



A scribe at work, MS Harley 273, fol. 70r (detail), a miniature pen drawing illustrating Richard de Fournival's *Bestiare d'amour*. Harley 273 is one of three surviving books that contain the hand of the Harley scribe. By permission of The British Library.

Studies in the Harley Manuscript

*The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts
of British Library MS Harley 2253*

*Edited by
Susanna Fein*

Published for TEAMS
(The Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages)
in Association with the University of Rochester

by

Medieval Institute Publications

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Kalamazoo, Michigan — 2000

Introduction

British Library MS Harley 2253: The Lyrics, the Facsimile, and the Book

Susanna Fein

Sir Robert Harley's interest in purchasing the books of the late Dr. John Batteley first appears in the diary of his librarian Humfrey Wanley on July 18, 1718. A fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, Dr. Batteley (1647–1708) had held the offices of archdeacon of Canterbury and prebendary for twenty years. He had written a treatise upon the ancient Isle of Thanet (published 1711), and he left behind a substantial library of old books.¹ Negotiations for its sale were handled by Dr. Batteley's nephew John Batteley, and they proceeded steadily for years, with the bookseller Jonah Bowyer (at the Rose in Ludgate Street) serving as intermediary. On May 21, 1720, Wanley had opportunity to inspect the library himself, finding the books "in Confusion & most of the MSS. in very ill Condition." He records the offer that Bowyer made: buy the lot, obtain "the Old MSS. & Charters at 20 Guineas," and have the pick of the printed books "before they come to Auction."²

The sale and transfer of manuscripts took place on November 5, 1723. Seventy-one volumes in the Harley collection bear this date, and they apparently represent the full extent of that transaction (which did not exhaust the holdings of the Batteley library).³ Within this parcel was the trilingual miscellany now known by its modern shelfmark Harley 2253. The business notes Wanley kept in his diary betray no hint of an unusual interest in this one unusual manuscript. Nonetheless, Harley 2253 (catalogued as "99.A.7.") was the first Batteley item Wanley included in his *Catalogus Brevior*, an on-going project to itemize the full contents of Harley's large library. His handwritten entry on 99.A.7. was made after September 30, 1724, but well before July 6, 1726 (the day of his death), in the seventh volume of the catalogue, which was later finished by David

¹ Humfrey Wanley, *The Diary of Humfrey Wanley 1715–1726*, ed. C. E. Wright and Ruth C. Wright, 2 vols. (London, 1966), 1.15, and for the career of Archdeacon Batteley, 2.440.

² Wanley, *Diary*, 1.48, and for John Batteley and Jonah Bowyer, 2.440, 441.

³ Wanley, *Diary*, 2.263, 476. The seventy-one items are listed 2.263n1.

Casley and others. Sir Robert Harley had died previously, on May 21, 1724. Of the Batteley purchase Wanley described only eight volumes before his own death.⁴ Surely it is significant that he selected Harley 2253 first among these, and not until he had described some 120 more items did he select another Batteley book.

The sixteen-page description made by Wanley was published virtually unchanged in the posthumous completion of his catalogue, *A Catalogue of the Harleian Collection of Manuscripts in Two Volumes* (1759), which was later reprinted by the British Museum in four volumes (1808–12).⁵ Wanley's detailed itemization of the contents does not betray his feelings about his discovery other than those suggested when an erudite bibliographer pauses to give exceptionally close attention and unusually lengthy excerpts of material he has never encountered before. There can be no doubt that Wanley knew the rarity of the manuscript's contents, especially of its English contents, but there is no evidence that he shared this knowledge outside the privacy of his own study. Harley 2253 was not discovered by the world until after Wanley's description was published in 1759.

The first popularizer of things antiquarian to find Harley of peculiar interest was Bishop Thomas Percy, who printed the political poem *A Song of Lewes* (Wanley's no. 23) as the lead piece in his second volume of *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). He lambasted the poem as an "antique libel" that demonstrates "the liberty, assumed by the good people of this realm, of abusing their kings and princes at pleasure," and, for good measure, the piece was flourished with a propagandistic engraving designed to illustrate the ill effects of such libel.⁶ Bishop Percy followed *A Song of Lewes* with one more item

⁴ The other Batteley books catalogued by Wanley himself are MSS Harley 2374, 2375, 2381, 2386, 2388, 2400, and 2407. Wanley's seven-volume *Catalogus Brevior* is now British Library MSS Addit. 45701–45707; each volume is dated. For the description of Harley 2253, see Addit. 45707, pp. 81–96.

⁵ H. Wanley, D. Casley, et al., *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (1759; rev. and repr. 4 vols. London, 1808–12). For Harley 2253, see 2.585–91. The published catalogue faithfully transcribes Wanley's text but loses Wanley's careful reproduction of the layouts of stanzas and of verse texts written as prose. Wanley also made some errors in numbering that were corrected in the printed editions; two of his errors are still evident in the duplication of numbers 113 and 114 for what should be 115 and 116.

⁶ Thomas Percy, ed., *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3 vols. (London, 1765), 2.1–3. The two Harley poems appear at 2.3–10. Percy describes the engraving as follows:

On the one side a Satyr, (emblem of Petulance and Ridicule) is trampling on the ensigns of Royalty; on the other Faction under the masque of Liberty is exciting Ignorance and Popular Rage to deface the Royal Image; which stands on a pedestal inscribed MAGNA CARTA, to denote that the rights of the king, as well as those of the people, are founded on the laws; and that to attack one, is in effect to demolish the other.

from Harley, *The Death of Edward I* (Wanley's no. 47). Percy's *Reliques* was part of a swelling nationalistic and aesthetic movement to recover and explore the origins of English verse. Another leader in this effort, poet laureate Thomas Warton, came to the manuscript by way of Wanley and Percy, calling it, in 1774, "this curious Harleian volume, to which we are so largely indebted."⁷ Warton's capacity to understand the manuscript was, however, limited; rarely do his excerpts from it exceed those found in Wanley's fourteen long, dense columns, and in a few instances he confuses items gotten right by Wanley.⁸

Nonetheless, the earliest historians of writings in English were much intrigued by what they excavated from the Harley MS by means of their own digging. J. Strutt printed *When þe Nyhtegale Singes* in 1776, praising the poet as "very modest" and "entirely within the bounds of reason."⁹ Meanwhile, Joseph Ritson had begun his career of launching scathing attacks upon what he saw to be acts of irresponsible scholarship on the part of Warton and (especially) Percy, which he set about to rectify in his landmark *Ancient Songs* (printed 1786–87, but probably not issued until 1792). Here he gave to the world the first select sampling of the now-famous lyrics in complete form — *Alysoun; Spring; Blow, Northerne Wynd; A Winter Song; When þe Nyhtegale Singes*; and *The Man in the Moon* — and also two new political songs, *The Execution of Sir Simon Fraser* and *The Flemish Insurrection*.¹⁰

⁷ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry from the Eleventh to the Seventeenth Century*, 4 vols. (London, 1774–81), 1.33. In the more generally accessible second edition (1824; repr. New York, 1968), the discussion of items from Harley 2253 occurs on pp. 24–30, the quote on p. 28.

⁸ Warton confuses, for example, pairs of poems in identical stanzas: *Spring* and *Advice to Women* (p. 26); *De Clerico et Puella* and *When þe Nyhtegale Singes* (p. 27).

⁹ J. Strutt, *Horda Angel-Cynnan* (London, 1776), 3.151.

¹⁰ Joseph Ritson, ed., *Ancient Songs, from the Reign of King Henry the Second to the Revolution* (London, 1790), pp. 5–38. On the date of publication, see Bertrand H. Bronson, *Joseph Ritson, Scholar-at-Arms*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1938), 1.176. In the second edition Ritson published four more Harley items: *Advice to Women*, *A Song of Lewes*, and the French *Lament for Simon de Montfort* (with a translation by George Ellis) and *Trailbaston*; see *Ancient Songs and Ballads, from the Reign of King Henry the Second to the Revolution*, 2 vols. (London, 1829), 1.12–39, 51–70. On Ritson's contention with Percy and Warton, see Ritson, *Ancient Songs* (1790), p. 37 (an attack omitted from later editions); Joseph Ritson (but published anonymously), *Observations on the Three First Volumes of the History of English Poetry, in a Familiar Letter to the Author* (London, 1782), pp. 4–6; and Harris Nicolas, "A Memoir of the Author," in *The Letters of Joseph Ritson*, ed. Joseph Frank (London, 1833), pp. xvii–xlv.

The next notice of Harley 2253 appears to have been that of George Ellis, ed., *Specimens of the Early English Poets*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London, 1801), pp. 84–89. Ellis did not include Harley items

Thus did the modern world begin to recover the literary remnants to be found in MS Harley 2253. The chance preservation of this one volume allows us a strange and privileged glimpse into what is indeed (to us) a "curious" world of a once trilingual England, one quite rich for the making of vernacular poetry and where such verse did in fact flourish — somewhat to our astonishment — well before the Ricardian era. Ever since the days of Percy and Ritson, the assorted lyrics in Harley 2253 have dominated our reasons for looking at this old book. The rare secular songs vie for attention beside the equally rare array of political verses, with their blunt grumblings about national events and local injustices.¹¹ The "curious Harleian volume" is therefore of supreme value to literary scholars of medieval England. Because it gathers poems "whose loss would wipe out our knowledge of whole areas of English poetry . . . in a critical time of change," it may well be "the most important single MS of Middle English poetry."¹² Harley preserves more poems about love and politics than any other manuscript from the era, and for almost all of these items, preservation depends entirely on the book's own fortuitous survival.

The better comprehension of this extraordinary codex is the basic investigative goal of each writer whose essay is printed in this volume. Ever since the inquisitive early notices highlighted above, studies touching upon the Harley MS have typically dwelt on favorite English songs or political diatribes and given little attention to other items or to the distinctive qualities of the full book. Two influential publications may be seen as emblematic of this problem, even as they are the landmarks of present-day Harley studies; indeed, it is by their presence that the field and its boundaries are presently set. One is G.

in his first edition of 1790, but since he does not correct for Ritson's work until the 1802 edition, the 1801 text probably reflects work contemporaneous with Ritson's. Ellis prints only two Harley lyrics, *Alysoun* and *A Winter Song*. Other early notices appear in Edwin Guest, *A History of English Rhythms* (London, 1838), pp. 578–83, 590–91, 600–03, 628–29, and Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell, eds., *Reliquiae Antiquae*, 2 vols. (London, 1841, 1843), 1.102, 2.216.

The earliest publication of substantial portions of Harley 2253 (most of the English and French lyrics) was Thomas Wright's *Specimens of Lyric Poetry, Composed in the Reign of Edward the First*, Percy Society 4 (1842; repr. New York, 1965). The fullest early printing of the political poems was Thomas Wright's *Political Songs of England, from the Reign of John to That of Edward II* (London, 1839), recently reprinted with an introduction by Peter Coss (Cambridge, 1996).

¹¹ One early legal historian, influenced by Percy's *Reliques*, went so far as to suggest that *A Song of Lewes* led directly to the passing of a statute outlawing the slander of royalty. See Daines Barrington, *Observations on the More Ancient Statutes from Magna Charta to the Twenty-First of James I. Cap. XXVII* (London, 1767), pp. 94–95, cited and rejected by John Kirby Hedges, *The History of Wallingford*, 2 vols. (London, 1881), 1.329.

¹² Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977), p. 120. Pearsall ranks Harley beside Cotton Nero A.x. as our most precious preserver of fragile vernacular verse.

L. Brook's standard edition of *The Harley Lyrics*, first published in 1948 and then revised and reissued in 1956, 1964, and 1968 (the fourth edition).¹³ Brook's anthology contains thirty-two poems, some of which, like *Alysoun* ("Bytuene Mersh ant Aueril") and *Spring* ("Lenten ys come wij loue to toun"), number among the best lyrics written in the language. Brook's tidy edition has become something of a classic among anthologies of medieval verse. The second definitive work is the facsimile published by the Early English Text Society in 1965 with an important introduction by N. R. Ker.¹⁴ This volume was one of the earliest in a series of facsimiled early books produced by the Society, whose prompt selection of Harley 2253 testified to the volume's preeminence among medieval codices containing English texts.

Taken together, Brook's edition and Ker's facsimile give scholars and students far more evidence than did the eighteenth-century writers of the early notices, but it is still not nearly enough. What we have are just tantalizing glimmers and shadows. Each limited in its purpose, the edition and the facsimile can be seen to illustrate how Harley scholarship continues to be compartmentalized. Consider first the anthology: the English lyrics codified there constitute a mere fraction of the book's poetry. In practical terms, Brook's *Harley Lyrics* is a modern collection.¹⁵ In manuscript the English poems are *not* gathered in one place: they appear intermittently across seventy pages, and mixed in with them are forty-odd items. By making obscure the original arrangement of texts, the Brook edition omits what that arrangement might tell us about the Harley compiler's aims and achievement.

The facsimile, too, is limited in its present usefulness. Its very existence tends to make accessibility more perceived than real. The handiness of a reproduced Harley MS does not in fact deliver the items to a modern readership if pieces stay unprinted or unexplored, which is the case with many of Harley's contents. For texts that do have critical editions, such as *King Horn*, the Harley redaction may not draw much notice

¹³ G. L. Brook, ed., *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS. Harley 2253*, 4th ed. (Manchester, 1968).

¹⁴ N. R. Ker, intro., *Facsimile of British Museum MS. Harley 2253*, EETS o.s. 255 (London, 1965). For Ker's corrigenda to the facsimile, see Appendix (pp. 18–19).

¹⁵ Brook's title gives the impression that the group forms a manuscript collection, as with the Vernon Lyrics, when what we have is a modern selection of verse pulled from various locations. For the Vernon Lyrics, see Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, 2nd ed. rev. G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1957), pp. 125–208, and A. I. Doyle, intro., *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Poet. a.1.* (Cambridge, 1987), fols. 407r–412r. To be fair to Brook, one may note that Brown's and Robbins' anthologies (see nn. 16–17) do virtually the same thing, though their broader offerings more clearly display the ways editors select and compile.

because there is an acknowledged better text, as there is for *Horn* in Cambridge University Library MS Gg. iv.27 (2). Consequently, the existence of the facsimile seems to contribute little to discussions of such works. At the same time, there is also the problem of what the facsimile excludes from view: it reproduces only the folios written by the man now called the "Harley scribe" (fols. 49–140), but it omits fols. 1–48, more than one-third of the book. In this way, it — like the Brook edition — distorts the codex, and with it, the recoverable intent of the Harley scribe as he shaped a new volume out of an older beginning.

If the nature of the whole book is not well known, the cause may reside in how our modern academic disciplines are themselves divided by genre and language. These divisions, in turn, influence the making of editions (and facsimiles), and editorial selections and arrangements affect to a large degree how subsequent readers perceive and use books from the past, as these judgments determine which texts readers are most likely to know and value. In the case of the English Harley lyrics, the standard editorial method has long been to extract and to categorize. Such presentation has varied little since 1878, when Karl Bøddeker printed most of the English verse texts. Following Bøddeker's German edition, the Harley poems became more readily available to English readers through several authoritative, well-disseminated anthologies published from 1924 to 1959. The first were Carleton Brown's *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (1924) and *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (1932), in which twenty-six lyrics, including two political ones, appeared.¹⁶ In 1948 Brook's edition established a corpus of thirty-two secular and religious lyrics, with the political songs excluded. Then R. H. Robbins, in his *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (1959), printed seven more political pieces as a group.¹⁷ By virtue of these anthologies, the canon has attained its present shape: thirty-two "Harley Lyrics" (Brook's edition) and nine more political poems or social satires (two printed by Brown, seven more by Robbins).¹⁸

¹⁶ Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 3–14, and *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford, 1932), pp. 131–63. The political poems printed by Brown are *A Song of Lewes* (no. 23) and *On the Follies of Fashion* (no. 25a). See also Karl Bøddeker, ed., *Altenglische Dichtungen des MS. Harl. 2253* (1878; repr. Amsterdam, 1969).

¹⁷ Rosell Hope Robbins, ed., *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (New York, 1959), pp. 7–29.

¹⁸ See Table on pp. 16–17. By this brief overview of modern reception, I do not mean to suggest that the poems were not in print before 1924. The standard lyrics were all printed by Thomas Wright in 1839 and 1842 (see n. 10). I have prepared a detailed bibliography of the Harley Lyrics (Brook's selection), which will appear in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, ed. Albert E. Hartung, Vol. 11.

Böddeker's edition began the practice of filing the lyrics under category-names: "politische," "weltliche," or "geistliche" (Böddeker); "thirteenth century" or "fourteenth-century religious" (Brown); "historical" (Robbins); or simply "Harley," which meant either secular or religious but not political (Brook).¹⁹ An ingrained habit of modern reception by these nineteenth- and twentieth-century markers and distinctions has tended to make obscure what might be recovered about the contemporary reception of the verses by means of the book preserving them. Only a brief look at the Harley MS itself is needed to perceive that the scribe did not observe our categories. A political song may turn up in the midst of love lyrics. Religious poems do not cluster in one place, as the interspersing of them with secular songs in Brook's edition illustrates.²⁰ Prose texts reside next to verse texts; verse texts are not exclusively "lyric"; and, most importantly for our renewed understanding of the book, many texts in French or Latin exist beside English texts and vie for their own kind of authority. The editors' categories have thus affected how we see the manuscript — or how we have failed to see it. What is wanted at this point in the study of the lyrics is not more anthologized groupings but rather a letting-go of the categorical terms by which we have laid canonical claim to them. With the Harley poems so widely praised, it seems odd indeed that few readers understand the nature of the parchment artifact containing them.

Viewed overall, Harley is best characterized as a miscellany of texts in three languages.²¹ Wanley's 240-year-old description captures well the even-handedness of its distinctive variety:

¹⁹ Brook states that the term "Harley Lyrics" was already current before his edition came into existence (p. 1), and in his adoption of most of the titles found in the two Brown anthologies it appears that he regarded the collection as fairly established. Nevertheless, he chose to augment the canon by adding eight more works: *The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale* (no. 34), *The Meeting in the Wood* (no. 35), *A Wayle Whyt ase Whalles Bon* (no. 36), *A Spring Song on the Passion* (no. 53), *Dum ludis floribus* (no. 55), *Stond Wel, Moder, vnder Rode* (no. 60), *I Syke When Y Singe* (no. 62), and *Blessed Be Pou, Leuedy* (no. 66).

²⁰ Brook prints the lyrics in their manuscript order. For Brook's tenuous criteria for selecting "lyrics," see his preface, p. 2.

²¹ The term "miscellany" is here used in the broadest sense (a collection of texts miscellaneous in genre, style, and languages, and not selected for a single discernible purpose). Its use is not meant to deny the sequenced grouping of items that is often apparent in the book. On the complexity — and rather unsatisfactory nature — of the term "miscellany," see the collection of essays edited by Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany* (Ann Arbor, 1996). See too, in this volume, Theo Stemmler's and Marilyn Corrie's essays.

... written by several hands, upon several Subjects; partly in old French, partly in Latin, and partly in old English; partly in Verse & partly in Prose. . . .²²

Anthologizing tendencies are evident in it. The contents in some places seem to be grouped by section, topic, genre, language, meter, or medium (verse or prose). Less well known than the surviving lyrics, for example, is Harley's preservation of the largest collection of fabliaux in Anglo-Norman, and although these texts are also not specifically grouped together, the scribe has clustered them in one area of the book. The person referred to in this collection of essays as the "Harley scribe" was a professional who worked in Ludlow and its environs from at least 1314 until at least 1346. He copied the bulk of the book, folios 49–140, around the year 1340. More than twenty years of assiduous research by Carter Revard has unearthed forty-one Latin deeds and charters also written by this scribe, and there are two other surviving manuscripts that contain his work, preserving clues as to his training, reading, and collecting habits.²³ This very interesting scribe is also usually credited with being the agent behind the way the texts are compiled; it is thought that he is responsible for the selection and probably the order of items drawn from various exemplars in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and various dialects of English. Much of what he copied into Harley (and the two prior manuscripts) may be presumed, then, to betray somewhat his own tastes, training, and temperament — most likely tailored, as well, to the needs and desires of a patron. If the range of contents may be taken to represent his (or a patron's) diverse interests, one may see how provocatively they resemble the assemblage of styles and topics found in Chaucer's work some fifty years later. In a single volume we find romances and dialogues; tracts on pilgrimage and dream theory; profane fabliaux; pious saints' legends; an aesthetic concern with poetry, with genre mixing, and with literary uses of the vernacular; and humor in handling the volatile subjects of women, gender, and marriage.

The Harley scribe as compiler appears to embed certain literate purposes in the ways that he selected and arranged texts, that is, in what texts he put next to each other and,

²² Wanley et al., *Catalogue*, 2.585.

²³ The other MSS are London, BL MSS Royal 12.C.xii and Harley 273. For Revard's research, see his essay in this volume (pp. 21–109). Reports of his findings at earlier stages appear in the following essays: "The Lecher, the Legal Eagle, and the Papelard Priest: Middle English Confessional Satires in MS. Harley 2253 and Elsewhere," in *His Firm Estate: Essays for F. J. Eikenberry*, ed. D. E. Hayden (Tulsa, Okla., 1967), pp. 54–71; "Richard Hurd and MS. Harley 2253," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 26 (1979): 199–202; "Three More Holographs in the Hand of the Scribe of MS. Harley 2253 in Shrewsbury," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 28 (1981): 199–200; "The Scribe of MS Harley 2253," *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 29 (1982): 62–63; and "Gilote et Johane: An Interlude in B. L. MS. Harley 2253," *Studies in Philology* 79 (1982): 122–46.

Introduction

sometimes, in how he laid texts out on the page. Working fluently in three languages, the scribe's output exemplifies early fourteenth-century understandings of what kind of matter was deemed appropriate to each linguistic medium: devotional topics in Latin; religious, political, and bawdy subjects in French; and, mixed in with these, an important collection of early English texts. On the 140 folios of MS Harley 2253 appear no fewer than 121 items.²⁴ The first forty-eight folios were written by an earlier scribe in a textura hand, and the religious texts copied by this English scribe are exclusively in French. The Harley scribe copied the items found on fols. 49–140, and, according to Ker, he was probably responsible for the linkage of his work to the preceding folios.

Among English works in Harley one finds two venerable works that popularize religious doctrine (*The Harrowing of Hell* and *Debate between Body and Soul*), a romance of rich native appeal (*King Horn*), as well as the apparently innovative lyrics that blend continental trope and English idiom. Beyond these there are several arresting odds and ends: *Marina*, a tale of a cross-dressed female saint; a verse translation of *Dulcis Iesu memoria*; *Maximian*, an old man's lyric lament; the moralizing *Sayings of St. Bernard*; the proverb-packed *Hending*; and *A Bok of Sweuenyng*, a verse treatise on the origin of dreams. Mixed liberally in are many Anglo-Norman texts, for example, saints' legends and passions in prose and verse; the *Gospel of Nicodemus*; many religious, secular, or political verses, including an ABC for women and poems taking a pro or con stance in the debate on women; a tract on pilgrimage sites; four or five irreverent fabliaux; and *Gilote et Johane*, an unusual work of much originality, a "debate cum interlude cum fabliau."²⁵ The Latin prose texts include prayers; a list of the biblical books; occasions for certain psalms; Anselm's prescribed questions to the dying; and the lives of Saints Ethelbert, Etrfrid, and Wistan, the latter saint martyred at Wistanstow, which is ten miles northwest of Ludlow, the seat of the scribe's activity.

Convenient copies of all textual items appear, of course, in the facsimile, where they are accompanied by Ker's authoritative list of contents.²⁶ Ker has also supplied important summaries of codicological details and the clues that may help to localize Harley. But the potential research value of a facsimile is only as good as its accompanying resources. Few

²⁴ For this count, see Ker's listing of items, pp. ix–xvi, where, however, the numbering is somewhat confusing because it follows that of Wanley's catalogue (while listing item no. 42 as "Vacant") and adds six new items (nos. 24a, 24b, 25a, 75a, 108a, 109a). In addition, one probably ought to count as a separate item the tale of Thaïs, which is appended to no. 1 (the French verse *Vitas patrum*), bringing the actual number of items to 122.

²⁵ The term is Mary Dove's, quoted by Revard, "*Gilote et Johane*," p. 122n3.

²⁶ The item numbers appearing throughout this volume derive from Ker's list in the *Facsimile*, pp. ix–xvi.

people of our time have the training or even desire to laboriously read texts in three medieval languages written in a fourteenth-century anglicana hand. Thus, while the facsimile is essential to Harley studies, until there is an edition of the contents and more follow-up descriptions and investigations, our knowledge of what the curious Harleian volume contains will remain piecemeal at best. A big obstacle continues to be the accessing of texts. The Harley texts of three Latin saints' lives, for example, have never been printed. A collaborative edition in the Middle English Texts Series will include texts of all the contents of Harley 2253, with translations given for non-English works.

Meanwhile, as we search for critical ground more than two centuries after Wanley's catalogue listing and half a century after Brook's slim, definitive edition, it is clearly of timely import that we usher in a new phase in Harley studies, one that is attuned to finer nuances of historical influence and to interdisciplinary methods. That there have not been, up to now, any studies of the Harley volume's general character and features to follow upon Ker's facsimile is indeed startling. Such a study was initiated in the late 1970s, under the editorship of R. H. Robbins, but it remained unfinished at the time of his death and was never published.²⁷ Instead, there exists only a handful of narrow studies, with one recent preliminary study showing what the potential of such investigations may be.²⁸

The essays in this volume are offered in the hope, then, that they will lead to many more like them — and that they will reopen and begin to resolve, perhaps, several of the still unsettled points about this book, its contents, and its milieu. With the exception of one essay (a revised reprint of an article by Theo Stemmler), the work gathered here represents new research. The authors are unified by a desire to see the manuscript whole, that is, in ways not restricted to single forms or separate linguistic fields. The goal has been to identify what evidence at hand may reveal to us about the individuals and cultures that produced this codex, and what avenues are most promising for future study. As scholars grow more able to embrace the Harley MS in all its complexity, it will become better situated in its own particular time, place, and literate values, and we will begin to recognize and piece out the process of how one anonymous but fairly well-documented man of scribal skill, working in South West England for an unknown patron, patrons, or just himself, affixed his trilingual reading in religious and profane texts to that of an earlier scribe whose interests leaned toward pious tales, saints' legends, and biblical narratives.

The lead-off essay begins the discussion with crucial new evidence on the identity of the Harley scribe. The fruits of Carter Revard's long research in scores of public record

²⁷ Citation to it as "forthcoming" has occurred occasionally in the critical literature, as in Revard, "*Gilote et Johane*," p. 122n3, and in Stemmler's 1991 article reprinted in this volume.

²⁸ See Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 192–217.

offices and libraries are displayed in photographic reproductions of forty-one newly recovered deeds and charters written by this man. Because these documents are precisely dated, they provide a chronological record of changes in the scribe's handwriting over time and therefore a means for exact dating of his three manuscripts and the texts therein. Revard's remarkable achievement provides an intimate look at the scribe's professional life, setting him among named associates in legal and business contexts that are far more intricate and particularized than were before understood.

Following Revard's study is Theo Stemmler's article, "Miscellany or Anthology?," a piece first published in 1991 in the German journal *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*. It is here reprinted with authorial revisions. Stemmler shows how critics have tended to apply the terms "miscellany" and "anthology" rather loosely, even interchangeably, and by applying these words' definitions more strictly, he assesses the features and different sections of Harley accordingly. He determines that although MS Harley 2253 exhibits "no traces of a sustained organizing principle," it does have several groups of texts "discernibly arranged" and thus betrays the anthologizing impulse of its compiler.

Stemmler's piece having thus set up one of the larger debates about the nature of the Harley MS, the next two essays provide comprehensive reevaluations of two broad categories of contents in the book: religion and politics. Michael P. Kuczynski describes the array of religious material present in three languages and in prose and verse, that is, everything from the French and English lyrics, to the Latin saints' legends, to admonitory pieces, to the biblical narratives and instructions on reading the psalms. His illustrative essay — which is closely attentive to the few bits of gloss and marginalia provided by the scribe — reminds us that the lyrics do not exist as isolated moments of devotion, but as part of a larger culture of piety shared by the scribe and his audience.

Covering the political verse of Harley 2253, John Scattergood shows how it is steeped in a regional form of nationalism, one deeply loyal to the concept of nation but suspicious of centralized authority. Several works address national events; others are more personal. Attitudes on the decline of the times sometimes tend to surface as grumblings about the repressiveness of officialdom by individuals caught on the wrong side of the system, whether that system is represented by the articles of trailbaston, oppressive tax collectors, or an allegedly unfair judicial process. Satires against forms of bastard feudalism and against the clerical orders are similarly rooted in an "atavistic conservatism" suspicious of and resistant to a new culture of change.

Richard Newhauser's essay upon "historicity and complaint" in the metrically intricate *Song of the Husbandman* uses a critical analysis of that poem to dismantle the view that its complaint stems from a particularized historical moment. Instead, Newhauser finds in it allusions to an eternal "theodicy" wherein through God's justice "the presence of evil is seen to contain within itself the promise of its ultimate punishment." The poem is, in

this reading, a moral complaint on how the abstractions Will, Falsehood, Woe, and Misery walk the land. The analysis exposes a theoretical issue lurking throughout the essays, the issue of reception then and now. What we have long read as political may in fact have been cast as religious for fourteenth-century readers. Our own distinctions need to remain open and fluid.

The two essays that come after Newhauser's follow this thread into more detailed examinations of popular genres and motifs that obviously appealed to the Harley scribe: debates and dreams. They draw our attention to the prevalence of forms in the Harley MS that are not generally recognized as part of its make-up. Karl Reichl considers the presence of key debate poems in the volume, and, in particular, he highlights those deriving from long-standing European traditions: the French dispute between Winter and Spring (the second piece copied by the Harley scribe) and the English one between Body and Soul. There are also debates of a more comic turn — including one drawing upon the "question of women," the bawdy *Gilote et Johane*, and another with a jongleur cleverly inverting the social pretensions of a king — and pastourelle-like arguments between potential lovers, as found in two English lyrics.

Helen Phillips's study of dream lore in the Harley MS points to a more subtle interest displayed by the compiler. One of the least-known of the English works in Harley is *A Bok of Sweuenyng*, a treatise on the myriad variety of dreams and the predicted outcomes of precise dream topics. Phillips explains the Latin context behind this work and shows how the Harley piece derives from two Middle English versions of the *Somnia Danielis* "run together." Elsewhere in Harley, in *King Horn*, dream imagery plays an important symbolic role that forwards a romance narrative, while the dream tradition found in the body-soul debate poem *In a Bestri Stude* is entirely visionary and admonitory.

The varied contents of Harley viewed in relation to codicological categories of evidence — specifically, scribe/anthologist and author — are the concerns of the next two scholars. David L. Jeffrey determines who are some of the identifiable authors of Harley material, and he examines which items are shared by other manuscripts. In so doing, he situates Harley among comparable early English anthologies, many of which are suffused with Franciscan spirituality. The influence of fraternal theology is also to be found, he demonstrates, in some lyrics and meditations of Harley 2253. Because authorship in Harley is an elusive issue, Jeffrey's list of authors is useful and illuminating: Anselm of Canterbury, Jacques de Vitry, John of Wales, Nicholas Bozon (or Bohun, of the well-known Hereford patronage family), and anonymous translators of works by Jacopone da Todi, Bernard of Clairvaux, and pseudo-Bonaventure.

John J. Thompson's essay on the biblical texts of Harley 2253 offers another perspective on scribal activity, authorship, and topic in Harley 2253. Thompson reminds us to consider that more than one scribe is involved in the overall product that Harley represents and that

each of the two main ones executes a sizeable redaction of biblical narrative.²⁹ Scribe A (of fols. 1–48) created a “mini-anthology” of “diverse French vernacular biblical material” including the *Vitas patrum* and an extract of Herman of Valenciennes’s *Bible*. Scribe B (the Harley scribe) copied the lengthy Old Testament Bible stories at the end of the ninth quire. Thompson’s study supports the intriguing theory, first proposed by A. D. Wilshire, that the Harley scribe himself made this biblical translation in Anglo-Norman prose, and that he likewise is author of the dialectally similar *Fouke le Fitz Waryn* of MS Royal 12.C.xii. The level of active reflection and authority embedded in the Harley scribe’s redactive output is thus a continuing question that conjoins with issues of how thoroughly Harley 2253 is a planned book and how deliberately it follows an agenda set by its scribal maker.

Like Thompson, the next writer is concerned with some French contents, but of a different sort. Texts written in Anglo-Norman occupy more manuscript space than all the Latin and English texts combined. The items examined now are, however, very distant in manner from the implicit piety of Bible stories. Barbara Nolan looks at the clustering of five fabliaux in the Harley MS’s sixth independent block (comprised of Quires 12–14), and she notes how the material interspersed with them tends to reinforce a sense that what is going on here is a discussion of women and their duplicity, meant to entertain, warn, and instruct young men, as fabliaux and texts on women’s nature coexist amidst the more overt didacticism of courtesy books. Of keen interest is Nolan’s detection of unique prologues and epilogues in several of the Harley fabliaux, two of which appear to borrow phrasings from Chrétien de Troyes or Marie de France, and which may be the Harley scribe’s own creations.

Mary Dove’s work is closely related to Nolan’s as she examines many of those other texts about women. Dove’s emphasis is mostly on the French, but also some English, verse that draws on a traditional discourse about the “characteristics of women,” producing texts either of accusation or praise. An associated tradition offers pro or con arguments upon the wisdom of marrying, and the range of such texts extends even to the Latin extract of John of Wales’s *Communeloquium*. In comparing the formal relationships within this literary type, Dove suggests that questions of “priority and influence” need to yield to newer questions of “mediation and negotiation.” Furthermore, she asks that this literature be contextualized within an audience of both women and men so that the “intimacy of shared vernacular texts” may be perceived as being in play in their enactment between genders.

²⁹ Wanley distinguishes the “round Text Hand” of fols. 1–48 from the “English Law hand” of fols. 49–140 (*Catalogue*, 2.585). A third hand adds recipes in English on fol. 52va–b (the end of the fifth quire). See also Ker, *Facsimile*, pp. xviii–xx.

Can one discern, therefore, in the sheer arrangement of texts, reasonably obvious indicators of meaning for a medieval reader, and, if so, can one plausibly ascribe these constructed arguments to the Harley scribe? My essay on *Marina* and the English love lyrics addresses this issue as it continues the focus upon secular texts, again in the context of manuscript making and specific codicological features. Many of the most revered English lyrics — for example, *Annot and John*, *Alysoun*, *The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale* — appear in the seventh quire of Harley 2253. Mixed with these lyrics are several other categories of discourse: a political poem, a saint’s tale, a quasi-religious poem, a pastourelle, a bawdy French interlude. By examining the neglected saint’s legend *Marina*, a fascinating English tale of penitence, sexuality, and cross-gendering, I suggest that the quire achieves an amusing unity of purpose in the motif of women’s parts hidden under clothes, a favored convention of love poets, which is here submitted to many permutations in a textual sequence composed by someone (possibly this scribe-compiler) and filling up this quire.

Allied to my suggestion that we more closely analyze the manuscript according to its makeup by quires and blocks, Elizabeth Solopova and Frances McSparran point to other physical means by which we ought to renew our study of Harley 2253. Solopova offers an analysis of the Harley scribe’s habits in copying English verse: how he observes a systematic practice in regards to layout, punctuation, and stress patterns. Comparison to analogous manuscripts, particularly to the Oxford manuscripts Digby 86 and Jesus College 29, reveals a method in use by pre-1350 scribes of English verse texts whereby lines were by scribal understanding recorded with end rhymes, so that where alternate rhymes occurred, they were copied as belonging to internally rhyming caesural lines. As with Revard’s paleographical study, Solopova’s essay causes us to regard anew the scribe’s sense of his craft.

Frances McSparran looks at the Harley scribe’s orthographical practices and attempts to determine the degree to which he (1) reproduced the forms he found in his exemplars, (2) translated to his own dialect, or (3) created forms “in between these two poles of replication and translation.” McSparran’s study carefully reexamines the English dialects in Harley 2253 in light of the data now available in *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*.³⁰ She is able to determine much of the scribe’s active and passive repertoires of spelling, and by dialectal evidence, to detect the orthographic patterns of some exemplars that he used for certain texts. In these “suggestive networks of connection” within groups of texts we may begin to glimpse, on occasion, those exemplars that gave the scribe more than one text.

³⁰ Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, Michael Benskin, with the assistance of Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, 4 vols. (Aberdeen, 1986).

Introduction

The final essayist in this collection, Marilyn Corrie, asks us to view Harley 2253 in relation to other English books of its time, and particularly to Digby 86, which has recently appeared in another facsimile edition published by the Early English Text Society. Comparison of the two codices indicates the rich variety of native and continental French literature circulating in England ca. 1270–1340. Corrie shows, specifically, that the corpus of available texts in Anglo-Norman was “rather less consistently bleak, and less unremittingly improving” than the standard surveys would lead us to believe. Indeed, our knowledge of the literary landscape of the period is woefully incomplete because of monolingual biases among scholars and the often selective aims of modern anthologists and editors. Corrie also reminds us how different were the medieval compilers’ criteria of selection (“a lack of self-consciousness” and a concern for the “potential usefulness” of texts) compared to those of modern editors.

In essence, Marilyn Corrie’s essay brings us full circle to the problem of recovery. These documents — Harley 2253, Digby 86, and others — have survived through more than six centuries. They are now well protected and preserved in university or national libraries. They are, moreover, facsimiled for everyone to view. But amidst this recognition of their treasured value and their unique status as artifacts from a certain time and place in British history, it is quite remarkable that they have not yet been scrutinized as thoroughly as they might for what they may yield about the reading lives of those in the fairly particularized society that created them. The essays in this volume demonstrate not so much what we know about these books as what we still need to investigate and find out from them. Paleography, codicology, dialectology, metrics, physical layout — these are some of the sciences that help us to learn more. Literary-historical studies in religion, politics, and day-to-day culture — with the many intersections and interdependencies of these forces — will produce yet more results. And, most of all, our reading the books in the ways that they were composed — that is, whole and in awareness of each of the alternating languages used by scribes — will clearly give us a fuller grasp of the textual interrelations as they were received and understood by the medieval people for whom they were made.