most of this poem could be read as a
generalized critique, as exemplified by the ambiguous pronoun usage, this particular
passage could not: it is too obviously referring to Wolsey alone. The audience would
likely, on reading this, be reminded of Wolsey’s non-noble upbringing; whether everyone
in Skelton’s audience was aware of such critiques, it seems fairly certain that Colyns was,
given the ‘classist’ attacks on Wolsey in Item 64, “Of the cardnall Wolse” (discussed
above). Moreover, one of Colyns’s contemporaries interpreted this poem as an attack on
Wolsey, for a note left by the copyist of “Collyn Cloute” in London, British Library MS
Lansdowne 762 records, on f. 71r, “The profecy of Skelton 1529.” 1529 marks the year
of Wolsey’s fall, and so it is quite clear that this compiler has interpreted parts of this
poem as a direct attack on Wolsey.

Because its reliance on traditional models of satire undermines the veracity of
Skelton’s particular charges against Wolsey, Greg Walker has questioned the usefulness
of this poem for historians. As he demonstrates, a poem criticizing an ecclesiast’s overly-
fanciful palace dwellings has antecedents in a fourteenth-century sermon, Walter Map’s
Latin poetry, Gower’s *Vox Clamantis*, *Piers Plowman*, *The Plowman’s Tale* and *Pierce
the Ploughman’s Crede* (John Skelton 134-35). According to Walker, Skelton’s use of
conventions, since the poet received them pre-fabricated and is not adding an original
critique, cannot tell us anything definitive about the Cardinal himself. We cannot
conclude from “Collyn Cloute” that Wolsey was actually any more voracious than other
churchmen of his time. Walker further points out that “Collyn Cloute” omits any
criticism of the merchant class or of lawyers, both groups that would have comprised
much of Skelton’s London audience. As he concludes, “Skelton was writing for a City
audience largely comprised of merchants and traders, and his intention was not to

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improve their morals by castigating their sins in homiletic fashion, but to appeal to their prejudices and grievances” (132). Thus, although “Collyn Cloute” may be unreliable as historical evidence about Wolsey’s moral character, it certainly provides further evidence of the political bent of John Colyns, one of Skelton’s earliest readers. The emphasis on Wolsey in this text, accompanied by “Speke Parott,” accords well with the series of anti-Wolsey texts recorded throughout this MS. Colyns clearly disliked Wolsey, and if he is like most London merchants, his problem was with the financially onerous taxation that was seen to be the Chancellor’s doing. In “Collyn Cloute,” Skelton sought an urban audience who harbored this resentment against Wolsey. In order to pitch this piece, he played off traditional criticisms of the powerful, and he clearly found a receptive ear in John Colyns.

1.6: London Guild Life: A “Contest Mobility System”:

In late medieval and early modern London, citizenship was the key to financial security. Men became citizens (and were subsequently known as “free”) through membership in one of the many guilds of the city, and they could not practice a trade unless they belonged to the appropriate guild. One could enter a guild in one of three ways: by apprenticeship, in which case one served a set term under a master, learning a particular trade and finally, after demonstrating the necessary skills, becoming a member of that particular guild; by redemption, in which case one purchased membership in a guild; or by patrimony, in which case one’s father’s position in a guild ensured one’s own membership. Apprenticeship was, by far, the most common route to citizenship, as nine out every ten citizens in the early 1550s had been an apprentice (Rappaport 24). Sylvia Thrupp notes how high the turn-over rate was in London, where the city constantly needed men from the provinces to take up apprenticeships just to maintain a sustainable
population growth (206-22). Recent historians have stressed the surprising amount of social mobility that the guild structure provided. Pamela Nightingale notes that “although the livery companies were run by the masters and were unashamedly hierarchical, the humblest apprentice was encouraged to identify his ambitions with the power and standing of his company, and he had every hope of rising in it” (565).\textsuperscript{45} Steve Rappaport has studied the guild system in early modern London most exhaustively, and his conclusions are worth examining in detail for the picture they yield.

One important thing for understanding Colyns and his literary compilation is the likely expectations that he would have had for his career. Rappaport offers the following contrasting sociological models, which help elucidate the aspirations that Colyns likely entertained:

Though in reality early modern societies contained elements of both, status attainment by achievement and by ascription can be seen as two contrasting, ideal-typical systems: “contest” and “sponsored” mobility systems. Success is something that can be achieved in a contest mobility system, opportunities for social mobility available to all who compete in what is essentially an open and competitive struggle. In a sponsored mobility system, on the other hand, success cannot be won merely by achievement. Rather, since membership in a superior estate is the indispensable key to success and candidates for admission are recruited directly by members of the elite on the basis of certain criteria, family background and often patronage are the factors which determine the level of individual status attainment. (288)

Rappaport’s study argues that historians have overemphasized the elements of sponsorship at play in London guild structures and have consequently obscured the many ways in which sixteenth-century London operated on a contest mobility system. Sponsorship was certainly not moot: for example, if one’s father was a member of an elite company, then one was well-placed to receive a good apprenticeship and thus have a foot up on the rest of the work force. However, once one entered a company, it was largely one’s ability that determined how far up the company echelons one would climb. Patronage could always give one a boost, but

\textsuperscript{45} See also Vanessa Harding 30-33.
there is no direct evidence that in sixteenth-century London family background affected rates of social mobility to the status of householder. Where a man was born, whether his father was alive, the social status of his family, whether he pursued an occupation which was the same or even similar to his father’s, not one of these factors had the slightest effect upon his chances of setting up his own shop. (337)

The picture Rappaport draws is of a city with a high degree of social mobility. The population of London did not have much of a chance to be overly elitist, overwhelmed as it was with people from the provinces. The city was certainly not operating under an exclusively sponsorship model—such a transient work force precluded that possibility. In fact, five out of six men who became citizens ca. 1550 were not born in London (77).

Within the guilds themselves, a hierarchy existed: at the bottom were apprentices, who had no real role to play in guild governance. Next was the yeomanry, which was the collective body of all those who were not in the livery of a particular company. (Colyns falls into this category.) The yeomanry consisted of journeymen, who as wage laborers were the poorer members of the guild, and householders, who were licensed to operate their own businesses. At the top of the company were the liverymen who functioned as the corporate elite of their respective companies. Though there was no formal minimum wealth requirement to enter the livery, a de facto minimum existed, as the costs of entrance, livery clothing, and supporting the company coffers when things were tight could be quite onerous (257). But these costs were apparently not prohibitive, as three-fifths of all non-journeyman Mercers in 1527 were in the livery (261).

Rappaport’s statistical analyses of London social mobility suggest that most who became citizens (and this was over 75% of London adult males) could expect to become householders. He estimates that 64-74% of those who became citizens left London to settle in the provinces (where most of them had come from). This emigration created opportunity for those who stayed: “In early modern London becoming a householder and thus having a shop of one’s own was a reasonable expectation” (340). The key to making
a living in London was to stay there and to live long enough to move up the successive steps within the guild. 46

Life under such a “contest model,” where one rises within the confined structures of the guild based on one’s talent, could easily contribute to a belief in the ability to master one’s environment. If a tradesman worked harder, his efforts were rewarded in a more direct way than in other realms of late medieval and early modern economic life. This is not to say that London operated on an open-market, capitalist system—Rappaport is very clear on this point (366); however, this is to suggest that the guilds would have offered a merchant in the sixteenth century opportunities for social advancement that were lacking in most other arenas of economic life. London guilds offered one the most immediate forms of social mobility in response to one’s labor, for it was one of the few areas, outside of the clerical ranks, where one’s potential for economic success was not predominantly circumscribed by one’s birth. 47

Two further texts, which I have not yet discussed, provide the most striking examples of Colyns’s immersion in a largely contest-based society. The first is Item 11, which records a series of proverbs of good counsel. There is a heavy emphasis in this text on proper service:

Whate man þou serve, Alway hym drede,
And hys good as þine Awne spare;
Lett nev yer þy wyll þy wytt ov yer lede;
Be lowly & servysabyl & love hys welfare. (f. 3r)

46 This social mobility does not extend to entering the livery, for that seems to have been a relatively elite position in London. As Rappaport states, “Barring death or departure from London, approximately three-quarters of the city’s men became householders but no more than two-fifths of those men crossed the second major division of the estate hierarchy of the livery company and thus gained entry into the elite” (348). Nevertheless, I would contend that, relatively speaking, even this rate of mobility is not evidence of an entrenched elitism. A world where the majority of the males could expect to become householders, and two-fifths of those could expect to don the livery must have seemed a welcome alternative to the more limited options outside the city.

47 Of course one could here object that Wolsey’s rise from middle-class origins to becoming the wealthiest man in England challenges Rappaport’s model, since Wolsey rose through the predominantly aristocratic world of court politics. I would, however, contend that Wolsey is the exception that proves the rule. For proof of this, one need look no further than the stigma that followed him throughout his life: “Of the cardnall Wolse” records the scandal of seeing “A Churle, A Bochers Curre, / To Rayne & Rule in soche honoure.”
This text proceeds in Polonius-like fashion, issuing a series of moral admonitions and platitudes to its reader:

He þat yn yowþe no vertue wyll use,
In Age all honour wyll hym Refuse.
Spend no manys good in vayne
For borowered [sic] thynge wyll hom Agayne. (f. 3r)

Such an emphasis on proper moral behavior is not in and of itself surprising. Texts like these abound in late medieval England, and Frost notes nine extant contemporaneous analogues (138-40). But this text’s emphasis is not on proper service and behavior in order to accord with God’s will or to fulfill some duty to societal norms; rather, the ending of this text makes clear that one should follow the precepts herein to accrue financial benefit:

Yf þou be trobylyd with ynconvenyens
Arme þe alway with Inward pacyens;
Inure þe with them þat byn wyse
Then to Ryches thow shalt Aryse. (f. 3r)

In what sounds like a proleptic version of the Protestant work ethic, we are here told that if one acts in accord with virtue, then one will grow in wealth. This ideal squares quite comfortably with a contest model of social mobility: in both the system as laid out by Rappaport and this anonymous poem, one’s success is largely determined by one’s efforts.

The second text is Item 50, an ephemeral prose narrative that Colyns has scribbled in the top right corner of f. 84v. He has written the first line of the text from right to left, then rotated the paper ninety degrees and begun writing parallel to the long end of the folio. It is likely written in this fashion because Colyns is cramming this material into the last two folios of a quire. This particular text is found on the blank leaves at the end of the final quire containing Ipomadon. But the crammed presentation of this particular piece—one of only two pieces in this MS to be written vertically—suggests an urgency of presentation, as if Colyns needed to include this text badly enough that he placed it
anywhere it would fit. This text is the narrative of a merchant, so Colyns’s desire to fit this text into his collection makes sense on a topical level.

In this short anecdote, an English merchant travels abroad and is called by “a grete lorde of þat contre” to a feast. At this feast the lord questions the merchant on the veracity of the reputation of Englishmen as the best-fed nation in the world, for he has heard that “one man wolde ete more then vj of Another nacyon” (f. 84v). The anecdote concludes with the merchant’s reply that there are three reasons the English eat so much:

one was for love, Another for phesyke & the thyrde for drede, syr. As towchyn for love, we use to haue many dyvers metys for owr frendys & kynnes & folke; some lovythe one maner of mete & some Another becawse every man shulde be contente. The second cawse ys for phesyke, for dyvers maladyes þat men have; som wyll ete one mete & som Another be-cause every man shold be pleasyd. The thyrde cawse ys for drede; we have so grete A-bowndans & plente in owr Realme yf þat we shulde not kyll & dystroye them, they wolde dystroy & devoure us, bothe beste & fowles. (f. 84v)

Certainly Colyns’s nationalistic pride is at play here, as an Englishman plays instructor to a foreign lord; it would seem that humor is also at play here, as the merchant’s third response seems intended to evoke a laugh. But also at play is an insistence on seeing the merchant as the one controlling the information, as the one in the pedagogically superior position to an aristocrat. The merchant answers the question that the lord cannot; he provides the humorous third reason; and, most importantly, his voice is the one that dominates this narrative. This lord is holding a feast—a particular marker of aristocratic identity in late medieval England—yet this very feast is incomplete without the merchant’s presence and knowledge. After all, it was the lord who sent for the merchant. This feast is shown to be imperfect because it is inferior to English practices: it is the English who can eat so much because they have the abundance that obviates the need to worry about reckoning food supplies. The status of a never-ending food supply, of there being no need to count, of reveling in excess all subtend the aristocratic practice of feasting. But in an inversion, it is here the merchant who delivers the information containing that very logic. This short narrative plays a triumphalist role in Colyns’s
collection, affirming his class identity. Thus, I find it difficult to accept the moralizing titles which Frost and Parker each ascribe to this particular piece: “Drei Gründe für die Völlerei der Engländer” (261) and “The Reason for Gluttony in England” (93).

Yet at the center of this same collection lie the two romances—Ipomadon and the Stanzaic Morte Arthur—which belie the relativity of the rest of this collection (to be discussed in Sections VII and VIII, below). These texts bear the mark of cultural memorialization: a clear and polished presentation, a use of catchwords, a consistent number of lines to a page, spaces for illuminated initials, a neat and polished script. All of these qualities are markers of a text aimed at stability, one that is distinctly not ephemeral. Among these romances, furthermore, Ipomadon endorses aristocratic social ideals, and so sits in ideological contrast with the surrounding mercantile texts, which evince a contest model. The Stanzaic Morte, by fostering a sense of what I will term communal mourning, encourages its audience’s identification with the nation of England. In this regard, it accords well with some of Colyns’s more ardently patriotic texts, as discussed above. The MS, however, bears no acknowledgment of any incongruity between the ideological significance of Ipomadon and Colyns’s text, nor between the professional appearance of the romances as a whole and the amateur, private appearance of Colyns’s texts. With this paratactic relationship between the romances in the center and the mercantile material surrounding those romances, Colyns has created a dual-voiced cultural artefact.

1.7: Ipomadon

The romances in this MS are clearly central to Colyns’s cultural practice, yet at the same time they do not exist in the same relation to his lived experience as those texts which he copied out by his own efforts: the two former texts are a commodity, something
purchased with Colyns’s expendable income and something likely created on a speculative basis, made for an anonymous market; the latter texts were brought to life by the physical labor of this merchant, selected and copied with an eye to their place in his commonplace book. Further, the first of the texts which Colyns purchased, *Ipomadon*, exists in ideological tension with those ‘mercantile’ texts that form the bulk of this collection (Item 47). Such contrast is maintained on the codicological level, as discussed above, for the clean, polished appearance of the romances causes them to stand out from the irregular and haphazard copying practice of Colyns. This very appearance reminds the modern viewer of this MS that a synthesis between these two sections of this MS was never fully achieved. But this lack of synthesis can be seen beyond the level of the materiality of the text, for when we attend to the social significance of *Ipomadon*, it is clear that—within the context of Harley 2252—it refuses to participate in a mercantile project.

This tension will only seem puzzling if we approach this MS with an overly reductive and simplified view of ideology: if the merchant class of early modern London inhabited a world marked by a general social mobility, then why would a merchant choose to purchase and read a romance aimed at those above him, one that denies the existence of social mobility and insists on a static view of social class? Such a view, however, depends on defining ideology as a simple ‘master key’ which can explain cultural practice. I would suggest that a workable theory of ideology must be flexible enough to encompass a cultural practice—like Colyns’s—that can at times work against one’s class interests and double back upon itself in apparent contradiction. It should be one that always remembers that ideology is a lived experience, and that life contains contradictions that cannot be adequately explained by such broad categories as ‘mercantile ideology.’ For this more complex conception, Raymond Williams—borrowing from Antonio Gramsci—substitutes the term “hegemony,” of which he comments:

> A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships,
and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice, that is, hegemony can never be singular. [...] It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice. (Marxism 112-13)

Within the widely varying contexts of Harley 2252, we see evidence of just this “realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities,” for Colyns’s cultural interests range over a wide variety of mercantile texts, as discussed above, set beside this romance that envisages a traditional society, based on nobility of blood.

Central to my project is the idea that a text can never be said to exist in material abstraction, simply as Literature, that its materiality is fundamental to the ways it can create meaning for both its original community and for subsequent readers. “It is essential,” as Roger Chartier insists, “to remember that no text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read” (161). Thus a text, such as Ipomadon, that endorses an aristocratic social ethic, collected by a merchant and included in a MS containing texts otherwise interested in social mobility and mercantile concerns, is fundamentally a different text from The Lyfe of Ipomydon, edited by Tadahiro Ikegami and published in paperback from Seijo University Press in 1983. It is, then, to Ipomadon as it was used by John Colyns that we now turn.

Ipomadon draws upon the conventions of the Fair Unknown narrative, a type whose outright endorsement of aristocratic difference and superiority contradicts the meritocratic undertones of urban life. In fact, the social dynamic of the Fair Unknown texts is nearly diametrically opposed to that which undergirds a contest mobility system. In a general sense, the Fair Unknown text involves an aristocratic character’s conscious decision temporarily to give up the noble life and to undergo a series of tests to prove his

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48 Larry Benson defines the Fair Unknown narrative as a story in which “a young man, either concealing or not knowing his parentage, undertakes an adventure to which he is guided by a sorrowful damsel, who heaps abuse on him until finally he proves himself worthy of the climactic adventure” (Malory’s 97). For a discussion of the Fair Unknown in medieval literature from across Europe, see Mills’s introduction to Lybeaus Desconus (42-60).
worthiness to hold the title he has abdicated. This is a type of narrative in which the protagonist seeks to perform deeds incognito and then, at the conclusion of the narrative, reveals his identity and at one instant claims all of the honor that had been deferred due to the other characters’ doubts about his nobility. J.A. Burrow refers to this process in *Ipomadon A* in monetary terms: the hero accrues honor throughout the story, but by refusing to claim it as the story proceeds, he winds up with more honor by the story’s conclusion—he has, as it were, earned interest (28-32). The ending of the tale erases any doubts about whether this unidentified knight could really be worthy of his deeds, causing those characters in the story—and often the reader—to re-think the narrative and re-consider their ethical evaluations of the protagonist.

This type of narrative exhibits and tests some of the mythology that subtended medieval views of social class, in which it was widely assumed that the aristocracy exhibited a moral superiority to the rest of society: “The postulate is that external evidences of refinement arise from an inner nobility. Psychology is recruited to explore and validate a proposition that courtiers are not simply those people who occupy a particular role and station in life, but indeed are beings essentially and qualitatively different from ordinary and inferior people” (Burnley 79).

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49 Examples of this type of narrative in Middle English can be found in the versions of *Ipomadon* and *Lybeaus Desconus*; traces of it can be found in *Havelok the Dane, King Horn,* and *Sir Percyvell of Gales.* Thomas Malory also relies heavily on this narrative convention: besides “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney,” discussed below, traces of the convention occur in the story of Arthur and the Sword in the Stone (12-16), the Balin episode (61-92), the tale of Sir Torre (99-120), La Cote Male Tayle (459-76), and Alysaunder le Orphelyne (633-48). All references to Malory’s text are from *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory,* ed. Eugène Vinaver.

50 There are three Middle English versions of this poem extant, known as the A, B and C versions, each of which survives in a single MS. *Ipomadon A,* which survives in Manchester, Chetham MS Mun. A.6.31 (8009), is an 8,890-line tail-rhyme romance dating from between 1375-1450 (Purdie xi). The version recorded in Colyns’s MS, a 2,346-line metrical romance known as *Ipomadon B,* was likely composed around the time of its copying (i.e. 1450-75) (Ikegami lxiv). Finally, *Ipomadon C* is a prose version of the poem that survives in Longleat House, Longleat MS 257 (*olim* Marquis of Bath 25), dating to the middle of the fifteenth century and owned by Richard of Gloucester shortly before his accession (Meale, “The Middle English Romance” 138-39). The source for all three of these versions is the Anglo-Norman romance *Ipomedon,* composed in the late twelfth century in the Welsh Marches by Hue de Rotelande. Of the three versions the A-text is usually found to be the aesthetically superior text and is the closest, most faithful translation of the Anglo-Norman original (Schmidt and Jacobs 40-44).

51 One is here reminded of the Myth of Ham, a medieval interpretation of Gen. 9:21-23, in which Ham, the youngest of Noah’s three sons, fails to cover Noah’s naked body while he is sleeping. According to the
of Knychthede provides a cogent example of the perceived connection between lineage and virtue: “In the quhilk lordschip thare is sa meckle nobless, and in servitude thare is sa meckle subjection, bondage, and thrillage, that grete difference is betuene, and than suld thare be alsmeckle difference in the personis, as thare is difference betuix the twa estatis” (14). It is precisely this myth that informs the Fair Unknown narrative.

Much of this social mythology not only connects moral superiority to noble birth, but also physical superiority. Hence, one sees an emphasis on the size and physical prowess of chivalric heroes. But beyond raw physical strength, there is also a perceived connection between lineage and male physical beauty (and thus we get the Fair Unknown). In Ipomadon A, this is played out in a particularly humorous scene wherein Ipomadon has left Calabria and has ventured off to France in order to fight with the king and to win renown for himself. While there, he learns from another knight that Lyolyne has come to Calabria to claim the hand of La Fièrre for himself. Ipomadon, having never met this knight, inquires about his physical appearance. The response to his question is telling:

“Ys he fayre?” “Ney certys, he!
A fowler man ther may non be
Ne more vncomely thyngh!
Hys hed ys row wyth feltred here,
Blake bryste[l]d as a bore,
Hys browys full they hynge;
Wyth longe tethe, I warand yow,
Euery lype, I dare avowe,
Hyngyth lyke a blode puddynge.” (6144-52)

The humor here is driven by an excessive description of Lyolyne’s physical repulsiveness, with the clear suggestion that Ipomadon, the truly noble hero, possesses a

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common medieval interpretation of this scene, the three brothers represent the three estates of society, and the punishment which Ham received is carried by the peasants of the medieval world. Also relevant is Susan Crane’s discussion of the use of pastoral imagery in late medieval aristocratic Maying rituals. According to Crane’s reading, the use of such simplistic imagery, by its deliberate valuation of the valueless and trivial, re-affirms the superiority of aristocrats over those who work on the land, and whose labor is thus directly dependent on these pastoral images which the courtiers are flaunting (The Performance 55-58).

52 Quotations from the A-text are from Ipomadon (ed. Purdie).
superior physical appearance to match his superior chivalric abilities (which will be made manifest when he subsequently defeats Lyolyne).

These Fair Unknown texts explore this social mythology through the identity of the hero. It is his movements up and down the “social ladder” that forms the vehicle for the testing of aristocratic social mythology. Typically the hero begins in what is perceived by the other characters as a debased social position and only assumes an elevated position once he has demonstrated enough martial prowess to allow him to remove his disguise. It is, in the words of Alex Davis, “a contrived test” of the connection between lineage and virtue (55). The plot’s tension revolves around whether the other characters in the narrative are aware of the identity of the man behind the disguise, and in well-constructed versions the characters become aware in successive steps (with mounting tension). What is consistent throughout the Fair Unknown texts is that the protagonist voluntarily takes on a debased social role and earns his prowess while in that role. Thus, for all the characters know (and sometimes for all the audience knows), the lineage of the person performing the noteworthy chivalric deeds does not live up to the valor of those deeds. These texts consistently threaten to unravel the myth of aristocratic class, suggesting that high birth does not have to precede chivalric action and that chivalric action does not have to arise from high birth. However, the ending to these texts just as consistently reveals this to be a feint. The hero finally reveals his identity at the end, and all the potential questions about the class myth are answered emphatically: indeed chivalric action is innately connected to high parage. There is, then, a confident circularity to the Fair Unknown texts.

The structure of these texts increases the tension under which the class myth must strain. The ending, when the fool who has done the amazing deeds pulls off the mask and everyone sees that he is actually a nobleman, forces the characters to re-evaluate their ethical judgments of the protagonist. Those readers who believed in the hero’s ascent and saw him as a non-aristocrat who had managed to pull himself up by the bootstraps, as it were, would find that they had made an error in judgment, for there was no social ascent after all—merely revelation of inherent nobility. By contrast, those who resolutely
refused to believe, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, that a fool could ever act the part of a knight are vindicated at the dénouement. These texts, then, provide a coherent testing and reinscription of the myth of nobility, a myth that contradicts the impulses underwriting much of the rest of Harley 2252.

The clearest example of this textual process can be seen in Malory’s “Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney,” which is worth examining in detail for the specific ways its use of the Fair Unknown motif plays out this drama of social class. In this story, Gareth, an exceedingly tall young man, comes to court incognito, requesting three boons, the first to be given now and the others to be revealed later. Arthur agrees, and Gareth requests merely food and drink. In response, Arthur gives Gareth over to Kay’s guidance. Kay, as is to be expected, mocks Gareth, calling him “Beawmaynes,” Fair Hands, which “calls attention unkindly to Gareth’s most outstanding feature: not his extraordinary height but his aristocratic hands, which seem unsuitable to his apparent status as a ‘vylane’ lacking high parage” (Ruff 108). At the Feast of Whitsuntide, Linet comes to Arthur seeking a knight’s aid in freeing her sister from the pursuits of an evil duke. It is at this point that Gareth makes his final two requests: that Lancelot dub him a knight and that he be given the charge of aiding Linet’s sister. Arthur keeps his word and grants both requests. As Gareth journeys with Linet he overcomes a series of chivalric challenges, culminating in the defeat of the Red Knight of the Red Lands, who has held Linet’s sister, Dame Liones, prisoner. Gareth and Liones fall in love, Gareth’s identity is revealed, and Gareth and Liones’s chastity is tested. Gareth then proves himself in a tournament against the Round Table, following which he and Liones are married.

Malory’s particular use of this narrative type is so masterful because of the way he builds suspense. The narrator of “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney” himself feigns ignorance about the status of Gareth’s identity, thus amplifying the social dynamic already at play in this text. The narrator seems to be as ignorant as any character in the text as to Gareth’s identity. Before Kay has rudely given Gareth the epithet “Beawmaynes,” the narrator simply refers to Gareth as “this yonge much man” (294). Subsequent to Kay’s bequeathing of the epithet, the narrator adopts the use of the name
Beawmaynes himself. Prior to his dubbing, Gareth in fact reveals his name to Lancelot (299) and then later to Linet and the Blue Knight (317). But even after both revelations by Gareth the narrator continues to call him Beawmaynes. Only once Gareth has defeated the Red Knight of the Red Lands and has thus freed his future wife from a wrongfully-motivated suitor does the narrator begin to refer to Gareth by his proper name. This increases the narrative tension, for throughout much of this story, due to the omission of the narrator’s reference to the name of Gareth, son of King Lot, the reader is led to believe that this seeming arriviste might not have the expected pedigree to be performing such feats of arms. In fact, quite the opposite effect is achieved: the narrator, by adopting Kay’s epithet in reference to Gareth, suggests that this knight who is effortlessly performing chivalric deeds may be nothing but a kitchen knave who happened to have learned some good fighting skills. Of course the ending resolves all of these tensions, but for most of this text, Malory’s style of narration has amplified the class tensions already inherent in a Fair Unknown story.

When Kay gives Gareth the name “Fair Hands,” he is implying that this man, who did not act in an aristocratic or chivalric manner (since he requested merely food and not a horse and armor), had some of the physical signs of noble birth, but that they are misplaced on such a low-born one as Gareth seemed to be. While Gareth is temporarily mis-located by being placed in the kitchen by Kay, his servile surroundings do not adulterate his identity. Of course, Kay is not aware of this, and merely imagines that he is sending a knave to his proper social place. But the specific location of the kitchen serves to amplify that social tension, for once there Gareth has to work with his hands. Though he is surrounded by those who have worked with their hands their entire lives, the beauty of Gareth’s own hands shows that he had previously avoided labor. The same tension between the character’s physical markers versus his social appearance is at play in the title “Fair Unknown,” which reminds us that the character bears the aristocratic marker of beauty (i.e. he is “fair”), but that his social station is unclear (i.e. he is “unknown”). These texts are not about revealing how one can prove oneself; rather, they are about revealing the mistakes we make when we try to locate chivalric prowess in the
non-pedigreed. Texts that appear to offer a meritocratic economy of reward for chivalric performance ultimately, at the conclusion, show themselves to be anti-meritocratic. Chivalric performance does not hold open try-outs.

Raluca Radulescu’s reading of “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney” contrasts with my analysis; she suggests that Malory’s text endorses social mobility by inviting the audience to identify with Gareth’s social ascent, which would have a particular appeal to Malory’s gentry readers. The gentry were, after all, just coming of age in the fifteenth century. As her study demonstrates, around 1400 they began to be recognized as a distinct class immediately below the nobility, and the gentry in fifteenth-century England became particularly dependent on the nobility in order to win positions and titles.53 Many sought to enter knighthood or the service of a particular nobleman, and Edward IV is especially noteworthy for having knighted many members of this class (7-14). In Radulescu’s reading, “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney” would have an appeal to such an audience, for in Gareth’s character they can equate social status and action—one can better one’s social situation by performing the proper deeds: “Gareth represents a model for any gentleman who wants to perfect himself in knighthood, a common fifteenth-century concern for the gentry who wanted to gain access into higher social circles through emulation of the behavior and activities of the aristocracy” (92). Central to Radulescu’s reading is the notion that Gareth’s noble identity, once re-covered and re-established, is recognized to be the product of individual exertion. This is why the gentry would find it attractive. But such a reading cannot account for the confident circularity of the Fair Unknown texts. Here, at the text’s conclusion, the audience is reminded that, although Gareth has worked his way up the ‘chivalric ladder,’ he is only proving that he was noble from the start. In the end, the joke is on the audience for their failure to recognize his nobility.

I have spent this time discussing “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney” because it brings the social dynamic at play in Fair Unknown texts to the fore. Ipomadon also

53 For further discussion of the importance of the gentry in fifteenth-century England, see Chapter 2, Section III.
participates in this same dynamic. This romance narrates the story of Ipomadon, the son of the King of Apulia, who hears about the daughter of the recently-deceased King of Calabria. On hearing of her, Ipomadon immediately falls in love and receives permission from his father to seek her. He disguises himself so as not to seem noble and is taken on as the lady’s cup-bearer. Almost immediately a strong sexual attraction grows between them, and she invites Ipomadon to dine with the court. At dinner, though, he stares at her longingly, and when the maiden scolds her cousin Jason for staring at his lover (which is intended as a subtle hint to Ipomadon), Ipomadon decides to return to Apulia. After his departure, the lady falls under pressure from local barons to marry; she finally acquiesces, agreeing to marry whomever wins a tournament to be held in Calabria. Ipomadon disguises himself and returns to Calabria, where he enters the household of King Mellyager, the lady’s uncle, as servant to Mellyager’s wife. On each morning before the tournament, Ipomadon tells the king’s court that he prefers to hunt instead of going to fight in the tournament, which evokes scorn. Yet each day, Ipomadon sends his steward, Tholomew, to do the hunting, and Ipomadon rides, disguised, into the tournament. At the conclusion of each of the three days of jousting, Ipomadon brings the food that Tholomew has caught and presents it to the queen.

The first three days of the tournament completed, days which had been devoted to jousting, the final day commences, during which Ipomadon sends the horses he has won each day in the jousting to Mellyager, Mellyager’s wife, and the maiden, among others. At this point everyone knows that their guest was actually not a hunter but a great knight; however, Ipomadon has still not revealed his name, and he returns to Apulia, where he finds that his father has died. His mother gives him a ring, an identical copy of which she had earlier given to her illegitimate son. Ipomadon postpones his accession to the throne until he has improved his chivalric reputation, entrusting the throne to his uncle until he returns. Ipomadon then returns to Calabria to seek further adventures, where he dresses like a fool, wearing rusty armor and wielding a crooked spear. At Mellyager’s castle he

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54 The author of the A-text adopts the name of “The Fere,” after Hue de Rotelande’s character La Fièrre; the author of the B-text never mentions her name, and thus I refer to her as “The Maiden.”
requests to be given the next adventure, when suddenly a maiden and dwarf appear requesting the court’s help in defending their lady from an evil duke (the very maiden for whom Ipomadon had fought in the tournament). Ipomadon is given the task, and he defeats the evil duke, donning the dead duke’s armor. Ipomadon then tries to ride to see the maiden, but as she sees someone approaching in the duke’s armor, she assumes the worst and flees on a boat. Campanus, one of Mellyager’s knights, then takes it upon himself to fight the knight whom he assumes is the victorious evil duke. As Ipomadon and Campanus begin to do battle, Campanus recognizes Ipomadon’s ring; they are indeed half-brothers, and with that Ipomadon reveals his identity and Ipomadon marries the maiden. They live together in happiness “Tille theyme departyd dethe sore” (f. 84r; 2334).55

From the text’s inception, there is no doubt that Ipomadon’s behavior matches the nobility of his blood, for from his youth he exhibits nobility—an identity which he will subsequently attempt to obscure (per the conventions of the Fair Unknown text):

Hende he was, curteyse and fre,
A godelyer man myght no man see.
They preysed hym, bothe more and lesse,
Both man and woman, as I gesse.
All lovyd hym þat were hym by,
For he bare hym so curtessely. (ff. 54v-55r; 69-74)

This is a rather conventional romance depiction of the hero: the adjectives “curteyse” and “fre” are particularly class-bound appellations. As Ipomadon is preparing to enter the land of Calabria, the home of the damsel with whom he has fallen in love, he makes his retinue swear that they will not reveal “what I am” or “Where I shall go ne whens I cam” (f. 57r; 233-34). Although Ipomadon lacks the suspense that characterized “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney,” wherein the audience did not know the protagonist’s identity until later in the narrative, the end result is still the same: the hero consciously conceals his noble identity in order to take up a debased social position.

55 I provide quotations from The Lyfe of Ipomydon (ed. Tadahiro Ikegami). The line numbers I provide correspond to Ikegami’s edition, as well.
Ipomadon dramatically effects this social position by dropping to his knees and adopting the posture of a beggar at the feet of the lady. He asks that he might live at her court to learn her “norture” (f. 57v; 272). Yet the lady can see that this is a ruse, that this man should not be serving, for she notes that “Hym semyd wele a gentilman” (f. 57v; 280) and that “for no seruyce come he noght” (f. 57v; 286). Apparently, no matter how hard he may try to pretend that he is not a king’s son, his superior inner nature cannot be subdued.\textsuperscript{56} Ipomadon happily accepts the role of cup-bearer to the lady, and though his noble identity is unknown, this servile position cannot erase her doubts.\textsuperscript{57}

Ipomadon’s aristocratic behavior is so ingrained that he cannot cease acting like a nobleman, even though the part would seem to call for a suspension of noble behavior. As he begins working in the kitchen, he gives “a lace of sylke full clere” (f. 58v; 326) to the butler. This act of gift giving marks him as noble, as is indicated by the members of the court who discover Ipomadon’s act: “Grete honowre they spake hym alle / And sayd he was no lytelle man, / That suche yiftys yiffe kan” (f. 58v; 336-38). Such an act continues to complicate Ipomadon’s class identity. He has, to this point, desired a servile position, but his behavior and appearance cause other characters to question whether he really belongs in such a low position. This complication suggests that Ipomadon’s attempts to hide his identity can only be partially successful, that no matter how hard he may try to obscure his noble origins, the outside world continues to perceive them. Ipomadon is not the actor that Gareth was.

As was the case with “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney,” the text of \textit{Ipomadon}, at this point in the narrative, offers the enticing suggestion that nobility is imitable, and that one could, as Ipomadon has done to this point, simply perform the proper deeds and gain

\textsuperscript{56} One is reminded of the \textit{kyne-merk}, that physical marker on Havelok’s body that testified to his superior birth. Also analogous is a scene from Malory, where the Lady of the Lake is seeking Sir Tristram so as to win his support in preventing Arthur’s death. As Malory relates it, she recognizes him instantly, without having seen him before: “And thus [as] she rose uppon a downe she mette with sir Trystram, and anone as she saw hym she knew hym” (490). In both cases, as in \textit{Ipomadon}, high parage is manifested materially.

\textsuperscript{57} Such positions of service were often seen as honorable in romance: Lucan is Arthur’s butler and Bedivere his cup-bearer; however, such does not seem to be the implication in \textit{Ipomadon}, where the protagonist’s employment places him in the kitchen, in contact with the menial servants. The position of
the requisite social recognition. This possibility remains open in the following scenes, as well, wherein Ipomadon exhibits his skills in hunting—another potentially learned behavior. But in spite of the possibility that the audience might laud the notion of social advancement through imitating noble behavior, the ending will point up such desires as illusory. Throughout the majority of the text, however, the potential for nobility to be located in action alone rests tantalizingly before the audience’s eyes. In all these moments, nobility of behavior is to the fore and nobility of blood is—temporarily—forgotten.

When he later returns to Calabria and enters the service of King Mellyager’s wife, Ipomadon continues making conscious efforts to obscure his identity. The complex ends to which he goes to manipulate others’ perceptions of his social class increase the social tension already inherent in the Fair Unknown narratives. Here, Ipomadon disclaims interest in the events of the tournament being held for the hand of the lady he loves; instead, he tells Mellyager’s court each day that he is going hunting (which of course is merely a ruse so that no one will suspect that he is the mysterious knight performing the marvelous deeds each day at the tournament). But Ipomadon is consistently in control of the performance of his class identity: his act of duping the court into thinking he is but an unimportant servant of the king who has no interest in the martial aspects of aristocratic life builds suspense for the final revelation of his identity. Each moment, as Ipomadon tricks the court again, adds one more layer to the incorrect image that they hold of him. The more honor he accrues—but defers—throughout the narrative, the more he can claim at the end, in one triumphant moment.

The steps Ipomadon goes through to fool the court are quite intricate and exhibit his interest in theatrically manipulating events so as to control the social valence of his identity. He had previously hidden his greyhounds and horses in the nearby town, and on each morning he excuses himself to go hunting while the rest of the court’s men go to participate in the tournament. Ipomadon changes into his armor in the woods, while cup-bearer seems to be envisioned as the highest form of service, but service nonetheless. In the A-text Ipomadon is referred to as a “valet.”
Tholomew hunts in his place. After fighting incognito, he returns to the woods and takes up the catch which Tholomew has brought back, which he then presents to the queen as if he has caught the animal himself. This is all orchestrated by Ipomadon to achieve the maximum awe in the court audience once his identity has been revealed: the color of the armor he wears to the tournament each day matches the color of the greyhound with which he claims to have hunted (and about which he is sure to tell the queen). After the first day, when Ipomadon had fought in white armor, he gives the deer he has caught over to the queen. A messenger enters and reports to the court about the day’s proceedings at the tournament: “In white armure he was dight, / In all þe feld was none so wight, / But if it were my lord, þe kynge” (f. 66v; 913-15). Ipomadon then instructs the messenger to relay to the king that “my good whyte greyhound / Hathe slayne more dere and broght to ground / Than wold hys haue done to-day” (f. 66v; 923-25). The court does not realize the coincidence of colors for three successive days, but Ipomadon is here laying the groundwork for their future realization. He is attempting to control his social identity by dictating the exact manner and speed with which he re-ascends the social ladder and re-assumes his rightful place as a king’s son.

Ipomadon spends but a brief time back in “Poyle-lond,” during which time he discovers that his father has died. His refusal of the crown for the time being provides a further indication that he is controlling the public perception of his identity. In a perfect narrative sequence, the crown would mark the culmination of a Fair Unknown’s progression up the social ladder. Thus, he must delay its acceptance until he has satisfactorily revealed his identity to those in Calabria and claimed the lady for himself. In order to achieve this next step, he now must further conceal his identity, and so he assumes the appearance of “a fole” by shaving, donning rusty armor and a crooked spear, and riding “on an old rouncy” (f. 75v; 1637-50). He knows he must return to Calabria in order to win the lady for good, which he cannot do under his old appearance, for he was by now too well known in the land. But the extreme measures he takes to obscure his identity—to the point of inviting scorn—show the lengths to which he will go to manage the process of his social unveiling.
In the final episode, Mellyager’s court receives Ipomadon, and he asks to be given the next feat of arms which arises at the castle, which request Mellyager grants. Conveniently, a maiden and dwarf appear, requesting the court’s help in freeing the lady from Duke Geron, who is commanding that she marry him. Apparently Ipomadon’s decision initially to leave Calabria after the tournament—where he had earned the right to claim the lady as his wife—left her in a vulnerable social position. Once again she was nearly forced into a marriage by the pressures of neighboring magnates, and once again Ipomadon is there to remedy the situation. Here, Ipomadon rides with the maiden and dwarf, just as Gareth did, and Ipomadon is abused by the maiden, who expresses incredulity at the prospect of this fool being worthy of rescuing the lady. The progression of the narrative becomes frustrating, as we expect Ipomadon to reveal his identity and claim the woman he has already won. The text gestures towards entropy, threatening to devolve into an endless series of deferred revelations. Again, as happens in Malory’s “The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney,” the damsel falls for the hero at the moment he has proven that he is indeed no knave. Once Ipomadon has put on the armor of a defeated knight, and once he thus looks the part, the maiden falls for him and presses him to forget about the heir of Calabria and be with her instead. And like Gareth, Ipomadon will not be distracted from the goal of achieving the highest eligible bachelorette in the land, and so he rejects this maiden’s seductions.

After defeating Duke Geron, Ipomadon is finally ready to reveal his identity. The pieces are in place and he can finally take off his mask. His reputation having reached critical mass, he can now stake a claim to all the deeds he has performed. It is now time for everyone to find out that this unknown, mysterious “straunger” is indeed a king’s son. The questions about the social status of the unknown servant at the lady’s court, of the man who served Mellyager’s wife and surreptitiously won the hand of the lady, of the fool dressed in rusty armor, are all answered in one instant. Here, Ipomadon recounts his actions to Campanus and his retinue, after which they recognize Ipomadon’s identity with one voice:
They saw it was þe same knyght,
þan all there hertes began to light.
Euere as they went, they gan hym kysse,
There was joye and moche blisse.  (f. 81v; 2135-38)

Once the lady is brought to Ipomadon, he recounts the entire narrative in extensive detail (f. 82r; 2167-2204). This thirty-seven line précis of the narrative serves to cement Ipomadon’s social status in the characters’ minds. The story ends quite suddenly—as do most romances about the hero proving himself worthy of the lady—with their marriage. All of the tension between noble action and noble birth is triumphantly discarded at this text’s conclusion. The eponymous hero had seemed to be lacking the pedigree that is a prerequisite for such an impressive chivalric performance; however, we all find out definitively that there was never any incongruity, that aristocratic behavior is indeed exhibited by aristocrats. At the conclusion, then, nobility of blood and nobility of behavior are finally rejoined in triumphant fashion and the meritocratic impulses the text had conjured are now voided.

Carol Meale has argued that the three Middle English versions of *Ipomadon* attest the wide appeal of “conduct literature” in late medieval England. Both the A- and B-texts can be traced to merchant ownership, and the C-text was owned by Richard, Duke of Gloucester (the future Richard III). The extensive focus on Ipomadon’s education and aptitude in the service of both the lady’s and Mellyager’s courts indicates, according to Meale, “a didactic emphasis on matters of courtesy [. . . which] proved especially attractive to audiences in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (the time during which all three MSS were produced and were in circulation) for during this period courtesy books proliferated” (“The Middle English Romance” 155-56). According to Meale, though such literature could appeal to gentry and aristocratic interests, as evidenced by the emphasis on service in Edward IV’s *Liber Niger*, it could also appeal to members of the middle class aspiring to social advancement. However, I disagree with such a reading for much the same reason as I disagreed with that of Radulescu: both foreground the narrative’s focus on social mobility to the exclusion of the elitist mentality.
exposed by the dénouement. Both readings, that is, foreground the text’s display of imitable behavior, thus disregarding the elitist endings of the Fair Unknown texts, endings which foreclose the meritocratic tendencies conjured through the narrative. Once the character—be he Gareth or Ipomadon or Lybeaus—reveals his identity, it becomes clear that there was no real social mobility, that it was all a feint. Someone in the contemporary audience who, reading or hearing a Fair Unknown text and identifying with the hero’s social ascent, thinking to himself that he could do what the hero did, would—at the conclusion—find himself quite disappointed.58

In a reading which contrasts with those of Meale and Radelescu, Alex Davis suggests—quite rightly, I believe—that the implications of the motif of the unknown knight recovering his identity run counter to the idea of social ascent by any but the gentle classes. In such texts, social ascent is shown to be natural, the product of one’s innate virtue, and not of ambition: “Everything that appears to make such narratives into tales of meritocratic advancement simultaneously indicates that the character in question is merely drifting towards his proper level in the social hierarchy” (57). The question this raises is how such an anti-meritocratic text functions inside the otherwise mercantile collection of John Colyns.

Indeed Ipomadon sits uncomfortably within the rest Harley 2252, which is so focused on the concerns of merchant life. London guilds operated on a system of social reward for one’s labor. As Rappaport indicated, there was a mobility system within the guilds into which its members could reasonably expect to tap. One became an apprentice, then a journeyman, then a householder (and possibly a liveryman). As one

58 Susan Wittig, in her discussion of the “male Cinderella” motif (which encompasses what I have referred to as the Fair Unknown), offers an alternative view to that of Meale and Radulescu, one which I find equally unconvincing: “It serves as a means by which the culture can resolve certain conflicts it feels about the restrictiveness of its class system. In one sense, the romance serves as an apparent vehicle for upward mobility; it offers the hope to the lower class that even a princess can be won by a worthy man, whatever his economic and social status. But at the same time, it endorses the upper-class belief that worth and birth are synonymous, that only a nobleman can be a noble man, fit by nature to gain the princess and the kingdom and to rule over both. Perhaps this ability to bridge two distinctly different classes within the culture […] is one of the most important aspects of the Middle English romance and accounts in large measure for its importance as a community ritual and for the culture’s determination to preserve it” (189).
moved up one earned a greater income and more prestige within the company. But Colyns purchased this particular romance, a text that, in his compilation, sits in a paratactic relationship to its mercantile surroundings. Nowhere does Colyns indicate any ideological disconnect between this text and the rest of his collection. But perhaps we are operating on an oversimplified view of ideology if such a parataxis surprises us, and perhaps we are oversimplifying Colyns’s cultural practice. The type of ‘code switching’ this MS required of its sixteenth-century readers is indicative of how ideology is a lived experience and not an economically predetermined set of practices. The comments of Raymond Williams are once again particularly helpful:

We have to revalue “determination” towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue “superstructure” towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue “the base” away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process. (“Base and Superstructure” 410; emphasis mine)

In his particular formulation of the base-superstructure relationship, Williams reminds us that ideology is not a reflexive process, that human beings exert pressures both for and against the dominant culture. Here Colyns’s MS exhibits some of the “fundamental contradictions” of late medieval and early modern society. Colyns was able to generate a MS responsive to the values of one involved in capital exchange. Yet at the heart of that very MS is a romance whose core values run counter to that ideology. Real, lived cultural practice threatens the reductive dichotomies that an oversimplified historical narrative would like to place upon this London merchant of the early sixteenth century.
1.8: The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*

Unlike *Ipomadon*, the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* has some clear affinities with the textual project that Colyns himself recorded in Harley 2252. Overall, through its elegiac longing for a lost political unity, this romance provided Colyns with a means of imaginatively participating in a national identity. In this way, the *Morte* connects to the other texts in Harley 2252 that called its readers into a common association founded on a conception of the nation as an organic whole, underwritten by an ideological coherence and consistency. In all of these texts, then, we can catch glimpses of how this particular merchant envisioned the kingdom and what part he desired to play in it. Colyns has purchased a text that is—relative to both the Middle English Arthurian tradition and to its Old French source text—obsessively focused on the destruction of his nation’s idyllic period. The intensity of this focus leaves the reader bereft, without the standard consolation that other Arthurian texts provide. Thus, the audience of the Stanzaic *Morte* is forced into what I will term communal mourning. In such a way Colyns can identify with the collective enterprise of the English nation.

One way of speaking or writing about one’s nation is through a pragmatic approach, wherein one draws upon empirical data to define a nation and its significance. In modern usage, we most often see such an approach in those who discuss their country through facts and figures (e.g., the GDP, rates of inflation, interest rates, spending on foreign aid). Underlying such discussions is the belief that things like the economic health of the nation or the state of the nation’s poor or the depth of the nation’s international charity can be adequately expressed in the form of data. Many of the texts in Colyns’s collection exhibit such a pragmatic nationalism, including his list of all the MPs of each shire, the record of the acts passed by the 1534 Parliament, the petition to Henry VII regarding foreign traders in London, and the several lists of the kings of

59 This romance, an adaptation of the Old French Vulgate Cycle’s *Mort Artu*, has been definitively established as a source for parts of Tales I, VII and VIII of Malory. See Kennedy, “Malory” 48-55. For a further discussion of Malory’s adaptation and synthesis of the *Mort Artu* and the Stanzaic *Morte*, see Donaldson; Robert Wilson; and Vinaver cxiv-cxviii.
England (Items 31, 34, 24, 46 and 84, respectively). In each of these texts, Colyns can be seen to have an interest in the nation as a whole. The very fact that he recorded each of these lists, that he deemed them worthy of commemoration is indicative of his identification with England as a nation. Although we will never be able to locate Colyns’s specific motivations for collecting these particular texts—for that is not the kind of thing that archives transmit—we can draw certain conclusions about the likely relationship between text and collector: without evidence that Colyns intended these texts to be read subversively or ironically, we can conclude that they are all texts of endorsement, texts that one would not likely include in a private collection unless one, for example, valued the historical foundations of England’s throne or believed that Parliament was an institution which in some way embodied the nation.

An alternative form of conceptualizing national identity is through a more imaginative one, whereby one relies on a narrative about the nation. In modern times this form of imagining the nation can be found in cultural mythology, such as “The American Dream.” The belief that one can rise solely by effort and that talent provides the only limitation underwrites the economic attitudes of many Americans. Colyns’s relation to England as a whole can similarly be glimpsed through some of the more imaginative texts of nationhood that he has provided. As an example, the triumphalist rhetoric of the poems about the Battle of Flodden Field (Items 42 and 43), discussed above, provides some insight into his patriotism. The act of copying these texts next to texts of more obvious economic interest intimates an organic continuity between mercantile and national affairs. The inclusion of these texts that unequivocally celebrate the national victory over the Scotts, that lionize Henry VIII and vilify James IV, that laud the great noblemen who led England into battle—all inscribed by the hand of a merchant—suggests that he imagined himself as connected to those events. The zeal and vitriol of the anti-Wolsey materials, furthermore, strongly indicate Colyns’s belief in the importance of national politics. After all, one does not comment on the aberrance of national policy without imagining that he/she has a personal investment in that nation’s government. The voice of the one crying for reform is the voice of one who perceives
himself to have some personal stake in the institution. Through these more imaginative texts we can glimpse that on some level Colyns envisioned himself as personally invested in the politics of the realm of England.

It is here that his decision to purchase the Stanzaic Morte receives its most important contextualization within Harley 2252 (Item 52). The Morte is, as I will argue, a text presupposing audience identification with a sense of national unity. This notion of a common readership is announced from the opening lines of the text:

Lordinges that are lef and dere
Listeneth, and I shall you tell,
By olde dayes what aunters were
Among our eldres that befell. (f. 86r; 1-4; emphasis mine)\(^{60}\)

The first person plural pronoun establishes a common association between audience and narrator. This pronoun insists that what is to follow is our history. A comparison with the opening of its source, the Mort Artu, makes the invocation of the Middle English poem all the more striking:

Après ce que mestres Gautiers Map ot mis en escrit des Aventures del Seint Graal assex soufisanment si com li sembloit, si fu avis au roi Henri son seigneur que ce qu’il avoit fet ne devoit pas soufrire, s’il ne ramentevoit la fin de ceus dont il avoit fet devant mention et comment cil morurent dont il avoit amenteües les proesces en son livre; et por ce commença il ceste derrienne partie. Et quant il l’ot ensemble mise, si l’apela La Mort le Roi Artu, por ce que en la fin est escrit comnnet li rois Artus fu navrez en la bataille de Salebieres et comment il se parti de Girflet qui si longuement li fist compaignie que après lui ne fu nus hom qui le veïst vivant. Si commence mestres Gautiers en tel maniere ceste derrienne partie. (1)\(^{61}\)

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\(^{60}\) I provide quotations from The Stanzaic Morte Arthur (ed. Larry Benson). Line numbers also refer to Benson’s edition. Note, though, that this edition on occasion regularizes the scribe’s morphology. For ease of reference, though, I have reproduced Benson’s readings.

\(^{61}\) Hereafter, all quotations from Mort Artu are from La mort le rois Artu (ed. Frappier). Translations of the Mort Artu are from Norris Lacy (ed. and tr.), The Death of Arthur. Lacy translates this as: “After Walter Map had put into writing the Adventures of the Holy Grail as fully as he thought proper, his lord King Henry was of the opinion that his work would be left unfinished if he did not recount the rest of the lives of those about whom he had earlier spoken and the deaths of those whose feats of prowess he had recorded in his book. And for that reason he began this last part, and when he had composed it, he called it The Death of King Arthur, for the end tells how King Arthur was wounded in the battle at Salisbury and how he was
This version distances the audience from identifying with the narrative: what is to follow will not be a common endeavor between teller and audience, as in the Middle English redaction; here, the work’s creation can be fully explained by the patronage relationship between Henry II and “Walter Map,” to whom this romance is spuriously attributed. This is a text that is the product of Map’s literary labor, as the final sentence makes clear, so if the reader plays any role, it is purely a passive one. The text is completed by Walter Map and the reader is merely to receive that finished work. The Middle English version, by contrast, replaces exclusion with a collaborative enterprise between text and audience.

From the text’s opening lines, there is an assumption of familiarity with the Arthurian tradition. The second stanza makes this clear:

The knightes of the Table Round,
The Sangrail when they had sought,
Aunters they before them found
Finished and to end brought;
Their enemies they bette and bound
For gold on life they left them nought.
Four yere they lived sound,
When they had these workes wrought. (f. 86r; 9-16)

The simple reference to the completion of the Sangreal suggests familiarity with the events immediately preceding the kingdom’s dissolution. Of course, this is the order of tales found in the Vulgate Cycle, and this is the order which Malory maintained. In this text, however, there is no Sangreal—the narrative simply begins with a reference to the quest for the grail having been completed. Such an omission assumes the audience knows the basic details of the quest, for none are forthcoming from this text.

More importantly, though, this reference points towards the uniqueness of the Stanzaic Morte, for the absence of the previous adventures of the Arthurian kingdom from this text forces the audience’s focus squarely upon the dissolution of the kingdom. This uniquely excessive focus on the destruction of the realm concentrates the audience upon a brief, distilled moment of loss, inviting a communal sense of mourning. Whereas

 separated from Girflet, who stayed with him so long that he was the last one to see Arthur alive. And in that way Master Walter begins this final part” (91).
the Vulgate Cycle’s and Malory’s narratives both set the downfall within the context of the entire history of the Round Table, and thus give a diachronic perspective through which to view this tragedy, the Stanzaic Morte only affords its audience a synchronic view of the last moment of the corporate body of chivalry. In this text there is no consolation that the kingdom was ever powerful, that the world was at one time positively affected by the ethos of chivalry, or that the political values of Arthur’s realm were ever firmly established—as there are in the diachronic texts. In fact, quite the opposite occurs here, for from the very inception of the text the destruction of the kingdom sets in. As Arthur and Guinevere lie in bed, in a rare moment of intimacy between this couple whose love almost never bears children in the Arthurian tradition, Guinevere explains to her husband that the kingdom is in disarray:

Sir, yif that it were your will,
Of a wonder thing I wolde you mene,
How that your court beginneth to spill
Of doughty knightes all bydene;

Sir, your honour beginnes to fall,
That wont was wide in world to sprede,
Of Launcelot and other all,
That ever so doughty were in deed. (f. 86r; 21-28)

Set within this scene of intimacy is the ominous warning of political destruction. From the beginning, the note of imminent demise has crept into the one arena which should be safe from such sentiments. The marriage bed, theoretically life-giving, becomes the foreboding scene of a coming death.

There are other Middle English Arthurian romances which have a similar synchronic focus on Arthur’s court and do not participate in an encyclopedic narrative of the history of that court. Such narratives, similar to the Stanzaic Morte, deny the consolation of viewing the ‘good times’ of Arthur’s realm, and thus set themselves apart from the diachronic texts. However, unlike the Stanzaic Morte, such texts do not actually narrate the destruction of Arthur’s kingdom, and thus do not force the audience into what I have termed communal mourning. Two of these in particular share the Stanzaic
Morte’s foreboding sense of the destruction of the realm and thus merit brief consideration. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, for example, the audience sees a text removed from any placement in the historical narrative of Arthur’s rise to power and subsequent fall. Within this synchronic look at the court, the audience is afforded a short series of moments that, taken individually, might not seem significant, but when taken in the aggregate, over the course of the narrative, paint a chilling portrait of a court unaware of its own imminent demise. One such moment occurs in Fitte I; here, after the Green Knight has entered, described in all of his disconcerting size and color, the court is reduced to silence:

Þerfore to answere watz arȝe mony aþel freke  
And al stoune at his steuen and ston-stil seten  
In a swoghe sylenye þurȝ þe saule riche.  
As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez  
In hyȝe—  
I deme hit not al for doute  
Bot sum for cortaysye—  
Bot let hym þat al schulde loute  
Cast vtnto þat wyȝe. (241-49)

The poet’s understated rhetoric, exhibited in the last four lines, subtly implies that the court’s prowess is wanting. As the poet says, all in the court were quiet; not all, however, were quiet “for doute,” but rather some were quiet because that was in accord with the dictates of courteous behavior. The narrator’s description of so much “doute” is a tacit indictment, then, of the court’s chivalric virtue. Such a suggestion, which begins with the idea that not everyone was failing at this moment, certainly frustrates a reader’s attempts to locate the perfect operation of chivalry in Arthur’s court. This suggestion subsequently validates the Green Knight’s declaration that the court is comprised of “berdlez chylde” (280).

Most of the tension in Fittes III and IV revolves around Gawain’s attempts—and failures—to live up to the rigid requirements of the chivalric life. Nevertheless, after great anxiety and a series of difficult challenges overcome, Gawain returns to the court with the girdle, the symbolic representation of lessons learned. Whatever the girdle is to
symbolize, it is certainly invested with much of Gawain’s spiritual and physical labor. He imparts to the court just how much symbolism has become invested in the girdle:

\begin{quote}
Þis is þe bende of þis blame I bere in my nek.
Þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I laȝt haue
Of couardise and couetyse, þat I haf cȝst þare;
Þis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I haf cȝst þare. (2506-09)
\end{quote}

This is the public acknowledgement of his sin, of his fallibility and limitation as a human being. This acknowledgement is Gawain’s act of sharing with the court the substance of his anagnorisis. Yet in spite of what should be a similar moment of reflection for the court, a very different response is evoked:

\begin{quote}
Þe kyng comfortez þe knyȝt, and alle þe court als
Laȝen loude þerat and luflyly acorden
Þat lordes and ledes þat longed to þe Table,
Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue. (2513-16)
\end{quote}

The poem then rapidly concludes by reminding the reader that this is one of the greatest adventures since Brutus’s time. But the tension between Gawain’s arduous journey to and adventures at Hautdesert, and his subsequent confession to the court of his limitation, is sharply juxtaposed with the court’s lack of reflection. We are left with the image of Arthur comforting the knight and the court laughing in merriment. For the court, the girdle will never be the polysemous symbol, invested with a great personal struggle, that it is for Gawain. Yet the ending leaves the reader with the discomfiting suggestion that, ignorant of this fact, the girdle will assume a regular place in the clothing of Arthur’s courtiers, a trivial piece of courtly livery. There are this text, then, deep and foreboding intimations of the problems inherent to Arthur’s kingdom.

A similar synchronic focus on the court, divorced from the larger historical narrative of Arthurian history, can be found in The Awntyrs off Arthure, a late fourteenth-century romance in which Gawain and Guinevere encounter the ghost of Guinevere’s mother, who speaks to them of the importance of charity and humility for salvation. Gawain asks the ghost about their future, and in the question he admits that Arthur’s conquests have been motivated by greed (260-63). In response, the ghost tells them that
the kingdom will fall and that Arthur will be killed by another knight. The medieval reader, of course, would immediately understand the cryptic reference to Mordred. Then, the ghost adds:

In kyng Arthurs halle  
The child playes atte the balle, 
That outray schall yo alle 
Derfely that daye. (308-11) 

The ghost then departs, leaving Guinevere and Gawain to ponder this striking and startling detail. This image of the child who will bring down the kingdom, figured as playing an innocent child’s game, is never resolved and never discussed further in the text. Once the ghost has gone, Guinevere and Gawain return to the court, and the second half of the text is taken up with a dispute over land between Gawain and Galrun, a knight who claims that some of his lands have been wrongly given to Gawain.

This unresolved tension, and all of the accusations against the morality of Arthur’s court, are thus never resolved in this text. The very notion of Mordred as a child sends a chilling message throughout the conclusion. The one who is to bring down the kingdom, one who is otherwise always figured as an adult and a knighted member of the court, is suddenly shown in an unquestionably innocent light. But within that moment of innocence, the audience is forced to recognize the terrible events of the future. As A.C. Spearing comments, “I find this the most poignant moment in the poem: at this point of equilibrium, Mordred is only a child, playing harmlessly and innocently in Arthur’s court, yet he is Mordred all the same, and must play the terrible part we know in the coming destruction” (Medieval 137). Instead of playing out those events, instead of actually narrating the downfall of the Arthurian kingdom, The Awntyrs chooses merely to hint at the events to come in the ominous figure of a child playing with his ball.

The Stanzaic Morte certainly shares with Sir Gawain and The Awntyrs an interest in the destruction of the idyllic political state; what makes it unique, however, is that this

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62 In this chapter, quotations from The Awntyrs are from Ywain and Gawain, Sir Percyvell of Gales, The Anturs of Arther (ed. Maldwyn Mills).
is the only Middle English text to focus synchronically on the destruction itself. Whereas Malory, Layamon’s *Brut*, and the Old French Vulgate Cycle tell Arthur’s story over the *longue durée*, narrating the kingdom’s destruction in the context of its entire political development; and whereas the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* tells of Arthur’s extensive continental conquests; and whereas *Sir Gawain* and *The Awntyrs* both contain hints of Arthur’s downfall, the Stanzaic *Morte* is the only Middle English text to be composed solely of the political destruction. Unlike the texts of the diachronic tradition, this narrative does not offer its reader the consolation of an historical process. And unlike *Sir Gawain* and *The Awntyrs*, this narrative does not offer the subtlety of a mere hint of destruction. The Stanzaic *Morte*, like nothing else in the Middle English Arthurian tradition, lays the corpse of political unity upon the table for its audience to see, forcing that audience into a position of communal mourning.

In addition to its uniqueness within the Middle English Arthurian tradition, it is also important to consider the Stanzaic *Morte*’s relationship to the Old French *Mort Artu*. Through such a comparison, we get a clearer picture of how the Middle English version places its predominant ethical concerns on the communal level instead of on the individual level, further suggesting why such a text might have been attractive to Colyns, who was so interested in the collective enterprise of the English nation. The opening lines of the Stanzaic *Morte* encourage the reader/audience to consider the corporate body. As discussed above, the opening stanza speaks of the adventures “Among our eldres that befell” (4); by contrast the *Mort Artu* states that it will narrate “conmnet li rois Artus fu navrez en la bataille de Salebieres” (1). In the Middle English version, the focus is on the actions of the political community, not on those of a solitary monarch. As they lie in bed together, Guinevere tells Arthur that the honor of all his knights is now in jeopardy, and this suggestion instigates Arthur to call a tournament. It is this very tournament which initiates the downfall of the kingdom, as Agravain begins to lie in wait to catch Lancelot and Guinevere together. Arthur’s concern for the reputation of his court thus initiates this series of events, and ultimately the downfall of the kingdom. From the very inception of
this text, then, the Middle English adaptor’s preference for querying communal ethics rather than personal ethics becomes clear.

One of the noteworthy innovations the Stanzaic *Morte* makes from its source regards the locus of moral failure. The *Mort Artu* went to great lengths to show Arthur’s personal failings. Such a focus on the personal has the cumulative effect of locating the blame for the downfall of the kingdom within the register of sin and penance, which, of course, makes sense, given that the editor of the *Mort Artu* dates its composition to the middle of the 1230s and posits a clerical authorship for the entirety of the Vulgate Cycle (Frappier vii-ix). Such a focus on personal sin would accord well with the theological interests of the thirteenth-century Church, which at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made yearly auricular confession mandatory for all laypeople. On one level, the *Mort Artu*’s Arthur is portrayed as a fool, as one so obtuse that the audience is forced into viewing him with ironic disdain. In one instance that does not enter the Middle English tradition, Arthur is lodging at the castle of Morgan La Fey, whose walls contain a series of pictures Lancelot painted while he was prisoner several years prior. The paintings detail Lancelot’s greatest accomplishments, including his continued adultery with the queen. When Arthur sees this, he expresses his awareness of Lancelot’s sin: “Par foi, fet il, se la senefiance de ces letres est veraie, donques m’a Lancelos honni de la reîne, car ge voi tout en apert que il s’en est acointiez; et se il est veritez einsi com ceste escriture le tesmoigne, ce est la chose qui me metra au greigneur duel que ge onques eüsse, que plus ne me pooit Lancelos avillier que de moi honnir de ma fame” (61). Morgan confirms Arthur’s knowledge that Lancelot and Guinevere have been carrying on an affair. Arthur has here encountered a memorialization of Lancelot and Guinevere’s sexual acts. These acts have been recorded—albeit in the privacy of a

63 For a full discussion of the changes that the Stanzaic *Morte* makes to its Old French source, see Kennedy, “The Stanzaic.”
64 “My word, if these letters are telling the truth, Lancelot has dishonored me with the queen, for I see clearly that he was having an affair with her. And if that’s true, as these letters suggest, this causes me more grief than I’ve ever known. Lancelot could not shame me worse than by dishonoring me with my wife” (106).
bedroom—and preserve the memory of Lancelot’s illicit love. It is a very un-subtle way of reminding the audience that Arthur knows in one of the most overt ways possible that Lancelot is a traitor to the realm. Subsequently, when Agrain finally makes public the charges against Lancelot, Arthur’s reaction is telling: “Comment, fet li rois, me fet donc Lanelos honte? De quoi est ce donc? Dites le moi, car de lui ne me gardasse ge jamés que il ma honte porchaçast; car ge l’ai touzdis tant ennrò et chier tenu que il ne deüist en nule maniere a moi honte fere” (109).65 Such a protestation rings hollow, following as it does upon Arthur’s earlier unequivocal discovery of Lancelot’s indiscretion. Perhaps this depiction of Arthur was omitted by the author of the Stanzaic Morte because of its lack of psychologically coherent motivation, for the Old French Arthur comes across as rather foolish at this particular moment.

Arthur’s obtuse incredulity continues on the day before his battle with Mordred. On the prior night Arthur had dreamed that he was on the Wheel of Fortune, and Fortune herself “le prenoit et le trebuschoit a terre si felenesement que au cheoir estoit avis au roi Artu qu’il estoit touz debrisiez et qu’il perdoit tout le pooir del cors et des membres” (227).66 The narrator tells us that Arthur had unequivocally understood the meaning of the dream: “Einsi vit li rois Artus les mescheances qui li estoient a avenir” (227).67 The next night, as Arthur is preparing for battle, he goes for a walk with the archbishop, and they come upon a rock inscribed with the following: “EN CESTE PLAINGNE DOIT ESTRE LA BATAILLE MORTEL PAR QUOI LI ROIAUMES DE LOGRES REMEINDRA ORFELINS” (228).68 Again, as was the case with Lancelot’s illustrations of his sin, the text has presented a memorialization of the message which Arthur is to

65 “‘What!’ said the king. ‘Is Lancelot dishonoring me? What is this about? Tell me, for I never suspected him of seeking my dishonor, and I’ve always honored and cherished him so much that he should never shame me in any way!’ ” (119). In the Stanzaic Morte at this moment Arthur does not express a similar doubt that Lancelot could have committed adultery with Guinevere. Instead, he expresses sadness that Lancelot’s chivalric greatness should be debased by his moral failings: “Alas, full grete dole it were / In him sholde any tresoun be!” (f. 108r; 1742-43).
66 “And then she took him and dashed him to earth so cruelly that it seemed to King Arthur that he was crushed and that he lost all the strength of his body and its members” (150).
67 “Thus did King Arthur see the misfortunes that were tobefall him” (150).
68 “THIS PLAIN WILL BE THE SITE OF THE TERRIBLE BATTLE BY WHICH THE KINGDOM OF LOGRES WILL BE ORPHANED” (150).
ignore. The letters, carved in stone, are intended as a public display. This is not a private correspondence which Arthur has chosen to ignore, nor is it a prophecy shrouded in enigmatic language which he might be said to fail to interpret. It is, rather, a verifiable public inscription whose meaning is unmistakable. Yet Arthur’s hubris becomes evident in his response to the archbishop, who had told him not to proceed with the battle:

\[
\text{Sire, fet li rois Artus, g’en voi tant que, se ge ne fusse tant venuz avant, je retornasse, quel que talent que ge eüsse eü jusques ci. Mes or soit Jhesucrist en nostre aïde, car ge n’en partirai jamés jusques a tant que Nostres Sires en ait donee enneur a moi ou a Mordret; et se il m’en meschiet, ce sera par mon pechié et par mon outrage, a ce que ge ai greigneur plenté de bons chevaliers que Mordrés n’a. (229)\]

There is here a sense that his personal failings have corrupted his will, for his intellect recognizes that this is not the right course of action, but he seems powerless to fight his own depravity. He is determined to have it out with Mordred, in spite of the warnings of Lady Fortune, the words of the archbishop, and the inscription of Merlin.

The final moment which is illustrative of the \textit{Mort Artu}’s focus on Arthur’s hubris comes after the end of the great battle with Mordred. Here, only Arthur, Lucan and Girflet have survived, and as Arthur stands up to survey the carnage, he “prent Lucan qui desarmez estoit et l’embrace et l’estraint, si qu’il li crieve le cuer el ventre, si qu’onques ne li lut parole dire, einz li parti l’ame del cors” (247).\footnote{“He seized Lucan, who was wearing no armor, and embraced and clutched him so strongly that he crushed his heart within his chest. And Lucan had no time to say anything as his soul left his body” (155).} This moment does not survive into the Middle English tradition, and the effect of its omission is quite striking. As Edward Kennedy suggests, the crushing of Lucan is “an act that suggests God’s disfavor” with Arthur (“The Stanzaic” 95). The effect of these moments causes the reader to locate a good deal of the blame for the kingdom’s fall in Arthur’s personal failings. With these moments removed, the Stanzaic \textit{Morte} encourages the reader to look elsewhere for that blame. The results of this re-location of blame leave the reader without the consolation

\footnote{“I see enough that, if I hadn’t come so far, I would be convinced to turn back, however eager I had been until now. But now may Jesus Christ come to our aid, for I will never leave until Our Lord has given victory to me or to Mordred; and if I come to harm, it will be because of my sin and my own failure, for I have far more good knights than does Mordred” (150).}
of dismissing the kingdom’s fall as the personal failings of a man. Such a consolation would be a more comfortable solution, for the medieval reader—including Colyns—would likely have the requisite tools to understand the discourse of personal sin. Nevertheless, the Stanzaic *Morte* refuses this consolation, locating the blame for the dissolution somewhere in the social aggregate. Once again, the audience of the Stanzaic *Morte* is forced into a position of communal mourning.

Evidence for the Middle English text’s shift away from a register of personal morality comes in the narrator’s references to the relationship between Arthur and Mordred. Of course the reader educated in the Arthurian tradition would know of the incestuous relations between Margawse and Arthur, resulting in Mordred’s conception. But the author of the Stanzaic *Morte* only references this relationship obliquely:

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That false traitour, Sir Mordred, 
The kinges soster son he was 
And eek his own son, as I rede 
(Therefore men him for steward chese).  (f. 122r; 2954-57)
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Such a reference merely makes the reader do a bit of figuring before realizing that Arthur had sexual relations with his sister. It does not deny the relationship, but rather gives the narrator a loophole through which he can avoid directly mentioning the incest. The addition of the clause “as I rede,” so often a throw-away tag line intended to fulfill metrical requirements, is here doing more: by locating Arthur’s indiscretion in the source text, the narrator again defers responsibility for Arthur’s indiscretion away from his own narrative and onto his Old French source. Though this reference may seem coincidental, the second time the narrator mentions Arthur and Mordred’s relationship is not so, for there he omits any mention of Arthur’s incest:

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Arthur then changed all his cheer; 
What wonder though his herte was sore! 
His soster son, that was him dere, 
Of him shoulde he here never more.  (f. 124; 3140-43)
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In this case, Mordred and Arthur are made out to be nothing but nephew and uncle. By not reminding the audience of them, the narrator has chosen not to indict Arthur’s personal failures.
This shift away from personal ethics and towards communal ethics can be dangerous, for if the reader is then to have any consolation in the narrative, it has to be located in the secure operation of institutions. Here, those institutions are shown to be flawed and unstable, further deferring any possibility of consolation for the reader of this text. One such important moment involves the flawed administration of justice, particularly in the case of Guinevere and the poisoned apple. At dinner, a certain unnamed squire, seeking to kill Gawain, places a poisoned apple in front of Guinevere, knowing that she would pass the first piece of fruit to Gawain. But Guinevere unpredictably gives the apple to an unnamed Scottish knight, who dies immediately upon eating it. Suspicion naturally falls upon Guinevere, and the deceased knight’s tomb records “How there lay the Scottish knight / The queen Gaynor with poison slogy” (f. 98v; 878-79). This public acclamation of Guinevere’s guilt has the sanction of the court: “Knightes don none other might / But buried him with dole ynow / […] A riche tomb they did be dight” (f. 98v; 872-73, 876). The antecedent of “they” can only be the ambiguous group of “Knightes,” suggesting that the corporate body endorses the epitaph condemning the Queen. But in spite of their belief in her guilt, no action would have been taken against her had not Mador, the dead knight’s brother, read the words on the tomb and demanded justice. Only once Mador has publicly accused Guinevere does Arthur demand that Mador fight whichever knight will volunteer to be her champion.

The reader of this text knows, of course, that Guinevere is innocent of these charges. In spite of this, though, the narrator twice reminds the audience that, were an inquest of knights to be called, Guinevere would certainly be convicted (916-19, 1318-23). Such an admission plays out a scene of dramatic irony, wherein the reader knows of Guinevere’s innocence, while the narrator continues maintaining that, in the eyes of Arthur’s court, she is guilty. From the very start, then, the Arthurian justice system is shown to be flawed. Guinevere then begs a series of knights (Bors, Gawain, Lionel, Ector) to fight on her behalf, and one after another they coldly deny her (1340-1403). On one level this is an indictment of their failure to live up to the chivalric requirement to protect women. But on another level, given the narrator’s concessions that a trial would
yield an inaccurate verdict, this series of denials throws into relief the fallibility of each of these knights: they, the ones who would pass judgment on Guinevere in a trial, are subject to misjudgment (severe misjudgment in this case). Such fallibility undermines the system of Arthurian justice, leaving the audience in an uncomfortable place. The invitation simply to indict Arthur has been removed; now, one is forced to locate moral failing in the corporate body of chivalry, for its very institutions are shown to be deeply flawed.

Of course, Lancelot rides to the rescue at the last moment and—although not likely his intended end—ensures that justice is carried out by defeating Mador in one-on-one combat. Only after the battle is complete do they seek alternative means of discovering the identity of the man who murdered the Scottish knight:

The squiers then were taken all,
And they are put in harde pain,
Which that had served in the hall
When the knight was with poisun slain.
There he graunted among them all
(It might no lenger be to laine)
How in an apple he did the gall,
And had it thought to Sir Gawain. (f. 107r; 1648-55)

This is a puzzling moment which raises the question of why such methods, whose effectiveness is made clear in this passage, were not used sooner. Trial by battle is certainly more theatrical than simply applying torture in the hopes of gaining information; however, it is only when the theatrical failed that the court turned to more mundane methods of finding the guilty party. Here, torture yields forensic evidence with ease, the squire is summarily executed, and the narrative moves on to take up the plot between Agravain and Mordred to trap Lancelot and Guinevere in the act. In fact, the transition to the next part of the text is so abrupt as to suggest that the author believed the story of the poisoned apple had been satisfactorily completed. Immediately after the squire’s execution, we find this transition:

Lancelot, that was so hende,
They honoured him with all their might.
A time befell, sooth to sayn,
The knightes stood in chamber and spake [...] (f. 107r; 1670-73)

Chaos ensues from this moment forward, as Agravain and Mordred trap Lancelot in Guinevere’s chamber and Lancelot fights his way free. This is the beginning of the end, but its sudden imposition at the conclusion of the squire’s execution gives the sense that things are being rushed. There is no reflection on the near-failure of Arthurian justice, and the speed with which the narrative moves on to the famous death scene, which Colyns would likely have known well, forecloses the possibility of reflecting on those failures.

As Arthur sleeps the night before his final battle with Mordred, he dreams that he is on the Wheel of Fortune, which takes him from the height of her rotation and casts him down into a black sea. Such a moment is common in the many narratives detailing Arthur’s death. What is unique to the Stanzaic *Morte*’s use of this moment is the narrator’s insistence that Arthur does not fall alone:

> Him thought he sat in gold all cledde,
> As he was comely king with crown
> Upon a wheel that full wide spredde,
> *And all his knightes to him boun.* (f. 125r; 3172-75; emphasis mine)

In the *Mort Artu*, Arthur faces this frightening omen alone, forcing the audience to consider the king’s failings (149-50). But in the Middle English adaptor’s version of this same scene, the entire group of knights accompanies the king. Once again, the Stanzaic *Morte*’s focus is on the community of knights rather than the person of the flawed king.

At the conclusion of Arthur’s battle with Mordred, when 100,000 men lay dead on the field of battle, the narrator pauses to set the consequences of this fated day within the context of English history:

> Sithe Brutus out of Troy was sought
> And made in Britain his owne wonne,
> Such wonders never ere was wrought,
> Never yet under the sun. (f. 127r; 3376-79)
The reference seems innocent enough: Brutus is often used as an historical milepost in discussions of English history, most notably in the opening and closing stanzas of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. But here, the effect is quite different. Here, the text announces the closure of an historical moment: the promise that Brutus’s colonization brought, that reached its zenith in Camelot, is now finished. This moment hermetically seals off those idyllic days of England’s history from subsequent generations, and the sixteenth-century reader of this text, consequently existing across an historical chasm from Arthur, is only afforded a commonplace response: “Ubi sunt?” It is a response that would unite its audience in mourning for the permanently lost days of Arthurian glory.

The final episode to be considered is the beginning of the great battle between Arthur and Mordred. This is perhaps the greatest innovation that the Middle English version makes upon its Old French source. In the moments leading up to the battle, Arthur sends a peace envoy to Mordred, offering both Cornwall and Kent now and the throne upon Arthur’s death, which offer Mordred accepts. Of course Arthur has discovered that Lancelot is on his way with military support, and so a delay is intended to allow time for his arrival. For a brief moment, it seems as though tragedy may be averted, yet that hope is dashed when the two sides meet to ratify the peace agreement:

But as they accorded sholde have been,
An adder glode forth upon the ground;
He stang a knight, that men might sen
That he was seke and full unsound.

Out he brayed with sworde bright;
To kill the adder had he thought. (f. 126v; 3340-45)

In a cruelly ironic twist, this tragedy, the result of countless human failings, seems as if it were about to be prevented by a conscious decision to seek peace. But an intruder from the natural world ruins the prospects of such a possibility. The adder brings with it associations with the Fall of humanity, and the Fall, though the direct result of the actions of two human beings, denotes a general state of sin into which all people are born. The adder, then, figures forth the status of humanity within the world: born in a state of
depravity, helpless to remedy this state by human action. Thus, in the action of the adder providing the literal catalyst for the final battle, the text evinces a sense of helplessness that is beyond human capacity to remedy. Of course the medieval or early modern reader versed in the Christian tradition would understand the Incarnation as the remedy for the Fall. But the Stanzaic *Morte* never presents the consolation of Christ, presenting only the isolated symbol of evil. This, perhaps more than any other innovation in this text, suggests that the locus for blame lies beyond the moral control of any single actor in this text. It lies, rather, somewhere in the abstract and indefinable realm of Original Sin, of human frailty, but cannot be localized in one single person or in one single action. Such a moral economy affords no consolation to its reader, leaving the audience bereft of alternative responses.

Such a narrative as the Stanzaic *Morte*, by focusing on the synchronic moment of the kingdom’s demise, but by simultaneously refusing to allow the reader securely to blame any of the human agents of that demise, drives an ethical wedge between text and reader. The reader is forced to witness the destruction but is denied a familiar framework within which to view that destruction. Hence, the reader finds herself witnessing a tragedy which she would likely not have the interpretive tools to process fully—the other Arthurian texts, after all, do not share this same orientation, and thus could not have adequately prepared her for the ethical dilemmas posed by this text. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, those texts that had foreboding hints of the court’s demise, must have alarmed and discomfited their audiences, but those texts did not play out the actual events of that destruction, and thus did not force the reader to watch. The Vulgate Cycle’s *Mort Artu*, as I have discussed, offered its readership the consolation of just blaming Arthur. But the Stanzaic *Morte*, more so than anything else in the Arthurian tradition, starkly pushes its audience into a lament for what is gone. Cruelly, it provides no answers, leaving its audience with the united response of lament.

Some of Harley 2252’s texts that speak of the nation as a whole seem motivated by a desire to celebrate triumphantly the victory of a united England over Scotland (e.g., Items 39-43). I have already discussed most of this jingoistic material in previous parts
of this chapter, but revisiting a few of those texts will now throw into relief the
difficulties posed by the Stanzaic Morte. In “The lamentacion of the kyng of scottys,”
Colyns has recorded a poem that wears its patriotism on its sleeve (Item 42). Here, a
dreamer encounters the exiled King of Scotland, who has fallen upon hard times because
he sided with the French against the English and is now being punished by God:

Thus for my folye I ffele I do smerte.
Bothe lawe & nature dothe me acuse
Of grete vnkyndnes that I shulde take parte
Ayenste my brother & hys lyege Refuse.
I purposyd warre, yet I fayned truse.
Thys dyd I, ffrenshe kyng, for þe love of the.
Yn-ordynat affeccsion so dyd me abuese:
Mysere mei deus et salve me.  (f. 43v)

This poem, due to its excessively celebratory and triumphalist rhetoric, creates a political
community among its readership. Only those who identify with the English would be
drawn to such material, and it is only for their circle. This text’s assumption of an
esoteric political community presupposes that its reader—and this includes Colyns, who
devoted his labor to copying this text—shares in the celebration. A similar conclusion
can be drawn about the subsequent item, “O rex regum,” which again celebrates the
victory of the English over the Scottish at Flodden Field (Item 43). This text provides an
extensive catalogue of the various noblemen who led the English forces and even goes so
far as to suggest that both nature and God are allied on the English side: “The mone that
day dyd shynne full bryght / And the luce hed that day was ffull bente. / The Rede
cressente dyd blynde þe scottys syghte” (f. 47v). Apparently the moon itself intervenes to
help the English cause. The poem continues on to invoke God’s mercy:

O Rex Regum and Ruler of all,
As thow for vs suffryd thy passyon,
Haue mercye on kyng Iemys sowle—
Indulgens graunte hym for hys transgressyon.  (f. 48r)

This poem, like the one before it, leaves no doubt of its—or Colyns’s—beliefs about the
nation of England.
The position of lament, of mourning for a lost political unity, is where the Stanzaic Morte is most closely allied with the rest of the politically idealistic material in Harley 2252. Though their rhetoric could not be further apart—the one being a hopeless lament, the other a series of over-the-top jingoistic celebrations of English superiority—the way each positions the reader is similar. Both, in effect, force the reader into an identification with the community of the English nation. Whether lamenting its lost unity or celebrating its great defeats, these texts work to effect a fraternity among their audiences. The comments of Patricia Ingham about Arthurian romance are applicable here:

Late Middle English tales return again and again to the loss of fellowship and the death of Arthur. Because of their repetitive and poignant delectation of this tragic sovereign and his fragile, fractured community, these Middle English tales can help us see that narratives of fragmentation, of sovereign mutability and loss, might be just as culturally useful as stories that emphasize cultural unity, wholeness of recovery. […] The tragic fragility of Arthur’s fellowship heightens our longing, since we gain only the briefest glimpse of Arthurian chivalry and justice. Traditions of Arthur as the Rex quondam, Rexque futurus answer such longing with the image of a dying sovereign body passing away yet ever poised to recover the throne. This Arthur is already lost, yet still somehow perpetually surviving. (3-4)

Though Ingham’s comments can apply to almost all Arthurian literature—which is, by its nature, inherently tragic and given to “fragmentation”—they provide a particularly apt synopsis of the ethical difficulties the Stanzaic Morte imposes on its readers. This text, through its focus on loss and its denial of consolation, pushes its audience into a position of collectively mourning for the idyllic Arthurian kingdom. And Colyns, by his decision to purchase this text and make it the centerpiece of his book, exhibits his desire to participate in this communal process.
CHAPTER 2:
LINCOLN, CATHEDRAL LIBRARY MS 91

The next compiler offers us a particularly rich source of evidence, for there are two surviving MSS containing Middle English romances compiled by Robert Thornton. For the present chapter, I focus on the more famous compilation, Lincoln, Cathedral MS 91 (often referred to as the Lincoln Thornton MS or even the Thornton MS and hereafter referred to as the Lincoln MS). In the following chapter, I will address London, British Library Additional MS 31042, the other MS compiled by Thornton.

Examination of the Lincoln MS shows us that Thornton divided his romances into discrete categories, each of which bears distinct cultural resonances. At the head of his compilation we find two romances, the Prose *Alexander* and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, to which Thornton has given particular decorative emphasis. As several critics have noted, such an emphasis celebrates the royal power of the kings in these texts. However, the texts themselves undermine any pretensions to triumphalist rhetoric, as they point towards a tension at the center of monarchical power. But beyond these kingly narratives, Thornton has also created another section of romances which mediate two key issues of gentry economic identity: social ascent and the maintenance of the nuclear family. These romances, unlike the complex vision at the heart of *Alexander* and the *Morte*, celebrate their gentry heroes in a straightforward fashion. At the hands of Thornton, then, the Lincoln MS attests to many of the forms of cultural work the genre could perform.¹

¹ Unlike the relatively small number of romances contained in the MSS I discuss in Chapters 1, 3 and 4, the Lincoln MS contains nine romances; thus, there is no way to give adequate attention to every one of them. In the discussion that follows, I have chosen the main thematic groupings of romances best representing the cultural significance of Thornton’s compilation. The reader will note, therefore, that I do not discuss in
It has often been remarked that Middle English romance relies heavily on conventions and places relatively little emphasis on authorial ingenuity. The English traditions of Alexander and Arthur, for example, draw upon a limited body of themes revolving around death and fate and their implications for the body politic. The verse romances (which comprise the second section of Thornton’s texts that I discuss) are even more hyper-conventional, having recourse to a limited number of motifs recurring among the various texts in often only slightly altered garb. To this end, Susan Wittig has suggested that the verse romances in Middle English can be reduced to two basic patterns: separation-restoration and love-marriage (179-90). Thus, all compilations of Middle English romance will, in some sense, appear as variations on a theme. Detailed attention to MS context, however, shows that beneath the surface of such traditional stories lie myriad potential uses and applications at the hands of medieval compilers. In particular, by attending to the codicological presentation of Thornton’s romances, and setting this in the context of what we know about his socio-historical moment, we see that such conventions can do complex cultural work. By looking at Lincoln, Cathedral Library MS 91—as opposed to reading such romances in abstraction—romance becomes more than just a repetitive sequence of narratives. Such texts bear particular ideological resonances when we localize them in this one particular codex, born in the particular time of the mid-fifteenth century in the particular locale of the North Riding of Yorkshire at the hands of one particular member of the gentry.

detail either *The Awntyrs off Arthure* or *Sir Perceval*, neither of which fits into any larger discernible thematic patterns that I discuss herein.
2.1: Robert Thornton of East Newton

Though rather little material about Thornton has survived, there is enough to sketch a rough biography and to make relatively confident conjectures about his standing in society. 2  The date of Thornton’s birth is difficult to determine.  In the Yorkshire Archbishop’s Register for 1397-98, George Keiser has identified a license granted to Thornton’s father permitting private masses to be celebrated in the family’s manor (“More Light” 111).  Keiser suggests that Robert’s birth may have prompted the family to hire a chaplain, in the hopes that the chaplain would play a role in educating their son.  The specific entry in the Register, which is quite laconic, states that “Robertus Thornton de Neuton habet licenciam missas & alia divina officia audiendo seu facere celebrari in capella,” and that this is to last “durante vacacione,” that is, during the time in which the Archbishopric is sede vacante (Reg. 5A f. 253v).  But this does not seem sufficient evidence to conclude that there was any type of permanent private devotion held in the family’s home.  When Henry VIII’s commissioners surveyed the chantries, guilds, and hospitals in Yorkshire in 1546, they did not find any such objectionable practices associated with Thornton’s parish. 3  Indeed the family did not retreat to a private chapel in their home, but rather stayed very active in Holy Trinity Church, the parish church of Stonegrave, for a plaque at the church today discusses how the space occupied by Thornton family tombs had come to dominate the church, and thus when it was partially renovated in the nineteenth century, most of the tombs had to be removed to the cemetery outside the church.

Thornton most likely inherited the family manor of East Newton in 1418, for appended to The Autobiography of Mrs Alice Thornton, a descendant of Robert Thornton living in the late seventeenth century, is a pedigree of the Thornton family, tracing her

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2 Published references to Robert Thornton of East Newton can be found in CFR (19: 45-47, 83-84), Inquisitions and Assessments (6: 314, 316, 319), CCR 1441-1447 (158, 189), CCR 1447-1454 (111), Yorkshire Deeds (7: 150 and 8: 125), and Testamenta Eboracensia (2: 82).
3 This list appears in Certificates of the Commissioners.
genealogy back to the early fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{4} This pedigree states that Robert Thorntons, Lord of East Newton, married Agnes in 1418, the same year in which Robert’s father is recorded as having died. Thornton must have been dead by 1465, for at that date the pedigree appended to \textit{The Autobiography} attests that his second wife re-married. Other documentary evidence shows that he had definitely passed away by 1474, for in a deed dated 10 March, 14 Edward IV, he is listed as deceased (\textit{Yorkshire Deeds} 8: 125).\textsuperscript{5} The manor of East Newton is located in the Parish of Stonegrave in the Wapentake of Ryedale in the North Riding of Yorkshire, which lay approximately twenty miles north of the city of York.\textsuperscript{6} The family arms, \textit{argent a bend gules with three carbuncles or thereon}, still survive in an early fifteenth-century tomb still to be found in the church (\textit{VCH North Riding} 1: 565). This tomb is most likely that of Thornton’s father and mother, and other Thorntons were buried in the north choir of the church.

Besides the manor of East Newton, Thornton also had economic interests in Bedale, Thornton Steward, and Richmond for he was sued by a William Thornton over these lands in the early 1450s.\textsuperscript{7} The opening of the plea in this case is addressed to “To the most Reuere end fader in godd my lord Cardinall Archbyschop of Canterbury and Chaunceler of yngland.” This plea, then, dates from some time between 21 July 1452-2 March 1454, during which time John Kemp simultaneously bore the titles of Chancellor, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Cardinal. This would fall relatively late in Thornton’s life, after he had been lord of East Newton for at least thirty-three years. In this plea, a William Thornton claims that he “is seisid of and in v meses & C Acres of land and xxx\textsuperscript{ii}”

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{4}] George Keiser, “Lincoln Cathedral Library” 161-62, notes, though, that \textit{The Autobiography} must be treated with circumspection, for its information often conflicts with what survives in more trustworthy archival sources. For example, the pedigree found in \textit{The Autobiography} lists Thornton as having only one son; however, an entry from 1449 from \textit{CCR 1447-1454} 111, records “Robert Thornton of Neweton” as having three sons: William, Thomas, and Richard. Three different pedigrees of the Thornton family also survive in the York Minster Library archives (Additional MSS 142, 163/4, and 164/4); none, however, traces the family back to the fifteenth century.
\item[\textsuperscript{5}] He was definitely still alive in 1450, for he witnessed a deed in that year. See \textit{Yorkshire Deeds} 7: 150.
\item[\textsuperscript{6}] <http://www.maps.google.com> reports a distance—traveling by modern roads—of 23 miles between York and Stonegrave.
\item[\textsuperscript{7}] TNA: PRO C 1/229/32. For a transcription of this Chancery case, and for a discussion of its relationship to Thornton’s biography and MSS, see Johnston (forthcoming).
\end{itemize}
Acres of meadow with thappertynaunce in Bedell, Thornton Steward and Richmond within the Counte of York in his demean as of fee,” but that the proof “touchyng and concernynge the said landys and tenamentys be comyn to th[e h]ande and possession of oon Robert Thornton and Angnes Thornton.” William goes on to complain that Robert and Agnes have refused to hand the proof in question (presumably a deed) over to him, concluding that “because your said orator knowes nott the certente ne the content of the said evidens and charters ne whether they be in bag or in box seallid or in chist lokyd he hath therefore no Remedie by the Course of the Comon law.” Unfortunately, no record survives of how this case was resolved.8

The defendant named in this case is certainly this same Robert Thornton, for the compiler of these two MSS was an active landholder in North Yorkshire at the time of the complaint, and his first wife was named Agnes. The identity of the plaintiff, William Thornton, is harder to discern. According to The Autobiography, Robert had a brother named William, whom the family genealogy merely notes was ‘living [in] 1438’; however, no reference to a William Thornton from the fifteenth century survives in the VCH North Riding volumes. Robert also had a son named William (CCR 1447-1454 111). However, given the preponderance of Williams in the Thornton family, it seems just as likely that the man suing Robert was a distant cousin as that he was Robert’s younger brother or son. As no family records from Thornton’s lifetime survive, and as no manorial records for East Newton have survived, there is no way to establish Thornton’s connection to the lands under dispute. The manor of Bedale lay in Hang East Wapentake about 32 miles ENE of Thornton’s manor, while Thornton Steward was in Hang West Wapentake, about 38 miles ENE from Thornton.9

8 In fact, it was not until the reign of Henry VIII that the Chancery first began recording its decisions. For a thorough history of the fifteenth-century Court of Chancery, see, in particular, Haskett; Baildon xi-xlv; J.H. Baker 97-116; Alan Harding 99-103; and Charles Smith.
9 See VCH North Riding 265-66, 293-95. The mileage involves travel by modern roads, as cited on <www.maps.google.com> The manor of Bedale, along with the advowson of its church, was in the early fifteenth century jointly possessed by Robert Grey of Rotherfield, Knight, and Miles de Stapleton, Knight. See Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem XVIII 67 and XXI 72-73.
The names of the other individuals who appear in surviving documents alongside Thornton offer some suggestions as to his place in Yorkshire society. For example, in 1449 Thornton witnessed a quitclaim of the manors of Northolm and Great Eddeston involving Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury and Ralph, Baron Greystoke (CCR 1447-1454 111). Thornton, then, must have had contact with these men at least on this one occasion, which is of itself significant, given the violence that erupted in the North Riding between Salisbury and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland shortly thereafter (discussed in Section III). And, of course, Salisbury would, along with his son Warwick, soon become York’s main allies against Henry VI when the realm descended into civil war. However, this single reference is not enough to demonstrate that Thornton had any type of economic or political relationship with Salisbury. In fact, Thornton does not appear on the only surviving list of Salisbury’s retainers. Yet this quitclaim is the lone document placing Thornton amongst figures of such national importance. It is, rather, to the local gentry that we must turn to find what the surviving records indicate is Thornton’s primary political sphere.

One good example of the more localized and immediate circles that made up Thornton’s political and economic world can be found in an earlier quitclaim for the manors of Northolm and Great Eddeston, dated 1443 (CCR 1441-1447 189). This was witnessed, along with Thornton, by John Thryske, Mayor of York and MP for the city of York for 1450 and 1467 (Parliamentary Representation of Yorkshire 46); Richard Warter and Thomas Ridley, aldermen of York; and Thomas Grey, who owned the manor of Barton-le-Street, also in the Wapentake of Ryedale. Both Northolm and Great Eddeston lay in Ryedale, the same Wapentake in which Thornton resided, and both lay in parishes (Kirkdale and Great Eddeston, respectively) near Thornton’s parish of

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10 See A. J. Pollard.
11 Thornton’s father had some economic ties to one of the more powerful—and violent—magnates in Yorkshire, for in the inquisitio post mortem of Ralph Hastings, who was executed for his participation in Archbishop Scrope’s Rebellion of 1405, Robert Thornton is one of a number of men listed as having held land of the now attainted knight. Thornton was forced to give his rights to the land over to Hastings’s father. See Inquisitions post mortem Relating to Yorkshire 61.
12 For a description of Grey’s lands, see VCH North Riding 1: 473.
Stonegrave. Along with the nearby landowner Thomas Grey, the most important members of the York city government had come to witness this quitclaim. This, then, provides an illustration of the predominantly local significance to Thornton’s circles of acquaintances.¹³

Thornton had a particularly close relationship to Richard Pickering, who was elected MP for the Parliament meeting in September 1429, and who served as Sheriff for Yorkshire during 1432 (Parliamentary Representation of the County of York 186). Pickering, though a figure of no significance on the national level, was one of the prominent gentry landowners in the North Riding. He owned a number of manors in Ryedale and the contiguous wapentakes, including Ampleforth, Beadlam, Oswaldkirk, Great Barugh and Lockton (VCH North Riding 1: 462, 518, 549, 2: 446, 457). Thornton appears with Pickering in several documents: in 1428 they are both, along with William and Isabella Roos and William Tourney, listed as owning land in Ampilford, Bildesdale, West Newton and Harum (Inquisitions and Assessments 314).¹⁴ However, from this document it is clear that, of the two, Pickering occupies the higher social status, for he is listed with the title miles, while Thornton has no title at all. Pickering and Thornton had a close relationship, for Pickering’s will, dated 1 September 1441, mentions Robert Thornton as the executor, and Pickering leaves Thornton “meam nigram togam furratam cum foynes” (Testamenta 2: 82).¹⁵

In an entry in Inquisitions and Assessments for 1428, Thornton appears alongside William Green, John de Etton, John Crathorn, Richard de Clay, John de Nunyngton, and John de Laysthorpe as holding land in Stayngref (Stonegrave) and West Nesse (316). Among these men, William Green and John de Etton are given the title miles, while the other men, including Thornton, receive no title. These men were all part of England’s

¹³ For more on this particular deed, see Keiser, “More Light” 112-13.
¹⁴ This William Roos must have been part of a cadet branch of the Roos family, which was one of the most powerful aristocratic families in Lancastrian England. William does not appear on the genealogy of the family’s main line, which is appended to Seaton, Sir Richard Roos.
¹⁵ For a further discussion of the relationship between Pickering and Thornton, see Keiser, “Lincoln Cathedral” 160-61.
late medieval elite, for they all held land and had family arms. None of these men, however, seems to have exerted any noteworthy influence outside of the North Riding. Their world, the circulation of their power and influence, was within local society.\footnote{With the possible exception of William Green, who was one of those retained by Warwick (A. J. Pollard 59 n.25).} For example, William Green owned two manors in the North Riding (\textit{VCH} I: 414, 546), Etton owned one manor and was Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1406 and 1412 and warden of Roxburgh Castle in 1415 (I: 481-82), and Crathorn owned two manors (I: 508, II: 235). Men of Pickering’s status and below—men who ranked among the middling gentry—formed Thornton’s main circle.

In addition, we must consider Thornton’s learning and level of literacy. J. B. Friedman’s extensive study of northern English book production and ownership in the later Middle Ages clearly demonstrates that Yorkshire was no cultural backwater. Friedman specifically mentions the great number of men of the propertied classes who copied out their own books (26-27).\footnote{For a more conservative estimate of book ownership among the laity in the city of York, see Goldberg. For a general discussion of the level of learning among the Yorkshire gentry, see Vale, “Piety.” In addition, Moran 151-54 discusses book ownership among the gentry and nobility of late medieval Yorkshire, with a specific examination of books attested in wills.} The sheer number of exemplars to which Thornton must have had access is in and of itself a testament to an extensive culture of literary lending and borrowing.\footnote{Ralph Hanna, “The Growth” 61 estimates that Thornton must have had access to a minimum of fifteen MSS to construct his two compilations.} Angus McIntosh posits a common exemplar for two texts in the Lincoln MS (The Alliterative \textit{Morte Arthure} [Item 5] and \textit{The Previte of the Passion} [Item 29]), and he further suggests that a group of eight texts, appearing in both of Thornton’s MSS, “may be said to be basically in a kind of Middle English which belongs somewhere not very far from where the counties of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and Nottinghamshire meet” (231-32). But Thornton’s MSS provide almost no evidence—beyond that which can be garnered from a linguistic analysis—for the origins of their texts. The only mention of a source for Thornton’s texts comes from a marginal gloss inscribed alongside the \textit{Liber de diversis medicinis} (Item 81), where on f. 288r he writes...
“Rector de Oswaldkirke.” Oswaldkirk is but two miles from Thornton’s parish of Stonegrave, and so it is likely that Thornton borrowed this text from the parish priest at Oswaldkirk, or he copied an exemplar that had at one time been in the possession of that parish. Either way, this mention of the neighboring parish suggests a local literary scene, with borrowing and copying of texts taking place among gentry neighbors and local clerics in the North Riding.  

How Thornton received his education is a question that is, once again, hindered by the paucity of surviving evidence. He probably did not attend either university, as he does not appear in the lists of the graduates from either Cambridge or Oxford. However, the ability to write coupled with the familiarity with Latin attested by his MSS suggests that he must have received some level of education. D.S. Brewer describes Thornton as “an educated man of literary tastes” (vii). It was a widespread practice in the later Middle Ages for children of the English gentry and aristocracy to be educated in their homes or the home of a local aristocrat (Moran 83), and in that vein George Keiser has suggested that Thornton may have been educated by the family chaplain (discussed above). But, as I have shown, this chapel was not necessarily a permanent establishment, and there is no way to determine whether it was connected in any way with the education of Thornton, who may not have even been born when it was established. It seems quite likely that Thornton could have been educated at one of the grammar schools that existed throughout Yorkshire in the fifteenth century. Jo Ann Hoeppner Moran estimates that, in the period 1400-50, there were 20 grammar schools in the York Diocese (96). In particular, there is evidence of the existence of several schools in Thornton’s wapentake around the time he would have been of the right age: Helmsley, the parish directly north of Stonegrave, had a grammar or reading school in the thirteenth century and definitely had a reading or song school in 1471, when John Dawy left money to students there. In

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19 For further comments on the literate milieu in which Thornton likely lived, see Keiser, “Lincoln Cathedral Library” 165-77.
20 Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge* and *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford*.
addition, Old Malton, several miles west of Stonegrave, is known to have had a grammar school in the late fourteenth century. There were also a number of schools within the city of York, located just twenty miles from Thornton’s home, including a grammar and song school at York Minster; a grammar, reading, and song school at St Leonard’s Hospital; and a reading school at St Mary’s, Castlegate.21 There is no way to establish whether Thornton ever went to one of these schools; nevertheless, it seems a reasonable conclusion that he must have received some formal education, whether it was at East Newton, the home of a nearby aristocrat, or at one of the schools in Ryedale or York.

2.2: Codicological Description

There is little evidence pointing to exact dates for Thornton’s copying activities, as only one text in the Lincoln MS provides firmly datable evidence: the text entitled “quedam revelacio” (Item 67) narrates a woman’s visions of Purgatory, who tells her confessor of the dreams she had “appone saaynt lowrence day at nyghte þe zere of oure lorde a thowsande foure hundrethe twenty and two” (f. 250v); this cannot be taken, prima facie, as a terminus post quem for Thornton’s compiling activities, as the possibility exists that he could have copied other texts before coming to this particular narrative. Most scholars have placed the end of Thornton’s compiling activities sometime around 1450, and the words of A.E.B. Owen suffice as a general representation of scholarly views of the date of the compilation of the Lincoln MS: “Writing and watermarks are both regarded as consistent with internal evidence which points to the manuscript having been written c.1430-50” (“Collation and Handwriting” xvi).22 M.S.

21 I have compiled his list of schools from the data in Moran, “Appendix B: Schools within the Diocese of York” 237-79.
22 Doyle, “A Survey” 276 similarly dates the Lincoln MS ca. 1450.
Ogden concludes that the mention of the birth of the scribe’s grandson in 1454 (discussed below) provides a *terminus ad quem* for his copying activities (xii-xiii). However, I do not see the fact that someone (the hand is decidedly not that of Robert Thornton) recorded the birth of Thornton’s grandson on one of the blank leaves at the end of a quire as sufficient evidence to establish a *terminus*. Since the act of compiling this MS would have taken many years, and would have required access to many exemplars, it seems best to err on the side of a more liberal range of dates for Thornton’s compiling activities. I assume that he could have begun compiling texts once he was settled as the lord of East Newton, and I assume he could have copied these texts up to his death, and thus I offer the conjectural dates of his copying activities as 1420-1465.

The MS, entirely in paper, is collated as follows:23

124 (wanting 1-4, 23; ff. 1-19), 224 (wanting 1; ff. 20-42), 38 (made up of eight singletons; ff. 43-52), 416 (ff. 53-68), 518 (ff. 69-86), 618 (ff. 87-102), 722 (wanting 1, 22; 7, 21 are fragments; ff. 103-22), 822 (12 is a stub; ff. 123-43), 922 (wanting 5, 18; ff. 144-63), 1016 (16 lost or cancelled; ff. 164-78), 1120 (ff. 179-98), 1224 (ff. 199-222), 1320 (wanting 1; ff. 223-36), 1418 (wanting 1; ff. 237-53), 1530 (wanting 1; 10-12 cancelled; ff. 254-79), 1630 (wanting 30; ff. 280-314), 17? (7 fragments).

Almost the entirety of this MS is in Thornton’s hand, for on f. 98v he writes “R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit sit benedictus.”24 This is in the same hand as the rest of the Lincoln MS, and so we can confidently conclude that the scribe is Robert Thornton.25

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23 It should be noted that my assessment of the collation of this MS is based largely off the work of A.E.B. Owen, who was able to examine each quire when it was unbound for repair in 1973. In so doing, he was able to verify which bifolios formed the center of each quire. Since the MS was then re-bound with each folio pasted to a piece of modern paper (and the quires thus taken apart), such an assessment is no longer possible, and thus his determinations on collation must be the starting point of any future work with this MS. By checking watermark evidence against Owen’s collation, I have modified it in some minor ways. For further details of this, see Appendix D. Owen’s collation is published in “Collation and Descent.” Note that the collation he provides in this article is corrected from the earlier one appearing in his introduction to the Scolar Press facsimile of the Lincoln MS.

24 He also writes this phrase on f. 213r, and he writes a variation on this on f. 196v. He has also written his name on ff. 211v and 278v.

25 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, the antiquarian who founded the Roxburghe Club, was the first in print to connect the Robert Thornton named in both MSS with the lord of the manor of East Newton in the Wapentake of Ryedale in the North Riding of Yorkshire. This identification was printed in *A Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in the Northern Counties of England and Scotland*.
Virginia Everett has noted, there is a rebus on the family name appearing inside a four-line initial on f. 23v, where someone, presumably Thornton, has drawn a thorn bush and a barrel (i.e. thorn + tonne).\textsuperscript{26} The image of the thorn tree in this image matches the family arms that survive today in Thornton’s parish church of Stonegrave, where, in the northern part of the nave survives the tomb of Thornton’s mother and father, complete with arms.\textsuperscript{27} Further evidence clearly indicates that the scribe was Robert Thornton of East Newton. For example, on f. 49v, a blank leaf between the Prose Alexander and the Alliterative Morte Arthure, someone (not Robert Thornton) has written “Isto die natus ffuit Sancta Maria ante domini nostri Ihesu Chrisi Robertus Thornton in Ridayll anno domini m cccc liij” (Item 2). Reference to The Autobiography’s genealogy shows that Robert’s grandson was indeed named Robert and was born in 1454, just one year later than the MS attests. The margins of the MS also contain the autographs of several members of later generations of the family. The foot of f. 49v reads “Wylliam Thorntun armiger this boke”; f. 75v, 137r, and 194r read “Edward Thornton”; f. 135v reads “Ellinor Thornton”; and both f. 265r and 266r have the name “Dorythy Thornton” in the right-hand margin.\textsuperscript{28} These references to the Thorntons of Ryedale are sufficient proof,
along with the scribe’s self-identification as “R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit,” to connect this MS to Robert Thornton, lord of the manor of East Newton.

I am in agreement with M.S. Ogden (x-xiii), John Thompson (“The Compiler” 113), and Angus McIntosh (231) that this MS is written by the same hand (with a few minor exceptions, for which see Appendix C). Thornton writes in a readable, relatively consistent Anglicana hand throughout the MS, and his hand is typical of the mid-fifteenth century. He consistently uses a double-chambered –a; long –r; –d that has a looped ascender and whose oval runs at a 45 degree angle relative to the body of the letter; –h with an exaggerated looped descender; and a –þ whose oval descends back towards the ductus at a sharp angle, resembling a modern –p or sometimes –y, all of which makes his hand rather standard among fifteenth-century English scripts. Given the length of this MS, and given that Thornton copied out two voluminous MSS (that we know of), it is clear that he must have put several years into this endeavor, and thus variations in the appearance of the script and page layout are due to his changing writing habits over the years and/or to his gradual ageing, to what Ralph Hanna describes as “an indeterminate but obviously protracted period” of compilation (“The Growth” 51). In spite of these variations, inspection of the letter forms shows that almost the entirety of the MS is in one hand.

L.F. Casson, in the introduction to Sir Degrevant, has doubted that this entire MS is in Thornton’s hand, specifically contending that Degrevant was written in a different, albeit contemporary, script, “a somewhat larger and less tidy hand than the poems to which Robert Thornton’s name is appended” (x). Guddat-Figge tentatively agrees, stating “it seems doubtful whether [Thornton] was the only scribe of this MS” (135), and “I am also inclined to doubt the one-scribe theory” (141 n.5). Moreover, in a recent article Finlayson avers, “While the idea of Thornton as the sole scribe and ‘grand

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29 For the description of Thornton’s hand, I rely primarily on the discussion and plates from Preston and Yeandle, English Handwriting, and Parkes, English Cursive.
30 The only exception to this is in the way Thornton forms his –þ in texts he copied later. As Keiser, “Rev. of Robert Thornton” 157-58 notes, in such texts Thornton took greater pains to close the top of his –þ in order to distinguish it more clearly from the letter –y.
compiler’ of the Lincoln Thornton is highly attractive, because of its uniqueness, the available evidence suggests that we settle for the view that, while he had a considerable hand in the collection, excluding the Liber de diversis medicinis, this miscellany may in fact be by Thornton and others, possibly family” (“Reading” 640). Finlayson specifically notes a variation in script across ff. 80v, 119r, 162r, and 182r. However, we should bear in mind that f. 80v contains the Alliterative Morte, and f. 182 contains The Previte of the Passion, almost certainly the two earliest pieces copied by Thornton, while f. 119r contains The Erle of Tolous, almost certainly copied relatively late in the process.31 Thus, it would make sense that there would be variation in script across texts copied over many years. Furthermore, Thornton employs a different page layout for alliterative romance (f. 80v) versus prose religious text (f. 182r) versus tail-rhyme romance (ff. 119r, 162r). Most importantly, though, all of the markers of Thornton’s script, as discussed above, are consistent throughout the Lincoln MS, leading me to concur with Ogden, Thompson, and McIntosh (pace Casson, Guddat-Figge, and Finlayson) that the entirety of the MS is in the hand of Robert Thornton.32

Physical evidence confirms that Thornton compiled this MS slowly, through a haphazard and often seemingly ad hoc process of individual booklets.33 A glance at Appendix D demonstrates the irregular patterns of compilation Thornton undertook. The size of each quire varies greatly across the MS, with no apparent pattern: Thornton has gathered one quire of eight folios, three quires of sixteen, two of eighteen, two of twenty, three of twenty-two, three of twenty-four, and two of thirty.34 One salient example of this process comes from Angus McIntosh’s study of the Alliterative Morte Arthure (Item 5), where he demonstrates that Thornton’s copy of the Morte and The Previte of the Passion

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31 For a discussion of the Morte and The Previte as the earliest texts, see McIntosh. For a general hypothesis on the stages of Thornton’s compilation, see Hanna, “The Growth.”
32 The only texts not in Thornton’s hand are some ephemera scribbled on pages he left blank. See also Thompson, Robert Thornton 3, who relates that in a private correspondence Malcolm Parkes has confirmed that the fifteenth-century material in both Thornton MSS is in a single hand.
33 For a discussion of the booklet-production of medieval MSS, see Robinson. See also the complex chronology of Thornton’s compilation procedures suggested by Hanna, “The Growth” 59-60.
34 I do not include quire 17 in this tabulation since it exists as seven fragments at the end of the MS and thus is original size is irrecoverable.
(Item 29) were both derived from a single source (233). What is significant about McIntosh’s findings for the present discussion is what Thornton did with those two texts. Specifically, he separated them, placing each one at the head of a new quire, indicating that there was a preconceived plan of distinct sections for religious and romance texts in this MS. Working by individual booklets, Thornton was able to construct the Lincoln MS in a piecemeal fashion, adding texts to their appropriate section as he came across them. In the particular case of the Morte and The Prevote, he was not constrained by the fact that these texts came from the same exemplar; rather, booklet production allowed him to situate each text in a new place within his compilation.35

One of the most striking features of Thornton’s collection is the generic divisions he maintains throughout. The MS divides generally—though not absolutely—into three distinct units, with his romances occupying ff. 1r-176r, the religious material covering ff. 176r-279v, and a medical treatise covering ff. 280r-end.36 As is to be expected of a medieval reader who does not share our penchant for literary classification, the generic divisions are not rigorously maintained. It seems that medieval readers of romance, like Thornton, were no more able to define the genre than are today’s critics.37 Of the nine romances recorded by Thornton in the Lincoln MS, four are called so in their incipits,

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36 Finlayson, “Reading” 640-43, suggests four sections to this MS; in particular, he considers the Prose Alexander as a unique section unto itself. However, as I demonstrate in Section V, Thornton consciously compiled Alexander beside the Alliterative Morte, and so to group these two texts in separate sections is to ignore Thornton’s decision as compiler. For a discussion of Thornton’s religious section, see Keiser, “‘To Knaue God Almyghtyn’” and “Pe Holy Boke” 306-14, and Thompson, “Another Look.”
37 Apart from Auerbach’s classic definition (which applies most obviously to Old French romance), noteworthy attempts at definitions of the genre of romance include those by Kane and Schmidt and Jacobs. Kane states that “the essential characteristics [of the genre] are that the story should be treated in terms of chivalry, and that it should not be naturalistic, but that instead its setting, characters and action should be heightened to enable the escape from the limitations of actuality which the romances were designed to afford” (2). Schmidt and Jacobs offer a less dogmatic, but more vague conception of the genre: “The medieval English romances are stories in verse which deal with the adventures of noble men and women and which end happily” (1). Suffice it to say that modern scholars have not reached anything resembling a consensus on the definition of the genre. See also the comments of James Simpson, Reform 263-64, who expresses frustration at the tendency among critics to lump all chivalric narratives into the category of romance.
while one is called a *vita* in its *explicit*.\(^{38}\) Further complication arises from Thornton’s inclusion, in the “romance” unit, of *Lamentatio peccatoris* (Item 4), *Vita Sancti Christofori* (Item 9), *De miraculo beate Marie* (Item 12), *Lyarde* (Item 13), and *Thomas of Ercledoun* (Item 14), none of which fits any workable definition of the genre.\(^{39}\) But perhaps we are asking too much of Thornton if we expect him to conform to our narrative standards. After all, this book was likely produced for his own private reading and that of his family, and thus there was no need to maintain distinctions which could be measured against some outside criteria, as if he were producing a public document that must stand up to critical scrutiny. What matters for the present discussion is the clear “architecture” to this MS, with the romance narratives being read together, separate from the moral and devotional treatises and poems (even if not maintained absolutely). Thornton generally separated the two types of texts—texts that do different cultural work.\(^{40}\) As George Keiser observes, “An obvious inference to be drawn from the fact that he organized his material in this way is that Thornton had in his mind a clear distinction between the two general categories of writings [romance and devotional/moral writings] he expected to collect and between the emotional and intellectual responses of a reader to each” (“Lincoln Cathedral Library” 177).

Joel Rosenthal, in his study of the cultural and literary interests of the peerage of late medieval England, concludes rather disparagingly that “The concern for the artifacts of literacy and literary culture was real, if moderate. The aristocracy was willing to support and encourage the life of the spirit and of the mind, provided the demands made upon the support were not very great” (“Aristocratic Cultural Patronage” 548). Though this may be true of the peerage, who could afford to hire scribes to create books reflecting

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\(^{38}\) Those given the classification romance are *Octavian* (f. 98v), *Sir Isumbras* (f. 109r), *The Erle of Tolous* (f. 114v) and *Sir Perceval* (f. 161r). The *Prose Alexander* is called a *vita* on f. 49r.

\(^{39}\) It should be noted that each of these “non-romance” texts is substantially shorter than the romances that make up this section. For more details on this, see Appendix C. In addition, Daly 205-39 discusses how the *Vita* participates in many of the conventions of romance, a point with which I concur. For a discussion and edition of *Lyarde*, see Furrow.

\(^{40}\) See also the comments of Brewer ix. John Thompson, “The Compiler” 116-23, however, is more sceptical of Thornton’s generic awareness.
their own cultural interests, it cannot be said to apply to Robert Thornton and his MSS. He made these books himself, and the sheer amount of time he invested in creating both these compilations shows a strong dedication to what Rosenthal terms “the life of the spirit and of the mind.” In seeking out a variety of MS sources for his texts, and taking the time to copy them out in a neat, readable hand, even sometimes adding decorations or marginal flourishes, Thornton has created a cultural artefact that—by the combination of and interrelations between its texts—stands as a testament to the complex cultural world of a fifteenth-century gentleman in England. He almost certainly believed in the folkloric, quasi-scientific medical lore contained in the Liber de diversis medicinis (Item 81); his religious faith appears suitably orthodox and standard for a layman in late medieval England; and the romances he has chosen give voice to a particularly rich constellation of texts reflecting doubt about the position of the monarch, celebrating gentry economic identity, and presenting fantastical solutions to the problem of aristocratic violence.

2.3: Thornton, the Gentry, and the Nobility

The early fifteenth century marked an important moment of change in English class structure, as people became more conscious of gradations among the upper levels of society. Referring to late medieval England, Chris Given-Wilson comments, “Good birth, inherited land and lordship, and membership of the ‘officer’ ranks in battle were probably the most important determinants of status. Title, legal privilege, a substantial degree of wealth, and the trappings of the noble lifestyle provided the visible evidence of that status” (ix), an apt description of what set those at the top of English society off from the rest. But in the early fifteenth century, particular gradations began to develop which
evince a growing complexity to aristocratic social identity. As the king came more and more to rely on country landholders for assistance in the remote regions of the country, a system of titles developed to reward those who were not noble but who held land, commanded privilege in local society, and served the king. Specifically, the titles of knight, esquire and gentlemen grew into importance in this period, titles reserved for those outside the nobility. As Christine Carpenter notes, the 1420s witnessed the title of esquire beginning to appear regularly on deeds, and in the next decade or two men began regularly to refer to themselves as gentlemen in such documents (Locality 48). A statute of 1413 offers interesting evidence of the new emphasis on categorizing the nomenclature of the gentry: it required that “in all original writs of personal action and in appeals or indictments in which process of outlawry lay, the estate, degree, or mystery of the defendant be stated” (Gray 625). Such an insistence on naming and classifying gradations within the gentry points towards changes within that class, as well as the growing importance of that class—the very one with which Thornton certainly would have identified himself.

In fact, it is estimated that non-noble landholders controlled 60-75% of the land in the later Middle Ages, leading Christine Carpenter to conclude that “potentially [the gentry] were therefore the most powerful element in the shires” (Locality 36). That those in the early fifteenth century recognized a separation between the nobility and the gentry is attested by the tax assessment for 1436, which consistently, for every county, separates the value of baronial lands from the value of lands of those below the nobility (Gray 610). H.L. Gray’s study of these tax returns provides insight into both the various gradations among the nobility and gentry (as perceived by Westminster, at least) and the

41 The social distinctions among the fifteenth-century aristocracy are discussed most clearly by Christine Carpenter, Locality 35-95 and Pugh. K.B. McFarlane, who drew sharp distinctions between the parliamentary peerage and the rest of English society, was extremely influential. However, for some revisionary remarks on this approach, see Given-Wilson 1-25.
42 See Alan Harding 92-98 for a discussion of the gentry’s importance to the king in their particular role as Justices of the Peace.
43 T.B. Pugh 121 n.52 specifically locates 1414 as the first recorded use of “gentleman” in a public record.
actual wealth of the various strata.\textsuperscript{44} Such information can help us place Thornton within the hierarchy of England’s elite, the land owners of his day.

The tax assessed in 1436 was a graduated tax, and the surviving records indicate each person’s name and income. Records survive from only sixteen counties, and although Yorkshire is not one of them, these records are nevertheless valuable for the present discussion. They provide a picture of landed society at the moment Thornton had been lord of his manor for eighteen years and, more importantly, was in the process of copying out both of his MSS. In total, according to Gray’s extrapolations of the surviving data, England had fifty-one lay barons, 183 greater knights (incomes of £100-399 p.a.), around 750 lesser knights (incomes of £40-100 p.a.), around 1,200 esquires, or men with enough income to be known as esquires (incomes of £20-39 p.a.), and around 5,000 lesser landowners (incomes of £5-20 p.a.) (630). Thornton, as lord of East Newton and as one possessing family arms, would at least have been recognized as an \textit{armiger}; however, he would not have been counted among the nobility or the greater or lesser knights, for he is never given the title \textit{miles} in any surviving document, and he does not seem to have owned much land. It seems most likely that Thornton would have fallen somewhere among what Gray calls the “squierarchy,” that is the numerous esquires and lesser landowners who made up the great majority of those assessed in 1436 and of those eligible to vote in Parliamentary elections which, after 1429, was reserved for those with income from lands of at least 40s (630).\textsuperscript{45}

In addition to the census-like numerical data, it is important to consider social perception, for it does not seem likely that those in the fifteenth century imagined class in strictly monetary terms any more than we would today. The comments of T.H. Marshall are particularly relevant here:

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. the cautionary remarks about Gray’s methodology in Pugh 97-101.
\textsuperscript{45} Thornton’s father is referred to as an “esquire” in the \textit{inquistio post mortem} of Ralph Hastings, which took place in 1407 (\textit{Inquisitions post mortem Relating to Yorkshire} 61). Indeed, even in the reign of Elizabeth I, Thomas Tonge, Norroy King of Arms, while on his visitation of Yorkshire, lists William Thornton, Robert’s grandson, as an “esquire” (\textit{Heraldic Visitations} xxv). Thus, the middling gentry status seems to have been handed down the family line.
The essence of social class is the way a man is treated by his fellows (and, reciprocally, the way he treats them), not the qualities or the possessions which cause that treatment. It would be possible, and perhaps useful, to group people simply in terms of their attributes, without asking how those attributes affected their social relations, but the result would be a study of social types, not social classes. (qtd. in Given-Wilson ix)

Without a doubt, we can say that Thornton would have been perceived as part of England’s elite, as he was conversant with Latin, had family heraldry prominently displayed in the parish church, witnessed land transactions with prominent national figures like Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, and, most importantly, owned land. Whatever the specifics of Thornton’s position in local society, it is clear that while he was not threatening to break into the elite ranks of wealthy knights, he was certainly counted a peer among the elite landowners who comprised the fifteenth-century gentry in the North Riding.

The most intriguing surviving document to mention Thornton is found in an entry from CFR for 31 Henry VI (1453), wherein “Robert Thornton of Neweton” is named as one of five men appointed tax collector for the North Riding (47). More and more frequently from the late fourteenth century on, the king had come to rely upon the gentry’s service in provincial offices (e.g., J.P.s, sheriffs, coroners), so Thornton’s appointment to this job is unremarkable. However, this appointment did not proceed smoothly, for a subsequent entry, dated 9 May 32 Henry VI, states that “the king, moved by certain sinister informations laid before him in the Chancery, by his writ had lately directed to the treasurer and barons of the Exchequer had discharged the said John Hedlam, William Byngham, Robert Thornton and John Capon from the collection of the said tax” (83). George Keiser speculates that these coincidences raise “the interesting question of whether the ‘sinister informations’ reported in the chancery might have concerned participation by Robert Thornton and the others in the disturbances in the North Riding, perhaps on the side of the Percy family” (“Lincoln Cathedral Library” 163). The Neville-Percy rivalry had erupted into open violence in 1453, and shortly thereafter the king suffered a nervous breakdown, which resulted in Richard, Duke of
York becoming protector. York quickly nominated Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury as Chancellor—with all this coming less than one month before the date of Thornton’s decommissioning as tax collector. While Keiser’s suggestion is tantalizing, the evidence is too exiguous to make any determination about Thornton’s politics. After all, he had witnessed a deed involving Salisbury’s land transactions in 1449 (as discussed above), and so the suggestion that he had taken up arms against Salisbury by 1453 seems less than likely. But whatever the cause for the abrupt end of Thornton’s duties, his position as king’s servant in the provinces puts him in the mainstream of the late medieval English gentry.

Robert Thornton, minor landowner that he was, was squeezed between the sprawling holdings of the several powerful families who dominated the north of England. Within his own wapentake lay the manors of several powerful nobles. The Roos family had Lancastrian connections, as Thomas, 9th Lord Roos grew up in Westminster as a companion of the young king and because of these connections was eventually beheaded by Edward IV (Griffiths, The Reign 54, 736). The Rooses owned the manors of Harome and Pockley, both in Helmsley parish, immediately to the north of Stonegrave (VCH 1: 493); they also owned the Vill of Riccal in the parish of Nunnington, due east of Stonegrave (1: 547).

In addition, the Westmorland branch of the Neville family had a powerful presence in the North Riding. Ralph, Second Earl of Westmorland, inherited estates directly from his grandfather, Ralph, First Earl of Westmorland, in 1425, as his father had

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46 Evidence potentially connecting Thornton to the Percies may be found at the foot of f. 53r, the opening of Thornton’s copy of the Alliterative Morte, where Thornton has written “En espyraunce may…” Though the remainder has been torn away, this could be a form of the Percy family motto, “Esperaunce ma conforte.” The Percy earls of Northumberland used this motto throughout the fifteenth century until it was changed, near the end of the century, to “Esperaunce in Dieu.” I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of my forthcoming article in The Library for drawing my attention to this particular reference. It should, though, be remembered that during most of Thornton’s life, the Nevilles and the Percies ruled Yorkshire in peace, and that it was not until the early 1450s that the local gentry would have found themselves forced to choose sides between the two great families.

47 Richard, Duke of York, does not figure in this discussion, for although he held twenty-two manors in Yorkshire, none was in the North Riding. For a list of his holdings, see Rosenthal, “The Estates and Finances” 194-96.

48 For a discussion of Roos’s life, see Seaton 30-35.
died in 1420. But the majority of his grandfather’s estates passed through his grandfather’s second wife, Joan Beaufort, to Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury.\textsuperscript{49} This division of lands caused conflict between the two branches of the Neville family throughout the 1430s, but Salisbury, as a member of the King’s Council, ensured that the conflicts were consistently resolved in his favor. As a result, the Westmorland branch did not support the Nevilles in their battle with the Percies during the 1450s (Storey, \textit{The End} 109-15). In Ryedale, the Westmorland Nevilles controlled the manor of Kirkby Moorside, which lay in the parish of Kirkby Moorside (\textit{VCH} 1: 513); the manor of Appleton in the parish of Appleton (1: 466); and the manor of Riseborough in the parish of Normanby (1: 542). In the vicinity of Thornton’s wapentake, they also owned a manor in Langbaurgh and three manors in Cleveland (2: 295, 314).

Though they owned no manors in Ryedale, it was the Nevilles and the Percies, both of whom held much land throughout the North Riding, who held the most power in the vicinity of East Newton. Ralph Griffiths describes the rivalry between these two families as “a struggle of giants” (“Local Rivalries” 590).\textsuperscript{50} The Neville stronghold lay just to the south of Thornton in the Wapentake of Bulmer, where they owned the castle of Sheriff Hutton and the manor of Easingwold (\textit{VCH} 2: 129, 177). Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury also owned manors in Middleham, located in Richmondshire in the northwest corner of the North Riding, and he controlled castles at Barnard, Richmond, and Middleham (Storey, \textit{The End} 128). The Percy Earls of Northumberland’s estates in the North Riding lay primarily in the Wapentakes of Pickering-Lythe and Birdforth—that is, the Wapentakes contiguous with Ryedale to the east and west. In Pickering-Lythe they owned the manors of Seamer and Thro xenby (\textit{VCH} 2: 481, 483).\textsuperscript{51} In Birdforth was the Percy honor of Topcliffe, the family’s chief seat in the North Riding, as well as the manors of Asenby, Catton and Gris thwaite (2: 73-76). Thus, just to his south Thornton

\textsuperscript{49} For the Percy-Neville genealogy, see Storey, \textit{The End} 110-11.
\textsuperscript{50} For a detailed map of Neville and Percy estates in Yorkshire, see Storey, \textit{The End} 128. For a map of the Neville lands in the late fourteenth century, see Given-Wilson xii.
\textsuperscript{51} For a more detailed discussion of the Percy holdings in the fifteenth century, see Bean 36-42.
would have found one of the strongholds of the Neville family, and to his east and west he would have found the strongholds of their great rivals, the Percies.

The two families’ conflicting interests boiled over into open violence in 1453 in what was the most fantastic and dangerous case of magnatial feuding in late medieval England.52 The event that ignited the conflicts to follow was the announcement that Thomas Neville, a younger son of Salisbury, was engaged to Maud Stanhope, co-heiress of Ralph, Lord Cromwell. As it happened, Henry VI had previously granted Cromwell two manors which had formerly belonged to the Percy family and which had reverted to royal possession after Henry Percy, First Earl of Northumberland was attainted for treason against Henry IV. By the 1440s, Henry Percy, Second Earl of Northumberland had re-claimed those very lands for himself and thus was none too pleased with the prospect that they would fall into the hands of his enemy’s son. Suddenly, Percy was faced with the potential for a large power shift in northern politics. As a result, his sons orchestrated a series of attacks against the Nevilles across the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1453-54.

In June, 1453, John Neville, a younger son of Salisbury, attacked Lord Egremont, a younger son of Percy. In response, Richard Percy, Egremont’s brother, ransacked two Neville manors in Yorkshire. In August, the Percies planned their revenge by ambushing the Nevilles as they returned from the wedding which had precipitated the violence in the first place, and seven hundred and ten men were charged for participation in the Percy ambush. It was an unfortunate coincidence that Henry VI lapsed into a mental breakdown in this very month, resulting in these magnates having even fewer inhibitions against violence. September witnessed a series of attacks by each family upon the manors of the other, and in October, both families—including Salisbury and Northumberland themselves—met in full array at Topcliffe. Although the violence continued into 1454, there was a sudden shift decidedly in favor of the Nevilles when York became Protector of the Realm and Salisbury, his closest ally, Chancellor. York

52 I derive my discussion of the Neville-Percy conflict primarily from Ralph Griffiths, “Local Rivalries.”
and Salisbury headed to the city of York, with the authority of the crown behind them, where they held a commission that convicted Egremont and Richard Percy, forcing them both to accept onerous financial penalties. By November 1454, both Percy brothers were in York’s possession.

The Neville-Percy rivalry hardened the families into opposing factions, as the Nevilles came to be allied with York and the Percies with Henry VI. As Ralph Griffiths comments:

The Percy-Neville dispute was unusually crucial in the passage of events towards the outbreak of war. When it entered its most violent phase in 1453, it was still a northern feud between two rival houses whose history over the previous three-quarters of a century had made mutual hostility a way of life. But between the summer of 1453 and May 1455 their private disagreement was absorbed into the wider struggle for national, public objectives. (“Local Rivalries” 629)

These factions had formed as a result of this series of conflicts (which all occurred quite close to Thornton’s lands). It is, then, no great leap to the events of 1455, when York, Neville and Warwick took up arms against the king at the Battle of St Albans, often seen as the opening salvo of the Wars of the Roses. There is no evidence that Thornton was at all involved in these disputes; however, the aristocratic violence that erupted in the North Riding must have affected Thornton deeply, even if he were astute enough not to become personally embroiled in the turmoil. In a poignant example of what conflicts between rival magnates could bring, the Percy-Neville dispute, and the war that followed, would ultimately bring down the king, as well as York, Salisbury, Warwick and Northumberland—that is, all the leading magnates of the North Riding.
2.4: “The Democratization” of Religion: The Devotional Aspects of the Lincoln MS

The latter half of the Lincoln MS is taken up with texts of a primarily devotional and moral nature. These texts, some in Latin and some in English, are consonant with what Christine Carpenter calls the “utterly conventional” religion of the fifteenth-century English gentry (“The Religion” 58)—there is certainly nothing smacking of heterodoxy in this collection. Thornton was one of the privileged few in the fifteenth century who had access to a wide variety of MSS and supplies of paper on which to copy texts of devotion, as well as the free time to create these two compilations. He is a part of what Hilary Carey describes as “a tiny elite, the spiritual athletes of later medieval England” (381). The texts Thornton has gathered reflect two of the main tendencies in late medieval devotion: an affective focus on the Passion, and a lay desire for access to the spiritual practices of the institutional Church. If one reads through A.I. Doyle’s “A Survey of the Origins” with a specific eye to the religious texts Thornton collected, a clear trend emerges: the devotional texts he was reading predominantly circulated among clerical audiences, suggestive of Thornton’s desire for access to church-sanctioned spiritual texts.53 Further evidence for a clerical milieu is provided by his copy of the Liber de diversis medicinis (Item 81), which contains the marginal comment “Rector de Oswaldkirke” (f. 288r), indicating that this text, as well, had circulated among churchmen before Thornton copied it (as discussed above in Section II).

Several of his texts, the most notable of which is The Previte of the Passion (Item 29), form extended affective meditations on Christ’s suffering and death. The Previte, a translation of the Pseudo-Bonaventuran Meditationes vitae Christi, invites its reader to enter into Christ’s suffering, to experience what Christ experienced on the cross.54 After a short introduction, the text reads: “Be-gynne nowe thy meditacyone at the be-gynnyng

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53 For example, for a discussion of the MSS of “John Gaytryge’s Sermon,” see Doyle, “A Survey” 30-36; for the Tractatus Willelmni Nassyntagyn, see Doyle 43-44; and for Hilton’s Epistle on Mixed Life, see Doyle 197-202.

54 Nicholas Love’s Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ was a more widely disseminated translation of this pseudo-Bonaventuran text, and it seems that these two Middle English translations were undertaken separately.
of cristes passyone and persue it feruently to þe laste Ende, of the wilke I sall towche to þe a littill. […] Be-holde nowe besylye to every poynste as if þou were there bodyly. And be-holde hym graythely as he rase upe fro his super” (f. 179r). The words “as if þou were there bodyly” intimate a desire to experience what Christ experienced. The text then continues through a chronology of the Passion, dividing the events of Christ’s death into sections that accord with the monastic hours. In this way, the reader can meditate on the Passion at intervals throughout the day and can participate in monastic devotions without having to leave the active life. Eamon Duffy aptly observes that such devotional texts “reflect the democratization of the tradition of affective meditation on the Passion which was the staple of the religious practice of the devout and the religious élite of late medieval England and Europe in general” (265). Thornton’s collection also contains a few Latin texts encouraging meditation on the Passion. His “ffyve pryers to the wirchipe of the ffyve wondys of oure lorde Ihesu Cryste” (Item 24) serves as a good example: “[P]er sanctissimam plagam, dulcissime Ihesu, misericordie, O Ihesu beatissime, O Ihesu quam in dextro pede tuo sustitenuisti [sic] in cruce, perduc nos ad cognicionem viam veritatis amen. Pater noster, ave Maria, amen” (f. 178r).55

The second major emphasis among Thornton’s devotional texts centers around validating and exploring the mixed life. Significant in this context is Thornton’s inclusion of a number of works by Richard Rolle, the Yorkshire hermit who died in 1349, likely as a victim of the plague.56 As Jonathan Hughes explains, Rolle’s significance lies largely in his extensive connections with a number of lay patrons, and the wide-spread lay interest in his writings that developed throughout the early fifteenth century (82-95). As he comments, “The works of Rolle and the author of The Cloud are a testimony to the

55 For further examples of affective devotion to the Passion, see Items 34, 49, 51-53, 55, 57, and 76-79.
56 For a discussion of Rolle and his intellectual and religious milieu, see Allen’s extensive introduction to English Writings. For a concise description of Rolle’s form of affective piety, see Vincent Gillespie, “Mystic’s Foot.” Jonathan Hughes notes that “Robert Thornton was a member of a minor gentry family who had been lords of the manor of East Newton near Pickering, where Rolle had his first cell” (93). Thus, there may have been a large element of ‘home-town pride’ in Thornton’s decision to inscribe so many of Rolle’s writings in the Lincoln MS. For a further discussion of Thornton’s geographical proximity to Rolle, see Allen, Writings Ascribed 36-37.
importance of the initiative of solitaries and others outside the regular orders in private religion” (104). But Rolle’s form of mysticism was by no means austere, and as Nicholas Watson notes, his ascetic program lacks the rigor that was expected in late medieval Christianity (43). A limited (and thus attainable) form of ascesis would certainly appeal to a gentry landowner, however devout he might have been, for the daily tasks required of running a medieval manor must have been onerous. And as we know from the romances he has collected, Thornton was no stern moralist, rejecting the world—he liked his entertainment, and his romances, as we will see, celebrated the worldly life of the landed gentry.57

A number of texts from the Lincoln MS could be used to illustrate Thornton’s interest in validating the mixed life, but I will here focus briefly on just two: *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (Item 71) and Walter Hilton’s *Epistle on Mixed Life* (Item 60). The first is an anonymous prose treatise that announces its intentions from the very beginning: “A, dere brethir and systirs, I see þat many walde be in religyon bot þay may noghte owthir for povête, or for drede of thaire kyn, or for band of maryage, and for-thi I make here a buke of þe religeon of þe herte þat es of þe abbaye of the holy goste” (f. 271r). The text, then, is directed at those who have inclinations to devotion but are constrained by social forces from following up on those inclinations in the standard manner by taking religious orders. This becomes a treatise for those in the mixed life. The *Abbey* subsequently develops an analogy between the virtues practiced by one in the mixed life and the physical building of those in religious orders, suggesting that one can construct one’s own metaphorical cloister based on proper living (ff. 271v-272r). Such an idea would be palatable to a man like Thornton, who clearly had devotional inclinations, but was also the paterfamilias of a landed estate.

57 Though he does not mention Thornton, Watson discusses a group of Rolle’s works that happen to appear together in the Lincoln MS, stating that these works show “signs both of Rolle’s adaptability and of his growing awareness of the complexity of the spiritual life” (239). For a dismissive view of Rolle’s career and writings, see Knowles 48-66, who comments that “many of those who have written of him have accepted him also as a mystic of note. This is a mistake” (64).
The second text, *The Epistle on Mixed Life*, is by Walter Hilton, a northern English religious writer who lived a generation after Rolle and who was clearly influenced by Rolle’s ideas. Like Rolle, Hilton is known for his concern that devotional practices be disseminated among the laity. The portion of this text recorded by Thornton addresses those with sovereignty over other men, specifically those owning land:

> And sothely, as me thynke, this mellid lyfe accordis maste to þe. Ffor sence owre lorde hase ordaynede þe And sett þe in þe state of soveraynte over oþer, als mekill als it es and lent þe habowndance of werldly gudes for to rewle and susten specyaly all þose þat are undir thi governace and thi lordchipe after thi myghte & thi cunnynge. And also after thou hase ressayuuede grace of þe mercy of oure lorde godd for to hafe overwhate knaweynge of thi selfe […] (f. 223r)

The implication is that one can rule as a secular lord—so long as one does not abuse one’s position—and still live a life greatly devoted to contemplation. Since Hilton returns repeatedly to the theme of how to treat one’s servants and tenants, it is no surprise that Thornton selected this portion of Hilton’s work. Jonathan Hughes suggests that Thornton would have identified himself with the recipient of Hilton’s text, a suggestion which, given the emphasis on lay access to devotional practices expressed in this section of the Lincoln MS, seems accurate (295).

Robert Thornton was most definitely a man who took his religious devotion seriously. The act of copying so much material in both MSS would have been an arduous task, an act of devotion in and of itself. He does not, then, accord with Colin Richmond’s contention that the religion practiced by the fifteenth-century English gentry was characterized by “a fatal lukewarmness” presaging the Henrician reforms (“Religion” 196). Whether Richmond’s analysis is correct as it applies to English society at large is beyond the scope of the present discussion. What can be confidently asserted is that Thornton did not suffer from any such “fatal lukewarmness.”

But in terms of Thornton’s practice of compiling romances, the devotional texts form no more than a backdrop, for he has separated them from the narrative texts,

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58 See also his similar comments in “Religion and the Fifteenth-Century English Gentleman.”
suggesting he kept his entertainment and his devotion comfortably separate. The religious texts contained in the Lincoln MS are certainly a valuable testament to the history of lay spirituality in late medieval England. For the present discussion, these texts show us the depth of Robert Thornton’s religious devotions, and they show us that he envisioned these devotions as different in kind from his romances. It is to those romances that we now turn.\(^{59}\)

### 2.5: The Kingly Romances of Alexander and Arthur

The opening of the Lincoln MS contains two texts, the Prose *Life of Alexander* (Item 1) and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Item 5), which bear striking similarities to one another: both focus on the exploits of a ruler bent on conquering wide swaths of land, both have a ruler who dies at the hands of a treacherous enemy, and both have a ruler who ultimately ends up inscribed in the catalogue of the Nine Worthies. But even more to the fore in Thornton’s compilation are the allusions to the Alexander legend contained in the Alliterative *Morte*.\(^{60}\) Interestingly, William Matthews notes some of these similarities without mentioning that the Alliterative *Morte* and the only Middle English prose Alexander narrative both survive uniquely in Thornton’s compilation. The fact of their survival in a single MS, of course, suggests that this intertextuality was not lost on

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\(^{59}\) Throughout his dissertation, Owen Daly asserts that Thornton’s religious texts and romances exhibit a cohesive ideological pattern: “For a member of the Thornton family, to read a romance and to practice formal meditation were physically and perhaps psychologically similar acts” (290). However, as I discuss in what follows, Thornton’s romances celebrate the economic identity of the gentry. While this is not in any way antithetical to orthodox religious practice in the fifteenth century, the orientation of these romances is explicitly this-worldly, and thus I do not find Daly’s attempts to synthesize the devotional and narrative elements of this MS convincing. These are elements which Thornton himself, after all, went to lengths to keep separate.

\(^{60}\) To be discussed in more detail, below. For more on these allusions, see Matthews 32-67 and Patterson, *Negotiating* 219-22.
Robert Thornton, the only individual we know definitively to have read both of these texts.

Within Thornton’s collection, however, the connection between these two romances runs further than textual allusions, for it seems that Thornton intentionally placed these texts together as a cohesive unit, set at the head of his MS. These two texts are different in kind from the other romances which Thornton has recorded: whereas the other romances, which I will label “familial romances” (discussed below), work to effect a cohesion in their audience and triumphantly celebrate structures of power harmonious with the economic position of the gentry, these two texts are more troubling and are marked by an ambiguous relationship to centralized authority. Both of these texts take up the figure of the king, and they suggest an indissoluble tension at the center of royal power.

From an examination of the MS, it is clear that Thornton placed these two texts into a thematic unit. Most significantly, he has created a program of illuminated initials for these texts which is not replicated elsewhere in this MS (though he does take up this program in the London MS). As Joel Fredell notes, the Prose Alexander contains ten spaces for large (i.e. 10-13 lines) initials and 103 small (i.e. 2-5 lines) initials, and the Alliterative Morte contains eighty-two spaces for small decorated initials (78). This opening unit, then, “suggests a decorative hierarchy which attaches particular prestige to these two works in the miscellany as a whole” (Fredell 79). None of the other romances garners this attention from Thornton, indicating that he intended that these two texts be received as a single unit. This program of illumination draws the reader’s attention to these particular texts; by comparison, the other romances in the collection appear quite sparse. There, the romances lack decorated initials, and the text generally appears in unadorned double columns.

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61 Of the other romances, Thornton uses four large initials in Sir Eglamour and three in Sir Degrevant; the rest of the romances contain one or two. For a discussion of the difficulties encountered in trying to represent these initials in her edition of the Prose Alexander, see Chappell.

62 See the similar remarks of Hardman, “Reading the Spaces” 250-56.
2.5.1: The Prose Alexander

The Historia covers the entire life span of Alexander, from his conception by the Egyptian sorcerer Anectanabus and the Macedonian Queen Olympia, through his childhood, his conquests, and ultimately his death by poisoning at the hands of Antipater’s son. Christine Chism’s reading of the Alliterative Wars of Alexander provides a valuable starting point for the current analysis, for the issues she foregrounds contrast with the interest in monarchical power foregrounded by the decoration opening the Lincoln MS. Chism’s analysis is based on the Alliterative version, but her conclusions certainly apply to the Prose Alexander, as these are the two sole surviving English translations of the I3 recension of the Latin Historia de preliis, and an examination of the two texts reveals them to be quite similar. Chism reads this text as marked by deep anxieties about the East. In this text, the East appears in a variety of forms (e.g., the Persians, the Jews, the Gymnosophists, the Brahmins), but Alexander effaces each one in his series of conquests. But along with conquering the physical space of the East, Alexander is also trying to outrun his heritage, since his lineage marks him as a hybrid of East and West. He was born of an Egyptian father and a Macedonian mother.

63 The Prose Life of Alexander is a translation of the Latin Historia de preliis Alexandri magni, which itself is an epitome of Archpriest Leo of Naples’s Nativitas et victoria Alexandri magni. Leo reputedly translated his text from Pseudo-Callisthenes’s Greek Alexander narrative ca. 950. The Historia was written from Leo’s translation ca. 1100, and, according to Richard Stoneman, “In the three centuries from 1100 when vernacular literature was being composed, the Historia de preliis was translated more times than any other text except the Gospels” (240). The Historia survives in three distinct recensions, the third of which (known as I3, composed ca. 1200) forms the source for the Prose Alexander. Bunt describes Thornton’s text as a plain, straightforward translation of the Historia de preliis. However, he notes that in Thornton’s translation there are parts of the letters exchanged between Alexander and Dindimus found in the I1 and I2 recensions, but not in the I3 (149-50). For a complete textual history of the various recensions of the Historia, see Cary 38-61 and Ross 50-65. George Cary dates the I3 translation to before 1150, and he posits a now-lost I3a recension which, he conjectures, was created in England and which forms the source for Thornton’s text and for the Alliterative Wars of Alexander. However Hoyt Duggan, “The Source” argues that Cary’s date for the I3 recension is too early, dating it instead to the late twelfth to early thirteenth century. In addition, Duggan has shown that there is no reason to posit the I3a recension, suggesting instead that Thornton’s text and the Wars are based on the I3 recension itself. For an edition of the I3 recension, see Die Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni, ed. Karl Steffens. George Cary notes that the I3 redactor has “injected a stream of moral reflexions, symbolic interpretations and bombastic phrases. […] The I3 Historia de Preliis remained pre-eminently the moral version of the legend” (169).

64 This reading is found in Chism 111-54.
and he cannot, no matter how he tries and how much he conquers, write the East out of his personal history. In killing his teacher Anectanabus he has unwittingly killed his father, and he subsequently becomes a student of Aristotle, thus killing off the East and replacing it with the West. But the text’s consistent return to Alexander’s mortality ultimately frustrates these efforts to re-write his lineage. At seemingly every turn, he meets some reminder of his imminent death, thus alerting the audience to the fact that Alexander’s attempts to write the East out of his past are doomed to failure.

However, the MS context of Thornton’s *Alexander* suggests that issues of the East and of origins are not to the fore. Instead, Thornton’s program of illuminated initials, uniting this text in appearance with the Alliterative *Morte*, intimates that these two texts engage in a common cultural project, one that, as I will show, focuses centrally on questions of monarchical power. As Joel Fredell demonstrates, the large initials in the *Prose Alexander* cluster around the hero’s youth and around his exchange of letters with Darius, and Phillipa Hardman similarly notes that the illuminations in this text “were meant to emphasize the political power and kingly status of Alexander” (255). By contrast, Alexander’s encounters with the various wonders of the East do not receive the textual markers of large initials. A group of spaces for large initials clusters around the first three folios and introduces sections of the narrative wherein Alexander tames his horse Bucephalus (f. 1r); Alexander accepts the challenge from King Nicholl, which marks his first battle as a military commander (f. 2r); the first letter from Darius, Emperor of the Persians, who will become Alexander’s great rival (f. 2v); and Alexander’s first address to the Macedonians on his accession to the throne (f. 3v). Additionally, in the

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65 The only surviving copy of the B version of the Alliterative *Alexander*, found in Oxford, Bodleian MS Bodley 264, does suggest an interest in the East, for although only seven folios of *Alexander* survive, it has been compiled alongside a French romance of Alexander and a French narrative of the travels of Marco Polo (Guddat-Figge 253-54). The other surviving English Alexander romances, however, lack such a context. The surviving fragment of the A version, found in Oxford, Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. C.3, only contains some Latin school texts in addition (Guddat-Figge 280). The C version, which is the immediate subject of Chism’s reading, survives in two MSS: Dublin, Trinity College MS 213, which contains only a one-folio fragment of C, along with selections from the A-text of *Piers Plowman*, a Life of St Remigius, and a short prose description of Alexander’s enthronement, taken from Caxton’s edition of the *Dictes* (Guddat-Figge 114). The other surviving C version is found in Oxford, Bodleian MS Ashmole 44; this MS, however, contains only this Alexander romance, a fragment of 97 folios (Guddat-Figge 246).
margin next to the blank space for the large initial on f. 7r., Thornton has written “Rex equitans,” which shows his intention of providing an illustration of Alexander astride Bucephalus, an assertion of the emperor’s royal identity.66 In addition to the spaces left for large initials, a series of small illuminated initials portrays the successive kings whom Alexander conquers, each containing the head of an older, bearded man with a crown. These smaller initial letters were all executed, and they typically occupy three or four lines.67 Such an emphasis contributes to the impression that Thornton was interested in this text’s portrayal of the monarch. Furthermore, the size of the illuminated initials that would have been accorded to Alexander—had they been executed—dwarfs the initials accorded to Darius and Porus, indicating Thornton’s interest in portraying Alexander’s regnal power, along with his superiority over those whom he conquers. However, the depiction of monarchical power in this text is fraught with difficulties, and the text eludes this merely celebratory system of illumination. An examination of several of Alexander’s conquests will illustrate the text’s ambivalent portrayal of its hero.

In the text recorded in the Lincoln MS, Alexander wrestles with questions of his fate. Early in the narrative, the god Serapis comes to him in a dream, foretelling that his “dedes schall be made mynde of to the worldes end” (f. 4v; 15).68 But on learning this, Alexander only wants to know of his death, which enquiry Serapis answers quite bluntly: “After a drynke þou schall take thi dede” (f. 4v; 15). The verbal parallel between Alexander’s dedes and his immanent dede is striking, and this moment suddenly interjects a tint of death to an otherwise triumphant period for Alexander: he has just killed the wicked Anectanabus, his illegitimate father, and King Philip is now dead, leaving Alexander to rule. Immediately upon accession Alexander had rather effortlessly

66 Further spaces for large initials occur on ff. 6r, 22v, 24v, 26r, and 26v. Only one of these spaces, that on f. 26r, does not celebrate Alexander’s royal power. This particular space marks the beginning of the letter of the Queen of the Amazons to Alexander. Alexander’s reply letter is similarly marked by a large initial, on f. 26v. There is also a small depiction of Alexander inside a 5-line initial A.
67 Depictions of Darius can be found on ff. 7r, 9r, and 17r. A depiction of Porus can be found on f. 24r.
68 Herein, I provide quotations from *The Prose Life of Alexander*, ed. J.S. Westlake. This is a diplomatic edition which thus gives a good representation of Thornton’s text, with minimal editorial intervention. References are to page numbers from this edition.
subdued Africa and Rome. His military prospects looking promising, he has halted this progress to re-admit death into the narrative by asking Serapis how he will die. When Serapis predicts greatness for Alexander, the young king only wants to know of his death. Awaking from this dream Alexander understandably feels burdened, and his first action is to found a city, which he named “Alexander after his awenn name” (f. 4v; 15).

The contrasting ideas of death and the realm’s dependence on the king’s body are yoked together, given emphasis by the immediacy with which Alexander transitions from his dream of death to the founding of the city. His decision to name the city after himself, then, must be read in light of this mingling of death and the expansion of power. From this point on, the reader can no longer look at the expansion of Alexander’s power in a purely triumphalist way, for the mutability of the human body, which is here seen to subtend the actions of the nation, places doubt on the long term durability, and even validity, of those actions.

At several points in the narrative, the text engages in extended meditations on the rhetoric of kingship. Such moments, wherein Alexander meditates at length on the nature of monarchy, are relatively rare in the Middle English romance tradition (one noteworthy exception being the Alliterative Morte), and in this text the amount of space devoted to them outweighs that devoted to descriptions of battles. Furthermore, the text gives voice to the extended discourses of those who would challenge Alexander’s power. These series of exchanges—between challenge and defense—never achieve rhetorical resolution: there is no definitive moral “winner” to Alexander’s debates with Darius or the Brahmins. Instead, the debates are simply aired.

Several of Alexander’s conquests point further to the tensions surrounding centralized power in this text. Early in his series of conquests, Alexander prepares to lay siege to Jerusalem. As he readies for the attack, an angel visits the Bishop of the Jews, telling him to open the city to Alexander and to welcome him, “For hym by-houe & be lorde of alle þe werlde. Bot at þe laste þe wrethe of godd sall falle apon hym” (f. 6r-v; 19). When Alexander enters the city, he comes upon the bishop’s miter, “whare-on was wretyn þe name of grete godd Tetragramaton,” a reference to the Hebrew form of the
divine name (Yahweh/Jehovah), held in reverence by the Jews. At this moment, Alexander seems to be up for special approbation, for the Jews have welcomed him warmly to their city, Alexander has won Jerusalem without bloodshed, and he has done due reverence to the God of the Christian Bible. There appears to be a harmonious marriage of Alexander and the Jewish people here. But when the reader moves on to Alexander’s subsequent conquests, the privileged position of his “marriage” to the Jews is undermined, and Alexander cannot be seen as the champion of proto-Christian monotheism. In subsequent conquests, he worships the god of the sun (f. 10r; 28) and he worships Apollo (f. 10v; 29), suggesting a political pragmatism to his worship.69

The Jews also take Alexander into the temple and, after teaching him how to worship the Jewish God properly, show him “a buke of þe prophicye of Daniel, in þe whilke he fande wretyn, þat a man of Grece sulde distruy þe powere of Perse. And Alexander was reghte gladde, supposynge þat it was hym-selfe” (ff. 6v-7r; 20). This “prophicye of Daniel” is a reference to Daniel 7-8, which details a he-goat destroying a ram with two horns. Most scholars read this passage as an allusion to Alexander the Great’s defeat of the Persian empire, freeing the Jews from Persian control (Boadt 508-09), and Alexander here correctly interprets the he-goat’s conquest as a reference to himself.70 However, the vision related in Daniel continues to relate how “at the height of [the he-goat’s] power the great horn was shattered,” referring to the division of Alexander’s kingdom after his death. Alexander, though, chooses to read this prophecy selectively, focusing on the passage’s initial illustration of his glory and ignoring its subsequent prediction of his imminent death, a selective reading process which renders him—naively—“reghte gladde.”

69 W.R.J. Barron discusses the same passage as it appears in the Alliterative Wars of Alexander, which comes from the same recension of the Historia as the Prose Alexander. Barron notes how “The blurring of Jewish and Christian traditions casts Alexander in the role of the benevolent pagan” (29).
70 The Book of Daniel was likely compiled during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-64 BC), the Seleucid King who ruled over Palestine. Boadt labels this book a “vaticinium ex eventu,” that is “a prediction after the fact,” in which the author creates a character of long ago and puts into his mouth as predictions all the important events that have already happened right up to the author’s own time and place” (509). Thus, this book was written well after Alexander’s conquest of Palestine.
This subtle critique of Alexander continues in his encounter with a primitive group known as the Gymnosophists, who live in simple poverty without homes or clothing. In admiration of their lifestyle, Alexander offers them a boon. Their only request serves further to undermine Alexander’s power by casting ironic light upon it: “‘Gyffe us,’ quoþ þay, ‘vndedlynesse, so þat we mow noste dye; for oþer reches couet we nane’” (f. 30r; 73). The text here puts forth its moral critique of Alexander, foregrounding the failures inherent to his quest for political dominance: he has offered the Gymnosophists a boon—an act of political power, to be sure—but their ironic reply shows up the very limitations of that power. No matter how much he may conquer, he cannot grant immortality. Such a limitation makes Alexander’s subsequent statement all the more damning, for he has failed to recognize—or perhaps, once again, selectively chosen to ignore—the Gymnosophists’ critique. When asked why he continues trying to conquer so many nations, he replies, “þe cause whi I do it es of þe prouydence of godd. For hys mynystre I am, doand þe commandement of hym” (f. 30r; 74). Alexander’s rather pious claims ring empty here, given the Gymnosophists’ immediately preceding critique of his pretensions to power.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to Alexander’s ethical system comes from the Brahmins, another primitive group whom the Greeks encounter at the margins of the world. The series of exchanges between Alexander and the Brahmins exemplifies the indissoluble tension at the center of this text’s vision of monarchy, for they cannot meet face to face:

Alexander hadd grete desyre to speke wit þe Bragmayns. Bot he myȝte noste wynn ouer þe water; it was so depe & so brade Bot if it had bene in þe monethe of July and Auguste. And also it was full of ypotaynes & scorpyones and cocadrilles, out taken in þe fordais monethes. And when he saw þat he myghte on na wyse wynn ouer he was reȝte heuy. (f. 31v; 77)

Instead, they are forced back upon the consolation of an exchange of letters, with each putting forth arguments regarding the superiority of their lifestyle. But the arguments are
never resolved. Where military might cannot exert itself, political rhetoric steps in, but such rhetoric—in this text—is unable to provide clear solutions.

The series of letters which Alexander and the Brahmins exchange occupies six folios (ff. 31v-37r), by far the longest sequence in this text. Alexander initially writes to the Brahmins asking for instruction in their way of life, but their reply contains some sharp criticism of the Greek lifestyle and an assertion of the superiority of the Brahmin way of life. The Brahmins resemble the Augustinian vision of the prelapsarian world, wherein the human will accords perfectly with God’s: they only eat so much as will sustain their bodies; they do not wear clothes; they do not have private property; they only have sex for the purpose of procreation; no one is a servant of another. Alexander then replies, in a long letter, that they live in such a simple manner out of necessity (i.e. the poverty of their land) and not virtue, and thus they should not make claims to moral superiority over the Greeks. The Brahmins write back yet again, condemning Alexander and the Greeks for their pride, and Alexander concludes the final reply letter with a threat: “I swere 3ow by oure godde3 of myghte, þat, & I myghte come to 3ow with an oste, I sulde gare 3ow leue 3our wrecheid lyfe, and by-come men of armes, als many of 3ow als ware able” (f. 37r; 88). But his threats are hollow, for he cannot cross over the final river, and his consolation is to erect a pillar stating, “I, Alexander, Philipp son of Macedoyne, after þe discomfytour & þe dedd of Darius & Porus come one were vn-to this place” (f. 37r; 89). The series of letters exchanged achieves no resolution and, when Alexander’s recourse to military action fails, he is forced back upon establishing a memorial to his conquests. But even that memorial undermines his pretensions to absolute power. By highlighting his recent successes against Darius and Porus, and reminding the pillar’s viewer that he had intended to bring war to the Brahmins (“I […] come one were vn-to this place”), the pillar ultimately leaves us with an uneasy sense of failure, the sense that Alexander has reached the limits of his power.

Alexander’s death scene brings to the fore—in the most poignant manner in this entire narrative—the fragility of monarchical power and its dependence on the body of the ruler. After being poisoned by the son of Antipater, Alexander calls his notary and
makes a public proclamation of the division of his kingdom. After this follows an earthquake, which the Babylonians interpret as a sign that Alexander has died: “And than thorowte all Babyloyne þe noyse rase þat Alexander was dede. And þan all þe Macedoynes rassee hallely and come armed to the Palace, and cryed on prynces & said vn-to þam: ‘Sothely,’ quoþ þay, ‘but if þe onane schewe vs oure Emperour we sall slaa þow ilk ane’ ” (f. 48r; 112). The repetition of “and” here suggests a series of causally-linked events: Alexander has proclaimed the dissolution of the empire, which is followed by an earthquake, which is followed by rumors of Alexander’s death, which is followed by chaos in the body politic. The perception that the great leader has died unleashes a surprisingly immediate form of chaos, an indication of the fragile connection between the ruler’s body and the effective functioning of centralized power. The mob’s insistence on seeing Alexander foregrounds this connection, for they need to behold his physical presence to know that his power is still intact.

Of course, Alexander is not dead yet. His final political act restores—for a fleeting moment—unity to the body politic. As he speaks to them, frail and near death, they are reduced to tears. And then he dies and is buried. But the text does not end on the burial of the leader, at that moment when the body has officially disappeared from public sight. Instead, the text ends with a catalogue of the twelve great cities which Alexander built:

He biggyd also in his lyfe xij grete citees þat hider-to-wardes bene enhabyt, and þis are þaire names. First Alexander þat es called yprysilicas, þe secund Alexander es called Bepyporum, þe thrid Alexander es called Sithia, þe ferthe Alexander es called Bicontristi, þe fift Alexander es called Þeraucton, þe sixt Alexander es called Buctiphalon, þe seuent es called vnder þe ryuer of Tygre, þe aghtend New Babiloyne, þe nyend Aptreadam, þe tend Messagetes, þe elleuend Ypsyacon, þe twelfed es called Egipt. (f. 49r; 115)

In this final moment, we are reminded that these “grete citees” have “hider-to-wardes bene enhabyt,” which memorializes Alexander’s regnal power, attempting to sever that power from the corruptibility of the king’s body: although Alexander may have died, his cities are still inhabited. And even their being called Alexanders highlights the
connection between the king and his cities. The same moment in the I3 recension of the
*Historia de preliis* makes this connection more explicit, for here the prose turns to meter,
drawing the reader’s attention to the repetition of the lands named for Alexander:

Prima Alexandria, que dicitur Ypsiaritas,
Secundia Alexandria, que dicitur Yepiporum,
Tertia Alexandria, que dicitur Sithia,
Quarta Alexandria, que dicitur Ricastricti,
Quinta Alexandria, que dicitur Yaranicon,
Sexta Alexandria, que dicitur Bucefalon,
Septima Alexandria, que dicitur sub fluvio Tigris,
Octava Alexandria, qui dicitur Babilon,
Nona Alexandria, que dicitur Aprecreandam,
Decima Alexandria, que dicitur Massagetas,
Undecima Alexandria, que dicitur Yproxiaton,
Duodecima Alexandria, que dicitur Egyptus. (198)

The confidence of the Latin text, marked by its use of anaphora, is not replicated in the
Middle English translation, where the connection between the cities and their founder
breaks down mid-way through the catalogue: “þe sext Alexander es called Buctiphalon,”
but by “þe seuent” city, the translator no longer bothers to make explicit the dependence
of the city upon the name of its founder, for it merely “es called vnder þe ryuer of Tygre.”
Alexander is no longer mentioned in connection with the final six cities, as the attempt to
memorialize the leader, to deny the kingdom’s dependence on his physical presence, is
given up in exhaustion and exchanged for a mere list.

Finally, a brief return to Alexander’s reading of the Book of Daniel will illustrate
the tension which lies at the heart of this text’s view of monarchical power. Alexander’s
conquest of Jerusalem, when placed in the context of this vision, is devalued; whereas the
list of cities Alexander has founded, or the *explicit* to the text (“Here endez þe lyf of gret
Alexander, conquerour of all þe worlde”) gesture towards permanence, the revelations
contained in Daniel remind the audience of this romance what is to happen after
Alexander has died. For after the he-goat has died, and his horn is shattered, four more
horns grow in its place (8:8), a reference to the division of Alexander’s empire among
four of his generals upon his death. Alexander’s general, Ptolemy, followed by his
successors, controlled the Jewish lands for several generations. Then, “out of one of [the four horns] came a little horn which kept growing toward the south, the east, and the glorious country” (8:9). This is the Seleucid Kingdom, which came to have power over the Jews in 198 BC (Boadt 496). 1 and 2 Maccabees complete the series by narrating the Jewish fight for independence from the Seleucid Kingdom, finally erasing Greek-derived power from Palestine.

These Scriptural passages provide a commentary upon Alexander’s career, contained inchoately within the romance itself, which, to a medieval reader equipped with a basic familiarity with the Scriptural chronology, would color any evaluation of that career. This one moment, this one passage from Scripture mentioned as Alexander conquers Jerusalem, positions Alexander’s conquests relative to a whole series of subsequent military rulers to conquer the Jews, removing him from any permanent position of privilege. In such a light, Alexander’s pretensions to absolute power are shown to be temporally limited, for although he does conquer the entirety of the known world, all the way to the river of the Brahmins, he cannot alter the kingdom’s dependence on his physical presence. Recourse to the Bible’s narration of Alexander’s successors, then, provides further illustration of the indissoluble tension at the center of monarchical power: the king’s body is necessary for the maintenance of power, and without that bodily presence, power is diluted and passed on. And although Robert Thornton’s planned system of illustrations might point the reader towards moments of triumph—moments of Alexander’s youth when his physical prowess is at its peak—the text’s insistence on the fragility with which such power underwrites the kingdom militates against an over-simplified, triumphalist reading.

Such a tension would be all-too-familiar to one living in England through the middle years of the fifteenth century. Someone in Thornton’s time and place was particularly positioned to appreciate the connection between the king’s body and the effective functioning of the monarchy. Henry V died in 1422, leaving his eight-month-old son as the King of England. At this moment those who had been the closest advisors of Henry V faced a challenge, for they could not, based on their own authority or what
they perceived Henry V would have wanted, simply assume power for themselves. Power had to be granted to the council by the reigning king, who at that point was too young even to speak. To get around this difficulty, the Lords created the necessary fiction that governing authority belonged solely to the king, but that it was temporarily being ceded to the council (Ralph Griffiths, *The Reign* 28). By 1436, when Henry VI began taking a hand in governing the realm, this fictional exchange of power was rendered moot, but from 1422-36, when the king’s body was absent, so to speak, the governance by council was anything but smooth: Gloucester, the Protector of the King, and Beaufort, the Chancellor, openly disputed in council; lawlessness increased dramatically throughout the provinces; new taxes were introduced; and the English lost the Battle of Orléans, lost control of Paris, and lost their alliance with Burgundy. And perhaps an even more poignant reminder of the fragile connection between the king’s body and the realm’s effective governance would have come from the period of Henry’s mental collapse, 1 August 1453-25 December 1454. During this period, the greatest outbreak of Neville-Percy violence erupted in Yorkshire, as the magnatial families of the north gathered in opposing factions. These became the very factions which soon hardened intractably into the two sides of the civil war. Such moments likely brought to the fore—for those living through them—the tenuous dependence of the government on the king’s bodily presence.

**2.5.2: The Alliterative *Morte Arthure***

The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (Item 5), the other romance in Thornton’s first unit, narrates the story of the Arthurian conquest of continental Europe, which can be traced back to Geoffrey of Monmouth and is associated with the chronicle tradition of

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71 For details about the minority, see Ralph Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI*, especially ch. 2, 7 and 9.
Arthurian literature. In this story, the Emperor Lucius sends emissaries to the Arthurian court, demanding tribute, and in response Arthur attacks and defeats him. He does not stop there, but conquers much of the continent, not stopping until he is recalled to England by the usurpation of Mordred, whom he had left behind as regent. The story ends as Arthur and Mordred kill one another in battle. The poem’s composition has been variously dated from 1360 to 1400, but the Lincoln MS contains the only surviving copy.

Much of the criticism of this poem has, until recently, centered on several very basic questions, namely questions of genre (i.e. is this a romance or is it a chronicle?), questions of Arthur’s culpability, and questions of the dating of the poem (i.e. mining the poem for topical references to events of the late fourteenth century). Recently, scholars have brought more theoretical nuance to their readings of the text, variously reading it through post-colonial, New Historicist and psychoanalytic perspectives. But the perspective of real medieval readers has not been adequately addressed to date, making the comments of Richard Moll all the more pressing: “If we, as modern readers of Arthurian literature, truly wish to understand the interpretive context of a medieval Arthurian text, we need to listen to what medieval readers have to say” (9). Lee Patterson comments that “It is relevant to note that according to the most recent paleographical report, the Thornton MS originally began with the Morte Arthure and that a prose Alexander was added later, apparently as an appropriate introduction” (Negotiating 221 n.61). But such a statement comes in the footnotes, relegated to an interesting speculation on the connection between the Alliterative Morte and the Prose Alexander, but disconnected from Patterson’s central argument. Here, though, the MS itself suggests that it deserves a more central place in our analysis of these two texts, for it offers us the only evidence of a real medieval reader of these two texts, texts which so many scholars

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72 For a discussion of the specifics of the poem’s sources, see Krishna 17-19 and Matthews 3-67.
73 For a discussion of the dating of the poem’s composition, see Krishna 12 and Benson, “The Source.”
74 See Moll 81-83 for a concise critical history of the poem.
75 For example, see Patterson, Negotiating 197-230; DeMarco; Chism 189-236; Ingham 77-106; D. Vance Smith 188-222; and Heng 115-79.
have noted are similar, but which no one has seriously pursued as a single cultural artefact. By looking at these texts in conjunction, we can begin to see “what medieval readers have to say,” which is surely more than just “relevant to note.”

It is significant for the present discussion that the *Morte* contains a number of allusions to Arthur’s predecessor in conquest, Alexander. In fact, William Matthews demonstrates that the author of the *Morte* must have had access to some recension of the *Historia de preliis* or one of the many vernacular translations of the text (38-40). In many ways, the *Morte* holds Alexander up as a model for Arthur. In one episode near the middle of the poem, Gawain leads a foraging expedition into the woods in search of food. He meets a strange knight with whom he does battle, and after both wound one another, they set aside their arms and begin to talk. The strange knight, Priamus, reveals his identity to Gawain:

> [My father] is of Alexander blood,  overling of kinges;  
> The uncle of his aiele,  Sir Ector of Troy.  
> And here is the kinreden  that I am of come,  
> Of Judas and Josue,  these gentle knightes.  (f. 81r; 2602-05)\(^76\)

Priamus’s lineage marks him as a descendant of four of the nine worthies, but the supremacy of Alexander within this tradition, and Priamus’s close connection to Alexander, are revealed a few moments later in the narrative. Gawain claims to be but a knave in Arthur’s court, which elicits great respect from Priamus:

> Yif I hap to my hele  that hende for to serve  
> I be holpen in haste,  I hete thee for-sooth!  
> If his knaves be such,  his knightes are noble!  
> There is no king under Crist  may kempe with him one!  
> He will be Alexander eier  that all the world louted,  
> Abler than ever was  Sir Ector of Troy!  (f. 81r; 2630-35)

At this moment, coming as this text does immediately after the Prose *Alexander*, Priamus’s prediction that Arthur “will be Alexander eier” sounds foreboding. Much like

\(^{76}\) I provide quotations from *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* (ed. Larry Benson). I provide folio numbers from the MS and line numbers from Benson’s edition. Note, though, that this edition on occasion regularizes the morphology. For ease of reference, though, I have maintained Benson’s readings.
Alexander’s selective reading of Daniel, which reads the triumphs to the exclusion of the downfall, so too does this text suggest Alexander’s triumphs as a precursor to Arthur’s, without mention of Alexander’s tragic end. Such silence leads Lee Patterson to conclude that “no answer is given to the question of how Arthur, invested with Alexander’s force, can avoid Alexander’s fate” (Negotiating 222).

Of course the most well-known connection between Arthur and Alexander comes from their common membership in the Nine Worthies. In the Alliterative Morte, Arthur has a dream wherein he witnesses the Worthies each climbing onto the Wheel of Fortune: “The eldest was Alexander that all the world louted” (f. 89r; 3408). After the text provides a catalogue of the first eight Worthies, Fortune turns to Arthur and says, “For-thy Fortune thou fetches to fulfill the number / Als ninde of the noblest named in erthe” (f. 89v; 3438-39). It is, apparently, Arthur’s destiny to complete the Wheel that began with Alexander. Then, in Arthur’s final moments, after he has returned to England and is preparing to face Mordred, he connects his own destiny to that of Alexander:

Then romes the rich king with rewth at his herte,  
Heves his handes on height and to the Heven lookes:  
“Why then ne had Drighten destained at His dere will  
That He had deemed me today to die for you all?  
That had I lever than be lord all my life-time  
Of all that Alexander ought whiles he in erthe lenged!” (f. 96v; 4155-60)

At this moment, Arthur holds Alexander up as the benchmark of conquerors.

Such allusions portray Arthur as an inheritor of Alexander, and as we have seen, references to Alexander within the first thematic unit of this MS suggest tension around the tenuousness of monarchical power. And although the Morte does not adumbrate the same tension around the issue of the king’s body, there is, nevertheless, a significant amount of what I will label “doubling back” in this text to suggest that, in conjunction with the Prose Alexander, the first thematic unit in the Lincoln MS presents a very ambiguous portrait of kingship.

The opening lines of the text encode an anxiety about the rhetoric of the project about to be undertaken. After the initial eight lines, asking—in a rather standard romance
invocation—for God’s blessing on the world and salvation for humankind, the author turns to his own role: “And wisse me to warp out some word at this time / That nother void be ne vain but worship til Himselven / Plesand and profitable to the pople that them here” (f. 53r; 9-11). The invocation continues by providing a précis of the narrative to come; this précis, however, presents only the first half of the story, that is Arthur’s conquest of Lucius’s kingdom:

Herkenes me hendely and holdes you stille,  
And I shall tell you a tale that is trew and noble  
Of the real renkes of the Round Table  
That chef were of chivalry and cheftains noble  
Both wary in their workes and wise men of armes,  
Doughty in their doings and dredde ay shame,  
Kind men and courtais and couth of court thewes,  
How they won with war worshippes many,  
Slogh Lucius the lithere that lord was of Rome,  
And conquered that kingrik through craftes of armes;  
Herkenes now hiderward and heres this story! (f. 53r; 15-25)

Entirely absent from this are Arthur’s subsequent conquests of continental lands (an action which many have seen as indicative of his overweening pride), and, of course, the treason of Mordred, and Arthur’s ultimate death. The occlusion of the bad events to come undermines the preceding stanza’s pretence to a monologic “Plesand and profitable” truth. These stanzas, taken together, leave the audience with the unsettling notion that not all will be told.

As Arthur sets out on his campaign against Lucius, and before any fighting has commenced, he has a dream wherein a horrible dragon comes from the West, killing everything in its path. Coming to meet the giant, from the East, is a bear, and, as is to be expected, the dragon and bear battle, with the dragon finally killing the bear (ff. 61r-61v; 756-805). Arthur, as usual, is incapable of unpacking the allegory of his dreams, and so asks his philosophers to interpret it for him. Their interpretation is unambiguous:

“Sir,” said they soon then, these sage philosophers,  
“The dragon that thou dremed of, so dredful to shew,  
That come drivand over the deep to drenchen thy pople,
Soothly and certain thyselven it is,
That thus sailed over the se with thy seker knightes.” (f. 62r; 814-18; emphasis mine)

Later, Arthur encounters the Romans, and their Viscount has adopted the dragon as his heraldic symbol:

He dressed in a derf sheld, endented with sable,
With a dragon engoushed, dredful to shew,
Devourand a dolphin with doleful lates,
In sign that our soveraign sholde be destroyed,
And all done of dayes, with dintes of swordes,
For there is nought but dede there the dragon is raised! (f. 75r; 2052-57)

This is more than mere coincidence or heraldic “sloppiness” on the part of the poet, for here the dragon is explicitly stated to be a “sign” that Arthur should be destroyed, the exact opposite of his earlier dream, wherein the dragon functioned conversely as a sign that Arthur would destroy “the tyrauntes that tormentes thy pople” (824).77

After defeating Lucius and turning his eye towards other continental kingdoms, Arthur makes a vow not to harm church lands:

Then will I by Lumbardy, likand to shew,
Set law in the land that last shall ever,
The tyrauntes of Tuskan tempest a little,
Talk with the temporal, whiles my time lastes;
I give my protection to all the pope landes,
My rich pensel of pees my pople to shew.
It is a folly to offend our fader under God
Other Peter or Paul, tho postles of Rome;
If we spare the spiritual we speed but the better;
Whiles we have for to speke, spill shall it never! (ff. 78v-79r; 2406-15)

But Arthur’s claims to respect Church lands do not long hold up, as his conquest of the town of Crasine results in destruction of church property: “Ministeres and masondewes they mall to the erthe, / Churches and chapels chalk-white blaunched, / Stone steeples full stiff in the street ligges” (f. 85v; 3039-41). Most significantly, though, as Arthur’s army moves towards Rome, the pope himself feels threatened and sends a cardinal to

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77 For an extended discussion of the instability of heraldry within the Morte, see D. Vance Smith 192-212.
Arthur, seeking “suraunce for sake of the Lord / But a seven-night day to they were all sembled,” when Arthur should be crowned in Rome (f. 87r; 3181-82). The papal court and Arthur exchange hostages to ensure the maintenance of the covenant. And so although Arthur never directly attacks the pope, the curia definitely interprets his intentions as threatening, and it thus responds by seeking a truce. Arthur has seemingly forgotten his earlier vow: “If we spare the spiritual we speed but the better; / Whiles we have for to speke, spill shall it never.”

Although Arthur may have a troubled moral status in many Arthurian texts, Mordred never does. He is, with the exception of the Alliterative Morte, consistently depicted as the evil usurper. But in this text, Mordred is given a moment of repentance, when he wishes that he had never betrayed Arthur. After witnessing Gawain’s death, Mordred is overcome with grief:

Yet that traitour als tite teres let he fall,  
Turnes him forth tite and talkes no more,  
Went weepand away and weryes the stounde  
That ever his werdes were wrought such wandreth to work!
When he thought on this thing it thirled his herte;  
For sake of his sib-blood sighand he rides;  
When that renayed renk remembered himselfen  
Of reverence and riotes of the Round Table,  
He romed and repent him of all his rewth workes,  
Rode away with his rout, restes he no lenger,  
For rade of our rich king, rive that he sholde. (f. 94r; 3886-95)

The elegiac longing invested in this passage, his lament for the past, for the “reverence and riotes of the Round Table” complicates the status of Mordred. He is no longer the standard Mordred, a merely wicked usurper who takes advantage of Arthur’s absence, nor is he the embodiment of Arthur’s incestuous indiscretions. From his moment of repentance—and given that moment’s uniqueness in the Arthurian tradition—this Mordred becomes a character who complicates Arthur’s status. No matter what faults texts within the Arthurian corpus ascribe to the king, he is undeniably the rightful ruler,

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78 I first heard of the Alliterative Morte’s unique presentation of Mordred in 2004 at a paper presented by Edward Donald Kennedy at the 39th International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, MI.
and thus these texts brook no sympathy with the one who would try to steal the throne.79
But here, in one brief moment, that tradition is challenged, as a glimpse of sympathy for
Mordred comes through.

The other unique addition of the Alliterative Morte to the Arthurian tradition
complements this text’s focus on Mordred’s repentance and its resultant complication of
the righteousness of Arthur’s cause: Mordred has impregnated Guinevere (3550-52).80
Arthurian texts consistently depict Arthur and Guinevere’s relationship as barren,
indicative of the political sterility of the kingdom. This depiction is striking when set
within the context of romance at large, which places such a high premium on
reproduction. Most noteworthy is the Middle English Havelok, who, after claiming the
thrones of England and Denmark and re-establishing good governance, is gifted with
fifteen children. The Erle of Tolous, which survives in the Lincoln MS, also contains
such a sexually prolific ending, where the hero, once he achieves the throne, has fifteen
children (discussed below). In many romances, procreation is the final stamp on the
restoration of good governance to a family, locality or nation. In these cases, the
fecundity of the body politic and the fecundity of the human body mirror one another—
and the same happens in the Arthurian tradition, only in reverse. But this brief mention
of Guinevere’s reproductive capacity points the audience suddenly, if only briefly,
towards Arthur’s sterility. By showing Guinevere as capable of reproduction, this text
suggests that the fault for their sterile relationship lies with Arthur.

79 The one notable exception to this standard clear moral division between Arthur and Mordred, beyond the
Alliterative Morte, is Malory’s Morte Darthur. In this text, near the end of the first tale, Arthur takes on
the role of Herod in the Slaughter of the Innocents when he orders all infant boys to be killed, in the hopes
of killing Mordred. Interestingly, though, Field suggests that this moment may have originated in a now-
lost longer version of the Alliterative Morte. Of course, we will never know whether this is accurate or not,
but if Field is correct, such a text would certainly complicate the moral divide between Arthur and Mordred
even further.
80 In the Old French Mort Aru, Mordred also has children, but in this text it is clear that they are not
Guinevere’s. After Arthur has died, Mordred’s two sons emerge and attack Winchester: “Cil dui fill
estoient bon chevalier et adurê” (252), a description indicating that they were grown men and thus could
not have been the children of Guinevere, who had only recently been seized by Mordred when Arthur
departed for the continent.
Throughout the Arthurian tradition, Arthur has always been a figure of ambivalent moral status. From the romance tradition’s portrayal of Arthur’s dubious conception, to the Mort Artu’s depiction of royal hubris and obtuseness, to Layamon’s depiction of Arthurian brutality, to Malory and the Stanzaic Morte’s pathetically fated king, Arthur has never been an unproblematically good monarch. But the Alliterative Morte has subtly encoded a critique of Arthur that has a unique place in the tradition. By highlighting Arthur’s affinities with Alexander (and by ignoring their common fate towards which such affinities point), and by developing several key moments of what I have labeled “doubling back,” the Morte suggests that the exercise of monarchical power is not a clean, monologic affair. Heraldic symbols, evil usurpers, and monarchical procreation do not behave in accord with official royal ideology.

2.5.3: Compiling Alexander and Arthur

Codicological evidence shows that Thornton copied the Alliterative Morte early in the compilation process and the Prose Alexander rather late, which points towards a conscious choice on Thornton’s part to place these texts together. Angus McIntosh has shown that Thornton’s copy of the Morte and The Previte of the Passion (Item 29) were both copied from a common exemplar (as discussed above), and Thornton has placed each of these texts at the front of separate booklets, indicating that they were acquired early in the composition process, intended to be used as the first texts in two distinct sections of the MS: a romance section and a religious section. Thornton copied the Morte on paper stocks B, C and E, while he copied The Previte on stock E alone. It thus seems that Thornton began by copying the Morte, and once this paper stock ran out switched to stock E. When the Morte was completed, or at least after stocks B and C
were exhausted, he began copying *The Previte*. These two texts most likely form Thornton’s earliest efforts at creating this compilation. Furthermore, the Prose *Alexander*, which appears in its own booklet at the head of the MS, is written on a combination of stocks F and L, which stocks also appear sporadically throughout the later quires of this MS. If indeed the *Morte* was copied first, on stocks B, C and then E (once B and C ran out), stocks F and L, appearing—besides in *Alexander*—later in the MS, would represent later copying activity. This state of paper stocks then suggests that the Prose *Alexander*, since it is copied on stocks F and L alone, was also copied late and then placed at the head of the MS. In addition, the folios at the end of the *Alexander* booklet appear to be single leaves, and Thornton has left several of them blank. In the other booklets of the Lincoln MS, Thornton consistently filled the final leaves with ephemeral poems or charms. The variation from this otherwise consistent pattern suggests that Thornton has added the *Alexander* romance at a comparatively late stage.82 And the most convincing evidence of the relatively late addition of the *Alexander* quires can be seen in the worn appearance of the leaf containing the opening of the *Morte*. In fact, it is the most badly worn of all the intact leaves of this MS, suggesting that, for most of its early life, it lay unbound, at the head of the MS (until the late addition of the Prose *Alexander*).

The significance of this codicological finding lies in what it reveals about Thornton’s efforts at creating a thematic unit at the head of the Lincoln MS. The physical appearance of the *Alexander* text suggests that it belongs more properly in the London MS, for the excerpts of the *Cursor Mundi* appearing there contain the same system of large illuminated initials. Moreover, the London MS also contains romances about Charlemagne and Richard the Lionhearted, the global scale of whose conquests

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81 See Appendix D.
82 See Keiser, “Lincoln Cathedral” 177 and Hanna, “The Growth” 61. John Thompson, “The Compiler” 117-19, suggests that the existence of the blank leaves after *Alexander* precludes us from concluding that Thornton intended these two texts be read together. The assumption that a few blank leaves would impede the medieval reader’s ability to make thematic connections between two texts is, I think, unwarranted.
would accord nicely with Alexander’s.\textsuperscript{83} The fact that the \textit{Cursor Mundi} appears on a paper stock that was also copied late in the process, coupled with the illuminated initials it shares with \textit{Alexander}, indicates that they were both copied around the same time.\textsuperscript{84}

But Thornton chose not to put \textit{Alexander} in the London MS, but instead to place it at the head of the Lincoln MS. Given the \textit{Morte}’s allusions to Alexander, and given their common vision of irresoluble tensions underlying monarchical power, this pairing works to create a cohesive, and disconcerting, introduction to the Lincoln MS. As we will see in the next section, the rest of the romances in the Lincoln MS have a more local focus, speaking to issues more directly concerned with the social and economic world of the gentry. But these two texts consistently turn the gaze to the figure of the king, and in tandem they suggest an unease with royal power: \textit{Alexander}, marked by its investigation of the tenuousness of royal power, in tandem with the \textit{Morte}’s exploration of some of the contradictions inherent to centralized power, challenge any over-simplified, triumphalistic politics.

Such questions make sense for a man in Thornton’s position. Both of his MSS are devoid of reference to Henry VI, and, if the texts he copied are any indication, he seems to have had little interest in English national affairs. As we saw above (Section I), Thornton’s concerns were enmeshed in the business of the North Riding: his land is there, his associates all hail from there, and his short stint as tax collector only required that he work in Yorkshire. In this collection we do not see texts by Chaucer, Gower or Langland, texts associated with the south of England—London or even the court itself—and texts that enjoyed a comparatively wide national circulation at this time. Since Thornton’s interests were predominantly provincial, a cool distance from the king is only natural. After all, Henry VI had only visited Yorkshire on one occasion before being forced to flee there by the outbreak of civil war. In Thornton’s daily existence, more to the fore than the king would have been the aristocratic violence plaguing Yorkshire.

\textsuperscript{83} Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 622 provides a relevant example of a medieval compiler placing an Alexander text in the same MS as \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem}, a pairing which Thornton has rejected.

\textsuperscript{84} For the argument that the \textit{Cursor} was copied relatively late, see Chapter 3, Section I.
during the 1430s and 1440s (which I discuss below in Section VII), and more to the fore would have been the pressures exerted by magnatial landowners, triangulated as Thornton was by the Neville Earls of Westmorland and Salisbury and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (as discussed above in Section I). One can imagine the most pressing concern of all would have been management of his land, with Thornton trying to make East Newton yield enough profit to maintain his gentry lifestyle in a period that has been described as one of the worst agricultural depressions in English history, one whose “implications were potentially worse for landlords than for the peasantry” (Bailey, “Rural Society” 153). It is, then, no wonder that Thornton would not embrace the form of triumphalist political rhetoric that we saw, for example, in John Colyn's compilation.

Lest we think that this cool distance from Westminster is the sole political implication of the first unit of the Lincoln MS, we must remember Thornton’s illumination program. As discussed above, the large illuminated initials celebrate moments of Alexander’s ascent to power and celebrate him at his peak of power, while the smaller initials portray the kings whom Alexander vanquishes, all of which creates a paratextual support for Alexander drawing the reader’s attention to kingly power. Also, as noted by Joel Fredell and Phillipa Hardman, Thornton has developed a set of small illuminated initials for the Morte. In addition to these illuminated initials, he has also added a series of marginal flourishes (i.e. illustrations of animals and trellised patterns running up the outer edge of the text) on almost every folio of the Morte. These designs add prestige to these texts, something otherwise noticeably lacking in this MS. The

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85 See also the comments of Carpenter in “The Fifteenth-Century.” As she demonstrates, most minor landowners in the fifteenth century were struggling to make a profit, and typically what profits there were went towards maintaining the appearance of a gentry lifestyle.
86 These are likely the work of Thornton, for on f. 93v appears an eagle holding a scroll with the words “Robert Thornton” on it. There is, however, no way to know for sure whether this could have been the work of Thornton’s grandson, Robert.
87 John Thompson, “The Compiler” 118, suggests that this difference is due to a time lapse between copying the Morte and Octavian, the next text in the Lincoln MS. However, given the affinities between the Prose Alexander and the Morte, and given the decorative emphasis accorded to these two texts alone, I think this is an oversimplification. It seems more likely that Thornton is investing a special visual aesthetic in this text.
texts to follow, by contrast, are copied with only occasional sparse initials and no decorations in the margins.\textsuperscript{88}

This decorative program is far from an artistic accomplishment, for the decorations appear amateurish at best, and the illumination program for the large initials in the Prose \textit{Alexander} was never executed. However, the program does indicate Thornton’s intention of marking these two texts as somehow different, somehow more distinguished. We are left with a contrast between the celebratory appearance and the ideological implications of these two romances, especially when they are read in succession. This contrast is, ultimately, one that is not resolved in the context of this MS. But perhaps it never could be resolved, for it was one of the indissoluble contrasts of a life as a mid-fifteenth-century minor Yorkshire landowner, one whose concerns were more local, one who lived nearly two hundred miles from the seat of national government, and yet one who lived in a world where the propriety of monarchy in general was taken for granted.

The reign of the young Henry VI had proceeded disastrously. At Henry V’s death, English power was at a high point: the French had been defeated at Agincourt in 1415, and, in the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, Henry had been acknowledged as the heir to the French throne. But under Henry VI’s minority, and under his young rule, England lost to Joan of Arc and the French at Orléans in 1428, lost their Burgundian alliance at the Congress of Arras in 1435, lost control of Paris in 1436, and slowly began to lose control over Bordeaux, lands that had been held by the crown since Eleanor of Aquitaine married Henry II: “The effect of the calamities on Henry VI, his government, and his subjects may be imagined in terms of personal distress and dejection, and national shame and despair” (Ralph Griffiths, \textit{The Reign} 533).\textsuperscript{89} And, as we have seen, Thornton was the subject of “certain sinister informations laid before” the king, as a result of which he was

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\textsuperscript{88} Daly 18-97 suggests that the few initials appearing in \textit{Octavian} and \textit{Sir Degrevant} are important as structural divisions that mark large thematic shifts in the text. But there are so few of these initials (especially when compared to \textit{Alexander} and the \textit{Morte}) that their relative unimportance is beyond question.

\textsuperscript{89} For further discussions of the calamities of Henry’s reign, see Wolfe and Powell.
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discharged from his duties as a tax collector. It is understandable, then, why the texts in this first unit, the one focusing on the king, might problematize the ideology of kingship. But at the same time, the paratext he has created for the two romances lends them a sense of dignity, suggesting a respectful attitude towards the crown, if not towards Henry VI himself.

2.6: Familial Romances

In the next section of this MS, Thornton has recorded a series of romances which fit the pattern I label “familial romances”: Octavian, Sir Isumbras, The Earl of Tolous, Sir Degrevant, and Sir Eglamour. These five romances are markedly different from Alexander and the Morte, for the scope of their vision is much more localized, and unlike those earlier two texts, these are overtly economic. These romances work to test the nuclear family: by placing obstacles in the way of the paterfamilias, by scattering the nuclear family, and by finally allowing the hero to overcome each obstacle and re-construct the nuclear family through the exertion of his chivalric prowess, they play out a fantasy of the inviolability of the family (economic) unit that is both masculine and specific to the gentry.

90 I will discuss Sir Degrevant at length in Section VII of this chapter. Space prohibits me from discussing The Awntyrs or Sir Perceval here, though I take up the Awntyrs in Chapter 4. To date, Finlayson, “Reading Romances” and Daly are the only critics to examine in detail the literary implications of Thornton’s romances as a whole unit. One of the few other people even to comment on the ideological implications of the Thornton romances as a whole is Jonathan Hughes, who makes a brief comment that Thornton’s romances, taken as a whole, suggest that the nuclear family is the best societal method for controlling passions (282). Although I agree, as I argue in this section, that the romances place great emphasis on the nuclear family, I cannot concur with the moralized reading Hughes provides.

91 These romances follow the basic pattern of “the comic” outlined by Simpson, Reform 271-83, who strikingly demonstrates how nearly all late Middle English romances fit the pattern of comedy. His analysis focuses on the structural pattern common to the genre. The texts Thornton has copied, however,
Each of these familial romance inflects two issues of central importance to the gentry of fifteenth-century England: concerns with social advancement, coupled with concerns over how to keep the family line intact. In fifteenth-century England, these issues were tied up with one another as twin problems facing the gentry. As Christine Carpenter states, “In the later Middle Ages the only route to a degree of permanence for a gentry family, one that would survive even the end of the male line, was ennoblement” (“The Fifteenth-Century” 55). Social advancement was, no doubt, a top concern for many of the gentry, as under Bastard Feudalism they depended on neighboring magnates for economic security. Through practices such as maintenance and embracery, the fortunes of gentry families could rise and fall, often by events which they were helpless to control. Fifteenth-century England was, then, a place where the gentry knew their dependent status and had it consistently affirmed for them. But concerns for the nuclear family were also pressing, as gentry families who sought to expand their land holdings faced the threat of extinction. These twin concerns of social advancement and the security of the family can be seen in the anxieties mediated by these familial romances.

F.R.H. DuBoulay has identified the later Middle Ages as the time when a conjugal, private, and emotional model of the family began to stand beside the more traditional dynastic model in England (109-27). In particular, this time in England witnessed “the rise of the family, concerned with its domestic rather than lineal being, more turned in on itself, more private, less casually sociable, and, above all, more interested in its children for their own sake” (119). However, as DuBoulay goes on to remark, “If the close conjugal family was on the way, it had not yet in the later Middle Ages ousted the family as an institution which stretched across the generations, attracting a deep emotional loyalty that was dynastic rather than personal” (119). This transitional state provides an interpretive field within which to locate some of the central concerns of this grouping of romances. These texts evince a consistent concern for the nuclear family—with how father, mother and sons (never daughters in these texts) are to stand in

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are best thought of as a specific subset of the comic. As I discuss here, their focus is on integrating the role of social ascent by the gentle but non-noble with the concerns of the maintenance of the nuclear family.
relationship to one another, at the same time demonstrating concern for questions of inheritance. Interestingly, four of these five romances (*Octavian* being the exception) do not have an Old French or Anglo-Norman source and seem to have originated in late medieval England, providing further indication of their immersion in their historical moment, one of whose central characteristics was the changing dynamics of the family.

Peter Coss suggests that many of the romances of late medieval England likely circulated among the households of the country gentry. In his estimation, most of the surviving romances found their genesis in this cultural milieu, and most would have been read aloud, among select company, in the privacy of the chamber. As Coss rightly notes, the technology of booklet production facilitated these circumstances, where MSS could be passed around in unbound quires and easily combined with other booklets to form composite MSS. Booklet production would allow families to acquire—for a short time—a wide variety of texts, and to share them among friends and neighbors. The sheer diversity of exemplars required for Thornton’s MS, which was also produced as a series of booklets (see Section II above), is a testament to such a means of textual circulation. Coss’s suggestions are important to bear in mind, for they point to the private, domestic space of the gentry home as the main locus for reading romances. The concerns of this class over the inheritance of the family estate, mediated through a focus on the nuclear family, coalesce in the romances I discuss in this section and the next.⁹²

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⁹² For more on the difficulties the gentry faced in maintaining estates intact, see Carpenter, “The Fifteenth-Century.”
2.6.1: Octavian

The first romance in this unit, Northern Octavian (Item 6), is the story of the emperor and his family, and follows the common motif of the calumniated queen.\textsuperscript{93} When Octavian’s mother devises a ruse to make the court believe they have caught the queen in adultery, Octavian, fooled by the ruse, sends his wife and two sons into exile. Soon, a different animal steals each of the children, and Florent, the youngest, ends up living in Paris with a merchant while the other, Octavian, is reunited with his mother where they live at the court of the King of Jerusalem. The entire family is only reunited when France comes under attack from the Sultan, and Christians from around the world ride to the kingdom’s defense. During the battle against the Saracens, the younger Octavian is victorious, freeing his father and brother from Saracen captivity. Now the family is reunited, the emperor is reconciled to his wife, and they ride back into Rome as a victorious family.

Much of this text has a surprisingly overt interest in economics, presented in the form of class humor.\textsuperscript{94} Florent’s first act after Clement has adopted him, one that depends heavily upon stereotypes, sets the stage for several later moments of class humor. In this instance Florent, on his way to enter an apprenticeship to become a butcher, travels with two oxen. On his way he meets a squire who has a falcon and, as befits the son of an emperor, he trades the two oxen for that falcon. A medieval reader could hardly miss the symbolic import of these two types of animals: the oxen, used to plow the fields, is exchanged for a falcon, used to hunt, a behavior that is the preserve of the aristocracy. It is not clear why Clement would have had oxen in the first place, for he lives in the city, is called a merchant, and seemingly has no ties to agricultural labor. But Octavian is not motivated by the constraints of realistic character portrayals. Instead it

\textsuperscript{93} There are two distinct versions of the Middle English Octavian, known as Southern and Northern Octavian. Southern survives only in London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.2, while Northern survives in the Lincoln MS and in Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38.
operates, as we will see, in large thematic units used to play out various characters’ class associations. These are flat characters, as Nola Jean Bamberry notes, playing out a gentry drama about social class (384).

When Octavian banishes his wife, he leaves her with £40 for her exile. This sum, a common one in romance texts, is no mere random figure, for regulations in 1430 and 1439 decreed that anyone with £40 or more of income was obligated to accept knighthood.\(^\text{95}\) Thus £40 would have stood as a distinctive class marker, an amount signifying a title and concomitant social prestige, separating the upper reaches of the gentry from the more modest gentry. And, as discussed above, the documents in which Thornton appears attest to an interest in delineating who was a *miles* and who was not, always presenting the names of the *milites* first. The reference to £40 here serves as a sign of inclusion to the gentry audience, a sign that this is a text about their world.

But reference to an amount of £40 is not limited to this moment in the narrative. Clement sends Florent out with £40 to deliver to Clement’s brother, but *en route* Florent passes a horse which he decides to purchase. The horse’s owner, a merchant, offers to sell the horse for £30, but Clement instead offers £40: “The merchaund therof was full blythe / For to take the money swythe, / And hastyd hym away” (736-38).\(^\text{96}\) On one level, there is an element of slapstick comedy here, with the merchant darting off with the money of a naïve youth who clearly does not understand the game of haggling. But the criticism is not really pointed at Florent, for this moment actually serves to affirm his class identity and difference from the merchant. To Florent, £40 is an indivisible figure, for to divide the £40 would adulterate it with mercantilism. Once it becomes a figure tied into arithmetic, then its entrance into the commodity world is completed. But by

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\(^{94}\) Simons 105-11 discusses the social anxieties inherent to such class-based humor in *Octavian*. His discussion, however, focuses on the social changes occurring in England after the Black Death in 1348, which is the approximate date of the translation of Northern *Octavian* into Middle English.

\(^{95}\) The practice of distraint of knighthood, where the Exchequer tabulated the value of an individual’s land holdings and fined those who had a certain income yet refused to take knighthood, dates back to at least Edward III. For more on this, see Gray 623 and D. Vance Smith 29-37.

\(^{96}\) I provide quotations from *Octavian* (ed. Harriet Hudson). Note that there is a leaf missing between ff. 102 and 103, and half of f. 108 is missing. Hudson supplies the missing lines from the version preserved in
maintaining the “purity” of the £40 amount, and insisting on turning it over to the merchant as a whole, Florent maintains his existence in the realm of knightly non-arithmetic. This class critique is compounded by the fact that Florent was purchasing a horse, which—along with the falcon he had previously purchased—would have functioned as the animal most obviously connected to that knightly identity. Thus, Florent’s activities, though humorous, reinforce his identity as a member of the upper classes.

Florent’s ‘gentrified’ bartering habits contrast with those of his foster-father, Clement, for earlier in the narrative outlaws had kidnapped Florent and brought him “To the Grekkes se” (f. 102r; 569), where they met Clement. Here, Clement decides he wants to purchase this child and so inquires from the outlaws if he is for sale. In the inverse of Florent’s purchase of the horse, they offer to sell him for £40, and Clement bargains them down to £20 (f. 102r-v; 580-91). Such a moment shows, once again, how characters like Florent are different in kind from characters like Clement. Neither Clement nor the outlaws understand the inviolability of this amount, and so to them £40 is just another figure which is to be tossed about in a bartering process. Clement provides further illustration of his class difference when he names the child Florent, a pun on the gold florins with which he paid the outlaws for his new son. This points yet again to Clement’s immersion in a system of monetary exchange, a system from which £40, with its pretensions to indivisibility, would have us believe it is immune. This system of mercantile versus knightly arithmetic is an ‘in joke’ aimed at the gentry audience, men like Thornton, reinforcing the perception of class distinctions, which had, as we have seen, become more intensively codified in the early fifteenth century.

After Florent has killed the Sultan’s giant, the emperor Octavian—in France as part of the world-wide Christian army that has come to defend against the incursion of the Moslems—holds a feast in his honor. (Of course, they do not recognize one another as father and son at this point.) Feasts were marked, like hunting, as aristocratically-
privileged activity, and Clement’s behavior at this feast illustrates, with great comedic effect, his inability to maneuver within this world. For some unstated reason, Clement is under the impression that he is responsible for paying for the feast, and so as minstrels make their way into the hall, Clement dispels them by beating them, out of fear that he will not be able to afford their fees. He then steals the mantles of the kings gathered at the feast, holding them as ransom: “For youre mete moste ye paye / Or ye gete tham no more” (f. 105v; 1218-19). Only when the king assures Clement that he will pay for the feast does Clement return the mantles. Finally, when Clement tries to pay for his meal Florent “schamede full sore” (f. 105v; 1255), a clear indication of the inherent difference between the two. Clement does not understand the rules of aristocratic feasting, where to mention the cost while at the feast is anathema. To suggest that the things on the table have a price that can be summed and paid for would, as with Clement’s attempts to divide the £40, suggest that aristocratic social practice is part of the world of commodities. Octavian’s immediate affection for the boy Florent provides the final indication that Florent is somehow different from his foster father.

But bookending this dynamic and comedic drama of social class is a hyper-conventional romance text. In the beginning of *Octavian*, and at the conclusion, the text relies upon a string of romance conventions. In the beginning, Octavian and his queen cannot conceive, but after building an abbey as an act of piety, the queen gives birth to twin sons. Then follows the motif of the calumniated queen, as Octavian’s mother accuses the queen of adultery and sets a trap so that the court believes the accusations, as well. This is followed by the exiled woman losing her children to various wild animals, and the woman and her older son ending up in Jerusalem, a common locale in romance narratives. These developments occupy the first 529 lines of the text, after which the text turns to Florent’s adventures in the urban setting of Paris. These sections focusing on Florent, then, represent a move away from the standard fare of romance narrative, which rarely revolves around urban settings for long periods of time, has little interest in the domestic space of those outside the nobility, and certainly does not detail long exchanges between merchants and noblemen. *Havelok the Dane*, which devotes much time to
detailing Grim’s home and Havelok’s exploits in the city, provides the closest analogue to these moments in the middle of *Octavian*. But *Havelok* is an anomaly within the romance tradition, as most critics have noted, and these middle sections of *Octavian* are similarly anomalous. The end of the text mirrors the beginning in its return to conventional romance motifs. Here, the younger Octavian, his mother, and the lioness who rescued them from exile leave Jerusalem to join the battle against the Moslems, during which they free Octavian and Florent from captivity, defeat the Moslems, and return to Rome as a reunited and victorious family, all thoroughly conventional romance matter.

The central portions of this text, describing Florent’s time in Paris, are, as we have seen, marked by a dynamic comedy of social class, one which lies outside the conventions of romance. These lines occupy the great portion of the middle of this text, lines 530-1674, comprising a total of 1114 lines, or 62% of the entire narrative. Such an extended focus on Florent effectively pushes the child Octavian and his mother to the margins of the text, as they are in Jerusalem and receive no mention during this part of the narrative. Only at the very end, when the Christians descend upon France to defend against Moslem invasions, does the younger Octavian re-emerge, but his re-emergence becomes central to this text’s relation to gentry economic identity. Octavian is the one to bear the lineal succession of the family, for it is written in his name—he is the replication of the father.

At the beginning of the text it is not clear who is the older of the two sons. In response to their inability to conceive, the empress suggests she and her husband build an

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97 See also *Sir Launfal*, which similarly has an extended focus on urban life.
98 This count is based on the line numbers provided in Hudson’s edition. However, this does not reflect exactly the proportion of lines in the Lincoln MS, as there is a leaf missing between ff. 102 and 103, and half of f. 108 is missing. Hudson supplies the missing lines from the version preserved in Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38. This reconstruction, however, provides an accurate estimate of the proportion of Thornton’s text that would have been devoted to a depiction of Florent in Paris, had the text survived intact.
abbey: “And sone he gatt knave childire two, / Als it was Goddis will” (f. 99r; 83-84).99

The ambiguity as to which son is older is never explicitly resolved, and the children are separated in exile. But events soon demonstrate that the two sons, who are never given names by the emperor Octavian (and are only named by their respective foster fathers), indeed exist in a hierarchical relationship to their father’s power. A lion accompanies Octavian on his voyage to Jerusalem, protecting both him and his mother. We know from Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier au leon* that the lion often accompanies a knight as a sign of that knight’s worth. Moreover in *Sir Isumbras* (discussed below), the next romance contained in the Thornton MS, the lion is specifically associated with the eldest son. In that romance, as the three formerly lost sons ride into battle to meet with their parents, we see the two younger sons riding on a leopard and a unicorn. Then, “one on a lyone he come by-forne, / That was thair eldeste childe” (745-46).100 Here is evidence that points back to *Octavian*, suggesting that the child Octavian, by virtue of his association with the lion, is to be understood as the eldest son.

Florent ends up in Paris, living the urban life and receiving an education in chivalry from a merchant. By contrast, Octavian ends up in the court of Jerusalem, certainly a fittingly distinguished locale for one whose name indicates his superior position vis-à-vis his inheritance. Immediately upon meeting him, the King of Jerusalem provides the greatest attestation to Octavian’s position as eldest son by baptizing him and naming him Octavian (f. 102r; 514-16). From this point it is clear that the two sons are not indiscriminately placed in Paris and Jerusalem, but rather the one who is properly to bear the inheritance, the one who carries on his father’s name, is in the place of greater dignity.101

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99 As Ramsey notes, in many romances and folkloric narratives, the birth of twins was often scandalous, regarded as evidence of two fathers (170). In *Octavian*, however, there is no indication of any such association.

100 Herein quotations from *Isumbras* are from *The Thornton Romances*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell.

101 *Pace* Finlayson, “Reading,” who claims that Florent is “the real hero of *Octavian*” (647).
The younger Octavian’s sudden re-emergence into the text at the end cements his position as the eldest son, for when he rides into battle against the Saracens, both Florent and his father are held captive by the Sultan:

The Emperour, wythowt lees,
That hys own fadur was,
Bowndon fownde he there. [...] 
Hys fadur was the furste man,
That he of bondys to lowse began,
Ye wete, wythowten lees;
And he lowsyd hys broder Floraunce
Or he dud the kynge of Fraunce. (1741-43, 1747-51)

It is significant that, at the point of his re-entry into the text, Octavian frees both his father and brother. In the space of six lines the text repeats twice the father-son relationship between the two Octavians. This act of freeing his own father asserts the younger Octavian’s central place in the family drama, illustrating as it does the father and younger brother’s dependence on the older brother/son, even a brother/son who has effectively been absent for most of the text. And as Octavian re-emerges, and the family is re-united, Florent receives his compensation, as well: he is to marry the Sultan’s daughter, Marsabelle. The emperor forgives his wife, the older son is securely in line, and the younger son now has the bright promise of a wealthy future. The family returns to Rome, where they had previously been living in peace, having been dispersed, tested and finally re-united.

So this text provides a nice reassurance to the gentry audience that the nuclear family can survive hardships intact, and that every member will benefit from his/her place in that family structure. The wife is reconciled to her husband and returns to her place of prominence; the younger son is rewarded handsomely; and the eldest son sits secure in his position as inheritor of the family fortune and name. This is, of course, a fantasy which obscures the real economic conditions of many of the gentry in late medieval England:

Younger sons were the problem. Bearers of the family name, whose claim to some sort of gentility could not be pushed aside, but a terrible potential
drag on the heir [sic]. […] The great majority of these families were just not rich enough to support a wider kin-group or to leave younger sons with much more than the hope, nurtured by their fairy-tale counterparts, of finding a rich princess. (Carpenter, “The Fifteenth-Century” 51-52)

In spite of these social realities, this text—coupled with the class humor aimed specifically at the gentry members of the audience—functions as a triumphalist celebration of the social world of men like Thornton.

2.6.2: Sir Isumbras

Like Octavian, Sir Isumbras (Item 7) also narrates the temporary dissolution of the nuclear family and its subsequent reunion.102 This text, however, expresses less interest in a drama about social class and is instead more focused on the actions of the paterfamilias, illustrating the family unit’s dependence on his efforts to re-constitute their family after they have been separated. Here, the interest is in the figure of the father and his governing role, serving as a nice companion piece to Octavian, wherein, as we have seen, was expressed an interest in working out just how the nuclear family could support each of its members. In this text, Isumbras begins as a proud and wealthy landowner who pays no heed to his religion and is offered a choice: does he want to suffer now or in his old age? Isumbras chooses to suffer now, and immediately loses all his possessions. Forced to set out with his family in poverty, he successively loses each child to a wild animal and loses his wife to the Sultan, who is passing by on a ship and steals her away, throwing some gold to Isumbras for payment. Bereft of a family or an income, he takes a job for seven years as a blacksmith, where he makes armor for himself and, using this

102 Isumbras, a popular text if judged by MS survival, survives in eight MSS besides Lincoln: Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 175/96; Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1; London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.2; London, Gray’s Inn MS 20; Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III MS XIII.B.29; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61; Bodleian MS Douce 261; and Oxford, University College MS 142.
armor, defeats the Sultan. After a seven-year pilgrimage—during which an angel announces to Isumbras that he has been forgiven—he and his wife are reunited, and a battle between Christians and Moslems ensues. In this battle, Isumbras’s sons return, fighting for the Christian side and are, of course, victorious. And as in *Octavian*, the family is reunited after the final battle.

Andrea Hopkins notes how *Isumbras* mirrors the general pattern of the Sacrament of Penance, with sin followed by repentance followed by forgiveness and followed, ultimately, by an act of penance. These moments are all clearly visible in this text. Sin can be seen in the beginning, which unmistakably describes Isumbras as a man who does not care for his God. Repentance comes to the fore almost immediately, as Isumbras lectures his laborers on the importance of poverty, which Hopkins reads as an indication of Isumbras’s rejection of his former wealth (132-40). His forgiveness can be seen most clearly in the words of the angel:

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Forfeffene es the alle thi tryspase,  
For sothe als I the sayne!  
And wele the gretis nowoure hevens kynge,  
And grauntes the nowe his dere blyssynge,  
And byddes the torne agayne. (f. 113r; 535-39)
```

The angel also brings bread and wine to Isumbras, a sign that he has been re-accepted into the community of the faithful, for the Eucharist was forbidden to those in a state of mortal sin.103 Finally, Hopkins reads Isumbras’s fight against the pagans as a sign of his penance (142-43).104

But within this religious structure is a drama of one man’s descent and his reliance on chivalric prowess to re-establish his position at the head of his family. Thus, the discourse of both penance and chivalry are operative in this text. Individual exertion, central to chivalric ideology, is not antithetical to the theology of penance, for the decision to undertake auricular confession was a choice for a certain moral action that

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103 See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Tertia Pars 80.4.
104 Furthermore, *Sir Isumbras* can be seen to have religious overtones because of its clear narrative similarities to the Life of St Eustace.
one had to make, as was the decision to perform specific acts of penance. That Thornton likely would have been attuned to the penitential elements of this text seems obvious, given his interest in lay spirituality, as discussed above. However, in addition to the moral/theological register, it also seems important, given the gentry concern of the romances immediately surrounding *Isumbras*, to attend to the socio-economic concerns of this text. As Susan Crane notes, the so-called pious romances, of which *Isumbras* is certainly one, do not have the same pretensions to holiness as more overtly religious texts of the medieval English tradition, and they do not endorse the world-effacing ethos of hagiography; instead, these romances adapt the conventions of hagiography in order to advance the status of their decidedly worldly characters, and Crane rightly concludes that “romances and religious literature are animated by different values and ultimately endorse separate truths” (*Insular* 96). One of the truths *Sir Isumbras* endorses—and the truth that its context within the Lincoln MS foregrounds most clearly—is that the hero’s exertion of his chivalric will is the glue necessary to maintain the integrity of the nuclear family. His moral status as a properly penitent Christian would, of course, only contribute to his image as a proper head of the family.

Early in *Isumbras’s* descent, he finds his wife and children fleeing naked from their burning home. As he covers them with his clothes, he reassures them that those who are true to Christ will ultimately be rewarded (f. 110r; 99-134). Then he carves a cross into his shoulder. This action, seemingly motivated by some ascetic sorrow for his sin, stands in an interesting contrast to the legend of Havelok, who bore the “kyne-merk,” also a cross, on his shoulder. But Havelok’s mark was an external sign bearing witness to his predetermined role as king. Havelok did not choose to be king—the choice was, rather, thrust upon him, and the rest of *Havelok the Dane* narrates his efforts, and the efforts of those supporting him, to manifest his divinely-ordained role. But *Isumbras’s* actions do not reveal anything about the nature of the divine, for, as in *Job*, the divine is stable and unwavering throughout this text. Here, the divine truth is not awaiting a human figure to bring its message forth into the world, as in *Havelok*. Rather, it is *Isumbras* who must take specific actions and adopt specific attitudes in order to achieve a
state of concord with the divine, a state from which he has fallen. And so although this moment in *Sir Isumbras* works to show the audience that the hero is dedicated to his moral renewal, it also points the audience, from the outset of this text, to the significance of Isumbras’s active role in shaping his identity.\\footnote{It is also relevant to note that, as Daly 161 n.7 indicates, it was believed by many that the poor who died on crusade would be marked by a cross burnt into their shoulders.}

As Isumbras sets out, destitute and alone, he comes upon a blacksmith, who offers him a job. This moment completes the hero’s descent: formerly a wealthy landowner, he has now become an urban laborer. It is clear that he has become fully immersed in his new identity:

\begin{quote}
And thus bare the knyght iryne and stone  
Unto the seven wyntter were alle gone,  
And wroghte hym-selfene fulle woo;  
And untille that he couthe make a fyre,  
And than thay gafe hym 3omans hyre,  
Wele more he wroghte thane twoo!  
A smethymane thus was he thore  
Fully severe 3ere or more,  
And blewe thair belyes bloo. (f. 112r; 404-12)\\footnote{Strangely, Daly 135 suggests that Isumbras here becomes a miner, though it is clear that he is in fact employed in the shop of a blacksmith.}
\end{quote}

Here, he has fully entered the urban economy, as the text attests: “A smethymane thus was he thore.” He has even taken up a particularized spot in the guild structure, as he is given “3omans hyre.” The yeomen, the collective body of all those outside of a company’s livery, occupied the lower levels of guild life.

This moment marks Isumbras’s social nadir: separated from his family, all his former wealth gone from him, forced to work as a blacksmith. But at this very moment, Isumbras takes specific action to re-assert his former economic identity: he uses the technology of the blacksmith shop to build armor for himself (f. 112r; 413-16). I find this particular moment difficult to explain if we have only the rhetoric of sin and penance at our disposal, for the focus on the centrality of chivalry to Isumbras’s identity—armor is, after all, the thing he builds which marks his movement back towards his former knightly
status—suggests his moral status is but one part of his overall social identity. By his own hands he has begun to re-establish his former economic position, as well.

Isumbras also effects his reunion with his wife by his own actions, although both are unaware of the other’s identity (for it has been quite some time since they were together, Isumbras having survived seven years in a blacksmith’s shop followed by seven years on pilgrimage). Nevertheless, his chivalric efforts set off a chain of events which leads to their mutual recognition. First, he kills the Sultan who has been holding Isumbras’s wife as his queen. Then, after seven years of pilgrimage, and after receiving God’s forgiveness from an angel, he ends up at the castle where his wife now lives as a widow queen. A tournament then allows Isumbras to show off his martial prowess and enables a series of events to unfold which ensure the family’s reunion:

That daye the tournament solde be stede,
They horsed [Isumbras] on ane olde croked stede,
And sitt for-thoghte tham alle.

Bot by syr Ysambrace had redyne thurgh the felde,
There was none that undir schilde
Durste mete his croked stede,
That he ne gafe hym swylke a clowte,
That bothe his eghne stode one strowte. (f. 113v; 613-20)

Central to this scene is the hero’s martial superiority, seen also in the conventions of the Fair Unknown motif (as discussed in Chapter 1), wherein the court is unaware of the hero’s identity, assuming him to be a churl, here illustrated by the court’s placing Isumbras “on ane olde croked stede.” But the hero overcomes these obstacles, and his martial prowess wins him the respect of the court, as the queen cries out that this pilgrim who has come to her court “is wele worthi to fede” (f. 113v; 627).

Immediately upon the queen’s recognition of Isumbras’s chivalric superiority, the hero stumbles upon the very gold which the Sultan had earlier thrown at Isumbras as he stole his wife and the thing that will ensure the queen recognizes her former husband. The transition to this moment, the line after the queen’s exclamation of his worthiness, suggests that this find is no mere happenstance:
And so it byfelle ones appone a daye,  
The palmere wonte to the wode to playe,  
As it was are his kynde;  
The palmere saw a neste one heghe.  

The transition provided here (“And so it byfelle ones appone a daye”) indicates an immediacy to Isumbras’s fortuitous find. Inside the nest is the money with which the Sultan purchased his wife years ago. This point, Isumbras’s first lucky break of the entire narrative, comes right on the heels of his ‘chivalric coming out,’ so to speak, intimating a connection between otherwise seemingly chance events and one’s social stature. From here, Isumbras hides the gold in his chamber, only to be discovered by the queen, who also recognizes the money. This discovery made, Isumbras and his wife have their moment of recognition and he becomes the new king of the deceased Sultan’s kingdom. The catalyst for all these events was Isumbras’s victory in the tournament, and so, in this case, fortune helps the chivalrically able.

The end of the narrative sees the children return to fight alongside their father, an insistence that the nuclear family can overcome separation if the paterfamilias has the chivalric mettle. Here, the Saracens now under Isumbras’s rule have revolted against his decree that all the kingdom’s inhabitants become Christian. With an uprising on his hands, he and his wife put on arms and prepare to defend their throne and their faith, as husband and wife alone face an army of 30,000 angry Moslems. Though this moment tends towards the melodramatic (with the hero ready to fight such a force accompanied by no one but a woman), the sheer preposterousness of it underscores the centrality of Isumbras’s chivalric identity. But then, the sudden reappearance during the battle of the three lost sons comes completely unmotivated: “For righte als [Isumbras and his wife] solde hafe takene bee, / There come rydande knyghttes three” (f. 114r; 741-42). In fact, the only motivation for their sudden re-emergence in the text necessitates recourse to divine guidance: “An angelle thame to the batelle lede, / That semely was to sene” (f. 114r; 748-49). The united Christian family roundly defeats the Saracens and they have their brief moment of joy at their reunion, where King Isumbras distributes land to each
of his sons, once again, as in *Octavian*, fulfilling the fantasy of adequate rewards for each of the male inheritors.

### 2.6.3: Sir Eglamour of Artois

*Sir Eglamour of Artois* (Item 11) continues this focus on family relationships. Here, once again, the nuclear family is dispersed and only reunited because of the martial abilities of the father. In this particular case, though, the dissolution of the family unit very nearly results in incest—until, that is, Eglamour’s skills in fighting right an unspeakable wrong. Specifically, Eglamour is a knight (read “a gentleman, but not a member of the titled nobility”) who falls in love with Cristabelle, the daughter of the Earl of Artois. The Earl, not thrilled with the notion of his daughter marrying someone of a lower social status, offers Eglamour his daughter’s hand in marriage, provided he can complete three herculean tasks. After completing two of the tasks, he returns home, marries Cristabelle clandestinely, impregnates her, and leaves to face his last deed of arms. Of course the Earl is upset at finding his seemingly unmarried daughter with a child, and so he casts her, bastard son in tow, out to sea. Through some fantastical machinations, the son is separated from his mother and ends up in the court of the King of Jerusalem, who raises him and names him Degrabelle, while Cristabelle ends up at the court of the King of Egypt, who just so happens to be her uncle. Degrabelle, now fifteen years old and ignorant of the fact that Cristabelle is his mother, wins her hand by defeating the King of Egypt in a tournament and marries his own mother. Only when she recognizes the significance of Degrabelle’s heraldic symbols does Cristabelle begin asking who he is, and mother and son reach their moment of mutual recognition just before the disastrous consummation was to take place. Just then Eglamour returns to participate in a second tournament for Cristabelle’s hand, which he naturally wins, restoring the individuals to their proper places within the family.
The centrality of social class to this text becomes clear from the very outset, for Eglamour clearly inhabits a lower station than the Earl of Artois. The Earl’s title sets him apart from Eglamour, as earl was the most common heritable title of nobility in late medieval England. This is something of which Thornton would no doubt have been aware, as he lived among the strongholds of Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury, and Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmorland. In this text, it is clear that Eglamour is aware of the social gulf separating him from Cristabelle, for in response to Eglamour’s request that his squire reveal this love to Cristabelle, the squire tells him:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\textquote{e are a knyghte of lyttill lande,} } \\
\text{And mekill wolde hafe mare;} \\
\text{If I wende and say hyr sa,} \\
\text{In a skorne scho will it ta,} \\
\text{And lightly late me passe.} \\
\text{Maystir, þe man þat hewes ouir hey} \\
\text{The chyppis fallis in his eye:} \\
\text{Thus fallis it now and ay was. (ff. 138v-139r; 65-72)}
\end{align*}
\]

The squire’s insistence on the paucity of Eglamour’s wealth makes clear that for the daughter of an earl to marry one outside the ranks of the titular nobility would be a social transgression. Eglamour’s squire knows that a knight is different in kind from an earl. But Eglamour insists on trying to cross that class divide, and so he asks for Cristabelle’s hand in marriage. The Earl himself regards such an idea as a transgression, as well, for in response to Eglamour’s request that he marry his daughter, the Earl insists that Eglamour undertake three deeds of arms.

Such a condition might be read as a test of the worthiness of potential husbands for Cristabelle, as if these were the actions of a caring, paternalistic father. However, the Earl’s reaction to Eglamour’s return, after he has completed two of the three tasks, strongly suggests that the Earl reads Eglamour as a threat to his power:

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107 Herein quotations are from Richardson’s edition of *Sir Eglamour*, which provides parallel-text versions of the Lincoln MS and Cotton Caligula A.2.
The earl feels threatened by Eglamour’s chivalric successes, as he conjures the image of Eglamour taking these possessions—land and daughter—directly out of his own hands. Eglamour concedes the economics of this moment when he tersely comments, “So mot I the, / Noght bo[t] if I worthy be— / By God, þat es beste!” (f. 142v; 661-63). In other words, Eglamour admits that he will indeed win the Earl’s lands and daughter, so long as he continues to prove himself in the chivalric realm. When Eglamour returns, after having completed his final task and after Cristabelle has been exiled, he enters the Earl’s hall and, depositing the head of the dragon he had just killed at the Earl’s feet, audaciously demands the lands of Artois: “‘Haue here,’ he said, ‘þe wormes heuede! / And whare es myn þat I here leuede?— / Þou syttande in my place’ ” (f. 144v; 988-90; emphasis mine). By using the informal pronoun “Þou,” Eglamour adds further insolence to his demands. Finally, in an act of open defiance, he offers to dub anyone in the hall a knight, clearly usurping the role of the Earl (even if rightfully so, given that he has fulfilled his end of the contract). But before the situation escalates into open violence, Eglamour, for reasons unstated, leaves for fifteen years of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, leaving the Earl in power.

By this action, Eglamour not only defuses a potential fight with the Earl, but he also moves out of the text, forgotten about for the next few episodes. With his chivalric prowess effectively marginalized, the story turns to Cristabelle and Degrabelle, and it is at this precise moment that the incest plot begins to unfold. Through this motif, the narrative turns from a fantasy of social advancement to a fantasy of familial endurance, centered around the figure of the father. Here, a threat to familial relations is conjured that only Eglamour can prevent. But to get to the point wherein Eglamour saves the family and asserts his central role, he is first taken out of the narrative, and we may
thereby see just how chaotic domestic relations become without his powerful presence. The stanza wherein the text’s focus shifts from Eglamour to Cristabelle and Degrabelle illustrates just how dependent is the impending incest upon Eglamour’s absence:

Syr Eglamour, as ȝe may here,  
Dwelled in þe Holy Lond XV ȝere  
The heden men among.  
Full dowȝtyly he hym bare  
There ony dedes of armes ware  
Agayn þem þat lyued wrong.  
Be þat þe XV ȝere were come and gon  
The chyld þat þe grype had tane  
Was both stren and stronge:  
In iustenyng nore in tournament  
Þer myȝt no man sytte his dent,  
Butt he cast hem to þe ground.  (1015-26)\textsuperscript{108}

In the middle of this passage, we abruptly shift from Eglamour’s absence to the child Degrabelle’s martial prowess. Degrabelle’s skill at fighting is exactly what will allow him to win the hand of his mother and nearly consummate his marriage with her. Thus, a clear but subtle connection comes to the fore here—whereas Eglamour’s chivalric skills were used to build a family, with his absence, his son’s skills begin to pervert those familial relations. In the next scene, as Degrabelle comes to the court of Egypt and sees Cristabelle, he feels a spontaneous attraction to her: “Hir sone stode and hir byhelde: / ‘Wele were hym þat myght þe welde!’ / Till hymseluen sayd he” (f. 145r; 1090-92). Without the chivalric paterfamilias in the picture, the family relations quickly devolve into chaos. It is, then, no surprise when Degrabelle defeats the King of Egypt and, as the prize, wins the hand of his mother in marriage.

The two are brought to church and married in an official ceremony: “Thorow þe myghte of God þus haf þay spedde: / His awen modir hase he wedde, / Als clerkes þus gun rede” (f. 145v; 1141-43). The narrator, at the moment the taboo is broached, has to fall back upon the authorization of religious figures (“Als clerkes þus gun rede”), and
although this sounds like one of the common tag lines used to meet metrical requirements, it is here doing more. It provides a deferral of this moment onto the institutional church, for the text, clearly discomfited by such a scene, can attribute it to the institution which vigorously prohibited marriage within the prescribed degrees of consanguinity. But more in keeping with the interests in the other romances of this section of the Lincoln MS is a drama about the economic significance of the roles underlying the nuclear family, as I have been discussing. In this vein, it could only be Eglamour who straightens out the momentarily oedipal family relations, redirecting them along more proper and patriarchal lines. The text’s brief flirtation with the oedipal, then, functions as a *reductio ad absurdum* of what can happen when the influence of the patriarch is absent.109

After Eglamour wins the final tournament, the one wherein he regains Cristabelle, the spectators point the audience’s attention towards the solitary nature of his efforts: “Thase opir said, ‘Hally one þe molde, / He þat berys þe schippe of golde [i.e. Eglamour], / Has wonne hir by his ane!’ ” (f. 146v; 1267-69). The emphasis expressed in the last line—that Eglamour acted alone—sounds puzzling, for in the romance tradition, all the way back to Chrétien, knights routinely win women in single combat. However, in this case their unified exclamation points, yet again, to the centrality of the father’s chivalric prowess, unaided by anyone, as the glue holding the family together. To win this tournament he had to defeat his son, described in three concise lines: “Sir Eglamour tuk his swerd platte / And gyffes his son swylke a swappe / Þat to þe grownde gan he gane” (f. 146v; 1261-63). And just like that the son is made subject to the father and the father reclaims his wife. As usual, the scene of mutual recognition follows immediately upon the victory of the paterfamilias.

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108 This passage is taken from the version surviving in the Cotton MS since the version in the Lincoln MS in these few folios has been partially destroyed. However, comparison of the parts surviving in the Lincoln MS shows that its readings are similar to that attested in the Cotton MS.

109 *Pace* Finlayson, “Reading,” who avers that Eglamour “is one of the few Middle English romances in which love is the sole motivation for action” (650).
But now that the family has been reconfigured, the text turns back to complete its trajectory of social advancement, which Eglamour had left unfinished when he went on pilgrimage for fifteen years. As the final triumphant stamp on Eglamour’s ascent, the Earl of Artois falls, breaks his neck and dies. In response, the narrator reaches for a religious platitude: “With God may na man stryue” (f. 147r; 1347), suggesting that the audience view this ending as indicative of God’s manifestation of justice in the political realm of Artois, and the foolishness of resisting God’s will. As with Sir Isumbras, there is certainly here a level on which a medieval reader could accept such a moralized reading of this tale. However, with this narrative’s consistent dependence upon the role of the eponymous hero in order for events to fall into place, it is certainly limiting to accept the theological as the final word on this text. If indeed God is active in the world of a text like Sir Eglamour, then such a god is certainly pliable and amenable to participating in a gentry fantasy of social advancement, one propelled along on the back of a hero whose skills at fighting provide the glue which enables such advancement.

2.6.4: The Erle of Tolous

The penultimate text of the grouping I have labeled “Familial Romances” is The Erle of Tolous (Item 8) (sometimes, as in the Lincoln MS, referred to by the title Diocletian, the name of the emperor whom the Earl defeats). In this text, the Emperor Diocletian takes land from the Earl of Tolous, one of his enemies. In response, the Earl defeats Diocletian in battle—and also happens to fall in love with the Emperor’s wife. Meanwhile, the Empress falls victim to the plot of two of her servants, who set a trap for her so that the court might believe they have caught her in adultery. Like Lancelot

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110 This romance survives in three MSS besides the Lincoln MS: Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 45; and MS Ashmole 61. For a discussion The Erle of Tolous surviving in Ashmole 45, see Meale, “‘Prenes: engre.’” This MS is worthy of note because it is one of the only MSS of Middle English romance containing an illustration; in addition, as Meale notes, this MS can be traced to mercantile ownership.
defending Guinevere in “The Poisoned Apple” scenes, the Earl here offers to be the Empress’s champion. But unlike Lancelot, the Earl will not ride impetuously into this battle; instead, he dresses as a monk and hears her confession, just to make sure she is not actually guilty of adultery. Once he has received the necessary assurances, he fights in defense of her, winning the tournament. In the end, when the Emperor discovers that this man who has defended his wife is his enemy, the Earl, he makes peace with him. Soon after, the Emperor dies, the Earl marries the Empress, is elected Emperor, and he and his new wife produce fifteen children and live in happiness.

Unlike Sir Eglamour and Sir Isumbras, the central character in this romance is not one who would be identified as a member of the gentry, for his title of Earl precludes such an identification. However, just like we will see in Sir Degrevant, the economic injustices committed against the hero would have been something all too common in the experience of the fifteenth-century gentry. In this particular case, a more powerful neighbor, the Emperor, has brazenly seized the lands of the Earl of Tolous, one who is clearly less powerful. As is to be expected, there is a lack of motivation for this act of economic aggression:

The Erle of Tholous, Sir Bernerde,  
The Emperor with hym was full harde  
And gretly was his foo.  
He had with wrange owte of his hande  
Thre hundrethe poundes worth of londe.  
There-fore his herte was woo. (ff. 114v-115r)

The mention of the exact yearly value of the land reveals an interest in the economic impact this would have on the Earl. We are no longer in the quasi-magical realm of, for example, Chrétien’s Yvain, wherein Calogrenant sprinkles water from a basin on a stone in the forest of Broceliande and a black knight appears, seemingly from nowhere, to defend his ownership of the forest. Here, by contrast, is a reflection of an economic

111 Diamond, “The Erle” 83, suggests that the Empress is the protagonist in this text. However, given the centrality of masculinity and chivalric prowess to the tales in this section of the Lincoln MS, such an identification does not seem to have been one Thornton likely would have endorsed.

112 No critical edition is based on the Lincoln MS; thus, I provide quotations from the MS itself.
reality for the gentry audience, for one can imagine, by comparison to the yields of their own estates, the audience reacting to the significance of losing £300 worth of land. Of course, according to H.L. Gray’s analysis of incomes for 1436, very few in England would have held lands whose total value exceeded £300, and so such a moment as seen here in *The Erle of Tolous* seems intended to overwhelm (economically) the landowning members of this text’s audience.

This text returns to the theme seen in these romances, that if the male hero can measure up—chivalrically speaking—then eventually the exertion of his will will yield economic or political success. In this text, though, such success—figured here as the reclamation of lands wrongly seized—is not delayed until the end, as in *Sir Eglamour* and *Sir Degrevant*. Here, almost immediately upon losing his lands the Earl gathers an army and routs the Emperor. At this point it is clear that the Earl has won his lands back, for “Bot þan þe Emperour was full woo / He hase loste men & lond also” (f. 115v). But simply re-acquiring lands that had been unjustly seized in the first place would not make much of a class fantasy. Instead, the rest of the text narrates the Earl’s attempts to win the Emperor’s wife and, finally, to succeed him as Emperor. Most of this text, then, is not much interested in social ascent by the increase of one’s landed possessions; rather, the particular form of social ascent practiced here revolves around winning the woman of the overbearing and more powerful land-owning neighbor.

The Earl gets his revenge in some colorful and memorable moments. One of the most striking of such moments occurs when he disguises himself as a monk and hears the Empress’s confession. Besides being surprisingly irreverent, this moment illustrates the lengths to which he will go to secure the Emperor’s wife. From the following passage, it becomes clear that the Earl, in disguise as a Monk, is following the procedures of a real confession:

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In monkes wede I-wysse
To þe Emperour he kneled be-lyue
Þat he moghte þe lady schryue
An-none rescheyuede he es
And anone he examynd hir witterlye.
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Als it es tolde in this storye
Scho was with-owten gylte. […]
The Erle assoylde hyr with his honde
And sythen appertly gan upe stonde. (f. 121v; emphasis mine)

The discourse of the Sacrament of Penance is to the fore in this passage: the Earl/monk examines the penitent’s conscience and after the confession provides absolution. As the Earl earlier insisted, he does this to be sure that the Empress, for whom he is about to undertake a fight, is actually innocent. But the deviousness of the Earl’s actions here, always aimed at securing the Empress, contributes to his image as a hero with a singular focus on social ascent. Here, even the Sacraments are tools at the disposal of the hero on his quest for economic justice.\(^{113}\)

As is standard in these familial romances, the hero must, in the end, prove himself on the battlefield (whether in war against Saracens, as in *Octavian* and *Isumbras*, or in a “friendly” between Christian knights, as here and as in *Sir Eglamour* and *Sir Degrevant*, discussed below). First the Earl wins the tournament, thereby exonerating the Empress. Soon after, the text moves rapidly to its conclusion, suggesting that the Earl’s chivalric triumph was the real climax of the text. In the final one hundred lines, the Emperor discovers that the man who has defended his wife is his enemy and so forgives the Earl, makes him a steward, and dies. All that is left is for the Earl to be elected Emperor, marry the Empress, and have fifteen children with her.

The ending of this text pays careful attention to the legalities of the Earl’s possession of his lands. As we saw earlier, the Earl had re-claimed his land from the Emperor by force: “Bot þan þe Emperour was full woo / He hase loste men & lond also” (f. 115v). The conclusion, however, suggests that the Earl’s legal possession of that land was in doubt, for here “[The Emperor] made [the Earl] steward of hys londe / And sesyd agayne into hys honde / That he had rafte hym froo” (1199-1201).\(^{114}\) Either there is here

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\(^{113}\) Daly 196-97 sees this moment as one that sanctifies the love between the Earl and the Empress, since the Earl’s realization of her fidelity comes within the confines of the Sacrament.

\(^{114}\) The last leaf of *The Earl of Tolous* in the Lincoln MS has not survived. Thus, quotations for the missing sections of the text are provided from *The Middle English Breton Lays* (ed. Laskaya and Salisbury), indicated by reference to line numbers and not folio numbers.
an inconsistency (i.e. the author has forgotten that the Earl had previously fought back and re-won his lands), or the Emperor is now officially legally endowing the lands (i.e. the practice of “seisin”) in the Earl’s hands. Either way one reads the scene, the impression is the same: the Earl, by his chivalric accomplishments, has effected economic justice. The more powerful landowner, seemingly unmotivated—and when there is no motivation, one can often ascribe it to some evil impulse, likely here greed—has bullied his less powerful neighbor, and that less powerful neighbor has, by his own skills, ensured that the wrong is redressed.

Finally, the Earl’s victory over the Emperor takes a particularly masculine turn, for not only does he marry the now-deceased Earl’s wife, but he sires fifteen children on her, “Doughty knyghtys all bedene, / And semely on to see” (1212-13). Notwithstanding the fact that the odds of having all fifteen children born male are 1 in 32,768, it here becomes clear that the Empress is the final piece of the Earl’s social ascent. Not only does he defend his rights as a landowner, but he gets revenge on the Emperor by ending up with his throne and, ultimately, with his wife. The fifteen knightly children provide the final stamp on this ascent, for each of them has the potential to inherit the Earl’s land and to produce more children to whom he can pass on the inheritance. In this hyper-masculine conclusion, the former Emperor is reduced to a memory, with none of his blood line left, and the fifteen descendants of the new Emperor ensure the continuation of the new line. This is an extravagant exclamation point on a text that continues one of the several themes seen in these familial romances: social ascent—by one who already owns land but is under the thumb of a more powerful neighbor—can be accomplished by one with the requisite skill set. That skill set always involves martial prowess, but the peculiar addition of *The Erle of Tolous* is that the skill set can also involve questionable behavior, if performed in the name of defending one’s economic rights. The defense of land rights, of course, was a common concern among the late medieval English gentry, particularly for those living during the many lawless periods in Yorkshire under Henry VI. As we shall see in the next section, it forms the central focus of *Sir Degrevant*. 
2.6.5: Compiling the Family

These familial romances, as I noted above, lack the decorative program that marked Thornton’s *Alexander* and *Morte Arthure*. Here, the texts appear uniformly in double columns (with the exception of *Sir Degrevant*, which is in double columns with the tail-rhyme line written in the margin), with minimal marginal flourishes and very few small decorated initials. It seems that Thornton ruled these texts, for their appearance on the page, although sparse, is neat and readable, and his hand is consistent throughout. But such a simple presentation is not evidence that these texts occupy some sort of inferior position within the economy of the Lincoln MS; rather, their simple and direct appearance complements the simple and direct ideological implications of these texts. In these familial romances, the audience is encouraged to identify with the hero, as the texts triumphantly celebrate his social ascent or his unequivocal ability to unite the family around him, firmly at the center. The celebratory, triumphalist rhetoric adopted in these texts is, in the final analysis, much simpler than that seen in the Prose *Alexander* or the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which alienates the reader’s subjectivity, often pushing her into a position of skepticism with regards to the moral status of their monarchical heroes. It is easy to ignore these familial romances or to dismiss them as so much romance flotsam and jetsam, unworthy of critical attention because they are, at their core, the literary works of hacks. If we have recourse to nothing but our own modern sensibilities and a theoretical paradigm ready to be applied to the texts that catch our eye, we would never stop to notice these texts. They lack the inherent paradoxes and ambiguities, as well as subtlety and irony, which draw modern readers and critics to texts. For the inverse reason, *Alexander* and the *Morte* have garnered more critical attention. But if we have recourse to the MS context of these familial romances, and if we can move beyond our tendency to reject texts that lack paradox and ambiguity, then a unique and different interpretive field opens itself up to us. We can see these romances forming a particularly meaningful constellation, lumped together in one section of the Lincoln MS and
containing several running themes that provide a cultural mouthpiece for gentry ideology.\textsuperscript{115}

Such romances as Thornton has collected were popular, if we are to judge by MS attestation. Beyond those copied by Thornton, several other Middle English romances treat of similar themes and could also be similarly categorized as familial romances: \textit{Sir Degaré, Sir Triamour, Sir Torrent of Portyngale, Lai le Freine}, and \textit{Generides}. In addition, a number of important MSS, contemporaneous with Thornton, contain various combinations of these romances and, like the Lincoln MS, seem most likely attributable to gentry, or at least non-noble, ownership. Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.2.38 contains \textit{The Erle of Tolous, Sir Eglamour, Sir Triamour, Octavian}, and \textit{Sir Degaré}. London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.2 contains \textit{Sir Eglamour, Octavian}, and \textit{Sir Isumbras}. London, British Library MS Egerton 2862 contains \textit{Sir Degaré} and \textit{Sir Eglamour}. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61 contains \textit{Sir Isumbras} and \textit{The Erle of Tolous}.\textsuperscript{116} And finally, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 261 contains \textit{Sir Isumbras, Sir Degaré}, and \textit{Sir Eglamour}.\textsuperscript{117} Clearly, Thornton was not alone in grouping texts such as these within a single volume.

There is some magnetic attraction between these texts, something in them which has drawn all these MS compilers to create different groupings of these texts that share ideological resonances. Lee Ramsey has noted this trend towards the familial in romances of late medieval England:

\begin{quote}
The nature of the new romances suggests an audience with less refined tastes and less leisure time […] One thinks immediately of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{115} Wittig has some insightful comments about thematic groupings of Middle English romances, which she develops from oral-formulaic theory. With regards to the romances Thornton has compiled (though she does not mention Thornton or MS context), Wittig develops several relevant categories: “Threatened Marriage and Rescue,” encompassing \textit{Sir Eglamour, Sir Perceval}, and \textit{Sir Degrevant} (143-55); “Service and Marriage,” encompassing \textit{Sir Eglamour} and \textit{The Erle of Tolous} (155-57); “Separation and Adoption,” encompassing \textit{Sir Perceval, Octavian} and \textit{Sir Eglamour} (163-68); and “Revenge,” encompassing \textit{Sir Perceval, Octavian, Sir Eglamour}, and \textit{The Erle of Tolous} (169-73).

\textsuperscript{116} For a discussion of the changes imposed by the scribe within this MS, see Blanchfield.

\textsuperscript{117} For a discussion of each of these individual MSS, see the relevant entries in Guddat-Figge. Of these MSS, Douce 261 is dated to 1564, and Egerton 2862 is dated to the late fourteenth century. The rest, however, are from the middle of the fifteenth century and thus were produced around the same time as the Lincoln MS.
increasingly literate middle classes, but what we see may only be evidence of a broader audience for all literature in English, as the courts and their literature became gradually less isolated from the rest of society toward the end of the Middle Ages. […] The central concern in the typical fourteenth-century romance seems to be with the family. Whereas earlier romances present patterns of self-realization through social climbing and the winning of kingdoms or else concentrate on lovers struggling to find happiness in a hostile world, the new romances tend to center about disrupted family or domestic situations and the trials that ensue until the family unit can be reunited. (157-58)

Though I would quibble with his dismissal of the audiences of these texts having “less refined tastes,” the general point Ramsey makes is consonant with the preceding discussion and describes quite aptly the thematic concerns of these romances in the Lincoln MS—with one large exception. What Ramsey describes as the emphasis of the “earlier romances” on “self-realization through social climbing and the winning of kingdoms” has not been written out of the tradition. In fact, as I have shown, these romances work to synthesize social ascent with the centrality of the nuclear family (specifically the ordering of the sons with regards to their inheritance), both issues which were at the center of gentry life.118

These familial romances encode a fantasy that would appeal directly to someone in Thornton’s position. These are not fantastical texts of the Arthurian court, interspersed with magical quests and held together by the central figure of a king. Instead, the heroes of these texts are provincial landowners who fight their way up through their society and who, by the very act of fighting their way up, are simultaneously able to lock the members of the nuclear family into place. And unlike the knights of Arthur’s court, characters like Eglamour, Isumbras, and Degrevant seek a settled domestic existence.

118 The similar comments of Owen Daly are also important here: “By showing the family as protagonist and ultimately as a collective unit achieving fulfillment at the close of the poems, the romancers have discovered a generic via media. Where epic, and to some extent, religious mythologies, glorify the triumph and sense of identity of the tribe or of a larger social aggregate, romance characteristically focusses upon the fulfillment of the individual. [The romances in the Lincoln MS], by contrast, show the triumph of something in between these extremes. The family is indeed a little society, involving responsibility and collective values, and yet its instincts for solidarity and private withdrawal from the larger world are a
Their goal is to establish the family line and to people the manor house with their children, not to follow the questing beast or to fight for their king. Thus, if we think of romance solely in terms of Chrétien or Malory, we mistake what romance was for Thornton. For him, romance affirmed his social identity. He was the paterfamilias of a middling gentry family. Thornton no doubt had pride in his social position, having arms and a family crest, as well as governing the manor of East Newton. His wife and children were central to that identity. Yet he was also among the lower echelons of that elite society. For Thornton, and for a number of other MS compilers from the fifteenth century whose compilations only survive anonymously, characters like Isumbras, Degrevant, and Eglamour were the new heroes. These were men who established, by their chivalric efforts, their role as head of a nuclear family.

2.7: Sir Degrevant and Aristocratic Violence

The final text to be addressed is Sir Degrevant (Item 10), a romance that has received almost no critical attention, and a romance that, within the Lincoln MS, bears a unique relationship to Thornton’s life and to the widespread problem of aristocratic violence, thus meriting a detailed analysis. This is a narrative of a knight who falls victim to the aggressions of a neighboring Earl, who breaks onto Degrevant’s lands, hunts his parks, fishes his rivers, and kills his foresters. In response, Degrevant attacks the Earl by killing all the animals in his forests. He also falls in love with Melidor, his enemy’s daughter, and when Degrevant wins the tournament for her hand, the Earl refuses to accept him as his son-in-law. When the Earl threatens to kill his daughter modified version of the individualism of romance” (253-54). See also the comments of Hudson, “Middle English” 75-78.

119 For the few studies of Degrevant, see Edwards, “Gender, Order”; Davenport; Diamond, “Sir Degrevant”; Marvin 163-68; and Forste-Grupp.
because he suspects she is sleeping with Degrevant, she confesses that she loves Degrevant and, in a sudden change of heart, the Earl forgives him and agrees to let him marry his daughter.

One of the most striking aspects of this romance is its detailed focus on the incursions of the Earl upon Degrevant’s lands. The detail invested in these passages suggests some sort of real experience lying behind these events. Witness the words of W.A. Davenport:

Striking effects developed from this combination of material are, first, a general sense that this romance is closer than many to the actual concerns of the landowning class of the time—property, fences, hunting rights, being just to one’s tenants, seeking proper legal redress for wrongs, and eventually, after much harm done, compromise and reconciliation. (114)

Here, we see an interest in the details of what specific actions would mark an occurrence of aristocratic violence, as the text shades towards realism. *Sir Degrevant*, then, builds on the interest—seen in the familial romances, discussed above—in inscribing facets of the economics subtending gentry life (e.g., the £40 amount, the attention to titles of knighthood versus titles of nobility, the accounting of the hero’s land values) into romance narratives. Here, however, the details provided are even more specific than those seen in the other familial romances, for the Earl’s incursion into Degrevant’s lands suggests that the real social phenomenon of aristocratic violence is lying behind this depiction.\(^\text{120}\)

An entry in *CPR* for 21 Richard II (1398) indicates that Thornton’s father was accused of actions similar to the Earl in *Sir Degrevant*. This entry states that a commission of oyer and terminer was established to investigate the claim of Hugh Gascoigne, the parson of Stonegrave (which was the Thornton family parish church, no

\(^{120}\) L.F. Casson has similarly noted the realism animating the opening scenes of *Sir Degrevant*: “Incidents similar to this are found in both the history and the romance of the Middle Ages, but in view of the realistic treatment of this part of the story, it may be inferred that the author looked no further for details than to his own observation of what was going on round him. The germinal idea of the dispute about lands between the hero and his feudal superior was probably obtained from some romance […], but the manner of its presentation seems to imply more special knowledge of how an estate was run than is usual in romances” (lxiii; emphasis mine). For a similar comment, see Mehl 94-95.
less), who said that twelve men, along with “other armed malefactors,” “broke his close and houses at Steingreve, assaulted him, fished in his several fishery there, and took away fish and goods and chattels to the value of 200 marks as well as 1000 (sic) marks in money, and assaulted his men and servants” (365). One of the men named is Robert de Thornton of Neuton, along with a Richard de Thornton of Berughby, and “William Cok, ‘leper’, late servant of Robert de Thornton of Neuton.” From this list, it seems that Thornton committed this act as part of a posse, for the fact that there is another Thornton accused alongside Robert suggests a family relationship, and Thornton’s servant was also involved in these events. This Robert Thornton is almost certainly the father of the scribe, and if the dating discussed in Section I above is correct, the scribe would have been a young boy at this time.

But one does not need to look to the Thornton family for examples of such violence, for England in the middle of the fifteenth century was plagued by similar incidents. As was discussed above, Thornton lived in the midst of tensions between the two branches of the Neville family. He also found himself living near the center of the open feuding of the Nevilles and the Percies in the 1450s. But beyond these rivalries, there is also the well-known story of the Pastons and their encounters first with the Duke of Suffolk (in 1465) and then with the Duke of Norfolk (in 1469) over lands they had inherited from John Fastolf.121 Two of the letters surrounding Suffolk’s attacks on the Paston manor at Hellesdon are worth brief consideration. On 10 July 1465, Richard Calle wrote to John Paston I informing him of the threat Suffolk posed:

Plesith it youre maysterschip to witte of the rwle and dispocion of the Mastre Philp and the balyf of Cosse, wyth uther of my lorde of Suffolc men, on Monday last past at aftre-noon were at Heylesdon wyth the nombre of ccc men forto haue entred, notwythstandyng they sayde they come not for to entre, but wythoute dought and they had ben strong j-nough for vs they wolde haue entred, and that we vndrestonde nough; but we knowyng of ther comyng and purveyd so for hem þat we were stronge

121 For a discussion of these conflicts, see Norman Davis xvi-xvii and Bellamy 112-22. The range of options available to the gentry in defending their land is nicely illustrated by the battle between the Pastons and Lord Moleyns for the manor of Gresham. For a detailed analysis of this case, see Middleton.
j-nough. We had lx men wythinne the place, and gones and suche ordynauns, so that if they had sette vpp-on vs they had be distroyed. (2: 310)

In this situation, Suffolk has used brute force in an attempt to seize the Paston lands. Calle then describes how Suffolk has been empowered to head a commission of oyer and terminer to investigate the very outbursts of violence he perpetrated, which of course does not bode well for the Paston family’s chances of getting justice. (Suffolk was, after all, one of Henry VI’s closest confidantes.) Finally, Calle suggests that Paston seek help from the Duke of Norfolk.

But the threat did not pass away, for on 17 October 1465, Margaret writes to her husband that Suffolk has convinced the city government of Norwich to arrest all who supported the Paston cause. Then, she reports on the specific acts of violence Suffolk committed:

The logge and the remenaunte of your place was betyn down on Tuesday and Wednesday, and þe Duke rode on Wednysday to Drayton and so for to Cossey whill þe logge at Heylesdon was in þe betyng down. And þis nyght at mydnyght Thomas Sleyforth, Grene, Portere, and Joh[n] Botesforth and the baly of Eye and othere had a cart and fetched awey fetherbeddes and all þe stuffe þat was left at þe parsones and Thomas Waterer hows to be kept of owres. I shall send you billes er-after as nere as I may what stuffe we haue forborn. (1: 324)

Here we can see, narrated with great vigor from the perspective of a woman on the receiving end of a violent act, a specific instance of a magnate using force to exert his will against a less powerful neighbor, a member of the gentry.

As R.L. Storey notes, the reign of Henry VI was particularly marked by lawlessness in the more remote provinces.122 After around 1420, the number of complaints about unjust practices, akin to what the Pastons experienced, increased. The comments of Ralph Griffiths best capture the depth of the problem facing England in the time of Robert Thornton:

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122 For a general discussion of lawlessness at this time, see Griffiths, *The Reign* 128-53, 562-609. See also Bellamy, Maddern, and Simon Walker.
Some of the king’s own actions and decisions, particularly his passion for
pardoning and his incautious and short-sighted indulgence of courtiers,
servants, and friends, had the effect of stimulating, rather than pacifying,
quarrels and rivalries. As a consequence, a number of the nobility
especially were emboldened to resort to criminal activity and to thumb
their nose at the common law and the king’s council; it was a greater
threat to the upholding of the law and the preservation of stability when
they, rather than any other section of the community, did so. (The Reign
562)

Furthermore, after about 1440, appeals to the King’s Bench from the northern counties
decreased dramatically, suggesting that individuals who felt they had been wronged were
less and less frequently seeking restitution through the official avenues of the King, and
were more and more often seeking justice through more local forms of protection. As an
official response to outbreaks of violence, the king’s justice could be extended to the
provinces through the commissions of oyer and terminer, but, as we saw with the Duke of
Suffolk and the Pastons, such forms of justice were easily plied by those with power on
the local level. The forms of protection and/or revenge offered by what has come to be
known as “Bastard Feudalism” apparently offered a more reliable system of support—at
least for those in the remote northern reaches of the realm—than did Westminster
(Storey, “The North” 132).123 Given its unusually high concentration of magnates,
Yorkshire was particularly prone to such violence during Henry’s reign and was the most
lawless of all English counties at the time (Griffiths, The Reign 563).

Turning now to Sir Degrevant, we can see how the backdrop of aristocratic
violence animates the opening sequences in the text.124 Here, the neighboring Earl
wreaks havoc on Degrevant’s possessions:

Hym thoghte desdeyne of þe knyghte
(For he was hardy and wyghte),
And thoghte þe beste how he myghte
Þat doghety degrade.
The Erle was steryn and stowte,

123 For a thorough discussion of the development of “Bastard Feudalism,” and of the historiography
surrounding it, see Hicks. See also Carpenter, “The Beauchamp Affinity” and “Law, Justice and
Landowners.”
124 This romance survives in two MSS, the Lincoln MS and Cambridge, University Library MS Ff.1.6, the
Findern Anthology.
And rade with a great rowte,
And brake his perkes al abowte,
Þe beste þat he hade;
In þam he made a sory playe,
The fatteste he fellyd aye,
Righte by sexty on a daye,
Swylke maystris he mad.
He drew his veuers (sic) of fysche,
He slew his fosters, i-wysse. (f. 130v; 101-14)125

As in *The Erle of Tolous*, we witness a less powerful neighbor fall victim to the seemingly unmotivated aggression of one more powerful. Here, however, we get specific details about the transgression, details which in many ways resemble the cases of trespass and breaking and entering that so occupied the Commissions of the Peace and the court of King’s Bench in the later Middle Ages. The language of the indictments of these courts can be heard in the background of *Sir Degrevant*, especially in this passage’s attention to the specific details of the earl’s trespass—breaking Degrevant’s close, killing his deer, fishing his rivers. The Earl has killed Degrevant’s fish and best animals, as well as his foresters, and, true to aristocratic practice, he has brought a posse of his retainers along with him (he “rade with a great rowte”). Briefly examining one such case elucidates the similarities.

This particular case was heard before the Commissions of the Peace in 1477. I offer it as a representative example of the type of litigation that was a part of the life of nearly every landholder in the later Middle Ages, and one that resounds with similarity to the events detailed in *Sir Degrevant*:

Inquisicio capta ibidem coram prefatis iusticiariis dictis die et anno per sacramentum Iohannis Pakynton Iohannis Lankston Ricardi Thurkyll Iohannis Costantyne Dauid Donyss Willelmi Smyth Thome Cave Walteri

125 Herein quotations are from *Sir Degrevant*, ed. L.F. Casson, who provides parallel-text versions of both the Lincoln and Findern copies of this text. Note that several folios are missing from Thornton’s copy of the text, and so Casson provides only readings from the Findern MS for ll. 800-1024; hence, quotations I provide for that section of the text will be from Findern. The two texts are, however, close enough in their story lines that quotations provided from Findern will give an accurate representation of the words Thornton most likely recorded.
In this case a certain Roger Hadley stands accused of having entered the close of Thomas Wodde. The phrase “vi et armis,” with force and with arms, is here used, as it is in many such indictments, to indicate that the action qualifies as an assault. Its details of trespass remind us that, although the version in *Sir Degrevant* is much more sensationalistic, such narratives of entering another’s land, breaking his close “vi et armis” would have been familiar to someone like Thornton.

*Sir Degrevant* figures the Earl’s act of trespass as the aggression of a more powerful magnatial neighbor against a member of the landed gentry, for Degrevant is repeatedly denoted as a knight, one who holds “A hundrethe pondis worthe of londe / Of rent wele sittande, / And somm-dele more” (f. 130r; 66-68). Though £100 is not intended as a systematic census of Degrevant’s land values, it certainly suggests that he was a wealthy landowner. However, he is clearly inferior to his neighbor, who bears a title of nobility. Furthermore, once Degrevant has returned the favor to the Earl by trespassing onto and destroying some of his property, and the two have entered into an open conflict, the Earl announces that he will hold a tournament for his daughter’s hand and, most importantly, Duke Gerle will be there to fight for her, as the text once again demonstrates an acute awareness of class distinctions. In England Earl was the highest heritable title of nobility until 1337, when Edward III created the first dukedom. The appearance of Duke Gerle is, then, no coincidence; rather, the class stakes have been increased yet again, as Degrevant now not only will defeat an Earl in a dispute over property rights, but he will also defeat a Duke in a tournament. In addition, at the point wherein the Duke arrives for the tournament—in the version surviving in the Findern Anthology—the text refers to Degrevant as a “Baneret” (1033) an ascription with significant class associations and one
which provides further evidence of this text’s taxonomic insistence on locating everyone within their social station. As Chris Given-Wilson demonstrates, the title of “banneret” denoted one who had been promoted to the peerage for a reason other than the acquisition of land, “with the status implied falling somewhere between full baronial rank (indicating membership of the peerage) and knightly rank. […] By the 1370s, there is fairly clear evidence that the bannerets were seen as a distinct group within the peerage” (63). The equivalent passage in the Lincoln MS simply calls Degrevant a “baron,” a title which would indicate, in the words of Michael Hicks, “the bottom rank of the parliamentary peerage” (223). Both readings, then, locate Degrevant among the lower echelons of the landed aristocracy, specifically just below the titled nobility.

Moreover, the earl’s trespass is specifically shown to have had a negative economic impact on Degrevant’s source of income, his manor, adding further to the sense of realism governing the opening of this text:

To his manere he wente:  
A faire place was þer schent,  
His husbandes þat gaffe hym rent  
Heryede in plighte:  
His tenandrye was alle downe,  
Þe beste innes in ylke towne,  
His nobyll perkes comowne,  
And fowly by-dyghte. (f. 130v; 137-44)

Degrevant’s hunting preserve has been turned into common grazing land, jeopardizing his identity as a member of the landed class, and his tenants have been “heredyed in plighte,” jeopardizing his economic security. As a result, he gathers up a group of armed men and takes vengeance on the earl. This revenge is narrated with great vigor and is figured specifically as retribution for the earl’s previous incursions, for as Degrevant chases the earl’s men, he is said to cut them down, just as they had previously done to his deer. The fantastical vanquishing of the earl is effected so triumphantly that none of Degrevant’s men is injured, and as he returns to visit his men, “Fande he neuer ane slayne / Ne þe worse by a pere,” that is no one was hurt worse than a pear.
The ending of the text works out a solution that strains the reader’s credulity, but one certainly consonant with an interest in social ascent by the landed gentry. After Degrevant has wreaked havoc on the Earl’s lands, and has killed off the Earl’s squire, butler, pantler, usher of the hall and fifteen other men, the Earl—rather inexplicably—offers to forgive Degrevant and allow him to marry Melidor. But before the Earl committed his *volte-face* he had made it clear that there would be no reconciliation with Degrevant, going so far as to swear that Melidor would die before he would eat again (f. 137v; 1753-55). Given the tremendous damage Degrevant has inflicted, it does not strain one’s credulity to imagine the Earl would be angry at the prospect of his daughter marrying him; however, the Earl suddenly changes his mind, declaring, “I for-gyffe þe thi gylte; / It sall be ryghte als þou wilt, / I may do no mare” (f. 137v; 1790-92). In the space of less than forty lines, the Earl has gone from wishing death upon his daughter to full reconciliation to her and to his sworn enemy.126

Of course we do not want to ascribe too much to psychological motivations for the actions of characters in texts such as these romances that operate more on the level of conventional types than subjective psychologies. Nevertheless, the abruptness of this decision, contrasted with the vitriol with which the Earl had previously invested his rhetoric, suggests that this resolution is too neat and simple. In this sense the ending is redolent of Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale, wherein, after the solicitous Dorigen has talked through and thought over the conflict between her oath to Aurelius and her own sense of female virtue to the point of exhaustion, and after Aurelius’s previously lecherous inclinations have taken him all the way to Orléans just to ensure his possession of Dorigen, the tension at the heart of the plot instantaneously dissipates as Aurelius releases Dorigen from her obligation. Paul Strohm suggests that this sudden turn towards good

126 A.S.G. Edwards offers a different reading of the Earl’s decision to forgive Degrevant, one which foregrounds the role of female agency in effecting the reconciliation between male enemies: “The poem here simultaneously reflects both on male intransigence and the power of female reason, with its emphasis on reconciliation and love ultimately to control such intransigence” (“Gender, Order” 59). See also the comments of Daly 61-97. This reading is more persuasive when one considers the Findern MS version of *Degrevant*, for it is likely that much of that MS was transcribed by women (for which see McNamer). But
will in The Franklin’s Tale, where there had previously been a noticeable absence of
good will, evinces a desire to redefine oaths away from their feudal, and hence
aristocratic, associations:

Rejecting the sterility of formalized agreements that can only bring
sorrow, [Aurelius] chooses spontaneously to embrace the affirmative
values of *franchise* (natural liberality and elevation of spirit) and
*gentillesse* (the demonstrated capacity for courteous and considerate
deeds)—values available not just to the particular parties to an agreement
but to all persons of good will. (106)

There is a similar dynamic at play in the sudden turn to good will at the end of *Sir
Degrevant*, for in both texts the seeming inexplicability of that turn works to effect a class
fantasy. Of course the specifics of that class fantasy are different in these two texts: put
simply, the Franklin, in an ambiguous relationship to gentility, is definitely of a lower
station than Degrevant. What unites these two texts, though, is that they both encode a
desire for social advancement within the terms of a simplistic good will which can
remove obstacles to that advancement.127

Degrevant’s movement from his position as a powerful yet untitled landowner to
a position of titled nobility is then completed as the Earl meets Degrevant and they seal
their reconciliation. Once again, the Earl’s words to Degrevant strain the audience’s
credulity, suggesting that this text is reaching for an oversimplified conclusion to the
conflict between these two characters:

“Welcome, sir, to this place!
I swere þe, by Goddis grace,
We hafe bene lange fase,
Now will we be frende.”
Or any man þat wist,
All wranges ware redrischt. (ff. 137v-138r; 1813-17)

127 Thus I find Daly’s contention that this sudden turn to good will is part of the generic expectation of
romance to be unconvincing. He says that *Degrevant* “is a romance, itself a fictive escape from outer
reality, and that such changes of heart are the very essence of the genre” (93).
The speed with which their reconciliation takes place causes it to elude even those who were present. But this insistence on Degrevant now being in the Earl’s good graces is merely a means to the more important ends of Degrevant’s assumption of the Earl’s social position and his consequent triumph over a perpetrator of aristocratic violence. As we saw in *The Erle of Tolous* and *Sir Eglamour*, it is essential to such a narrative of social advancement that the protagonist end up in a higher social stratum—for Degrevant, that is an earldom. So it should be expected, given the generic conventions, that less than one hundred lines later the Earl and his wife die and Degrevant inherits his land and title.

L.F. Casson, the text’s editor, suggests that the rapid ending to *Sir Degrevant* is an aesthetic flaw:

> The ending is unduly hurried, as though the author had tired of puppetry. Thus after the marriage we are told of the death of the Earl and the Countess, Sir Degrevant’s succession to the lands, thirty years of married life, the birth of children, Melidor’s death and then Sir Degrevant’s. All this is passed over with disproportionate haste, even for a story that moves swiftly throughout. (lxxiii)

Though there is some truth to Casson’s words, I think the rushed sense of the ending illustrates that this text is not so much interested in the details of Degrevant’s new life as an earl and as the husband of Melidor; rather, the energy animating this text centers on the process of a knight assuming the place of titled nobility and enacting an approved form of vengeance upon the overly-aggressive aristocratic neighbor who had committed economic injustices against him. In short, the text’s interests lie in the process more than in the results. In fact Casson’s criticism could be leveled against each of the familial romances Thornton copied, for in each the ending rushes over all the important details for which the characters had been searching throughout the entire text. Once Isumbras, for example, has been reunited with his family, or once Sir Eglamour has married Degrabelle properly and has secured the Earldom of Artois, the texts hasten to their *explicitis*. The interest is in the process of securing an economically stable “happily ever after,” not in narrating the details of that happiness.
The final aspect of *Sir Degrevant* which causes it to stand out within the context of the Lincoln MS involves its genre, specifically the text’s ambivalent relationship to some of the generic conventions of romance. In the beginning, Degrevant is announced as a member of the Arthurian court:

With Kyng Arthure, I wene,  
And Dame Gaynore þe quene,  
He was knawen for kene,  
Þis commly knyghte. (f. 130r; 17-20)

Though the Thornton version makes no explicit statement about Degrevant’s lineage, the Findern Anthology’s version identifies Degrevant as a nephew of Arthur (26). However, James Orchard Halliwell suggests that Degrevant’s name may be a mistranscription of *d’Egrivaunt*, the Old French spelling of Agravain (plus the preposition), who is best remembered as Mordred’s co-conspirator in the plot to catch Guinevere and Lancelot and who was a brother to Gawain and Gaheris—and Gareth, if we accept Malory’s lineage—as well as a nephew to King Arthur. As evidence for such a genealogy for Degrevant, L.F. Casson notes that the depiction of Degrevant’s arms, contained in lines 1045-56, indicate that he was the second son of King Lot of Orkney (134). If such conclusions are accurate, the role of Degrevant’s lineage is marked by a puzzling silence throughout the rest of the narrative, for his connections with the Arthurian court are never mentioned again, and, as I have noted, his life and status are marked more as a late medieval landowning gentleman than as a knight from the hazy past of the Arthurian reign: “[In *Sir Degrevant*] Arthur’s court seems to be used simply as a setting which evokes a chivalric atmosphere” (Moll 286 n.5). The mention of Arthur in this text serves more as a generic authorizing device, a tip of the hat to audience expectations that enables the text to turn to

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128 In what follows I depart from the readings of L.F. Casson and W.A. Davenport, both of whom see *Sir Degrevant* as a pastiche of romance conventions and thus as a hyper-conventional text. While I would not disagree with the general thrust of either of their readings, I think it is important to acknowledge some of the ways this text eludes the categorization of “romance,” which I discuss here.

129 This discussion is to be found in the notes to his edition of *The Thornton Romances* (288-89). Davenport (115) and the notes to Casson’s edition of *Sir Degrevant* (134 n.1045-55) both affirm Halliwell’s suggestion.
the narration of a knight’s enactment of justice against his overbearing magnatial neighbor. Such is not the typical matièr of romance, and so it would seem that this authorizing function is necessary in order to compensate for this text’s derivations from the generic conventions.

One of the most striking moments in this poem is the description of the interior of Melidor’s chamber. It is a unique moment within the Middle English tradition, one more akin to, as L.F. Casson notes, the penchant for description of elaborate interior spaces in the Old French romance tradition (lxvii). Melidor has an embossed roof depicting Revelation, the Pauline epistles, and the parables of Solomon. She also has a statue of each Gospel writer and a painting of the story of Absolom (f. 136r; 1453-67). In addition, the room has an elaborate series of wall paintings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ale þe walle was of gete,} \\
\text{[With] gaye gabelettes and grete,} \\
\text{Knyghtes syttand in þaire sete} \\
\text{Owt of sere landes:} \\
\text{Kyng Charles with croun,} \\
\text{Godfraye de Bolyone,} \\
\text{Sir Arthur de Bretayne,} \\
\text{With þaire bryght brandes. (f. 136r; 1477-84)}
\end{align*}
\]

These are, of course, the three Christian Worthies, but the text has here seemingly forgotten that Arthur is supposed to be alive and well, the current king and possibly the uncle of the text’s protagonist. Instead, Arthur has been frozen in a wall painting, enshrined in a catalogue of historical heroes, essentially turned into a static representation. The mention of Arthur as the reigning king at the beginning of this text has seemingly been forgotten, suggesting how unimportant the opening allusions to the Arthurian kingdom were.

A comparison with an analogous moment from the Old French Mort Artu highlights, by contrast, some of the uniqueness of the treatment of wall paintings in Sir

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130 Regarding Degrevant’s penchant for rich description of interior spaces, Finlayson, “Reading,” remarks: “Such an impression of luxury, beauty and the exotic is not found frequently either in French or English romance, and in English is rivalled only in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and The Knight’s Tale” (654).
Degrevant. In the Mort, Arthur stops for the night at the castle of Morgan La Fey, the same castle where Lancelot, while imprisoned by Morgan, had previously made wall paintings depicting his affair with Guinevere. Arthur enters the room at night, unaware of the existence of the wall paintings, but as the sun rises the next morning, he slowly becomes aware of what is depicted around him:

\[L\]i rois commença a regarder entor lui et vit les peintures et les ymages que Lancelos avoit portretes tandis comme il demora leanz en prison. Li rois Artus savoit bien tant de letres qu’il pooit auques un escrit entendre; et quant il ot veües les letres des ymages qui devisoient les senefiances des portretures, si les commença a lire, et tant que il connut apertement que cele chambre estoit peinte des oeuvres Lancelot et des chevaliers. [...] Si commence a regarder ceste chose et dist a soi meïmes tout basset: “Par foi, fet il, se la senefiance de ces letres est veraie, donques m’a Lancelos honni de la reïne, car ge voi tout en apert que il s’en est acointiez; et si il est veritez einsi com ceste escriture le temoigne, se est la chose qui me metra au greigneur duel que ge onques eüsse, que plus ne me pooit Lancelos avillier que de moi honnir de ma fame.” (61)¹³¹

In this instance, the wall paintings and accompanying text serve a dynamic purpose. The Prose Lancelot narrated the active creation of this wall painting, a visual and textual representation of Lancelot’s emotions; subsequently, in the Mort, as discussed here, we see the dynamic process of interpreting the meaning of these images and words, as Arthur follows the various panels of the wall painting, uncovering the story piece by piece. This is a dynamic moment, one in which the incremental process of interpretation finally leads Arthur to the truth about Lancelot. The text adds a dramatic flair by having the sunlight slowly fill the room, resulting in Arthur’s incrementally increasing ability to perceive the paintings.

¹³¹ Lacy translates this as: “The king began to look around him and saw the pictures and the images that Lancelot had painted while he was imprisoned there. King Arthur could read well enough to decipher a text; and when he saw the letters and images that explained the meaning of the paintings, he began to read them, and he realized that they depicted Lancelot’s deeds and the exploits he had performed since the time he first became a knight. [...] He began to look at that and said quietly to himself, “My word, if these letters are telling the truth, Lancelot has dishonored me with the queen, for I see clearly that he was having an affair with her. And if that’s true, as these letters suggest, this causes me more grief than I’ve ever known. Lancelot could not shame me worse than by dishonoring me with my wife” (106).
In such a moment, the wall paintings function to advance the plot, a sharp contrast to the static role of the decorations of Melidor’s chamber. The biblical imagery in her chamber has no connection to the literal level of the story; nor, for that matter, do any of the three Christian Worthies, for the entirety of this narrative, excepting the opening stanzas’ reference to the Arthurian court, is taken up with a very localized and non-courty battle over land rights. In this instance, the wall paintings in Melidor’s chamber frame King Arthur into a static piece of art. If this were a ‘true’ Arthurian text, then generic conventions would have led readers to expect Sir Degrevant to reflect on themes of governance or the place of an individual’s chivalric pretensions within the political body. But here, by affixing Arthur to a wall painting, and forgetting that he is Degrevant’s reigning king, the text can turn its emphasis to the battle between knight and Earl. The generic expectations have thus been acknowledged, but dismissed.

Compounding this attempt to dismiss the generic claims of Arthurian romance upon this text is the fact that all three of the Christian Worthies are here depicted. The Worthies are otherwise seen in Arthur’s dream of the Wheel of Fortune, where each successively climbs on, ascends, and falls.\footnote{Thornton would certainly have known of this from his copy of the Alliterative Morte and Winner and Waster, which he recorded in the London MS. We also know of Arthur’s dream from the Old French Mort Artu, the Stanzaic Morte Arthur, and Malory’s Le Morte Darthur.} But this dream, too, is dynamic, containing the movement of each Worthy onto the Wheel, and requiring that Arthur seek the wisdom of philosophers to interpret his dream. But not so in Sir Degrevant, where the Christian Worthies, like the lovers in Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” stand frozen.

This moment treats the romance elements of Sir Degrevant—though they must be present to fulfill the generic contract with the audience—as a burden that need to be dealt with but that are in no way central to the text’s concerns. Rather, as we have seen, this text takes up the very real and pressing problems of aristocratic violence. Its answer to this social dilemma, however, is far from realistic and is more akin to the fantasy of a landowner living within the ranks of gentility, but one excluded from the charmed circle of the titled nobility. For, as we see in The Paston Letters, and as many historians of the
fifteenth century attest, aristocratic violence was a wide societal problem: although John Fastolf seemed to have left lands to the Pastons, Suffolk desired those lands and was able to manipulate the system to ensure that he got what he desired. By attacking the Pastons directly, and by becoming the head of the commission of oyer and terminer, Suffolk was able to ensure that justice was filtered through him and thus served his own interests. It is not difficult to imagine how a text like Sir Degrevant would appeal to someone like a John Paston, who sat in the shadow of Suffolk, attempting to defend himself but ultimately at the mercy of the Duke—and his broader resources. Unfortunately, as the Paston case makes clear, the gentry fantasy encoded in Sir Degrevant is ultimately an oversimplification—such a wide-reaching problem could never be remedied by the mere application of a knight’s chivalric prowess. There were larger social forces at play.
CHAPTER 3:
LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY MS ADDITIONAL 31042

This chapter turns to London, British Library Additional MS 31042, the second MS we know to have been compiled by Robert Thornton (which I will hereafter refer to as the London MS). In this volume, Thornton has gathered together a series of romances characterized by an aggressive religiosity that finds its *raison d'être* in the suffering of Saracen and Jewish bodies. In this particular collocation of texts, we find further evidence for the critical consciousness governing Thornton’s compiling practice. As I argued in Chapter 2, Thornton reserved the Lincoln MS for a series of religious texts emphasizing alternatively the mixed life and affective piety. Thanks to his decision to gather these Christian romances and the texts of affective piety into two different MSS, we are afforded a glimpse into the distinct spiritual—and ideological—resonances of each mode of religious practice.

To date, several scholars have noted the religious tenor of the London MS, commenting variously on its narration of “sacred history” (Keiser, “Rev. of Robert Thornton” 159), its “strongly religious ethos” (Hanna, “The Growth” 61 n.16), or its “affirmati[on] of the reader’s Christian faith in terms both of orthodox doctrine and of popular devotion” (Hardman, “The Sege” 86). Merely designating the romances of the London MS as devout, however, is too imprecise, for such a label can be applied equally to the affective pieces that Thornton copied into the Lincoln MS and the romances that celebrate violence against the enemies of Christianity. By considering the specific form of religious practice engendered by the romances of the London MS, we will see how,

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1 For details on Thornton’s life, see Chapter 2, Section I. For details on Thornton’s social milieu, see Chapter 2, Section III.
2 For a further discussion of Thornton’s critical consciousness, see Chapter 2, Section II.
3 See also Foster 12-13; Hanna, *Pursuing* 32; Hardman, “Reading” 267-69; and Stern 212.
although absolutely consonant with orthodox Christianity, they encourage an ethical position in their audience that is fundamentally different from the tradition of affective piety.

The aggressive, militaristic religiosity espoused by these romances is different in kind from the tenor of many later medieval devotional writings. J.A. Burrow, citing art historian Emile Mâle, describes the “goût de la pathétique” that characterizes much later medieval devotion (“An Approach” 253-56). Similarly, Rosemary Woolf, in comments that are applicable to many of the devotional texts Thornton copied into the Lincoln MS, states that:

The main subjects of the medieval religious lyric are those central to medieval meditation, the Passion, and the Last Things, especially death, with the emotions proper to them, love and fear. In order that the reader of the poems may feel these emotions personally and keenly, he is persuaded by the lyric to imagine himself in a scene which will provoke them. (19)

In particular, she notes that “meditation on the Passion brings tears to the eye and sweetness to the heart: the meditator grieves and loves. This idea is the cornerstone of the Middle English Passion lyrics and of the Latin tradition of meditation lying behind them” (21). Such texts find their fulfillment in the private communion between the individual and her God, and their ultimate referent is the reader’s moral and emotional response. When one ponders the suffering Christ, one is encouraged both to think about one’s own unworthiness and simultaneously to feel compassion for the pains of the Crucifixion.4

Many such examples of Thornton’s “goût de la pathétique” are evident in the Lincoln MS.5 For example, in the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Previte of the Passion*, the

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4 Though it is beyond the scope of the present discussion, it is important to keep in mind the comments of Aers, *Powers* 15-42, who contends that texts of affective piety are not free from ideology. As he demonstrates, by their reduction of Christ to the single moment of his death, such affective texts deflect attention from the more radical aspects of Christ’s Gospel, thus serving the conservative ends of the Church.

5 For a discussion of the religious texts in the Lincoln MS, see Keiser, “ ‘To Knawe God Almyghtyn’ ” and “Pe Holy Boke” 306-14, and Thompson, “Another Look.”
reader is encouraged to contemplate each event of Christ’s Passion as an isolated incident, allowing each individual moment to resonate with him emotionally. At the hour of Prime, he is to ponder the moment when Jesus was stripped and scourged, and the emotional register here is unmistakable: “Be-holde hym here mekly & habondandly and if you can have here no compassione of þi lorde Ihesu, wete you wele þi herte es hardere þan þe stone” (Lincoln MS Item 29, f. 181v).

Thornton also copied a number of affective lyrics, including one which he merely titles “Tractatus.” This poem praises Christ for his saving power, specifically stating at its conclusion:

Ihesu in thi lufe wounde my thoghte
And lyfte my herte to the.
Ihesu, my saule þat þou dere boghte
Thi lufere make it to bee.
Now Ihesu, Lord, þou gyffe me grace—
If it be thi will—
That I may come un-to þi plac[e]
And wonn ay with the stylle. Amen. (Lincoln MS Item 49, f. 211v)

Thornton also copied a number of affective lyrics in Latin, including one entitled the “meditacione of þe ffyue woundes of oure lorde Ihesu Criste with a prayere in þe same,” which provides exactly what its title suggests:

Adoro te, piissime Ihesu, qui redimisti me.
Ihesu pie, te postulo
Pro venerando wulnere
Quod fixum est per lanceam
Tibi in dextro latere,
Ut ab omni me crimine
Labe velis absoluere
Que commisi nephario
Visu, verbo, et opere. (Lincoln MS Item 52, f. 212v)

This poem occurs in the static moment of Christ hanging motionless on the cross, and it catalogues the wounds on Christ’s body. Each stanza of the poem encourages the reader to ponder a different wound, and the reader is thereby encouraged to connect his sins to the suffering Christ, through whose suffering those sins are to be forgiven. As the
reader’s gaze moves over Christ’s body, the savior never moves. Such moments encourage a private and intimate ethical relationship between text and reader, one standing in sharp contrast to the exertion of militant Christianity that marks the opening sequence of the London MS. Such affective texts of religious devotion dominate the second half of the Lincoln MS, indicating both that Thornton had a penchant for such texts and that he tried to collect them together.

The romances gathered into the London MS do not share this private ethical orientation; rather, they celebrate the muscular exertion of the Christian faith, with a particular focus on erasing competing religious systems. In these texts, although the Saracens and Jews may be worthy foes, we never lose sight of the fact that this was a conflict between right and wrong, that Christian history was perceived as a pitched battle between Vera Ecclesia and heresy. Violence could, so it went, justifiably be used against Jews (in pogroms, in forced banishment), against Moslems (in the Crusades for the Holy Land), and against heretics (in the Albigensian Crusade). As such, these romances replicate the confident logic underwriting Roland’s famous assertion that “The pagans are wrong and the Christians are right” (Song of Roland 1015).

By their sheer triumphalism, these romances encourage the reader to identify with the fantasy of inevitable Christian victory. Robert Warm, in comments about the corpus

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6 In his meekness, this Christ is the embodiment of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 52:13-53, wherein the messianic figure “has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases” and “was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.” Moreover, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

7 For a discussion of the significance of the Crusades in fifteenth-century England, see Tyerman 302-23, who argues that the passion for crusading, characteristic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was still alive and well in fifteenth-century England: “The mentality of the fifteenth century was separated by no great divide from the outlook of earlier generations” (307). During Thornton’s youth, the English had been involved in the last attempt by the West to re-conquer Jerusalem, which ended in crushing defeat for the Christians at Nicopolis in 1396. But later, the English led a crusade against the Hussites in 1428, and each of the Lancastrian kings toyed with the idea of organizing a crusade. According to Tyerman, during the period 1444-1502 in England there were twelve separate indulgence campaigns to finance a crusade against the Turks (315). And of course the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the Turkish siege of Belgrade in 1456 would have caused alarum in the Christian world (around the time of Thornton’s compiling activities).
of Middle English Charlemagne romances, rightly notes the identification which they encourage:

The audience must not then be regarded as passive observers, situated outside the text. [...] The audience is regarded as possessing a set of values identical to those held by the narrative actors themselves. As readers, we are constructed as members of an all-male Christian group, actively involved in the narrative subordination of the Saracen other. We pray to assist the Christian knights, and our involvement results in our receiving rewards similar to those of the crusaders themselves. The act of listening to a battle as recounted in a romance becomes equated with the act of participating in the battle which the romance describes. (98)

These texts, then, are supra-hegemonic, effecting a fantasy political realm in which the duality of rulers and ruled is replaced with a desire for a monologic cultural body. Hegemony, of course, depends on a polarity between the demands of the ruling class and the assent of the ruled: in hegemonic systems, those whom Gramsci calls “the intellectuals”—i.e. “the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government” (306)—galvanize the tacit consent needed for the ruling class to govern effectively. In Gramsci’s formulation, the ruling class does not merely impose its will by force, but rather, through the work of these intellectuals, garners the “‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (306-07). In such a system, the ruling class is able to cling to its position because of the compliance of the working class, specifically their willingness to adopt the dominant ideas, to live as if such ideas were in accord with their own class interests. In these romances, the duality between the dominant and the subaltern, to use Gramsci’s terminology, finds its

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8 The classic formulation of “hegemony” is to be found in Gramsci 189-221, but see also the qualifications to Gramsci in Williams, *Marxism* 108-14.

9 To this end, Gramsci remarks, “Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity” (211-12).
parallel in the Christian and the Judeo-Moslem. However, these texts seek a very
different political resolution to this duality. The fantasy underlying such romances is that
if the Christians exert their form of religiosity hard enough, the Judeo-Moslem subaltern
can be written out of the imaginary. The romances of the London MS, then, are animated
by a genocidal, rather than hegemonic, logic. In such a form of Christianity, we find
ourselves in quite a different ideological register from the texts of affective piety, which
come to fruition in the private, intimate relationship established between the reader and
Christ.

3.1: Codicological Description

Of all the MSS treated in this study, the original state of the London MS is by far
the most difficult to reconstruct. The MS has been greatly cropped, causing the loss of
most of the quire signatures and catchwords. Furthermore, when it was re-bound in
1972, each folio was remounted as a single leaf, and no records were kept as to the
original state of the MS (Thompson, Robert Thornton 8-9). These two facts obscure the
original arrangement of the MS, making any reconstruction of the quires all the more
difficult. Moreover, the loss of an often indeterminate amount of material exacerbates
this difficulty. For this MS, which is entirely on paper and measures 272mm x 188mm, I
offer the following collation:10

ii parchment flyleaves (counted as ff. 1-2 by the MS’ s modern foliation), 17 (wanting an
indeterminate number of leaves; ff. 3-8); 224 (ff. 9-32), 322 (wanting 22; ff. 33-53), 420 (ff.
54-73), 528 (wanting 5, 8, 26, 28; ff. 74-97), 636 (ff. 19-20 are stubs; wanting ff. 6-10; ff.

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10 Previous attempts at collation can be found in Hanna, “The London Thornton Manuscript,” Horrall, “The
London Thornton Manuscript,” and Thompson, Robert Thornton 19. As it provides the most detailed and
most accurate collation, my work is based on Thompson’s, which I have corrected and refined in several
respects. For a detailed explanation of each quire and some of the points on which I disagree with
Thompson, see Appendix F. For a brief description of the MS, see Catalogue of Additions 148-51. Note,
though, that the Catalogue incorrectly claims that the MS is on parchment.
35-36 cancelled; ff. 98-124), 72 (wanting 20-22; ff. 125-43), 826 (f. 26 cancelled; ff. 144-68), 99 (fragment of 13 ff.; ff. 169-81), ii parchment flyleaves.

We know that the same Robert Thornton who copied out the Lincoln MS is also responsible for the London MS, because on f. 66r, at the conclusion of The Siege of Jerusalem (Item 3), he has added the following colophon: “R. Thornton dictus qui scripsit sit benedictus. Amen.” Also, the name “R. [   ]ton” appears on f. 50r, where the last name has been partly erased. This colophon on f. 66r is similar to that which Thornton added in the Lincoln MS on f. 98v.11 In addition, paleographical analysis demonstrates that almost the entirety of both MSS is written in the same hand.12 Finally, there are six paper stocks common to these MSS, indicating that Thornton was working on both simultaneously.13

As with the Lincoln MS, Thornton has here employed colored lettering sporadically throughout the MS. For example, he uses a blue two-line initial on f. 9v and a green three-line initial on f. 105r. He also uses touches of green on many of the opening letters of each line throughout The Virtues of the Mass (Item 20), Richard Coer de Lyon (Item 28), and Ypokrephum (Item 29). He has also included a number of large initials at the beginning of texts or at textual divisions, most notably on f. 14r, where he has drawn in a ten-line rubricated initial. Finally, Thornton has included several blank spaces in this text, which he presumably intended to fill with illustrations (discussed in more detail below).

Whereas the names scribbled in the margins of the Lincoln MS indicate that it was owned by members of the family through the seventeenth century, the only names (other than that of Thornton) to be found in the London MS are not so easy to identify and bear no obvious relationship to the family. At the top of f. 49r appears the phrase

11 In the Lincoln MS, Thornton has also included a variation on this phrase on f. 213r. Furthermore, he has inscribed his name on ff. 211v and 278v.
12 See the detailed analysis of the variations in Thornton’s script in Stern 201-04.
13 Pace Hanna, “The Growth” 51 Horrall, “The Watermarks” 385-86, who note only five paper stocks common to both of Thornton’s MSS. Paper stocks a, b, c, e, f, and h are to be found in both. For analysis of the stocks used in the London MS, see Appendix F; for an analysis of the stocks used in the Lincoln MS, see Appendix D.
“John Nettleton’s book.” The name “Nettylton” is also inscribed three times in the right-hand margin of f. 139v in what appears to be a later sixteenth-century hand. The top of f. 73v also bears the name “William Frost” in red ink. The foot of f. 139v contains several scribbled autographs in sixteenth-century hands, each written perpendicular to the text on the page. John Thompson speculates that the John Nettleton whose name appears in this MS may be the same man who collected literary and religious texts for Henry Savile of Banke, a late sixteenth-century MS collector in Yorkshire (Robert Thornton 6-7). Frances Foster, though, dates the hand to the fifteenth century, suggesting that it “is perhaps to be identified with John Nettleton of Thornhill Lees, Yorkshire, son of John Nettleton and Elizabeth Holgate, who were married in 1420” (“Introduction” 12). In either case, such connections are much more tenuous than the clear evidence of Thornton family ownership of the Lincoln MS. Nothing definite is known of the MS until it was sold to the British Museum in 1879.

Though the London MS has received much less attention that the Lincoln MS, in some ways it is every bit as well organized a compilation as its more famous counterpart. This can be seen primarily in the opening five quires, which exhibit a surprisingly high degree of structural planning and organization. In this regard, I disagree with John Thompson’s suggestion that the London MS is merely an “‘overflow’ volume” for material that did not fit the purportedly superior Lincoln MS (Robert Thornton 68). Thompson further concludes that “it seems appropriate to characterise the final results of Robert Thornton’s book-compiling activities as an intriguing mixture of obvious and sometimes happy accident, and occasional careful design” (69). Overall, the first five quires present a sequence of texts that, beginning with the life of Christ, narrate salvation history up through the Christian Middle Ages. This series begins with the Cursor Mundi

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14 A.I. Doyle, Rev. of Robert Thornton 272, suggests that this name reads “Willam Frooster” or “Froweeter,” though I concur with Thompson that it is probably “Frost.” Either way, the name is very difficult to decipher.
15 In what follows, I focus primarily on the opening five quires, where Thornton has placed three of the four romances of the London MS. The later quires of the MS may be considered evidence for Thompson’s characterization of Thornton’s merely “occasional careful design,” but, as I will argue here, the first five quires provide clear evidence of a well planned production.
(Item 1), which has been selectively edited to include only the sections on the life of Christ up to his crucifixion; this is followed by the Northern Passion (Item 2), which narrates Christ’s death; The Siege of Jerusalem follows (Item 3), a text detailing the revenge visited upon the Jews for their deicide. These are followed by The Sege of Melayne (Item 4) and Roland and Otuel (Item 6), which both narrate the exploits of Charlemagne in defeating the Saracens. Thus, as a series, the texts in the opening five quires trace—in chronological order—the story of Christian salvation from its originary moment in Christ’s death and resurrection, through the fantastical vanquishing of various threats to the Christian dispensation.

The most interesting editorial work Thornton has done is to be found in the opening two texts of this MS, where he has woven together the Cursor Mundi and the Northern Passion, forming them into a devotional foundation for the romances to follow. To begin with, it seems that he only included the sections of the Cursor focusing on Christ’s life. The Cursor itself is an expansive text, tracing salvation history from the creation of the world to the last judgment. By only copying the portions that concern Christ’s life, Thornton has created a very focused opening for this MS, one that provides a coherent context for the first romance, The Siege of Jerusalem, in which the Jews are punished for their role in Christ’s death.

In addition, Thornton has neatly yoked together two distinct sections of the Cursor, lines 10,630-14,915 and 17,111-17,188. The first selection ends at exactly the point where the poem shifts from couplets to “septenary long lines, usually arranged in quatrains but sometimes also presented in stanzas of five verses” (Thompson, Cursor

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16 Item 5 is a Marian lyric, discussed below (in Section IV).

17 It is possible that Thornton actually did copy the entirety of the opening sections of the Cursor and that they were subsequently lost (as the text is now acephalous and there is no way to determine how much of the beginning is lost); however, without firm evidence to establish how much is lost, and in light of the fact that he definitely did not copy the parts of the text that follow Christ’s death, it seems best to err on the side of caution and assume that not much more than is missing was part of the original collection. George Keiser, “Rev. of Robert Thornton” 157 concludes that Thornton did originally copy the entirety of the Cursor, while Phillipa Hardman, “Reading” 257 concludes that he most likely did not. For more on this, see my discussion of Quire 1 in Appendix F.
Mundi 67). He stopped copying the first excerpt of the Cursor right before this metrical change, adding his own colophon that reads:

For now I thynke of this make ende
And to þe passyoun will I wende
Anothir boke to bygynn
And I may to my purpose winn
And þat I till ende may brynge. (f. 32r; 14916-20)\(^{18}\)

He then supplies a short section (lines 17,111-17,188) wherein Christ speaks from the cross directly to the reader, at the conclusion of which he adds a further colophon: “Et sic procedendum ad passionem domini nostri Jhesu Christi que incipit in folio proximo sequente secundum ffantasiam scriptoris” (f. 32v). As promised in this colophon, Thornton then proceeds with his copy of the Northern Passion, which is similarly written in rhyming couplets. It is clear, then, that Thornton has carefully selected parts of the Cursor that set up the Passion narrative that follows, and he has provided bridges between the texts. In sum, this provides for a smooth reading process, as each text is set up to build from the previous text, and the opening two texts are edited so as to have metrical conformity. Thornton’s editorial work brings the opening of the London MS together, creating a focused beginning to the MS that sets the stage for the violent form of Christianity to be expounded in the romances to follow.

But Thornton has also added a decorative system to both the Cursor and Northern Passion, one that points towards the elevated status of these devotional texts. In the Cursor, he has added seven two-line initials, forty-three three-line initials, seven four-line initials, and one ten-line initial.\(^{19}\) Similarly, in the Northern Passion he has included one two-line initial, forty-six three-line initials, twelve four-line initials, and one five-line

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\(^{18}\) The version of the Cursor from the London MS has been transcribed in two parts, to be found in the appendices to The Southern Version, Vol. 2 (151-92) and Vol. 3 (165-210). I provide quotations from these editions, but I have supplied punctuation, as both appendices are merely diplomatic transcriptions.

\(^{19}\) The two-line initials are found on ff. 9v, 11v, 13r, 14v, 16r, 16v, and 28r. The three-line initials are found on ff. 3r, 3v, 4r, 4v, 5r, 5v, 6r, 6v, 7r, 7v, 8v, 9r, 10r, 12r, 12v, 13r, 14r, 15r, 15v, 17r, 19r, 19v, 20v, 21r, 23r, 26r, 27r, 29v, 31r, 31v, and 32r. The four-line initials are found on ff. 14v, 17r, 18r, 20r, 21v, 24v, and 25v. The ten-line initial is found on f. 14r.
initial. By contrast, in the three romances Thornton copied into the opening five quires, outside of marking the opening of texts or passus/fitte divisions, he rarely uses large initials. In *The Siege of Jerusalem*, he uses one two-line initial, three three-line initials, three four-line initials, and one five-line initial, of which five are marking the text’s opening and passus divisions. In *The Siege of Milan* he uses even fewer initials—he created only two two-line initials and two four-line initials, of which three are marking the text’s opening or passus divisions. Finally, in *Roland and Otuel* he uses just six four-line initials, of which two are marking the text’s opening and a fitte division. Thornton has, then, invested a special aesthetic in the two opening devotional texts of this MS, something he has chosen not to do for the romances. Such an aesthetic points to the devotional context which Thornton has created for the opening of the MS, for those sections that are focused explicitly on Christ.

Beyond the simple addition of illuminated letters, throughout the *Cursor* he has also left a series of ten blank spaces occupying between eight and thirteen lines, which he presumably intended to have illustrated at a later date. Had this system been completed, it would have added further to the devotional potential of this opening text. But since the sections of the *Cursor* that Thornton has copied center around the life of Christ—and not his crucifixion—such illustrations would have encouraged a devotional participation in Christ’s active ministry (and not the affective focus on the suffering Christ or his suffering mother encouraged by the religious texts of the Lincoln MS). This focus accords well with the active, muscular Christianity adumbrated in the romances to follow.

For example, the space for the illustration on f. 23v comes immediately after line 13,759,

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20 The two-line initial is found on f. 46v. The three-line initials are found on ff. 33r, 33v, 34r, 35r, 35v, 37r, 37v, 39r, 39v, 40r, 40v, 43v, 45v, 46r, 46v, 47r, 47v, 48r, 48v, 49r, 49v, and 50r. The four-line initials are found on ff. 33r, 34r, 34v, 35r, 36r, 38r, 38v, 40r, and 40v. The five-line initial is found on f. 38v.

21 The two-line initial can be found on f. 63r. The three-line initials can be found on ff. 50v, 54v, and 57r. The four-line initials can be found on ff. 51r, 53v, and 60v. The five-line initial can be found on f. 50r.

22 The two-line initials can be found on ff. 73r and 78v. The four-line initials can be found on ff. 66v and 69v.

23 The four-line initials can be found on ff. 82r, 83r, 84v, 87r, 90r, and 92r.

24 As discussed in Chapter 2, Section V, Thornton similarly placed more decorated initials in the opening two romances of the Lincoln MS, and then in the remaining romances used initials much more sparingly.

25 These can be found on ff. 4v, 7r, 7v, 8v, 9r, 12v, 21v, 23v, 24v, and 25v.
where Jesus has forgiven the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). An illustration here would likely have depicted Christ in the dramatic act of drawing on the ground or the Pharisees preparing to stone the woman. Furthermore, the space for an illustration on f. 25v, placed right after line 13,991, comes after a series of healing miracles that Jesus had performed. The last one mentioned is the cure of Simon the leper. The most significant blank space is to be found on f. 33r, at the beginning of the Northern Passion. Here, Thornton has left a space running the entire width of the page and taking up the equivalent of about fourteen lines of text, an unusually large amount of space. Since this space stands at the head of this Passion narrative, Phillipa Hardman has suggested that Thornton intended “a picture of the Crucifixion functioning as a pictorial title or frontispiece to the text” for this space (“Reading the Spaces” 261). Had this illustration been executed, the focus would no doubt have been on Christ crucified, the typical matter of affective piety. In this way, this particular illustration would have stood out in its present context. In sum, there is an elevated status to the opening of the London MS, which shows us that, although its religiosity is not inflected in the same way as in the Lincoln MS, Thornton certainly envisioned the London MS a testament to his Christian faith.

Codicological evidence also points to the critical consciousness governing Thornton’s decision to group the Cursor and the Northern Passion at the head of this MS, for the Cursor was actually copied later than the Northern Passion.26 By this deliberate placement, Thornton has allowed the Cursor to stand as a prolegomenon to the Northern Passion, and, ultimately, to the issues of Christian identity foregrounded in the opening five quires. Several factors suggest this to be the case. First, Thornton’s Cursor selection finishes on f. 32v, the very end of quire 2, and the Northern Passion begins on the following folio. These two texts being in distinct quires supports the possibility of a time

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26 See also Chapter 2, Section V, where I argued that in the Lincoln MS the Alliterative Morte was one of the first pieces copied by Thornton, and that he at a relatively late stage placed the Prose Alexander before the Morte. In the context of the Lincoln MS this was a significant act in Thornton’s compilation process, as this late addition helped to create a thematic sequence at the MS’s opening asking unsettling questions
lapse between their copying. Furthermore, the *Cursor* is copied on paper stock A, which is found nowhere else in the London MS and only in quire 10 of the Lincoln MS, which there represents later copying activity.\(^{27}\) The fact that Thornton went to this same stock of paper for his copy of the *Cursor* suggests that this text was copied relatively late in the process, when other stocks had been exhausted.\(^{28}\) Finally, George Keiser has observed that Thornton, later in his compilation process, began to distinguish between –þ and –y more carefully than in his earlier efforts, taking pains to close the top of his –þ in order to differentiate the two letter forms (“Rev. of Robert Thornton” 157-58). The existence of this differentiation in the *Cursor*, and its notable absence in the Northern *Passion*, adds further weight to the idea that Thornton copied the *Cursor* at a later stage.\(^{29}\)

This decision to add the *Cursor* late in the compilation process illustrates just how controlled and organized this collection is. These two opening texts work as a foundation for the violent types of Christianity to come in the romances. Thornton points to such a connection with his incipit to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, which immediately follows the Northern *Passion* and points back to the issues it raises: “Hic incepit Distruccio Jerusalem quomodo Titus & Vaspasianus obsederunt & distruxerunt Jerusalem et vi[n]dicaru[n]t mortem domini Ihesu Christi” (f. 50r). There are also internal textual echoes between *The Siege of Jerusalem* and the Northern *Passion* that point further towards the intricate connections between the texts that open the London MS. The *Passion* mentions the legend of the vernicle which was used to wipe Christ’s face on his

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\(^{27}\) Quire 10 in the Lincoln MS contains the ending of *Sir Percevell*, the last romance Thornton copied, followed by a series of religious lyrics and prayers. This quire was likely copied relatively late in the process of compiling the Lincoln MS. The following quire begins with *The Previte*, which, as I argued in Chapter 2, was (along with the Alliterative *Morte*) the earliest piece copied in the MS. The first religious lyrics in the Lincoln MS, appearing at the end of quire K, are thus most likely representative of later copying, used by Thornton as a bridge between the end of the romance section and the already-copied *Previte*, which follows immediately on from quire 10.

\(^{28}\) For the details of the paper stocks and quire divisions in the London MS, see Appendix F.

\(^{29}\) Comparison of f. 32v with f. 33v demonstrates this difference: the former, the last folio of the *Cursor Mundi*, shows a clear distinction between both letter forms, while the latter, the second folio of the Northern *Passion*, shows little.
way to Calvary (f. 46v; 1*-54*). This vernicle, once Christ’s face has been imprinted upon it, takes on miraculous healing powers, and the woman in whose possession it was gave it to the pope where “wha so will to Rome pilgrm be / thare thay may þe sothe see” (53*-54*). Similarly, in The Siege of Jerusalem, Vespasian (who along with his son is converted to Christianity and leads the attack on Jerusalem) suffers, at the text’s opening, from an odd malady: “A beke of waspe bees brede in hys nose / Heued up heghe in his heuede— he had þam of þowthe” (f. 50v). When Vespasian’s son, Titus, converts to Christianity, Vespasian orders his knights to bring the vernicle which Veronica used to wipe Christ’s face, and the pope himself presents it to Vespasian:

The pope avaylede with the vale and his vesage towchede
Sythen the body alle abowte and blyssede hym thryse;
Than went the waspes awaye and alle the woo aftire
That are lazare was laythe lyghttere was he neuer. (f. 53v)

Such intertextual allusions strikingly indicate the seamlessness of the London MS’s opening sequence. Specifically, Thornton has woven together the life of Christ with the actions of later, illustrious milites Christi, depicting a salvation history that arcs from the foundation of the Church up through the Christian Middle Ages. The resounding emphasis of this history intimates a siege mentality, wherein Vera Ecclesia is under constant attack from threatening outside forces. It is, then, to the devotional foundations of the salvation history that we now turn.

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30 To indicate that this section of the Passion does not appear in the other extant MSS, Foster provides a system of line numbers with asterisks. This section is found in Foster’s edition on p. 180.
31 As no critical edition of The Siege of Jerusalem is based on the London MS, I here provide citations directly from the MS itself.
3.2: “Transitive” Christianity and the Devotional Beginnings of the London MS

The opening two texts in this MS, the *Cursor Mundi* and the Northern Passion, both narrate events from the life of Christ; as such, they provide a devotional ground for the romances to follow. However, although certain elements in each text could be equated with the matter of private devotion, their context within the London MS encourages a different interpretive model. Here, they narrate the foundations of Christianity—i.e. the life and Passion of Christ—which will, in the romances to follow, become the transnational force that unites the armies of the west against Jews and Moslems. The Christ-child in the *Cursor*, moreover, is not the meek sufferer that he would become as an adult in so many devotional texts. In his more active depiction in the *Cursor*, Christ can be seen as the precursor of Bishop Turpin and Richard I, the audacious characters who rally the Christian troops to victory in the romances of the London MS. In addition, both the *Cursor* and the Northern Passion anticipate the binary between Christians and Jews/Moslems that will be carried to its violent narrative solution in the romances to follow. Within this context, the reader of the *Cursor Mundi* and the Northern Passion is not so much asked to ponder his lack of moral worth or to develop gratitude for the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection; rather, he is to consider how the heights of Christ’s sacrifice—and by implication the political body of Western Christendom, descended from that act—have been jeopardized by the incursions of the Jews and Moslems. Thus, although both texts bear unmistakable affinities with the types of material Thornton has compiled in the Lincoln MS, it is clear that he has pressed these texts into a different type of service in the London MS, one that figures forth an active, violent form of Christianity.

Just as a transitive verb needs a direct object for its grammatical completion, so too does the religiosity of these texts seek an object—a person or group of people upon whom the Christian can enact his faith. The logic underwriting these texts is that such an object provides the natural fulfillment of the religious impulse, and without this
fulfillment there is a lack. In particular, these texts find their completion through the suffering of Jews and Moslems, by which suffering Christian faith is empowered.

The first section of the Cursor appearing in the London MS, corresponding to lines 10,630-14,915, covers the life of Christ up to his crucifixion.32 The second excerpt from the Cursor, much shorter, has a vision of the crucified Christ, who speaks to the reader, imploring him/her to turn away from sin. The inclusion of these two specific selections seems to have been a conscious decision by Thornton to include the parts of the text addressing the life of Christ (Thompson, Cursor Mundi 80-87). One of the more noteworthy aspects of the section of the Cursor Thornton has included is its reliance on the apocryphal Gospel tradition, namely the Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium (Fowler “Introduction” xx). Outside of the Nativity stories from Matthew and Luke, and Luke’s sketchy stories of the child Jesus in the temple, the Bible provides no details of Jesus’s life before his baptism as an adult at the hands of John the Baptist. The apocryphal tradition, however, attempts to fill that void, and the picture of the child Jesus that emerges in this tradition, and thus that survives through the parts of the Cursor copied by Thornton, presents a wild and audacious young boy.

In this case, particularly in lines 11,927-12,659, the child Jesus is possessed of a divine power without the necessary maturity of judgment about when and how best to exercise it. In one story, Jesus is playing with other children in Galilee, making mounds of clay into and out of which water is running. An unnamed child “that full was of the Sathane” destroys one of Jesus’s mounds, at which Jesus issues a death sentence for the child:

32 The Cursor begins acephalously and the opening quire is clearly a fragment, so it is impossible to determine with any great accuracy exactly how much Thornton may originally have copied. What now survives contains two excerpts of the poem, covering lines 10,630-14,915 and 17,111-17,188 of the poem. (This numeration is taken from the appendices to The Southern Version, Vol. 2 [151-92] and Vol. 3 [165-210].) Eight folios presently survive in the opening quire, but based on watermark symmetry, the minimum size of the opening quire would have been twelve folios. Given the size of the other gatherings in the opening section of this MS, it seems plausible that three quires would have been sufficient to encompass the entirety of the opening 10,000-plus lines, had Thornton decided to copy the entirety of this voluminous text. For a more detailed discussion of this quire, see Appendix F.
“Childe, whi dide þou soo?
Þat I hafe done þou fordose.
Þareof sall þou make na rose.”
Þare was no langare of to mote
Bot dede he felle at Ihesus fote. (f. 11v; 11946-50)

Subsequently, Mary and Joseph try to send Jesus to school, but he is too precocious to be instructed, and his knowledge exposes the ignorance of two different priests. Although this picture of the Christ child is not unique to the Cursor (being found in the apocryphal Gospel tradition and also in Ypokrephum, recorded later in the London MS [Item 29]), it certainly stands in contrast to the devotional tenor of many late medieval religious texts. Texts depicting Christ in school or playing with other children do not ask for the reader’s pity, but rather suggest how the lives of those in the world might be sanctified. The Cursor’s focus on the active life of Christ, set at the head of this collection, begins this series of texts with an emphasis on the role of the Messiah’s humanity, engaging with the world.

But the Christ-child does not just strike down bad children and expose incompetent pedagogues—he also asserts the superiority of Christian doctrine by revealing the falsity of Saracen worship, thereby prefiguring the direct attack on Saracens to follow in The Siege of Milan (Item 4) and Roland and Otuel (Item 6). When Christ is still an infant, the holy family flees Bethlehem for Egypt. Once there, Mary and her child enter one of the local temples, where suddenly “Alle [the Egyptians’] mawmettes within a stounde / Wyd opynne felle vnto þe grounde / And doune at þe erthe ware þay layde” (f. 10v; 11759-61). Though the Egyptians are never identified as such in this text, they are clearly associated with what were perceived to be Moslem practices. Within the London MS itself, references to Moslem Egypt are found in Richard Coer de Lyon in the

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33 In this respect, the Christ-child bears some affinity to the tradition of the puer-senex, for which see Curtius 98-101. However, the Christ-child, while exceedingly learned, because of his wild nature cannot be said to exhibit the wisdom of elders, and thus he does not accord exactly with this tradition.

34 For a discussion of the medieval redactions of the apocryphal legends of Christ’s childhood, see Dzon.
many lists of the nations supporting the Sultan against Richard’s Crusade.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, *The Siege of Milan* opens with a religious crisis similarly centering around “mawmettes,” as the Sultan Arabas has seized Christian relics and burned them, replacing them with Moslem idols throughout Italy:

\begin{quote}
The emagyry that ther solde bee,  
Bothe the Rode and the Marie free,  
Brynnede tham in a fire.  
And than his mawmettes he sett up there  
In kirkes and abbayes that there were. \textsuperscript{36} 
\end{quote}

Here, the term “mawmettes” stands as the antithesis of Christian relics, an absolute binary between the two systems admitting no shades of gray.\textsuperscript{37}

The *Cursor* does not just establish itself in opposition to Islam, though, for it soon turns its criticism to the Jews. In this anti-Semitic move, the text sets the stage for the first romance of the London MS, *The Siege of Jerusalem* (Item 3), wherein the Jews will be eradicated for their role in Christ’s death. In an unsurprising fashion, the *Cursor* turns to anti-Semitism at the moment in which the Jews are conspiring to kill Christ:

\begin{quote}
Lordynge, wele we wate  
Þat oure eldurs þe Bible wrate.  
Godd luffed the Iewes lange byforne  
Are that his sone in Erthe was borne,  
And mekill kyndenes thaym had done. […] 
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35} Of course, many in Latin Christendom knew that Moslems, just as Christians, were monotheistic. For an assessment of the knowledge of Islam in the Latin West, see Metzlitzki 197-210. Such academic concerns, though, are not part of the imaginary of these texts.  
\textsuperscript{36} Citations from *The Sege of Melayne* are from Alan Lupack’s edition of *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*.  
\textsuperscript{37} In Middle English, the word denoted any material item used in idolatrous fashion; however, in romances it is applied with particularly frequency to Moslems, likely because of its phonological resonance with and likely derivation from the Old French rendering of the Prophet Mohammed, “Mahomet.” In *The Siege of Jerusalem*, when Veronica’s veil is brought to pagan Rome, “[The pagans’] mahowne and thaire mawnetries mourlede in peces / And al to thruschede als the clothe thorowe the kirke passede” (f. 53r.) In this case “mahowne,” the Middle English rendering of the name Mohammed, comes to represent the abstract concept of idolatrous worship, as the name of the prophet of Islam takes on a synecdochical function for all aberrant religious practice. Furthermore, the term “mawmettes,” while in crusade romances often applying to Saracen practices, is also used frequently throughout the Old Testament in the Wycliffite Bible to denote false worship. For example, Gen. 31:19 reports that “Rachel had stolne þe mawmettes of here fader,” while Wisdom 14:8 notes that “þe mawmete […] maad bi hondis is cursed, & it & he þat made it” (*MED* s.v. “maumet” n.1).
\end{flushright}
He sent a man thaym to lede
Out of that cursed thede,
Moyses than highte he.  (f. 28v; 14,398-402; 14,406-08)

This passage draws attention to the historical dependence of Christianity upon Judaism ("oure eldirs þe Bible wrate"), while simultaneously attempting to assert the moral inferiority of the Jews. Here, Christianity is not seen to be standing on the shoulders of its Jewish antecedent, but rather the scandal of Christian origin is admitted but immediately erased by the text’s insistence on Jewish unworthiness. This attitude is quite common in late medieval discussions of Judaism, wherein the Covenant is figured as having passed on to the Christians. Within such formulations, in the words of Christine Chism, “The Jews themselves become historic/prophetic books for Christians, readable by others, reified and blind in themselves, their faith concretized into both sign and referent of their own unknowing subjection to Christian utility” (159). The Cursor, with its very human and active Christ, placed within a world dominated by Judeo-Moslem idolatry, begins to bring into focus the issues that comprise the opening sequence of this MS. The world in which the Christ-child finds himself is threatening and godless, and as we move into the romances, the solution which is offered to such a world is the violent imposition of Christianity.

Thornton follows the Cursor with the Northern Passion, which narrates the events of Christ’s death. This text is one that goes to great lengths to exploit the anti-Semitic potential of the Passion narrative; in particular, the version appearing in Thornton’s MS takes even greater liberties than the other extant MSS by depicting the Jews as the active persecutors of Christ, the ones running the show while the Romans are relegated to spectator status. In this way, Thornton’s version of the Northern Passion—although focused on the death of Christ, and thus potentially available for private devotional use—functions as a preview of the vengeance that will be enacted upon the Jews in the text to follow, The Siege of Jerusalem.

The most interesting diversion from the biblical narratives, and one which resonates with the anti-Judeo-Islamic sentiment of the Cursor and the romances to

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follow, is the insistence that the Jews, and not the Romans, were the ones to scourge Christ (f. 40r; 1179-1216). Yet the version recorded in Thornton goes even further than the other extant MSS in shifting much of the blame for Christ’s death from the Romans to the Jews. In the other extant versions, when Pilate asks the Jewish crowds what they would have him do, “Alle þei cride wiþ on voys / 3eue him doom to hange on croys” (1273-74), while Thornton’s version states that “alle thay sayde with o voyce / Gyffe hym vs to hange on croyce” (f. 40v; 1273-74). The London MS’s narrative has the Jews expressing a desire to take a direct role in Christ’s death, in contradiction to the biblical narrative and the other versions of the Northern Passion. The next two lines continue this re-writing of biblical history. The other MSS, in accord with the version presented in the Gospels, attest that “Pylate grauntyd hem here wylle, / he safe the dome Ihesu to spylle” (1275-76), while Thornton’s version again has the Jews in the role of active persecutors of Christ: “Pilate graunted thaym e thayre will / he gaffe thaym Ihesu for to spill” (f. 40v; 1275-76). Here, Pilate turns Christ over to the Jews, letting them kill one of their own. In the subsequent lines in the London MS, those nailing Christ to the cross are referred to only with the ambiguous “þay,” suggesting that the Jews themselves are executing Christ, a quite radical—and radically anti-Semitic—narrative change.

The conclusion of the Passion in the London MS makes clear the devotional context of this poem:

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38 The Northern Passion announces itself as a conflation of “Marke: Mathewe: luke and Iohn / In holy write accorde in till one” (9-10). However, the poem often strays outside of the Bible for its sources, and it is primarily based on the Old French Passion, which itself is a conflation of the Gospels and legendary material. See Foster 49. Citations herein from the Northern Passion are from Frances Foster’s EETS edition, which prints parallel texts from four MSS, including the London MS.

39 As representative of the other extant MSS of the Northern Passion, I cite from Cambridge, University Library MS Dd.1.1, printed in parallel by Foster alongside the version from the London MS. The Cambridge MS’s readings are similar to that of Cambridge, University Library MS Gg.5.31 and London, British Library MS Harley 4196, also printed by Foster. For a discussion of the relationship between the MSS of the Northern Passion, see Foster 38-47.

40 Note that in the lines presented here, the version Foster prints from Cambridge, University Library MS Dd.1.1 is defective, and she thus provides a reading from Cambridge, University Library MS li.4.9, a MS genetically related to Dd.1.1.
Now Ihesu Cristoure heuens kynge
Off whayme es made this prechyngre
Send vs thi strange pynynge [...] 
Þat we may to Ioye wende
Þat euir sall laste with owttyne ende
That es þe heghhe blyisse of heuene
Amene for his names seuene
And alle þat hase herde this passioune
Sall haue a thowsande þeris to pardone
Amen amene par charite
And louynge to God þerfore gyfe we. (f. 50r; 2079-81; 2087-94)

Such a conclusion, though rather standard, points towards the pious purposes such a text could serve. And though there are many points of intersection between the Northern Passion and the texts from the Lincoln MS that are informed by affective piety—namely a focus on the figure of Christ on the cross and the encouragement to participate vicariously in his suffering—the insistence on blaming the Jews for Christ’s death resonates loudly in the context within which it was read: immediately following the Cursor Mundi’s anti-Semitic rant and depiction of the destruction of Moslem “mawmettes,” and preceding The Siege of Jerusalem’s celebration of violence against Jews. With the Messiah having been violently executed, the stage is now set for the Christian attack on the Jewish capital.

3.3: The Ghosts of Christians’ Past: The Siege of Jerusalem

The Siege of Jerusalem (Item 3) tells the story of the destruction of the Jewish capital by the Romans in 70 AD. A king, Titus, and his father, Vespasian, both suffer

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41 One of the most popular Middle English romances, The Siege survives in nine MSS. For a discussion of the extant MSS, see Hanna and Lawton, “Introduction” xii-xxvii. Hanna and Lawton also remark that The Siege is written in an alliterative meter that “is as close as one can find to being perfectly representative of
from seemingly incurable afflictions: Titus has a facial deformity wherein “His lyppe laye on a lompe lyuerde one his cheke / With a kankire un-clene clotherede to-gedir” (f. 50v), and, as mentioned above, Vespasian suffers from bees in his nose. Once both are healed through Christian miracles, Nero nominates them to lead an attack on Jerusalem to force the Jews to pay their tribute. After the Jews battle the Romans in the open field, and the Romans roundly defeat them, the Jews retreat into the city. A siege follows, which occupies the last 700-plus lines of the poem. The text takes a small detour from the siege to narrate the series of emperors following Nero, each of whom dies after a short period of wicked rule. As a result, Vespasian is named the new emperor, and upon receiving the news he returns to the capital, leaving Titus in charge of destroying Jerusalem. The Jews finally relent and allow the Romans into the city, whereupon they proceed to strip the opulent temple of its jewels and then to raze it, after which they “Wente syngande a-waye,” returning happily to Rome (f. 66r).

This text marks the London MS’s move away from the suffering of Christ, the event lying at the foundation of the Christian dispensation, to the suffering of the Jews at the hands of new Christian converts. In this way, suffering is transformed from a single soteriological act into a tool at the service of the political and militaristic ends of the Church militant. The Passion itself, the central focus of so many of the religious texts Thornton has gathered in the Lincoln MS, here becomes a justification for violence. In particular this text takes great delight in detailing the suffering of Jewish bodies, offering such moments as the inverse of corollary moments from the Passion narrative. In the London MS, from the inception of this narrative forward, Christ’s death is no longer a non-repeatable, expiatory act—now, the events of the Passion form the pattern for violence to be enacted by Christian heroes upon the bodies of Jews and Moslems. In such a transition, that which is typically the centerpiece of private devotion becomes the animating force behind the expanding borders of a violent Christendom.

later Middle English alliterative poetry: highly competent, lacking in mannerism, and conforming to the most recent metrical descriptions of Duggan and J. Turville-Petre” (lxxiv).
Although medieval romance is noteworthy for its fascination with the suffering inflicted on knights’ bodies, *The Siege of Jerusalem* stands out as particularly given to celebrating the results of violence: “Even in a genre where battle eviscerations are more or less de rigueur, *The Siege of Jerusalem* has the dubious distinction of being the most inventively vicious poem of the alliterative revival” (Chism 167). At the hands of the Siege-poet, Christianity becomes something to be performed, to be enacted upon the bodies of non-Christians. Such violence is not part of an agonistic battle between two chivalrically gifted individuals (as seen in the episodic conquests of heroes like Beves, Guy or Lancelot), nor does it exist within the conflict of two opposed, but equally fierce, armies carrying out the clash of civilizations (as in the crusade romances and earlier *chansons de geste*); rather, *The Siege of Jerusalem*’s violence is one-directional, a series of attacks the Romans visit on the Jews, who are holed up inside of their city. This text takes great relish in narrating the details of Jewish suffering, and—quite remarkably—once Titus and Vespasian have been cured through divine intervention, Roman suffering receives very little attention. In the most memorable scene, the Jews have fled into the city and the Romans are besieging them by launching stones over the walls:

A pregnant woman flying over the wall and a number of women being ripped open by projectiles reminds us that we are not in the typical romance world, with its stylized, Christian-on-Christian, chivalric violence. Here, the text conjures realistic details of bodily suffering. But these were—according to such anti-Semitic formulations as exist in the Northern *Passion* (Item 2)—the very people who had caused that single act of

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42 The lines here do not make sense, for it is not clear what is “borne als a balle ouer the burghe wallis.” However, it seems that Thornton has omitted a line, for Hanna and Lawton’s edition reads: “With [a] ston o[f] a sta[yre] as þe storyj telleþ, þat þe barn out brayde fram þe body clene / + Born vp as a bal ouer þe burwe walles” (830-32). It is strange that Thornton has omitted what is perhaps the most comically grotesque line in the entire poem.
suffering upon which the late medieval gaze fell so intently. As we have already seen,
Thornton’s incipit to this text makes the connection between the punishment of the Jews
and Christ’s crucifixion all the more explicit: “Hic incepit Distruccio Jerusalem quomodo
Titus & Vaspasianus obsederunt & distruxerunt Jerusalem et vi[n]dicaru
mortem
domini Ihesu Christi” (f. 50r). Thus, the rules of the game here are different from the
typical romance: retributive logic requires that the Jews’ suffering be figured in an
intensely corporeal manner.43

But this text is far more than mere genocidal propaganda, for rather than depicting
an absolute binary between the Christianized Romans and the Jews, it includes occasional
moments wherein the Christian debt to Judaism is acknowledged or wherein sympathy
for their plight is expressed. By this strategy, The Siege of Jerusalem conjures the
Christian debt to Judaism—only to eradicate it by the conclusion of its narrative.
Although such moments may strike us as baffling, especially given the polarities in which
the conflict is framed, they remind us of what was, for many medieval Christians, the
scandal lying at the heart of the Church: that Christ himself was a Jew and that the Old
Testament was birthed and transmitted among Jews.44 At one particular moment, as the
Jews are gathered in preparation for battle,

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43 See also the comments of Malcolm Hebron, who notes that, of the various Middle English romances
taking up the siege of a city, “that of Jerusalem is perhaps the one which would have had the strongest
claim to be just for a medieval audience: all the violence exercised by the Romans is simply the expression
of the divine will, a visitation on the persecutors of Christ of the same degree of violence which they
themselves perpetrated” (127).

44 Elisa Narin van Court and Bonnie Millar have both recently offered readings of this poem that take up
such moments of ambivalence towards Jews. Narin van Court 154-55 locates the poem within medieval
theological attitudes towards Jews, particularly those writers indebted to St Augustine, whose “doctrine of
relative toleration” held that Jews are significant for the maintenance of Christian communal memory and
thus should be kept around (but in a limited capacity). The ambivalence seen in The Siege of Jerusalem,
she argues, “goes far to debate the myth of a univocal, universal medieval anti-Judaism, not an insignificant
contribution to medieval studies” (163). In a similar vein, Bonnie Millar locates The Siege in relation to
doctrinal anti-Judaism (i.e. the theological debate about the errors of the Jewish faith) and not in anti-
Semitism (i.e. popular hysteria and anti-Jewish propaganda resulting in violent acts, like pogroms): “The
Siege of Jerusalem was not written as a crusading romance, or a vehicle of popular anti-Judaism, in contrast
to other retellings of the destruction, nor is it anti-Semitic; it is a measured account of the glorious conquest
of Jerusalem that displays the influence of doctrinal anti-Judaism” (180). For more general comments on
medieval Christianity’s ambivalence towards Jews, see Kruger 4-5.
Leride men of the lawe that lowde couthe synge
With sawtirs satt hym by and the Psalmes tolde
Off doughty davide the kynge and oþ dere storyes
Off Iosue the nobill Iewe and Iudas the knyghte. (f. 55r)

Set within the impending battle—which is, after all, framed as revenge for Christ’s
death—the reference to Jews reading “sawtirs” becomes unsettling. Of all the books of
the Old Testament, the Psalms in particular had become central to Christian worship, and
large numbers of books of Psalms circulated among the literate laity in later medieval
England. But also significant is the reference to David, Joshua and Judas, the three
biblical members of the Nine Worthies. Typically, reference to the Worthies connotes a
unified body of elite warriors, a grouping that erases, rather than highlights, historical and
religious differences between its members. In this formulation, chivalry is usually
offered as the force able to transcend historical differences, as the biblical, classical and
medieval traditions are brought together with equal representation from each. The
reference here to the Jewish members of the Worthies draws the reader’s attention, then,
to the commonalities underlying Christian and Jewish history. On hearing the names
“Joshua, David, Judas,” the almost reflexive response would be to fill in the other six.
Yet here, only the Jewish names are given, which undercuts the normally unifying
process encouraged by reference to the Worthies. Such a resonance becomes
disconcerting when, soon after, the Romans begin their attacks on the Jews. But
immediately prior to this moment, the combination of the Psalms and the reference to the
Jewish contributions to chivalric history suggest that Christian identity cannot be
established in stable isolation from its Jewish antecedents.

The binary further breaks down when the timing of the Roman siege is set within
the context of Passover. The Passover holiday is a particularly troubling one for those

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45 For an extensive discussion of the wide popularity of primers among the late medieval English laity,
based largely on the Psalms at the center of the monastic hours, see Duffy 209-98. The Psalms were
definitely important to Thornton, who recorded an alliterative paraphrase of Vulgate Psalm 50 in the
London MS (Item 19). For an analysis and an edition of this Item, see Fein.
46 The standard representation of the Worthies is also to be found in two of Thornton’s texts, the
Alliterative Morte (from the Lincoln MS) and Winner and Waster (Item 31 in the London MS).
Christians who would wash the Church clean of its Jewish origins, for it was, of course, in celebration of this holiday that Christ himself entered Jerusalem, inaugurating what Christians commemorate as Holy Week (the height of the liturgical calendar). As the Jews flee into the city, a brief mention is made that this is “Paske tyme,” (320), referring to the Jewish holiday of *Pesach*. The *Siege of Jerusalem* had earlier reminded its audience of the connection between Christ’s death and this holiday: while telling Titus the story of Christ’s life—the very story which prompts his conversion, healing, and ultimately his desire for vengeance against the Jews for killing the Christ about whom he has just learned—Nathan says, “The prynces and the prelatis agaynes the paske tyme / Alle thay hatede hym in herte for his haly werkes. / It was a dolefull dede when þay his dede keste” (f. 52r). Later, Vespasian again draws the same connection while attempting to rally the Roman troops:

> I qwytte-clayme the quarells of alle the qwyke beryns  
> And claymes of euere-iche a kyng safe of cryste one  
> That this pepill to pyne hym of hym no pete þay hade  
> Alls proues his passione, who-so at paske redis. (f. 55v)

Here, the audience is reminded that at the time of *Pesach*, the devotion of the Church is drawn towards the Passion narrative. The connection, then, between Christ’s entry into Jerusalem—and the foundational sacrifice to which this entry immediately led—and the flight of the Jews into Jerusalem within this narrative, both occurring at Passover, interrogates the fiction of a Christian Church without a genealogy. Such connections simultaneously conjure sympathy for the Jews—if only momentarily—who become associated with the death of Christ, an innocent murdered in Jerusalem at the time of Passover. Here, the Jews are fleeing into the city at *Pesach*, and they “Flowen as þe foule

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47 This passage is taken from Hanna and Lawton’s edition (based on Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 656), as the London MS is wanting the folio containing these lines. However, comparison of Thornton’s text with their edition shows them to be remarkably similar in terms of plot, and so these lines provide a reasonably good idea of what Thornton must have originally copied. The London MS is lacking what corresponds to ll. 293-369 of Hanna and Lawton’s edition, and so all citations from this section of the text will be provided from their edition.

48 A further mention of *Pesach* can be found on f. 64v, when the Jews pray for a cessation of the siege, since “this was at the Paske tyme.”
doþ þat faucoun wolde strike,” which adds a sacrificial patina to the slaughter that is about to happen (314). At the very least, it is a subtly sympathetic element of this text, one that is not given the final word, but one that certainly destabilizes the binary between Christians and Jews and intimates what was seen as the scandal lying at the origin of the Christian Church.49

Such moments point the audience of *The Siege* towards the historical debt Christianity owes to Judaism. These moments are not, however, offered in the spirit of ecumenism. As Mary Hamel notes, the poem often turns from moments of seeming sympathy for the Jews to seeming glee in their suffering: “Yet in spite of the poet’s occasional empathy, the overriding theme of vengeance for Christ’s death is allowed to stifle humane impulses” (186). This recognition of a commonality between Jews and Christians ultimately yields to the need to excise the debt to Judaism from the Christian imagination. Earlier in the London MS, the reader had been presented with one particular common strategy for unburdening Christianity of such a debt: the insistence that the Jews were unworthy of the Messiah. In the sections of the *Cursor Mundi* that Thornton copied out, we find reference to Christianity’s historical debt:

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Lordynges wele we wate
Þat oure eldirs þe bible wrate
Godd luffed the Iewes lange byforne
Are that his sone in Erthe was borne
And mekill kyndenes thaym had done. (f. 28v; 14,399-402)
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The depiction of Jews as “oure eldirs” conjures the Jewish-Christian connection, one that is necessary for Christians to lay claim to the Old Testament. Yet this purported connection between the *Cursor*’s imagined Christian audience and their Jewish forebears

49 In addition, it should be noted that the siege—in the version attested in some MSS and in Hanna and Lawton’s edition of the poem—is also described in terms redolent of biblical history and the Christian liturgical year: “For four[ty] dayes byfor þey no fode hadde, / Noþer fisch ne flesch freke on to byte” (1071-72). This points towards the Jews’ forty-day sojourn in the desert en route to the Holy Land, which formed the typological basis for Christ’s forty-day fast in the desert and the Christian forty-day period of Lent. However, Thornton’s text, along with four other MSS, here reads only “four dayes.” Hanna and Lawton emend this to “four[ty],” a reading found in two extant MSS, which emendation, they claim, “seems simply commonsensical” (page 145, note to l.1071).
is soon severed, as the author gives a brief précis of salvation history, from Moses through Christ, highlighting the consistent failure of the Jews to respond in a worthy manner to the great gifts of God (14,403-39). As the capstone of his historical sketch, the author maintains that the Jews were too ignorant to recognize the Christ:

The mare kyndnes þat he thaym bedde  
The ffaster fra hymwarde thay fledde  
Alle that he moghte do to gode  
The Iewes helde hym euer wode. (ff. 28v-29r; 14,456-59)

By highlighting Jewish unworthiness, the text can simultaneously acknowledge a debt once held while justifying Christian superiority over its progenitors. The comments of Steven Kruger help to elucidate medieval strategies for representing the historical relationship between the two faiths:

Jews are positioned differently from any other group in relation to Christian history. As the direct precursor of Christianity, Judaism is precisely that which Christian history needs to move beyond. Indeed, the Christian incarnational reorganization of history, in working to make fully past that which precedes the rupture of the incarnation, operates efficiently to put Judaism to rest, to kill it off (at least, but not only, phantastically) and thus to make way for the new, Christian dispensation. (2-3)

In this way, the Covenant is seen ineluctably to pass over to a worthier community, and, now denuded, the Jews can be disparaged or—in the more extreme form mediated by The Siege of Jerusalem—eliminated with genocidal glee.

As we have seen, both the Cursor and The Siege of Jerusalem admit the debt of Christianity to Judaism, but The Siege’s strategy for erasing that debt from the Christian imaginary is much more violent than that adopted by the Cursor. The Siege, in keeping with its insistence on the attack as avenging Christ, seizes upon several moments from the Passion narrative and plays out their inversion upon the Jewish community. In this way, the Jewish violence that forms the originary moment of the Christian dispensation is doubled back upon them. Such a formulation suggests that not only are the Jews unworthy of the Covenant (as the Cursor insisted), but also that their deicide was not a single, non-repeatable event. By replaying the events of the Passion back upon the
Jews—essentially recreating the Passion, but with the roles reversed—the *Siege of Jerusalem* tries to sever the historical connection between Christianity and Judaism. No longer is Christianity birthed in a single act of violence. Here, the logic of the originary Jewish violence is dislodged from its permanent, foundational status and turned into a series of acts to be appropriated by the zealous converts, Titus and Vespasian. In such can be seen *The Siege*’s attempts at erasing the Jewish-Christian historical relationship and recovering from the destabilizing similarities to which I have made reference.50

One of the most detailed passages of the entire text depicts the torture and execution of Caiaphas, “pat Crist þroþ conseil bytrayede” (354), along with other Jewish scholars who are all captured after the first battle of the text. By focusing particularly on Caiaphas—who among the Jews had arguably the largest role in Christ’s death next to Judas—and showing his death as the inverse of Christ’s, the narrative transforms the Passion, typically the focus of so much introspective, meditative angst, into a public spectacle around which the Christians in the text can rally. The poet expends much energy on delineating the forms of bodily torture: Caiaphas and the scholars are to be flayed, drawn, and then hanged. Once hanging, their skinless bodies are to be anointed with honey. The description then focuses upon the suffering of Caiaphas in particular.51 Four stray animals “with clowes full scharpe” are to be attached to his thighs, while two “apis” are to scratch at his “rawe flesche appon rede peces” (f. 58r). The realistic details

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50 In Thornton’s copy of the Northern Passion (Item 2), Jesus challenges his audience:

*Lukis 3if þat any passiown or pyne
May ben bitterere thane es myne
the haly writt says naye
No pyne to his euynede be maye
Ne none oþir myghtfull kynge
Moughte suffire my paynes no thynge.* (f. 48r; 1758-64)

The retribution for the crucifixion, as figured in *The Siege of Jerusalem*, with its focusing on visiting the inverse of the Passion upon the Jews, would seem to be incongruous with such a sentiment as expressed in the Northern Passion.

51 Ralph Hanna, “Contextualizing,” suggests that this text’s obsession with punishing Jews, and the focus on their bodily suffering, should be read in light of the Church’s attempts to expose the suffering body of godless Lollards. There is no indication, however, that concerns with heterodoxy—Lollard or otherwise—were part of Thornton’s concerns at all, and such certainly does not seem germane to the sequence of texts in the opening of the London MS.
depicted in the suffering of these Jews is incongruous with the typical romanticized and stylized violence seen in the Middle English romance tradition. (In fact, this passage reminds one of the intricate details of skinning Bercilak’s deer rather than the suffering induced by the stylized violence that is typical of chivalric literature.) Here, the details of Jewish bodily suffering have to be extreme and fantastic in order to capture a fully retributive sense of justice—after all, the Romans are trying to avenge an act of deicide.

The connection to Christ’s death is made explicit in the mention that Caiaphas was “pyned fro þe pryme with percede sydis / Till the sonne downe sett” (f. 58r). The time of Caiaphas’s suffering mirrors that of Christ, who was crucified around 9:00 (i.e. prime) and was taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea in the evening.52 Furthermore, the reference to the suffering Christ in Caiaphas’s “percede sydis” is not to be missed. This similarity is then amplified by the narrator’s comment that the scholars who were tortured alongside Caiaphas “were tourment on a tre” (f. 58r), an unmistakable allusion to the crucifixion.

A further quite striking inversion is to be found in the sorrowful moment wherein a Jewish mother is forced to eat her own child. This moment builds upon the narrative trajectory of the Incarnation, locating its inverse in the Jewish community that is under siege, playing out the fantasy that the Jews were unworthy to have received Christ in the first place. In this scene, the city is on the brink of starvation: “Brede ne brothe ne no beste appon lyff / Olde schetis and schone ffull scharpely thay ete” (f. 62v-63r). In the midst of this doleful scene comes the story of a Jewish mother, described as “a milde wyf” (f. 63r), forced to eat her own child for sustenance. In Hanna and Lawton’s edition, this woman is named Mary, but Thornton’s text does not provide a name for her, instead beginning the line with an invocation to the Virgin, “O Saynt Marie” (f. 63r). Several

52 The Gospel of Mark is the only one to mention the time of Jesus’s crucifixion (9:00 am), and Mark also mentions that Joseph takes Jesus’s body down in the evening. Though neither Matthew nor Luke mentions the time at which Jesus was nailed to the cross, they both follow Mark in relating that Joseph took down Christ’s body in the evening. Unlike the synoptic Gospels, John provides no mention of the time of the events of the crucifixion.
critics have commented upon this scene as a reversal of the Eucharist. Though the Eucharist may be lurking in the referential background here, a more obvious association is with the Incarnation. In this scene, the woman speaks to her child before eating him: “‘And there-fore selde þat þou zafe and azayne torne; / Enter þare þou owte come’ and Etis the childe” (f. 63r). It is important to note that this woman not only attempts to eat her child, but she phrases it as if the act of eating put the child back into her body, a retreat to the pre-natal stage. In this rather ingenious move, the Siege-poet has struck upon a device for canceling the Jewish role in the Incarnation, stripping them—ex post facto—of the honor of having given rise to the savior.

Ultimately, then, this text is underwritten by a genocidal logic, one that presents an often subtle recognition of the common identity underlying Christianity and its converse, but one that simultaneously attempts to vanquish that converse from the Christian imaginary. In this vein, Roger Nicholson remarks:

A poem like The Siege of Jerusalem, then, seems to point to a foundation for Europe, in laying out the significant plot of history; the West discovers itself in its opposition to the East. […] The Siege re-establishes a point of origin, offering a history that is cleaned up; no messy indeterminacies; a perverse history, maybe, but sanitized. (475)

Coming immediately after the devotional pieces which began the London MS, and coming immediately before two Charlemagne romances (which narrate the defense of Christendom against Moslem incursions), the particular textual collocation within which The Siege of Jerusalem finds itself draws our attention to what I have termed transitive Christianity. The Siege of Jerusalem insists that the Church is self-sustaining, that it does not owe its origins to Judaism, and it finds a remarkably violent way to make this point.

53 e.g., Roger Nicholson, who remarks that “This child’s body is graphically dismembered. His death puts a representative stop to the natural history of humanity, but also, like the changing health of the Roman generals, acts as a sign of the spiritual health of his community. In doing that, it refers inevitably to the corpus mysticum, the transubstantiated body of Christ that is impossibly fragmented, yet bewilderingly preserves its full integrity—its integrity is dependent, in fact, on fragmentation, on ingestion. Where the Jewish mother Mary and her son are doomed to carnality and ruin, not unlike the temple that is the body’s other representative in the poem, the body of Christ must be broken in order to achieve an incomprehensible, salvific vivacity” (482). For further readings connecting this moment to the Eucharist, see Narin van Court 158-62 and Chism 160-63.
3.4: The Ghosts of Christians’ Present: The Siege of Milan, Roland and Otuel, and Two Devotional Lyrics

The Siege of Milan tells the story of the Sultan Arabas, who has overrun Milan and “Moslemized” it, destroying Christian relics and replacing them with those of Islam (Item 4). Sir Alantyne, the Lord of Milan, is then faced with a choice: convert to Islam or be executed. As he prays for guidance, an angel assures him that Charlemagne “sall wreke thy wrethis alle” (96). Charlemagne responds by sending Roland and 40,000 men to fight the Saracens, but the Christian army is summarily defeated and only Roland and three other peers remain alive. There follows a miracle in which Arabas tries to burn a crucifix in the presence of his four Christian captives, but he fails, as the crucifix emits a fire, blinding all the non-Christians and allowing Roland et al. to escape back to Charlemagne. On returning to Paris, Roland informs Bishop Turpin of the defeat of the Christians, and the Bishop vows to take up arms on behalf of the Church. After some initial hesitation by Charlemagne, both he and Turpin lead a massive army against the Saracens. The Christians finally have some military success, as the Moslems are forced to flee inside the walls of Milan, where a siege is now imminent. After the Christian reinforcements defeat those of the Saracens, the text ends, intriguingly, at the very

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54 This romance is unique to the London MS and is unfortunately incomplete: two folios have been lost, including the ending. It is written in the standard twelve-line tail-rhyme stanza.
55 References herein are to Alan Lupack’s edition of the poem, found in Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances.
moment when the siege engines were about to be unleashed: “A nobill hurdas ther was graythede / And baners to the walles displayede / And bendis up thaire engyne” (f. 79v; 1597-99).

Several critics have pointed to the devotional context of this poem, one that often shades towards the hagiographic. For example, Suzanne Conklin Akbari comments that The Siege of Milan “can be seen as representative of what one might call ‘devotional romance’ (that is, a chivalric narrative with pronounced spiritual or theological content)” (“Incorporation” 23).56 Significantly, Akbari does not claim that this text is, properly speaking, a devotional piece. Rather, she correctly notes the devotional trappings with which this heroic text has been overlaid. Of course almost all Middle English romances are peppered with devotional sentiments—seen most often in the benedictory rhetoric of their openings and closings and the blessings offered upon the knight who fights on the side of right.57 In The Siege of Milan, however, the use of such strategies is foregrounded even more than is usual for the genre. Nevertheless, we should not think of this poem as akin to devotional texts like those Thornton compiled in the Lincoln MS; rather, The Siege of Milan, although affecting a great devotional emphasis, should still be read as a thoroughly militaristic text. We see this emphasis most clearly in the person of Bishop Turpin, through whose character the typical matter of private devotion is transformed into a force for violence against the Saracens. In addition, the militaristic aspects of this poem are foregrounded within the London MS, for this text ends with a siege (which one assumes would have resulted in Christian victory, had the entirety of the text survived), which thus complements The Siege of Jerusalem: specifically, in this textual pairing there is a clear movement from vanquishing the ghosts of the Christian past, to the enemies of the present.

The monologic exertion of Christian superiority lying at the heart of this text crystallizes around the person of Bishop Turpin, who is the main character of the romance: Alan Lupack even refers to the entire romance as a “character study” of Turpin

56 For similar comments, see Shepherd 128-29 and Hardman, “The Sege” 77-84.
57 For a discussion of the use of religious language in Middle English romance, see Dalrymple.
The first time we meet Turpin is on Roland’s return from battle, when the bishop is en route to pray at the monastery of St Denis, and the figure he strikes from the very beginning is of an impetuous, fiery miles Christi. Immediately upon hearing Roland’s story, the Bishop throws aside his clerical vestments, vowing to take up the fight against Islam. The frenzy of Turpin’s response is thrown into relief by comparison to Charlemagne’s response: when the king hears Roland’s story, he is reduced to tears, a form of paralysis that makes the Bishop’s eagerness for battle all the more striking. But the contrast between the Bishop’s desire for revenge and Charlemagne’s dithering comes out explicitly when Turpin enters the debate against Ganelon, who had advised the king not to send more men against the Saracens: “‘Now Cristis malyson,’ quod the Bischoppe, ‘myghte he have / That Charls first this concell gaffe’ ” (f. 71v; 601-02). Such a statement pulls out the highest trump card in the medieval Christian deck: the curse. Of course such a curse was directed at Ganelon, who next to Judas was the most notorious traitor in the medieval imagination; nevertheless, the use of such impassioned rhetoric at this moment complements Turpin’s image as the wild and impulsive, yet extremely dedicated, miles Christi. In this way, Turpin is an exemplary character in the London MS, a celebration of the transitive form of Christian faith.

By throwing aside his clerical vestments and entering the battle, the Bishop inaugurates a new direction in the Charlemagne-Saracen conflict that comprises this text, insisting on throwing the resources of the Church militant into the forefront of the struggle and consigning the French to a secondary role. He boldly confronts Charlemagne for listening to Ganelon’s advice, calling the king a “crayon” (i.e. a coward) (680) and “were than any Sarasene” (694), accusing him of “eresye” (688), and procuring

58 See also Trounce 101, who calls Turpin “the finest piece of characterization in Middle English literature, with the exception of Chaucer’s best, and, possibly, of Gawayne in Gawwayne and the Grene Knyt.” Furthermore, Oliver, “Battling Bishops,” seeks to account for Turpin’s memorable character by suggesting that he was modeled on Hugh Despenser, Bishop of Norwich from 1370-1406. Despenser had a bellicose reputation: he led an army against the rebels in 1381, and he was the main proponent of an English Crusade against the supporters of the Avignese pope in Flanders in 1383.
the implements of excommunication (f. 72r; 690-93). In the most stunning of all his actions, Turpin gathers his army of clerics and surrounds Paris, prepared to attack Charlemagne before heading off to fight against Islam. Suddenly, however, Charlemagne relents and kneels—in the fashion of the emperor Henry IV barefoot before Pope Gregory VII at Canossa—before the Bishop, requesting forgiveness. Now united, both Bishop and King will fight the Saracens together, but only after the moral superiority of the Church in this fight has been made painstakingly clear.

Such an emphasis on the Bishop over the King complements the opening five quires’ insistence on an indivisible Christianity that can be exerted upon and can destroy all forms of alternative religious orientation. Simply put, a text such as the Chanson de Roland, with its focus on French heroes, would not have worked nearly as effectively at this place in the London MS. What is called for at this moment is a text that continues The Siege of Jerusalem’s universal, international appeal for a united Christianity. As Robert Warm comments:

> The Middle English Charlemagne romances are celebrating Christian heroes who happen to be French, rather than French heroes who happen to be Christian. They are deliberately ignoring the deadly rivalry between the two countries, and constructing an idealised vision of the past, within which true Christian knights fought the infidel rather than one another. […] In a sense, then, what these romances are providing is a narrative vision of the way the world should operate, as an antidote to the reality of an increasingly fragmented Christian meta-state. (87-88)

Specifically, in The Siege of Milan Turpin becomes a rallying figure for the forceful exertion of Christianity. After Charlemagne and the Bishop had to be separated from one another, Turpin proclaimed, “For we are halden with the righte, / Clerkes appon cursede men to fighte. / I calle the Goddes foo” (f. 72v; 736-38). The confident assurance of the rectitude of his cause, an assurance that will subsequently be vindicated when the momentum of the Christian-Saracen conflict turns in the Christians’ favor, is here made clear. Even the narrator echoes these sentiments in his celebration of Turpin’s superiority over Charlemagne: “Slyke clerkes beris my benysone, / For trewere men of relygyoun / In erthe were never none made” (f. 73r; 766-68). Though this statement may qualify as
an example of the text’s “ridiculous clericalism” (Smyser 94), more importantly it foregrounds the audacious Bishop as the undisputed center of attention, relegating the French king to an inferior position. This new focus places the Church militant at the center of the rest of this text.

In the final battle with the Saracens, Turpin also takes on the role of the suffering Christ. This particular use of *imitatio* is more than a devotional trope, though, for the particular emphasis here is on the Christ figure as an active, military leader, one who suffers his wounds on the battlefield, not the static and unmoving cross. Charlemagne in particular desires to see Turpin’s wounds, asking him on two separate occasions to expose them (f. 76v; 1183-84; f. 77v; 1338-41). Turpin is specifically wounded through the side by a lance, an unmistakable allusion to Christ on the cross (f. 77v; 1300-05), and the Bishop himself draws attention to the crucifixion with his refusal to stop fighting: “Criste for me sufferde mare. / He askede no salve to His sare, / Ne no more sall I this tyde” (f. 77v; 1345-47). Finally, the narrator later states that Turpin was “fastande dayes three” (f. 79v; 1578). Though the allusions may at times seem forced, the point is not to be missed: the Bishop is a figure of Christ, being tortured here by the Saracen unbelievers.

The contrast between this series of allusions to the suffering Christ and the devotions to the wounds of Christ, as seen in several texts of the Lincoln MS, is quite telling. The Christ of the devotions is an unmoving figure upon whom the Christian is to meditate, and only the mind and heart of the believer is to experience any motion as such. Within *The Siege of Milan*, though, this figure of Christ acts as a rallying point to spur the Christians on to military success, a dynamic figure with a much greater emphasis on human action. This association of Christ accords well with the London MS’s overarching emphasis on God active in history—a God who specifically acts in and through Christian warriors.

A salient contrast between the standard devotion to the *vulnera Christi* and the more active “devotion” of *The Siege of Milan* is to be found when Arabas attempts to burn the crucifix (to be discussed in more detail below). This particular scene draws
attention specifically to the figure of Christ as represented on the crucifix, for here the “rode” is said to be “Fourmede ewenn als He gane blede” (f. 70r; 426-27). This specific detail—while certainly to be found on every late medieval crucifix—focuses the audience upon the figure of the suffering Christ on the cross. But in this particular situation, that suffering figure does not sit motionless before the gaze of the devout; instead, that very crucifix, when thrown into the fire, soon morphs into a force for Christian violence: “A fire than fro the crosse gane frusche / And in the Sarasene eghne it gaffe a dosche” (f. 70r; 469-70). Just as through Bishop Turpin the matter of private devotion has been transformed into a tool of violence against non-Christians, so too with the cross itself.

However, unlike The Siege of Jerusalem’s haunting insistence on querying the binary separating Christians and their Jewish counterparts, the Saracen romances establish a much more stable binary, which makes sense, given that Christian origins owed no debt to Islam and thus there is nothing in common between the faiths which the Christian imaginary feels compelled to exorcise. Dorothee Metlitzki, in comments certainly applicable to The Siege of Milan, aptly sums up the corpus of Middle English Saracen romances as follows, noting particularly the rather blunt binary logic on which these texts operate:

The Middle English romances that depict the military confrontation of Christians and Saracens […] are unromantic because, though embodying the adventures of some hero of chivalry, Christian knight or converted Saracen, and belonging both in matter and form to the ages of knighthood, they are essentially vehicles of fanatical propaganda in which the moral ideal of chivalry is subservient to the requirements of religion, politics, and ideology. Pagans are wrong and Christians are right whatever they do. The ideal held up to the audience is not courtly love or perfect knighthood. It is the triumph of Christianity over Islam. (160)

Although The Siege of Milan invests remarkably little energy in describing the Saracens, when it does so it portrays them as caricatures developed from stereotypes of Islam. Sir Garcy, the Sultan who replaces Arabas (who had died when the crucifix emitted fire), is given sixty virgins for his coronation. Consistent with the stereotype of Moslem male virility, he sleeps with all of them and then marries each off to a Saracen knight after he
has enjoyed “Thaire althere maydynhede” (f. 73v; 867). The narrator follows this up with the disparaging comment that “So mekill luste of lechery / Was amange that chevalry / That they [myg]hte noghte wele spede” (f. 73v; 871-73). This comment is certainly puzzling, given that up to this point in the text, the Saracens have roundly defeated the Christians, managing to kill all but four of the 40,000 soldiers sent against them.

The most memorable scene of this romance clearly exposes the sharp polarity of Christian and Saracen identities when, in an attempt to show the superiority of Islam, the Sultan Arabas insists on burning a crucifix in front of his Christian captives. Though this moment has the feel of an affected and hackneyed clash of religious systems, it is of central importance within the development of the narrative; here, the author has gone to great lengths to emphasize the specific theological differences between the two faiths. The divine judgment that follows is, then, an unequivocal affirmation of Christianity and condemnation of Islam. Roland exploits the moment to engage in some catechesis, using language clearly meant to be redolent of the Creed, as he delineates for Arabas the central tenets of Christianity:

For sothe, thou Sowdane, trowe thou moste
One the Fader and the Sone and the Holy Goste.
Thire thre are alle in one
That borne was of Marye free

59 Dorothee Metlitzki intriguingly suggests that “The isolation of Britain from the scene of the actual encounter with the Saracens of Western Europe must have accentuated the design of a propagandistic stereotype in Middle English literature” (167).

60 This Moslem-Christian showdown finds a clear and intriguing parallel in 1 Kings 18: 20-40, one that nicely concretizes the polarities between the true faith and the idolatrous practices of the Other. In this particular story, the Old Testament prophet Elijah prepares a bull and orders the inimical priests of Baal to do likewise. Elijah says, “Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the Lord; the God who answers by fire is indeed God” (18:24). Just as Roland re-states the Christian creed before Arabas casts the crucifix in the fire, so too does Elijah call upon the God of the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Israel (18:36), at which point divine fire vindicates the true faith and Elijah orders the priests of Baal to be rounded up and executed. This biblical narrative nicely illustrates the idea of two irreconcilable faith systems being pitted against one another in absolute opposition, monotheism being one of the non-negotiable dogmas of Judeo-Christian belief. A similar polarity is to be found in the cross-burning moment of The Siege of Milan, where a similar divine intervention indicts Islamic polytheism. In such a moment, we can see a very monologic projection of Christian truth and Moslem error, one which does not admit any of the shades of gray encountered in The Siege of Jerusalem.
Sythen for us dyede one a tree;
In other trowe we none. (f. 69v; 409-14)

The Sultan responds by laughing and insisting that he has burnt the Christian gods in the fire, a reference to his previous act of destroying Christian relics and replacing them with the “mawmettes” of Islam. The Sultan’s obtuseness here seems insuperable, for in spite of Roland’s clear recitation of Christian monotheism, Arabas insists that each of the relics he has destroyed was one of Roland’s gods. To settle this dispute, Arabas procure a crucifix, throwing it on the fire in an attempt to prove the impotence of the Christian gods. But the cross will not burn, no matter how much brimstone, pitch and tar the Saracens add.

Suddenly, though, the cross emits a fire which blinds the Saracens and makes them deaf. This particular form of maiming is just, in the poem’s formulation, as the senses which caused the Moslem obduracy are the very ones attacked by the divine fire emanating from the crucifix. Their failure adequately to hear the message of Christian salvation, and their failure visually to recognize the truth of the revelation of the Christian God is visited back upon those very senses. The Saracens’ hearing being struck echoes with the formula repeated by Christ in Mark’s Gospel: “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” (4:9, 4:23), which of course the Saracens had failed to do. But this moment also echoes with the apocryphal legend of the birth of Islam, as narrated most famously by William Langland (XV.396-415). In this tale, Mohammed, initially a Christian, is said to have been thwarted in his desire to become pope and thus, out of jealousy, trained a dove

61 The depiction of Moslems as polytheistic was a common trope in later medieval romances, which Dorothee Metlitzki labels “the primitive literary conception of Saracen idolatry” (199). The attribution of polytheism is again picked up later, when Charlemagne taunts the Sultan, who is fortified inside Milan:

“That cité bot thou yelde to me
And fully trowe and Cristyn be
Appon one God and no moo,
In felde yif ever I see the mare
I sall by myghtfull God,” he sware,
“Hewe thi bakke in twoo.” (f. 77v; 1324-29)

For a discussion of the theological debate among clerics of the Western Church over the polytheism of Islam, see Metzlitzki 197-210.
to pluck corn from his ears. By this trick he is said to have been able to convert many to his new heretical sect. Of course, this narrative is primarily a tool to subvert the validity of Islam’s prophet. But the corn in Mohammed’s ear, while a part of his sleight of hand to prey on the credulous, simultaneously serves as a Christian commentary on his obstinate refusal to hear God’s truth. His mission, then, can be entirely written off as one founded on a deliberate choice to stop up the ears of the so-called prophet, and he thus becomes another of those who, to return to the words of Mark’s Gospel, has ears but does not hear.

Unfortunately, as no ending survives, we cannot know for certain how the final battle would have been resolved. However, it is almost certain that the text would have ended in some sort of victory for Charlemagne: of the surviving corpus of Middle English Charlemagne romances, only two texts end with any significant successes on the part of the Saracens. Smyser surmises that the text most likely “ended with the escape of Garcy from Milan to Attaly, from which capital he sends his challenge to Charlemagne at the opening of [Roland and] Otuel” (93-94). Alternatively, Phillipa Hardman speculates that, given Turpin’s penchant for making references to the Virgin and given the fact that Thornton has appended a Marian lyric, “O Florum Flos” (Item 5), to the end of The Siege of Milan, the ending may have involved a Marian intervention on behalf of the Christians (“The Sege” 82-83). Regardless of the resolution, though, the emphasis on the universal Church rectifying Charlemagne’s errors coupled with the re-writing of private devotion into militaristic spectacle in the person of Turpin, demonstrates just how well this text fits into the opening five quires of the London MS. Like The Siege of Jerusalem before it, The Siege of Milan is animated by the transitive type of Christianity that waxes as Judeo-Moslem bodies wane.

After the intervening Marian lyric, Thornton has copied Roland and Otuel (Item 6), another Saracen romance. Like The Siege of Milan, Roland and Otuel also survives

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62 Namely, Otuel and Roland and—one assumes, since the ending has not survived—the fragment of the Middle English Song of Roland. For a discussion of the Middle English Charlemagne romances, see Smyser 80-100.
only in the London MS and is also written in the same tail-rhyme stanza. Also like The Siege of Milan, this romance narrates a conflict between Charlemagne’s douzepers and an army led by the Saracen Garcy, and it offers a similarly stable binary. At the opening of this text, Otuel, a Saracen knight, comes to the court of Charlemagne to deliver a message of the Saracen victory over the Christians in Lombardy: “Þe powere there of sir Garcy / Appon a daye we garte þam dy / Fully Fifty thousande” (f. 83r; 136-38). As Roland and Otuel prepare to do battle, a dove miraculously descends on Otuel’s shoulders, causing an instantaneous conversion. The remainder of the text tells of the attack by Charlemagne and his men, along with their newest warrior, Otuel, upon the forces of the Sultan Garcy.

This text, by its exceedingly confident portrayal of Christianity and its concomitant vilification of the Saracens, works, even more than The Siege of Milan, to establish a clear and unequivocal binary between the two opposing sides. By the end of the text, the Saracens have been roundly defeated and the Christians return home in unquestioned triumph. In this way, Roland and Otuel sits as a capstone, the most whole-hearted and unambiguous celebration of the myth of a unified, transnational Christianity—something towards which the texts in the London MS’s opening five quires all gestured, but something which is effected most evidently in this, the final text of the sequence. In this way, Roland and Otuel synthesizes the concerns with a Christianity that is active and engaged with the perceived forces of evil, concerns raised throughout the opening of Thornton’s compilation.

From the very beginning of this text, we see that Charlemagne’s men will brook no dissention and that the impulse to violence is present from the start. Unlike the Siege of Jerusalem, which required a religious conversion to awaken the inchoate militarism of Titus and Vespasian, and unlike The Siege of Milan, whose Charlemagne vacillated in the face of Moslem incursions into Christendom and had to be spurred to action by Bishop Turpin, these Christians are united naturally in their desire for violence by the common

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63 Citations from Roland and Otuel are from Sidney Herrtage (ed.), “The Sege of Melayne,” “The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne,” and a Fragment of “The Song of Roland.”
bond of the faith. After Otuel’s conversion to Christianity, Charlemagne immediately turns the attention of his court towards the Saracen threat, asking them what course of action they would advise. Their response points towards the text’s attempts at depicting a single, indivisible body: “And þay þan answurde ẃi tyster n mode: / ‘to fende of, lorde, vs thynke it gude, / to batayle are we priste’ ” (f. 87r; 670-72). This moment admits no doubt, as the corporate body of warriors speaks with a single voice. Here, all debate and all royal dithering has been written out of the text. Most importantly, Ganelon is not to be found, at this the very moment when one would expect him to push for Roland leading the army and Charlemagne staying home (as in The Siege of Milan) or for Roland to lead the vanguard (as in the Song of Roland). The Judas-figure has been excised from the company of the douzepers, and the result is a front unambiguously united in violence against the Saracen threat.

In addition to the unified voice of the French court, this text is also remarkable for its marginalization of Christian suffering, contributing further to the monologic impression it makes. Such marginalization provides one of the clearest examples of how the religiosity evinced by the London MS centers around the suffering of Moslem bodies (in contrast to the identification with the suffering Christ fostered by the religious texts of the Lincoln MS). In fact, in Roland and Otuel very few Christians die during the narrative itself: the vast majority of Christian deaths are reported events, tragic nonetheless but comfortably sanitized by their descriptions as past events. By contrast, the text relishes depicting Saracen suffering. At the opening, the court is feasting and making merry when news comes of the death of 30,000 Christians at the hands of the Moslems. But no more is made of this event, and it merely serves as a pretext for war. War is hence justified, but the audience is never faced with encountering textual representations of Christian death. Instead, with the pretext for war in place, the audience’s gaze turns consistently to the suffering of Saracen bodies that results when Charlemagne seeks revenge. At one moment, “Rowlande thurgh [Askuardyn’s] scholdir gan schere, / his armours ne vaylede noghte a pere, / his hert blode he gan þer spill” (f. 88r; 814-16). In another case, Sir Ynglere:
In a Sarazene breke a spere,  
Within a littill stounde:  
And in his hande lefte a littill truncheoun  
Per-with full faste he dange þam doun,  
Full Many Ane hethyn hounde.  
he crakkede full many a carefull croun.  
(f. 90r; 1061-66)

Though such moments are certainly not rare in the Middle English romance tradition (which has a proclivity for stylized violence), the one-sidedness of the killing in this text bespeaks its triumphalism and ideological reductiveness.

This absence of Christian suffering continues as night falls after the first great battle, when each side retires to its respective camp. At this moment, we learn that a good number of Christians have been wounded and killed:

Of dede folked þay hepes fett,  
To berye þam withowtten lett,  
those þat cristen were.  
leches come that couthe on booke,  
Woundede men for to loke,  
to salue þam of þaire sare.  
(f. 91r; 1180-85)

Such a moment comes as a surprise at this point in the narrative, for there had been no previous mention of Saracen successes on the battlefield. This moment still fits within the triumphalist framework, for the Christians here are reduced to a nameless mass of bodies—laid on “hepes”—whose suffering has, as it were, taken place ‘off screen.’ In fact the only named Christian to die ‘on screen’ is Sir Brian, who is killed when five Saracens gang up on him (ff. 92v-93r; 1435-40). But this particular death does little to undermine Christian superiority, for Brian is not a major figure of this narrative, and actually only appears at the moment of his death. He is certainly not one of the traditional twelve douzepers, nor does a Brian appear as a major figure in Middle English chivalric literature. Thus, the text allows one Christian to be slaughtered in view of the audience, but still ensures that that Christian is, for all intents and purposes, anonymous, thereby keeping intact the myth of Christian heroism.
Two of the *douzepers*, though, are captured by the Saracens, and the moments of both of their captures point yet again to the reductive simplicity of the way *Roland and Otuel* figures the Christian-Saracen conflict. The first to be captured is Ogier the Dane, who is held captive for most of the great battle. However, once the battle begins to rage, he escapes from prison almost effortlessly, suggesting that his captors never held any power over him in the first place:

Oggere Dannays laye in presoun  
And of þat noyse he herde the soun,  
& heghte men kepede hym one.  
Bot preualy he made hym boun,  
*With* a nastell schide he slewe þam doun,  
hys wardens thus hath he slayne.  (f. 93v; 1543-48)

As Sidney Herrtage explains, “a nastell schide” is “a beam or baulk of timber” (159); the impression given by this passage is that Ogier has here merely picked up a piece of wood that was lying around his prison and used it to escape. The timing of his escape is, of course, contrived to coincide with the climax of the battle. But there is no explanation as to why, when it was seemingly so effortless to take on “heghte men” with a piece of wood, Ogier did not free himself sooner. Even within a genre placing little emphasis on realism, this moment of Ogier’s escape from prison is overly contrived, pointing yet again to the reductive nature of this text. The other French knight to be captured is Naymes, one of the *douzepers*. In this case, Naymes is captured and, two lines later, Roland “reschewsede hym with honour” (f. 93v; 1536). The immediacy of Naymes’s rescue is suggestive of the brash confidence this text consistently evinces: the Saracens, though many in number, are never a serious threat to Christian dominance.

But above all else, Otuel’s conversion and incorporation into the Christian community form the centerpiece of this text’s fantasy of Christian unity and Saracen annihilation. The duel between Roland and Otuel provided the one moment wherein the absolute dominance of the Christian faith was in dispute, for both Roland and his Saracen enemy were seen to be equally matched: “So thikke þaire dynttis to-gedir pelyde, / thaire armours hewenn laye in þe felde” (f. 86r; 502-03). Then, in a fantastic recourse to a *deus*
ex machina, the Holy Spirit itself intervenes in the narrative, ensuring that the one potential weapon in the Moslem arsenal is re-directed towards the ends of Christian militarism: “a dofe come fro the holy gaste, / & one þe Sarazene lightes,” causing an immediate, almost reflexive, conversion (f. 86v; 578-79). At the end of the narrative, it is Otuel who captures the Sultan Garcey, and he is then made a peer, the elevation into the highest order of French chivalry, and marries Belisaunt, Charlemagne’s daughter. By capturing his former leader, and reproducing with the daughter of his new leader, Otuel is shown to be fully incorporated into his new Christian community. This text, then, functions as a triumphant capstone for the opening five quires of the London MS, announcing that fully, and without doubt, Christians are right and Moslems are wrong. The haunting parallels between the Jewish enemy and the Roman Christians, seen in the Siege of Jerusalem, and the Bishop-King conflict seen in The Siege of Milan, are gone, replaced with this baldly propagandistic romance. This is an effective, triumphant capstone for the opening section of the London MS.

Finally, it is important to consider the two lyrics which Thornton has interspersed among these romances, texts which adorn these five quires with the material of traditional devotion. Phillipa Hardman suggests, based largely on the presence of these lyrics, that Thornton read The Siege of Milan as an essentially devotional poem:

The lyrics are carefully placed to encourage the reader’s personal, devotional response to the Passion-centred narratives. In ordering the texts in this way, Thornton was not violently forcing The Sege of Melayne into an unnatural context but was responding to signals in the text that make this an entirely natural way to understand the poem. (“The Sege” 74)64

Hardman’s suggestion that the romances in the London MS have a religious grounding is without doubt correct. However, applying the label of “devotional” to this collection is too reductive, for it misses the distinguishing criteria Thornton has applied between the Lincoln and London MSS: as I discussed above, those texts most closely fitting the idea of devotional—texts upon which one would meditate—are to be found among the

64 See also her further comments in “Reading” 269.
religious texts of the Lincoln MS. While the two lyrics Thornton has included in the opening of the London MS are unequivocally standard religious texts, their appearance does not require that we consider the entirety of the MS to be religious in the same way. As I have here argued, the romances in the first five quires of this MS, while certainly consonant with late medieval orthodox sentiment, are not devout in the same way as the texts of the Lincoln MS. The texts in the London MS negotiate the transitive face of Christianity, particularly figuring the Church as growing in power in relation to the suffering and loss of Jews and Moslems. Though one certainly could pray for the suffering and loss of rival faiths (and no doubt countless did), the ethical relationship between text and reader is quite distinct from the pathetic response encouraged by the meditative texts of the Lincoln MS.

Thornton placed the first of the lyrics, “O Florum Flos” (Item 5), between The Siege of Milan and Roland and Otuel. This lyric begins in praise of Mary’s body, surveying it from top to bottom and praising its perfect proportion, in accord with courtly traditions. Everything from her eyes, eyebrows, fingers and breasts, to even her womb, a “cloystre of virginite” (f. 81r), are placed under the poet’s gaze. The lyric also traces Mary’s role in salvation history, offering praise for the part she played in the Incarnation, the Passion and finally her Assumption, where God is said to have made her beautiful for eternity:

He hath renewede þy bewte ones for ay
And stablide it thurghe heghe assencyone;
With auryall of souereynge sanyte
He said, “Welcome uni-to my mansyone,
O ffloorum flos, O fflos pulcherime.” (f. 81v)

This lyric serves as a nice transition between The Siege and Roland and Otuel, offering the reader a brief reprieve and a devotional pause from the fast-paced narratives of military conquest. Like any well-constructed narrative, the sequence at the opening of the London MS intersperses such moments of reflection between episodes of action. Such a text would remind its reader that the spectacles of religious revenge being played out in the romances enjoyed divine sanction.
The second lyric Thornton entitles “quedam Tractatus Passionis Domini nostri Ihesu Christi in Anglicis” (Item 7, 10). Interestingly, he began copying this lyric on f. 94r, immediately after the explicit of Roland and Otuel, but then broke off this copy after nine lines and re-commenced copying on the following folio, half-way down the page. Phillipa Hardman speculates that “the blank half-page [after which he re-commenced copying this lyric] was no doubt intended for an illustration of this scene” (“Reading the Spaces” 266), a suggestion that seems reasonable. Hardman further argues that “This large devotional picture at the end of the Passion-centred sequence of texts would emphasize the meditative purpose of Thornton’s compilation very clearly” (267). This lyric accords closely with the general tenor of the affective texts of the Lincoln MS, for it reflects what J.A. Burrow labels “the humanizing pathos which is characteristic of late medieval religious feeling” (“An Approach” 255). In this text, Christ speaks to the reader directly from the cross, encouraging her to incorporate a memory of the Passion into her daily life:

The to restore I hange appone this crosse,
Corouned with the thorne, wounded with the launce,
Handes and feete to encrese my greuance
With scharpe nayles my blode made ryne doune.
When euery thou felis any perturbance
Looke one my woundes, thynke one my passyoun,
Thynke and remembre apon my blody fface,
The reede, the sponge aysole, mengyde with galle,
Ffull fele rebukes, O man, for this trispace. (f. 94v)

Such an integration of these devotional texts among the romances at the end of the first five quires reminds us that Thornton is not operating under modern, scientific ideas of genre. (And we saw as much in Thornton’s practice of mixing The Life of St Christopher and Thomas of Erceldoun in amongst the romances in the Lincoln MS.) Nevertheless, the general outlines of a generic consciousness can be discerned in Thornton’s efforts to compile these romances about Christian identity apart from the Lincoln MS. These two lyrics, interspersed amongst the romances of the London MS, remind us that the medieval Christian who relished the fantasy of the destruction of Jews
and Moslems as a form of entertainment could also meditate on the Passion. The two, however, are distinct acts.

3.5: “Embrac[ing] the Taboo”: The Extreme Actions of *Richard Coer de Lyon*

This text (Item 28) was one of the most popular Middle English romances, surviving in seven MSS. Also one of the longest Middle English romances (coming in at over 7,000 lines), it begins as Henry II’s barons convince the king of the need to marry. His men procure for him Cassodorien, the princess of Antioch. After his father’s death, Richard accedes to the throne, inaugurating his new reign with a tournament, after which he turns his sights to the Holy Land. Incognito, he travels to Jerusalem and on his return home is imprisoned by the German king. Richard earns his sobriquet when he defeats a lion which the German king had sent to kill him and then eats its heart in front of the king. Most of the remaining narrative is taken up with detailing a series of military successes for the Christian army, led by Richard, against the cities of the Moslem Saladin. Near the conclusion of the text, Richard receives word that his brother, Prince John, is developing plans to usurp the throne, and so before leaving the East, Richard negotiates a three-year peace with the Saladin, allowing Christian pilgrims unfettered access to the holy sites. Richard is then assassinated on his return to England.

Thornton did not place *Richard* in the sequence of romances opening this MS, but rather consigned it to the end of his collection. This codicological ‘homelessness’ for *Richard* finds an intriguing parallel in the excesses of the text’s eponymous hero: the actions of the king are often so extreme that the text seems out of place, even in a MS that

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65 For a description of the extant MSS, see Brunner, “Einleitung” 1-24. It should be noted that there are two main MS families. Family A, of which the copy in the London MS is a member, is the longer version and adds the story of Richard’s mother. For a further discussion of these two textual traditions, see Finlayson, “*Richard*” 159-60.
includes several brash acts of devotion to the Christian cause. Richard is a leader with, like Bishop Turpin, an unflagging devotion to the militaristic wing of Christendom. Both Richard and Turpin share a zeal that leads them to violate social conventions; however, only with Richard does such passion lead to the transgression of cultural taboos.

The most audacious of Richard’s actions are directed towards celebrating the superiority of Christianity over Islam. Among all his shocking acts, though, his two acts of anthropophagism stand out. In their open flouting of cultural taboos, these acts represent an astonishing logic: the importance of fighting for the Church and defeating the infidel is so absolute as to nullify behavioral regulations. By showing Richard eating Saracens, the text insinuates that the claims of the Christian dispensation are such that morality can be dispensed with. Such an absurdity only reinforces the pressing importance of winning this conflict. This is certainly an extreme form of dogmatism, one that resounds as a perverse echo of St Augustine’s famous imperative, “Love and do as you will.” In this formulation, so long as one loves, and hence one’s actions are motivated by the right force, then the actions flowing from that motivation cannot be wrong. Replace the notion of “love” with fighting for God’s Church against the infidel, and Richard can do as he will.

Richard’s anthropophagism has garnered the most attention from critics. Geraldine Heng places great emphasis on these particular acts when she comments that “a spectacular story of cannibalism performed by the King of England” lies “at the heart of” this text (63). The first time Richard eats human flesh happens early in the siege of Acre, when he has fallen ill and after his miraculous recovery develops an insatiable craving for pork. His cooks, upon not being able to find any pigs, decide to kill and

66 Because of the colonial resonances of the term “cannibalism,” I here follow Nicola McDonald in preferring the term “anthropophagism.” As she explains, “The word ‘cannibal’ derives from Caniba, a variant of Carib, the term used by both the islanders and Spanish colonists to designate the natives of the Caribbean islands. Columbus promoted the belief that the Canibales were savage man-eaters; their reputed dietary transgressions were quickly exploited by the colonists as a justification for the decimation of native culture and its practitioners” (144 n.3).

67 See Heng 63-113 (but especially 63-68, 73-78); McDonald; Ambrisco 500-11; Akbari, “The Hunger” 206-14; and Cordery.
prepare a Saracen and serve him to Richard, passing it off as pork. When Richard discovers the ruse and the head of the Saracen he has just eaten is brought before him, he cheekily responds, “What, is Sarezynys flesch þus good? / And neuer erst j nouȝt wyste?” (3216-17). By adding laughter to his reply, Richard passes off what could have been a radically transgressive moment as a racist joke, bestializing Moslems by turning them into something edible.

On one level, Richard’s first anthropophagic act is a thinly-veiled mockery of the Judeo-Moslem prohibition against eating pork. But more than anything else, this action throws into relief the outlandish nature of his character: he does not merely laugh at the discovery that he is now an eater of human flesh; on the contrary, by enshrining such an act as part of his plan for Christian military triumph, he brazenly capitalizes on the potential of this moment to violate the taboo:

Schôle we neuere dye for defawte,
Slee Sarezynys, þe flesch mowe take,
Seþen, and roste hem, and doo hem bake,
Gnawe here fþlesch to þe bones.
Now j haue it þrouyd ones,
Ffor hungyr ar j be woo,
J and my ffolk schole eete moo. (3219-25)

Here, even an act so seemingly transgressive is made into a weapon for the Church’s battle against the infidel. Through such excess we see how Richard, although sharing the zeal animating the Christian heroes of the opening five quires, undertakes more extreme and questionable measures to reach the goal of Christian victory. The reference to gnawing on flesh and the preparatory steps required to make it palatable here foreground Richard’s unadulterated celebration of the goriest details of ingesting a human body, as what should be shunned is celebrated. By such logic, each bite he takes further

68 The London MS’s copy of Richard is lacking two folios after f. 143. This equates to ll. 3109-3612 of Brunner’s edition, which uses the version surviving in Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 175/96 as its copy text. Though the London MS and Brunner’s edition often differ syntactically and morphologically, the plot of both matches quite closely and, according to Brunner’s stemma, both MSS are genetically quite closely related (14). Caius MS 175/96 and the London MS are the only two surviving copies of the A-text of Richard, and thus for the missing sections of the London MS, I provide quotations from Brunner’s edition.
demonstrates the essential superiority of Christianity, flaunting the divine sanction of Richard’s cause. Only one acting dogmatically on the behalf of right could countenance the open violation of such taboos.

Richard, though, does not rest content with this one instance of eating Saracens, but instead seizes the opportunity to exploit this practice and make it a centerpiece of his foreign policy. He calls the Sultan’s messengers to a feast, at which he serves the heads of his Saracen prisoners, complete with the names of each attached to the respective forehead. Understandably the Saracens are too petrified to eat, but Richard very meticulously has his carver slice one of the heads and ingests it in full public view. He follows this up with a self-deprecating joke, explaining that it is his custom to eat Saracens as the first dish (3439-520). This turn to humor demonstrates clearly Richard’s transgressive behavior: willfully ignoring the taboo, he pretends that he has merely violated principles of etiquette. He caps off his final speech to the Saracen messengers by weaving the eating of human flesh into his military strategy: “Into Yngelond wol we nouȝt gon, / Tyl þay be eeten euerylkon” (3561-62).

What is most shocking is that this second instance of anthropophagism, unlike the first, was no accident but was, rather, scrupulously planned by the king. Nicola McDonald has suggested that, though disturbing, there is a narrative logic to eating Saracens in Richard, that the reduction of Moslems to an edible dish serves the larger colonialist ends of the text:

Although Richard’s consumption of the Saracen is shocking (for fellow crusaders and the romance audience), it neither elicits narrative censure nor, I would argue, the opprobrium of its original audience. The fact that both Saracen and French (the anti-types against whom the English Christian is measured) do censure Richard (explicitly and implicitly, respectively) only serves to confirm the narrative’s endorsement of his diet. The romance narrative embraces the taboo inherent in anthropophagy while, at the same time, insisting that eating people makes culinary and cultural sense. (133-34)

McDonald is right to note that these actions are not censured by the narrative. The logic adopted here suggests that the defense of Christianity against the Judeo-Moslem threat
requires nothing less than the complete and total devotion of its adherents, and the more extreme the acts of the faith’s defenders, the deeper their devotion appears. Bishop Turpin was willing to excommunicate and attack Charlemagne and, as a soldier in the field, replicated the suffering of Christ, all in the name of defending Christendom. Richard takes such an idea to its absurd end: here, no action is too far beyond the pale to demonstrate the depth of one’s devotion. In this case, the more outlandish the action, the better testimony it makes to the rightousness of the cause.

Richard’s extreme behavior manifests itself in other ways, as well, and though none is quite so shocking as his anthropophagism, taken together they complement the impression of the flesh-eating king’s extreme dedication. For example, there is a populist flavor to some of his actions, seen most fully near the end of the text. In one particular episode, the Christians are re-building the walls of Chaloyne, one of the cities they have conquered from the Saracens. Richard insists that everyone—including the nobility—grab tools and begin working. The Duke of Austria, however, refuses, citing class privilege: “My ffradir was neuer masone ne carpentere / And giff ȝour walles alle to-schake / I ne schall neuer helpe þam to make.” Richard offers a contrasting rejection of class privilege by castigating the Duke: “And thou ligges ay still als a foule glotoun / And rystes the in thi pavelyoun / And drynkis wyne gud and strange” (f. 158r), after which the Duke leaves indignantly, followed by the parties of France, Burgundy and Bologna. This moment is, to say the least, quite strange, for here we see the king insisting on performing manual labor. This episode depends upon the audience’s shared assumption that it is not befitting a king to perform labor of this kind (and in fact the audience would likely have identified with the Duke of Austria’s response). A belief in the moral superiority of the aristocracy must be part of the audience’s social assumptions in order for them to recognize Richard’s behavior as odd. Here, in particular, his dedication to the cause—which is deep enough to lead him indecorously to take up manual labor—has its desired effect: only those whose commitment to the Christian cause is deep enough that they will violate yet another social norm (having already witnessed their leader devour human flesh) are left to reap the benefits of possessing Saracen lands. The superficial devotion
of the Austrian, French, Burgundian, and Bolognese parties is exposed, and the wheat is thereby separated from the chaff.

A further aspect of Richard’s extreme characterization of the king is to be found in his direct communication with angels, which elevates Richard into an agent of divine justice, indicating the confidence with which this text espouses its vision of a unified Christendom. This is a relatively rare feature in the Middle English romance tradition. Only Richard’s narrative is presumptuous enough—three times—to ascribe an unequivocal divine message to its military leader. In the first instance of angelic communication, after the king has conquered Acre and has rounded up all the survivors of the town, an angel “Cried ‘Sayntours, tues, tues, / Spars þam noghte, hedis alle thies’ ” (f. 144v), which admonition Richard follows “hastylike” (f. 144v). Later, an angel warns the king that the horse given him by the Sultan is possessed by a demon, saying “Wakyn, Richerd, þou gud knyghte, / Mi Lorde dose the to undirstande / þat þe sall come ane horse to hande” (f. 155r). Such approbation of an unabashed flesh-eater—for Richard is here called a “gud knyghte” by one carrying a message directly from “mi Lorde”—is jarring to modern sensibilities, and this certainly reads to us like a thinly-veiled theological justification for genocide.

The codicological state of the MS itself provides some interesting hints that Richard would not have been quite at home among the opening sequence. It seems that Thornton copied this text relatively early in the compilation process and that, failing to find a proper place for it in either of his MSS, simply placed it near the end of the London MS. My hypothesis is that Thornton copied this text and the next (creating a booklet of

69 Within the London MS’s romances, there are several incidents that draw upon communication with God. For example, in The Siege of Milan (Item 4) Charlemagne dreams that the Duke of Milan is in trouble, and he awakes to find a sword by his bed, thus validating his dream. Similarly, in The Siege of Jerusalem (Item 3) Titus is healed by the vernicle, as discussed above. In both cases, a divine agent plays a key role in compelling the Christian hero on to his defense of Christendom, but Richard is different in kind from both of these narratives. In neither The Siege of Milan nor The Siege of Jerusalem do messengers from the divine overtly direct the actions of the hero. In those narratives, revelation is much more heavily mediated.


71 In one further case, an angel awakens Richard and instructs him to fight the Sultan at Jaffa and then to negotiate a peace (f. 162r).
two quires containing both Richard and Ypokrephum (Item 29)) before he could recognize how each MS was going to divide up along generic lines, and he thus left these two quires as an unbound booklet. This adaptability allowed him to wait and see where it would fit best into his developing compilations. As Ralph Hanna notes, Thornton “was remarkably flexible in his methods” of constructing his MSS: “Each [booklet] was capable of extension and of melding with other units, so long as new texts could be acquired. The only rule, not a particularly rigorous one, which Thornton seems to have followed was that each fascicle contained works which were generically homogeneous” (“The Growth” 60). In this case, when Richard finally turned out not to fit either MS very well, Thornton simply tucked it into the back of the London MS. Indeed, Thornton seems to have had no available series of related texts within which to place Richard, unlike the kingly romances and the familial romances in the Lincoln MS, and unlike the romances of Christian identity in the opening five quires of the London MS.

Furthermore, the relationship between Ypokrephum (Item 29) and the Cursor (Item 1) points to the likelihood that these two quires were copied at an early stage. The narrative in Ypokrephum is largely redundant within the London MS as it now stands, for its story is quite similar to the opening of the Cursor Mundi sections at the head of the MS. As I discussed above, Thornton almost certainly copied the Cursor quite late in the process of compiling his MSS, and this text functions as a fitting introduction to the Northern Passion (Item 2), which he copied quite early. Thus, it seems most likely that Thornton was attracted to a narrative of Christ’s life—as it is a central feature of salvation history, the theme taken up by much of the London MS—and initially copied Ypokrephum; however, he later came upon the idea of copying the Cursor, which he could place before the already-existing Northern Passion, allowing him to create a chronologically coherent series of texts, but simultaneously rendering Ypokrephum
redundant. As a result, Thornton has stuck this now-redundant booklet near the end of the MS, unattached in any organic way to the opening five quires.\footnote{Evidence derived from examining the paper stocks is unfortunately of little help. These two quires exclusively use stocks I and K, of which I is used nowhere else in either of Thornton’s MSS and K is elsewhere used only in quire 9 of the London MS. For more on this, see Appendix F.}

Such a hypothesis is also supported by the fact that Richard begins at the opening of a new quire. This position afforded Thornton the flexibility to place quires seven and eight wherever he desired. The inordinate amount of wear that f. 125r (the opening of Richard) exhibits also supports such a hypothesis, for this state demonstrates that this quire likely lay separated from the rest of the MS for some time. In addition, Thornton’s use of –þ suggests that this may have been copied at a relatively early stage, for as Karl Brunner notes with regard to Thornton’s copy of Richard, “Die Ziechen þ und y scheidte der Schreiber nicht und verwendet sie unterschiedlos für beide Laute” (“Einleitung” 6).\footnote{For a particularly clear example of this, see f. 143v, where Thornton’s –þ and his –y are virtually indistinguishable.} Such was, as discussed above, the way in which Thornton formed this letter in his earlier copying efforts. Though none of these details in and of itself proves an early copying date for Richard, the totality of the evidence in convincing. Finally, Ralph Hanna’s speculative chronology of Thornton’s compilation process likewise supports the assertion that the quires in question here were copied relatively early in the process (“The Growth” 59). It would seem, then, that Thornton left these two quires out and then finally inserted them into the London MS at a relatively late date.

The notion, garnered from this mass of codicological detail, that Robert Thornton could not make this romance fit comfortably into its present MS environment, is in fact complemented by an examination of the literary content of the text itself. Within Richard there are a number of allusions and similarities to the heroes of romances from both of Thornton’s MSS, which could explain much of his indecision regarding which compilation would have formed a better home for Richard. The most obvious moment comes from two separate lists the narrator provides of romance heroes whom Richard surpasses. Though such lists were common enough in romance as a way to validate the
chivalric hero (a generic convention memorably parodied in Sir Thopas), these lists mention characters from both Thornton MSS: Octavian, Alexander, Arthur, and Gawain (from the Lincoln MS) and Charlemagne, Roland, Oliver, Turpin, and Ogier (from the London MS) (ff. 125r, 160v). Such lists, by drawing on central figures from both MSS and offering Richard as superior, may point to some indecision on the part of Thornton; after all, Richard is a hero who surpasses those from both Thornton MSS.

But there are also specific reasons that Richard would have fit well in both MSS. Richard would have complemented the Alliterative Morte, for both tell the story of an English king who achieves tremendous success in foreign conquests and who, at the very zenith of his power, is called home by the treason of a close relative. Richard also might have fit the Lincoln MS as a companion for the Prose Alexander, for both texts narrate a hero from the West who suffers from dubiously “Oriental” origins and proceeds to conquer a series of lands in the East. However, there are also clear affinities with the romances in the London MS, foremost of which is the fact that Richard obsessively delineates the differences between Christians and Moslems and repeatedly insists on Christian superiority. These are among the issues at the heart of the first five quires of the London MS, and so it makes sense that this text would be bound up in their vicinity.74

Thornton’s final decision was to connect Richard—albeit obliquely, by placing it near the end of the MS—to the romances narrating the defense of Christendom. But even in a MS so stridently celebrating the transitive face of Christianity and the suffering of Jews and Moslems, the extreme behavior of this English king did not quite fit. Perhaps Richard I was even too zealous for Robert Thornton.

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74 Further intertextual moments can be found in the following: in Richard, the Duke of Milan governed the Holy Land until he fell victim to treason and was forced to flee, opening the door for the Sultan to begin conquering Christian territory. This moment echoes the threat to Milan’s Duke from Arabas at the opening of The Siege of Milan. Later, Richard and his men conquer “pe cyte of Cayphas” and Jerusalem, echoing the events from The Siege of Jerusalem. Finally, Saladin is several times compared to both Charlemagne and Alexander, major figures in both Thornton MSS.
CHAPTER 4: PRINCETON, UNIVERSITY LIBRARY TAYLOR MS 9

The manuscript to which we now turn, Princeton, University Library Taylor MS 9 (also known as the Ireland MS, which it will hereafter be called), brings to the fore a very different set of issues from any of the previously discussed collections. Although it was compiled under similar circumstances to both Thornton MSS—that is, it was put together in a middling gentry household, in a provincial setting, in the middle of the fifteenth century—its texts carry quite a different ideological message, a message that is more coherent than the texts in either of Thornton’s collections. Whereas Thornton’s texts ranged from militantly Christian crusade romances to familial romances to pious devotional texts, the three romances in the Ireland MS cohere more clearly around the single issue of largesse. Yet such a seemingly straightforward picture is complicated by the MS’s inclusion of eighty pages of records from the Magna curia de Hale, the sessions of court baron held to enforce the Ireland family’s feudal rights as lords of the manor of Hale. The inclusion of these records, as I will demonstrate, complicates the vision espoused by the romances. When one reads the MS as a whole—which is an interpretive act lying at the heart of this entire project—with the romances alongside the court documents, one is afforded a rare glimpse into one of the central contradictions of late medieval aristocratic cultural practice: how to maintain the fiction that theirs is a world independent of commodity exchange at the very moment when farming the demesne was becoming less and less profitable, and landlords increasingly sought cash rents for land. In other words, how could one continue to espouse a belief that the aristocracy is different in kind from the rest of society because it does not need to reckon costs at the very moment when profits from land reached historic lows? The Ireland MS brings this ideological conflict to the fore.
D. Vance Smith has argued that romance incarnates an aesthetic realm in which the aristocratic class can negotiate anxieties over the notion of possession. Specifically, he remarks that “romance is the space in which the oikos is transgressed, crossed over, in search of the limitless regions of the otherworld of possession, where things can be totally, unproblematically, and cannily possessed” (xvii). This focus on possession points us towards one of the central issues to which all three romances in the Ireland MS encourage its audience to attend—the idea that aristocratic economics (characterized in the myth of unending reserves and the ability to give limitlessly) is a complete system unto itself, one that is able to sustain itself without the intrusion of commodity exchange and the forces of the market, and one which is propped up by divine sanction.1 Within the Ireland MS, the audience is afforded another economic perspective in the form of the manorial court documents from Hale, a series of texts that, while definitely not “literary,” and while perhaps more directly related to the economic realities of the fifteenth century than their romance counterparts, nevertheless offer a reflection back upon any economic message the literary texts in this MS would wish to proffer.

4.1: The Ireland Family

In the fifteenth century, when this MS was produced, the Ireland family were lords of the manor of Hale, which lay in southwest Lancashire on the Mersey.2

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1 Yet Smith’s readings return again and again to the problems inherent to such fantasies, for an irresolvable contradiction lies at the heart of such a cultural project: on the one hand the enjoyment of surplus was problematic in most medieval formulations, while on the other hand the exploitation of surplus wealth on the household level was of fundamental importance to the aristocracy’s economic existence. While my attention will not be directed towards the notion of surplus, in what follows I do suggest that these three romances conjure an analogous tension: all three work to negotiate an economy founded on aristocratic gift giving, while simultaneously leaving traces of doubt as to the sustainability of such a model.

2 This discussion will focus almost exclusively on the family’s history from the late fourteenth through the fifteenth century. For a discussion of the earlier and subsequent history of the family, see Beamont,
Specifically, their home manor lay in Childwall Parish in the Hundred of West Derby. At this time the family’s residence was at the Hutt, which lay in Halewood, a village contiguous to Hale and one whose history, as the *VCH Lancaster* notes, is difficult to distinguish from that of Hale (3: 150). In *The Domesday Book* the two manors were part of a single administrative unit, but in the thirteenth century they were split and given as rewards to loyal followers by King John and Henry III. The family controlled Hale, their home manor and the site of the court baron whose records survive in this MS, from the fourteenth century on. But the Hollands maintained control of most of the lands in the village of Halewood, and they maintained the advowson of All Saints, the church of Childwall Parish. This church lay in the northern part of the parish, far removed from the Irelands’ residence at the Hutt, and so the family undertook the construction of St Mary’s church in Hale ca. 1260. This church was clearly connected to the family and its attempts at developing social prestige, as both John Ireland (d. 1411) and his grandson, John (d. 1462) were buried there (Ireland-Blackburne 46). In addition to Hale, the inscription on the tomb of John Ireland (d. 1462) reads, “Hic iacet Johannes Yerlond armiger, qui fuit dominus de Hale et dimidio ville de Bebington inferioris” (qtd in Ireland-Blackburne 46), indicating that the family possessed some lands in Bebington, located in Cheshire. The lands in Bebington came into the family possession as a result of John’s (d. 1411) marriage to Agatha (*VCH Lancaster* 3: 145 n.2).

The succeeding patresfamilias of the Ireland family during the period in question are as follows:

- John I (d. 1411)
- William I (d. 1436)
- John II (d. 1462)

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Ireland-Blackburne, Irvine, and Hatton. According to the *VCH Lancaster*, the Irelands also possessed some land in the manors of Much Woolton and Garston (3: 115, 125). This confirms the picture of the Irelands as middling gentry, ones who didn’t own land over wide geographical areas, for these two manors are both contiguous to Hale, the former lying due north and the latter lying to the north-west.  

3 For a description of Hale and Halewood, see *VCH Lancaster* 3: 140-50 and Baines 5: 37-52.

4 Note, though, that Ireland-Blackburn gives 1401 as the date of John Ireland’s death and that William Beamont follows her in this dating. However, John’s will, discussed below, shows that he died in 1411.  

5 Since Ireland-Blackburne provides a diplomatic transcription of the epitaph, I have silently expanded the abbreviations. This tomb was destroyed when St Mary’s Church burnt in 1977.
William II (d. 1503)

The will of John I survives in the Lancashire County Record Office, which I here transcribe:

In dei nomine, amen. Ego Johannes de Irland, miles, condo testamentum meum in hunc modum: in primis lego animam meam deo, beate marie virginis & omnibus sanctis & corpus meum ad sepeliendum in capella de Hale. Et volo quod omnibus debitis meis persolutor una cum expensis factis circa sepulturam corporis mei predicti residuum omnium bonorum & catallorum meorum distribuatur inter Margeriam, uxorem meam, et Johanna & Katerinam, filias meas, in auxilium maritagiorum suorum. Et ad istud testamentum meum bene & fideliter exequendum, ordino & constituo predictam Margeriam uxorem meam & dominum Thomam de Burton, capellanum, meos executores, et David de Hulme, Thomam de Sotheworth, clericum, & Willelmum Kendale, capellanum, supervisores testamenti mei predicti. In cuius rei testimonium presentibus sigillum meum apposui. Datur quartodecimo die maij anno regni Regis Henrici quarti post conquestum Anglie duodecimo.6

This is a rather standard will for a member of the gentry, and, like most late medieval wills of those below the nobility, it tells us little about the testator’s wealth, social status or possessions. Most significant here, though, is John I’s self-appellation of miles, a title which his son and grandson did not adopt. They styled themselves esquires, as seen in the inscription on John II’s tomb: “Hic iacet Johannes Yerlon, armiger.” The titles of esquire and gentlemen were, as I discussed in Chapter 2, recent developments in fifteenth-century England, and were assumed titles (that is, titles that did not have to be bestowed). But the group of milites, although by the fifteenth century no longer primarily mounted warriors, continued as a select class at the top of local society, the group of men who had been dubbed and who hence were set apart as the prominent local landowners (Carpenter, Locality 35-95).

The Ireland family papers contain an indenture “made betwene William of Irland, Sqwyer, on þe tone side, and Geffron of Standisshe, Sqwyer, on þe tother syde” (Box 3).

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6 Lancashire Record Office, DDIB Box 6. The records of the Ireland family survive in sixteen uncatalogued boxes at the Record Office, and hereafter reference will be to box number. This will is also printed in A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills 158.
Here, we find further evidence that John I’s son did not have the title of miles. The next deed in the same box reads, “Hec carta indentata testata quod ego, Willelmus Irland de Hale, filius Johannis Irland, militis…” Here, William I demonstrates awareness of the discrepancy between his father’s title and his own, careful to ascribe the title miles to his father while he makes no mention of a title for himself. Finally, the same box contains a deed from 1461 in which Thomas and William Stanley, milites, stand as witnesses to a land transaction involving John II, who, like his father, is styled an armiger. Next to these two members of the powerful Stanley clan, John II retains his status as esquire.

But John I’s wealth was not particularly great, and there is no reason to think he should, based on land holdings alone, have been set apart from the vast body of the gentry in southwest Lancashire, the majority of whom were not knighted. Michael Bennett estimates, by extrapolating the data from the 1379 poll tax, that there were about 280 gentry families in Lancashire, of whom around forty had sufficient income to be eligible for knighthood. However, most with this level of income did not receive the title: of the six Lancashire individuals surviving in the 1379 returns with incomes from land of over £40, only two are listed as knights (Community 81-83). And the Ireland family, being lords of the manor of Hale “et dimidio ville de Bebington inferioris” (i.e. only one-and-a-half manors) are certainly not in the elite group of Lancashire landowners. Their wealth paled in comparison to the rapidly growing fortunes of the

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7 Unfortunately, there is no way accurately to determine the wealth of the Irelands. The only clue comes from an entry in Part II of this MS that reads: “Item ex alio latere loquitur de vij li. in compotis Stephani le Clerke ibi est recordacio de vij li. Idem recepit de vij li. de redditu de hale de termino Annunciacionis dominicalis anno viij & de vij li. xij s iij d de redditu terrarum dominicalium ibidem ad festum sancti Michaelis Anno ix et de vij li. de redditu ibidem de termino sancti Martini eode anno. Et magna recordacio est ibidem de compoto redditus de hale, Rybeatle & Dicton. Ideo respicere” (27). The term “de compoto redditum” suggests that this was copied from a manorial account. If this is the case, it would indicate that the yearly rents taken in by the Irelands were a mere £7, which would put them well below the £40 threshold used to determine eligibility for knighthood. However, it is certain that this account is not exhaustive, for it does not include the lands in Bebington that we know the Irelands to have owned in the fifteenth century. In addition, it is not clear from this entry what calendar year is being referred to.

8 Comparison between the Ireland properties and those of the wealthier gentry in Lancashire (as listed in Bennett, Community 84) gives a qualitative sense of the inferior position of the Irelands within the larger Lancashire gentry community.
Stanleys and Molyneuxs, both of whose strongholds centered around southwest Lancashire.

It seems that John Ireland’s title was most likely related to his military service. In the Lancashire Record Office there survives a charter describing the salvific powers of the relics contained in the church of St Salvator in Spain (DDIB Box 4). Along with this document is a note, dated 1958, from P.D.A. Harvey, who surmises that it “is thus in effect, though not in form, a certificate of pilgrimage.” As William Beamont notes, this church burnt down in 1388, and he further speculates—quite plausibly, I believe—that this document indicates that John I was serving with John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, on his invasion of Spain in 1386-87 (22-24). If John I did have a military career with Gaunt, it also seems a distinct possibility that he would have participated in Edward III’s campaigns in France.9 This military service offers the best explanation for Ireland’s title of miles. Thus, although the first Ireland paterfamilias of the fifteenth century bore the more prestigious title of miles, it seems best, given the subsequent titles of William I, John II, and William II, to regard the family’s social status as similar to that of Robert Thornton; that is, they were among England’s landed elite—the manorial lords—but within that elite grouping, they most likely fell somewhere in the broad middle range.

Several surviving entries from CPR further illuminate the social status of the Irelands and provide interesting evidence of some of their activities within Lancashire. In 1434, Parliament sent orders into each county for local knights to gather prominent members of local society “who should take the oath not to maintain peace breakers” (CPR 1429-1436 370). In Lancashire, sixty-eight men swore the oath, among whom was “William de Ireland” (379). Of these sixty-eight men, the first eighteen are given the title chivaler, while the remaining fifty, including Ireland, are given no title at all. Later, in 1457, Henry VI established orders for magnates and local gentry to round up an assigned number of archers from each county. For Lancashire, John II is named as one of eleven men assigned to raise 113 archers. Again, he is given no title in this document, though

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9 None of the Irelands, though, appears in either volume of John of Gaunt’s Register.
two men therein are described as knights (CPR 1452-1461 410). This second entry is particularly interesting for its potential relationship to larger events in England and in the Hundred Years’ War. The order for John II and others in Lancashire to round up archers was issued from Westminster in December 1457, the moment when England’s civil war was just beginning to gain momentum. In 1455, the king had been captured by York and Salisbury’s forces at St Albans, the opening salvo of the war, and York was soon to become Protector of the Realm. Henry had re-emerged by February 1456, ending York’s time as Protector. But political upheaval in the capital forced Henry to move the government to Coventry in the summer of 1456. Beyond England’s internal problems, there were also looming threats from the French, who had attacked Sandwich in August 1457.

It is not clear from this entry in the Patent Rolls whether the archers were being summoned for defense against the crown’s internal or external enemies. If it were the former, of course, this would provide interesting evidence of the Irelands harboring Lancastrian sympathies. The county of Lancashire tended to support the Lancastrians, which was only natural, given the close relationship between the Lancastrians and the Duchy lands (VCH Lancaster 2: 211-16). Among the eleven men commissioned to summon archers from Lancashire were Thomas Stanley, knight, and Thomas Stanley, esquire; that is, the father and son of the most powerful family of the northwest in the fifteenth century.¹⁰ John Stanley (d. 1414) was one of the key supporters of Bolingbroke during the precarious early years of his young reign, helping to secure Cheshire for the king during Glendower’s revolt. As a result of this loyalty, Stanley became Steward of the King’s Household from 1405-12. However, the three succeeding Stanleys—his son John (d. 1437), grandson Thomas (d. 1459), and great-grandson Thomas (d. 1504)—were

¹⁰ For this discussion of the history of the Stanley family, I draw primarily from Michael Bennett’s “Good Lords” and Barry Coward’s The Stanleys. In addition, it should be noted that several scholars have hypothesized a connection between the Stanleys and the Pearl-poet. Edward Wilson examines the possibility that the Stanleys of Storeton and Hooton, of whom the Stanleys of Lathom were a cadet branch, may have been the patrons of the poet. Even more strikingly, Breeze makes the fantastic claim that John Stanley of Lathom (d. 1414), the very man mentioned on numerous occasions in connection with the Irelands (discussed in this section) was himself the Pearl-poet.
not such ardent Lancastrian partisans. In fact Thomas Stanley (d. 1459), the very same man mentioned alongside John II in the commission to summon archers, deftly managed to negotiate a *via media* in the civil war, which in and of itself was a remarkable feat. He served on York’s protectorate council in 1454, but also served under Henry VI when he recovered from his mental breakdown and resumed his responsibilities. But by 1457, Thomas Stanley was serving under Edward, York’s son, who had been named successor to the throne in the compromise through which Henry’s son was disinherited. As the most powerful figure in the Lancashire and Cheshire region, Thomas Stanley was needed by both sides of the conflict, and his ability deftly to negotiate the shifting power struggles is a testimony to the family’s political opportunism. It does not, though, provide us with evidence of any deeply engrained political affiliations. Thus, while tempting, it is not possible to draw a connection—by association with the dominant figure of Thomas Stanley—between those listed in this summons to raise archers and any particular side of England’s civil war.

The appearance of members of the Stanley family alongside the Irelands (in the two documents mentioned above) is noteworthy and raises questions about the nature of the relationship between the two families. In the *CPR* entry of 1434, John I appears alongside Thomas and John Stanley. In the *CPR* entry of 1457, as discussed above, John II appears alongside the two Thomas Stanleys, father and son. But such a common appearance would not be surprising, given the power of the Stanleys in Lancashire: “As early as 1422 one Lancashire squire had referred to the Lord of Lathom [John Stanley] as his ‘sovereign master,’ and fifty years later there were few gentlemen in the northwest who did not acknowledge the leadership of the House of Stanley” (Bennett, “Good Lords” 15-16). Anyone, that is, of note on the local level would have had many occasions on which he was bound to have political contact with the family. Barry Coward, while admitting primacy in the northwest to the Stanleys, notes twenty families, including the Irelands of Hale, who formed the predominant core of landowners in fifteenth-century Lancashire (112).
The Irelands, however, appear to have had a rather closer than average connection to the Stanley family. David Ireland, the father of John I, was married to Margery, daughter of William Stanley (d. 1360). Thus, John I was a nephew (by marriage) of John Stanley (Beamont 17). Later, John II married the daughter of John Stanley (d. 1437), creating further alliances between the two families (Beamont 36). In addition to marriages between the Irelands and Stanleys, there was also a good deal of business conducted between them, as attested by several surviving deeds from the Lancashire Record Office. The first document of import is dated 2 Henry VI, wherein William grants to “John of the Mill” a parcel of land for the remainder of John’s life, at 4s. 5d. This is witnessed by, among others, John de Stanley, knight (DDIB, Box 3). In 28 Henry VI, Laurence of Holme gave lands to “Johanni de Irlond del Hutt,” a transaction witnessed by Thomas Stanley, miles (DDIM 42/7).11

An economic relationship between the Irelands and Stanleys was inevitable, given that the principal seat of the Stanley family was in Lathom, a short distance to the north of Hale.12 But, in spite of the intermarriages and common economic interests, it seems that John Stanley (d. 1414) attempted to lay claim to the Ireland lands in the early fifteenth century. References to this survive in the Hale Charter Roll, three membranes stitched together and copied front and back that attest to the Ireland family’s claims to their land from the reign King John up through the time of Henry IV (DDIB, Box 4). This roll was begun in a thirteenth-century hand and was successively added to as disputes involving the Irelands’ lands were settled. The disputes relevant to the Ireland family in the period under discussion can be found on the front of Membrane 3 and continuing onto the dorse of Membrane 1.

11 This terminology is a bit confusing here, for though the Irelands usually referred to themselves as “of Hale,” they occasionally referred to themselves as “of the Hutt,” the name of their chief residence in the fifteenth century, which actually lay in the manor of Halewood.
12 <http://www.maps.google.com> reports a distance of 24.5 miles from Halewood to the present-day Stanley Industrial Complex, traveling by modern roads. As R. Sharpe France notes, the Stanley estate of Lathom was sold in 1720 and was demolished in 1929 (189; qtd in Coward xii).
The case first appears in 8 Henry IV, when John I sued Peter Legh in the Duchy Court for the manor of Hale, which the court decided in Ireland’s favor. Since Lancashire had Palatinate status, issues among the local aristocracy were not referred to the royal courts, as would be normal procedure for the rest of the realm, but rather were handled in the Duchy Court. But in the following year, John I was again in court with Legh over the same lands. After a long rehearsal of the family’s right to the manor, the record notes that Legh called upon John Stanley, to which John I objects:

Et predictus Johannes de Irland dicit quod predictus petens ad huiusmodi vocari ad warrantum admitteri non debet quia dicit quod predictus Johannes de Stanley, chivaler, & Johannes, filius eius, & cetera, nec aliquis antecessorum suorum neque aliquid habuerunt in maniero predicto cum pertinencis in dominico aut in servicio post seisinam predicti Ricardi de Mida, de cuius seinsula & cetera usque diem impetracionis brevis ipsius Johannis de Irland, scilicet vicesimi quarti diei Mercurii anno regni dominii Regis nunc octavo. 

Here, we learn that the Irelands’ possession of their lands was not wholly secure, and that Legh had enough of a case to reach the Duchy Court. In addition, we find that the Stanleys, in spite of their connections to the Irelands via marriage and common economic

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13 The will of Thomas Molyneux, a local Lancashire knight, dated 1 June 15 Edward IV (1475), asks that his lands be divided among “my wif, myn uncles Sir Pers Legh, knyght, & maister Hentricus Molyneux, and my cosyn William Ireland, esquier” (Lancashire, County Record Office, DDM 17/60). Thus, there seems to be some connection, by marriage, between Legh and the Irelands, though I have not been able to work out of what this connection consists. Furthermore, VCH Lancaster reports that a Robert Ireland possessed the manor of Kirkdale in Walton parish in West Derby, but released these lands, as well as a mesuage in Hale, to Lora and John Legh, his mother and her new husband (now that Robert’s father, John, had died). It further notes that “In 1404 [Robert Ireland] was outlawed, at the suit of John de Legh, for non-payment of a debt of 12 marks. Four years later he released to William de la Moore of Liverpool his right in various tenements in Kirkdale and Liverpool. […] Peter and Robert de Legh, sons of John and Lora, also disposed of their lands here to the Moores, who thus became undisputed lords of the manor” (3: 36). In spite of the fact that the VCH here prints the arms of the Ireland of Hale, this Robert Ireland is almost certainly a member of a cadet branch of the family. His great-great grandfather was Adam Ireland, who was the great-grandfather of John I, and thus it seems that Adam settled the manor of Kirkdale on a younger son, through whom it descended to this Robert Ireland. Nevertheless, this case from 1404 provides further testimony to the extended Ireland family’s legal battles with the Leghs, specifically here the same Legh who is involved in the court battle over the manor of Hale.

14 Richard de Mida was an ancestor of the Ireland family.
interests, were opposing John I in court, with John Stanley and his son serving as warrants for Peter Legh.

As the Charter Roll reveals, the case was not finally resolved until 11 Henry IV, when the court judged in favor of the Irelands: “ideo consequens est quod predictus Johannes de Irland recuperet versus predictum Petrum manerium predictum cum pertinenciis, et ideo Petrus in misericordia & cetera.” In the same year, John I also sued John Stanley over the contested status of Hale, and once again the Charter Roll reports (proudly, one would surmise) that the court found for the Irelands. Thereafter follows a copy of a letter from Henry IV to the Sheriff of Lancashire: “cape in manum nostram […] de terris Johannis de Stanley, chivaler, & Johannis, filii eius, pro defectu ipsorum Johannis & Johannis ad valenciam manerii de Hales cum pertinenciis quod Johannes Irland, chivaler, in curia nostra coram iusticiariis nostris apud Lancastriam clamat.” Then, the two Stanleys are called to appear “coram iusticiariis nostris apud Lancastriam die jovis in tercia septimana quadragesime.” This series of disputes then ends with a letter from the king noting that John Ireland “recuperavit seisinam suam versus Petrum filium Johannis de Legh de manerii de Hales cum pertinenciis sine dilacione.” This final letter is dated 8 May 11 Henry IV (1410). Thus, this legal battle with Legh and the Stanleys occupied the Irelands for three whole years.

The Stanleys’ landed wealth grew immensely with John’s marriage to Isabel Lathom ca. 1385, as Isabel brought the manors of Lathom and Knowsley to John, and she soon inherited the manors of Huyton-with-Roby, Childwall and Rainford, forming the center of their expanding power-base in southwest Lancashire, the immediate vicinity of the Ireland lands. Significantly, all of these manors lie in the same Hundred as Hale (West Derby), and the Stanley manor of Childwall lies in the very same parish as the Irelands’ lands.15 In addition to John Stanley becoming Steward of the King’s Household

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15 There is some discrepancy between Coward’s history of the Stanleys and the description of the manors in VCH Lancaster. In particular, Coward claims the Stanleys possessed the manor of Rainford (4), while the VCH’s account of that manor does not mention the Stanleys (3: 382-85). For Lathom see VCH Lancaster 3: 248-54; for Knowsley see 3: 158-69; for Huyton-with-Roby see 3: 175-76; for Childwall see 3: 109-11; for Rainford see 3: 382-85.
under Henry IV, the family was also given wide swaths of land forfeited by the Percies for their revolt against the king. Most of these manors lay in Cheshire, thus extending south the territorial power of the family, but they were also given the Isle of Man and were styled kings of the island. But even under Henry VI the close association between the crown and the Stanleys was maintained, as Thomas (d. 1459) was named Controller of the King’s Household in 1439. Finally, the Stanleys were influential in securing Henry Tudor’s victory at Bosworth, and legend even has it that Thomas Stanley (d. 1504) placed the crown on the new king’s head while on the battlefield. As a result, this Thomas was created Earl of Derby in 1485.

One can imagine that such a legal victory as is recorded on the Hale Charter Roll marked a momentous occasion for the Ireland family. The roll, in its entirety, documents the history of Hale and its possession by the Irelands, dating back to the family’s moment of origin, a gift of 1/6 of a vill to Richard de Mida in 1203 from King John. This roll was most likely the official record that the family kept for just such an occasion as their legal battles with Legh and the Stanleys. This victory would also mark a key moment for them, a moment when they defended the rights to their land against a much more powerful neighbor. Given that Thomas Stanley was the Steward under Henry IV, and given that the Duchy lands (and its system of justice) were the personal property of the Lancastrian kings, it is surprising that the Irelands fared as well as they did in this case. There is, of course, no way to discern what went on behind the scenes, as it were, to determine the court’s verdict. How seriously the Stanleys took this case is in no way indicated by such a laconic record. Nevertheless, it clearly was important enough to the Irelands, and to their perception of their rights to Hale, that they had it inscribed on the Charter Roll alongside the foundational moments of the family’s property.

One of the central features distinguishing the landed aristocracy in late medieval Lancashire from the rest of England was the region’s lack of resident nobles.16 As Michael Bennett demonstrates, the region lacked the significant presence of any magnate,

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16 For the following, I draw heavily on Michael Bennett’s excellent study of the Lancashire and Cheshire gentry in Community, Class and Careerism, especially chapters 2 and 5.
with the result that power resided predominantly in the hands of the local gentry. Families like the Stanleys, Molyneuxs and Norrises dominated Lancashire politics and economics, yet none (at least not before Thomas Stanley was created Earl of Derby in 1485) was ennobled. (In this sense, the political environment of the Irelands stands in stark contrast to that of Robert Thornton, whose Yorkshire was teeming with magnates, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section III.) In Lancashire, political power was located on the county level, and that power was exercised by those who were, in general, resident in the county. Unlike, for example, Yorkshire, where the main noble families (York, Percy, Neville) served variously as Marcher lords and members of the king’s council, led the English army in France, and served in the Lords—all of which would have required frequent absence from their home region—in Lancashire, the leading families tended to be much less peripatetic. In addition, such magnates as surrounded Robert Thornton owned much larger swaths of land, and they had castles in several regions, which meant that, even when not called to Westminster for business of national importance, they were still less likely to be in any one place for an extended period.

But Lancashire’s lack of magnatial presence did not just mean that the region was free from the undue influence of a Neville or, to take the more famous example of the Pastons, a Norfolk or a Suffolk. It also meant that those lower down the social scale (i.e. the gentry) wielded more economic power relative to their local society. This is not to say that they were better off in real economic terms than their gentry counterparts from other counties; in fact, Lancashire was one of the poorest regions in late medieval England (Miller 42). But the lack of titled nobility dominating the local scene meant that heads of families like the Stanleys and Molyneuxs, and, to a lesser extent the Irelands, were the most prominent individuals on the local scene. A good example of this increased importance is provided by Bennett’s analysis of the sixty-seven manorial units that comprised the Hundred of West Derby (which included Hale). Of these, six were demesne lands of the Duchy, two belonged to non-resident nobles, eight belonged to religious houses, and a remarkable fifty-one belonged to the local gentry. But West
Derby is not anomalous: “From rough calculations for other hundreds, it seems that the West Derby figures reflect conditions right across the region” (68).

This particular economic formation is essential to a full understanding of the ideological implications of the Ireland MS. As I argue below, the romances contained in this MS center around the aristocratic cultural practice of *largesse*. It is this very practice—one which a gentry landowner could participate in *on the local level* just as ably as could a magnate of great wealth, provided he had sufficient income to support the myth that he could give without limit—that is taken up by the three romances in the Ireland MS. Although such a practice could be undertaken much more adroitly by the titled nobility in fifteenth-century England, who could exhibit wealth on levels a more modest gentry family like the Irelands never could, the participation in the practice was theoretically open to all who were members of England’s tiny elite: the landowning aristocracy. The Irelands, as evidenced by their family arms, titles (*miles* for John I, *armiger* for William I, John II and William II), and jurisdiction over the *Magna curia de Hale*, were definitely a part of this social class. Their engagement with this practice (at least on the aesthetic level of literature, if not in their real spending habits) intimates their participation in the charmed circle at the top of English society. There is, as I argue below, a confidence in gentry social identity that is inscribed in the progression of these three romances, as they appear in this MS. This confidence is akin to the ways David Burnley describes “courtliness” in late medieval England: something of which Westminster does not have a monopoly, something in which all those who are part of England’s tiny elite can participate by their engagement with a common set of transcendent aristocratic values (136-47).

This MS’s contrast with the Lincoln Thornton MS is salutary in this regard. In Chapter 2, we saw that what I termed the “familial romances” in the Lincoln Thornton MS negotiate issues of gentry economic identity, particularly with regards to the roles within the nuclear family (i.e. the proper relationship between the paterfamilias and eldest male) and with regards to the gentry fantasy of upward mobility into the elite ranks of the titled nobility. These romances thrive on a perceived difference between the titled
nobility and landowners of lesser means, like Thornton, as they attempt to carve out a socio-economic niche for the gentry within a world dominated by nobles. Thus we see the knight Degrevant enjoying a fantastic victory over his unjust and aggressive neighbor, who happens to be a duke. And we see Eglamour, also a knight, using his martial prowess to ensure that his son and wife are aligned in their proper places within the nuclear family, seeing to it that succession can take place properly. These romances, much more than the Ireland romances, thrive on confrontation, as if the socio-economic position of the gentry were threatened and called on the literary realm for a defense.

Much of the ideological difference between these two sets of romances is illuminated by their differing circumstances of production, with Thornton’s texts exuding an anxious awareness of the differences between the middling gentry and the magnates, while the Irelands’ three romances work on a much more cohesive social model, one which works to erase differences between members of the upper and lower ends of the aristocracy, highlighting their common participation in elite economics. This difference can, in part, be explained by the historical differences between Yorkshire and Lancashire in the fifteenth century. This connection draws us specifically to the question of determination, of the manner in which socio-economic forces affect and participate in the shaping of cultural production. The words of Raymond Williams are important here:

For in practice determination is never only the setting of limits; it is also the exertion of pressures. As it happens this is also a sense of “determine” in English: to determine or be determined to do something is an act of will and purpose. In a whole social process, these positive determinations, which may be experienced individually but which are always social acts, indeed often specific social formations, have very complex relations with the negative determinations that are experienced as limits. For they are by no means only pressures against the limits, though these are crucially important. They are at least as often pressures derived from the formation and momentum of a given social mode: in effect a compulsion to act in ways that maintain and renew it. (*Marxism* 87)

In Williams’s formulation, determination does not have to figure as an outside force fixing limits to human behavior. Instead, it structures the discourse of cultural production, forming the very conditions that allow literary texts or works of art to speak.
Such a formulation recognizes that artists (and in this case, manuscript compilers) have agency, while simultaneously recognizing that such agency can only ever be operative within certain socio-economic confines. In this particular case the distinct socio-economic environments of Thornton and the Irelands, as I have identified them here, are some of the primary forces exerting pressures on their respective cultural products. As such, these different systems are not merely negative determinations dictating cultural formations. Rather, the local power structures identified here—in particular the different degrees of social and economic autonomy which Thornton and the Irelands likely experienced—animate the act of manuscript compilation, offering “a compulsion to act in ways that maintain and renew” them. With particular reference to the Ireland MS, the insistence on extolling a largesse economy suggests a social confidence, a sense of common membership in an elite group. And conditions in fifteenth-century Lancashire were right for such a middling family to stake such a confident claim, for there were, after all, no noble families around to challenge this claim or to show up the real discrepancies between such a family and the immensely wealthier nobility.

### 4.2: Codicological Description

The Ireland MS, so called after the family responsible for its compilation, dates from the middle of the fifteenth century. It is entirely on parchment, and bears no illuminations or decorations.¹⁷ In this sense, it accords with A.I. Doyle’s description of the typical late medieval manuscript containing alliterative poetry, occupying “a middle

¹⁷ For the best descriptions of the MS, see Robson, “Description” and Dickins. Don Skemer, Curator of Manuscripts at Princeton University Library, has informed me that a full description of the Ireland MS will be appearing in the forthcoming catalogue of Western MSS in Princeton’s collection.
range of quality and cost, whether bought or home-made” (“The Manuscripts” 100). It is collated as follows:18

16 (ff. 1-12), 26 (wanting 4; ff. 13-24), 36 (ff. 25-36), 46 (ff. 37-48), 56 (ff. 49-60), 67 (pp. 1-28), 77 (pp. 29-56), 86 (pp. 57-80)

Part I of the MS contains three romances: The Awntyrs off Arthure, Sir Amadace and The Avowing of Arthur. There are no other texts in this section of the manuscript, making it one of only three surviving manuscripts containing multiple Middle English romances and no other texts.19 As mentioned briefly above, Part II of the manuscript contains records from the manorial court of Hale, the home of the Irelands. I will discuss these two sections of the manuscript in turn.

The three romances are all in the same hand, a very upright Anglicana with some traces of Secretary influence. Overall, it is a well-executed, readable hand. This scribe consistently uses the Anglicana –w and –d, as well as the double-chambered –a typical of the Anglicana hand, and he tends to mark the feet of his minims with the ‘ticks’ common to more formal book hands. He regularly employs exaggerated strokes on the ascenders of the letter –h. One of the more distinguishing features of his hand involves his use of descenders, which typically extend well below what is standard, sloping backwards from the ductus of the letter at a pronounced angle and often merging with the text on the line below. All told, this hand is a typical English book hand of the mid-

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18 Part I is comprised of quires 1-5; Part II is comprised of quires 6-8. Unlike the other MSS in this study, the collation of this MS is relatively straightforward and can be reconstructed with confidence. Quire signatures show Part I to be composed of regular gatherings of six. The loose binding allows one to see quite clearly that the quires in Part II are made up of two gatherings of seven and one of six. This collation is also confirmed by the note appended to the front of the MS in the hand of James A.H. Murray. Part I of the MS contains the standard folio markings, but Part II is numbered by pages (as in a modern book). To make this distinction clear, when referencing Part II, I will use “p.” followed by the page number.
19 See the discussion in Guddat-Figge 28. The only other MSS to contain multiple romances and no other texts are London, British Library MS Egerton 2862 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 261. Technically speaking, since the Ireland MS also contains the manorial court documents, it should not be grouped in with these other two; however, because the court documents were originally produced as a separate volume, it is justified to treat the Ireland MS as a romance-only codex.

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fifteenth century. Bruce Dickins dates the hand of the romances to no earlier than 1450 (64-65), a conclusion with which A.I. Doyle agrees ("Note 105" 69), and a conclusion which seems tenable (though, given the absence of datable references in Part I, and given that the manuscript is not on paper and thus does not bear watermarks, I would not be quite so certain as to say that it could not have been written a few decades before 1450).

Although Part I is unadorned and not overly attractive, it is clear that the scribe has put some forethought into the layout and presentation of the texts. Although most of the ruling has been scraped off the parchment, occasional marginal guide lines have survived, and there are a few prick marks throughout the MS. In general, the scribe writes in straight lines with relatively consistent spacing between words and between lines. Additionally, each text is divided into three sections, usually entitled "Fittes," and always begun with a space for a 2-line initial (none of which was executed). Interestingly, the only time this pattern is broken is on f. 44v in *The Avowing of Arthur*, where the scribe, instead of writing his usual "a ffitte," has written "primus passus." But given the consistency of the layout in Part I, this is most likely a mistake, a moment when the scribe intended to write "a ffitte," but inadvertently substituted the nearly synonymous term "passus."

It is a distinct possibility that the scribe of the Ireland MS is responsible for this plan of textual organization and is not importing it from his exemplars. Overall, each romance seems to have been edited so as to fit the overall collection. This well-wrought organization, of course, is an interesting enough textual feature of this MS, but it also complements the ideological coherence of the romances (which I discuss below). Both on the textual and ideological levels, then, this MS is a coherent, organized cultural

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20 For a similar script, see Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Digby 181, f. 47r, which is reproduced as Plate 3.ii in Parkes (English Cursive 3). The comments of Roger Dahood are also relevant here: "Malcolm Parkes has advised me privately that working from photographs he has dated the hand to the third quarter of the fifteenth century or perhaps slightly later" (13).

21 *Sir Amadace* is acephalous (missing just one folio), and thus there is no way to determine whether it opened with a two-line initial or not. Dickins 63 conjectures that *Amadace* may have contained the only executed illumination in the manuscript, and thus its opening folio was likely cut out at a later date. For this pattern of fitte divisions and spaces for 2-line initials, see ff. 6v, 12v, 21r, 27v, 44v, and 50v.
artefact. On the textual level, reference to other extant manuscript copies of the texts contained in the Ireland MS reveals that no other version employs such a pattern. *The Avowing of Arthur* is unique to this manuscript and so cannot be compared; however, *Sir Amadace* survives in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1, which contains no textual divisions. Finally, *The Awntyrs off Arthure* survives in three other manuscripts: the Lincoln Thornton MS; London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 491; and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 324. Of these, the Lambeth MS has no textual divisions, the Thornton MS employs two sections, while the Douce MS employs three. Both the Lincoln Thornton and the Douce MSS indicate section divisions with just a capital letter. Such a uniform pattern across the texts in the Ireland MS is, then, strongly suggestive of a conscious plan imposed upon the source materials by the compiler of this MS.

Beyond the formal layout of the texts, Phillipa Hardman has argued that “the Ireland MS represents the work of a single compiler, making alterations to his chosen texts according to certain consistent principles” (“The Unity” 52). Just two examples from the many Hardman has gathered suffice to demonstrate the plausibility of the argument that this MS was consciously worked into an articulate compilation. Both examples involve passages from two romances which echo one another and which are unique to the readings attested in this MS. The first is found in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *The Avowing of Arthur*. In the former, once Gawain has been reconciled to Galeron, the narrator declares, “Thus Gauan and Galrun, gode frindes ar thay” (f. 15v; LIV.9). In the latter, once Gawain and Menealfe have been reconciled, the narrator states, “Now gode frindus ar thay” (f. 46v; XXXVII.1). This is a common enough sentiment that it is not, in and of itself, sufficient to establish a textual emendation by the compiler of the Ireland MS; however, the fact that both lines occur when Gawain and a knight whom he is fighting have suddenly made peace is suggestive. Since *The Avowing* is unique to this

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22 For a diagram of the textual divisions of the MSS of *The Awntyrs*, see Phillips 88-89.
23 Citations from all three romances are from Robson (ed.), *Three Early English Metrical Romances*, which is based on the Ireland MS. His edition provides stanza numbers but no line numbers. Thus, in my citations I provide his stanza numbers, while I have supplied line numbers.
MS, one does not have recourse to other attestations of this line; however, comparison with the three other extant versions of *The Awntyrs* demonstrates that this line is unique to the Ireland MS’s version. The second persuasive example that Hardman notes is to be found in both *Sir Amadace* and *The Avowing*. In the former, the narrator, in describing the eponymous hero’s former liberality, states that “For his mete he wold not spare, / Burdes in the halle were neuyr bare, / With clothes richeli diȝte” (f. 20r; XIV.4-6). In the latter, the narrator describes Baldwin’s court with remarkably similar language: “There was no spense for to spare, / Burdes thay were neuyr bare, / Butte euyr court clene” (f. 50r; XLVIII.2-4). These lines from *Sir Amadace* are also unique to the Ireland MS, which lends support to Hardman’s theory that this collection has been edited to form a cohesive whole. The textual evidence Hardman marshals is quite persuasive, and, coupled with the formal consistency uniting all three of the romances as they appear in the Ireland MS, it makes sense to conclude (tentatively, given the paucity of the evidence) that these texts were brought together and collected in an intentional order, one which is reflected in both form and content.24 I will address the thematic connections (i.e. the similarity in content) more fully below.

Two of the three texts in this MS, moreover, contain a good deal of geographical specificity, locating the action of *The Awntyrs* and *The Avowing* in the far northwest of England. *The Awntyrs* specifically takes place in Inglewood Forest (Cumbria) and also ranges over Carlisle and what is now southwestern Scotland (Robson, “Introduction” xiv-xvi). *The Avowing* also takes place in Inglewood Forest (xxiv-xxv).25 These locations are a good seventy or eighty miles north of Hale, so there is no suggestion that the

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24 I would, though, dissent from Hardman’s conclusions as to the ideological implications of this collection. Primarily, as I discuss below, the romances’ focus on *largesse* can hardly be labeled “bourgeois,” as it forms one of the central tenets of the ideology of the late medieval landowning class. Such a focus on the “bourgeois” nature of the romances also obscures the relationship between the romances comprising Part I and the manorial court roll from the Ireland family lands, which comprises Part II. Attending to the issues raised by Part II shows quite clearly that the Irelands’ socio-economic status was tied to the possession of land, marking them distinctly as part of the feudal aristocracy and not part of some emergent or nascent middle class.

25 See also Eadie 3-5 on the identification with Cumberland of “Rondolessette Hall” from line 371 (from Hanna’s edition) of *The Awntyrs*. 286
Irelands themselves had any connection to the authorship of these texts. However, this geographic uniformity provides further justification for seeing this collection as a cohesive, unified whole.

It is certain that the two sections of this manuscript were not originally bound together. First, they both have different quire notations. Part I labels each quire with a letter, in a series from A to F. Part II, although it has only two quire signatures, also begins its series with an A, indicating that Parts I and II were originally separate compilations. Furthermore, Part I bears the traditional manuscript foliation, while Part II bears Arabic numerals on the recto and verso of every leaf. In addition, the first and last leaves of Part I are quite weathered; in particular, the ink on f. 1r is worn, while the parchment on f. 60v (the end of Part I) is yellowed in a way that is not reflected elsewhere in the MS. This state of wear suggests that this section lay unbound for some time before being joined with what is now Part II. However, these two sections of the MS must have been joined by, at the very latest, 1545, for on f. 48r of Part I appear the following inscriptions: “Per me Rychardum Latham scrispit hoc / Thomas Yrlond scrispit hoc.”

The name of Thomas Ireland also appears on p. 68 of Part II. Both of these inscriptions are written in a sixteenth-century hand, making the Thomas Ireland who inherited Hale in 1525 and died in 1545 the most obvious candidate. This would establish 1545 as the terminus ad quem for the joining of these two sections of the manuscript.

It is, however, almost certain that Section I was in the possession of the Irelands well before the sixteenth century. (It was most likely produced for them in the middle of the fifteenth century.) The formal organization that was given each of the romances (as discussed above) suggests this was a bespoke production organized according to a

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26 Part II has an A in the bottom right corner at the end of quire 1 (p. 28) and a B in the top left corner at the beginning of quire 2 (p. 29).
27 Dahood 15 claims that the phrase “scrispit hoc” in both inscriptions is written in a third hand, though I do not see the evidence as sufficient to support such a claim.
28 The binding that the MS is in today, wooden oak boards that are extremely worn, appears to be the binding that was originally used when the two parts of the MS were joined.
prescribed plan, and thus was not a haphazard compilation produced on an *ad hoc* basis along the lines of John Colyn’s Commonplace Book. However, there is an almost complete absence of the typical markers of professionally produced books, suggesting that the scribe of this MS was not connected with the book trade. For example, the quire numeration is haphazard. Placing signatures at the beginning of quires is strange enough, but this scribe, by putting different signatures at the beginning and end of the same quire (e.g., in quires 3, 4 and 5), while only placing the traditional single signature at the end of quire 2, has created some disunity to the collation of this MS. Furthermore, there are no catchwords or running titles, which are both typical markers of professionally produced books.

One further detail points us towards the scribe’s lack of professional experience: at the top of f. 27v, he has placed the final line of a fitte of *Sir Amadace*, which he then followed with a space for an illuminated initial to announce the beginning of the following fitte. Though this is a minor detail, by placing a single line from the end of a fitte at the top of a folio—instead of finishing the fitte on the previous folio—the scribe evinces a certain lack of attention to the layout of this MS. Thus it seems most likely that this book was produced by someone from the area whom the Irelands commissioned to write this out, perhaps a local clerk or even someone in the employ of their household, but definitely someone with limited experience in the production of literary manuscripts. Moreover, the dialect of each of the texts can be localized to southern Lancashire, which provides further evidence for the connection between this MS’s commissioning and the Ireland family. Mary Serjeantson specifically notes that “It is probable that the [Ireland] MS. had always belonged to the Manor of Hale, and that the poems were actually copied

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29 If quire 1 bore a signature, it was lost when the foot of f. 12 was torn away. The end of quire 2 bears a –C in the lower right corner (f. 24v); the beginning of quire 3 bears a –D in the upper left corner (f. 25r); the end of quire 3 bears an –E in the lower right corner (f. 36v); the beginning of quire 4 bears an –ff in the upper left corner (f. 37r); the end of quire 4 bears a –G in the lower right corner (f. 48v); and the beginning of quire 5 bears an –h in the upper left corner (f. 49r).
there. The dialect in which the romances are written is in favour of this presumption” (328).30

Paleography, coupled with an analysis of the dates of the court entries from Part II, also provides evidence that the two parts of the manuscript were produced around the same time (and that neither is anywhere near as late as the terminus of 1545). Like Part I, Part II is entirely written by a single scribe (though it is definitely not the same scribe as that of Part I). Since he is creating a legal document and not a literary text, this scribe’s script is neither as neat nor as consistent as that of Part I. Nevertheless, an analysis of his letter forms shows that there is one scribe throughout the entirety of Part II.31 The script employed by this scribe is consistent with mid-fifteenth-century hands, and thus we can conclude that both Parts I and II are roughly contemporaneous.32

The second part of the manuscript survives in a less clear state, though. The lack of a consistent pattern in entry dates makes the court documents particularly hard to date. The earliest overall date recorded is 1379: “die Veneris proximo ante festum Purificacionis beate marie virginis Anno regni regis Ricardi Secundi post conquestum secundo” (p. 19). The latest date recorded is 1464: “die martis proximo post festum Sancti Martini in lene anno regni regis Edwardi quarti quarto” (p. 1). Thus, these entries cover court sessions held over an eighty-five year period. Within these entries, however, the dates move forward and backward in time, clearly indicating that these were not original documents produced in situ by scribes attending the court, but rather were

30 Serjeantson specifically locates the MS in the south of Lancashire, in the dialect region which she labels the northwest region of the West Midlands. For the specific dialectical markers of this region, see 66-67. The findings of the following confirm Serjeantson’s identification of the MS’s linguistic features with the area occupied by the Irelands: Dahood 28, Brookhouse 10-16, and Robson, “Introduction” x-xi. Neither Hanna’s nor Gates’s introductions to their respective editions of The Awntrys comments specifically on the dialect of the Ireland MS. Furthermore, as Hooper demonstrates, The Awntrys most likely was originally composed in a northern dialect and then was copied into the West Midlands dialect of the Ireland MS and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 324.

31 Pace Dickins, who avers that Part II of this MS divides into two distinct sections, covering pp. 1-8 and 9-80, the latter section “being in a decidedly earlier hand than pp. 1-8” (64). However, the scribe throughout Section II writes with similar flourishes on the feet of his minims, similarly thick strokes on descenders and very erect descenders, the same short –s where the bottom half loops back towards the ductus of the letter, and the same abbreviation for the phrase “regni regis.”

32 For a similar hand, see Preston and Yeandle, Plate 8, and Hector, the bottom half of Plate 12a.
compiled after the fact. Just a few examples of the irregular dating of the entries will suffice to demonstrate the haphazard nature of this section of the MS. On page 12 begins an entry for a court session held in 7 Henry IV, while on page 14 begins one dated to 16 Richard II, followed by a session held in 4 Henry IV beginning on page 27. Pages 40-57 proceed straight through, in an uninterrupted series from 1-4 Henry V, but on page 64 the entry jumps back in time to 15 Richard II, followed on the same page by an entry from 6 Henry IV. This irregularity alone demonstrates that this is not a document that was created at the sessions of the manor court, but was crafted after the fact. (I discuss this in greater detail in Section VII, below.)

4.3: The Cultural Practice of Largesse

In the thirteenth century, Henry III had the following inscribed on the wall of the Painted Chamber in Westminster Hall: “Ke ne dune ke ne tine ne prent ke desire” (qtd in Kaueper 197).33 This motto illustrates nicely the aristocratic myth that the detachment from wealth is—in what is counterintuitive to a capitalist formulation—productive of wealth. Such an attitude to material possessions can be traced back to the Aristotelian notion of the Liberal man and the Magnificent man, as outlined in Book IV of the Ethics: “it is a trait in the Liberal man’s character even to exceed very much in giving so as to leave too little for himself, it being characteristic of such an one not to have a thought of self” (80). By the scale of his spending, the Magnificent man exceeds even the Liberal man:

And the Magnificent man will incur such expenses from the motive of honour, this being common to all the virtues, and besides he will do it with pleasure and lavishly; excessive accuracy in calculation being Mean. He

33 Kaueper translates this as “He who does not give what he has will not get what he wants” (197).
will consider how a thing may be done most beautifully and fittingly, rather, than for how much it may be done, and how at the least expense. (86; emphasis mine)³⁴

Both the inscription of Henry III and the Aristotelian theory from Book IV of the *Ethics* attest an ethical system asking one to deny the calculation of material goods, and even to deny a dependence on the economic base. A belief in liberal spending, coupled with a belief that one can go on doing so indefinitely, intimates a fantasy economic realm that lies outside of any Base-Superstructure formulation. Such expenditure is founded on a myth of independence from the mode of production: to recognize that the feast put on in the manor house or the hoods distributed as livery (to take just two of the more prominent examples of late medieval signs of wealth and power) were underwritten by the forced labor of peasants on the demesne or rent extracted from tenants would cause the system on which such *largesse* is founded to collapse, as the purportedly absolute difference of aristocratic practice would suddenly be revealed to be difference in degree alone.

Such an economic posture finds its medieval manifestation in *largesse*, the theory that the proper lord should give liberally without reckoning the costs.³⁵ Marian Whitney provides the most concise description:

> The truly courteous lord does not give primarily or even mainly in order to gain friends and followers, or to impress others with his power and splendor, still less as a means of rewarding merit or of relieving distress; but as a duty he owes to his rank and to himself. For him it is a matter of ‘noblesse oblige’; who profits by his bounty is of comparatively little

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³⁴ For a summary of Aristotelian theories on *magnanimitas* and their application in medieval social practice, see Starkey 253-56. Although *largesse* may trace its roots to Book IV of the *Ethics*, in Book V is to be found Aristotle’s most influential discussions of economics. This book’s discussion of market forces would challenge *largesse*’s pretensions to isolation from the market. For more on Aristotle’s economic theories in the *Ethics*, see Meikle 6-42. Furthermore, Aristotle’s theories on economic exchange had a profound impact on medieval thought, for which see Kaye. In particular, Kaye argues that by the fourteenth century “habits of thought and perception initially restricted to those actively in commerce came to be adopted by members of all segments of society” (16). Thus, medieval aristocratic ideals of indifference to possessions—by their denial of the economic base—exhibit a selective dependence on Book IV of the *Ethics*, to the exclusion of Aristotle’s extremely influential Book V.

³⁵ See also the definition provided by Mathew 360. For an insightful analysis of the symbolic exchanges governing late medieval English households, see Heal. For a discussion of how *largesse* came to be associated with the knightly class in particular, see Harwood 483-85.
importance. It is such giving which, to the mediaeval mind, constitutes the virtue of largesse. (186-87)

As Felicity Heal notes, this theory’s “preoccupation with conspicuous consumption and grandeur is peculiarly fitted to the assumptions and needs of the great nobility of this period” (193). In the European literature of the later Middle Ages, Alexander becomes the paragon of liberality, but such an attitude is also ascribed to nearly any king or nobleman of literature as a character trait deserving of emulation. It is a virtue that is particularly concentrated in the romance corpus, a body of texts that is, after all, written about the class with sufficient capital (social and monetary) to participate in the world of chivalry. Not surprisingly, then, *largesse* forms one of the foundational principles of the chivalric manuals, including the most famous of such, Ramon de Lull’s *Libre de l’ordre de cavayleria*. This formulation is also illustrated in the moral exemplum entitled “Mercatorum vita amota computacione, a multis approbatur,” contained in *An Alphabet of Tales*. Here, an Earl takes on various disguises so as to experience life in different social stations. At the end of this potted social experiment, he concludes that “þe merchand crafte war þe beste crafte þat he fand, & þe best offes, war not a thyng war, þat is to say, cowntyng & reknyng in þe end. For, he said, at evyn when þai come home þai made rekkenyng of þe leste peny at þai reseyvid, and at þai expundid and he þat made not a gude reknyng was casten in prison & holden þer” (329). Though this moment would seem to be sanctioning the life of a merchant, it actually functions as a subtle endorsement of a *largesse* economy. Here, in something akin to a backhanded compliment, the Earl claims to approve of everything about mercantile life except “cowntyng & reknyng,” the very

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36 Such a theory, of course, pre-dates the later Middle Ages. Whitney 185 locates the origins of *largesse* in the Teutonic *comitatus*, where the freeman would serve the richest and most powerful lord, the one who could dispense the most gifts, while Shell 34-39 notes how the corporate warrior cultures of the *chansons de geste* incarnate a *largesse* economy, with the gifts from the king forming the center of the community. I would, however, disagree with Shell’s theory that the figure of the king dispensing gifts forms the *locus classicus* for *largesse* and that, by the high Middle Ages, such values were threatened by Christian concepts of charity and growing mercantile values. At least, such a theory is not supported by the romances considered here.

37 See the discussion in Keen, *Chivalry* 1-17.
things comprising the essence of that life. As such, this short narrative affirms the superiority of the Earl’s existence outside of commodity exchange, lying within the fantasy economic realm of *largesse*.

Often, medieval configurations of *largesse* posited a theological justification. All medieval formulations of the need to give liberally could, in some sense, find justification in a Christian imperative to put God before mammon. Two particular moments from the Ireland MS’s romances point to such theological underpinnings (and both will be discussed in greater detail in the relevant sections below). The first comes from *Sir Amadace*, wherein the eponymous, impoverished knight has spent his last bit of money on burying a dead merchant and now, fully destitute and without servants, meets the merchant, resurrected as a knight, in the woods. This knight asks Amadace why he is mourning, and he delivers a speech to Amadace about the unimportance of material possessions:

\begin{quote}
Thowe schild nozte mowrne no suche wise,
For God may bothe mon falle and rise,
For his helpe is euyr more nere.
For gud his butte a lante lone,
Sum tyme men [haue] hit, sum tyme none. (f. 26r; XXXVIII.7-11)
\end{quote}

The second example comes from *The Avowing of Arthur*, in which the Arthurian knight Baldwin relates a story from his military campaign in Spain, when the town he occupied was under siege and food supplies were dangerously low. Baldwin treated the messenger of the opposing army to a lavish feast. Complaining that such a feast is wasteful, given the low food supplies, Baldwin’s knights instead suggested that they surrender:

\begin{quote}
In this howse is no bred,
No quyte wine nyf red,
3o be-houes 3ild vppe this stid,
And for oure lyuys pray. (f. 57v; LXIX.5-8)
\end{quote}

Yet Baldwin dismisses their claims with a simple aphorism: “3ette God helpus ay his man” (f. 58r; LXIX.9).
Both of these moments underwrite their characters’ dismissive attitudes to material possession with a theological justification. In the passage from *Sir Amadace*, the ghost suggests that God is the one ultimately in control, and since all goods are on loan from God, we would do well not to cling to any possessions. In a similar vein, Baldwin is able to dismiss his knights’ concerns about imminent starvation with a simple religious platitude. And, of course, in both texts the platitudes are ultimately confirmed, as Amadace secures his possessions only after he learns to let go of them, and Baldwin’s feast has its desired effect when the enemy messenger relates to his leaders how luxurious Baldwin’s town still is and, determining that their efforts have yielded no fruit, they give up the siege. It is not difficult to imagine that a medieval reader could extract a simple lesson from these two tales: the proper indifference to material possessions causes the multiplication of material possessions. Or, in its more succinct formulation, “Ke ne dune ke ne tine ne prent ke desire.”

In the only reading of this manuscript as a whole, Phillipa Hardman rightly notes this moralizing strain, commenting that “The Ireland MS may be said to be about the role of civilian knights. […] All three stories stress that true knightly excellence resides in qualities of the spirit, in virtues like charity and courtesy which all gentle men and women ought to possess” (“The Unity” 59). Hardman’s is, of course, a valid reading, as moral virtue forms the centerpiece of the economic lessons that the White Knight (in *Sir Amadace*) and Baldwin (in *The Avowing of Arthur*) impart. But an ideology critique encourages us to read against the grain of these very loaded moments, for in these two examples from *Amadace* and *The Avowing*, the overtly economic practice of liberal giving has been sublimated into theological discourse. Liberality is not just a simple theological virtue: the virtues are by their nature universal, intended for actuation in the life of every Christian. Liberality, by contrast, is the preserve of class privilege, a ‘virtue’ that can only be practiced by those with the requisite means. Thus, although Hardman is certainly correct, I would add that we need to consider what these moments of liberality suppress as much as what they say. As Terry Eagleton writes, “Successful ideologies are often thought to render their beliefs natural and self-evident—to identify them with the
‘common sense’ of a society so that nobody could ever imagine how they might be different. […] Ideology, on this view, offers itself as an ‘Of course!’, or ‘That goes without saying’ ” (58-59). Nothing came more to hand in the later Middle Ages as a justification for aristocratic economic practice, as a way to naturalize that practice by associating it with a transcendental body of truth, than orthodox religion.38

Felicity Heal’s reading of late medieval household economic exchange offers an effective way to demystify this naturalized practice of aristocratic gift giving. She argues that the household was the most important site of social exchange in the later Middle Ages in England, the place where the practice of largesse took on ritualized form intended to exhibit the role of the lord and to lock his inferiors into asymmetrical relationships:

These transactions largely fall within parameters defined by anthropologists as those of symbolic exchange—Bourdieu’s “fake circulation of fake coin.” The underlying benefits sought and given were real enough, but the form of the interchange was usually gestural, ritualized, and not obviously commercial. (180)

Such a reading, by highlighting the cultural capital invested in this aristocratic practice, points to the very issues that the religious platitudes from Sir Amadace and The Avowing of Arthur would seek to suppress—namely, that aristocratic indifference to wealth and the associated practice of largesse were ultimately dependent on commodity exchange and the labor of peasants on the demesne in order to provide the funds which could be so liberally dispensed by the lord, which only then could afford the lord the opportunity to be so indifferent. P.D.A. Harvey, one of the foremost historians of medieval manorial documents, states: “Any medieval estate, large or small, was only half of a single institution. It was, so to speak, the productive half—the half that produced the money

38 I am not here suggesting that this was a conscious process of applying a thin religious veneer to an economic practice, for I wish to avoid what Eagleton terms the “rationalist view of ideologies”; that is, the view that ideologies are “conscious, well-articulated systems of belief.” This approach, he notes, “is clearly inadequate: it misses the affective, unconscious, mythical or symbolic dimensions of ideology; the way it constitutes the subject’s lived, apparently spontaneous relations to a power-structure and comes to provide the invisible colour of daily life itself” (221). Joel Rosenthal traces a similar association between
and goods that supported the consuming or spending half, the household” (3). But of
course one who spends his life working with manorial documents would realize only too
readily what is not readily apparent to one who predominantly reads the literature of the
age: that the late medieval English landowning class was absolutely dependent on the
forced labor services or cash rents (depending on the type of manor) of peasants in order
to maintain the myth of endless reserves.

A reading of Sir Amadace or The Avowing of Arthur in a critical edition obscures
the fact that these two texts were collected and read in succession, that their messages
about indifference to material possessions resonate in tandem. But, even more important
in this case, reading these two texts outside of their MS context causes one to lose sight
of the fact that each was bound up with the manorial court documents of Hale, the very
documents reminding us that the Irelands’ ability to support a gentry lifestyle was
dependent on peasant labor, a combination which gives voice to what the romances’
statements on the indifference to wealth would suppress. In this way, a critical edition of
any text from the Ireland MS, by divorcing it from its manuscript context—a context that
foregrounds the economic base—replicates the ideologically motivated suppression that
these romances themselves seek to foster.

I turn now to a specific examination of each of the three romances in this MS. As
Phillipa Hardman’s textual analysis demonstrates (discussed in Section II, above), there
is a strong possibility that these three texts were edited with a formal architecture in
mind: that is, they were each divided into three fittes (contrasting with all other extant
copies of the texts), were each given spaces for two-line initials at fitte divisions, and
contain several lines that seem to have been edited so that they echo one another, all of
which points to a consistent logic underlying this compilation. Specifically, these three
romances, in the order in which they were placed, intimate a progression in the
confidence with which they espouse and celebrate the practice of largesse. The series
begins with The Awntyrs off Arthure, which raises troubling questions about the nature of

aristocratic economic practice and religious justification in late medieval England in The Purchase of
Paradise (especially chapter 7).
late medieval land possession. By the conclusion of *The Avowing of Arthur*, all such questions have been emphatically dismissed, replaced with the bald assertion of aristocratic values.

**4.4: The Awntyrs off Arthure**

The first romance in the Ireland MS, *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, begins as Arthur and his knights go hunting, and Gawain stays behind to keep Guinevere company in the woods. Suddenly, though, the clouds darken and ominous weather moves in, as the ghost of Guinevere’s mother emerges from a mere to speak to Gawain and to her daughter, explaining that she is now suffering in the afterlife for the pride she exhibited while on earth: “Now I am a gryselyche gost, and griseliche I grone, / With Lucifere, in a lake, thus lau am I lyte. / Thus lau am I lyte, take witnesse by me” (f. 4v; XIII.7-9). She instructs Guinevere that thirty masses must be said for her soul to secure her release from torment. After imparting a few moral warnings to Guinevere about the dangers of pride, the ghost disappears and the clouds lift. The tale then shifts back to the Arthurian court, where Galeron, a Scottish knight, challenges Arthur and his knights, claiming that his lands have been unjustly seized and granted to Gawain. Gawain agrees to fight on behalf of the court, and the ensuing battle, described in extensive detail, fails to produce a clear winner. As a result, Guinevere begs Arthur to order them to cease fighting, which

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39 This text is written in a relatively rare meter, made up of thirteen-line stanzas, of which the first nine alliterate (typically aa//ax or aa//aa) and rhyme a-b-a-b-a-b-a-b-a, followed by a four-line wheel rhyming c-c-c-a. For a detailed discussion, see Hanna, “Introduction” 11-17.

40 This motif of the ghost of one’s mother returning and requesting a trental of masses in order to release her soul from suffering is likely derived from *The Trental of St Gregory*, which circulated widely in both Latin and Middle English. For more on these connections, see Klausner 309-17.
he does. Striking a compromise by ennobling Galeron (making him a duke) and granting him the disputed lands, Arthur simultaneously recompenses Gawain by granting him “Glawmorgan londus, with greuys fulle grene; / The wurship of Wales, to weld and thou wold, / Kirfre Castelle with colurs ful clene” (f. 15r; LII.2-4).

Criticism of this poem has tended to center around two main questions: what is the poem’s moral message, and what is the poem’s structure? The focus on the moral register of the text makes sense, of course, given that the ghost of Guinevere’s mother delivers very pointed critiques of the Arthurian court, critiques upon which the rest of the poem can be seen as a gloss. Recently, though, Christine Chism has argued that the text is critical of the aristocracy’s self-indulgent rituals surrounding death: “The failure of Arthur’s court to learn from its dead darkens the poem’s picture of a doomed aristocracy more invested in their possessions and self-inflating performances than in the justice they are entrusted to serve” (252). Chism’s attention to the text’s critique of aristocratic practice—since her reading focuses on the relationship to the upper echelons of late medieval England in general and less on the specific figure of the king—offers the clearest insight into how this romance resonates within the context of the Ireland MS. In this context, The Awntyrs stands as the first in a series of three texts that progressively reveal a more confident and celebratory attitude towards aristocratic possession, an attitude that is specifically encapsulated in the discourse of largesse. And although The Awntyrs deals the least specifically with liberal giving, it initiates this series of texts by posing troubling questions about the justification for—and even the moral rectitude of—the landowning class’s means of acquiring and holding their lands.

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41 Galeron describes himself as “The grattus of Galway, of greuys and of gillus; / Of Carrake, of Cummake, of Conyngame, of Kile, / Of Lonwik, of Lannax, of Laudoune hillus” (f. 10r; XXXIII.2-4), which place names Robson, “Introduction” xv-xvi identifies with southwestern Scotland.

42 For the former, see Klausner; Hanna, “The Awntyrs”; Speirs 252-62; Moll 125-40; Fichte; and Matthews 152-63. For the latter, see Spearing, “Central and Misplaced” and “The Awntyrs”; and Phillips. For a psychoanalytic and postcolonial critique of the poem, see Ingham 180-91, who locates The Awntyrs within the discourse of sovereignty, claiming that “both episodes [i.e. the episode with Guinevere’s mother and the episode with Galeron and Gawain] explore the significance of land to sovereignty, and examine the pleasures and pains of the sovereign’s territorial ambitions” (180).
One of the more remarkable achievements of this text is the tough questions it poses and the simultaneous lack of answers it seems to provide, which works towards what I term a paratactic effect. In particular, The Awntyrs asks several penetrating moral questions about aristocratic economic practices and then proceeds to detail situations that would seem to offer test cases for those questions, moments with the potential to resolve those very questions. Nevertheless, this text steadfastly refuses to acknowledge any correlation between the critiques and potential test, with the result that the moral critiques remain insulated from the action of the narrative. Specifically, this text raises questions about the aristocracy’s displays of wealth and about the justification for its possession of land. The ghost of Guinevere’s mother is the one who raises these critiques, and as we subsequently meet the Arthurian court, we see embodied the very things against which she had spoken. However, neither the court as a corporate body, nor Guinevere or Gawain (the two characters who were with the ghost in the woods and who thus heard her moral warnings) evince any sort of awareness of a moral disconnect between those warnings and the court’s social practices.

The existence of this parataxis requires that both episodes of this text be treated together, an assumption that has been challenged by some critics. Ralph Hanna, reviving a theory advanced in Hermann Lübke’s 1883 dissertation, claims that The Awntyrs was originally two disparate texts that were subsequently compiled together and that consequently we should read this as two distinct narratives.43 In fact his edition of The Awntyrs prints the text in two sections, labeled “Awntyrs A” and “Awntyrs B.”44 Even if Hanna is correct, such a finding applies only to a discussion of the putative author of The Awntyrs, and not to the text as it was read by the Irelands. In fact, given the MS’s...

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44 If Hanna is a “splitter,” then Spearing is a “lumper,” as he argues for an aesthetic unity to the romance. In addition, it should be noted that Helen Phillips, based on an examination of the extant manuscripts of The Awntyrs, argues quite convincingly that Hanna’s theory is misguided. Hanna contends that the first half of the poem (and what is now the final stanza, which he claims was originally part of the first half) is formally different from the second half. Hanna notes that the first half consistently uses iteration between lines 8 and 9, and the second half uses this device with much less frequency. However, as Phillips 64-71 shows, if you allow any of lines 6, 7 or 8 to iterate with line 9, the apparent differences between the two
division into three fittes, there is no indication that its compiler ever envisioned this as anything but a single text. And a single text is most certainly what the Irelands read.

At the opening of the second fitte, Gawain takes advantage of the opportunity to ask the ghost of Guinevere’s mother a very pointed question, a question never answered in this text:

“How schalle we fare,” quod Gauan, “that foundus to these fiȝtus,
And defoules these folk, in fele kyngus londus;
Riche remus orerennus, agaynes the ryȝtus,
Wynnes wurschip, and wele, throghe wyȝtenes of hondus?” (f. 6v; XXI.1-4)

Gawain here exhibits a surprising degree of chivalric introspection. The first three lines of this passage ask troubling moral questions about the rectitude of the Arthurian empire. He illustrates his reservations about his sovereign’s conquests in his use of the clearly pejorative terms “defoules,” “orerennus,” and “agaynes the ryȝtus.” But the final line frames these questions in a different sense, using the positive terms of chivalry ironically to question the entire system. After all, Arthurian knights were expected to win “wurschip” and “wele” using the “wyȝtenes of hondus.” But here, what is usually valued positively is placed paratactically next to a clear moral condemnation, a subtle rhetorical move that hangs a question mark over the entire notion of the possession of land being enforced by militaristic power. This is all the more challenging coming as it does from Gawain, the greatest knight of the insular Arthurian tradition.45

45 cf. Phillips, who contends that we should not overemphasize the moral condemnation implicit in the ghost’s warning to Gawain: “If we see the ghost’s conversation with Gawain too readily as a continuation of the message to Guinevere about sin and salvation, then its most prominent themes will indeed seem to be sin and morality; it will seem part of a condemnation running all through A [i.e. the first half of The Awntyrs] of the aristocratic way of life: of luxury, courtly love and now—apparently—chivalry itself. If, however, we look at it in the context of what follows then its predominant themes are mutability, kingly power and territorial lordship. Of course, both perspectives are valid, but the indictment of territorial conquests as ‘covetous’ forms only a small part of the stanzas concerned” (74-75). Phillips’s comments are important to keep in mind, and certainly the text can be read in light of the larger concerns of Arthurian history. But given the two texts which follow The Awntyrs in the Ireland MS (discussed below) and their attention to issues more specifically located in the social practices of the late medieval aristocracy, and given the ways in which these three texts seem to have been edited into a consistent anthology (discussed
The ghost’s answer to Gawain offers no solace, but instead provides a gloomy prediction of the downfall of the kingdom. But then she leaves and the weather lifts, and within a matter of ten lines the entire Arthurian assembly has gathered for a great feast, one whose opulence is noted by the poet: the princes among the company were “pruddust in halle,” and the retinue sat “Vndur a seler of sylke, with dayntethis diȝte; / With alle welthis to wille, and wynus to wale, / Briddes bacun in bred, on brent gold bryȝte” (f. 8r; XXVI.10, XXVII.2-4). Such opulence in feasting is common to chivalric romances, marked as they almost unanimously are by a celebration of the life of the court. But given the speed with which the text moves on from the ghost, who had deliberated about overweening pride and the dangers inherent to chivalry for sixteen stanzas with Gawain and Guinevere, to the feast, it is hard not to read such luxurious extravagance as a commentary upon the court’s moral failure.

Immediately, though, the scene shifts again, as Galeron enters the feast, demanding that Arthur undo the wrongs he has committed. Whereas the first abrupt shift in the narrative—from the ghost to the feasting—emphasized the contrast between the ghost’s moral message and the court’s seeming lack of attention to the issues she raised, the second shift draws the audience’s attention directly to Gawain’s earlier question, “How schalle we fare […] that foundus to these fiȝtus.” Here, Galeron challenges the court, claiming Arthur has wrongly seized his lands. His claims echo the very doubts about the chivalric system that Gawain had expressed to the ghost:

That thou hase wonun on were with thy wrang wiles,  
Gifhen hom to Syr Gauan, that my hert grillus;  
3ette schalle thou wring thi hon dus, and wary thè quil es,  
Or any we schild hom weld, atte my unnewilles;  
Atte my unnewilles, I-wis, he schalle hom neuyr weld. (f. 10r; XXXIII.5-9)46

above), the issue of the aristocratic life in general is more to the fore in this particular collection than the concerns of Arthurian history.

46 The sense of these lines is obscure, but is clarified by reference to the reading from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 324 (from Ralph Hanna’s edition):

Thou has wonen hem in were with a wrange wile  
And geuen hem to Sir Gawayn—þat my hert grylles.  
But he shal wring his honde and wary þe wyle,
Galeron’s claim is comprised of the same essential question as Gawain had posed: how can one justify seizing lands from another based on nothing more than the exertion of superior martial prowess? But Galeron’s claims do not represent some abstract concern about proprietary rights, but, rather, contain a critique aimed directly at Gawain. This makes his claims all the more pressing, given that Gawain was the one with the moral hesitation in the first place. Furthermore, Galeron’s previous claim, when he first introduces himself to Arthur, echoes Gawain’s words. He says to Arthur, “For festing thus am I fraest and foundut fro home” (f. 9v; XXXII.9), which bears an uncanny resemblance to Gawain’s previous question of “How schalle we fare […] that foundus to these fiþus” (XXI.1). These similarities are such that we can see, once again, that the text is working by parataxis; that is, morally problematic questions are posed initially and are followed by scenarios that embody the problems underlying the very questions that were asked, without any apparent acknowledgement of a contradiction by the characters involved.

Of course Galeron did not come to Arthur’s court to offer some revolutionary challenge to the notion that might makes right. Rather, Galeron chooses the standard romance method for solving this land dispute: “were / Opon a Fayre Fylde” (f. 10r; XXXIII.12-13). And so, once again, the specter of a moral challenge is raised and then forgotten about. But the battle itself does not follow the standard pattern wherein the true winner is revealed on the battlefield. Here, the fight between Galeron and Gawain rages for ten whole stanzas, as “on fote con thai feste, opon the Fayre Fildus, / As fresch as ij lions, that fawtutte the fille” (f. 13r; XLV.1-2), but they do not reach any definitive resolution. Gawain appears to be on the verge of victory, having grasped Galeron by the collar. But then Guinevere intercedes, begging Arthur to call an end to the battle, as, simultaneously, Galeron agrees to give up his claim to Gawain’s lands (f. 14r-v; XLVIII.7-L.6).

Er he weld hem, ywis, agayn myn vnwylles. (421-24)

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David Klausner has argued that this lack of resolution effects a pleasing compromise to the poet’s dilemma. As Klausner sees it, Galeron’s claims are justified, yet at the same time any audience would clearly expect Gawain, the great Arthurian hero, to win such a duel: “The drawn-out battle and the nearly equal outcome are his only obvious solution” (323). Though I agree with Klausner’s contention that the outcome of their battles is oddly indecisive, I cannot agree with the notion that “the author has clearly shown that Galleroune is in the right,” as Klausner would have it (323). Instead, by the text’s recourse to its paratactic method, Galeron’s claims, by their repetition of Gawain’s, are shown to be just another in an endlessly repeatable series. The “nearly equal outcome” coincides with the text’s refusal to answer the difficult ethical questions it poses.

Arthur’s proposed solution to the dilemma points further to the court’s insulation from the ghost’s ethical challenges. He creates both Gawain and Galeron dukes, enfeoffing to Galeron the lands in question and compensating Gawain by giving him

Glarmorgan londus, with greuys fulle grene;
The wurschip of Wales, to weld and thou wold,
Kirfre Castelle with colurs ful clene;
Iche Hulkersheme, to haue and to hold,
Wayifforthe and Waturforthe, wallet, I wene;
Two baroners in Bretan, with burgesse fulle bold,
That is batelt aboute, and biggutte fulle bene. (f. 15r; LII.2-8)

This specific attention to geographical detail throws into relief the very questions that have gone unanswered, for this is no mere abstract kingdom which Gawain has been given, but rather a specific set of lands in Glamorganshire and Brittany.47 Such attention to geographical specificity gives one pause, for Arthur’s actions here raise the question of whether such a grant of lands to Gawain will bring yet another knight to the court seeking justice, whether another Galeron—this time hailing from “Glarmorgan londus” or “Wayifforthe”—will feel wronged by Arthur, which suggests “that Arthur’s court will witness this same tournament battle over and over again” (Ingham 186). The just
ownership of land, at least in the context of the Arthurian court, is shown to have no transcendent basis, to be only as strong as the arm of the man who can defend it or as frivolous as the whim of the monarch. Such a state of affairs had provided the substance of Gawain’s original hesitation about Arthurian chivalry in the first place. But Gawain, operating under what can only be termed a severe case of cognitive dissonance, accepts his new title and lands, becoming “gode frindes” with Galeron, and silently drops out of the text before Guinevere’s final act of ensuring masses for her mother (LIV.9).

The moral lessons of Guinevere’s mother are not forgotten about in the end, for the very last stanza abruptly shifts the audience’s focus back to Guinevere’s promise to have masses said for her soul. And so, after the feast to celebrate the peaceful resolution to Gawain and Galeron’s dispute, and Galeron’s new marriage, the audience is given this sudden transition: “Thenne gerut Dame Waynour to write into the west, / To alle the religeus, to rede and to sing” (f. 15v; LV.1-2), ensuring that the proper religious services are carried out to save her mother’s soul. Nowhere in this text is the court’s insulation from the moral critiques of the ghost more apparent, for this final stanza follows immediately upon the conclusion of the land duel. Christine Chism nicely summarizes the moral critique latent in the conclusion: “At the poem’s end, Gaynour limits herself to this institutional solution but takes it to flamboyant extremes. She impresses an army of priests and bishops into commemorative service by organizing a million-mass-march into the west, dramatizing her daughterly piety with a desperation that only underscores her neglect of the ghost’s repeated call for charity” (254). Given the lack of resolution to Gawain’s hesitations about chivalry, and given Arthur’s repetition of the very thing against which Gawain had objected, such a moment can certainly be read as an ironic statement about the court’s ignorance of its failures, as once again past behavior is repeated without any sort of reflection on how past events should shape the present.

The effect of this parataxis is quite poignant, for The Awntyrs asks some frank and penetrating questions about aristocratic social practice, questions not found

47 None of the editors of this text (Gates, Hanna, Robson) has identified “Kirfre Castelle,” “Hulkershome,” “Wayifforthe” or “Waturforthe.”
elsewhere in the corpus of Middle English romance. It is certainly frustrating how the text evinces such an awareness of social criticism, but simultaneously exhibits a resolute determination not to answer such criticism, answers which seem inchoate within the text itself. This refusal, then, to draw what seems to be rather obvious connections forces

the reader into an indeterminate ethical position vis-à-vis the text: either *The Awntyrs* is aware of such moral dilemmas but intentionally leaves them unresolved, or it is oblivious to its own moral critique. Of course the text offers no firm guidance to resolve this question, and thus ethical indeterminacy becomes the final word. There are tough questions about the aristocracy, but no definite answers are forthcoming. For these reasons this text is, ideologically speaking, an unsettling one to begin a collection of romances compiled by an aristocratic family.

As I have here argued, *The Awntyrs* draws attention to two key factors comprising gentry and noble life in the later Middle Ages: the opulent display of wealth and the possession of land. These were both very much of the moment for the fifteenth-century gentry, and so the text’s adumbration of these issues is certainly significant in the context of this MS. Regarding the expectation of opulence, Christopher Dyer succinctly states that “Most aristocrats spent every penny they received, and often before it was received, on food, drink, servants, and display, rather than investing in buildings, equipment, and other capital assets” (157). But at the moment when the Irelands were having their manuscript compiled, the landowning class in England was in its worst economic position of the Middle Ages—in the face of its continued insistence on the display of wealth. Demand for land had begun to decline after the demographic changes of 1348, and it reached its nadir *ca.* 1450. As a result, incomes from land reached historic lows in the fifteenth century. It was a time when, at least among the masses of middling gentry, profligate families were dying out at an increasing rate. In the immediate region of the

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48 See also the comments of Christine Carpenter: “But the whole point of estate administration was not to plough back the profits for further growth in the modern sense, but in the medieval sense, of preserving a life-style consonant with one’s status, or augmenting that status by raising one’s standard of living, without getting seriously and permanently into the hands of creditors” (“The Fifteenth-Century” 50).
Ireland, this danger was compounded by the relative poverty of Lancashire. But by refusing to provide an answer to the questions it raises, and turning instead at the conclusion to Guinevere’s pursuit of “a meliun of massus, her modur mynnyng” (LV.4), this text offers a disquieting solace through the rituals of institutionalized religion, one that is a diversion from the economic problems raised in the text.

Similarly, regarding the challenging questions raised about the possession of land, the answer provided—wherein Arthur just gives one of the parties a different set of lands, essentially re-shuffling the same deck—is a diversion. Of course the importance of establishing the rights to one’s land would not have been lost on the Irelands, who fought against the Stanleys for the manor of Hale in the early fifteenth century (as discussed above, Section I). But The Awntyrs intimates that the right to one’s lands is not based on anything transcendent, but rather is dependent on subjective decisions; here, specifically, on the whim of a monarch whose past gifts resulted in injustice, and whose latest gift of land seems fated to bring further conflict. Such caprice cannot, though, be remedied by the application of martial prowess (which here fails to produce a decisive victor). One is, then, forced to accept that the right to land—the most important component of aristocratic socio-economic identity in late medieval England—is as capricious as Arthur’s will seems to be.

This text’s insistence on raising pointed ethical challenges while subsequently creating scenarios in which the lessons of those challenges merit application, all the while steadfastly refusing to connect the two, marks this text as a troubling one to form the opening piece of a romance anthology for the Ireland family. The seeming aristocratic crisis this text embodies, however, is remedied in the subsequent two texts of this MS, both of which seize upon the haunting questions posed by The Awntyrs and offer much less vexed solutions. For Sir Amadace, to a certain degree, and much more fully and confidently for The Avowing of Arthur, the solution to the dilemmas of an aristocratic life

\[49\] Unfortunately, there is not enough surviving documentation to assess the specific fortunes of the Ireland family. For a general discussion of the declining power of landlords in the fifteenth century, see Keen, English Society 48-76; Dyer Age of Transition 7-45; and Jacob 370-77.
lies in a fuller exploitation of the prerogatives of that life. The answer, that is, is simple: keep on giving.

4.5: Sir Amadace

This romance, on the level of both form and content, is much simpler and more straightforward than The Awntyrs. It is written in the standard twelve-line tail-rhyme stanza that is so common among fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English romances. This narrative begins as the eponymous knight finds that his income from his property is no longer sufficient and, ashamed of his lack of means, leaves his court. As he travels out, he comes upon a dead merchant who, because of a debt owed to another merchant, cannot be buried. In a supreme act of Christian charity, Amadace offers the remainder of his money to pay off the deceased merchant’s debts and to finance his burial. Now in the woods, alone and destitute, he meets a White Knight who promises to sponsor him in an upcoming tournament, provided Amadace divide half of his winnings with the Knight, to which Amadace agrees. In the tournament, Amadace wins the hand of the local king’s daughter, as well as numerous lands. Wealthy once again, he retires to provincial landowning life and has a son with his new wife. Suddenly, though, the White Knight returns, ready to claim his half of the winnings; only, in a cruelly literalistic interpretation of their contract, the White Knight desires half of Amadace’s wife and son. Amadace hesitates but finally agrees, and the White Knight only stops Amadace seconds before he is to cut his wife in half. The White Knight then reveals that he is the ghost of the merchant whom Amadace buried, delivers some parting homiletic advice on keeping one’s word and trusting in God, then departs. The story ends on a typical note, wherein
Amadace, on the death of his father-in-law, becomes a king in his own right, and he and his family live for many years in happiness.

Sir Amadace ultimately affirms an aristocratic economic model, but to arrive at its final affirmation, it allows such an economy to undergo a test from a model that is explicitly “other.” Thus it stands as a fitting bridge between the dubious adumbration of aristocratic social practice seen in The Awntyrs and the more confident version to be seen in The Avowing; that is, Amadace, while affirming the aristocratic life, recognizes that such a life does not exist as a vacuum, that there are alternative socio-economic models. One of its most striking methods of achieving this end can be seen in its employment of a merchant as a major character, something anomalous within the tradition of Middle English romance. Certainly members of the urban bourgeoisie figure as major characters in several romances, but what makes Amadace unique is that its merchant, in his resurrected form as the White Knight, is the one to teach Amadace the lesson about the proper attitude one should have towards possessions. The notion that a merchant has anything to teach a knight about the proper economic attitudes is, at the very least, counterintuitive within the romance ethic. Aron Gurevich summarizes the distinction between the two classes as follows:

[Among the aristocracy,] the frank and ostentatious possession of wealth and expenditures for public display were considered virtues. Spending money with no thought to actual income was taken as a sign of nobility and generosity. The merchant, on the contrary, could not be anything but parsimonious and economical; he had to accumulate his money and spend his resources wisely if he hoped to make a profit. (252)

But this text effects the inverse scenario, one in which the revenant, a merchant, tests the aristocrat’s understanding of the need to spend “money with no thought to actual income.”

The text initially effects a fraternity between Amadace and this merchant. Ad Putter has noted that both characters enjoyed the same yearly income of £300.\(^5\) It does

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\(^5\) It should be noted that Putter’s point only applies if one reads the version of Sir Amadace in the Ireland MS. In Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1, the merchant is said to have
not, though, announce this commonality; rather, each of their incomes is revealed at separate moments in the text, and it is up to the astute reader/listener to make the connection. First, the dead merchant’s wife comments to Amadace that her husband had enjoyed “euiyche zere thre hyndrythe pownde, / Of redy monay and of rowunde” (f. 19v; XII.10-11), while over 250 lines later Amadace thinks to himself, “For I hade thre hundrythe pownde of rente, / I spendut two in that entente. / Of suche forloke was I” (f. 25r; XXXIV.4-6). Furthermore, Amadace explicitly notes an affiliation between himself and the merchant when he comments that “zondur mon, that lise zondur chapelle withinne, / He myste fulle wele be of my kynne, / For ryste so haue I wroste” (f. 21r; XVIII.4-6). Such an affinity leads Ad Putter to write that “Amadace is, as far as I am aware, the only chivalric romance to suggest that a merchant and a knight might be kindred spirits” (376), and he further remarks upon “the irreducible double-sidedness of their relationship” (374).

The economic behavior of Amadace and the merchant in the first half of this text is also depicted in similar terms. In response to Amadace’s question, “Quat a mon in his lyue wasse he?” (XII.7), the merchant’s wife answers:

Sir, a marchand of this citè
Hade riche rentus to rere;
And euiyche zere thre hundrythe pownde
Of redy monay and of rowunde. (f. 19v; XII.8-11)

There is a noteworthy synthesis of two economic systems here, as the merchant is shown to derive his income from “rentus,” which is simultaneously expressed in terms of physical currency, symbolic markers of the landed class and of urban commerce, respectively.51 Amadace also finds himself with one foot in each world, as it were. From

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51 According to The Middle English Dictionary, “rent(e)” (n.1a) denoted “revenue from property, income,” suggesting that the wife’s use of the term here could refer to this man’s ownership of land, or it could simply refer to his income from more traditionally “mercantile” sources. The connection between the term “rents” and income from land is, though, more widely attested. Of course, many real merchants in the later Middle Ages owned property and took titles, and thus the lines were often blurred, but the point being...
the beginning of the text, we learn that he derived his income from his landed property, income which has dried up. As his Steward relates, “Sir, 3e awe wele more / Thenne 3e may of 3our londus rere” (f. 17r; I.4-5). Common liberal attitudes to wealth also governed the behavior of this merchant and Amadace (before his impoverishment). The merchant’s wife relates the behavior that got him into debt:

Riche festus wold he make,  
And pore men, for Goddus sake,  
He fed hom euyriche day. […]  
He cladde mo men a-gaynus a 3ole  
Thenne did a nobulle knyȝte;  
For his mete he wold not spare,  
Burdes in the halle were neuyr bare,  
With clothes richeli diȝte. (f. 20r; XIII.7-9, XIV.1-5)

His behavior as described here resembles the general expectation of the aristocracy: feasting, feeding the poor, Christmas celebrations, expensive clothing.

Such an affinity is not productive of harmony in this text, but rather embodies a frightening economic situation for Amadace. He has found himself, after all, enmeshed in a world of commodity exchange, a world foreign to the traditional ethos of chivalric literature. *Sir Amadace* works—as do most defenses of class practice—by stereotypes, by painting with overly broad strokes. Specifically, in each half, the text delineates a distinct economic model, the first based on explicit calculation of wealth, and the second on more properly aristocratic attitudes to wealth, wherein one feigns independence from the need to count possessions. In the first half, this text displays an anxiety on the part of both the titular hero and the wife of the dead merchant over achieving an exact tabulation of their resources, an impulse contrary to the tenets of *largesse*. As Amadace initially ventures out in a state of poverty, we learn of the exact amount remaining to him: “He lafte no more in his cofurs to spende, / But euyn xl. powunde” (f. 18r; V.11-12). But this is no arbitrary figure, for £40 was the income level at which, by the later Middle Ages, made here is that this merchant is acting the part of a member of the landed class, and thus the wife’s reference to “rentus” refers to the merchant’s possession of land.

52 Unfortunately, both surviving versions of this poem are acephalous, and thus we do not have any detail about exactly what precipitated Amadace’s economic crisis.
distraint for knighthood was set. If one was found to be in possession of lands worth this level or more, one was in theory obliged to accept knighthood. But as we have seen, Amadace’s income was actually a good deal greater than £40. The amount with which Amadace sets out, then, is not his regular income from his lands, but rather his last bit of money, suggesting that he is on the precipice of losing his aristocratic status. Thus, more than an actual sum, this figure stands as a synecdoche for an upper-class social identity, making Amadace’s subsequent expenses, each of which is meticulously calculated to show his £40 dwindling away, all the more productive of social anxiety.

First, once he has decided to pay off the dead merchant’s debts, he says to his steward, “Go foche me thritti powunde, / Of redy monay and of rowunde, / Hastely and be-lyue” (f. 22v; XXIII.4-6), leaving him with but £10. The Steward’s thought that such an action “was agaynus skille” (f. 22v; XXIII.7) makes sense from a pragmatic point of view, of course. Then Amadace realizes that he must also pay for the dead merchant’s burial, as he declares, “As furthe as x. pounde wille take, / I schalle lette do for his sake, / Querthrose he haue his riste” (f. 22v; XXIV.4-6). Now, with the last remnant of his £40 gone, Amadace releases his steward, his “sometour” and his “palfray-mon,” the last ties to his former social status, and, in a prayer to Christ, repudiates his former lifestyle:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thou lette me neuyr come in that syȝte,} \\
\text{Ther I haue bene knauen for a knyȝte,} \\
\text{Butte if I may avoue hit thanne;} \\
\text{And gif me grace to somun alle tho,} \\
\text{That wilsenly ar wente me fro,} \\
\text{And alle that me gode ons hase done. (f. 25r; XXXV.4-9)}
\end{align*}
\]

At this moment, the dissolution of aristocratic identity is complete. The words of Aristotle are again salutary in relationship to Amadace’s new economic situation: “The Magnificent man will incur such expenses from the motive of honour, this being common to all the virtues, and besides he will do it with pleasure and lavishly; excessive accuracy in calculation being Mean” (86). Rather than envisioning Amadace as forming some kind of cross-class brotherhood (à la Putter), or somehow embracing non-aristocratic

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economics, it seems more plausible to see his downward descent as incarnating aristocratic anxieties, as Amadace being forced into a world that is less than desirable.

However, this is only the story of the first half of the romance. In the second half, having fully played out the hero’s economic crisis, the text moves to re-instate aristocratic economics. Once Amadace has repudiated his former lifestyle, and all of his £40 is gone, he enters the woods, where he meets the mysterious White Knight. The location of this episode is significant, the forest being the *locus classicus* for the initiation of *aventure* in romance. Even the other two romances in the Ireland MS contain this narrative element, with Guinevere and Gawain’s encounter with the ghost in *The Awntyrs*, and Gawain, Kay and Arthur chasing a boar through the woods in *The Avowing of Arthur*. The first half of this text, by contrast, had been hyper-realistic, seen most notably in Amadace’s awareness of the foul-smelling corpse and the focus on calculating wealth. Here, then, we come to a moment of transition, away from the more realistic world into the more traditional romance setting of the woods.

Such a shift in setting is not free of class associations, for from this moment calculation is written out of the text and is replaced by Amadace’s accumulation of vast—and *uncountable*—sums. After striking his deal with the White Knight, Amadace miraculously happens upon a shipwreck that will provide him with sufficient wealth to enter the upcoming tournament:

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He fond wreken a-mung the stones,
Knynes in meneuere for the nones,
Stedes quite, and gray.
With *all kynne maner* of richas,
That any mon mynte deuise,
Castun vppe with waturz lay;
Kistes and cofurs bothe ther stode,
Was *fulle of gold* precius and gode,
No man bare nozte a-way. (f. 27v; XLIV.4-12; emphasis mine)
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Almost instantaneously, the world of calculation has been replaced. Instead of merchants and coins we now find battle horses and well-dressed knights. But more importantly, we find a new system of counting, one which cannot be expressed in the figures of a
merchant’s account book. (Of course, we know from the number of surviving manorial accounts that the landed class also kept meticulous balance sheets of income and expenditures, but once again such actual historical practices lie outside of the binaries this text creates.) Here, Amadace happens upon “all kynne maner of richas,” and chests “fulle of gold.” This wealth exceeds one’s ability to count—it is the stuff that can be given liberally, without thought to incoming and outgoing expenses.

We see a similar description of Amadace’s winnings from the tournament. The fact that Amadace is now participating in a tournament, a social ritual in theory limited to the class of those knighted (and thus excluding the likes of merchants), goes a long way towards the recuperation of his upper-class social identity:

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Ther he wanne so myculle honoure,
Fild and frithe, towne and toure,
Castelle and riche citè;
A hundrithe stedis he wan and moe,
And gaue the king the tone halue of thoe,
Butte ther othir til his felo keput he. (f. 29r-v; LI.7-12)
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Again, we find ourselves in a non-arithmetic world, wherein Amadace wins “A hundrithe stedis […] and more,” indicative of a symbolic mathematics, an amount surpassing tabulation. This is all the more striking given that Amadace is now winning horses, a definitive marker of aristocratic identity. Before, he had been careful to tabulate the number of coins left in his purse, but now the number of “stedis” he has won eludes his ability to count.54

But we know that Amadace has not achieved a perfected aristocratic posture towards wealth, for he still has to undergo a test of his understanding of aristocratic economics, which comes at the text’s climax. Returning to claim his half of Amadace’s winnings, the White Knight dismisses Amadace’s offer of half of his lands:

54 In a stanza that is missing from the Ireland MS, but one which all three editors of *Sir Amadace* that use the Ireland MS as a base text (Robson, Brookhouse and Foster) supply from the Advocates MS, we see a further example of the contrast to the money exchange system from the first half of the text: at Amadace’s wedding feast, “Ther was gold gyffon in that stonde, / And plenty of sylver, many a ponde” (LIV.6-7; emphasis mine). We are once again dealing with pounds, actual pieces of currency; only here, in stark
He sayd, “Broke wele thi londus brode,  
Thi castels hee, the townus made,  
Of hom kepe I riste none;  
Allso thi wuddus, thi waturs clere,  
Thi frithis, thi forestus, fer and nere,  
Thi ringus with riche stone,  
Allso thi siluyr, thi gold rede,  
For hit may stonde me in no stidde,  
I squere, bi Sayn John.”  (f. 31v; LXI.1-9)

The White Knight here provides a virtual catalogue of the possessions marking one as a late medieval aristocrat. This denial, in the manner of an *occupatio*, actually draws the reader’s/listener’s attention to that in which it claims to have no interest. In this list of possessions, we can see that Amadace has been fully re-integrated into the community of the upper echelons of his society.55 Combined with the narrator’s earlier admission that “Thus is Sir Amadace keuyrt of his wo” (f. 30r; LV.1), the audience is now assured that Amadace’s aristocratic status, though previously challenged by the limitations placed upon his ability to participate in the rituals of *largesse*, has been largely restored. But the White Knight is interested in claiming his half of Amadace’s wife and son, as he demands “be my faythe, with-outun stryue, / Half thi child, and halfe thi wyue, / And thay schalle with me gone” (f. 31v; LXI.10-12). The White Knight’s insistence on the literal interpretation of his contract with Amadace raises difficult ethical questions, ones similar to those raised by Arveragus’s insistence on Dorigen’s fidelity to her oath in Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale. Ad Putter sees this emphasis on literalism reflecting a larger theological concern of the entire text: the idea that, in a properly orthodox formulation, all possessions ultimately belong to God, and thus one should freely be willing to part with any possession:

55 Ad Putter usefully notes that this catalogue echoes the formulae used in medieval land grants, citing a grant from King Stephen to one John de Chesney: “Precipio quod idem Johannes […] et heredes sui teneant et habeant predictum manerium de me […] in bosco, in plano, in pratis et pasturis, acquis et mariscis, in molendinis et stangis” (389 n.36).
Human gifts are always already gifts from God to man; the vertical economy between God and man encompasses all horizontal economies between people. By doing away with the notion of human possession, this outlook also instantly abolishes the distinctions between commodities and people who acquire them. Collapsed in that category of “goods on loan” is the whole of creation: objects, women, children, happiness, and life itself. […] “[G]od’s” are God’s gifts, and thus designate humans as well as objects. And as the category of goods extends, so must our understanding of what it means to be “fre” with them: generosity here involves the readiness to commute any gift from God into a counter-gift. (386-87, 391).56

There is some justification for seeing the predominance of the theological in Sir Amadace, for, as Phillipa Hardman notes, even compared with the other surviving version of this romance, the Ireland MS’s version presents a much more pious vision of the titular hero (“The Unity” 50). And there is certainly no shortage of theological formulae in this text. In this vein, Laura Hibbard is correct to see echoes of the story of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac in the manner in which the White Knight orchestrates the final scene: he orders Amadace to cut his wife and child in half, allowing Amadace to raise the sword into the air and only stopping him at the very last moment before the blade was to meet flesh (74).57

But giving the final word in an interpretation of this text to the theological misses the class issues to which it gestures throughout, for beyond (or in addition to) the theological subtext, it is also possible to view the final testing of Amadace as a reductio ad absurdum of the practice of largesse. For Amadace is, as we have seen, faithful to his contract from the very beginning: when he won the tournament, he gave half of his winnings to the king and kept the other half for “his felo” (i.e. the White Knight). The final scene, though, tests whether Amadace will fully honor the contract into which he

56 See also the comments of Christopher Brookhouse, who similarly foregrounds the theological explanations for the economic attitudes espoused in this text: “Both The Avowing and Sir Amadace are didactic poems, each in a different way. […] Amadace emphasizes cautious generosity, Christian duty, and divine benevolence. These themes may be directly mentioned at times, but are more intermingled with the whole progress of one man’s poverty, which is one story” (30).

57 cf. Phelan 73, who suggests the wisdom of Solomon as an analogue for Amadace’s preference that the White Knight take his wife and child rather than divide them in half.
has entered by submitting his human possessions (i.e. wife and child) to the aristocratic economy. In order to fulfill his contract with the White Knight, he must demonstrate an indifference to his wife and child equal to that which he has demonstrated towards all of his possessions. We know that, in theory, he regards his wife as another possession, for when the White Knight first asks that Amadace kill his wife, he responds with regret “That euyr I this woman wan, / Or any wordes gode” (f. 31v; LXII.2-3), establishing an equivalence between the two. And when Amadace begrudgingly agrees to sacrifice his wife—after she, in the fasion of Arveragus, urges him to keep his word—the test is called off, suggesting he has demonstrated successfully that his magnanimity extends to everything he owns, including his wife.

Given the clash of aristocratic and mercantile economic models detailed in the first half of this text, and the subsequent erasure of the mercantile in the second half, it makes sense to locate this final scene within the same discourse. For if Sir Amadace were primarily invested in the discourse of lay piety, one would expect to see some sort of moral development in the person of the protagonist, the pattern which Andrea Hopkins traces in the so-called “Penitential Romances” (e.g., Guy of Warwick, Sir Gawther, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Isumbras), each of whose main characters subjects himself to the process of penance, at the conclusion of which he is a better and more holy knight.58 But such a trajectory is not operative in this narrative:

The narrative structure is not at all driven by the central figure’s self-improving work or shrewdness of calculation. On the contrary, all Amadace must do is to manifest what he already is at the beginning (i.e. noble) in order to ensure his return to noble status. The narrative is driven, that is, by what it always and already knows, and so is not concerned with personal “development” so much as with class display: Amadace must simply demonstrate his innate nobility for the narrative to return to its noble beginnings. (Simpson, Reform 267)

58 Hopkins, Sinful Knights. See also Mehl, who categorizes Sir Amadace as a “homiletic romance” (121), and Harkins, who comments that “The poet of Sir Amadace avoids the dull mustiness of a purely didactic tale by fusing elements from various sources and transforming the original narratives to delight and teach” (70).
This absence of “personal ‘development’ ” can be seen from the start of this text, wherein Amadace’s last act before leaving the court under the shame of poverty is to engage in one last round of gift giving (ff. 17v-18r; IV.1-V.12). Shortly thereafter, without hesitation he gives the last of his money to bury the merchant. And by the end of the text, when he offers his half of the wealth to the White Knight and eventually even offers half of his wife, he is operating under the same broad social precepts of largesse that have been governing his behavior consistently throughout the narrative.

In the figure of Sir Amadace at the conclusion of this romance, finally enthroned as king and having to his name an impressive catalogue of riches, we see one whose narrative trajectory particularly embodies the collective class aspirations and fears of the late medieval gentry. He had been forced into an Other economic realm, one that offered challenge to the aristocracy’s posturing about their social elevation due to participation in the rituals of largesse. But Amadace managed to negotiate the commodity world and, even though forced to participate in it, was always able to maintain his outsider status, was always able to keep enough of his class identity intact so as not to be adulterated by mercantile values. In the final analysis, then, this text does not merely celebrate a largesse culture to the exclusion of all else. Instead, by Amadace’s ventures into the world outside the confines of the landowning class, we can perceive, at the very least, the awareness that there are alternative economic models to those typically espoused by romances. Perhaps this is why Sir Amadace has been labeled “bourgeois.”59 But, as I have shown here, such a label is ultimately misleading, for this text is finally about celebrating the hero’s return to the comforting environs of the manor house or castle. As James Simpson comments:

The circular pattern of romances does indeed return to beginnings, and so appears to be conservative in its attempt to close out history and change

59 See Hardman, “The Unity” 59-60. Edward Foster locates this romance even further down the social ladder when he avers that “The romance is not even bourgeois; it often seems the most lower class of romances, celebrating money and its associated power from a vantage point near the bottom of the social scale. It is popular not aristocratic; indeed, it seems a view of the world, or the world of romance, from the perspective of the underclasses who might mistake the bourgeois for the noble” (406).
from the romance world. But, as we have seen, the movement to home base will always have encountered and recognized all that is other to value and order as defined by that ending. The return implies a conservatism; the provisional encounter with the other implies a reformist conservatism. (Reform 274-75)

But this note brings us to the very element of the narrative which makes the final text in this collection, The Avowing of Arthur, unique. This text, like Sir Amadace, celebrates the aristocratic values of its characters. But unlike Amadace, The Avowing goes to great lengths to maintain the fiction that there is no Other, that chivalric economics is entirely self-sustaining.

4.6: The Avowing of Arthur

The final romance in the Ireland MS is different from the two preceding texts in both its form and its relationship to aristocratic economic attitudes. With regards to the former, it is written in sixteen-line standard tail-rhyme stanzas. With regards to the latter, its unabashed celebration of the noble life should be noted. It begins with rather standard romance matière, as Arthur is regaling his knights at Carlisle when a hunter approaches, warning them of a boar that is terrorizing the nearby forest. Arthur and three knights pursue the boar, which Arthur vows to kill, and he then asks each knight to make a vow of his own. Gawain pledges to stand watch in the forest all night, while Kay vows to defend the forest. Baldwin, however, vows something different in kind, actually making three vows: never to be jealous of his wife, never to deny food to one who asks, and never to fear his own death. Arthur defeats the boar, Gawain successfully stands watch, and Kay (with the help of Gawain) stops Menealfe, another knight, from raping a woman in the woods. After Arthur, Gawain and Kay fulfill their vows and are reunited at
Carlisle, Arthur decides to go to Baldwin’s castle in order to test his vows. While there, Arthur tests each of Baldwin’s vows and finds him to be wanting in nothing.

This text has been almost uniformly ignored by critics, but the few who have studied it in any detail have focused on the text’s structure, particularly the way in which it seems to divide into a diptych.60 David Johnson notes how the first half of this text forms a hyper-conventional romance narrative, contrasting sharply with the second half:

As I read it, the contrast produced by the juxtaposition of the two panels is characterised by an opposition of idealism versus realism; that is to say that the vows and adventures of Arthur, Kay and Gawain in the first panel are representative of a self-affirming, competitive and impractical kind of idealism, while the boundaries of the world delineated by Baldwin’s vows and explanatory anecdotes in the second panel represent a real-world, socially grounded system of values. (199)61

The first half of The Avowing provides a virtual check-list of the conventions of chivalric narratives: knights hunting in the woods, a wild boar, an evil knight attempting to rape an innocent maiden, the defeat of the would-be rapist by the Arthurian knights, and the integration of the would-be rapist into the Round Table. Although in the second half of this text Baldwin demonstrates his mastery of the domestic sphere, he is not to be construed as an effeminized knight lacking the chivalric virtue of prouesse, a virtue that is so prevalent in the first half. Instead, this text spends just a brief moment, in the first half, demonstrating Baldwin’s chivalric skills, only to move on to its greater concern, his domestic skills. In Chapter 1, we saw how Ipomadon was mocked by other knights when it was believed that he was choosing to hunt rather than fight in the tournament. But of course he actually was fighting in the tournament incognito, and thus when his identity was revealed, all of the knights were forced to reevaluate Ipomadon, as his reputation

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60 See Burrow, “The Avowing” and Johnson 191-203. For a detailed discussion of the folkloric and proverbial sources for The Avowing, see Greenlaw.
61 Both Burrow’s and Johnson’s readings focus on this text as a diptych, just as do many critics of The Awntyrs (for which see Section IV, above); however, it should be noted that, as with The Awntyrs, The Avowing is divided into three narrative units in the Ireland MS, not two. Though my argument is not heavily invested in the dynamics of the text’s structure, it is worth noting the contrast between the more traditional opening of this text and the more domestically oriented second half.
instantaneously changed from one wholly lacking in prowess to one with an abundance of it. But quite a different dynamic is at play in *The Avowing*, where, although Baldwin chooses not to participate in the court’s ritual vowing, he nevertheless, when forced, demonstrates that even in the arena of martial prowess he is superior to Arthur’s knights.

After the knights (save Baldwin) have returned to Carlisle, each of their vows having been fulfilled, Kay asks Arthur’s permission to lead a party in search of Baldwin. Arthur warns Kay of Baldwin’s martial abilities in very direct terms:

> Be warre, for he is wyȝste!
> For he is horsutte fulle wele,
> And clene clad in stele,
> Is none of ȝst but he mun fele,
> That he may on-lyȝste. (f. 47r; XXXVIII.8-12)

Once Kay and his five companion knights accost Baldwin in the woods, the latter has no trouble defeating them in combat, causing Kay later to remark to Arthur, “We ar alle schente. / Of Sir Baudewyn, ȝour knyȝte, / He is nobulle in the fīȝte” (f. 49r; XLIV.8-10). But although this victory for Baldwin is definitive, it is the only evidence of his martial abilities demonstrated in this tale. The text then moves on to Baldwin’s domestic sphere, which occupies the rest of the narrative, confident that Baldwin’s worth as a knight has been adequately demonstrated, but much more invested in the virtue of *largsse* than *prouesse*. The second half of the romance shifts its narrative register away from the traditionally chivalric towards what J.A. Burrow refers to as “popular fiction” (“The Avowing” 104). Since it is the second half of the story wherein Baldwin reveals his extremely liberal attitudes to possession, attitudes which Philippa Hardman claims “may be said to draw together the themes present in the whole [Ireland MS]” (“The Unity” 58), it is to this part of the romance that I now turn.

The second half of this narrative revolves around the chivalrically successful king testing Baldwin’s domestic vows, vows lying outside the economy of martial prowess. Baldwin’s non-participation in the Arthurian, chivalric system is highlighted by the sharp contrast between his actions and those of Arthur and his knights after they have all made their vows: while Arthur *et al.*, fully armed, go to their tasks, “Boudewyne turnes to
toune, / Sum that his gate lay; / And sethun to bed bownus he” (f. 37v; X.11-13). Going to bed marks an extreme—and humorous—form of non-participation in the public rituals of aristocratic display in which the other knights are engaging. But as we come to the second half of the text, wherein Baldwin’s domestic vows are tested by Arthur, we see that Baldwin is not here anticipating the part of Melville’s Bartleby, who refused to yield to the homogenizing demands of his clerical job by simply repeating the mantra “I would prefer not to.” Instead, although Baldwin seems to have opted out of the martial aspects of aristocratic culture, he exuberantly celebrates its domestic side.

In the testing of his vows, we see that Baldwin takes Aristotelian *magnanimitas* to its extreme. In his various vows, and in the folkloric parables he tells to explicate the proper aristocratic attitudes to possession for the benefit of the ignorant Arthurian entourage, Baldwin exhibits model upper-class indifference to wealth. He effects a fantastic posture vis-à-vis commodities, essentially denying any interest in hanging on to his possessions, while simultaneously demonstrating that such an attitude actually makes one wealthier. In other words, only by rejecting wealth does one become wealthy. In this way, Baldwin becomes the spokesman for *largesse*. I will address each of these vows in turn.

Arthur tests Baldwin’s first vow, “Neuyr to be jelus of my wife, / Ne of no birde bryzte” (f. 37r; IX.11-12), in what is certainly, to modern sensibilities, an appalling fashion. After ensuring that Baldwin will be absent for the night, Arthur orders a knight to strip naked and climb into bed with Baldwin’s wife. Waiting for Baldwin’s return, Arthur sits by the bedside playing chess. But once Baldwin comes home, he does not supply the reaction for which Arthur had hoped, instead merely reasoning that:

\[
\text{Hitte was atte hur awen wille,} \\
\text{Els thurt no mon comun her tille,} \\
\text{And gif I take hitte thenne to ille,} \\
\text{Much maugreue haue Y,} \\
\text{For mony wyntur to-gedur we haue bene,} \\
\text{And ðete ho dyd me neuyr no tene,} \\
\text{And iche syn schalle be sene,} \\
\text{And sette fulle sorely. (f. 53v; LVII.5-12)}
\]
No doubt the flippancy with which Baldwin reacts to what to all appearances was indisputable evidence of his wife’s infidelity is shocking, to say the least. But that, of course, is the point: Baldwin is so unconnected to his possessions that he has no need to fret about them and could freely dispense with any of them at any moment. In this sense, the echoes from *Sir Amadace* are important, for that text reminded its audience that everything, even one’s wife and child, is to be submitted to the aristocratic economic model. But Amadace had to be coaxed into the acceptance of this lesson by his own wife’s insistence; here, by contrast, it is clear that such an attitude is constitutive of Baldwin’s daily existence and requires no special urging. Insouciance towards all possessions is a reflexive response by Baldwin.

But merely passing this test is not enough for Baldwin, who uses the moment to instruct Arthur in the finer points of *noblesse oblige* by narrating three parables illustrative of each of his three vows. He first tells a story that somehow manages to objectify women even more than Amadace’s eventual decision to cut his wife in half. In this tale, while Baldwin was serving his king in Spain, his garrison had three female servants. Two of them became jealous of the third and killed her, and soon one of the surviving women killed the other, again out of jealousy. The court wants to execute this double-murderer, but Baldwin intervenes, after she promises that she will continue to service the men of the castle by day, “And hur body iche nyȝte, / In tille oure bed beed” (f. 55r; LXI.15-16). From this, Baldwin extracts an almost inscrutable moral:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And bi this tale I vndurstode,} \\
\text{Wemen that is of mylde mode,} \\
\text{And syne giffes hom to gode,} \\
\text{Meculle may ho mende;} \\
\text{And tho tha giffus hom to the ille,} \\
\text{And sithin thayre folis wille fulfille,} \\
\text{I telle ȝo wele, be propur skille,} \\
\text{No luffe wille in hom lenge.} \\
\end{align*}
\] (f. 55r-v; LXII.1-8)

J.A. Burrow surmises that “[The poet’s] point seems to be that women are free to be good or bad as they please, so men must take them as they find them. But the story illustrates
that truth only in a very peculiar way” (“The Avowing” 108). Baldwin’s point is so muddled that Burrow’s guess seems like a decent approximation, and, without recourse to comparison with other versions of this text, that may be all that one can hope for. But I would add one detail to Burrow’s suggestion: an indifference similar to that which Baldwin expressed towards his own wife underwrites his attitude to the final washerwoman of this narrative, for Baldwin will not cling to possession of either. This commodification of women is emphatically underscored by Baldwin’s decision to spare her life only after he is assured that she will continue to service the men of the castle. As long as the clothes are being laundered and the men’s sexual needs are being fulfilled, one woman is as good as three (and is as good as any number): here, women become no different from any other item in an aristocrat’s catalogue of possessions. Baldwin completes his summary of the moral of this first tale by repudiating future jealousy, which emphasizes his indifference to all the women of this narrative:

Forthi jelius schalle I neuer be,
For no siête that I see,
Ne no biurdes briête of ble,
Iche ertheli thinke hase ende. (f. 55v; LXII.13-16)

As with Amadace’s attitude to his wife, so here Baldwin establishes an equivalence between “biurdes” and “ertheli thinke[s],” abjuring, in proper Aristotelian fashion, any bond to all of them.

A similarly blithe disposition underwrites Baldwin’s third vow (never to fear his own death), which is actually the second one he explains to Arthur through a parable. Here he relates a story that occurred at the same castle in which the washerwomen had lived. As Baldwin and his men left the castle to fight some Saracens, one of their soldiers was overtaken by fear and hid in a barrel. All of the soldiers with Baldwin won the field that day and returned home “Sowunde with-outun hurting” (f. 56v; LXV.14); however, the barrel in which the soldier was hidden was struck by a cannonball and he was killed. This, of course, suggests the futility of fearing death. I would not want to put too fine a point on this particular lesson from Baldwin, as it seems to bear the least explicit
connection to the overarching economic themes developed in *Sir Amadace* and explored in fuller form here in *The Avowing*. It does, though, point yet again to the nonchalant attitude towards all possessions, including human life, which is to be cultivated by a proper member of the aristocracy.

In his final lesson to Arthur, Baldwin explains the significance of his second vow. It is worth noting that this third parable, the one which develops most pointedly the text’s economic ideal, actually explicates his second vow. Such an inversion suggests a primacy of place for this vow, as if its message is the capstone for this entire narrative. Here, Baldwin explains why he vowed never to “werne nomon my mete, / Quen I gode may gete” (f. 37v; IX.13-14). This final parable occurs during the same military campaign in Spain, when his castle was under a seven-year siege and supplies had begun to run low. In response, Baldwin orchestrates a last-ditch effort to save the castle, treating the enemy messenger to a lavish feast. In response to Baldwin’s decision, his counsellors lodge what seems like a very pragmatic objection: “In this howse is no bred, / No quyte wine nyf red, / Zo be-houes zild up this stid” (f. 57v; LXIX.5-7). But when the messenger returns to his camp, he reports what seems like the endless supply of victuals still remaining in Baldwin’s castle, and the siege is called off.

Baldwin’s reply to his counselors’ objection is very telling. He offers only an aphorism: “God helpus ay his man,” (f. 58r; LXIX.9), suggesting that his decision evinces nothing but a simple faith in divine protection. This sentiment echoes Baldwin’s prior assertion, given in response to Kay’s wonder at the abundance of the feasts that take place at Baldwin’s castle: “Sir, God hase a gud pluse, / He may send vs alle enughe, / Qwy schuld we spare?” (f. 51r; XLIX.14-16). Both statements lay claim to an earthy, folkloric wisdom that refers any abundance to God. But such an attitude cannot be explained in purely theological terms, for this attitude is also a foundational tenet of *largsse*. Simply to reference such an ideal to the divine would suggest a transcendence or universality to this practice, as if this were an ideal for all of humankind instead of a social practice that is the preserve of the landed elite and is aimed at enshrining class difference. In other words, Baldwin places these folk affirmations at the service of an
economic practice in which the overwhelming majority of late medieval individuals had no hope of participating. (This class elitism should obviously not come as a surprise, but Baldwin’s employment of folk wisdom to make his aristocratic point is, at the least, in need of a bit of demystification.)

Baldwin goes on to justify his attitude:

He that gode may gete,
And wernys men of his mete,
Gud Gode, that is grete,
Gif him sory care!
For the mete of the messyngere,
Hitte mendutte all oure chere. (f. 58v; LXXI.5-10)

The assertion that the giving of meat “mendutte all oure chere” suggests a causal relationship, one whose simplicity and directness is redolent of the motto of Henry III: “Ke ne dune ke ne tine ne prent ke desire.” Moreover, his recognition that such attitudes are limited to “He that gode may gete,” and the specific application of such an aphorism to the aristocratic ritual of feasting, illustrates the limited scope of such a system. Although largesse may be a universal good—and Baldwin’s attempts at a theological and aphoristic justification suggest that he certainly views it as such—it is one that reinforces social hierarchies. This final parable, then, serves as a summation of Baldwin’s remarkable economic posture, encapsulating the leisurely indifference to all possessions that those at the top of society were theoretically to espouse.

At the conclusion of Baldwin’s explanation of his noble lifestyle, and really in response to his entire ethical system, Arthur replies with a puzzlingly ambiguous statement: “Thine a-vowes arne profetabulle” (f. 58v; LXXI.14). This marks a key dramatic moment in the text, as the audience waits to hear how the king will respond to Baldwin’s ideas. Baldwin had, after all, refused to participate in their more traditional chivalric activities in the first half of the narrative, and so a sharp contrast has been drawn between Baldwin and the rest of the Arthurian court. In this vein, David Johnson compares Baldwin to the group of Arthurian knights, suggesting that Baldwin “is a figure who more closely reflects the values of a flesh-and-blood fifteenth century (sic)
Englishman” (203). But Arthur’s response here is puzzling and raises the question of whether he gets it or not. For to claim that Baldwin’s economic way of life is “profetabulle”—a use of the word that points to the economics animating the second half of this text—is potentially a subtle employment of language, one in which Arthur uses the word without making it clear what it denotes. As in Present Day English, the adjective “profitable” in Middle English could denote that something is expedient or beneficial (MED “profitable” adj. 1) or that something produces income (adj. 3). If Arthur were implying that Baldwin’s vows were beneficial (in accord with adj. 1), such a statement could be seen as a rather straightforward celebration of the noble life Baldwin has espoused and to which Arthur and his knight are, thanks to their lecture by Baldwin, now privy. On the other hand, he could also be implying that Baldwin’s vows produce profit; that is, Arthur could here be consenting to the attitudes that Baldwin has advocated, affirming the notion that by denying commodities one actually grows in wealth. But if Arthur were to suggest that Baldwin’s vows produce profit, this would only serve as an indication that he has missed the point, for to desire something to be profitable is to cease to be perfectly detached from it. The only way to demonstrate one’s understanding of this ethos is to embody it, not to verbalize a desire for it. For once one verbalizes desire for the return of profit, one finds oneself outside the economy of largesse, in something more akin to what Sir Amadace offered as its binary Other: the mercantile.

No matter how we read Arthur’s statement at the end of this text, what is unchanging is that the king occupies the inferior position in relation to Baldwin: there is a student/teacher dynamic at play here. In the notion that this provincial aristocrat has something to teach a rather unschooled Arthurian court about largesse we can locate what is the most emphatic triumphalism of this entire text, and we can see why a family

62 The Middle English Dictionary also lists, as adj. 5, “Of vows: fulfilled, accomplished,” offering this very passage from The Avowing as the only example of such usage. But given Baldwin’s insistence on how noblesse oblige is to be properly ordered, the definition offered as “adj. 5” seems to miss the point that, in context, Arthur’s use of the word is double-faced, straddling both adj. 1 and adj. 3. Arthur is not implying that Baldwin has fulfilled his vows, but is rather making an evaluative statement about those vows.
like the Irelands might have been interested in such a text. On one level, one can see in the pedagogical dynamic between Baldwin and the Arthurian court a statement of provincial independence. In addition to this, the second half of this text mediates a gentry economic fantasy. Here, the provincial landlord is shown to be in full control of the social practice of *largesse*. Moreover, the character with the abundance of liberality is Baldwin, a largely anonymous figure within the Arthurian tradition. Yet that very same man is able show up the celebrities of the Arthurian retinue—even the king himself. Within such a dynamic can be seen the aspirations of the great mass of middling gentry, many of whom participated in aristocratic social rituals (e.g., the possession of coats of arms, presiding over manorial courts), yet whose titles indicated their inferior social position vis-à-vis the magnates, and whose wealth was dwarfed by the magnates and more powerful members of the gentry who dominated the county scenes. Such a text as *The Avowing* creates an imaginary democratization of aristocratic economics, suggesting that the lower rungs of the landed class could participate as equals, provided they were willing to adopt the same insouciant attitude to commodities. Yet the Ireland MS, when taken as a whole, reminds us that this democratization is modest: *The Awntyrs* posed very challenging questions for which it seemed to have no answers, and the binary opposition established in *Sir Amadace* showed an awareness of the need to define the boundaries of a *largesse* economy.
4.7: The Magna curia de Hale

Manorial courts in the later Middle Ages provided the main legal recourse for tenants, both free and unfree. While severe crimes, such as murder, were prosecuted in the king’s court, infractions of a more local nature, such as trespassing or complaints of slander among peasants, were dealt with in these local courts. Most importantly, the medieval manor court’s responsibilities included:

regulat[ing] many aspects of the relationship between lord and unfree peasants, and particularly the swearing of fealty to a new lord; recording land transactions and resolving disputes over property rights; prosecuting recalcitrant tenants, and damage and trespass against the lord’s property; levying servile dues and incidents, such as heriot, chevage, merchet, and leyrwyte; ensuring that tenants were found for empty holdings; electing manorial officials and regulating their performance; and upholding custom. (Bailey, The English Manor 169)63

Our main source of information on these court sessions comes from surviving rolls of court records, kept at each manor and usually surviving among the collections of individual families or great estates, records which J.Z. Titow calls “the most lively type of manorial documents to read” (32).

In studies of the Ireland MS and its romances, the second section of the MS has been almost uniformly neglected.64 John Robson’s Introduction to his edition of the Ireland romances contains the most detailed discussion to date. He concludes that “These records have evidently been inserted at various times, and apparently by William Irland (sic), Lord of the Manor of Hale during the reigns of Henry V. and VI. and at the

63 The best discussion of the jurisdiction and function of manorial courts is found in Poos and Bonfield xv-cxciii, from which much of the information contained in this section is drawn. See also Harvey 1-9; Bailey, The English Manor 167-92; Bennett, Life 153-256; Hone 127-40; and Raftis 93-109.

64 Witness the words of Phillipa Hardman: “The book known as the Ireland Manuscript has been conclusively shown by Bruce Dickins to consist of two quite separate manuscripts bound together. The first part, with which I am concerned, contains three metrical romances: The Awnyrs of Arthure, Sir Amadace, and The Avowynge of Arther, written in one hand continuously through five quires. The second part contains records and memoranda of the manor of Hale, Lancashire” (“The Unity” 45; emphasis mine).
beginning of Edward IV” (xxxvii). Robson also transcribes several pages, but offers no analysis and no commentary on the possible relations to the literary texts that precede these records.65

There are two things that must be immediately recognized about Part II of this MS: first, it does not include a chronological record of all the material presented before the court, listed session by session, but rather proceeds thematically.66 Second, these records are not recorded on a roll, as was standard for court documents. Part II of this MS is a standard court roll, then, in neither form nor content, and I thus follow Robson in labeling this part more generally as “records and memoranda of the court of Hale” (xxxvii). Here, entries have been grouped together according to the type of business with which the court was dealing. The earliest dated entry in the collection, 2 Richard II, comes on p. 19, while the latest entry in the collection, 4 Edward IV, comes on p. 1, and there is much variation between. There are groupings of entries dealing with the collection of feudal fines, disputes between tenants, complaints about dilapidated tenements, and an account of the court’s income, to name but a few.67 The original documents recording the court proceedings and created in situ would most likely have been written on an actual roll, and we find reference in Part II to this physical format for the original. At one point we find the phrase “in alio Rotulo papiri qui Incipit cum ‘curia de hale tenta ibidem die…’ ” (27). Later, we find “Incipit rotulus octavus,” an indication

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65 These court records also have not been recognized by historians, for they do not appear in the catalogue of surviving manorial court documents in Medieval Society 569-637, nor do they appear in the Manorial Documents Register, available in the search room of the National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office). On my visit to the Lancashire Records Office, I also discovered that there is no acknowledgment of this manuscript in the Ireland family papers, nor did the archivists know of the existence of the Ireland MS.

66 The standard form for manorial court documents was in a roll or series of rolls, with entries listed in chronological order. For a useful comparison, see Ray Lock’s edition of The Court Rolls of Walsham le Willows, and Warren Ault’s edition of the Court Rolls of the Abbey of Ramsey and of the Honor of Clare, both of which attest the standard chronological series of entries. Lock, “Introduction” 12 in particular, is able to deduce some demographic data from the rolls, including the average tenant holding. A cursory glance at the list of extant manorial court documents in Medieval Society 569-637 demonstrates that the great majority survive in chronological sequence of several years’ duration. From this, it is clear that Part II of the Ireland MS is not, technically speaking, a manorial court roll.

67 In this way, Part II may accord with the late medieval trend of creating books of abstracts of court rolls to allow for easier searches, for which see Bailey, The English 175 and Harvey 43-44.
that this section of the MS was extracted from the eighth roll of some series that no longer survives. As Michael Clanchy notes, the roll as the physical format of official records was peculiar to England, and Anglo-Latin used the term *rotulus* to describe this (136). But some of the entries have also been copied out from a codex, for p. 5 reads, “Hoc proclamatum fuit ad curiam predictam ut patet in quaterno continent Rental Johannis Irland, militis,” and p. 23 announces that the entry following was “extractus de paruo quaterno ff.” 68 The great majority of the entries in Part II demonstrate that the primary purpose of the manor court at Hale, as everywhere in late medieval England, was the enforcement of the lord’s feudal prerogatives. The greatest number of entries involves free tenants of the manor coming before the court to pay their entry fine or relief and officially to inherit their land. Since the various entries regarding this are so formulaic, one example will suffice to establish the nature of this particular type of court business:

```memorandum quod Ricardus Shorte venit hic ad curiam istam & cognovit se tenere de domino de hale unum mesuagium & gardenum cum quadam procella terre cum suis pertinencis que prius habuit de dono Ricardi Sampson & reddit domino per annum xxij d & inde fecit relivium suum per iij s viij d & inde fecit fidelitatem domino. (17)```

Here, Richard Short has come before the court and paid the 3s. 8d. entry fine, made his fealty to John I, acknowledged the yearly rent, and gained possession of his lands. We also see this enforcement of monetary privileges in the various lists of tallages recorded in Part II. For example, under the entry related to a session held on the Monday after the Feast of St Andrew in 1 Henry V (1422), the scribe lists the tallages collected from each villager for their pigs: “Robertus Coldecotes pro tribus porcis iij d. / Willelmus Poghdene pro duobus ij d.” (42).

We also see the manorial court upholding law and order on the village level. In one case, from the Tuesday after the Feast of the Annunciation in 1 Henry V (1423), a

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68 See also the definitions of *rotulus* and *quaternus* in Latham. Further evidence that Part II of this MS was copied out at a later date from a court document already in existence can be found in a scribal error. Here, the same line is repeated at the end of p. 2 and the beginning of p. 3. Such a repetition is not likely for one who was writing out this document *in situ.*
jury of fifteen tenants brought forth their complaints against villagers who had violated various customs, particularly breaking the peace:


In such a situation, the bailiff would issue a fine to the guilty parties, which would accrue to the lord. In these particular cases, the scribe has scribbled the fines in the margins and in the space between lines of text.

Several of the court entries remind us that the manor court of Hale dealt with some of the mundane realities of quotidian peasant existence. One humorous example comes from a court session held on the Feast of St Martin in 3 Henry V (1415), during which one William Morcell “queritur de Johanna Rogersdoghtur & de Willelmo Stevynson de placito transgressionis, et unde queritur Eo quod canes predictorum mordebant unam ovem predicti Willelmi” (47). Such a moment of levity (though one imagines it was certainly treated seriously by William Morcell and his bitten sheep) serves as an interesting rejoinder to the more earnest adumbrations of aristocratic life seen in Part I of this MS. A similarly humorous section of court proceedings can be found in a session dated to the Feast of St Luke in 3 Henry V (1415), wherein is grouped a series of complaints about the violent or obnoxious behavior of certain tenants:

Similiter Magota Raynalde garulavit in atrio capelle de Hale cum uxore Willelmi de Torbok & vocavit eam “meretricem.” Ideo in misericordia iiij d. Alicia Holland vocavit Ricardum Henryson “falsum latronem” & dixit quod ipse furavit suas anat[a]s & suas gallina[s]. Ideo in misericordia iiij d. (50)

Finally, the court functioned to ensure that each tenant maintained his or her property to acceptable standards. In one case, the thirteen-member jury:

Dicunt super sacramentum suum quod Diota de Sefton tenet unam domum non reparatam. Item dicunt quod Robertus del Coldecotes tenet unam
domum [ ] ruinosam. Item dicunt quod Henricus Jacson habet unum Orreum ruinosum. Item dicunt quod Henricus del Bruge tenet unam domum ruinosam. Item dicunt quod defectu Willelm Hugeson & Ricardi le Barker domus iuxta le Mersshe est ruinosa. Item dicunt quod camera Ade del Coldecotes est ruinosa & omnes isti habent diem ad emendandum domos intra hoc & festun translacionis Sancti Thome Martiris proximo futuro sub pena quorumlibet eorum dimidii marce. (43)

J.A. Raftis notes a large increase in the number of complaints about delapidated properties in manorial court records surviving from the fifteenth century. He speculates that as the peasant class grew in economic clout during this time, they increasingly refused to inherit villein land, often preferring to keep smaller, but entirely free, holdings (153-59). There is not enough information in the Ireland MS to make any sort of diachronic study of the long-term changes in the profits or patterns of land ownership in Hale, as Raftis does with the more voluminous data from across England, nor is there adequate data from any particular year to undertake any sort of synchronic study of the Ireland tenants. Nonetheless the concern over dilapidated homes evinced in this section of Part II is suggestive of the issues raised by Raftis.

It seems that the great majority of the tenants on the Ireland lands were free and that there were relatively few holding land by customary tenure. This is not surprising, given that by the middle of the fifteenth century throughout England most of the vestiges of servitude had been replaced by free tenure with lands held for cash rents. Most significantly, there is no mention in these court records of labor services—the primary marker of unfree tenure—being enforced. Furthermore, in Part II we see many examples of tenants coming to the manor court to pay relief or an entry fine, which marked the process of the inheritance of free land. Neither do we find any reference to the enforcement of childwyte, leyrwite or merchet, fines reserved only for those of villein status. But the use of the phrase “ad voluntatem domini” indicates that there may have been some lands owned by customary tenure. Pages 31-34, which list “Recepta redditus apud Hale die lune proximo post festum Sancti Andree Apostolici de termino Sancti
Martini Anno regni regis Henrici iiiij quarto,” contain numerous references to land held at the lord’s will; for example: “Idem Thomas pro terra ad voluntatem olim in tenura Ricardi Shorte in le Medow xij d. Idem Thomas pro terra ad voluntatem olim in tenura Johannis le Butterman xiiij d” (34). It should, though, be noted that the terminology used here may not be as stable as historians would wish it, for an earlier entry relates that a certain Johannes Dycunson Atkynson “fecit relivium suum xvj d ad voluntatem domini” (18). Technically, relief was supposed to denote payment for lands held freely, while the phrase “ad voluntatem domini” was supposed to denote land held in customary tenure, and thus they should not be used in combination. The seeming contradiction here should alert us to the fact that the terminology in these court rolls is not always as precise as we would like. But we can tentatively conclude that although the majority of the tenants of Hale were not of villein status, some unfree land did remain.

The discussion of free versus unfree tenure takes us, then, to the issue of feudal economics, an issue subtending—in dramatically different ways—each Part of the Ireland MS. It is almost certain that the family would have treated these documents from Part II as separate and distinct from the literary texts, and perhaps it is pure serendipity that they bound them together. But, in the state in which it survives, the Ireland MS affords us a unique glimpse of two contrasting sides of a late medieval gentry household: the productive side, seen in Part II, and the ideological representation of the spending side.

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69 For the specifics of this transition, see Keen, *English Society* 48-76; Dyer, *Age of Transition* 7-45; and Jacob 370-77.
70 As Philipp Schofield notes, the phrase “at the will of the lord according to the custom of the manor,” although still indicative of unfree tenure, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries came to replace older language that was redolent of serfdom and thus retained a certain taint. He further comments that “if there was a defining principle behind this multiplicity of forms, it was still to be found in the assumption that the tenant held from his lord according to manorial custom and not, therefore, from the king according to common law” (17).
71 In relation to the move towards cash rents from labor services, see the comments in Hindess and Hurst 221-59, who argue that rent, no matter what type (i.e. whether in cash or labor), forms the basis of the feudal mode of production and that the change towards cash rent does not signify the end of feudalism. Whatever form of rent is in effect, the underlying conditions for feudalism still hold: the producers live on the land, and thus directly control the means of production; as a result, the surplus must be appropriated by means of coercion by the manorial lord. Either form of rent satisfies this definition of the feudal mode of production.
seen in Part I. Central to Part II is the economics of manorial administration: counting fees and tolls, assessing rents, maintaining law and order. This provides insight into the material realities of gentry economic existence in late medieval England. For their survival, the Irelands needed, for example, to collect tolls on their tenants’ pigs or to collect feudal relief when a new tenant entered into possession of his land. Underwriting all this is the compulsion to count and keep track of the family’s income, actions that would seem indecorous within the fictional realm of the romances they compiled. In their real economic practice, though, they could not afford Baldwin’s insouciance.

Certainly, the romances in Part I are remarkable for their attempts to excise economic realities from their formulations. In *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, we see a sovereign who distributes land among an elite cadre of knights and then, when this system is challenged, merely incorporates the challenger into the chivalric body, enabling the king to distribute even more land. In *Sir Amadace*, we see an awareness of an Other economic system, a system whose challenge is overcome by the aristocratic hero, who ends his tale affirmed in the rectitude of his original economic status. And in *The Avowing of Arthur*, we see, in the brash confidence of Baldwin’s vows, a testament to a faith that aristocratic economics can function like a perpetual motion machine, one that can sustain itself on its own energy.72

Of course it should not surprise us that such texts have erased the economic base from what D. Vance Smith calls the “chivalric imaginary,” for this is standard practice among Middle English romances. But within the Ireland MS, this erasure is not taking place in a vacuum, for the memoranda of the manor court of Hale remind us that such an erasure bears a relationship to the real economic practices of this gentry family. Read in light of the evidence of such economic practices (as seen in Part II), the ideological work

72 In this vein, one is reminded of what is perhaps the most exuberant example of such an economic confidence in all of medieval literature, the wedding feast at the conclusion of Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*: “Never did anyone see together so many kings, counts, dukes, and barons at one Mass; so great was the crowd and so dense that the church was completely full. *No peasant could enter there*, only ladies and knights, and outside the door of the church there were many more, for so many had gathered that not everybody could enter the church” (122; emphasis mine). Here, the abundance of nobility is able to push the peasants to the margins, just outside the view of the reader/listener.
that the romances perform is given a coherent context. In particular, we are reminded
that peasant labor underwrote the refined behavior that the late medieval landowning
class used to set themselves off from the rest of the populace. For everything ranging
from the feast to the renovations of the manor house to the new chantry to the disposable
income that enabled Baldwin’s insouciance, the fifteenth-century aristocracy was
dependent upon the cash rents or (less and less frequently) the forced labor services of
their tenants. But of course it is the work of ideology to deny such a connection, to
naturalize aristocratic privilege by obscuring any connection to its rootedness in
economics and social life. Marx and Engels recognized as much in *The German
Ideology*:

If now in considering the course of history we detach the ideas of the
ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an
independent existence, if we confine ourselves to saying that these or
those ideas were dominant at a given time, without bothering ourselves
about the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, if we
thus ignore the individuals and world conditions which are the source of
the ideas, we can say, for instance, that during the time that the aristocracy
was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc., were dominant, during
the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc.
(173)

Criticism of the literary texts discussed herein that ignores the question of socio-
economic history runs the risk of confining itself merely to these dominant ideas (e.g.,
chivalric prowess, the superiority of the aristocratic over the mercantile, the virtues of
*largesse*), “attribut[ing] to them an independent existence.” But if most formulations of
the “chivalric imaginary,” to use Smith’s term, erase this connection, leaving it up to the
critic to “[bother herself] about the conditions of production and the producers of these
ideas,” then the Ireland MS presents a unique case study. Here, the evidence for what has
been erased or suppressed lies bound within the same volume as the romances
themselves. This codicological state suggests how the ideology of these texts might be
demystified.
CONCLUSION:
“Ne aboute my [bilyue] so bisy be na moore”

The preceding analyses have aimed at investigating what is to be gained if we make MSS a central feature of the cultural histories we construct. As a corollary to this, it is now appropriate to consider the critical edition. In the Introduction, I briefly discussed the ways in which editions construct singular readings, creating abstracted texts out of a MS culture whose textual practice was often diverse, diffuse and discrete. Now, having looked closely at four examples of such diverse, diffuse and discrete forms of the compilation of Middle English romance, it is worth returning to reflect on how limiting and distorting the critical edition can be (if it is relied upon as one’s only source of access to medieval textual culture.) In this, I am not calling for an iconoclastic destruction of critical editing. Such editions make our reading and teaching of medieval literary texts possible. Editors, by weeding through copious materials, produce something we can read and use. But that is precisely the point—editions are modern constructions for our use, not historical artefacts that reflect the way Middle English romance was used. As Tim Machan writes:

I want to reiterate that I am not arguing that Middle English textual qualities should never be represented in an edition. I am saying that since their representation is not historical, editions that employ strategies to recover them are themselves misrepresented if they are understood as historical recuperations of Middle English works. (Textual Criticism 182)

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1 The iconoclastic view was formulated influentially by Bernard Cerquiglini, who hailed the computer as a return to the medieval condition. For Cerquiglini, the computer offers the hope of displacing the anachronistic, author-centered critical edition of medieval texts. Cerquiglini’s views led to a special volume of Speculum in 1990, dedicated to what its contributors labeled the “New Philology.” For reflections on the practice of editing medieval texts in light of Cerquiglini’s work, see Nichols and Spiegel. For a critique of the “New Philology,” see Towards a Synthesis? and Kay.

2 For similar comments on the ways critical editions often distort the manuscript materials on which they are based, see Scala 1-15 and Sturges.
When we only read critical editions, we are destined to read the past through the lens of print culture.

On the lexical level, critical editing involves cleaning up a text, making its unstable MS witnesses fit into a single format. John Dagenais comments that:

When people from print culture look at a medieval manuscript, we cannot help seeing a fallen text. It is almost an instinctual reaction. From the beginning academic medievalism has taken as its mission the restoration of coherence, sense, to these texts, which appear to us to lie just beyond the horizon of modern European linguistic and cultural understanding. Our heart goes out to these injured children of another, less sophisticated age, so damaged through the hazards of scribal transmission and the inexorable workings of time. It is a noble mission. But it is a misguided one. Medieval textuality functioned, one way or another, in this fallen state. When we choose “coherence” or “intelligibility” as the *sine qua non* for undertaking work on medieval texts, pretending that these were qualities they once possessed but have now lost, we are simply choosing not to look at medieval texts. (*The Ethics* 111)

Critical editing certainly serves the needs of modern readers, who desire an author-centered text. As we have seen, though, in MS culture a text is not finished once it is “authored.” John Colyns, Robert Thornton, and the Irelands each had a role in shaping their texts, and each results in discrete cultural valences for romance. As D.F. McKenzie argued, a history of books should look not for “their truth as one might seek to define that by an authorial intention, but for their testimony as defined by their historical use” (29).

One (admittedly extreme) example of the way critical editions clean up MSS can be found in George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson’s Athlone Press edition of the B-text of *Piers Plowman*. In Passus VII, Kane and Donaldson make one of the boldest emendations in any edition of Middle English literature: “‘I shal cessen of my sowyng,’ quod Piers, ‘& swonke not so harde, / Ne aboute my [bilyue] so bisy be na moore’ ” (122-23).3 These are arguably the most important lines in the poem, as these are Piers’s

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3 For a further discussion of the Kane-Donaldson *Piers Plowman*, see Greetham 171-74 and Sturges 125-28. For a defense of Kane and Donaldson’s edition against its many critics, see Patterson, *Negotiating* 77-113.
words following his act of tearing the pardon which Truth had secured for him. The tearing of the pardon is an interpretive crux of the poem, and so Piers’s rationale for this act resounds with significance. The thing about which Piers promises “na moore” to be “so bisy” is of essential importance to any understanding of this action. Kane and Donaldson’s version would have it that Piers will no longer fret over his “[bilyue].”

If the astute reader of their edition looks at the apparatus criticus, though, she discovers that the MSS corresponding to the following sigla actually read “bely ioye” where Kane and Donaldson have emended to “[bilyue]”: WHmCrGYOC₂CBLMRF. If this same reader’s curiosity is still not exhausted, she will discover, by consulting the list of MS sigla on page 219 of the “Introduction,” that these sigla represent every B-text that Kane and Donaldson accept as legitimate, with the lone exception of MS H. If the reader then looks to the description of MS H, printed on page 9, she will discover that this particular MS’s B-text stops after V.127 and so did not even contain the lines in question. Putting this all together, the reader would realize that every extant MS of the B-text containing Passus VII reads “bely ioye.” Where Kane and Donaldson list the sigla WHmCrGYOC₂CBLMRF, they might just as well have written “all MSS.” But one has to do some investigation to piece this together.

If this reader then wants to know Kane and Donaldson’s rationale for this emendation against all extant witnesses, she would have two options: she could patiently thumb through the un-indexed discussion of their emendations, covering pages 70-220, hoping to alight on the line or two that discusses VII.123; or, she could look up the relevant passage in Peter Barney’s “Line-Number Index,” which would inform her that page 85 contains the relevant discussion. On page 85 Kane and Donaldson write, “A very large number of differences between the text of A and the archetypal text of B correspond to and are explicable in terms of scribal tendencies of variation. In the following instances the text of B has an easier reading.” Under this heading, they list “VII 123 bely ioye B: beluye A” (85). That is to say, the A-text reads “beluye,” and this is more in keeping with what Kane and Donaldson understand to be Langland’s intention.
Applying the principle of *lectio difficilior* here means that every single B-text scribe got it wrong and that no medieval readers of the B-text were reading the right words at VII.123.

This narrative is not at all intended irreverently, for Kane and Donaldson’s edition is a monument of textual editing; rather, it is offered as an extreme example of the transformation that, in essence, all critical editions perform upon medieval MSS, creating singular, final readings out of the diversity of MSS. In attempting to sort through extant MS witnesses to produce a single reading, the editor takes the discrete, malleable ways in which literary texts were compiled and encountered by real medieval readers and creates a single, orderly text. The unspoken assumption is that authors write stable, singular texts, and we need to recapture such stability, lost in the process of transmission, in order to read. As Tim Machan writes:

> It has typically been the modern editor’s task to construct a printed and therefore stable, infinitely replicable text that is characteristically conducive to interpretation for an audience that accepts all of these qualities as the givens of an edited text. But with a very few exceptions—of which the *Canterbury Tales* was not one—the situation is precisely the opposite for vernacular works as they were produced and existed in the Middle Ages: Over time manuscript copies proliferated diversely, and individual copies underwent alteration without the stabilizing and provident influence of a modern editor. (*Textual Criticism* 13)

Thus, the critical edition is a text to serve our needs as modern readers: it is something we can hold in our hands and ponder, write articles or monographs about, and assign to our students. Armed with a modern edition, we can all be assured that we are reading the same text, and we can go about our scholarship safe in the knowledge that a certain William Langland wrote that his character Piers would no longer be so busy about his “[belyue].”

But beyond the lexical “cleaning up” that editing does—which has received most of the critical attention to date—it also distorts much of the cultural work that texts in medieval MSS could perform (which, of course, has been the major focus of my analysis in the preceding chapters). One of the major side effects of editing is that the text is
severed from almost any connection to its compiler and MS context. If, for example, we read L.F. Casson’s edition of *Sir Degrevant* by itself, we could all too easily dismiss this text as the flotsam and jetsam of an age that liked its narratives blunt and unsophisticated. But for Thornton, *Sir Degrevant* was not a single text to be bound by itself inside the daunting brown covers of an Early English Text Society edition, complete with a detailed philological discussion, and to be read in abstraction. For him, it was something he copied out through hours of dedicated labor, and it was something he copied next to other texts which similarly take up gentry economic concerns. What I have called Thornton’s familial romances, which he compiled in the Lincoln MS, may seem like naive pulp fictions until we recognize that these texts, when compiled and read as a series, mediate the economic realities of Thornton’s life. Seen within the context of his MS, and in relation to his life, they take on an entirely different valence. To return to Jerome McGann’s words: “Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other” (77). If our only recourse to medieval texts is the critical edition, then we lose sight of the complex interplay between the words carried by a single literary text and all the other bibliographic features of its MS.

The theory of textual editing has created a large body of secondary literature and has given rise to an often surprising amount of vitriol. The focus in these debates, however, has centered consistently on the lexical level—that is, how should the variety of readings in medieval MSS be represented in modern printed editions. Keith Busby defends the traditional critical edition: “I still think that a modified form of the standard critical edition, whose presentation and apparatus criticus are informed by our renewed understanding of textual and linguistic behaviour and medieval poetics, can serve most, although certainly not all, purposes” (90-91). For Busby, it is adequate to have a properly constructed *apparatus criticus* where a reader can check for variant readings. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Bernadette Masters suggests that critical editing of

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4 For a particularly heated exchange over the editing of medieval Latin texts, see Hall, “The Editing and Emendation” and “A Reply” and Rigg, “The Editing.”
medieval vernacular texts should cease and that we as readers should be presented only with diplomatic transcriptions of a particular MS witness: “Otherwise we, as editors, run the risk of presenting readers with modern normalised closed texts dressed up in quaint medieval garb in order to make them appear authentic” (285).

Between these two poles lie a number of alternative views. A.S.G. Edwards has questioned whether, given the instability of the transmission of Middle English romance, we can even produce critical editions of such texts at all:

> The realities of composition and transmission serve, in many instances, to render at best indeterminate notions of purposive design and texture. And where texts cannot be established with even relative conviction, where, indeed, the concept of a text at all is difficult to sustain, critical activity becomes futile if it acknowledges the historical circumstances of the received text. That literary criticism of romances is possible at all is due to the fortunate survival of a number of relatively good, and usually unique, transcripts of a small number of texts, such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the alliterative Morte Arthur, and Havelok. (“The Limits” 104)

Tim Machan has proposed a solution to this dilemma for texts, like most Middle English romances, whose transmission is heavily dependent on orality. Specifically, he suggests that since the scribes of such texts did not attempt to conform to any authorial intention, neither should our editions. As a result, editors should print “‘scribal’ versions” of such texts instead of enforcing uniformity across a diverse MS tradition (“Editing” 242). With regard to editing Middle English romances in particular, Jennifer Fellows makes a similar argument: she favors parallel-text editions with minimal editorial intervention confined to footnotes. Such editions would allow the reader to see two versions, side-by-side, that were actually read by people in the Middle Ages. Finally, Ralph Hanna believes that each edition should simultaneously balance our modern needs as readers with the need to represent, as accurately as possible, the historical situation of the text. He writes that editors should consider “not An Edition, but a range of use- or interest-driven possible editions” (Pursuing 75). If, for example, a series of texts is interrelated, and such relationships were a particularly formative aspect of each text’s transmission and
reception, then such a grouping should be edited together. Alternatively, when dealing with works whose author sought to assert his or her presence—one thinks of Chaucer’s *Troilus* and Gower’s *Confessio*—critical editions aimed at reconstructing authorial intent would be most appropriate.

Although I am generally neutral on the question of editorial theory, Hanna’s solution seems a sensible compromise. My point, though, in examining these various approaches is that they all focus on the lexical level of the MS text; that is, the debate thus far has revolved around how the words of a medieval text can best be reproduced in a modern printed format. What is missing from the discussion is how the act of editing, of transforming a text from its MS context into a modern book, distorts other aspects of the medieval text. My interest in the preceding chapters has been in the significance of romance within particular compilations. As I have argued, there was no singular cultural valence to romance—each compiler made his texts anew for his own personal consumption. The very act of taking a text from its MS confines and putting it into an edition, where it will stand alone as a cultural monument to be ingested by today’s readers, in some crucial ways misrepresents the form in which medieval readers encountered the text. In terms of McGann’s model of the double helix, the critical edition takes the “linguistic codes” and divorces them from the “bibliographical codes.”

For those interested in a literary history of Middle English romance, there is no simple solution to this dilemma. We cannot dispense with critical editions, nor can we all go running off to the British Library on a regular basis to work with MSS. The solution, as I see it, can only come from broadening our scholarly and pedagogical praxis. First, critical editions should not be the only way we access medieval texts, but should rather be one of many. Alongside Kane and Donaldson, we should more regularly be using

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5 John Dagenais makes some suggestive comments about how the printed page reduces the complexity of the medieval page to a singularity that can be more easily understood and consumed. To explicate this, Dagenais makes the analogy to colonialism, which similarly reduces the complexity of “native” culture to simple, easily definable terms. He writes, “Our traditional view of the medieval page sees it as a prepared laboratory cross-section, sprayed with fixative and placed on a glass slide for scrutiny under the microscope. The medieval manuscript page and its culture are more like an open petri dish, a living, growing thing, placed within a fertile, organic medium” (“Decolonizing” 39).
facsimiles, microfilms, the *Piers Plowman* CD-ROM series, and Benson and Blanchfield’s *The Manuscripts of Piers Plowman: The B-Version*, to name a few of the available resources.\(^6\) (And, of course, we should make it to the British Library from time to time.) We should ask ourselves, our colleagues, and our students what else was in that MS, what was drawn in the margins, how many hands were involved, for whom it was copied, etc… Syllabi and exam reading lists should encourage students to think beyond the modern constructions of texts to the ways texts circulated in the Middle Ages. If we are to move beyond the critical edition’s (almost) exclusive presentation of the “linguistic codes,” and thereby to make the “bibliographical codes” coequal, then we need to think of John Colyns, Robert Thornton, and the Irelands, as well as Chaucer, Langland, and Gower.

In the preceding chapters, I have analyzed four different ways Middle English romance was constructed by three different individuals (or families) in the later Middle Ages. It has been my conviction throughout that by attending to the diverse forms of medieval textual practice we can learn much about the cultural history of later medieval England that we cannot by relying on critical editions alone. But all too often, MS studies has been treated as anterior to scholarship, as an empirical discipline which yields up facts and information about medieval books, but offers little to those interested in cultural history. However, by relegating codicology to this anterior position, we lose sight of one of the most untapped sources for understanding the way literature “worked” in the Middle Ages. To return to the comments of James Simpson, with which I opened my Introduction: “In the field of Middle English, palaeographers and codicologists for the most part stick to palaeography and codicology. They provide an invaluable service

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\(^6\) CD-ROMs are a particularly promising medium, as they allow the reader to alternate between reading an edited text, a diplomatic transcription, and the image of the MS itself (in full color, providing an excellent level of detail). The Society for Early English and Norse Electronic Texts has already released CD-ROM versions of five *Piers Plowman* MSS, as well as *William of Palerne, The Destruction of Troy*, and *Caedmon’s Hymn*. Forthcoming are two further *Piers Plowman* MSS, as well as editions of *The Old English Penitentials, The Siege of Jerusalem*, and the Alliterative *Morte*. See <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/seenet/home.html>. Furthermore, *The Canterbury Tales* Project has published CD-ROMs of several individual tales, as well as of the entire Hengwrt MS. See <http://www.canterburytalesproject.org/>. 
industry, but themselves eschew the translation of their findings into literary criticism and cultural history” (“Rev. of London” 292). Attention to the MS’s role in shaping cultural history offers, I believe, some hope for remedying this divorce within scholarship. By treating the MS as, among other things, a cultural artefact that can be—and in fact demands to be—read, just like a text in an edition, codicologists can provide more than “an invaluable service industry.” Conversely, through a more theoretically invested understanding of codicology, those critics interested in cultural history would be offered one of the most important forms of access to the medieval past that remains to us: the MS itself.
APPENDIX A:
CATALOGUE OF LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY MS HARLEY 2252

Key to entries:
A: My summary of the contents of this item
B: The incipit
C: The explicit
D: The title, if given in the manuscript
E: The folio(s) on which the item is found
F: The scribe(s) involved
G: The reference numbers from A New Index of Middle English Verse (IMEV), if applicable

Key to scribal identifications:
A: John Colyns
B: The unidentified second hand who alternates copying duties with Colyns
C: First professional scribe who copied out the romances
D: Second professional scribe who copied out the romances
E: Third professional scribe who copied out the romances
F: Robert Farrer, a subsequent owner of the manuscript
G: An unidentified subsequent owner of the manuscript

1
A: Lydgate’s “Dietary”
B: For helthe of bodye kepe from cold thyne hede
C: And with thy neybors love in reste and pese
D:
E: f. 1v
F: A
G: IMEV 824

2
A: Anti-fraternal rhyme
B: He that harborythe a ffrere harborythe fesycke
C: Loke well þat he harborew neythyr frere nor farte
D:
E: f. 1v
F: A
3
A: Ephemeral sentence
B: In viii° xiii° and iii° ys all my truste
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: 
E: f. 1v
F: A

4.
A: Spelling riddle
B: latonias deligibsino spell Backward and [on] ys begyled
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: 
E: f. 1v
F: A

5.
A: Latin epigram
B: Bullyscampe ecce dyes tunctus sanguine fyes
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: [Illegible title, canceled]
E: f. 1v
F: A

6
A: Proverbs
B: He þat spendys myche and getythe nowghte
C: Lett hym goe to þat place þat no man ken hym
D: 
E: f. 2r
F: A
G: IMEV 1163

7
A: Notes on weights and measures
B: Memorandum that xij° owncys troye weyghte ys juste a lib troy weyghte for gold & syluer
C: More in the lib on once and dimidium
D: 
E: f. 2r
F: A
8
A: Remedy for colick
B: [Illegible incipit]
C: a quarte of matheglyn & drynke hym at your pleasure
D: “A Specyall medsyn for the colycke and the stone”
E: f. 2r
F: A

9
A: Lydgate’s “Nine Properties of Wine”
B: Wyne of hys nature hathe properties ix
C: Hyt dothe a man myche good
D: 
E: f. 2r
F: A
G: IMEV 4175

10
A: Lament of the Duke of Buckingham
B: Alas to whom shuld I complayne or shewe my wofull hevynes
C: Þat wyll pray for the sowle of the dwke of bokyngam / Þat late was exiled remedies
D: “Of Edward duke of Bokyngam”
E: ff. 2v-3r
F: A

11
A: Proverbs
B: At owr begynnyng god be owr spede / In grace and vertue to plede
C: Inure þe with them þat byn wyse / Then to Ryches thow shalt aryse
D: 
E: f. 3r
F: A
G: IMEV 432

12
A: Annals of London
B: The namys of the mayre of london in kyng herrys dayes the iiiij th whyche was crownyd the xiiij th day of July
C: 1539: Wylliam Holes / John Feyry, Thomas Huntle
D: 
E: ff. 3v-8v
F: A,B
A: Summary of tax rates for wards of London
B: The wardys of London exsepte occidentalye
C: Sum totallys of þis taxe of xv amontys: vij c & xxx li xij s. viij d.
D:
E: f. 9r
F: A

14
A: Statistics of the realm
B: In Inglond therbe parıyssh[ys] sum totallys xlvj m\textsubscript{ill} ij c & lx
C: clere with owte the colectors expencys
D:
E: f. 9r
F: A

15
A: List of titles of Duke of Richmond
B: Lord henry vice roy duke of Rychemond
C: Syr Godfrey Fulgeam, Tresorer
D:
E: f. 9r
F: A

16
A: Tax rates for London
B: These Rate folowyng was had owte of the gylde hall
C: ys borne by the chambyr of Raynwell Rentys
D:
E: f. 9v
F: A

17
A: List of ecclesiastical institutions in London
B: All the parıysshе chyrches with yn the gatıys of thys cete of London
C: Totallys of all þе monastarys, colegys and chapellys: xxxv\textsuperscript{th}
D:
E: ff. 10r-11v
F: A (Frost claims B writes the last 15 lines, though I do not concur)
18
A: A decree dictating when one must serve jury duty
B: A determynacion for aparance upon enquestys
C: And yf hyt then be thoughte reasonably and good lenger to be continued
D:
E: ff. 12r-13v
F: A,B

19
A: A law restricting foreign merchants
B: Mercatores extraneos cum rebus venalybus veniente circumvenit
C: Consilium, axilium & favorom prestaverint et cetera
D:
E: f. 14r
F: A

20
A: An English translation of Item 19
B: The condission of thy acte ys thus
C: They to be in lyke wyse as afore ys seyd to be ponysshed et cetera
D:
E: f. 14r
F: A

21
A: London city ordinance
B: Hyt ys ordyned that the patronus of the galyes shall
C: Make retalyng with in the cete of London
D: “Ordynance in the cete of London”
E: f. 14r
F: A

22
A: A letter from Henry VII to the Mayor of London
B: Trustye and welbelovyd, we grete yow well
C: At owr paleys of Westminister the xiiiijth day of feveryere et cetera
D: “By Kyng Herry the viijth to the Mayre of London”
E: f. 14r
F: A,B
23
A: A decree from the city government regulating merchants
B: To owr trusty & welbelovyd, the mayer & sheriffys of owr citie of London
C: In shopis apertis post illam vigiliam et cetera
D:
E: f. 14r
F: A,B

24
A: Petition against foreign merchants
B: To the kyng owr soverayne lorde and to the honorabyll lordys spirituall and temporall
C: Shall praye for the longe preservacion of your noble estayte et cetera
D:
E: ff. 15r-16r
F: A,B

25
A: Statute against foreign traders
B: Wherfor the kyng owr soverayne lord by thavyce and assente of the lordys spirituall and temporall
C: Where yt shall happyn her after any such ffynes (explicit on f. 16v) Ffor ony such defendaunt be alowed yn the same et cetera (explicit on f. 38r)
D:
E: ff. 16r-16v, 38r
F: A,B

Item 25 has been affected by a subsequent re-binding. This text leaves off mid-sentence on f. 16v, then continues on f. 38 r. For more on this, see Section III of Chapter 1.

f. 17r contains a continuation of Item 46, which runs from ff.51v-f. 53v, then continues on f. 17r. This misplacement is due to a subsequent re-binding. For more on this, see Section III of Chapter 1.

f. 17v is blank.

26
A: A tract on weights and measures
B: Pleas hyt your good lordshypps to call to your remembra[unce]
C: Thys measure owghte to be usyd & alowyd et cetera
D:
E: ff. 18r-21v
F: A
27
A: Ordinances of Colyns’s parish church
B: Thys ys the copye of the odynaunce in the boke of owr Ladye of Wolchyrche Hawe
C: Then þe clerkys wagys was xxxv s. a quarter
D: E: ff. 21v-22r
F: A
G:

28
A: Ars moriendi
B: There was a pope the whyche when he shuld dye
C: Jhesu Cryst the whuch is blyssed withouten end. Amen.
D: E: ff. 22r-23r
F: A,B

29
A: Poem reflecting on Psalm 130 (129)
B: O mortall man, call to remembre, the day shalle com þat þou moste nedys dye
C: And we shall remembre this psalme de profundys. Explicit.
D: E: ff. 23r-24v
F: A,B

30
A: Poem lamenting the decline of England
B: Here begynnyth the sorowfull complaynte for the ruyn of a realme
C: & all þeyre progeny God gyve us all grace incessantlye. Fynis.
D: “The Ruyn of a Ream”
E: ff. 25r-28r
F: A

31
A: List of all the MPs for 1492
B: The namys of the Knyghtys, Cetezens, Barons of the v portys and Burgesses comyng to the Parleamente.
C: Summa totallys ij C iiij xx & xvj men þat be in the comen howse besyde the parlement howse of the kyngys grace & þe lordys.
D: E: ff. 28r-32v
F: A
32
A: Statute of preamunire
B: Hyt ys ordayned and establysshed þat yf ony persone do perchas or persue or cause to be purchacyd
C: Thys nobyll cete and namely hys pore parysshens.
D: “Anno xviij Ricardi Secundi”
E: ff. 32v-33r
F: A

33
A: Complaint of a prisoner
B: Nowe beyng in preson am I not abyll
C: Surely all Ynglond for hym ys bownde to pray. The Complaynte of Northe.
D: “The Complaynte of Northe to þe Cardnall Wolsey”
E: ff. 33v-34r
F: A

34
A: Acts of Parliament from 1534
B: In primus an acte of bogery / Item an acte for & ayenste the pope
C: And hys body to be compellyd to preson unto the sayd some be payd
D: “The actys of Parlement passyd Ffewer & Marche the xxvth yere of the rayne of Kyng Hery the viijte, Anno Domini 1534”
E: ff. 34v-36r
F: A

35
A: Generic letter modeling ars dictamini
B: Pleas hyt your hyghnes of your cheryte to geve & graunte unto your servaunte
C: And he shall daylye pray to god for your royall astate long to endure
D: “To the kyng owr soverayne lorde”
E: f. 36r
F: A

36
A: Letter to Henry VIII requesting pardon for a John Trevylyon
B: In hys moste humblyl wyse shewith unto your gracious hyghnes
C: Your good grace to graunte your gracious letter of pardon & cetera.
D: “To the Kyng owr soverayn lorde”
E: f. 36r
F: A
37
A: Narrative of the Turkish rulers
B: Ottoman made warre apone serteyn dukys borderyng uppon the
C: Or by stoppyng of x myghty & grete gonnus callyng bazalyskus on the Rever of
    Tonaw.  Pryntyd by Tomas Gybson.
D: “A brefe cronkelilof the grete Turke, declaryng wh[en] they began to reyne…”
E: ff. 36v-37v
F: A

The first five lines on f. 38r are the final lines of Item 22. These two items have been separated by a subsequent re-binding. For more on this, see Section III of Chapter 1.

38
A: A catalogue of the successive heirs of the Lords of Arundel
B: Roger of the Mounte of Gomercy, Erle Dallenson, whyche governyd the second companye
C: Whyche seyd Wylliam maryed Anne, suster to the Erle of Northehumbrylond, callyd Herry
D: “The Progeny of the Erle of Arundell”
E: f. 38r-v
F: A (Frost sees B at work, though I do not concur)

39
A: Letter from James IV to Henry VIII
B: Ryghte exelent hye and myghtye prence owr deryste brother and cosyn, we commend us unto you
C: To here hym & yeff hym credenauce ryghte excelelent, hyghe & myghty prence & cetera.  By Kyng Jemmy of Scotland.
D: “A letter send by Kyng Jamus of Scotlond to Kyng Herry the viijth, at suche tyme as he laye at the Sege of Turwyn in Ffraunce, by Ilay the Scottyshe herald of armus”
E: ff. 39r-40v
F: A,B

40
A: A description of the dialogue between the Scottish herald and Henry VIII
B: The xjth day of auguste anno 1513, the Kyng with many of hys nobyll lordys beying in ryche tente
C: The Ffrenshe Kyng shall have enowg[h] to do to kepe hys crownus for hym selffe
D: “The message that was don by Ilay lyon Scottyshe herald to be Kyng owr soverayn lord, Kyng Herry the viijth, when he laye at the Sege of Turwyn by the seyd herald, and the ansswere of the kyng to hym ayen.  Anno 1513.”
E: f. 41r-v
F: A
The reply letter from Henry VIII to James IV

Ryghte exelente hyghe and myghtye prense et cetera, I have rysserd your wretynng datyd at Edynborow the xvjth day of July

Be the helpe of owr lord and owr patron Saynte George & cetera. From Turwyn by Herry Kyng of Inglon the viijth

“The ansswer of the kyng of Scottys letter sente by Lyon the Scottyshe herawld from owr Soverayne lord Kyng Herry the viijth”

ff. 42r-43r

A (Frost sees B, though I do not concur)

A poem about the repentance of James IV for his lack of obedience to England

As I lay musyng my selfe alone / In m ynde not stabyll but waveryng here & there

To the hyghe, mercyfull Lord for me pray / Meserere mei Deus et salva me. Explicit & cetera.

“The Lamentacion of the Kyng of Scottys”

ff. 43v-45r

A, B

A poem celebrating the English victory at Flodden Field in 1513

O Rex Regum in thy reallme celestyall / Gloryfied with gawdys of Gabryellys company

I me submyte to your cherytablly coreccyon / And yn þus maner shalbe my conclusyon. Explicyit Bellum de Brampton per Ffrauncys Dyngley de Manston.

ff. 45v-48v

A, B

A list of what Londoners must offer to their church

Ffyrste that every persone, dweller and inbytant in any howse in London or subbarbis of the same hyred & occupyed as for a dwelllyng place

Arbyratowurs chosyn uppon the premysses as yn the tenowur of the compromyse therupon made oponlye hyt may appere

“The composysyon of all offryngys within the Cete of London & subbarbys of the same”

ff. 48v-50r

A, B

A list of what Londoners must offer to their church

This text is almost completely illegible
46
A: A chronicle of the Dukes of Normandy and Kings of England up to Richard II
B: In the ffyrste hyt ys to be consydered that in the yere of owr lord god viijC lxxvj
and at that tyme Alured being Kyng of Ynglond
C: And was beryed at Langley, and after Kyng Herry the iiiijth remevyd hym to
Westmynster & reyned xxij yere & iiiij monthys
D: “Cronekell. Thys brefe tretys ys compyled to brynge the pepyll owte of dowte
that have not hard of the cronekyllys and of the lynyall dyssente unto the crownus
of Inglond, Ffraunce, Castyll, and of Legyons, and unto the Dowchye of
Normandy sythe hyt was conqueryd”
E: ff. 51v-53v
F: A

NB: This item has an additional two entries which can be found on f. 17r.
For a discussion of this mislocation, see Section III of Chapter I.

47
A: Ipomadon
B: Mekely, lordyngis gentyll and fre, / Lystene a while and herken to me
C: To the blysse God bryng us alle / That dyed on rode for grete & smalle. Explicet
Ipomydon
D: “The Lyfe of Ipomydon”
E: ff. 54r-84r
F: C,D
G: IMEV 2142

48
A: Love lyric
B: O mestres whye / owte caste am I
C: To have free chayse / & spede as well
D: 
E: f. 84v
F: A

49
A: Ephemeral moral verse
B: Som do entende / There yowthe for to spende
C: Gentylly to have dalyance / Whylsy pat your yowthe dope tary
D: 
E: f. 84v
F: A
50
A: Narrative about a merchant who travels abroad
B: There was a merchaunt of Ynglond whych aveuryd into fferre contres
C: Yf pat we shulde not kyll & destroye them they wolde dystroy & devoure us, bothe beste & fowles.
D:
E: f. 84v
F: A

51
A: Story of a wise servant
B: There was a grete lorde pat had a sage fole the whyche he lovyd marvaylous well becawse of hys pastyme
C: And thedyr ye goo withowte amendment & therfor I geve yow all my money
D:
E: f. 85r
F: A

f. 85v is blank

52
A: Stanzaic Morte Arthur
B: Lordinges that are leff and dere / Lystenyth and I shall you tell
C: Jhesu that suffred woundes sore / Graunt us all the blysse of hevyn. Amen.
Explecit le Morte Arthur.
D:
E: ff. 86r-133v
F: C,E
G: IMEV 1994

53
A: Poem about sin
B: Thowghe I be bonde, yette am I ffree / Thowghe I be free, yet am I tyed
C: I do my beste, bothe nyghte & day / But bonde & free stytle am I steyed
D:
E: f. 133*r
F: A

54
A: John Skelton’s “Speke Parott”
B: Lectoribus auctor recepit opusculy huius auxesim
C: Crescet in im[m]ensem me vino psitacus iste / Huic mea dicetur skeltonidis inclita fama. / Quod Skleton, Lawryat, / Orator Regius / 34
D:
E: ff. 133*r-140r
F: A
55
A: Poem lamenting a lost love
B: Mornyng, mornyng / Thus may I synge
C: A mynyon eke / In Ynglond or in Fraunce
D:
E: f. 140r
F: A

f. 140v is blank but for a note at the top of the folio which reads, “By me Henry Lucas.” For more on this, see Section III of Chapter I.

56
A: Prognostication poem
B: Ye men þat wysdome wylt lerne / Ye moste lystyn a stevyn
C: Thys wysedom of these vij dayes / Comyth of truþ as Ezechyas sayes. / Explicit Propheta Ezechyell
D: “Ezechyelys Propheete”
E: ff. 141r-142r
F: A

57
A: Directions on how to make ink
B: Here begynnythe the crafte of lymmyng. Fyrste how thow shalte temper all thy colors to lymme with
C: And lette hyt stonde a whyle & temper hyt with thy vermylon withowtyn
D:
E: ff. 142r-146v
F: A

58
A: Letter from the king demanding that the complaints of the fictive “John at Noke” against the Merchants of the Staple be heard
B: Trustye and welbelovyd & cetera. Whereas owre humbyll subgiete John at Noke hathe complayne unto us
C: And as ye wyll avoyde owr greate indygnacion & dyspleasure in thys behalfe. Yevyn undyr owr sygnet. & cetera.
D: “By the Kyng”
E: f. 146v
F: A
59
A: John Skelton’s “Collyn Clout”
B: Quis resurget ad malygnantes aut quis stabit mecum adversus operantes
iniquitatem? Nemo, Domin[e].
C: Ah, pudet, ah, miseret. Vetor hic ego pandere plura pro gemitu et lacrimis prestet
peto premia pena.
D:
E: ff. 147r-153v
F: A

60
A: Prognostication poem
B: Yf Crystnas day on the Munday be / A trobolus wynter ye shall see / Medlyd with
waters stronge
C: Chyldren þat be borne þat day / Shalbe myghtye & stronge parfay / Of wytte full
reasonabyl
D:
E: f. 153v
F: A

61
A: Prognostication poem
B: Lordyngys, I warne yow al beforne / Yef þat day Cryste was borne
C: Yf þou awghte stele, hyt shall þe spyll / þou dyest yf sekenes take the
D:
E: f. 154r-v
F: A
G: IMEV 1905

62
A: Ephemeral text about someone’s last words
B: They seyd nothyng else savyng desyryng the pepyll to pray for them 5
Paternosters, 5 Aves, & iiij Credys & cry apon lhesu as hother before. God save
the Kyng. Amen.
C: [NA; entire text given in incipit]
D:
E: f. 155r
F: A

63
A: Allegory about the fall of Anne Boleyn
B: In a ffreshe mornyng among the flowrys / My servyce saying at certayne owrys
C: þat he may be hers & she may be hys / & send us good fortune. Amen
D:
E: f. 155r-v
F: A
A: Anti-Wolsey poem
B: God save Kyng Herry owr nobyll kyng / And all þat byn to hym lovyng
C: I dar no write under my name / Ffor fere to have to myche blame. / God save the Kyng.
D: “Of the Cardnall Wolse”
E: f. 156r-v
F: A

A: Moral verse
B: O mortall man, by grete exaltacion / In ryches, awtoryte, or in dygnyte sette
C: And god þou forgetyste & settyste all asyde / trustyng
D:
E: f. 157r-v
F: A

NB: A later hand has copied Colyns’s penultimate line in an attempt to mimic the script.
NB: Colyns ceased copying this poem in the middle of the final line. He completes the poem from a superior exemplar several folios later in this quire. For a discussion of this, see Section IV of Chapter I.

A: Anti-Wolsey poem
B: Thomas, Thomas, all hayle. Sythe / Of Yngland the rule & soverente
C: Besechyng God of peas & reste / & to kepe sensualyte in awe. / God save the kyng, the / Quene, & my Lady Prynces. / Amen.
D:
E: ff. 158r-159v
F: A

A: Prognostication poem
B: Sonday: When the prime fallythe uppon Sunday / in þat mone ye shall have drowghte.
C: Saterday: When þe prime fallythe on Saterday / Ye shall have plenty of rayne.
D:
E: f. 159v
F: A
68  
A: Prognostication poem  
B: When the prime fallith the uppon A then / the mone shall change the iiiijth day be  
C: The iiiijth day before the prime in ye / iiijde owr after none.  
D:  
E: f. 159v  
F: A  

69  
A: Moral verse  
B: O mortall man, by grete exaltacion / In riches awtoryte & dyngnyte sett  
C: Consydyr the worlde ys all full of care / & consyder hat dethe wyll no man spare  
D: “Consilium Domini in eternum manet”  
E: ff. 160r-161r  
F: A  

70  
A: Extract from Secretum Secretorum  
B: The huge vertue sothely & wond[er]full as wellin plantys as in stonyys ys sett of  
whyche thow we have determyned alse where at full in owr bokys as as [sic]  
suffiseth to thys presente werke  
C: the whyte be hyt put in the mowthe of hat on; yf ryghtwysenes parte to hym he  
shall speke anon, or else they shall wax dome as long as hyt shall be in hys  
mowthe.  
D: “Ingens vero vertus et mirabil tam in plantis et cetera”  
E: ff. 161v-162r  
F: A  

71  
A: Ephemeral proverb  
B: What I spende on myselfe, hat I have  
C: [NA: entire text contained in incipit]  
D:  
E: f. 162r  
F: A  

72  
A: Mathematical riddle  
B: ij before I & iij before v. Now lij & then ij  
C: & one at the last  
D:  
E: f. 162v  
F: F
73
A: Indenture between Robert Farrer and his gardener
B: Memorandum that I, Thomas Daviston of St Mary Ax, have bounde myself to
   Master Robert Ffarrers, Gent
C: therfore the some of vj s. viij d. at foure severall [   ]rmes.
D:
E: f. 162v
F: F

74
A: Ordinances of Colyns’s parish church
B: Memorandum that the xxvjth day of Novembyr, the yere of owr Lord God M\textsuperscript{III} V\textsuperscript{C}
   & XX\textsuperscript{I} and the xvijth yere of the rayne of Kyng Herry the Viiij\textsuperscript{th}, at assemble of the
   parysshens of Wolchyrche Hawe by the Stockys in London
C: Item that the sexton do ryng every day to morow mas, both wynter & somer, iij\textsuperscript{e}
   peleys & a dystaunce betwene the pelys at the leste of a quarter of an owr long
D:
E: ff. 163r-165r
F: A

75
A: Church rates of St Mary Woolchurch, Colyns’s parish
B: Whereat the accompte & awdyd at the howse of Jamus Fynard the ix\textsuperscript{th} day of
   Aperill for the acompte of Robard Hanford & the same Jamus the yere of owr
   Lord God M\textsuperscript{III} V\textsuperscript{C} & xxvj
C: for Saynte Anne to have of the wardens of Saynte Christofyr & Saynte Jamus in
   good money iij s. iiiij d. & no lesse
D:
E: f. 165r
F: A

76
A: Lament for England’s governmental instability
B: For falsenes & periury Ynglond hathe byn translatyd iij tymes from Bretons to
   Saxsons to Engystys men & Danys…
C: Withowte myracle by owr Lorde God be shewyd and ys to drede þat in shorte
   tyme to be ayen translatyd unto Bretons. & þis ys had owte of a boke callyd Vitas
   patrum.
D:
E: f. 165r
F: A
A: Medicinal remedy
B: Take a redde cocke & a mowse pece of beefe & sethe them with
C: & lett the pacyent drynke þis of fyrste in the mornyng & also laste at nyghte & provyd good
D: “A precyowus restoratyfe for a man that ys weke & lackys nature”
E: f. 165v
F: A

A: Misogynistic jingle
B: A woman hathe xij proportees: that ys iije conyngys, iij weshyngys, iij councellys, & iij wanyngys
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: 
E: f. 165v
F: A

A: Merchant’s list of items to purchase or items sold
B: Monday: Item dardes---xi hoges
C: Item hukenes[?]---iij
D: 
E: f. 165v
F: G
NB: This is inscribed by a subsequent owner

A: The circumference of the earth
B: The compas of the worlde from þat on syde to þat hother or overthwarte ys juste by trew porsyon ys xxj m[l] & vj C mylys & no more
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: 
E: f. 166r
F: A

A: Moral poem
B: Rede dystynctlye / Pray devoutlye / Syghe depelye / Suffyr pacyently
C: Thus alwaye thynke on love for þat longythe to God & to hys crea[tion]; and thus to love bryngythe the lover to everlustyng lyffe in Heven, worlde withowtyn ende. Amen
D: “A specyall glasse to loke in daylye”
E: f. 166r
F: A
82
A: Ephemeral moral sentence
B: Kepe well x & flee from vij, spend well v & com to Hevyn
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: 
E: f. 166r
F: A
G: IMEV 1817

83
A: Mathematical riddle
B: Ffyrste sette iij before on iiij before vij iiij go
C: And þis ys the lotte of Saint Thomas of Caunterbery
D: “The lotte of Saint Thomas of Caunterbery”
E: f. 166r
F: A

84
A: Total number of English kings
B: The nombyr of all the kyngys þat ha[ve] reyned in thys londe of Breten & Ynglond from Brute to Kyng Herry the Viijthe conteyne vijxx & vj kyngys.
C: [NA; entire text contained in incipit]
D: 
E: f. 166r
F: A
A detailed codicological description can be found in Frost (34-71) and Meale (“Social and Literary Contexts” 7-30).

1\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 1-16), 2\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 17-32), 3\textsuperscript{5} (singletons; ff. 33-37), 4\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 38-53), 5\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 54-69), 6\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 70-85), 7\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 86-101), 8\textsuperscript{16} (wanting 2; ff. 102-16), 9\textsuperscript{12} (ff. 117-28), 10\textsuperscript{6} (6 cancelled; ff. 129-33), 11\textsuperscript{16} (ff. 133*-148), 12\textsuperscript{8} (ff. 149-56), 13\textsuperscript{6} (ff. 157-62), 14\textsuperscript{4} (ff. 163-66)

Watermarks:

A: Main, au naturel, face interne
There are several close matches to this common watermark, of which Briquet remarks “est d’une abondance extrême et dont les produits se sont étendus très loin dans le nord et l’est de l’Europe” (3: 575). Frost suggests 11428, 11421, 11423, 11462, but the paper size of all four stocks is too small to be a match. In my estimation, 11435 is the best match, whose paper was large and which Briquet dates to 1504. It was manufactures in Troyes, with similar varieties also made in Paris and Maëstricht in the same year.

B: Tête de boeuf à yeux et à narines
There are several potential matches. Frost suggests 15068, 15073, 15077, and 15098, of which only 15.098 was on large enough paper. In my estimation, 15097 and 15110 are the best candidates, both of which were produced in the late 1460s, which would accord with the professional production of the romance fascicles in the third quarter of the fifteenth century.

C: Char à deux roues
There is no satisfactory match in Briquet. Frost suggests 3537, but the paper size is too small for this to be a match. As Briquet notes, though, this class of watermarks was on paper produced widely throughout the second and third quarters of the fifteenth century (1: 228), making it contemporaneous with the professional production of the romance fascicles.

D: Armoiries de France: Trois Fleurs de Lis posées deux et une
1740 is the best match, which Briquet dates to 1459?, which would be contemporaneous with the professional production of the romance fascicles.
E: Lettre P gothique accompagné d’un ornement autre que le quatrefeuille
There is no satisfactory match in Briquet. 8734 is the closest, which Briquet dates to 1500.

The Individual Quires:

NB: The numbers refer to the folio numbers in the manuscript, and the letters refer to the watermark on each folio, which corresponds to the descriptions of each watermark type given above. An “x” means that there was no watermark on that leaf. An “OO” indicates a lost or cancelled folio.

Quire 1:

1-x                           9-A
2-A                           10-A
3-x                           11-x
4-x                           12-x
5-A                           13-A
6-A                           14-A
7-x                           15-x
8-x                           16-x

Quire 2:

17-A                          25-A
18-A                          26-x
19-x                          27-x
20-x                          28-x
21-A                          29-A
22-A                          30-A
23-A                          31-x
24-x                          32-x

Quire 3:

33-x                          36-x
34-A                          37-x
35-x
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<td>80-B</td>
<td>81-x</td>
<td>82-B</td>
<td>83-B</td>
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## Quire 7:

<table>
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<th>86-x</th>
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<th>90-C</th>
<th>91-C</th>
<th>92-x</th>
<th>93-C</th>
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<td>95-C</td>
<td>96-x</td>
<td>97-x</td>
<td>98-x</td>
<td>99-C</td>
<td>100-C</td>
<td>101-C</td>
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Quire 8:

102-C 102-x 103-x 104-x 105-x 106-C 107-x 108-x

Quire 9:

117-x 117-x 118-x 119-C 120-D 121-x 122-D

Quire 10:

129-x 130-D 131-x

Quire 11:

133*-x 134-a 135-a 136-x 137-x 138-a 139-a 140-x

Quire 12:

149-x 150-a 151-a 152-x

367
Quire 13:

157-x  160-x
158-a  161-x
159-a  162-a

Quire 14:

163-E  165-x
164-E  166-x
APPENDIX C:
CATALOGUE OF LINCOLN, CATHEDRAL LIBRARY MS 91

Key to entries:
A: My summary of the contents of this item or, if applicable, the commonly used title of the item
B: The incipit
C: The explicit
D: The title, if given in the manuscript
E: The folio(s) on which the item is found
F: The reference numbers from A New Index of Middle English Verse (IMEV) or In Principio (IP), if applicable. Note that many of the IP entries are duplicated, but I have supplied both reference numbers
NB: The texts are all written in Thornton’s hand, unless otherwise indicated.
NB: I have included Hope Emily Allen’s conclusions as to the authenticity of each text that may be part of the canon of the works of Richard Rolle. These determinations are based on the relevant entries in her Writing Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole, and Materials for His Biography.

1
A: Prose romance about Alexander
B: “Down in to þe dyke and thare he felle” (acephalous text)
C: “Explicit vita Alexandry magni conqueroris / Here ende þe lyf of gret Allexander, conquerour of all þe worlde”
D: 
E: ff. 1r-49r

2
A: Record of the birth of Thornton’s grandson, plus some probationes pennae
B: 
C: 
D: 
E: f. 49v
NB: The scribe of this birth notice is unidentified, though it is not in Thornton’s hand. Neither is it in the hand of William Thornton, who has scribbled his name at the foot of the leaf.
3. A: Prognostications of the weather
      plenteth and darke”
   C: “And reste amanges āt peple of āt rewme āt yt falles in”
   D:
   E: f. 50r-v
   NB: This text is not in Thornton’s hand, nor does it seem to be in the same hand as Item
      2.
   NB: f. 51r is blank but for a few marginal scribblings in a later hand

4. A: A short lament of a sinner
   B: “All Crystyn men āt walkys me bye / Be-hold & see ās dulful seyght”
   C: “Be-thynk I heryd a horn blowe / All crystyn men be-war by me / Explicit
      lamentacio”
   D: “Lamentacio peccatoris”
   E: ff. 51v-52r
   F: IMEV 172
   NB: f. 52v contains an illustration of three armed knights and one horse

5. A: The Alliterative *Morte Arthure*
   B: “Now grett glorious godd thurgh grace of hym-selven / And the precyous prayere
      of hys pryse modyr”
   C: “In to bretayne the brode as āe bruytte tellys. Explicit. / Hic iacet Arthurus rex
      quondam rexque futurus. / Here endes morte Arthure writen by Robert of
      Thornton. / Thornton dictus qui scripsit sit benedictus. Amen.”
   D: “Here begynnes Morte Arthure”
   E: ff. 53r-98v
   F: IMEV 2322

6. A: Northern *Octavian*
   B: “Mekyll and littill, olde & yonge / Herkyns all to my talkynge”
   C: “Then gyffē us alle thi dere blyssynge / Amen, amen, per charyte amen.”
   D: “Here by-gynnes the romance off Octovyane”
   E: ff. 98v-109r
   F: IMEV 1918
7
A: Sir Isumbras
B: “Jhesu Christ, lorde of heuen kynge / Graunte us alle his dere blyssynge”
C: “He gyff e us all his dere blyssynge / Nowe and ever mare. Amen. Amen / Explicit Sir Ysambrace”
D: “Here begynnes the Romance off Sir Ysambrace”
E: ff. 109r-114v
F: IMEV 1184

8
A: The Erle of Tolous
B: “Ihesu Criste, God and Lorde in trynyte / Onely God and persones thre”
C: Ending is missing
D: “Here bygynnes þe Romance off Dyoclicyane þe Emperor & þe Erle Berade of Tholous and of þe Emprice Beaulilone”
E: ff. 114v-122v
F: IMEV 1681

9
A: The Life of St Christopher
B: “Lordynges if it be sowre will / And se will here & holde sow still”
C: “Thaure are samen in heuens blysse / God bryng us thedir when his will es. Amen. / Explicit vita Sancti Christofori”
D: “Vita Sancti Christofori”
E: ff. 122v-129v
F: IMEV 1990

10
A: Sir Degrevant
B: “Jhesu, Lorde in trynite / Graunte þam Heuen for to see”
C: “Graunt us all in Heuen to be / Thy worthy face for to see / And gyff us wele to spede. Amen. / Amen. Explicit Sir Degravaunt”
D: ff. 130r-138r
E: “Sir Degrevante”
F: IMEV 1953

11
A: Sir Eglamour of Artois
B: “Ihesu þat es Heuens kyang / Gyff us alle his blyssyng”
D: “Incipit Sir Eglamour of Artasse”
E: ff. 138v-147r
F: IMEV 1725
12
A: A hymn in praise of Mary
B: “Ihesu, Lorde in trinyte / Þat was & es and aye schall be”
C: “Jhesu till his blysse us brynge / Þat es ever lastande. Amen per charite”
D: “De miraculo beate Marie”
E: ff. 147r-148r
F: IMEV 1722

13
A: Anti-fraternal satire
B: “Lyarde es ane olde horse & may noght wele drawe / He sall be putt in-to þe parke hobyn for to gnawe”
C: “Thus endis Lyarde at þe laste worde / Yf a man thynke mekill kepe somewhat in herde. / Here endys Lyarde”
D: “Lyarde”
E: ff. 148r-149r
F: IMEV 2026

14
A: Thomas of Ercledoun
B: “Lystyns lordyngs bothe grete & smale / And takis gude tente what I will saye”
C: “…nges us to his heuen so hyye. Amen. Amen. / Explicit Thomas Of Erseledowun” (ending is partly missing)
D: “Tomas off Ersaskellonne”
E: ff. 149v-153v
F: IMEV 365

15
A: The Awntyrs off Arthure
B: “In Kyng Arthure tym ane awntir by-tyde / By the Terne Wahethelyn als the buke tellis”
C: “This fferly by-felle full sothely to sayne / In Y[n]ggillwed fforeste at þe Tern Wathelayne. / Explicit. Explicit.”
D: “Here By-gynnes The awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn”
E: ff. 154r-161r
F: IMEV 1566

16
A: Sir Percyvell of Gales
B: “Lef lythes to me / Two wordes or thre”
C: “As he es lorde of all thyng / Grante us all his blyssyng / Amen for charyte. / Quod Robert Thornton. / Explicit Sir Percevell of Gales, cosyn to Kyng Arthoure”
D: “Here bygynnes the Romance off Sir Percyuell of Gales”
E: ff. 161r-176r
F: IMEV 1853
17  A: A charm
B: “Say þe charme thris to it be [ ? ]”
C: “And Goddis forbott þou wikkyde worme / Bot awate mote þou wende to þe erthe & þe stane”
D: “A charme for þe tethe werke”
E: f. 176r
F: IMEV 1292

18  A: A charm
B: “Thre gude breþer are 3e / Gud gatis gange 3e”
C: “Bot awaye mote þou wende to þe erthe & þe stane”
D:
E: f. 176r
F: IMEV 3709

19  A: A Latin charm
B: “In Dei nomine amen. Sanc [manuscript damage makes the rest of the incipit illegible]”
C: “[Manuscript damage makes beginning of explicit illegible] & iii ave Maria + amen +”
D: “A charme ffors the [damage obscures remainder of title]”
E: f. 176v

20  A: A letter from Pope Leo to Charlemagne containing a charm reported to keep its owner safe in battle
B: “Hec est epistola Sancti Saluatoris quam Leo Papa transmisit Karolo Regi”
C: “Quia antiquus hostis fugit ubi te vidit + In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Amen.”
D: “Epistola Sancti Saluatoris”
E: f. 176v
F: IP 1366068, 1367592

21  A: A prayer that is reported to keep one safe from one’s enemies
B: “He þat devoutely sayse þis orysone dayly sall hafe remyssyone of all his synnys and that daye he ne sall noghte dy none euylle dede”
C: “& ab omnibus periculis libera me & protige [sic] me, domine Ihesu Christo, rex piissime, qui cum patte & spiritu sancto & rignas [sic] deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen.”
D:
E: ff. 176v-177r
22
A: A prayer to Mary
B: “[L]ady ffor thy joyes fyue wyssse me the waye of rightwys lyffe. Amen.”
Ave Maria. Amen.”
D: “A preyere off the ffyue joyes of owre lady [in] Inglys and of the ffyue sorowes”
E: ff. 177v-178r
F: IMEV 2099

23
A: A psalm
B: “Say ṭis psalme voce mea ad dominum clamaui with this colett folawande ṭat es full merytorye”
C: “Et a potestate omnium inimicorum meorum et spirituum inmundorum visibilium et invisibilium. Amen.”
D: “Psalmus voce mea ad dominum clamaui”
E: f. 178r

24
A: Prayers on the five wounds of Christ
B: “[A]doro te cruce in honore crucis in qua pependit dominus noster”
C: “Per te Ihesu Christe, saluator mundi, qui cum patre & spiritu sancto vivis et rignas [sic] deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen.”
D: “Here bygynnys ffyue preyers to the wirchipe of the ffyue woundys of oure lorde Ihesu Cryste”
E: f. 178r-v
F: IP 1366069, 1367593

25
A: A short prayer
B: “Now Ihesu goddis sonne giffere of alle vertus vouche ṭou safe to giffe me the seuen giftyes of ṭe haly gaste”
C: “And to knawe myne unworthynes and graunte me of thy blyssedhede vertuose lyffynge”
D: “Oracio in Inglys”
E: f. 178v
A: A prayer to Mary
B: “Sancta Maria, regina celorum, mater Christi, domina mundi, imperatrix inferni”
C: “Exaudi, exaudi, exaudi me dulcissime Jhesu, ut terrem Sathane per te queam euadere. Amen.”
D: “A Colett to owre lady saynt Marye”
E: f. 178v

A: A short prayer
B: “Omnipotens, sempiterne deus, miserere ffamulo tuo N., et per intercessionem beate & gloriose Dei genitricis [sic]”
C: “Et in tuo sancto serviciio usque in finem persueret [sic] per dominum Ihesum Christum filium tuum qui tecum [ends mid-sentence]”
D: “Oracio in modo collecto per amico”
E: f. 178v
F: IP 1366070, 1367594

A: A short prayer
B: “O virtutu domine per secula benedicimus te qui famulo tuo Leonardo specialiter dedisti in carcere”
C: “Qui tecum vivit & rignat [sic] deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen.”
D: “Antiphona Sancti Leonardi cum collecta”
E: f. 178v
F: IP 13366071, 1367595

A: A translation of pseudo-Bonaventure’s Meditaciones vitae Christi
B: “Who so desyres to ffynd comforthe and gostely gladnes in þe passione and in þe croysse of owre Lorde Ihesus”
C: “He has ordeyned to all þo þat here hertly luffes hym with all youre myghte, þe whilke joye & comforte he graunt us þat with his precious blode boghte us, Ihesus Christus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Per charite. / Explicit Bonaventure de misteriis passionis Ihesu Christi. / Of all thynge it is the best / Ihesus in herte fast to fest / And lufe hym over all thynge”
D: “In nomine patris et ffilii et speritus [sic] sancti. Amen. / Here begynnes the previte off the passione of owre Lorde Ihese”
E: ff. 179r-189r
30
A: Aphorism
B: “Of all thynge it is the best / Ihesu in herte fast to fest / And lufe hym ower all thynge”
C: [Entire text contained in incipit]
D:
E: f. 189r
F: IMEV 2616

31
A: William of Nassyngton’s Treatise on the Trinity
B: “A, Lord God of myghtys, maste fader and son and haly gaste / Ffader for þou ert almyghtty, sonne for thow ert all wytty”
C: “In thi luffe be my likynge / And there to make me glade & sayne / And for thy lufe to make mournynge / That for my lufe walde be slayne. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Per charite”
D: “Incipit tractatus Willelmi Nassyngton quondam aduocati curie Eboraci de trinitate & unitate cum declaracione operum Dei & de passione domini nostri Ihesu Christi”
E: ff. 189r-191v
F: IMEV 11

32
A: Lyric poem in praise of Christ
B: “Lorde god Ihesu cryste godd Almyghty I thanke þe with all my herte hally”
C: “Þat I may wonne with þe in blisse Endlesse. Amen.”
D:
E: f. 191v
F: IMEV 1954

33
A: Lyric poem in praise of God
B: “Almyghty god in trinite Inwardly I thanke þe ffor thy gud ded þat þou me wroght”
D:
E: f. 191v
F: IMEV 246, 1950.5

NB: Thornton has here joined two distinct poems together into one Item without distinguishing between them.
34
A: Lyric poem in praise of Christ
B: “Ihesu that diede one the rude for þe lufe of me / And boghte me with thi precious blode thow hafe mercy of me”
C: “And for thy lufe to make mournynge / That for my lufe walde be slayne. / Amen. Amen. Amen. Per charite”
D: 
E: ff. 191v-192r
F: IMEV 1757, 1741
NB: Thornton has here joined two distinct poems together into one Item without distinguishing between them.

35
A: A tract on the virtues of the Holy Name
B: “Ricardus herimita [sic] super versiculo oleum effusum nomen tuum in canticum & cetera. That es on Inglysce oyle owt settede es thi name”
C: “Ffor thare may na wykked spyritte noye þare Ihesu es mekyll in mynde or es nemenyd in mouthe. Explicit.”
D: “Of the vertus of the haly name of Ihesu”
E: ff. 192r-193v
NB: According to Allen, the Latin original of this text is undoubtedly by Rolle, though the English translation, preserved here by Thornton, does not seem to be (66-67).

36
A: The story of Rolle’s religious conversion
B: “When I hade taken my syngulere perpos & lefte þe seculere habyte”
D: “Narracio / A tale þat Richerde hermet”
E: f. 193v
NB: According to Allen, what Thornton has here recorded as two separate texts (Items 30 and 31) were originally part of the same translation of Rolle’s Canticles (68).
NB: Thornton has appended a short couplet to the explicit of this text (transcribed here), which the IMEV lists as a separate Item (1779.33); however, Thornton has not set this couplet off from the rest of this Item, and thus I treat the couplet as part of the Item.
37
A: A short prayer in Latin
B: “Deus noster, refugium, o creator noster & virtus nostra”
C: “Creatorem nostrum & dominum perueniamus ab omnibus peccatis mundati & absoluti. Amen.”
D: “A prayer ye that Richard hermet made, ye es beried at Hampulle”
E: f. 193v
F: IP 97905, 1366072, 1367596
NB: The authenticity of this text to the Rolle canon is in doubt, though Allen favors its inclusion (324).

38
A: A short prayer in Latin
B: “Ihesu, nostra redempcio, amor & desiderium, Deus creator omnium, homo in fine temporum”
D: “Ympnus quem compositus sanctus Ambrosyus & est ualde bonus”
E: ff. 193v-194r
F: IP 1366073, 1367597

39
A: Two short narrative about the dangers of insufficient contrition for sins
B: “Rycharde hermyte reherces a dredull tale of unperfitte contrecyone þat a haly mane Cesarius tellys in ensample”
C: “Þis þe abbot & þe prioure tolde þe scolere and he with grete joye thanked God”
D: “De in-perfecta contricione”
E: f. 194r
NB: Though no other MS contains this work, Allen maintains that it is likely by Rolle (403).

40
A: A moral narrative by Richard Rolle based on the attributes of bees
B: “The bee has thre kyndis. Ane es þat scho es neuer ydill and scho es noghte with thaym þat will noghte wyrke”
C: “Bot thay may noghte flye to lufe and contemplacyone of God þay are so chargede wyth othyre affeccyons and othire vanytes. Explicit.”
D: “Moralia Richardi heremite de natura apis unde quasi apis argumentosa”
E: f. 194r-v
NB: According to Allen this piece is “given to Rolle by good internal and external evidence” (269).
A: A short narrative about an anchoress
B: “Alswa Heraclides þe clerke telles þat a mayden for-suke hir cete and sate in a sepulcre”
C: “& loo swa perfity a woman lyfede. Richard herymyte reherces þis tale in ensampill”
D: “De vita cuiusdam puelle incluse propter amorem Christi”
E: ff. 194v-195r
NB: Allen attributes this text to Rolle (403).

A: A Latin lyric poem in praise of God
B: “Meliora sunt ubera tua vino. Dulciora et meliora sunt diuina eloquia”
C: “Amorem eius et gloriam mors proers auferet quando ab hac luce deus dignetur me vocare. & cetera.”
D: “Richardus herymyta”
E: f. 195r
F: IP 1366074, 1367598

A: A Latin lyric in praise of God
B: “O quam delectabile gaudium et delicatum solacium amare dei filium”
C: “Quia nichil in presenti desidero quod me in eternum habere non confido. & cetera”
D: “Item inferius idem Richardus”
E: f. 195r
F: IP 1366075

A: A tract on the 10 Commandments
B: “The fyrste comandement es thy lorde God þou sall loute and til hym anely you sall serve”
C: “Na-thynge till ill / And þat he lufe his neightbour saule / mare þan his body or any gude3 of þe worlde. & cetera. Explicit.”
D: “A notabill tretys off the ten comandementys drawen by Richerde the hermyte off Hampull”
E: ff. 195v-196r
NB: This work is definitely part of the Rolle canon (Allen 276-77).
45
A: A tract on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
B: “Þe seuen gyftes of þe Haly Gaste þat eye gyfen to men and wymmen þat er ordaynade to þe joye of Heuen”
C: “When we drede to wrethe God in þe leste syn þat we kan knawe and flese it also venym. Explicit.”
D: “Item idem de septem donis Spiritus Sancti / Also of the gyftes of the haly gaste”
E: f. 196r-v
NB: According to Allen, this piece is authentically part of the canon of Rolle’s works (274-75).

46
A: A short prose piece in praise of God
B: “Gernyng and delite of Ihesu Criste þat has na thyng of worldes thoghtes es wondyr-full pure”
C: “& to be payede with all godys sandes with-owtten gruchynge or heuynese of thoghte. & cetera. Explicit. Explicit. Carmen qui scripsit sit benedictus. Amen.”
D: “Item idem de dilectacione in Deo / Also of þe same delyte and æernyng of Gode”
E: f. 196v
NB: Allen attributes this piece to Richard Rolle (271-72).

47
A: The Mirror of St Edmund of Canterbury
B: “Videte vocacionem vestram. This wordes sayse Saynte Paule in his pistyll: and they are thus mekill to saye one Ynglysche Seese ȝowre callynge”
D: “Incipit speculum Sancti Edmundi Cantuariensis, Archipiscopi in Anglicis / Here be-gynnys the myrroour of Saynt Edmonde, þe Ersebechop of Canterberye”
E: ff. 197r-209v
NB: Though this text is attributed to Rolle in one MS, Allen declares that it is certainly spurious (362-64).

48
A: Tract on the Our Father prayer
B: “Pater noster qui es in celis. In all the wordes þat er stabilled and sett to say in erthe þan es þe pater noster þe beste”
D: “Tractatus de dominica oracione secundum & cetera”
E: ff. 209r-211r
49
A: Lyric prayer to Christ
B: “Ihesu Criste, Saynte Marye sonne / Thurgh whaym þis worlde was worthily wroghte”
C: “That I may come un-to þi place / And wonn ay with the stylle. Amen. / Explicit tractatus”

50
A: Lyric Prayer to God
B: “Fadir and Son and Haly Gaste / Lorde to þe I make my mone”
C: “One þe to see þat joyfull syghte / Ffadir and Sonn and þe Haly Gaste. Amen.”

51
A: Lyric prayer to Christ
B: “Ihesu Criste, Goddes son of Heuen / Kyng of kynges and lorde of lordes”
C: “Fair face for þe lufe þat you / Schewede to mankynde. Amen.”

52
A: A lyric prayer to Christ in Latin
B: “Adoro te piissime Ihesu qui redimisti me / Ihesu bone te deprecor per pena nimis aspera”

53
A: Affective meditation on the Passion
B: “Ó crux frutex saluificus uiuo fonte rigatus / Cuius flos aromatus ffructus desideratus”

D: “A medytacion of the crosse of Criste with a prayere”
E: ff. 212v-213r
F: IP 1366077, 1367601
54
A: A *memento mori* poem
B: “When Adam dalfē and Eue spane, So spire if þou may spede / Whare was þan þe pride of man, Þat nowe merres his made”
C: “*With I. and E.,* For love you me, Bese nane as I þe hete / Of all þi kyth dare slepe þe with, A nyghte undir þi schete. / Sit nomen domini benedictus ex hoc nunc et usque in seculum. Amen.”
D: 
E: f. 213r-v
F: IMEV 3921
NB: This poem is attributed to Rolle in some manuscripts (though not in Thornton), but according to Allen this attribution is spurious (296-97).

55
A: Short prayer to Christ
B: “Ihesu Criste haue mercy one me / Als þou erte kynge of mageste”
C: “And brynge me if it be this will / Till Heuen to wonne ay with þe styll. / Amen.”
D: 
E: f. 213v
F: IMEV 1674

56
A: John Gaytryge’s Sermon (aka *The Lay Folks’ Catechism*)
B: “Als a grett doctoer schewes in his buke of all þe creatours þat Gode made in Heuen and in erthe”
D: “Here begynnes a sermon þat Dan John Gaytryge made þe whilke teches how scritte es to be made & whareof and in scritte how many thynge3 solde be consederide. Et est Petrus sente[n]ciarum discrezione prima.”
E: ff. 213v-218v
F: IMEV 406

57
A: Lyric in praise of Christ
B: “Ihesu thi swetnes wha moghte it so / And þare-of hafe a clere knaweynge”
C: “Bot brynge me lorde un-to þi blysse / With þe to wonne with-owtten ende. Amen. / Explicit.”
D: 
E: f. 219r-v
F: IMEV 1781
58
A:  Of Angels’ Song
B:  “Dere ffrende, wit þou wele þat þe ende and þe soueraynte of perfeccione standes in a verray anehede of Godd”
C:  “I leue þe saying and gyfe stede to hym. It sufficith to me for to lyffe in trouthe princypally and noghte in felynge. / Explicit. & cetera.”
D:
E:  ff. 219v-221v
According to Allen, this piece is likely by Walter Hilton (365-66 n.2)

59
A:  A poem about the Christian life
B:  “Þi joy be ilke a dele to serue thi Godd to paye / Ffor all this worldes wele þou sese it wytes a-waye”
C:  “And thow sall heyen wende / Thow sall se wþiþh þeghe And come to Criste this frende”
D:
E:  f. 222r-v
F:  IMEV 3730
NB: The ending of this text is missing. This poem is likely by Rolle (Allen 301).

60
A:  Selections from Hilton’s Epistle on Mixed Life
B:  “Men þat ware in prelacye and oþer also þat ware haly temperalle men had full charite in affeccione with-in and also in wirkynge with-owtten”
C:  “Rannsaker of þe myghte of Godd and of his maieste with-owtten gret clennes and meknes sall be ouer-layde and oppresside of hym-selfe. & cetera. Explicit.”
D:
E:  ff. 223r-229r
NB: Text begins acephalously

61
A:  An epistle on the Holy Name
B:  “Wit thou wele, dere ffrende, þat þof þou had neuer done syn with thi bodi dedly ne venyall bot anely this þat es called orygynall for it es þe firste syn”
C:  “To the whilke blise he brynge us þat boghte us with his precyouse passion, Ihesu Criste, Goddis sone of Heuen. Amen.”
D:
E:  ff. 229v-230v
NB: According to Allen, this text was likely written by a follower of Rolle (352).
62
A: *Vita of St John the Evangelist*
B: “Of all mankynde þat he made þat maste es of myghte / And of þe molde merked and mesured that tyde”
C: “He was redy we rede / To þat lyghte he us lede / Þat euer more sall laste. Amen. / Explicit.”
D: “Of Sayne John þe Euangelist”
E: ff. 231r-233v
F: IMEV 2608

63
A: Tract on prayer attributed to Rolle
B: “Sranyg [sic] es a gracous gyfte of owre lorde Godd tyll ylk man diuysed as he vouches safe, till sum mare delyttyabyl till sum lesse, as all oþer gudnes & gyftes ere gyffen”
C: “To trespase no more bot besily to thynke one ay lastande lyfe in þe louynge of Godd, all if þay hafe will and grace for to serve Godd sitt may þay make”
D:
E: ff. 233v-236v
NB: Final pages of this text are missing

64
A: Six things needed for prayer
B: “Mercy habydes & sythen for all þat myster hase, qwykk & dede.  And that souerayne made wynnes þe prayand als saynt Gregore sayse”
C: “& gadir thi herte all to-gedir to loue t hy lorde & thanke hym of alle his gud dedis þat he to þe hase done þare you lytill seruede.  & cetera.”
D:
E: ff. 237r-240r
NB: Text begins acephalously

65
A: Tract on God’s grace
B: “Off Goddis grace stirrand and helpand and þat na thyng may be done with-owtten grace þat is”
C: “Þat þay lettis us noghte to accorde to Goddes will þat es þat we fordo all þat syn es or þat may styrre to syn with forthynkkynge of herte & scrifte of mouthe & withstandyng with will neuer to turne agayne.”
D: “De gracia Dei / Assit principio Sancta Maria mea”
E: ff. 240r-243v
66
A: Tract on how to serve God in your daily living
B: “Thre thynges are nedefull till ilk a man of what state he be to mekill his mede thurgh Goddes grace helpande”
C: “& he sall noghte fayle for to come to grace of Gode & ay lastand hele to þe wylke hele & cetera.”
D:
E: ff. 243v-250v

67
A: A vision concerning Purgatory
B: “Alle manere of thyng þat es by-gun þat may turne to the profyte of manes saule to God allonely and to oure lady Saynte Marie be þe wirchipe gyffen”
C: “I woke and all thyng was vaneschede. No more fadir at þis tyme bot God bryng us to his kyngdome. Amen. / Explicit tractatus de visione”
D: “Hic incipit quedam revelacio. A revelacyon schewed to ane holy woman now one late tyme”
E: ff. 250v-258r

68
A: Miserere prayer
B: “Miserere mei Deus secundum magnum misericordiam tuam / Et secundum multitudinem miseracionum tuarum”
D:
E: f. 258r-v

69
A: Veni, creator poem
B: “Veni creator Spiritus, mentes tuorum verita [sic] imple”
D:
E: f. 258v

70
A: A psalter and an office
B: “Beatus vero Ieronimus in hoc modo disposuit hoc spalterium sicut angelus domini docuit per Spiritum Sanctum”
D: “Here bygynns Sayne Jerome Spaltyre [sic]”
E: ff. 258v-270v
F: IP 1366078, 1367602
71
A: *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*
B: “Of the abbaye of Saynte Spirite that es in a place that es callide conscyence. A, dere brethir and systirs, I see þat many walde be in religyon bot þay may noghte”
C: “And se sall be deluyerde thurgh þe mercy of oure lord Ihesu Criste, there blyssed mot he be with-owtten ende. Amen. / Explicit Relegio [sic] Sancti Spiritus. Amen.”
D: “Religio Sancti Spiritus / Religio munda”
E: ff. 271r-276r
NB: Though this is in one MS attributed to Rolle, Allen denies its authenticity (341).

72
A: Extract from *The Prick of Conscience*
B: “The begynnyng es of thre / Ffull mekill þat in men may see”
C: “Thus may a man see his lyfe ay wh are / Ffull of caytefte and of care”
D: 
E: ff. 276v-277r

73
A: Prayer on the seven joys of Mary, attributed to St Thomas Becket
B: “[G]aude fflore virgenal / Honore quoque speciali”
C: “Et ad gaudia tua et eius [sic] eterna feliciter perueniamus. Qui vivis & rignas deus per omnia secula seculorum. Amen.”
D: “Ista oracio que sequitur est de vij gaudia Beate Marie virginis per sanctum Thomam et martirem et Cantuariensem [word crossed out] Archebishopum edita.”
E: f. 277v
F: IP 1366080, 1367604

74
A: Lyric in praise of Mary
B: “[G]aude virgo mater Christi / Que per aurem concepisti”
C: “Gaudet in celis eius meritis et intercessionibus valiamus [sic] peruenire per eundem Christum dominum nostri.”
D: “A-ňôr salutacioun till oure lady of hir fyue joyes”
E: ff. 277v-278r
F: IP 1366081, 1367605

75
A: Lyric in praise of God
B: “[B]enedicció et claritas et sapiencia et graciaírum accio honor virtus et ffortitudo Deo nostro in sese”
C: “Mandatis tuis et volu[n]tate tibi et accione placiamus [sic] per Christum dominum nostri.”
D: “Ane antyme to þe Ffadir of Heuen with a colett”
E: f. 278r
F: IP 1366082, 1367606
A: Lyric hymn about the Passion
B: “[T]uam crucem adoramus domine, tuam gloriosam recolimus passionem”
C: “Dignatus es, saluator mundi, qui vivis & signas [sic] deus per omnia secula
seculorum. Amen.”
D: “A-noðer antym of þe passyoun of Criste Ihesu”
E: f. 278r
F: IP 1366083, 1367607

A: Lyric hymn about humanity’s redemption through Christ
B: “[D]omine Ihesu Christe Ffili Dei uiui qui pendens in cruce pro peccatoribus
dixisti Patri tuo”
C: “Salve sancta facies nostri redemptoris cum tota oracione & versu & colecta &
cetera.”
D: “A colecte of grete perdon un-to Crist Ihesu”
E: f. 278r
F: IP 1366084, 1367608

A: Lyric hymn about the Passion
B: “[C]rucem coronam spiniam / clauos diram-que lanceam / deuote uenerem
ur”
C: “Ueneremur signa per hec in-desinentur signit a peccatorum nostrorum nexibus
liberemur per Christum dominum nostrum.”
D: “Thornton misereatur mei dei / miserere mei deus”
E: f. 278v
F: IP 1366085, 1367609

A: Lyric hymn about the Passion
B: “Salue plaga lateris nostri redemptoris / Ex te enim perfluat fons rosei coloris”
C: “Ab omni confusione & a mala fama atque ab omni periculo corporis & anime
per Christum dominum nostrum. Amen.”
D: “A preyere to þe wounde in Crystis syde. Ihesu Marie filius sit michi clemens &
propicius”
E: ff. 278v-279r
F: IP 1366086, 1367610
A: A *memento mori* lyric

B: “Erthe owte of erthe es wondirly wroghte / Erthe hase getyn one erthe a dignyte of noghte”

C: “Ffor when þat erthe appon erthe es broghte with-in brynke / Than schalle erthe of erthe hase a foulle stynke. / Mors soluit omnia”

D: “Memento homo quod cinis es / et incenerem reuerteris.”

E: f. 279r-v

F: IMEV 704

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A: *Liber de diversis medicinis*

B: “Ffore werke and vanyte in þe hede / Take vernayne or vetoyn or filles of wormod and make lee þere-of and wasche þi heued þere-with thrys in a weke”

C: “or of brynt asche & menge þer-with alse swyn grese & lay it to…”

D: “Hic incipit liber de diuersis medicinis & primo pro capite”

E: ff. 280r-321v

NB: The final seven leaves are stubs
APPENDIX D:
THE COLLATION OF LINCOLN, CATHEDRAL LIBRARY MS 91

1²⁴ (wanting 1-4, 23; ff. 1-19), 2²⁴ (wanting 1; ff. 20-42), 3¹⁰ (ff. 43-52), 4¹⁶ (ff. 53-68), 5¹⁸ (ff. 69-86), 6¹⁶ (ff. 87-102), 7²² (wanting 1, 22; 7, 21 are fragments; ff. 103-22), 8²² (12 is a stub; ff. 123-43), 9²² (wanting 5, 18; ff. 144-63), 10¹⁶ (16 lost or cancelled; ff. 164-78), 11²⁰ (ff. 179-98), 12²⁴ (ff. 199-222), 13¹⁸ (wanting 1, 16-18; ff. 223-36), 14¹⁸ (wanting 1; ff. 237-53), 15³⁰ (wanting 1; 10-12 cancelled; ff. 254-79), 16³⁰ (wanting 30; ff. 280-314), 17⁷ (7 fragments).

Notes:

It should be noted that my assessment of the collation of this MS is based largely off the work of A.E.B. Owen, who was able to examine each quire when it was unbound for repair in 1973. In so doing, he was able to verify which bifolios formed the center of each quire. Since the MS was then re-bound with each folio pasted to a piece of modern paper (and the quires thus taken apart), such an assessment is no longer possible, and thus his determinations on collation must be the starting point of any future work with this MS. By checking watermark evidence against Owen’s collation, I have modified it in some minor ways. Owen’s collation is published in “Collation and Descent.” Note that the collation he provides in this article is corrected from the earlier one appearing in his introduction to the Scolar Press facsimile of the Lincoln MS.

Quire 3:

A.E.B. Owen claims that surviving signatures prove that [quire 3] must originally have comprised at least fourteen leaves. When disbound, all the leaves in [this quire] were found to be “singles”; but ff. 51 and 52 could be “matched” by stain patterns and by a roughly-drawn red line continued across the top of both leaves, so as to make it virtually certain that ff. 51-2 were the centre bifolium. So [quire 3] consisted of eighteen leaves, f. 52 being the first of the second half; the remaining eight have gone but we can be certain they were cancelled and that there is no textual loss, as an original catchword on f. 52v carries us on straight to the Morte Arthure on f. 53. (“Collation and Handwriting” xiv).

However, I find Owen’s remarks here to be a bit confusing since the existence of a series of singletons in this quire would obviate the importance of the center bifolium and the need to posit cancelled leaves. If these are singletons, of course, one will not then find symmetry between pairs of watermarked and un-watermarked sheets, as there are no
conjoint pairs. The existence of singletons, furthermore, would make sense, given that these folios marked the end of the Prose Alexander, which, as I argue in Section IV, was likely copied relatively late, and certainly after the Morte, before which it now appears. Thus, it is reasonable to presume that Thornton, in adding the last section to this manuscript (but at the head of the manuscript), would finish the quire with singletons, as he only needed a few pages to complete the text and had no need to leave space for subsequent texts. Since the first eight folios do exhibit watermark symmetry, I conclude that Thornton has created a gathering of eight, and then inserted two unwatermarked half-sheets at the end.

Quire 10:

Owen lists quire 10 as wanting its final leaf, though I see no reason why it might not as likely have been cancelled by Thornton. Thus, I have listed it as wanting or cancelled.

Quire 11:

Owen’s suggestion for this quire presents problems with regards to watermark symmetry, as the outer two bifolia, in my examination, do not appear to bear any watermarks and thus should not be treated as conjoint pairs. One potential problem was the unfortunate lack of a cold light or ultraviolet light at the Lincoln Cathedral Library, where I examined this manuscript. Thus, I was using a standard desk lamp, and thus it is possible that I could not discern watermarks that were present. John Thompson, for example, has identified watermark E on f. 200 and watermark N on f. 222 (Robert Thornton 72). (Note that I have converted Thompson’s watermark identifications into my identification labels, as he uses a different system of identifying the watermarks.) If Thompson’s finding are correct, then this quire has no problems with watermark symmetry and can be accepted as an unproblematic gathering of twenty leaves. Another possibility is that the outer two leaves of the quire are both unwatermarked. As the only other alternative would involve an inordinately large quire with an anomalous number of cancelled leaves, it seems best to follow Owen’s suggestion for this quire, assuming either that the watermarks are present (but could not be discerned by me), or that there are two unwatermarked sheets in this quire.

Quire 12:

John Thompson has noted the existence of Watermark E on both f. 200 and N on f. 227, though I was able to discern neither. However, both folios must be watermarked if the quire is to exhibit symmetry, and so I have here accepted Thompson’s conclusions.

Quire 13:

John Thompson has noted the existence of Watermark N on both ff. 223 and 227. I, however, could not discern any watermark on these leaves. However, without watermarks on these leaves, the quire lacks symmetry. Thus, I have accepted
Thompson’s findings on these two watermarks, with the caveat that I was not able to locate them myself. Furthermore, I concur with Keiser (“To Knawe” 109) that this quire must have lost two leaves at the beginning and four at the end, not one and three, as Owen suggested. As Keiser demonstrates, this is the amount needed properly to account for the textual loss.

**Watermarks:**

References in this section are to Horrall, “The Watermarks” and the Appendix to Thompson (Robert Thornton 71-73).

A: Boeuf, 51 x 36 mm
Closest to Briquet 2804, which was produced in Herford, 1438

B: Tête de boeuf, de profil, 40 x 50 mm
There is no satisfactory match to Briquet. Thompson suggests 15203/6, with nearest 15204 and Horrall similarly suggests 15203/04, 15206. However, the paper of none of the stocks is big enough to be Thornton’s. It is worth noting, though, that all of the watermarks in this range date from the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

C: Char, 63 x 41 mm
There is no satisfactory match to Briquet here. Thompson and Horrall suggest 3528, but the paper size of this stock is too small to be a match. Briquet notes that “Cette marque, d’un dessin aussi conventionnel que celui du char à quatre roues, a été d’un long usage, et le papier qui le porte a été transporté fort loin de son lieu d’origine” (1: 228).

D: Un colonne, 58 x 21 mm
Thompson identifies this with Briquet 4398, which is from Grenoble, 1421. However, 4398 is too big to be a good match for watermark. It should be noted, though, that Briquet mentions 11 variants of this watermark, dating from 1428-39.

E: Un dauphin surmonté d’une fleur de lis, 55 x 37 mm
The closest match is to Briquet 5894, which is dated from Montpelier, 1427. Briquet also notes two other contemporaneous varieties of this watermark.

F: Semelle de soulier, 40 x 8 mm
There is no good match from Briquet, for in all the extant examples, the size of the paper batch is too small. However, Briquet notes that paper bearing the *semelle de soulier* was only produced for a short period of time in the second quarter of the fifteenth century (4: 676), making it contemporary with Thornton’s compiling activities.
G: Serpent, 30 x 16 mm
Once again, there is no satisfactory match in Briquet, for paper size of each of the possible candidates (13625 is the closest match) is too small to be Thornton’s paper. Nevertheless, this class of watermark dates almost exclusively from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, making it contemporary with Thornton.

H: Marteau, 48 x 26 mm
Once again, there is no satisfactory match in Briquet, for the paper size of each of the possible candidates is too small to be Thornton’s paper. Horrall suggests 11632, which is the closest match, though. Nevertheless, this class of watermark dates almost exclusively from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, making it contemporary with Thornton.

I: Deux clefs, 42 x 35 mm
Horrall rightly notes that Briquet 3868 is the closest match, which is dated to Fribourg, 1427. Briquet also lists sixteen variants of 3868, produced all over central Europe in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

K: Corounne, 50 x 44 mm
There is no satisfactory match to Briquet here, for in all of the possible candidates (4637 is the closest) the size of the paper stock is too large to be Thornton’s. It is worth noting that Briquet comments that the “couronne constitue un des filigranes les plus abondants et le plus variés de forme. Il a été en usage dès la seconde décade du XIVe s.” (2: 283), making it contemporary with Thornton’s compilations.

L: Crossed axes or keys, 30 x 35mm
There is no match in Briquet.

M: Tête de boeuf à yeux et à narines, 60 x 25 mm
There is no satisfactory match in Briquet, though this watermark bears a resemblance to most in the series from 15093-112, of which 15096 is the closest match. There is a great variety among this class, though most was produced in the first or second quarter of the fifteenth century in France, making this contemporaneous with Thornton’s compilations.

N: Un cercle, diameter of 25mm
There is no exact match in Briquet, though 2921 and 2922 are approximate matches for the watermark, though the paper size of both stocks it too small to be Thornton’s.

O: Roue dentée, 47 x 33 mm
Both 13261 and 13263 are close matches, and both date from the early fifteenth century. Neither, however, was on big enough paper to be a match for Thornton’s MS.

P: Lettre A, 42 x 25mm
7900 and 7903 are both satisfactory matches, though again the paper size of both stocks is too small to have been used in this MS. 7900 is also too early, dated by Briquet to 1385. Briquet dates 7903 to 1413.
The individual quires:

NB: The numbers refer to the folio numbers in the manuscript, and the letters refer to the watermark on each folio, which corresponds to the descriptions of each watermark type given above. An “x” means that there was no watermark on that leaf. An “OO” indicates a lost or cancelled folio.

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44-x 49-L
45-L 50-x
46-L 51-x
47-x 52-x

Quire 4:

53-x 61-B
54-x 62-x
55-x 63-x
56-B 64-x
57-B 65-x
58-B 66-B
59-B 67-B
60-x 68-B

Quire 5:

69-C 78-x
70-x 79-x
71-x 80-E
72-C 81-B
73-B 82-x
74-x 83-x
75-x 84-B
76-E 85-B
77-E 86-x

Quire 6:

87-E 95-E
88-E 96-E
89-x 97-E
90-x 98-x
91-E 99-E
92-x 100-E
93-x 101-x
94-x 102-x

394
Quire 7:

OO
103-x
104-x
105-x
106-H
107-H
108-fragment
109-H
110-x
111-x
112-x

Quire 8:

123-L
124-x
125-E
126-E
127-E
128-x
129-x
130-E
131-E
132-E
133-E

Quire 9:

144-x
145-B
146-x
147-x
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148-B
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151-B
152-B
153-fragment

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APPENDIX E:
CATALOGUE OF LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY MS ADDITIONAL 31042

Key to entries:
A: My summary of the contents of this item or, if applicable, the commonly used title of the item
B: The *incipit* and opening lines of the text
C: The *explicit* and closing lines of the text
D: The title, if given in the manuscript
E: The folio(s) on which the item is found
F: The reference numbers from *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (IMEV), if applicable

NB: The texts are all written in Thornton’s hand, unless otherwise indicated

1
A: Narrative of the life of Christ from the *Cursor Mundi*
B: “Scho was & that was sone appone hir sene / [ ] Godd hym-selfe in hir he lighte”
C: “That we may when we hethyn wende / Come to thi joye with-owttende. / Amen. / Amen, amen, per charite amen. Amen.” / Et sic procedendum ad passionem / domini nostri Ihesu Christi que incipit in folio / proximo sequente secundum ffantasiam scriptoris.”
D:
E: ff. 1r-32v
F: IMEV 2153

2:
A: The Northern Passion
B: “Lystenes me I maye 3ow telle / Of mekill gude I wille 3ow spelle”
C: “And alle þat hase herde this passioun / Sall have a thowsande 3eris to pardone. / Amen, amen per charite / And lovyng to God þere-fore gyfe we. / Explicit Passio Domini nostri Ihesu Christi”
D:
E: ff. 33r-50r
F: IMEV 1907
3:  
A:  *The Siege of Jerusalem*  
B:  “In Tyberyus tyme that trewe emperoure / Sir Cesare hym-selvyn was sessede in Rome”  
D:  “The Segge of Jerusalem / Off Tytys and Vaspasyane”  
E:  ff. 50r-66r  
F:  IMEV 1583

4:  
A:  *The Siege of Milan*  
B:  “All worthy men that luffes to here / Of chevallry þat by-fore us were”  
C:  “And baners to þe walles displayede / And bendis up þaire engyne.”  
D:  “The Sege off Melayne”  
E:  ff. 66v-79v  
F:  IMEV 234

5:  
A:  Marian lyric  
B:  “With humble hert I praye iche creature / Lorde & lady, knyghte and othere fferialle”  
D:  
E:  ff. 80r-81v  
F:  IMEV 2168

6:  
A:  *Roland and Otuel*  
B:  “Lordynges þat bene hende and ffree / Herkyns alle hedir-warde to mee.”  
C:  “Brynge us to thi blisses sere. / Amen per charite. / Here endes þe romance / Charlles / Of Duke Rowland & Sir Otuell of Spayne. / Explicit Sir Otuell”  
D:  “Þe romance of Duke Rowlande and of Sir Ottuell of Spayne / Off Cherlls of Ffraunce”  
E:  ff. 82r-94r  
F:  IMEV 1996
7:  
A: Lyric about Christ’s Passion  
B: “Hic incipit quedam [sic] tractatus passionis domini nostri Ihesu Christi in Anglicis / Man to reforme thyne exile and thi losse / Ffrome paradyce place of moste plesaunce”  
C: “Looke one my woundses thynke one my passione / Thynke and remembre the appon my blody face.”  
D: “Passionis Cristi Cantus”  
E: f. 94r  
F: IMEV 2081  
NB: Thornton stopped copying this item and then began again at the foot of f. 94v

8:  
A: Poetic fragment scribbled in blank space at the top of the leaf  
B: “In Bathelem in that fare sete: Thus was borne of Mare fre: / for he ys prens.”  
C: Entire text contained in incipit  
D: “Exultit [sic] celum laudibus”  
E: f. 94v  
F: IMEV 1471  
NB: Written in a sixteenth-century hand

9:  
A: Poetic fragment scribbled in blank space at the top of the leaf  
B: “Mare moder cum & se þin awne dere chyld ys nalyd on tre / Both fowt & hand he may not go þat blyssyd chyld ys lappyd in wo / þat blyssyd chy…”  
C: Entire text contained in incipit  
D: “Exultet celum lawdibus”  
E: f. 94v  
NB: Written in a sixteenth-century hand

10:  
A: Lyric about Christ’s Passion  
B: “O man to refoure thynex exile and thi losse / Ffrome paradyse place of moste plesanse’’  
C: “No bettir socoure and support in þaire nede / Than ofte to thynke one Cristes passioun / Explicit Passio Christi”  
D:  
E: ff. 94v-96r  
F: IMEV 2081  
NB: This is the lyric which Thornton initially began copying on f. 94r but then stopped.
11:
A: Lydgate’s verses on the kings of England
B: “Willelmus conqueror Dux Normannorum / This myghty Willyam Duke of Normandy”
C: “Wan Scotlande maugre þe Scottis strange / And alle Wales in despite of alle þaire myghte”

12:
A: Lydgate’s *Dietary*
B: “Be noghte hasty nore sodanly vengeable / To pore folkes doo no violence”
C: “Of Maister Antonye ne of Mayster Hughe / To alle in deferent recheste dyetarye”

13:
A: Latin aphorism
B: “Post visum risus: post risum transit in usum”
C: “Tactus ergo vita: ne moriaris ita”

14:
A: A Latin aphorism
B: “Lex est defuncta quia iudicis est manus uncta / Propter unguentum ius est in carcere tentum”
C: Entire text contained in incipit

15:
A: A Latin aphorism
B: “Alterius lingue dic quis moderatur habenas / vix est qui proprie possit habere modum”
C: Entire text contained in incipit
16:  
A: A moral lament  
B: “To thynke it es a wondir thynge / Of this werldis mutabilytee”  
C: “I ame matede in my mosynge / Of the variaunce the whilke þat I now see”  
D: “A gud scherte song of this dete / This werlde es to urnede up-sodowune”  
E: f. 97v  
F: IMEV 3778

17:  
A: The Quatrefoil of Love  
B: “In a mornenyng of Maye when medowes sall spryng : Blomes & blossom of brighte colours”  
C: “This herde I in a lay / Als I wente one my way / In a mornynge of May / When medowes sall sprynge”  
D:  
E: ff. 98r-101v  
F: IMEV 1453

18:  
A: Prayer to the Holy Spirit  
B: “Haile Holy Spyritt & joy be un-to the : my keper so swete myn [ ] so fre”  
C: “With þe blyssynge of his righte hande heme defende [ ] God in trynyte i wolde with-owten ende. Amen.”  
D:  
E: f. 101v  
F: IMEV 1051

19:  
A: Poem based on Vulgate Psalm 50  
B: “Miserere mei Deus secundum magnam miserecordiam [sic] tuam / O God þou have mercy of me : after thi mercy mekill of mayne”  
C: “Ne proicias me a facie tua / Fflat me noghte Lorde fra thi face : all if I falle in fandynges fele”  
D:  
E: f. 102r-v  
F: IMEV 990

20:  
A: Lydgate’s The Interpretation and Virtues of the Mass  
B: “Iudica me Deus with hole hert and entere / Theire conscyence purge fro þe synnes seven”  
C: “With goostely supporte to doo correccyone / The reforme where as þay see nede. Amen.”  
D:  
E: ff. 103r-110v  
F: IMEV 4246
21:
A: Short Latin aphorism
B: “Nunc dives dupis cum publco [sic] crimine purus / Hoc opus explevit quod
mentis robore clevit”
C: Entire text contained in incipit
D: 
E: f. 110v

22:
A: An incomplete religious lyric
B: “The Rose es the fayreste fflour of alle / That ever more wasse or evermore
schall”
C: “In plesande of þe Rose so trewe / And chaunyde hewe”
D: “A Carolle ffor Crystynmesse / The Rose of Ryse”
E: f. 110v
F: IMEV 3457

23:
The Three Kings of Cologne
A: “Ffor wynde or rayne ffor wate[r] or colde or hete / Þay nev[er] ne cessede while
þay leveande were”
C: “Ffor whose merites es grace dayly wroghte / To his hono[r] whom þay in Bedlem
soghte. / Amen. / Amen. / Explicit tract[at]us / trium magum.”

24:
A: A poem of moral advice
B: “Hic incipit cantus cu[i]sdam sapientis / Here by-gynnys a lovey song of
wysdome / Waste makes a kyngdome in nede / And nede makes a man to
travayle”
C: “And charyte in herte to holde / That we may wynn of blysse þe crowne. Amen. /Amen.”

25:
A: A poem about the value of God’s mercy
B: “By one foreste als I gan walke / With-owtten a paleys appon a ley”
C: “With soure frescly face us fede / And thus mercy passes rightwysnes. Amen. /
Explicit cantus. Amen.”
D: “A Song how þat mercy passeth rightwisnes”
E: ff. 122v-123r
F: IMEV 560
26:
A: A poem about the value of God’s mercy
B: “There es no creatoure bot one / Makere of ilke a creatoure”
C: “Now Criste putt all this grete passioun / Bi-twix us and thi jugement. Amen. / Explicit cantus. Amen.”
D: “A songe how mercy comes bi-fore þe jugement / Doo mercy bi-fore thi jugement”
E: ff. 123r-123v
F: IMEV 3533

27:
A: A poem about the value of God’s mercy
B: “Be weste undir a wilde wodde syde / Appon a launde there als I was lent”
D: “A songe how þat mercy passeth alle thynge”
E: ff. 123v-124v
F: IMEV 583

28:
A: Richard Coer de Lyon
B: “Lorde Ihesus Criste kyng of glory / The faire grace ad the victorye”
C: “And thus endys þe romaunc[e] of Richerd oure kynge / And God grante us alle gude endynge. Amen. / Explicit the Romance / Off Kyng Richerd þe conqueroure.”
D:
E: ff. 125r-163v
F: IMEV 1979

29:
A: Narrative of the childhood of Christ
B: “Here bigynnys the Romance of the childhode of Ihesus Criste þat clere[s] callys Ipokrephu / Allemyghty God in trynytee / Þat boughte man on þe rode so dere”
C: “With-owtten ende with sow to wonne / Thare joyes are ever & myrthe & playe. Amen. / Moraliter dicit in verbis prophecie.”
D:
E: ff. 163v-168v
F: IMEV 250
30:
A: *The Parliament of Three Ages*
B: “In the monethes of Maye whan mirthes bene fele / And the sesone of somere when softe bene the wedres”
C: “There dere Drightyne this daye dele us of thi blysse / And Mare þat es mylde qwene amende us of synn. Amen. Amen. / Thus endes the three ages.”
D: “The parlement of the thre Ages”
E: ff. 169r-176v
F: IMEV 1556

31:
A: *Winner and Waster*
B: “Here begynnes a tretys and god schorte refreyte / by-twixe Wynnere and Wastoure / Sythen that Bretayne was biggede and Bruyttus it aughte”
C: “Then will scho love hym lelely as h[i]r lyfe [?] / Make hym bolde & bown with brandes to smytte”
D: 
E: ff. 176v-181v
F: IMEV 3137
APPENDIX F:
THE COLLATION OF LONDON, BRITISH LIBRARY MS ADDITIONAL 31042

A detailed codicological description is offered by Karl Brunner (“Hs. Brit. Mus.” 316-27), Karen Stern (26-37, 201-18) and John Thompson (Robert Thornton 10-63). Complete collations have been offered by Horrall (“The London Thornton Manuscript” 99-103), Hanna (“The London Thornton Manuscript” 122-30), and Thompson (19). It should be noted that Horrall, Hanna and Thompson agree on the collation of the first four folios. Horrall’s collation relies on a series of small gatherings comprising ff. 74-124, a practice which does not accord with what we know of Thornton’s quire sizes from the Lincoln MS (who preferred much larger quires). Hanna’s collation similarly posits two small or fragmentary quires. Thompson’s collation is to be preferred, for it accounts most completely for watermark symmetry between conjoint folios and provides the most complete analysis of textual losses. Thus, in the collation I offer here, I have generally followed Thompson, correcting where I see fit.

ii parchment flyleaves (counted as folios 1-2 by the manuscript’s modern foliation), 1^7 (wanting an indeterminate number of leaves; folios 3-8); 2^24 (folios 9-32), 3^22 (wanting 22; folios 33-53), 4^20 (folios 54-73), 5^18 (wanting 5, 8, 26, 28; folios 74-97), 6^267 (folios 19-20 are stubs; wanting folios 6-10; folios 35-36 cancelled; folios 98-124), 7^22 (wanting 20-22; folios 125-43), 8^26 (folio 26 cancelled; folios 144-68), 9^7 (fragment of 13 folios; folios 169-81), ii parchment flyleaves.

Notes:

Quire 1:

This quire must have originally ended on what is now f. 8, since that folio bears a catchword. However, The Cursor Mundi, which opens this quire, is acephalous, and there is no way to determine for sure how many folios are lost. What survives of Thornton’s copy begins at line 10,630 of the poem. It is hard to determine whether Thornton ever copied out these opening lines. If so, he would have needed about 76 folios: in the earlier parts of Thornton’s copy of the Cursor, he averages around 38-40 lines/page in two columns; however, his writing becomes progressively more spread out, so that by the end of his copy of the Cursor he is averaging around 28-30 lines/page. Using an average, then, of 35 lines/page as a very rough estimate, we can conclude that it would have taken Thornton about 76 folios to encompass the opening section of the Cursor.

Given the surviving watermarks (see below), the minimum size of the opening quire would have been a gathering of twelve. John Thompson speculates that as many as three now lost quires may have originally comprised the opening of this manuscript.
Given the size of gatherings Thornton used in the opening sections of this manuscript, it seems plausible that three large gatherings would have been enough to encompass the entirety of the missing parts of the *Cursor*. It should also be noted that George Keiser, in his review of Thompson’s *Robert Thornton*, identifies the remnants of quire signatures at the bottom of ff. 15-20, which allow him to reconstruct what must have been the opening quires. He specifically concludes that the volume now lacks sixty-seven folios, an amount that could have contained the opening of the *Cursor* (157). I, however, am not so confident that the bits of script that remain at the foot of ff. 15-20 can be determined to be surviving quire signatures.

**Quire 2:**
This quire contains a catchword on f. 32v, and ff. 9-32 exhibit watermark symmetry, suggesting that it is a complete quire.

**Quire 4:**
There is a catchword on f. 73v, and its twenty leaves exhibit watermark symmetry. Thus, this is one of the few unambiguously complete quires in the MS.

**Quire 5:**
John Thompson’s suggested collation here is preferable to the explanations of Horrall or Hanna. As Thompson notes, this quire contains two distinct paper stocks, one nested inside the other (see watermark diagrams, below). In addition, his suggestions for the four wanting folios is plausible. In agreement with Horrall and Hanna, he speculates that the fifth and eighth folios are missing from Thornton’s copy of *The Siege of Milan*; since this is a unique text, we are precluded from comparing it with other texts to determine the amount likely to be missing. However, Thompson’s suggestion that this quire is wanting its fifth and eighth folios allows for symmetry between conjoint pairs of watermarks, and so I have accepted it.

In addition, it is clear from textual evidence that the twenty-sixth leaf of this quire (i.e. the one immediately following f. 96) is likely missing, for Thornton’s copy of Lydgate’s *Verses on the Kings of England* leaves off abruptly in the middle of the entry on Edward I at the end of f. 96v. Given that Thornton’s copy devoted seven lines to each king, we would be left with 34 missing lines (the last three lines of Edward I plus seven lines each for Edward II-Henry V), which is the right amount to fill one leaf. The verso side of the missing leaf would, as Thompson notes (*Robert Thornton* 25), likely have contained the opening lines of Lydgate’s *Dietary*, which now commences acephalously on f. 97r. This text is only missing seventeen lines, which is enough to fill up at most half of a leaf. However, it is possible that Thornton would have placed a lyric or some similar filler between the two texts.

Furthermore, the twenty-eighth leaf of this quire (i.e. the one immediately following f. 97) must be missing, for Thornton begins a new text four lines from the bottom of the f. 97v, something he would not have done unless it could continue on to the following folio (which has not survived). Assuming only one lost leaf here allows for watermark symmetry, and so I have accepted Thompson’s conclusion.
Quire 6:

Once again, Thompson’s collation is preferable to previous studies of this manuscript, for he has noted Thornton’s practice of nesting one paper stock inside another within a single quire (see below). In addition, I find Thompson’s suggestion that five folios are missing after f. 102 (i.e. ff. 6-10 of this quire) to be plausible, given the amount of text likely missing from this lyric on Psalm 50 and that which is missing at the beginning of this copy of Lydgate’s *Virtues of the Mass*, which is the following text (26-28). Hanna and Horrall suggest one missing folio, which underestimates how much space would have been required to complete this paraphrase of Vulgate Psalm 50 and to supply the beginning of what is now missing from Lydgate’s *Virtues of the Mass* (the next text in the London MS). Susanna Grier Fein, writing at the same time as Thompson and reaching her conclusions “without knowledge of Thompson’s work” (223 n.12), similarly suggests that “there must be at least two leaves lost, and possibly more” (233). If we assume five leaves are lost, this would allow for watermark symmetry. It is a distinct possibility that Thornton would have finished his paraphrase of Psalm 50, added some lyrics as filler, and then begun his copy of *The Virtues of the Mass*, which would be enough to fill five folios.

In addition, pace Thompson, I find it more likely that Thornton has cancelled the final two leaves of this quire. As it stands, he has crammed the final stanza of the lyric entitled “A Songe How Pat Mercy Passeth Alle Thynge” onto the bottom of f. 124v, which marks the last surviving leaf of this quire. Thus, it seems most likely that Thornton reached the end of the quire and decided simply to cancel two unnecessary leaves. Thompson hypothesizes that the original ending to the poem, contained at the beginning of what he suggests are two lost leaves, may have been damaged during Thornton’s life and that Thornton then re-copied the original onto the bottom of f. 124v (28-29). However, this argument seems unnecessarily complicated, and thus I have preferred the simpler explanation that the final two leaves were most likely cancelled.

Quire 7:

Textual evidence suggests that three folios from Thornton’s copy of *Richard Coer de Lion* have been lost from the end of this quire. Watermark symmetry bears this out, as well.

Quire 9:

This original state of this quire is largely irrecoverable, for the final text, *Winner and Waster*, is incomplete, and this text is unique to this manuscript. One possibility is that this was a complete quire and that Thornton filled it with other (now lost) texts. For this to be true, a minimum gathering of twenty-six folios would be required in order to maintain symmetry between conjoint pairs of watermarks. However, this does not seem likely, as Thompson notes (33), for Thornton has changed the format of his page on the final folio, beginning to force two lines of text into a single long line. This suggests that he was attempting to conserve space, indicating that he was coming to the end of the quire as it remained to him. It could be that the quire was already damaged, as Thompson suggests. Alternatively, Thornton could have cancelled the final leaves of the quire to use the paper for some other purpose.
Watermarks:

References in this section are to Horrall, “The Watermarks” and the Appendix to Thompson (Robert Thornton 71-73).

A: Boeuf, 51 x 36 mm
Closest to Briquet 2804, which was produced in Herford, 1438

B: Tête de boeuf, de profil, 40 x 50 mm
There is no satisfactory match to Briquet. Thompson suggests 15203/6, with nearest 15204 and Horrall similarly suggests 15203/04, 15206. However, the paper of none of the stocks is big enough to be Thornton’s. It is worth noting, though, that all of the watermarks in this range date from the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

C: Char, 63 x 41 mm
There is no satisfactory match to Briquet here. Thompson and Horrall suggest 3528, but the paper size of this stock is too small to be a match. Briquet notes that “Cette marque, d’un dessin aussi conventionnel que celui du char à quatre roues, a été d’un long usage, et le papier qui le porte a été transporté fort loin de son lieu d’origine” (1: 228).

D: Un colonne, 58 x 21 mm
Thompson identifies this with Briquet 4398, which is from Grenoble, 1421. However, 4398 is too big to be a good match for watermark. It should be noted, though, that Briquet mentions 11 variants of this watermark, dating from 1428-39.

E: Un dauphin surmonté d’une fleur de lis, 55 x 37 mm
The closest match is to Briquet 5894, which is dated from Montpelier, 1427. Briquet also notes two other contemporaneous varieties of this watermark.

F: Semelle de soulier, 40 x 8 mm
There is no good match from Briquet, for in all the extant examples, the size of the paper batch is too small. However, Briquet notes that paper bearing the semelle de soulier was only produced for a short period of time in the second quarter of the fifteenth century (676), making it contemporary with Thornton’s compiling activities.

G: Serpent, 30 x 16 mm
Once again, there is no satisfactory match in Briquet, for paper size of each of the possible candidates (13625 is the closest match) is too small to be Thornton’s paper. Nevertheless, this class of watermark dates almost exclusively from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, making it contemporary with Thornton.

H: Marteau, 48 x 26 mm
Once again, there is no satisfactory match in Briquet, for the paper size of each of the possible candidates is too small to be Thornton’s paper. Horrall suggests 11632, which is the closest match, though. Nevertheless, this class of watermark dates almost exclusively from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, making it contemporary with Thornton.
I: Deux clefs, 42 x 35 mm
Horrall rightly notes that Briquet 3868 is the closest match, which is dated to Fribourg, 1427. Briquet also lists sixteen variants of 3868, produced all over central Europe in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

K: Corounne, 50 x 44 mm
There is no satisfactory match to Briquet here, for in all of the possible candidates (4637 is the closest) the size of the paper stock is too large to be Thornton’s. It is worth noting that Briquet comments that the “couronne constitue un des filigranes les plus abondants et le plus variés de forme. Il a été en usage dès la seconde décade du XIVe s.” (2: 283), making it contemporary with Thornton’s compilations.

The individual quires:

NB: The numbers refer to the folio numbers in the manuscript, and the letters refer to the watermark on each folio, which corresponds to the descriptions of each watermark type given above. An “x” means that there was no watermark on that leaf. An “OO” indicates a lost or cancelled folio.

Quire 1:

3-x 4-x 5-x 6-x 7-x 8-A

Quire 2:

9-A 10-x 11-A 12-A 13-A 14-A 15-x 16-A 17-A 18-x 19-x 20-x 21-A 22-A 23-A 24-x 25-x 26-A 27-x 28-x 29-x 30-x 31-A 32-x
Quire 3:

33-x  44-B
34-B  45-x
35-x  46-x
36-B  47-B
37-x  48-B
38-B  49-x
39-x  50-B
40-x  51-x
41-B  52-B
42-B  53-x
43-x  OO-

Quire 4:

54-x  64-x
55-x  65-x
56-x  66-x
57-C  67-x
58-x  68-x
59-C  69-C
60-C  70-x
61-D  71-C
62-D  72-C
63-D  73-E

Quire 5:

74-F  86-G
75-x  87-x
76-x  88-G
77-F  89-x
OO   90-G
78-F  91-x
79-F  92-x
OO-  93-x
80-G  94-x
81-x  95-F
82-G  96-x
83-x  OO
84-G  97-F
85-x  OO
### Quire 6:

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<td>99-F</td>
<td>OO (stub)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-x</td>
<td>111-x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-F</td>
<td>112-x</td>
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<td>OO</td>
<td>115-x</td>
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<tr>
<td>OO</td>
<td>116-H</td>
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<td>117-x</td>
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<td>118-H</td>
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<tr>
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<td>119-H</td>
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Quire 8:

144-x
145-x
146-x
147-K
148-x
149-K
150-K
151-K
152- (Stub)
153-x
154-x
155-K
156-K
157-x
158-x
159-K
160-K
161-K
162-x
163-x
164-x
165-K
166-x
167-K
168-K
OO
Quire 9:

169-x
170-K
171-K
172-x
173-K
174-K
175-x
176-x
177-x
178-K
179-K
180-K
181-x
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London, British Library MS Harley 2252
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Princeton, University Library MS Taylor 9

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