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John Lydgate's *Verses* (Royal MS 18 D II) within the linguistic context of Middle English

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INTRODUCTION

This Master's Degree thesis is basically focused on two topics: the John Lydgate's *Verses on the kings of England* and, therefore, its relation with the linguistic context of Middle English.

The choice of this text, which is presented here following the redaction contained in the Royal MS 18 D II, has been carefully pondered. The search for a Middle English text has been initially caused by the intention to find a linguistically interesting text, which could be collocated in a dialect area, among those localised in Middle English and described in the thesis as well. Seeking among the manuscripts available on the net, I decided to focus mainly on those digitised by the British Library – which has one of the rare websites that furnish entire manuscripts online – and written in Middle English. I have decided to pick the Royal MS 18 D II and the John Lydgate's text it contains mainly for three reasons: (a) because it is perfectly legible (except for some words or abbreviations) and well-preserved; (b) its length (which fills five folios) could provide for the accurate analysis of the whole text, and (c) because it was written by an author quite known, who enjoyed a good repute in the Middle Ages, so the text has an importance within the medieval literary panorama.

Moreover, this version of the texts (which, as I am going to explain later, has been copied several times) seems to be unedited at the moment, since I could not find any edition of it¹.

The first chapter of the thesis can be considered as a sort of essential introduction, since it explains the previous dialectal context (that is, the Old English dialects), the linguistic situation of England during the Middle English period, the main differences between written and spoken language and the issues which the dialectology encounters when it focuses on a period so linguistically mutable. As we are going to see, all these reason often do not allow scholars to have a clear view of the regional varieties present in ME.

The second chapter tries to prove this professed variability, proposing a comparison among texts which are believed to have different origins. The choice of the texts basically follows the analysis proposed on Milroy and Baugh&Cable², with some changes which concern mainly the Scottish variety. Along with each text, I have decided to include also the related translations (extracted from the above mentioned authors or made by myself). The comparison is based on linguistic criteria which have been found through dialectology: they allow us to divide England into different areas which show their own peculiar features. Even though the extracts proposed are only a little part of

1 After the researches I have done, I have not found an edition of this version of the *Verses*. If it exists, I am not aware of it.

2 Milroy (1992): 156-206; Baugh, Cable (1978): 400-412.

these texts, the goal of the chapter is to show this difference among dialects and give an idea of the complicated linguistic context of Middle English.

The third and last chapter of the thesis can be considered the more applicative. The aim of this section is to propose the transcription of John Lydgate's *Verses on the kings of England* (following the version available in the Royal manuscript 18 D II) and the comment of the text. Despite the difficulties in finding information about this poem, I tried to focus both on its contents and on its linguistic features: for this reason, it has been necessary to include in the final Appendix another version of the text (the one available in Harley MS 372) which is often mentioned in my analysis.

The choice of the title is quite explicative: the study on John Lydgate's *Verses*, even if it closes the thesis, precedes, in my intentions, the rest of the work and I think it really deserves the attention of the reader, without removing anything from the value of the first part of my thesis, which is necessary for the comprehension in any case.

CHAPTER I

THE LINGUISTIC CHANGES IN ENGLAND AND THE RESEARCH ON DIALECTS

I.1 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Middle English (ME) period is certainly the phase which shows the greatest diversity within the written English language. According to Strang³ “ME is, par excellence, the dialectal phase of English, in the sense that while dialects have been spoken at all periods, it was in ME that divergent local usage was normally indicated in writing”. In fact, it is set between the Old English (OE) period, where the language had one kind of written standard (mainly, due to the shortage of written sources), and the beginnings of Standard English, when we witness the rise and spread of a uniform variety of English. For this reason, the variability in written ME is very extended: not only does it concern the geographical and chronological dimensions, which are the most evident, but also the linguistic one (morphology, syntax and lexicon).

The lack of standardisation is the socio-political aspect which mostly differentiates ME from the other periods. In fact, the concept of “standardisation” normally affects a language in two different requisites which are not satisfied in this case:

1) the linguistic scope, because a standardised language requires a regularity in the usage which is not present in the ME period (especially in the Early ME⁴ – 1100-1300). The only exception we found, is the so-called *AB language*, which has been considered an attempt to write in a particular and planned way (different from the writing habits of the scribes).

It consists in a variety of English which shows a sort of “homogeneity” in the phonological, grammatical and orthographical systems, even though it is located in two manuscripts written by different hands (the Corpus manuscript containing *Ancrene Wisse* – which stands for “A” – and the MS Bodley 34 in the Bodleian Library in Oxford – which stands for “B” –). It has been pointed out that this relative continuity is owed to the fact that the copyists tended to follow the OE scribal tradition, which was very present in the south-west Midlands area, where the manuscripts seem to

3 Strang (1970): 224

4 Notice that the division between Early Middle English (EME – 1100-1300) and Late Middle English (LME – 1300 – 1500) is a free interpretation and a matter of convenience. The long duration of this period presumes the rise of some linguistic changes which justify a division of this sort; anyway, it does not imply clear or definite temporal boundaries.

have been produced. Here, in fact, there was the stronghold of the English literary tradition in Early ME, therefore the OE material was still copied and studied by the scribes themselves.

2) The socio-political scope, which is strictly linked to what we said above. A variety like the *AB language* cannot be considered precisely a “standard language” because it appears in only two manuscripts, so neither can it be compared, for example, to Present-Day English (PDE), nor be accepted by all the English writers. Nowadays, indeed, PDE is universally accepted also thanks to the fact that hundreds of documents are written in the same kind of language, which is recognised as the standard one.

The most important thing to do, as modern observers, is not to be pushed to think that only a correct form of English can exist and, therefore, not to judge badly something which appears not to be “standardised” to a hypothetical ME spelling. In ME, variable language states were considered appropriate as vehicles for the written language, so the dialect variations do not have to be estimated as languages of a level lower than the standard one (which actually does not exist), but they are likewise accepted and used even in the written language. This is particularly important to stress and interesting to notice, especially if we address the Italian speakers, who often tend to consider the regional varieties as mediocre varieties for historical reasons that we briefly report here. According to Telmon et al⁵. “A partire dalla seconda metà dell'Ottocento iniziò un lento e continuo processo di erosione della vitalità dei dialetti. (...) Ma, al di fuori dell'impiego letterario, in tutti gli altri campi della vita associata si delineò una contrapposizione sempre più aspra fra dialetto e italiano. Alcuni fattori in particolare operarono una decisa azione in favore dell'uso della lingua nazionale, quasi sempre in contrapposizione – più o meno esplicita – all'uso del dialetto: la scuola, l'emigrazione, l'urbanesimo ecc.” “(...) Si radicarono nella scuola due 'vizi' che la caratterizzarono per lungo tempo: – una lingua italiana assunta dai modelli letterari, tendenzialmente puristica, socialmente esclusiva e isolata dalle altre varietà del repertorio; – la lotta senza quartiere ai dialetti, considerati il principale ostacolo nell'apprendimento della 'corretta' lingua. La dialettofobia istituzionale della scuola italiana – a parte lodevoli eccezioni – si protrasse, di fatto, fin oltre la metà del Novecento: si può considerare simbolicamente come data terminale solo il 1962, anno in cui fu istituita la scuola media unica, obbligatoria e gratuita.” (...) “Fino a tutti gli anni Ottanta il dialetto ha conservato connotazioni generali di collocazione sociale bassa, di svantaggio culturale, di ridottissimo prestigio, di discriminazione sociale, e questa percezione sociale ha sicuramente agevolato l'affermazione della lingua nazionale (...)”⁶.

5 Telmon, Grassi, Sobrero (2007): 244, 245, 254.

6 “A gradual and continuous process of erosion of the dialectal vitality began in the second half of the 19th century. (...) However, apart from the literary use, in all the other fields of the public life, an increasingly fierce contrast emerged between Italian and the dialects. In particular, some factors produced a decisive action in favour of the use of the national language, often creating an opposition – more or less explicit – against the use of dialect: the school,

I.2 OVERVIEW OF THE OLD ENGLISH DIALECTS

Before starting talking about the ME dialectology, a backward step to Old English dialects is needed in order to understand which background this linguistic situation has had.

Normally, in the philological tradition, there are four OE dialects recognized and named after four of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms⁷: West Saxon, Kentish, Mercian, and Northumbrian, with these last two sometimes grouped together in an only Northern variety called Anglian. These four dialects have been ascertained, basically, thanks to the surviving documents, which, actually, are few and fragmentary. So, we may suppose that there were many more dialects in England at the time, but there are no Old English texts which represent them. The University of Toronto published *The Dictionary of Old English* which defines the vocabulary of the first six centuries (from 600 to 1150) of the English language: it shows that the OE corpus consists of only 3037 texts, amounting to 3 million words (a total easily outnumbered by a single and prolific author, such as Charles Dickens). The existing texts can be divided into three categories:

- 1) the glossaries of Latin texts – in which the scribes used to add the OE definitions for the Latin words difficult to comprehend. Frequently they vary a lot in size, so some glossaries account for a few words (such as, the Corpus manuscript – from the Corpus Christi College, Cambridge – which glosses about 2000 words), while others are quite rich (such as the Book of Psalm – contained in the Vespasian Psalter – which glosses over 30000 words).
- 2) The prose works, including inscriptions, records, letters, homilies, translations, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, liturgical texts, medical texts, recipes, etc.
- 3) The poetry, including the major poems of the period (*Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Dream of the Rood*) and the smaller works (riddles, songs, various fragments and verses).

the human migration, the urbanization etc.” “Two 'vices' settled within the school and characterised it for a long time: - an Italian language derived from the literary models, therefore basically puristic, socially exclusive and isolated from the other varieties of the linguistic repertoire; - the endless battle against the dialects, believed to be the main obstacle to the learning of the 'right' language. This institutional 'dialectophobia' of the Italian school – apart from praiseworthy exceptions – effectively continued up to over the second half of the 20th century: symbolically, we can only consider 1962, when the comprehensive school (which was compulsory and free) was created, as the end date (...). “Until the end of the 80s, dialect retained some general features associated with low social status, cultural handicap, very low prestige and social discrimination. This perception surely fostered the establishment of the national language.”

7 The Anglo-Saxons, who mainly included people from Germanic tribes, came to England around the 5th century and ruled until the 1066, when the Normans with William the Conqueror invaded the nation. They settled in different parts of the country constituting the so-called Heptarchy – that is, the country of seven kingdoms (from the Greek ἑπτὰ + ἀρχή = seven + realm): Northumbria, Wessex, East Anglia and Mercia, which were the main four; Sussex, Kent and Essex which were the minor three.

As it is illustrated by David Crystal⁸, the evidence for a Kentish dialect in OE period is not well-supported (there are only some documents showing, essentially, south-eastern features), even though its features are quite interesting and, in some cases, have survived until today⁹. The West Saxon dialect, instead, provides for a huge corpus, due to the fact that this area had a great power at the time, which lasted until the arrival of the Normans.

Anyway, most of the suppositions about the OE dialects are based on the spelling variations found in the texts, which would be the reflection of the differences in pronunciation. In addition to that, other information can be deduced from the morphology: Old English retains a great number of grammatical structures of the Germanic languages, which nowadays do not exist any longer. Therefore, some differences amongst dialects can be provided by various constructions: in order to say “they are”, for instance, in West Saxon they used to say *hi sindon/hi sind* (like in Modern German, from the verb *wesan*), but in Northumbria and Mercia the form used was *hi arun/earun*, which has become later the standard form “are”. Of course, this can be replicated even with some other constructions in English. In respect to the lexical field, some elements about the word formation seems to be dialectally useful. As an example, we may consider the suffix of the female nouns (corresponding to the modern *-ess*, as in *princess*): it appears to be *-estre* in the West Saxon dialect and *-icge* in the Anglian dialect. So, the word for “huntress” is *hunticge* in the north and *huntigestre* in the south. Conversely, syntax is not very useful in showing dialect variations. The OE texts often cannot display syntactic information (the word order, for instance), especially when we deal with glossaries which provide little about natural Old English, being normally word by word translations of Latin sentences. Moreover, scribes are usually part of an elite, so it appears quite difficult to get an idea about how ordinary people used to speak their dialect.

One of the clearest thing, however, is that this partition of the OE dialects into four areas is quite simplistic and generic. Notice that some of these territories covered a huge part of the country (Mercia and Northumbria in particular), thus, we must consider that there were further divisions within them where other dialects were spoken (nowadays, these areas host many dialects which have not developed all of a sudden, but have slowly evolved). This means that it is not always correct to think merely from a geographic point of view when we talk about dialects, but, as it is going to be explained later, there are many more variables which have to be considered.

8 Crystal (2005): 36

9 The word *merry* is an example of the influence of the Kentish dialect on the language. It was spelled *myrige* during the OE period. As time passed, the form which prevailed was the Kentish *e* form (*merry*), instead of the expected *i* form (*mirry*).

I.3 DIALECTAL INVESTIGATIONS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

I.3.1 DIALECTOLOGY AND RELATED ISSUES

Dialectology entails the study of variation in language. We may say that its main purpose is to discover how language variants are distributed in a community, so dialectologists traditionally tend to focus more on the geographical dimension in order to have detailed information about the geographical distribution of variants. However, when we talk about dialectology in the ME language, the issues to face are various, mainly because the varieties attested are many and it is extremely complex to make useful linguistic generalisations about their distribution. First of all, differently from the PDE dialectology, the ME one does not have direct access to speakers (our informants are surely dead) but only to written witnesses (which cannot be expanded any more). So, since the evidences are present only in written form, we cannot know for certain some aspects of the spoken language, but we can only talk in general about them (such as the pronunciation of certain words/vowels/consonants).

The alphabetic writing system cannot reflect all the aspects of the spoken language: supra-segmental features (intonation, stress, pause), for instance, cannot be provided by the written language, which is based only on segmental phonology and may just give some concise indications about them. Furthermore, a ME text showing a perfect correspondence between the orthography and the phonology would be like a sort of phonetic transcription based on the interpretation that the scribe himself has of the phonetic system. Nevertheless, there is a book based on this principle, which has been considered useful in order to acquire information about the correct ME spelling system: the *Orrmulum*. It was written by Orm, an English monk who, around the 1200, wrote a book called the *Orrmulum – forrþi þatt Orm itt wrohhte* (“because it was Orm who wrote it”) in an East Midlands dialect.

It consists of a collection of homilies intended for church reading and based on the Gospel readings used during the ceremonies. Orm can be considered as the first real English spelling reformer and his language appears to be innovative, in respect to the style of other coeval poets, as well as very systematic: he did not use an alliterative and rhyming style, each of his lines has fifteen syllables, divided into two half-lines of eight and seven syllables. His main interest, however, was the idiosyncratic spelling system devised to give preachers some help in reading aloud in a period in which English was changing rapidly. He understood that there was a problem in distinguishing between “long” vowels and “short” vowels, thus he invented a way to signal graphically this

difference. So, the dominating feature in the *Orrmulum* is the use of double consonants to mark as short the preceding vowels; moreover, he was particularly precise to describe the different kinds of sound represented by the letter “yogh” ȝ in Old English:

- ȝ stands for the sound [j], as in *yet*, written ȝèt (the double acute accent stresses that the vowel *e* preceding *t* is short, as in Latin);
- ȝȝ stands for an [i] sound at the end of a diphthong, as in *may*, written *maȝȝ*;
- ȝh stands for a consonant sound, a voiced velar fricative [ɣ] as in *holy*, written *hallȝhe*.

Here there is an example of the way in which *Orrmulum* was written:

Nu broþerr Wallterr, broþerr in, affterr þe flæshess kinde,
Annd broþerr min i Crisstenndom þurh fulluhht annd þurh trowþþe,
Annd broþerr min I Ġodess hus, ȝèt o þe þride wise,
Þurh þatt witt¹⁰ hafenn tākenn ba an rezhellboc to follȝhenn,
Vnnderr kanunnkess had annd lif, swa summ Sannt Awwstin laid down;
Icc hafe don swa summ þu badd, annd forþedd te þin wille,
Icc hafe wennd inntill Ennġlissh Ġodspelless hallȝhe lāre,
Affterr þatt little witt tatt me min Drihhtin hafeþþ lenedd.

Now brother Walter, my brother, according to the way of flesh,
And my brother in Christendom through baptism and through faith,
And my brother in God's house, moreover in the third way,
Because we have both chosen to follow a monastic rule,
According to the order and life of canon, just as St Augustine laid down;
I have done as you asked, and fulfilled your desire,
I have translated into English the Gospel's holy wisdom,
With the little intelligence that my Lord has granted me¹¹.

Thanks to the fact that the text is long and this kind of spelling very methodical, we may get a sense of the accent that Orm must have had and, therefore, his provenance. For example, the fact that he wrote with the vowel *a* the words that usually in OE were written with the vowel *o*, when preceding the *n* (*mann* “man”, *maniz* “many”, *stannt* “stand” etc.), may lead to believe that the book was located in any place in the northern part of the East Midlands (probably a language of this sort was

10 *Witt* was a dual pronoun (meaning “we two”) which had become obsolete even in OE; Orm uses it a lot with the word *ba* (“both”), maybe to stress the dual aspect, which was becoming archaic.

11 Crystal (2005): 197

spoken around the Elsham Priory – an Augustinian monastery in Lincolnshire).

However, conclusions of this kind are always a little suspect, so they have to be interpreted as important indications, but not as absolute truths. The main problems depend, firstly, on the fact that during the initial part of ME period, some regions of the country were not well known and the texts we have are still quite sparse; and secondly, on the fact that the ME age fills a period lasting 300 years, so the linguistic changes are huge, even within the same dialect (an East Midlands text of 1200 is almost certainly different from an East Midlands text of 1400). Moreover, as it was already mentioned, the ME writing system is not exactly a transcription. A single letter, for instance, does not stand necessarily for a single sound (in PDE, too), so a sequence of letters may relate to a single sound or to many sounds or to no sounds at all. In addition, the same sound can be represented by different grapheme: *erþe/erthe* and *noȝt/noght* are graphic variants but do not reflect phonetic differences. Therefore, since there is no possibility to access directly to the ME speech, we restate again that these conclusions are useful in order to reduce the margin of ignorance, even if they have to be seen as generalised and idealised statements.

1.3.2 THE LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE NORMAN INVASION

Complications related to written dialects are not finished yet. The arrival of the Normans set a political and cultural boundary which became evident also in the scribal tradition. Although the West Saxon school enjoyed a certain prestige, which allowed to have a relative uniformity in the scribal practice, it underwent a demise after the 1066. The result was that a great part of the documents from 1100 to 1300 were chaotic from the writing point of view, mixing together different conventions and styles which did not belong to a single tradition anymore. The mixture of different spelling systems especially (belonging to Old English, Norman French and Latin) created difficulties in discerning the written form from the underlying spoken form: where some scribes could have used /a/ for the OE [æ], others could have used /æ/ for the same letter, without intending that a different pronunciation needed to be followed.

The Norman Conquest has also created a new linguistic background in England: the practice of primarily using Latin and French in contexts in which English was previously used, gradually ousted English as a written medium. So, the literary works written in English date back mainly to the period preceding the Conquest and for a century or more there was virtually no new writing in English. However, differently from what we might think, English does not die out after the 1066 (as it normally happens in other countries, such as in Brazil where Portuguese, arrived in 1500, has completely replaced the indigenous languages). The French language (especially one of its northern

variety – Norman French) became the language of the power: French barons, who arrived in England, even during the reign of Henry I (1110-1135), obtained important positions and huge tracts of land. Also within the Church, the main positions were assigned to French-speaking (the Abbot Lanfranc of Caen, for instance, became archbishop of Canterbury in 1070, replacing the Anglo-Saxon Stigand) and the French craftsmen and merchants arrived to England to avail themselves of the commercial opportunities provided by the new regime. William I spent almost all his reign without visiting England, William II and Henry I did almost the same (as their successors Henry II and Richard I). It is arduous to say exactly how much English these monarchs knew, but it was probably very little. Ordericus Vitalis, a chronicler who wrote in the 1130s, reports that William I tried at one point to learn English when he was forty-three years old, but the local rebellions and the necessity to govern the reign did not allow him to improve his English. Henry I, who had an English wife – Matilda or Edith of Scotland – was maybe more into the English language, even though we do not know how. We may generally assume that French continued to be the norm within the court at least until the 13th century and that the aristocracy was largely monolingual. However, the number of Norman people in England was insufficient to have a strong impact on general population: it has been calculated that there were no more than 10,000/15,000 Norman soldiers plus an indeterminate number of settlers. This means that the major part of English people have never had contacts with French and continued to speak Old English. It may be assumed that a few English people learned French in order to take the opportunity to become part of the nobility, but the pressure on French people to learn English was certainly greater (in those cases, for example, in which French-speaking had to do with local or working-class people). Moreover, the riot which broke out in the north of England and the campaign known as “Harrying of the North¹²” ended with the death of thousands people and the elimination of the Anglo-Saxon nobility. A great number of English speakers was forced to leave the region and moved to Scotland: the hatred against the French invader was, of course, followed by a strong antagonism towards the language which impeded its diffusion throughout the country. Even at the official level, the French language was hindered by Latin, which was still recognised as the language of law, administration, literature and, above all, religion (*Domesday Book*¹³, for instance, was written in Latin even if it was ordered by William the Conqueror and the Church continued to use Latin in the religious expression). So,

12 The Harrying or Harrowing of the North was a series of campaigns waged by William the Conqueror in 1069-1070 in order to rule over the North of England. It was caused by the arrival of the Scandinavian in York and their alliance with the English against the Normans.

13 *Domesday Book* is the name of the manuscript which gathered the results of a census completed in 1086, pertaining to England and Wales. It was ordered by William the Conqueror in order to quantify the properties of every landowner and the taxes they paid for them during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1002-1066). The striking name of the book originated by the fact that the assessments and the valuations made by the assessors were considered as law and therefore incontestable.

though French began to be used more and more in the official sphere, it never became the only voice of the officialdom. English, instead, easily found a very clear social role in speech and as the language of second-class. It has never become the language spoken in court amongst the Norman aristocrats and it was very seldom used in writing.

Thus, lastly, we can say that the Anglo-Norman England was in a linguistic situation of *triglossia*: three languages were spoken for different social functions, two – Latin and French – for “high-level” purposes and English as a “low-level” language. As time passes, this situation evolved and, England became initially a *diglossic* country in order to find a definite stability later, with the emergence of a *monolingual*¹⁴ nation, where English is the everyday language.

The diglossic situation is underlined by the monk Robert of Gloucester, who wrote a chronicle around the end of the 13th century. He describes the arrival of the Normans, firstly saying that they were monolingual:

And þe Normans ne couþe speke þo bote hor owe speche,
And speke French as hii dude atom, and hor children dude also teche ...

And the Normans could speak nothing but their own language,
And spoke French as they did in their own country, and also taught it to their children¹⁵ ...

Then, he stresses the difference between the languages spoken by the upper and lower classes:

Vor bote a man conne Frenss me telþ of him lute.
Ac lowe men holdeþ to Engliss, and to hor owe speche zute ...

Unless a man knows French he is thought little of
And low-born men keep to English, and to their own speech still¹⁶ ...

And, cunningly, proposes to learn both languages:

Ac wel me wot uor to conne boþe wel it is,
Vor þe more þat a mon can, þe more wurþe he is.

14 Notice that the monolingualism is a very unusual state for a country. Nowadays, it is quite impossible to find a nation where Standard English is the only language spoken: normally, there are also local varieties which go with English. In Singapore, for example, in addition to Standard English (which is one of the official languages) there is also a variety called Singlish (which is an English-based creole language) which creates a sort of diglossic context in that country.

15 Crystal (2005): 128

16 Crystal (2005): 129

And I know very well that it is good to know both
For the more a man knows the worthier he is¹⁷.

During the 13th century the number of handbooks teaching French and of bilingual dictionaries increased. The monk of St Werburgh's at Chester, Ranulph Higden, wrote in Latin a book called *Polychronicon* (a chronicle from the Creation to 1327¹⁸). Later, the book was translated in English by John of Trevisa (born at Trevesa, near St Ives in Cornwall) and printed by Caxton. At some point in the book, Higden reports the language situation in England, giving the reason for the decline of English as a mother tongue:

On ys for chyldren in scole, azenes þe vsage and manere of al oþer nacions, buþ compelled for to leue here oune longage and for to construe here lessons and here þinges a Frenynsch, and habbeþ suþthe þe Normans come furst into Engelond. Also gentil men children buþ ytauzt for to speke Freynsch fram tyme þat a buþ yrokked in here cradel, and conneþ speke and playe wiþ a child hys brouch; and oplondysch men wol lykne hamsylf to gentil men, and fondeþ wiþ gret bysynes for to speke Freynsch, for to be more ytold of.

One is for children in school, contrary to the usage and custom of all other nations, who are compelled to abandon their own language and to carry on their lessons and their affairs in French, and have done so since the Normans first came to England. Also the children of gentlemen are taught to speak French from the time that they are rocked in their cradle, and learn to speak and play with a child's trinket; and rustic men will make themselves like gentlemen, and seek with great industry to speak French, to be more highly thought of¹⁹.

Afterwards, within his translation, Trevisa tries to complete this vision adding some information which are more linked to his times: to sum up, he explains that this method was used in schools before the Black Death in 1349. But, in his days (around 1385), children have abandoned French and started composing and learning English. This means that children in schools are able to learn the grammar in less time than the children used to do, but also that they cannot speak French any longer.

This is shown well in the poem called *Speculum Vitae (Mirror of Life)* probably written by William of Nassyngton around 1325. In lines 61-78 he tries to explain why he is using English to write his poem:

17 Crystal (2005): 129

18 The narration was later extended by others until the 1357.

19 Crystal (2005): 130

In English tonge I schal zow telle,
zif ze wyth me so longe wil dwelle.
No Latyn wil I speke no waste,
But Englisch, þat men vse mast,
þat can eche man vnderstande,
þat is born in Ingelande.
For þat langage is most chewyd,
Os wel among lered os lewyd.
Latyn, as I trowe, can nane
But þo that haueth it in scole tane.

And somme can Frenssche and no Latyn,
þat vsed han cowrt and dwellen þerein.
And somme can of Latyn a party,
þat can of Frensche but febly.
And somme vnderstonde wel Englysch,
þat can noþer Laty nor Frankys.
Boþe lered and lewed, olde and zonge,
Alle vnderstonden english tonge.

In the English tongue I shall you tell,
If you with me so long will dwell.
No Latin will I speak nor waste,
But English, that men use most,
That is able each men to understand.
That is born in England;
For that language is most displayed,
As much among learned as unread.
Latin, as I believe, know none
Except those who have it in school done.

And some knows French and no Latin,
Who have used it at court and there remain.
And some know of Latin partly
Who know of French but feebly.
And some understand well English
Who know neither Latin nor French.
Both learned and unread, old and young,
All understand the English tongue²⁰.

However, this can be considered an exception, because the amount of poems written in English was still very limited in the 1350s.

1.3.3 WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE

As we already said before, without the possibility to consult ME speakers, we depend on written sources in our investigation about the ME dialects; however, the written and the spoken forms must be accounted as separate systems. This is very important in order to understand that the generalisations we make about the spoken language do not have to be taken as “dogmas” because they derive necessarily by written sources, which actually are another thing.

Also the view adopted in the LALME²¹ project by Angus McIntosh is based on considering the writing as a separate system of language, with its own structure which does not immediately derive from speech. Spellings used by scribes can be considered as evidence about the variety of the

20 Crystal (2005): 131

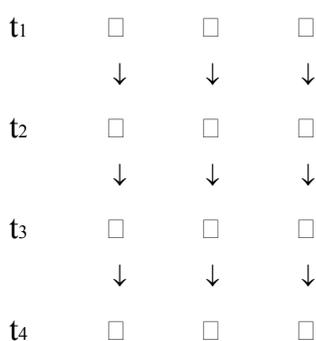
21 LALME: *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*. An electronic version named eLALME is available at the following website: http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme_frames.html

spoken language they use, but they are above all – even if it seems quite obvious – evidence of the written language. So, the atlas has to be understood as a research about the written ME and the maps, which are present in the project, display the variations within the written language: for example, a map showing the development of the word *stone* (*stan*, *ston*, *stoon*, *stane*, etc) is a map which displays where the scribes used to write it with the *a* and where with the *o*, but it does not necessarily reflect the way they pronounced it (though it sometimes might).

The separation between these two systems is caused also by functional differences which concern speech and writing. First of all, speech is employed to communicate with someone who is present at the time of the utterance, while writing to communicate with someone who is not. This means that writing has to be unambiguous and unmistakable, since the context and the interlocutors cannot help to clarify. Therefore, the written expression of the writer is not necessarily equivalent to the spoken one: usually, the written language is more formal, follows conventions and does not easily admit changes, thus it is more conservative. However, in some ME texts the written conventions are less fixed, so it is possible to come closer to what happens in speech. Moreover, writing is not a social activity as speech, so the knowledge of socially relevant details in ME is limited. Sometimes, it is possible to find comments on the linguistic situation dating back to the ME period, although they are rare. The best known are the Trevisa's comments (briefly summarised before) about the decline of French in schools and the Caxton's complaint (which is set within the debate about the divide between north and south) about the variability of the English language. Though these documents are very significant, we do not know how representative they are of the ME reality.

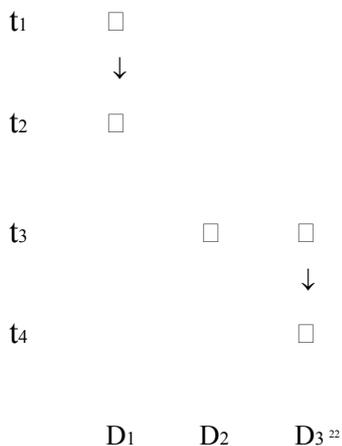
1.3.4 THE STUDY OF VARIATION IN SPACE AND TIME

In the historical dialectology the geographic aspect does not always go hand in hand with the temporal one. The ideal prospectus to display the story of a language is the one represented below:



D1 D2 D3

In this case we have a set of attested dialects (D₁ – D₃). Each of them has survived in chronological order in various text corpora (t₁ – t₄). Unfortunately, this order hardly ever occurs in OE or ME patterns, so the most common situation we find is the following:



Some dialects are attested early, in a few texts and then disappear; some appear at one period without leaving witnesses; and others appear later, without displaying a visible ancestry. It never happens to find a full t₁ – t₄ sequence for a dialect, so we may say that the study proceeds in “diagonal” instead of in “vertical” (considering different dialects in different times, and not only one dialect through time). When we think, for example, about the development of the OE masculine genitive singular, we notice that it is usually presented as **-os-* > **-as* > *-æs* > *-es*. The *-æs* form, however, is attested only in some Anglian texts, and the major part of the material survived is West Saxon (notice that the Anglian form is previous to the West Saxon one and, therefore, considered as its ancestor). The traditional sequence implies that the older form *-æs*, at some point, has become in turn *-es*: this very likely happened even in the ancestor of the West Saxon, but we do not have the evidence to prove it. So, in order to complete this sequence we have to think more largely about more than one dialect. This occurs very often when the ME dialects are involved: it is enough to think about the fact that very little ME texts of the 12th century have survived and that, among these, there is almost nothing coming from the North and the North Midlands, so the coverage is sparse. More or less, there are three types of sources which are contemplated when we talk about the ME texts coverage:

22 Laing, Lass (2006): 420

- 1) local documents; they appear to be quite rare when we consider the pre-Conquest phase and EME period in general. They principally include charters, wills and writs which often belong to the previous period and remain written in OE, since they are seldom copied by scribes in their contemporary language.
- 2) Glosses, which can barely give information about the actual linguistic situation as they reflect the linguistic disorder of the post-Conquest phase: writings are usually in Latin, with annotations to the main text in English and French.
- 3) Literary texts, which do the great part of the job. They provide a great amount of work which varies in usefulness and kinds (narrative works – which can give more linguistic data – short lyrics, proverbs, religious texts – which can be in verse or prose).

Very often, these texts have not a precise origin because the provenance is not clearly declared (literary texts in particular have no indications about the place and the date of their compositions, even because they are often copies which do not necessarily come from the same part of the country as the original). Scholars behave differently when they treat this problem: some do not consider this as the main goal, so they stay more focused on other things (such as on the ascertainment of the authorship). Others, especially the linguistic scholars, are more interested in the linguistic issues (without having any interests about the author of the texts, also because this is a challenging task, especially when only one copy of the text survived). Editors, instead, which seem to have had great influence in the traditional dialectology, are usually concerned with locating the provenance of the documents they are dealing with. Determining the provenance of a text is quite complex and the editorial conclusions may be also rejected, but it is also of great importance because knowing the exact origin of a text can be helpful in order to locate other texts confronting differences and similarities. Their main purpose is to establish which the original version is, and, therefore, to remove the variations possibly introduced by copyists over the years. In order to understand this in a clearer way, we may take the edition of the *Bestiary*²³ by Joseph Hall as an example: the editor, in the text notes, concludes that “the author of the *Bestiary* lived in East Anglia, sufficiently near to its northern border to account for such rhymes as *loð : sloð* 328, 329, *stedefast : gast* 434, 435, *vuemest* (read *-mast*) : *gast* 639, 640.”. The vowel *-a* for the OE [a:] in the present-participle forms, was considered a northern feature, instead the vowel *-o* a southern feature. Then he continues: “Our manuscript was written by a scribe of the Southern border of East Anglia. He has left his mark in a

23 The *Bestiary* or *Book of the Beasts* was a medieval collection in verse which described various animals. Some descriptions are referred to animal which are imaginary (phoenix, unicorn etc.), while others are not accurate and “scientific”. Despite this, they were taken into great consideration because the animals and the plants were believed to be the symbols of the existence of God. There is only one surviving manuscript of the *Bestiary*, written, as we said, in East Anglia in the 13th century.

number of syncopated presents which spoil the metre and probably in the case of others where the full form is metrical admissible.” So, he states that the final copyist came from the South of East Anglia where these syncopated forms (such as *stant* “stand”, line 1) were characteristic. Hall finishes saying that: “We may perhaps venture the guess that the poem was written in Lincolnshire and copied in Essex”²⁴.

The rhymes (as the example displays) are always taken into great account by the editors because, according to them, there is the tendency by the copyist in maintaining the original rhyming pairs, without adjusting them to their own language; however, it happens also that scribes translate pairs which rhymed in the original but do not rhyme in their dialect. The intervention of the scribes in the copying of a text can be substantial, also because the fact that a dialect is lavishly present in a text does not mean that it was copied in the region where that variant is spoken. It has been proposed, for instance, that the romance *Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Knyzt* (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*)²⁵, with other texts contained in its manuscript, would have been written in London, even if it shows a north-west Midlands dialect. It has been found that there are basically two strategies for copying a text: the first one is called *literatim*, which means that the scribe copies the forms of his exemplars faithfully, letter by letter. This seems to be the case of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, of which we report here a passage:

Al þu for-lost þe murȝþe of houene,
for þar-to newestu none steuene:
al þat þu singst is of gol-nesse,
for nis on þe non holi-nesse,
ne wened na man for þi pipinge
þat eni preost in chir[ch]e singe.

You forfeit the joy of heaven completely,
for you do not have any voice directed to that:
everything that you sing about concerns lechery,
for there is no holiness in you,
nor does any man on account of your piping conceive that any priest sings in church²⁶.

24 Hall (1963): 590-591, Vol. 2

25 *Sir Gawayn and þe Grene Knyzt* is a romance in alliterative verse written in the 14th century, which tells the story of the court of King Arthur. Scholars agree that the dialect used is that of Cheshire or south Lancashire, but the romance seem to have been written in London by a group of Cheshire men who surrounded king Richard II during his reign (1377-1399).

26 Corrie (2006): 125

In this extract we may notice an important feature: the OE form *-eo-* changes from *-o-* (as in line 1 – *lost* and *houene* – which correspond to the OE *-leost* and *heofone*) to *-eo-* (as in line 6 *preost*). This happened because the scribe copied a text from a version which had been written by two different scribes who used different spellings.

Despite this example, the copying strategy which is used more in ME is known as *Mischsprache*. In this case, the scribe neither translates the text in his own dialect nor copies it accurately from his exemplar, but he does something “in between”. The result is a text which combines some inherited forms with others added by the copyist. *The Prick of Conscience* (known also as *Ayenbite of Inwit*) is an example of this. It is a devotional poem composed in the north of England in the mid-14th century and it has a quite complicated history which is reflected in the language of many of its copies. The following extract (taken from the Cambridge University Library manuscript, Dd.11.89) shows this mixture which well represents the English diversity:

...	this bok ys in English <u>drawe</u> ,	<i>composed</i>
	Of <u>fele</u> maters that ar unknowe	<i>many</i>
	To <u>lewed</u> men that er <u>unconna[n]d</u> ,	<i>uneducated; ignorant</i>
	That can no Latyn undurstand;	
5	<u>To mak</u> hemsel frust to knowe	<i>to make them know themselves first</i>
	And from synne and vanites <u>hem drawe</u> ,	<i>withdraw themselves</i>
	And for to stere hem to <u>ryght drede</u> ,	<i>proper fear</i>
	<u>Whan</u> this tretes here or rede,	<i>when</i>
	<u>That prik</u> here concience wythinne,	<i>that it may prick their</i>
10	<u>Ande of that drede may a ful bygyng</u>	<i>and from that a fool can begin to fear</i>
	Thoru confort of joyes of hevene <u>sere</u> ,	<i>various</i>
	That men may afterward rede here.	
	Thys bok, as hit self bereth wyttensse,	
	In seven parts <u>divised</u> isse ²⁷ .	<i>divided</i>

The manuscript which contained this passage was probably copied in the south-east of England (Kent) in the 15th century. The southern features are mainly the form *bereth* (“bears”) in line 13, which shows the *-eth* ending for the third person singular of the present, and the plural pronouns *hem* and *here* (“them” and “their”); then we have in line 5 *frust* (“first”) which, instead, is a typical form of the south-west/West Midlands. The word *unconna[n]d* (“unknowing”) in line 3 is a present participle ending in *-and* which was average in the northern texts (while the *-ing* form was already standard in the south in that period), maybe it was kept to preserve the rhyme with *undurstand*.

²⁷ Corrie (2006): 126

I.4 SURVEY METHODS USED IN DIALECTOLOGY: THE LALME RESEARCH

When we consider the investigation within the ME dialects, the question of provenance appears to be crucial, so scholars tend to give extraordinary importance to those texts whose provenance is absolutely sure.

The questionnaire is the traditional dialectological tool: it consists in a list of selected items designed to elicit typical regional forms from the survey informants. The items could be words, phrase, objects or pictures which have to be named and, therefore, may elicit linguistic features about local usages. The advantage of the questionnaire is that the same list of items can be used for every informant and this allows the dialectologists to investigate both on the description of the dialects and on the comparison among them. The weakness of it, instead, is that its function as a linguistic displayer is restricted to a limited context. The LALME, for instance, can be considered a witness of the efficiency of the traditional questionnaire, which can provide a valuable summary of the features of the language under investigation and of the dialect discriminants.

The *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* is a survey of ME dialects (the period chosen is the century from 1350 to 1450), initiated by Angus McIntosh, which occupied more than three decades of research. Later, also a LAEME (about Early Middle English period) has been set up on similar lines under the direction of Angus McIntosh, Margaret Laing and Jeremy Smith.

The atlas is formed of four volumes containing hundreds of maps of different kinds which show the distribution of the linguistic items throughout the country and the occurrence of particular variants in smaller geographical sectors; in this way it deals with the chronological dimension, but also with the geographical one. Even if the period considered appears to be quite large, it would have been impracticable to consider a smaller time span due to the shortage of written sources (there were few texts from the north of England, for example). The atlas, in fact, is based only on written Middle English and the sources considered are mainly the documentary records and the literary texts. Their value has to be judged considering that the documentary texts can usually be precisely located, but do not offer much from a lexical point of view, whereas the literary texts are linguistically rich, but often with an uncertain origin. The main goal, for the investigators, is therefore to find a method in order to establish the origin of the literary manuscript, which are more useful for the survey (they display a less conservative language and a lexical/syntactic variety which is decisive for having an adequate lexical coverage). Notice that normally the texts which appear to show “mixed dialects”, seem to be written by different scribes or cannot be localised tend to be neglected, following a

modern approach toward the dialectology. In fact, if a present-day researcher was interested in studying the traditional regional dialects, he would not consider those speakers that, maybe due to the temporary stay in other places, are affected by other varieties and are no more considered as true natives in the area concerned. However, in this case, they cannot afford to be purists, because they are dealing with the written language (without the opportunity to have native speakers) of a period in the past, so all the texts have to be, as far as possible, taken into account.

The method devised for the LALME is based firstly on the so-called “anchor” texts – that is the localizable texts, whose origins are definite. Then, the other non-localized samples have to be related to these by using a “fit” technique: this means that, when these texts display something in common with the anchor texts, then they can be tentatively located on maps. The more texts are considered, the more the positioning is refined, even though it might merely talk about “relative positions” and not about “absolute positions”. However, as McIntosh et al., point out, there are some issues related with this technique: it is true that dialect variations form a continuum and that there are no definite boundaries, but sometimes the isoglosses can bundle and create situations where, in areas between one town and another, a “dialect boundary” is spoken. The result of this research is a series of dot maps, which covered both grammatical words (verbs, pronouns, etc.) and lexical words (nouns, adjectives, etc.). For example, a manuscript from Kent might contain the word “church” as *cherche*, one from Devon as *churche*, one from Oxfordshire as *chirche*, one from Yorkshire as *kirke* and one from Cumbria as *kyrk*. As each manuscript is studied, the distinctive forms for “church” are placed on a map of the country and, as time passes, the number increases.

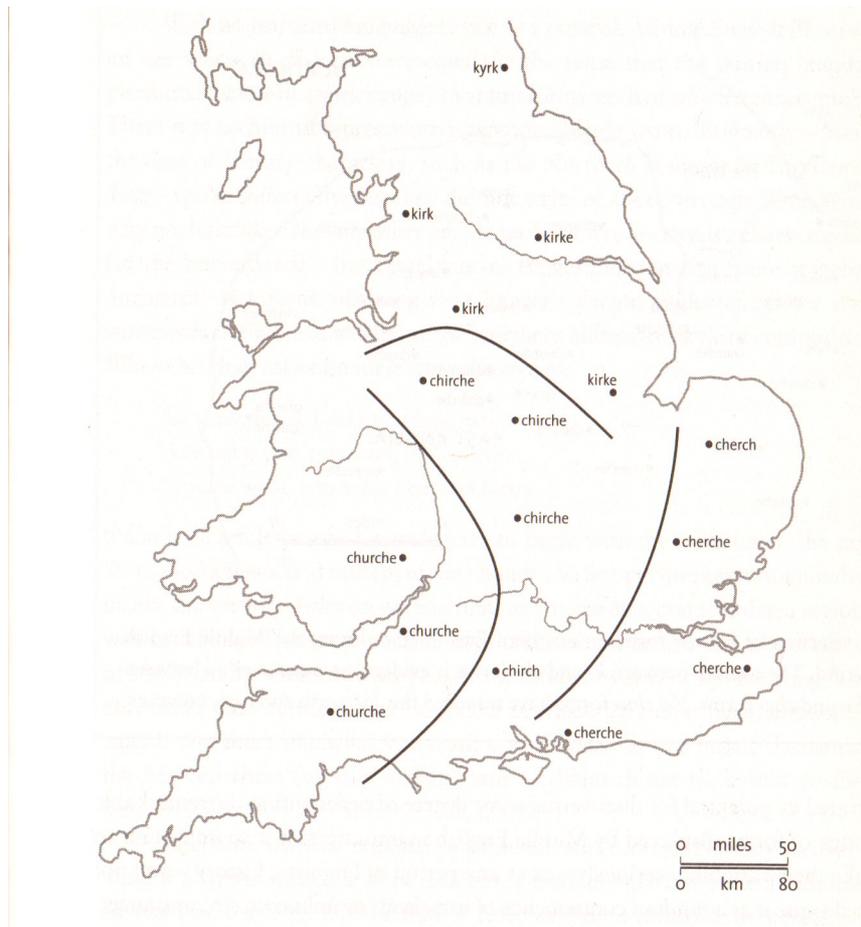


Fig.1 Church forms in England
Crystal (2005): 213

So, it appears that the forms like *kirk*, *kirke*, *kyrk*, *kyrke* belong to locations in the northern part of the country, instead the *ch-* forms are found in the south. Toward the east and south-east the *cherch-* form predominates; toward the west and south-west the *church-* form and in the centre of the country the forms *chirch-* and *chyrch-* are the most common. Starting from this “anchorages”, it is possible to map even other manuscripts according to the presence of these forms: so, a manuscript where we find *kirk* is bound to the North or East Midlands, a manuscript containing *cherche* can be located in the South-East, and so on. Of course, a single word is very limited, but if we consider many linguistic features, we can have more precise indications about the relative origin of the manuscripts. However, much variation is destined to remain inexplicable, also because during the Middle English period there is not a standard language which acts as a control, so all dialects are equal and the written language allows the use of a wide range of variant and acceptable forms. Therefore, variation was routine and this is one of the reason why we encounter so much scribal

mistakes, that is the absence of a standard language as a reference.

The case of *Havelok the Dane* is a good example of the application of the LALME method. McIntosh (1976) argues that this text might come from Norfolk (King's Lynn), in a place which is rather distant from Lincolnshire (Grimsby), where it is normally placed. The *-es* ending for the 3rd person singular present indicative makes it possible that the original was composed in north Lincolnshire (because the *es-* feature is typical of the northern dialect), but it is unknown how many copies intervene between the original and the copy analysed and *Havelok* often displays mixing of forms which are not peculiar of the north-east of England. McIntosh has tried to use the “fit” technique in order to find an answer to this question of the provenance. The most important comparison found is the one with the work of scribe D of BM Cotton Cleopatra C vi. This text displays many features in common with *Havelok* and, according to McIntosh, it is from west Norfolk rather than Lincolnshire. The majority of the *Havelok* forms selected by McIntosh for the “fit” technique seem to have a distribution in the south of west Norfolk more often than to the north of it. The incidence of these south variants appears to be greater in *Havelok* than in Cleopatra C vi: it means that *Havelok* is supposed to be from an area which is further south than the one of Cleopatra C vi.

CHAPTER II

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH DIALECTAL VARIETIES

II.1 THE MAJOR MIDDLE ENGLISH DIALECT REGIONS

The major dialect regions of the ME period correspond more or less to those already present during Old English. The main differences, which sometimes can cause confusion, are owing to some renaming. These areas can be listed and named as follows:

- Northern (delimited by the river Humber and corresponding to Northumbria)
- South-eastern (Kent)
- South-western (Wessex)
- East Midlands
- West Midlands (which were both part of Mercia)

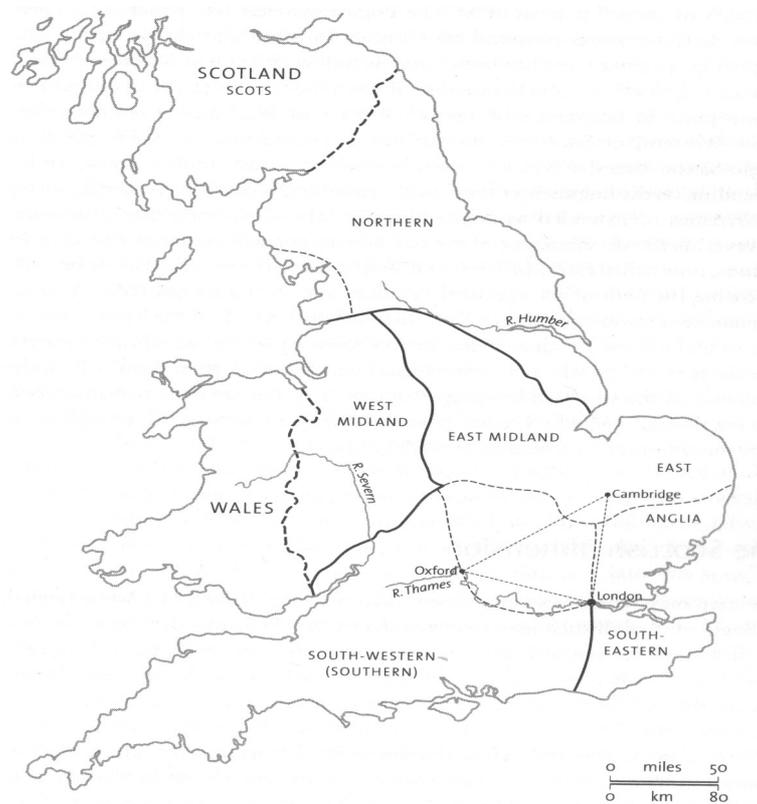


Fig. 2 Major Middle English dialect areas
Crystal (2005): 201

II.2 THE CRITERIA FOR THE DIFFERENTIATION

Broadly speaking, when we consider the features which can be used as regional indicators, we do not ever have to forget two principles:

- 1) the fact that the written sources are used as evidence for the spoken language;
- 2) the fact that a language, in reality, cannot be uniform and homogeneous.

It has been already pointed out that the orthographic features are not always so reliable, because their relation to phonology is not merely a one-to-one relationship. However, it is also true that there is a sort of “coherence” within the spelling systems²⁸, which would allow scholars to make assumptions about the pronunciation of some phonemes or about ME phonological variation. In addition to that, we have to remember that the spoken language is usually more prone to change than the written one. This means that the features, which characterise the dialects of ME, have to be seen as an “idealisation” (because they could not have been so uniform in reality), even if their variability has been verified in dimensions other than the geographical one. The contact varieties and the lexical diffusion²⁹, for example, have been considered as important indicators of variation. The study of contact varieties arises from the awareness that English had a direct contact with the Scandinavian languages and Norman French, from which it was influenced. Instead, the lexical diffusion examines the sound changes as something which happens gradually and cannot be applied to all the items of a phoneme class at the same time. This means that Middle English may be seen as a transitional stage of the language which may display changes through the lexicon and a recurring alternation between conservative and innovative forms.

After mentioning these general points, we now proceed in listing some of the phonological and then lexical/morphological criteria which are believed to be distinctive in English from a regional point of view and that can help to classify the texts:

- the OE long vowel [a], for example, continues to appear as [a] in the northern dialects, while it appears as [o] in texts from the south. Sometimes, it could happen that some texts present both forms: this can indicate that these texts may have been originated in a border area or copied by scribes from different areas.
- The OE long and short vowel [y] results as [u] in the south-west, as [e] in the south-east and

28 Lass (1992): 30 "A word is in order what spelling itself can tell us, supported by other evidence. (...) None the less, aside from such gross eccentricities, most spelling systems tend to be reasonably coherent, and we have bases for making assumptions about the likely ranges of phonetic values for particular letters".

29 For further information, see Milroy (1992): 174 and the bibliography there cited.

as [i] elsewhere. So the word *brycg* “bridge”, for instance, appears as *brugge*, *bregge*, *brig(ge)*, etc.

- OE [æ] (*daeg* “day”) appears as [a] everywhere, except in south-east and west midlands where it is [e].
- OE [a] before nasals developed into [o] principally in west midlands texts; it gains a wider spread elsewhere at a later stage.
- In northern and east midlands dialects, OE [eo, ea] are rare and the forms [e, a] are preferred; in the southern and south-west dialects OE [s, f] appear as [z, v].
- OE [hw] (*hwæt* “what”) can be found in these forms [wh, w, quh, q], later the forms [qu, q] became more common in Scotland. In East Anglia the form [w] appears to be very usual.

Regarding the lexical and morphological aspects, they seem to have a considerable weight too. The aspects usually examined are:

1. the form of the present participle;
2. the presence/absence of the OE prefix *ge-* before the past participle;
3. the forms of the personal pronouns;
4. the verbal endings.

The traditional present participle ending in the North is *-and(e)*; elsewhere, we find the forms *-inde*, *-ende*, *-iende*. However, around 1350, the forms *-inge* and *-ynge* became the rule in the south-east midlands and East Anglian dialects.

Concerning the pronouns, the third-person plural pronouns (*they*, *them*, *their*) are Scandinavian borrowings present in the northern and north midlands dialects which later become usual even in the South. The *th-* form was used in London, during the Chaucer's time, only for the subject case, while the forms *hem*, *here* remain for the oblique cases; texts coming from Scotland display already the *th-* forms in all cases.

The third-person singular ending, instead, shows an alternation between the *-s* and the *-th/-þ* forms: the *-s* ending originates in the North and it is the norm in the Scottish texts; in the South, the endings *-th/-þ* are used both for the singular and the plural, while in the midlands texts we found the *-th* ending in the singular and *-en* in the plural. The *-s* ending becomes later the rule even in London.

So, as we can see by this short list, the variations within the morphology and the pronouns appear to be very crucial in the establishment of the regional differences and also in the general studies about

the history of the English language, since they can help to enlighten the differences between Old English (which is a synthetic/inflected language) and Modern English (which is an analytic/uninflected language) and why and when these differences have taken place.

II.3 THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE AND THE SITUATION IN SCOTLAND AND LONDON

When we consider a country (especially those which have faraway extremities), we may easily hypothesise that the parts which are more distant one from the others, are also those which display the greatest differences: this seems to be true even in Britain where the north-south divide has been noticed and therefore stressed several times.

Robert Higden (as it has been translated by John Trevisa, who was a southerner) is one of the first to notice these variations within England: he talks about the Saxon tongue as something which can be divided into three (or four, if we consider also Scotland):

ys gret wondur, for men of þe est wiþ men of þe west, as hyt were vnder þe same party of heuene, acordeþ more in sounyng of speche þan men of þe norþ wiþ men of þe souþ. Þerfore hyt ys þat Mercii, þat buþ men of myddel Engelond, as hyt were parteners of þe endes, vnderstondeþ betre þe syde longages, Norþeron and Souþeron, þan Souþeron vnderstondeþ eyþer oþer.

It is remarkable that men from the east and men from the west, as it were under the same part of heaven, agree more in pronunciation than do men from the north with men from the south. Therefore it is that Mercians, who are from middle England, as it were sharers with the extremes, understand the marginal languages, Northern and Southern, better than Northern and Southern people understand each other³⁰.

Not only did the Southerners perceive this division, but also the people coming from the north, where it was written the verse chronicle *Cursor Mundi* (around 1300, maybe in Durham or Yorkshire). The author, at one point, writes:

And turnd it haue I till our aun
Langage o northrin lede
þat can nan oiþer englis rede.

30 Crystal (2005): 206

I have translated it into our own language for northern folk who can read no other English³¹.

He is talking about the necessity to translate, from the southern English, a passage about the Assumption of the Virgin Mary that he wanted to include in his poem, otherwise he would not have been understood. However, was this divide present for real? Or was it a falsified perception? Looking again at the Trevisa's translation of Higden's Latin poem *Polychronicon*, we find that:

Al þe longage of þe Norþhumbres, and specialliche at ȝork, is so scharp, slitting, and frotyng and vnschape þat we souþerne men may þat longage vnneþe vnderstonde.

All the language of Northumbrians, and especially at York, is so sharp, harsh, and grating and formless that we southern men can hardly understand that language³².

Even William Caxton appears to be worried about this distinction, because, as a publisher, he wonders how to print his books in a language that everybody may understand. In this regard, Caxton cites a story in the Prologue of the translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which is useful to better comprehend this separation. The extract narrates the complicated dialogue between a lady, who lived around the Thames estuary (south-east of England) and a sailor, hailing from Sheffield (Yorkshire, north of England).

And one of theym named sheffelde a mercer cam into an hows and axed for mete, and specyally he axyd after eggys. And the good wyf answered that she coude speke no frenshe. And the marchaunt was angry, for he also coude speke no frenshe, but wold haue hadde **egges**, and she vnderstonde hym not. And thenne at laste a nother sayd that he wolde haue **eyren**. Then the good wyf sayd that she vnderstod hym wel³³.

The cause of the misunderstanding is the different way in which they speak the word “eggs”: the form *egges* is a northern form, developed from the Old Norse, while *eyren* is a southern form, developed from Old English. Caxton should have chosen which form to prefer and he seems to be well aware of this issue:

Loo, what sholde a man in thise dayes now write, egges or eyren? Certaynly it is harde to playse euery man by cause of dyuersite & change of language³⁴.

31 Crystal (2005): 207

32 Corrie (2006): 120

33 Crystal (2005): 207; Görlach (1990): 217

34 Crystal (2005): 207

According to the recipe books of that period (1490 ca., toward the end of ME period), both words were used, even though *eyren* was beginning to disappear.

But for which reason were these parts of the country so different? The main reason was the influence of Old Norse towards the northern part, which caused various linguistic changes within lexicon and morphology. Many of the Norse words have become part of the language around the 12th century (for example *call*, *knife*, *give*, etc.): several of these now belong to the standard language, but the majority do not and are considered today only as distinctive tracts of regional dialects. Morphologically, one of the most important feature is the *-s* ending for the third-person of the verbs in the present tense. It may derive from the *-sk* ending which was present in the so-called “medio-passive” verbs in Old Norse (such as in *setjask* “they set themselves”, that is “they sit”, the *-sk* gives a reflexive quality to the verb). It has been hypothesised that a simplified version of *-sk* entered into English verbs in the north through contact with Norse and there is almost no doubt about the fact that the *-s* ending was perceived by the Southerners as a distinctive feature of the northern area. In addition to that, it has been noticed that the northern dialects of Middle English are the most advanced in showing the decay of the traditional Old English inflections, because the contact with Norse speakers seems to have favoured the loss of the inflectional endings. The following example is taken from the *Cursor Mundi*:

Man yhernes rimes forto here
And romans red on manere sere –
Of Alisaundur þe conquerour,
Of Iuly Cesar þe emparour;
O Grece and Troy **þe strang striif**,
Pere many thousand lesis þer liif;
O Brut, þat bern bald of hand,
þe first conquerour of England;
O Kyng Arthour þat was so rike,
Quam non in hys tim was like;
O ferlys þat hys knythes fell
þat aunters sere I here of tell³⁵.

In the highlighted phrase *þe strang striif* the adjective has no inflection. Normally, in OE, an adjective which follows the definite article or a demonstrative or a possessive adjective is weak, so it takes an inflectional ending in all cases. This example displays that the northern area has already

35 Corrie (2006): 117

lost this feature. On the contrary, when the southern copy of the same text was made in the 14th century, this phrase was translated in *þe longe strif*, changing the adjective (“long” replaces “strong”) and adding the *-e*, which confirms that here the endings were still accepted.

The northern area comprehends also Scotland, which is often not considered in the maps. Actually, even in Scotland, the English language was developing its distinctive character. Maybe a similar development was taking place – mainly in speech – also in Ireland and Wales, but there is no evidence about this. In Ireland, when the Anglo-Normans arrived, the languages spoken were French and Latin and English was used merely in administration; in Wales, the presence of a Welsh English is attested only in the 16th century. Thus, only in Scotland, during the ME period, we find the emergence of a dialectally distinctive English literary tradition. During OE, there was not a clear boundary between Scotland and England: in the 6th century, the Anglo-Saxons had several settlements in the south of Scotland; around the 850, after the union between the Scottish and Pictish kingdoms, there was a long battle among Celts, Saxons and Vikings for the control of the area. During this period, there is only little evidence of English in Scotland: just inscriptions or legal documents inspired by the proximity of Northumbria. Scotland began developing its own variety of English after the arrival of the Normans, during the reign of Malcolm III (1058-1093). He spoke English because, according to some historians, during the reign of Macbeth³⁶, he was in England at the court of Edward the Confessor³⁷. Moreover, in 1070 Malcolm married Margaret of Wessex, who settled in Dunfermline, a Benedictine priory of monks from Canterbury. From this moment on, many new towns received an English name and Malcolm began the development of a feudal society of trading settlements based on the Norman model, in which English emerged as *lingua franca*³⁸. These burghs quickly grew in size, incorporating even refugees, who escaped from the Anglo-Saxon and Norman kingdoms, but also immigrants from Scandinavia and Holland. These both spoke German languages and found easier to integrate themselves in an English-speaking society. As a consequence, English became rapidly more prestigious, so there was no motivation for the incomers to learn Gaelic, even if that was the mother tongue of the Scottish people. By the end of the 14th century, English was used in the court instead of French, and it has replaced also Latin in parliamentary proceedings. It was a dialect which had developed itself independently from the

36 Mac Bethad mac Findlaich (anglicised as Macbeth) was King of the Scots from 1040 to 1057. He is also known as the subject of William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. In 1054 he was defeated by Siward, Earl of Northumbria, in Dunsinane, giving the possibility to England to conquer the south part of Scotland.

37 Edward the confessor was one of the last Anglo-Saxon kings of England; he ruled from 1042 to 1066. He was called Confessor and canonised by pope Alexander III in 1161 (he is commemorated by both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church).

38 It is a language used mainly for communication purposes and, basically, among people who possess a different mother tongue (nowadays English is a an example of lingua-franca, such as Latin and Greek in the ancient times).

linguistic changes which were taking place in England.

In addition to that, we have to remember that also London displays its own dialect in ME. Originally, the dialect of London was believed to be that of the East Saxons, who controlled the city during the 5th century. However, due to the contact with speakers of other varieties, the central position and its economic/political prestige, London became the city where different varieties of English could converge and eventually emerge. The so-called “London English” changed a lot in the course of time (with the contribution of people who lived in the adjacent areas – Kent, Essex – and immigrants from East Anglia), creating an atypical and specific situation. During ME, we deal with a context of “mixed dialect”, which is visible in the work of scribes, who used to write dialectal forms of diverse kinds. The diversity of London English seems to have been beneficial to Chaucer, even though we have to remember that the language he used was a literary adaptation of the language spoken by the educated people.

II.4 SPECIMENS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH DIALECTS

In the following sections, they are going to be presented some extracts of medieval texts, useful in order to have a clearer idea about the ME dialectal varieties. Each section (north, south, east and west) collects two different texts (which, in some cases, have a relatively faraway origin, even though they should actually belong to the same area): after a brief presentation of them, an extract and the relative translation are presented, while, at last, it is possible to find the linguistic observation about them. The purpose is to stress the differences between the texts and to acquaint the readers with the differences that distinguish one dialect from another. Notice that the geographical location for some texts is easier than for others, thus sometimes the dialectal features are less visible.

II.4.1 NORTH

Cursor Mundi

Cursor Mundi can be considered as the most comprehensive work of biblical material which can be found during the ME period. The complete poem consists in ca. 30000 lines partitioned into a prologue and seven parts (according to the seven ages of the world). The subject, which may be drawn from various sources, such as the *Vulgate* and the *Historia Scholastica* of Petrus Comestor, is

related both to Old and New Testaments episodes, in addition to other religious topics. The author, who remains unknown, shows a style which is unusual for the period, and even if he is not a poet (he was certainly a cleric who wrote somewhere in the North, maybe Durham), he can versify well, using a straightforward style and giving a new adaptation to his material, which is with no doubt the reason of the success of the work. The poem has survived in various manuscripts, but the most complete version is the one preserved in the British Museum MS Cotton Vespasian A III (1300-1350).

	Pis are þe maters redde on raw	These are the matters explained in a row
	Pat I thynk in þis bok to draw,	that I think in this book to draw,
	Schortly rimand on þe dede,	shortly rhyming in the doing,
	For mani er þai her-of to spede,	for many are they who can profit thereby.
225	Notful me thinc it ware to man	Methinks it were useful to man
	To knaw him self how he began, –	to know himself, how he began, –
	How [he] began in werld to brede,	how he began to breed in the world,
	How his oxspring began to sprede,	how his offspring began to spread,
	Bath o þe first and o þe last,	both first and last,
230	In quatkin curs þis world es past.	through what kind of course this world has passed.
	Efter haly kyrc[es] state	After Holy Church's state
	Pis ilk bok it es translate	this same book is translated
	In to Inglis tong to rede	into the English tongue
	For the love of Inglis lede,	as advice for the love of English people,
235	Inglis lede of England,	English people of England,
	For þe comun at understand.	for all to understand.
	Frankis rimes here I redd,	French rhymes I commonly hear read
	Comunlik in ilk[a] sted:	in every place:
	Mast es it wroght for frankis man.	most it is wrought for Frenchmen.
240	Quat is for him na frankis can?	What is there for him who knows no French?
	Of England þe nacion –	Concerning England nation –
	Es Inglis man þar in comun –	the Englishman is common therein –
	Þe speche þat man wit mast may spede,	the speech that man may succeed most with,
	Mast þar-wit to speke war nede.	it were most need to speak therewith.
245	Selden was for ani chance	Seldom was by any chance
	Praised Inglis tong in france.	English tongue praised in France.
	Give we ilkan þare langage,	Let us give each their language:
	Me think we do þam non outrage.	methinks we do them no outrage.
	To laud and Inglis man I spell	To layman and Englishman I speak,

The Kingis Quair

The Kingis Quair (*The King's Book*) is an example of the poetic production of Scotland in the 15th century. It is composed of 1379 lines divided into seven-line stanzas, whose length and rhyme scheme follows the pattern used by Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde*. The influence of the Chaucer's works on the 15th century Scottish literature was quite intense, thus the poets of this period are also known as “Scottish Chaucerians”.

The author of this poem is believed to be James I of Scotland (who reigned from 1406 to 1437) according to a prefatory sentence, present in the manuscript, which reads: “Maid be [by] King James of Scotland the first callit the Kingis Quair and Maid quhen [when] his Maiestie wes in Ingland”. James I of Scotland was the third king of the dynasty of Stewarts (the name derives from the title of “stewart” – basically a governor – bestowed by king David I to Walter FitzAlan) and he was born at Dunfermline in July 1394 as the youngest child of Robert III and Queen Annabella. In 1405, he was sent to St. Andrews to be educated by the bishop Henry Wardlaw, but, towards the end of the year, his father advised him to go away from Scotland, at the French court. Besides the educational matter, his father was possibly worried for his son's safety: after the death of the duke of Rothesay, the young prince was the only obstacle between the duke of Albany and his ambition to become king, so he was in danger. A secret negotiation to leave the country began and James and his retinue embarked, in March 1406, aboard a ship which was carrying wool and hides from Leith. Unfortunately, the ship was intercepted by pirates, who after recognizing James, took him to the English court in exchange for the ship's cargo. James was imprisoned by Henry IV in the Tower of London, however we do not have any evidence that there was an alliance between the king and the duke of Albany to capture him, and it appears quite improbable anyway. Meanwhile, his father Robert died and, in June 1407, James was recognized as king of Scotland (the imprisonment in England lasted 18 years, during which the reign was run by his uncle Robert Steward, Duke of Albany, who was king in all but name).

The poem *The Kingis Quair*, which is semi-autobiographical, recounts also this episode. The incarceration ended when James married Joan Beaufort, who was the cousin of king Henry IV. He was officially crowned in the 1424 after having paid a ransom treaty of £40.000 sterling.

The language of the poem is, for certain, a literary language with features which can be identified as Northern or Scottish (we have to generalise, because there is a lack of material written in Middle

39 Baugh, Cable (1984): 400

Scots⁴⁰).

360 “O Venus clere, of goddis stellifyit,
To quhom I yelde homage and sacrificise;
Fro this day forth your grace be magnifyit,
That me ressavit have in suich wise,
To lyve under your law and do servise.
Now help me furth, and for your merci lede
My hert to rest, that deis nere for drede.”

365 Quhen I with gude entent this orisoun
Thus endit had, I stynt a lytill stound.
And eft myn eye full pitously adoun
I kest, behalding vnto hir lytill hound
That with his bellis playit on the ground:
370 Than wold I say and sigh therwith a lyte:
“A, wele were him that now were in thy plyte!”

Anothir quhile the lytill nyghtingale
That sat upon the twiggis wold I chide,
And say ryght thus: “quhare ar thy notis smale
375 That thou of love has song this morowe-tyde?
Seis thou nocht hir that sittis thee besyde?
For Venus sake, the blisfull goddesse clere,
Sing on agane and mak my lady chere⁴².

“O Venus clear, of gods made a star,
to whom I yield homage and sacrifice,
from this day forth your grace be magnified,
that I have received in such a manner
to live under your law and do service.
Now help me forth, and your mercy lead
my heart to rest, that near dies for dread”⁴¹.

When I, with good intent, this prayer
Thus had ended, I was still a little while.
Afterwards, my eye full piteously down
I cast, beholding into her little hound
That with his bells played on the ground:
Than would I say and sigh therewith a bit:
“Ah, well would he be that now were in your place!”

A while later the little nightingale
That sat upon the twigs would I chide,
And say right thus: “where are your gentle softness
That you of love has sung this morning?
Do you not see her that sits beside you?
For Venus sake, the blissful goddess clear,
Sing on againe and make my lady glad”.

II.4.1.1 LINGUISTIC OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE NORTHERN DIALECTS

The preceding texts hail from the north of England, therefore they display some particular features which are mainly the result of the Scandinavian influence over this part of the country (noticeable in the frequent presence of the vocal /a/. The Scottish text (*The Kingis Quair*) shares the greatest part of these characteristics, showing, in any case, some Scottish variants.

OE $\bar{a} > a$ (retention) everywhere in the North, while in the South (compare with the following section) and in all the other dialects, it develops always into *o* (*raw*, line 221; *knaw*, line 226; *bath*,

40 The Scottish dialect starts to emerge strongly by 1400, when John Barbour published *The Brus*.

41 Crystal (2005): 206, whereas the following two stanzas have been autonomously translated.

42 Northon-Smith (1971): 13-14.

line 229; *haly*, line 231; *mast*, line 239; *na*, line 240).

OE $\bar{a} > e$ (*dede*, line 223; *rede*, line 233).

Exquisitely belonging to the northern variety are: the *-and* ending for the present participle (*rimand*, line 223); the *-es* ending for the 3rd person singular of the present indicative, instead of *-ep* (*understandes*, line 250); the 3rd person plural pronouns in *th-* especially in the oblique cases (*þai*, line 224; *þare*, line 247; *þam*, line 248); the construction of the infinitive with *at* (*at understand*, line 16). Moreover, this variety tends to display typical forms of the verb *to be* in *es* (line 230) for *is*, *er* (line 224) and *are* (line 221), and the past form *ware* (which correspond to *weren* in the South).

Concerning the Scottish variant, we may notice some specific features: the past form of the verbs ends always in *-it* (*stellifyit*, line 358; *magnifyit*, line 360; *ressavit*, line 361, *playit*, line 369); the spelling of *wh-* develops into *quh-* revealing a strong and aspirated sound (*quhom*, line 359; *quhen*, line 365, *quhare*, line 374) and *sh-* appears as *-sch*. On the contrary, from a syntactic point of view there is nothing which could be considered essentially Scottish (the use of absolute constructions and hyperbaton in order to extend the period is a stylistic feature inspired by Chaucer). In the text, we may also notice the retention of some inflectional endings (such as in *Seis thou noght?* to form the negative question). Generally speaking about the vocabulary, in this period some words start to develop showing an evolving local character. Some of them are still used today in Scotland: *gang* “gone”, *gude* “good”, *sic* “such”, *till* “to”, *mekill* “great”, *syne* “afterwards”, *sare* “sore”, etc.

II.4.2 SOUTH

The Owl and the Nightingale

The Owl and the Nightingale is normally known as one of the first example of contest in verse in England (even though this genre was already frequent in Latin and French) and it could be said that it represents also the first extended piece of effective comic writing in English. For these reasons, it disagrees quite a lot with the rest of the production written in Middle English before the 14th century. We basically possess two manuscripts in which the poem survives: MS Cotton Caligula A.ix [C] – in the British Library, London – and the MS Jesus College 29 [J] – in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The C manuscript (on which are normally based the modern editions, with the integration of J, if required) is surely earlier than J and it displays a more conservative and faithful language based on two different spelling systems. We may presume that the scribe of C copied faithfully a manuscript written by two scribes, who used two different spelling system (*literatim* strategy). On the contrary, the scribe of J is more thoughtful and does not copy mechanically. The

result is that a scribe like the one in C can often make mistakes, but is more linked to the original text, while a scribe like the one in J – once having misinterpreted some parts of the text – might try to find the right sense, modernising and also emending the parts which are unclear to him: the final result could be a text which betrays the original, a sort of paraphrase. This makes it advisable to use C as the main source. Nevertheless, this poem is still considered quite mysterious: the provenance, date and author are not known. Maybe it was written in the period between the death of Henry II and the reign of Henry III (that is between the 1189 and 1216), but the possibility that it was composed after the death of Henry III in 1272 is accepted anyway⁴³. For sure, the dialect of the extant version is south-western, even if the evidence of rhymes and other forms in C suggest that there was a south-eastern (Sussex) influence⁴⁴. The name of Nicholas of Guilford (a parish priest who lived in the village of Portesham in Dorset) is mentioned several times in the text, but his character never actually makes an appearance. According to some scholars, he is mentioned because he is the author of the poem, however there is no evidence about that, so we continue to consider the author unknown.

	Al so þu dost on þire side:	It is just the same with you,
430	vor wanne snou lip þicke & wide, an alle wiztes habbeþ sorze, þu singest from eve fort amorze.	for when the snow lies thickly all around and all creatures is full of sorrow, then you sing until evening from dawn.
	Ac ich alle blisse mid me bringe: ech wizt is glad for mine þinge,	But I bring joy entirely when I arrive: every creature is glad because of me
435	& blisseþ hit wanne ich cume, & hizteþ azen mine kume.	and rejoice when I come and hope for my coming.
	þe blostme ginneþ springe & sprede, boþe ine tro & ek on mede.	The blossoms begin sprouting and spreading, both on the trees and in the meadows.
	þe lilie mid hire faire wlite	The lily with her lovely radiance,
440	wolcumeþ me, þat þu hite w[i]te, bit me mid hire faire blo þat ich shulle to hire flo.	welcomes me, as you well know, she bids me with her bright complexion that I should fly to her.

43 Cartlidge (2001): 75; Stanley (1981): 19, 131. From the line 1091 of the poem ("Jesus his soule do merci!" "Jesus have mercy upon his soul"), it emerges that the poem was written after the death of king Henry, but we do not know which one among Henry I (1100-1135), Henry II (1154-1189), Henry III (1216-1272) and the young king Henry (1170-1183), son of Henry II who never reigned effectively. The most probable hypothesis is that the reference is to Henry II, mainly because of the absence of some distinguishing marks (such as "old king Henry") that could referred clearly to Henry I. Moreover, the date of composition is believed to be previous to the accession of Henry III. Some scholars think that this line is dedicated to a living person (so contemporary with the period in which the poem was written and not subsequent), but this theory is normally rejected.

44 We are not able to determine precisely where the south-western area ends and where the south-eastern area begins. An influence from the Kentish area towards Dorset is presumable, also because we are dealing with the south part of a relatively "small" country.

Þe rose also mide hire rude,
 þat cumeþ ut of þe þorne wode,
 445 bit me þat ich shulle singe
 vor hire luve one skentinge:
 & ich so do þurȝ nigt & dai,
 þe more ich singe þe more I mai,
 an skente hi mid mine songe,
 450 ac noþeles noȝt over-longe;
 wane ich iso þat men boþ glade,
 ich nelle þat hi bon to sade;
 þan is ido vor wan ich com,
 ich fare aȝen & do wisdom.
 455 Wane mon hoȝeþ of his sheve,
 an falewi cumeþ on grene leve,
 ich fare hom & nime leve:
 ne recche ich noȝt of winteres reve.
 Wan ich iso þat cumeþ þat harde,
 460 ich fare hom to min erde
 an habbe boþe luve & þonc
 þat ich der com & hider swonk.

(...)

“Abid! abid!” þe ule seide,
 “þu gest al to mid swikel-ede:
 alle þine wordes þu bileist
 840 þat hit þineþ soþ al þat þu seist;
 alle þine wordes boþ i-sliked,
 an so bisemed an biliked,
 þat alle þo þat hi a-uoþ,
 hi weneþ þat þu segge soþ.
 845 Abid! abid! me shal þe zene
 [w]u hit shal wrþe wel i-sene
 þat þu hauest muchel iloȝe,
 wone þi lesing boþ un-wroȝe.
 Þu seist þat þu singist mankunne,
 850 & techest hom þat hi fundieþ honne
 up to þe songe þat evre ilest:

The rose also with her ruddy face,
 that emerges from the thorn-branches,
 bids me that I should sing
 something merry for her love:
 and I do so through night and day,
 the more I sing, the more I may,
 and delight her with my song,
 but nonetheless not over long;
 when I see that men are pleased,
 I do not want them to be over-indulged;
 when I have done what I came to do,
 I go away, which is the wise thing to do.
 When men are worried about their sheaves,
 and the yellowing comes upon green leaves,
 I take my leave and I go home:
 I do not care for the winter's garb.
 When I see that the hard weather is coming,
 I go home to my territory,
 and have both love and thanks
 that I came here and hither toiled.

(...)

“Hang on! Hang on!” said the Owl,
 “You are going about this entirely with trickery.
 You are talking such lies,
 that everything you say seems to be the truth.
 All your words are so slick,
 and so specious and casuistic,
 that anyone who hears them
 thinks that you are telling the truth!
 Hang on! Hang on! You will meet your match!
 Then it is going to be obvious
 that you have told a lot of lies,
 when your deceitfulness is exposed.
 You claim that you sing to mankind
 and teach them that they are bound for another place,
 up where the singing last forever:

ac hit is alre w[u]nder mest,
þat þu darst lize so opeliche.
Wenest þu hi bringe so liztliche
855 to Godes riche al singin[d]e?
Nai! nai! hi shulle wel avinde
þat hi mid longe wope mote
of hore sunnen bidde bote,
ar hi mote ever kume þare.”

but it is absolutely amazing
that you should dare to tell such bare-faced lies.
Do you think you can bring them so easily
to the kingdom of God, just by singing?
No, no, they will clearly find
that they have to beg remission
for their sins with much weeping
before they can ever enter there⁴⁵”.

Ayenbite of Inwit

This text is an example of *Mischsprache*, which means that the scribe does not copied faithfully the original and does not translated it into his own dialect. It could be said that he created a sort of combination between the two languages. The extract which follows belongs to the version which was copied in the 15th century in Kent, so it shares many characteristics with other southern texts presented; however, there are some features which are believed to be exquisitely Kentish.

Ayenbite of Inwit (also known as *The Prick of Conscience*) is a devotional poem translated in 1340 by the monk Dan Michel of Northgate, from the French *Somme le Roi* (a 13th century treatise on Christian morality written by Friar Lorenz). His intention was to provide a confessional treatise which was accessible to everybody, even to those who cannot speak French or Latin. This means that the poem, once translating into English, appears to be simplified in its language in respect to the French version (for example, there are many compound-words which are preferred to the French or Latin borrowings and even the word “amen” is often translated into *zuo by it* “so be it”). Despite this, it seems to have had a limited circulation.

Bis boc is dan Michelis of Northgate, y-write an englis of his oꝝene hand. Þet hatte: Ayenbyte of inwyt. And is of þe bochouse of saynt Austines of Canterberi.

(...)

Nou ich wille þet ye ywyte hou hit is y-went:
þet þis boc is y-write mid engliss of kent.
Þis boc is y-mad vor lewede men,
Vor vader, and vor moder, and vor oþer ken,

45 Bough, Cable (1984): 406-407; Cartlidge (2001): 12, 21

ham vor to berze vram alle manyere zen,
þet ine hare inwytte ne bleve no voul wen.
“Huo ase god” in his name yzed,
þet þis boc made god him yeye þet bread,
of angles of hevene and þerto his red,
and ondervonge his zaule huanne þet he is dyad. Amen.

Ymende þet þis boc is volveld ine þe eve of þe holy apostles Symon and Iudas, of ane broþer of þe cloystre of saynt austin of Canterberi, Ine þe yeare of oure lhordes beringe, 1340.

Vader oure þet art ine hevenes, y-halzed by þi name, cominde þi riche, y-worþe þi wil ase ine hevene: and ine erþe. Bread oure echedayes: yef ous to day. And vorlet ous oure yeldinges: ase and we vorleteþ oure yelderes, and ne ous led nazt: in-to vondinge. Ac vri our vram queade.

Zuo by it.

This book is Dan Michael's of Northgate, written in English with his own hand. It is called Ayebite of Inwit and belongs to the library of St. Augustine's at Canterbury.

(...)

Now I wish that you know how it has come about
that this book is written in English of Kent.
This book is made for ignorant men, –
for father and for mother and for other relatives–
to protect them from all manner of sin,
that in their conscience there may remain no foul blemish.
“Who as God” is his name said [Michael in Hebrew means “Who is like God”],
that made this book: God give him the bread
of angels of heaven and thereto his counsel,
and receive his soul when that he is dead. Amen.

Note that this book is fulfilled on the eve of the holy apostles Simon and Judas, by a brother of the cloister of Saint Augustine of Canterbury, in the year of our Lord's bearing, 1340.

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by your name, come your kingdom,
your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses:
as we forgive them that trespass against us, and led us not into temptation.

But deliver us from evil. So it be⁴⁶.

46 Baugh, Cable (1984): 409; Freeborn (2006): 182

II.4.2.1 LINGUISTIC OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE SOUTHERN DIALECTS

These two extracts are believed to have been originated in the south of England, so we are going to see now what are the linguistic features which distinguish them.

First of all, the C manuscript of the *O&N* can be divided in two parts, which depend on the two different spelling systems in which the manuscript was written: the first part (lines 1-900 and 961-1174) is called C1, while the second part (lines 901-960 and 1175-end⁴⁷) C2. These two spelling systems – which sometimes display some differences – probably replicate the spellings of a manuscript preceding C and written by two different hands.

The southern features here reported are likewise observable in the Kentish dialect of *Ayenbite of Inwit*, with some variants.

OE $\tilde{a} > o$ before nasals (*mon*, line 455). This was quite common everywhere in England, except the North and north Midlands.

OE $\bar{a} > \bar{o}$ everywhere in the south (*O&N*: *so* line 429, *snou*, line 430, *bope* line 438, *more* line 448; *Ayenbite of Inwit*: *ozene*, *huo*, *holy*, etc.)

OE short $\text{æ} > e$ only in Kent (*bet*) where it is better preserved, while in the rest of the South it corresponds to *a* (*abele*); similarly the $\bar{\text{æ}} > \bar{e}$ in Kentish, but always *a* in the C manuscript (*raddest*).

OE $y > u$ (rounded vowel) in the south-west (*cume*, line 435, *mankunne*, line 849, *sunnen*, line 858); while $y > e$ only in Kentish and this is one of its most characteristic feature (*ken*, *zen*, *ymende*, *volveld*).

OE *ea* $> a$ in words where it is unlengthened (*harde*, line 459) and *ea* $> e$ when lengthened (*erde*, line 460); in Kent *ea* displays a typical spelling, as in the word *dyad*.

OE *eo* $> o$ in the south-west, while *eo* $> e$ in Kent, where it displays the absence of rounding marks as in the previous case (*hevene*, *erpe*, *berze*).

Kent and the rest of the south share the $-e\delta/-ep$ ⁴⁸ ending for the 3rd pers. present indicative – except *bon*, line 452 – (*O&N*: *liþ*, line 430, *habbeþ*, line 431, *hiȝteþ*, line 436, *ginneþ*, line 437, *wolcumeþ*, line 440, *boþ*, line 451, *fundieþ*, line 850; *Ayenbite of Inwit*: *vorteleþ*); the present participle in *-inde* (*singinde* and *cominde*); the past participle with the prefix *y-/i-* and the loss of the final *-n* (*ido* and *ywrite*); the loss of the final *-n* in the infinitive (*O&N*: *springe*, *sprede*, line 437, *flo*, line 442; *Ayenbite of Inwit*: *to berze*); absence of the *th-* forms for the plural personal pronouns (*O&N*: *hi*, line 452, *hom*, line 850, *hore*, line 858; *Ayenbite of Inwit*: *ham*, *hare*).

47 Cartlidge (2001): XLV. Notice that this division is differently reported in Stanley (1981): 7, where the C1 spelling covers lines 1-900/961-1183 and C2 spelling covers lines 901-960/1184-end.

48 C1 and C2 display both *-þ*, however sometimes C2 displays *-ð* finally. Moreover, in the C manuscript often the final $-e\delta/-ep$ are written *-ed/-et*.

Distinctive appears to be the voicing of *f* and *s* at the beginning of syllable, both in the south-west and in Kent where it is very pronounced (*O&N*: *vor*, line 430, *avinde*, line 856; *Ayenbite of Inwit*: *vor*, *vader*, *vram*, *voul*, *ondervonge*, *volveld*, *vondinge*, *zen*, *yzed*, *zuo*, *zaule*, etc.).

Generally speaking, we may notice that in the south of England the disappearance of the OE cases is well advanced: nouns and adjectives are normally uninflected; the dative and genitive cases are commonly replaced by prepositional constructions and the future tense is already expressed by the auxiliaries *wille* and *schal*, which have lost much of their modal sense (“to wish” and “to be obliged”). In the case of *O&N*, the lexicon seems to be quite conservative, since almost the whole vocabulary derives from OE. Borrowings from other languages (Old French, Old Norse and Latin) are quite rare⁴⁹.

II.4.3 EAST MIDLAND

The Bestiary

If the readers approach the Middle English *Bestiary* in order to gain knowledge about the medieval zoology, they would be very disappointed: indeed, this text has not scientific bases and the large amount of fantastic and imaginary elements, used to describe the animals, confirm this. Moreover, the Greek origin of the text implies a different meaning within its title: the so-called *Physiologus* can be translated into “the Naturalist”, that is the philosopher who conjectures about the natural phenomena to interpret them from a moralistic and mystic point of view. The author of the Greek text, therefore, is not focused on the real features of these animal (but also of plants and minerals), but on the explanation of the signs and their symbolic meaning. This kind of text was really popular during the Middle Ages, even if it is quite difficult to determine precisely its place of origin, its date of production and its authorship. What we know for certain is that the ME *Bestiary* is the result of the development of the Greek text into the Latin versions, which became popular around England afterwards. The most important among them is the *Physiologus Theobaldi* which might be considered the main model for the English version: this work was written in verses and composed of 12 chapters. The distinctive tract, which contributed to make it well-known, was the ability of the author to reorganise the traditional materials in order to make it more usable by common people. The whole text, contrary to what happened in the previous bestiaries, is lacking in explicit biblical references, so that it appears to be easier to divulge and acquires completely its didactic and warning aspect. The Latin bestiaries started to be produced in England around the 12th century and rapidly were replaced by the vernacular and Anglo-Norman production. From the beginning, they

49 For a complete list of these words, see Cartlidge (2001): XLVII

display some differences compared to the Latin versions: the extension of the number of chapters and, subsequently, the insertion of new animals which are not present in the traditional bestiaries.

The following extract is part of the MS Arundel 292, the only manuscript which contains a version of the ME *Bestiary*. Even this text is quite unique mainly because the author divides each chapter into two sections: one, entitled *natura*, deals with the description, more or less accurate, of every animal; the other one, *significacio*, gives the allegorical and moralistic explanation of what is presented before. This division seems to underline once again the didactic function of the author, who has a intermediary role between the “real world” and the “symbolic world”, and has to give us the key to understand the whole poem. Moreover, the language is more colloquial, repetitive and appropriate for the oral performances, therefore it can be understood by those who are not able to read and allows the text to be spread more easily.

Natura cetegrande

Nature of the whale

Cethegrande is a fis
ðe moste ðat in water is;
ðat tu wuldes seien get,
gef ðu it soge wan it flet,
5 ðat it were á neilond
ðat sete one ðe se-sond.
Ðis fis ðat is vnride,
ðanne him hungreð he gapeð wide;
vt of his ðrote it smit an onde,
10 ðe swetteste ðing ðat is o londe;
ðer-fore oðre fisses to him dragen;
wan he it felen he aren fagen;
he cumen and hoven in his muð;
of his swike he arn uncuð;
15 ðis cete ðanne hise chaveles lukeð,
ðise fisses alle in sukeð;
ðe smale he wile ðus biswiken,
ðe grete maig he nogt bigripen.
Ðis fis wuneð wið ðe se-grund,
20 and liueð ðer eure heil and sund,
til it cumeð ðe time
ðat storm stireð al ðe se,
ðanne sumer and winter winnen.

Whale is a fish,
the biggest in the sea;
so that,
if you saw it floating,
you would say that it is an island,
sitting on the sand of a beach.
When this fish, which is huge,
is hungry, he opens its jaws:
out of its throat it comes a scent,
the sweetest thing on earth;
therefore, the other fishes feel attracted to it
and are happy when they smell it;
they move towards it and linger around its mouth;
they are not aware of its deceit:
the whale closes its jaws
and swallows all the fishes:
it deceives the smallest in this way,
while it cannot catch the biggest.
This fish lives on the sea bottom,
and stays always there, safe and sound,
until comes the storm
to shake the sea,
when the summer and the winter are in conflict.

Ne mai it wunen ðer-inne,
 25 So droui is te sees grund,
 ne mai he wunen ðer ðat stund,
 oc stireð up and hoveð stille;
 wiles [ðar] wender is so ille.
 De sipes ðat arn on se fordriuen, –
 30 loð hem is ded, and lef to liuen, –
 biloken hem and sen ðis fis;
 a neilond he wenen it is.
 Ðer-of he aren swiðe fagen,
 and mid here migt ðar-to he dragen,
 35 sipes on festen,
 and alle up gangen;
 Of ston mid stel in ðe tunder
 wel to brennen one ðis wunder,
 warmen hem wel and heten and drinken.
 40 Ðe fir he feleð and doð hem sinken;
 for sone he diveð dun to grunde,
 he drepeð hem alle wið-uten wunde.

It cannot live there during this period,
 because the sea bottom is very cloudy,
 so it comes up to the surface
 lying motionless on the water.
 When the weather is so bad,
 the ships which are shaken by the storm, –
 hateful to them is the death and pleasing to live, –
 look around and see this fish:
 they think it is an island,
 and this makes them happy,
 so, rapidly, they move towards it.
 They dock the ships
 and reach the island
 to light a fire, with the flint,
 on this marvel.
 They warm themselves, eat and drink:
 the whale feels the fire and, sinking all of a sudden,
 it causes their death by drowning,
 without wounding them.

Significacio

Meaning

Ðis deuel is mikel wið wil and magt,
 So witches hauen in here craft;
 45 he doð men hungren and haven ðrist,
 and mani oðer sinful list,
 tolleð men to him wið his onde:
 wo-so him folegeð he findeð sonde;
 ðo arn ðe little in leue lage;
 50 ðe mikle ne maig he to him dragen, –
 ðe mikle, I mene ðe stendefast
 in rigte leve mid fles and gast.
 Wo-so listneð deueles lore,
 on lengðe it sal him rewen sore;
 55 wo-so festeð hope on him,
 he sal him folgen to helle dim⁵⁰.

The devil is strong in will and power,
 as wizards who possess the gift of the magic arts.
 He lures men into starvation, thirst
 and other sinful desires.
 He attracts men with his perfume:
 whoever will follow him, will find woes.
 These are the smallest, who have a weak faith,
 the biggest – I mean those who are firm in the right
 faith, both in the flesh and in the spirit, –
 cannot be attracted.
 Whoever will listen to the doctrine of the devil,
 will bitterly regret over time;
 whoever will put his trust in him,
 Will follow him in the dark hell.

50 Baugh, Cable (1984): 402; Freeborn (2006): 155

The Peterborough Chronicle

The *Peterborough Chronicle* is a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and it is also known as Laud manuscript or E manuscript. According to Clark⁵¹, the text is basically composed of two main parts: the annals up to 1121, written in an uniform hand and ink; and the continuations, which are added later at Peterborough and which can be subdivided into two periods: 1122-1131 and 1132-1154. The date and provenance of the *Annals* are difficult to establish (they tend to describe facts contemporary with the moment they happen and it is believed they originate in Canterbury); the *Continuations*, on the other hand, are easier to locate. The book hails from Peterborough and this is confirmed by dialect.

Þa was corn dære, and flese and cæse and butere, for man ne wæs o þe land. Wrecce men sturuen of hungær. Sume ieden on ælmes þe waren sum wile rice men. Sume flugen ut of lande. Wes næure gæt mare wrecched on land ne næure hethen men werse ne diden þan hi diden; for ouer sithon ne forbaren hi nouthur circe ne cyrceiærd, oc named al þe god ðat þarinne was and brenden sythen þe cyrce and al tagædere. Ne hi ne forbaren biscopes land ne abbotes ne preostes, ac ræueden munekes and clerekes, and æuric man other þe ouermyhte. Gif twa men oþer iii coman ridend to an tun, al þe tunsceipe flugæn for heom cursede æure, oc was heom naht þarof, for hi ueron al forcursæd and forsuoren and forloren. War sæ me tilede, þe erthe ne bar nan corn, for þe land was al fordon mid suilce dædes. And hi sæden openlice ðat Crist slep and his helechen. Suilc and mare panne we cunnen sæin we þoleden xix wintre for ure sinnes.

“Then corn was dear, and meat and cheese and butter, for there was none in the land. Poor wretches perished from hunger. Some went begging who were formerly wealthy men. Some fled out of the land. There was never yet greater misery in the land, nor did heathen men ever do worse deeds than they did, for in defiance of custom they spared neither church nor churchyard, but took all the wealth that was therein and then burned the church and everything with it. Nor did they spare bishop's land, nor abbot's nor priest's, but robbed monks and clerics, and every man who had the power (robbed) the other. If two or three men came riding to a town, all the township fled before them – they thought that they were robbers. The bishops and learned men cursed them continually, but it was nothing to them – they were all accursed and perjured and damned. Wherever men tilled, the earth yielded no corn, for the land was completely ruined by such deeds. And they said openly that Christ slept, and his saints. Such things, and more than we can say, we suffered nineteen winters for our sins⁵².”

51 Clark (1970): xviii

52 Milroy (1992): 178; Clark (1970): 56

II.4.3.1 LINGUISTIC OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE EAST MIDLANDS DIALECTS

Phonologically, these two texts are different one from the other: *PC* appears to be strongly marked by the East Midlands dialect, while *Bestiary* does not. In fact, the features visible in it are more or less present even in other parts of the country: OE $\text{æ} > a$ (*ðat*, *water*, line 2; *fagen*, line 12; *craft*, line 44); OE $y > i$ (*unride*, line 7; *stireð*, line 22; *fīr*, line 40; *diveð*, line 41; *sinfull*, *list*, line 46); OE $eo > e$ (*lef*, line 30; *sen*, line 31; *devel*, line 43). The development of OE $\bar{a} > \bar{o}$ (*loð*, line 30; *wo*, line 48, *lose*, *sore*, line 54) is the only phonological feature which refers to an area south of the river Humber. On the contrary, *PC* displays several features belonging to this variety: OE $ea > e$ (while $ea > y$ in the West); OE $i > eo$, e ($i > ie$, y in the West).

However, in both cases the morphology displays East Midlands characteristics more clearly than the phonology does. The 3rd person singular normally ends in *-eð* (*Bestiary*: *hungreð*, *gapeð*, line 8; *lukeð*, line 15, etc.); the present plural ends in *-en* (*Bestiary*: *dragen*, line 11; *flugen*, *aren*, line 12; *cumen*, line 13) as the past participles and the infinitives (*fordriven*, line 2 and *seien*, line 3; *biswiken*, *bisgripen*, line 18). The pronoun shows the *h*- form (*PC*: *heom*; *Bestiary*: *he*, *here*, *hem*).

Generally speaking, *PC* seems to have lost the noun/adjective inflectional endings, but it sometimes retains the OE verbal endings (for example, the preterite plural inflection *-n* appears in *coman*, *flugæn*, *wæron*). *Bestiary*, on the other hand, displays some features which position the text in the northern part of the region: the occurrence of *s* for the OE *sc* (*fis*, *fisses*, line 1; *sipes*, line 29; *sonde*, line 48; *fles*, line 52; *sal*, line 54, etc.); the *-es* ending for the 2nd person singular (*wuldes*, line 3); the forms *arn*, *aren* in place of *ben*, which is more common in the East Midlands and appears in other parts of the text; and the use of *don* as a causative verb, whereas in other parts of England the verbs used, with the same function, are *geren* (North) and *maken/leten* (West).

II.4.4 WEST MIDLAND

St. Katherine

The following extract belongs to *Saint Katherine*, which was originally contained in the so-called *Katherine Group*. This collection gathers five texts in prose: the lives of three saints – St. Katherine, St. Margaret and St. Juliana – and two religious treatises, *Hali Meidenhad* and *Sawles Warde*. Probably, the texts were composed by an anonymous author of the English West Midlands (Herefordshire) towards the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century, but it is

impossible to assign a precise date to any of these texts. All the texts are directed to anchoress and praise the virtue of virginity. Each of the saints' story recounts the heroic resistance and then the martyrdom they suffered in order to preserve their maidenhood. In this case, it is reported the life of Catherine of Alexandria, a Christian saint and virgin, martyred in the 4th century by the emperor Maxentius (even if some scholars believe the emperor in question was Maximinus Daia). She was basically persecuted because of her Christianity and her protests against the persecutions of Christians perpetrated by Maxentius. The legend describes her as a strong girl, who denied to marry the Emperor since she considered herself the “bride of Christ”. She was very skilled in the use of oratory and after having discussed successfully with fifty philosophers about Christianity, not only did she refuse to convert herself to paganism, but she convinced them to become Christians. Thus, she was condemned to die on a breaking wheel (hence also known as the Catherine wheel), but not finding immediately the death in this way, she was finally beheaded.

In þis ilke burh wes wuniende a meiden swiðe zung of zeres, twa wone twenti, feier & freolich o wlite & o westum, ah zet, þ^t is mare wurð, steðefelt, wiðinnen, of treowe bileave, anes kinges Cost hehte anlepi dohter icuter clergesse Katerine inempnet. Þis meiden wes baðe federles & moderles of hire childhade. Ah þan ha zung were, ha heold hire aldrene hird wisliche & warliche i þe heritage & i þe herd þ^t com of hire burde: nawt for þi þ^t hire þuhte god in hire heorte to habben monie under hire & beon icloepet lefdi, þ^t feole telleð wel to, ah ba ha wes offearet of scheome & of sunne, zef þeo weren todreauet, oðer misferden, þ^t hire forðfederes hefden ifostret. For hire seolf ne kepte ha nawt of þe worlde. Þus, lo, for hare sake ane dale ha etheold of hire ealdrene god & spende al þ^t oðer in neodfule & in nakede. Þeos milde, meoke meiden þeos lufsume lefdi mid lastelese lates ne luvede heonane lihte plohen nenane sotte songes. Nalde ha nane ronnes ne nane luve runes leornin ne lusten, ah eaver ha hefde on hali writ ehnen oðer heorte, oftest ba togederes.

In this same town was dwelling a maiden very young in years – two lacking of twenty – fair and noble in appearance and form, but yet, which is more worth, steadfast within, of true belief, only daughter of a king named Cost, a distinguished scholar named Katherine. This maiden was both fatherless and motherless from her childhood. But, though she was young, she kept her parents' servants wisely and discreetly in the heritage and in the household that came to her by birth: not because it seemed to her good in her heart to have many under her and be called lady, that many count important, but she was afraid both of shame and of sin, if they were dispersed or went astray whom her forefathers had brought up. For herself, she cared naught of the world. Thus, lo, for their sake she retained one part of her parents' goods and spent all the rest on the needy and on the naked. This mild, meek maiden, this love-some lady with faultless looks, loved no light playings or foolish songs. She would neither learn nor listen to any song or love poem, but ever she had her eyes or heart on Holy Writ, oftenest both together⁵³.

53 Baugh, Cable (1984): 405

Lazamon's *Brut*

Lazamon, who lived towards the end of the 12th century, was a parish priest at Ernleze (Areley Kings) in Worcestershire; his name suggests he had Scandinavian origins. His poem *Brut*, also known as *The Chronicle of Britain*, is considered one of the most important poem of Middle English. The poem can be found in two manuscripts: MS Cotton Caligula A.ix and MS Cotton Otho C.xiii, both held by the British Library. The first manuscript is considered better than the other one; it is divided into two portions (which were originally distinct⁵⁴, according to Sir Frederic Madden, the first editor of *Brut*): the first one contains *Brut*, while the second part, which was written later, contains three poem by Chardri, a Chronicle in French, *The Owl and the Nightingale* and some religious and moral poems in English. The Otho version, instead, contains only the *Brut* but was partially damaged due to a fire set in the 1731 at Ashburnham House.

The poem consists in 16.000 alliterative lines telling the history of Britain from the landing of Brutus (hence the title) to the death of Cadwallader. For its composition, the priest was certainly inspired by the metrical translation made by Wace of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and by the poem *Roman de Brut*, written by Wace himself. However, the Lazamon's work is longer than both and appears to be innovative. He includes a great section which is dedicated to king Arthur and adds many new details to the story, so the characterisation of the king is completely changed: in Wace, he is pictured as a contemporary feudal king; in Lazamon, he is described more as an individual figure and he moves closer to a Germanic hero than a knight of chivalry. Despite the alliterative verse, the style is quite “popular” and very different from the classical OE poetry: it appears to be an early transitional stage between OE poetry and Chaucer's regular metrical rhyming couplets.

4070 'And ich wulle uaren to Aualun to uairest alre maidene,
to Argante þere quene, aluen swiðe sceone,
and heo scal mine wunden makien alle isunde,
al hal me makien mid haleweize drenchen.
And seoðe ich cumen wulle to mine kineriche,
and wunien mid Brutten mid muchelere wunne.'
Æfne þan worden þen com of se wenden,
þat wes an sceort bat liðen sceouen mid vðen,
and twa wimmen þer-inne wunderliche idihte,
and heo nomen Arður anan and aneouste hine uereden,

54 Le Saux (1989): 1

and softe hine adun leiden and forð gunnen liðen.
þa wes hit iwurðen þat Merlin seide whilen,
þat weore uni-mete care of Arðoures forð-fare.
Bruttes ileueð zete þat he bon on liue,
and wunnien in Aualun mid fairest alre aluen,
and lokieð euere Bruttes zete whan Arður cumen liðe.

'And I will journey to Avalon to the fairest of all maidens
to the queen Argante, most beautiful of divine creatures.
And she will heal all my wounds
and make me whole with health-giving draughts.
And thereafter I will come to my kingdom,
and dwell among the British with great joyfulness.'
Upon those words there came moving in from the sea,
it was a short boat gliding, driving through the waves,
and in it two women wondrously dressed,
and straight way they took Arthur and speedily carried him,
and laid him down gently and journeyed fourth.
Then it had come to pass as Merlin had prophesied of old
that there was excessive grief at Arthur's passing.
The British still believe that he is alive
and dwells in Avalon with the fairest of divine beings,
and the British still await the time that Arthur will return⁵⁵.

II.4.4.1 LINGUISTIC OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE WEST MIDLANDS DIALECT

The *Brut* extract appears to be highly conservative in retaining much of the OE inflectional morphology. However, it is possible that its grammatical conservatism is merely literary and that the colloquial English, in the Worcestershire area, was more advanced in the loss of inflections. In addition to that, we must remember that the North and the East areas have suffered a more rapid reduction of the inflectional system than the South and the West areas, even thanks to the closest relation with Danes and Normans, which facilitated this process. Thus, the traditional forms survived where the contact was less strong. The case retained in this passage are the following: *alre maidene* (line 4070) bares the ending of the genitive plural in the adjective *alre* (“of all”) and in the noun *maidene*. In *þere quene* (“to the queen”, line 4071), *þere* displays the dative singular feminine

⁵⁵ Milroy (1992): 178-179

ending. Also in *mid muchelere wunne* (line 4075) we find the word *wunne* (“the joy”) which is feminine and *muchelere* (“great”) in dative singular feminine. Also some verbal endings are retained, especially the final *-n* for the infinitives (*makien*, line 4073).

In both extracts, the pronouns appear to have the initial *h-* form in all cases, also the nominative (*Brut: heo*, “she” line 4072; *St. Katherine: ha, heo* “she” and *hare* “their”); the 3rd person plural present indicative ends often in *-eð* (*St. Katherine: telleð*). Usually, this is a peculiarity of the South, whereas in the East we find *-en*. The present participle ends in *-ende* (*St. Katherine: wuniende*).

The following are considered distinctive phonological features of the West Midlands variant:

OE *y > u* (rounded vowel, as in the South. *Brut: muchelere* – with the exception of the word *kineriche*, where *y > i*).

OE *eo > u* (*St. Katherine: zung, wurð*);

OE *a + nasal > on, om* (*St. Katherine: wone, monie; Brut: mon*). The *St. Katherine* fragment displays also the unvoicing of final *d* to *t* in *-et* (*incuret, inempnet, ifostret*, etc.).

II.5 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In the chapter above, we have tried to highlight the features which allow us to distinguish the various dialectal regions present in Middle English. Thus, we have proposed a series of texts which can be considered witnesses of these varieties, trying to underline both the common features and the disparities among them and among their dialects. This should provide an overall vision for the notorious Middle English diversity.

In this regard, it is expedient to mention also the following developments within the English language, and especially the emergence of Standard English. Its development began towards the end of the Middle Ages (around the end of the 14th century) and it was not planned or institutionalised⁵⁶. It grew spontaneously during the 15th century, where actually only the bases of Standard English were present. All the process took 300 years before the language has been recognised as it is today and became firmly established. The need of a Standard language started when the difficulty of communication became clear, also among literate people. Within the written language, the variation was so uncontrolled – since we already said that every variety was accepted – that a single word could be spelled in many different ways. An author, for example, could write a

56 A standard language can emerge in various ways: it can spontaneously develop within a society, when a language naturally “impose” itself on the others and is chosen directly by the speakers. It may be chosen, for instance, the variety of a particular body of religious or literary writing or the language spoken in the richest region of a country. Otherwise, an official body (an Academy) can “institutionalise” it, choosing a particular variety (which is considered to be the best for various reasons) and then creating dictionaries, grammars, handbooks, etc. so the common people can study it in school and start talking it.

form and nobody could surely assert whether that was his real intention or it was a scribal mistake. The main problem was not the writer's intention (because who writes a text is aware of what he wants to say), but the way in which the reader read the text. If a word has hundreds of possible spellings and the context cannot help, the misunderstanding is very probable. Moreover, a language is a set of shared conventions and cannot be left to the private opinion of individuals. So, when this diversity was taken to extremes, the presence of a common language in England became necessary and therefore Standard English began to develop.

CHAPTER III

JOHN LYDGATE'S *VERSES ON THE KINGS OF ENGLAND* ACCORDING TO ROYAL MS 18 D II

III.1 GENERAL HISTORY ABOUT THE ROYAL MANUSCRIPTS

The so-called Royal manuscripts are a collection of manuscripts (more than 2000) gathered by various kings and queens of England in over 800 years. The collection has been eventually presented to the nation in 1757 by George II, but the principal founder of the “Old Royal Library” is believed to be Edward IV, since he was the first king to bequeath a noteworthy collection of books to his successors. Before him, during the Lancastrian⁵⁷ period, the books collected were few and difficult to trace, mainly for two reasons:

- 1) there would have been no official inventories in England before the Tudor period⁵⁸, differently from what happened in other parts of Europe, such as in France. There is a French inventory which report, for example, the list of the goods possessed by Charles V in 1380 – books included.
- 2) During the XIV and XV centuries, the personal spending of the English kings was not precisely calculated. This happened because, in that period, the Crown was not compelled to convey its expenditures directly to the Exchequer⁵⁹, so we do not know exactly how much kings used to spend for buying and selling manuscripts. Nevertheless, some evidences about the storage of books have been recovered. One of these is the account of John de Flete, who was the Keeper of the Privy Wardrobe in the Tower of London from 1324 to 1341. According to it, towards the end of the reign of Edward II, in the Tower of London were stored 340 books (among which there were liturgical books, Bibles, quires, etc.). It seems that some of these books have had a royal provenance and have been inherited by Edward, while others were seized from bishops and businessmen who had political issues with the king. Moreover, some payments required for restoration works at Eltham Palace, justified the presence of a new study for Henry IV's books, which was a kind of non-institutional library. This means that even if a small amount, Edward IV inherited some book from his

57 The Lancastrian period refers to the reigns of Henry IV (1399-1413), Henry V (1413-1422) and Henry IV (1422-1471).

58 From 1485 to 1603 ca.

59 Nowadays comparable to the Treasury, it was an office responsible for the collection of the taxes and management of the revenues.

predecessors.

However, the nucleus of the Old Royal library is composed from the manuscripts that Edward IV accumulated during his reigns (1461-1470 and 1471-1483) and mainly during the last part of his reign. Sure enough, this passion arose during his exile in Bruges (1470-1471), where he was hosted by Louis de Gruthuyse, who was one of the most famous collectors of the 15th century. The greatest part of Edward's manuscripts were copies of well-known texts, often in French, after having been translated from the originals written in Latin. We may find, for example, historical narratives (such as the William of Tyre's *History of the Crusades*), the *Bible historiale* of Guyart de Moulins, the *De casibus virorum illustrium* of Boccaccio, etc. There are not inventories which list the books possessed by Edward and whether all of them have survived until now: today, fourteen volumes preserved in the British Library bare his coat of arms and others display badges which are linked to his own Yorkist environment⁶⁰. The following reigns (Edward V and Richard III) did not have any impact on the construction of the Royal library, since they ruled for a short period of time. Therefore, it was Henry VII (forefather of the Tudor line) the next to have a strong impact on the constitution of the library. In 1492 he appointed a dedicated librarian, Quentin Poulet of Lille, a Flemish craftsman, who received also extra payments for his ability as a limner (fig. 3⁶¹).



Fig. 3 London, British Library, Royal 19 C VIII, f.1 *Imaginacion de la vraie noblesse*.

60 The House of Plantagenet was subdivided into two cadet branches: the House of Lancaster and the House of York (to which belongs Edward IV). The rivalry between them caused the “Wars of the Roses” to achieve the control of the throne of England.

61 The original text is attributed to Hugues de Lannoy. In 1496, Quentin de Poulet copied it for the king Henry VII. The image illustrates the author himself who exhibits the book to the king.

The books collected by Henry were mainly gifts (and not purchases) that he received from scholars and ambassadors (especially from Italy and France) during their travels in England. Moreover, he added to his collection some previous manuscripts placing his coat of arms on them and fostering the development of the Royal Library by his successors.

During the reign of Henry VIII the Royal collection was expanded, mainly due to the Dissolution of the Monasteries which entailed the requisition of all the texts gathered in their libraries. The antiquary John Leland was designated to search, among these religious institutions, the relevant books and to collect the manuscripts. Within his New Year's Gift, a letter wrote in 1544 to Henry VIII, he declares himself to be pleased with his effort:

“I haue conserued many good authors, the whych otherwise had ben lyke to haue peryshed, to no small incommoditye of good letters. Of the which parte remayne in the most magnificent libraryes of your royall palaces. Part also remayne in my custodie.⁶²”

Subsequently, the process of consolidation of the library was reinforced when the librarian Bartholomew Traheron moved the manuscripts in the Westminster Upper Library after the Henry's death.

III.2 ROYAL MANUSCRIPT 18 D II

The information about this manuscript is limited and often difficult to track down, anyway we know that it has had various owners during its history. To sum up: it was originally copied and possessed by sir William Herbert, I earl of Pembroke, and his second wife Anne Devereux. Probably, it was designed as a presentation gift to Henry VI, but it did not become part of the Royal library until the 17th century. The book passed to Percy family, thanks to the marriage between Henry Percy, IV earl of Northumberland, and Maud Herbert, and then to his son Henry Algernon Percy; subsequently, it was possessed also by Henry FitzAlan, XII earl of Arundel and son of Anne Percy (who was the sister of Henry Algemon). His son-in-law, John Lumley, inherited the manuscript and his whole collection of books. The Lumley library (which collected 320 manuscripts and 2400 printed books) was later acquired by Henry Frederick (it is not clear if it was a gift or a purchase), prince of Wales and son of James I of England, and included in the Old Royal Library.

62 Hellinga, Trapp (1999): 275

The Royal MS 18 D II, dated 1457-1530 ca., is written in Middle English and includes various works of different poets, even though the main nucleus is formed by John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (ff. 6r-146r) and *Siege of Thebes* (ff. 147v-162r). However, in this manuscript we may find also the Lydgate's *Testament* (ff. 1v-5r) and *The reignes of the kyngis of Englande* (ff. 181r-183r); William Cornish's *A Treatise between Information and Truths* (ff. 163r-164r); John Skelton's *On the death of the Earl of Northumberland* (ff. 165r-166v) and *Le assemble de dyeus* (ff. 167r-180v). Moreover, there are a further description about the arms of various kings entitled “The blsoure of the arms of the kyngis” (ff. 183v-185v); the chronicle about the Percy family, written by William Peiris *Descent of the Lords Percy* (ff. 186-195) and others verses transcribed from the walls of the Percy's house (ff. 195v-211v). The manuscript displays different dates of composition, because the Peiris's chronicle and the ensuing parts are believed to be extensions to the original manuscript made between 1516 and 1527, whereas the part copied by sir Herbert dates back to 1460 ca.⁶³



Fig. 4 John Lydgate *Troy Book*. Miniature of the Wheel of Fortune with the king on the top. London, British Library, Royal 18 D II, f. 30v

63 All these informations are available on the British Library website http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_18_D_II

III.3 THE FIGURE OF JOHN LYDGATE

John Lydgate was born in the city of Lidgate, Suffolk, maybe in 1370 (we do not know the precise date) and dead, around 1449, in the monastery of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey, since besides having been a poet, he was also a Benedictine monk. Although we do not know much about his personal life, we know a lot about his works, thanks to the large number of manuscripts which contain and transmit his texts. For this reason, we can, with some confidence, assert that he is one of the most prolific authors of the 15th century and considered one of the most important poet of his time. The great number of surviving manuscripts and the diversification of patrons for whom he wrote vouch for the high respect that his contemporaries paid to him: his works include poems, translations, prayers, epics, hagiographies, dietaries, philosophical essays, which certify that he was considered skilful in almost every kind of writing. It has been estimated that there are twenty-nine manuscripts of the *Siege of Thebes*, twenty-two of the *Troy Book*, thirty-seven of the *Fall of Princes*, twenty-four of the courtesy poem *Stans Puer ad Mensam* and nearly thirty of the different versions of the *Verses on the Kings of England*⁶⁴. Moreover, all these manuscripts can help to understand the nature of this popularity among his contemporaries. First of all, in some manuscripts his works are placed with those of Chaucer, reinforcing the idea that Lydgate enjoyed a reputation equal to that of Chaucer. The copyists did not find weird to place, for example, the *Monk's Tale* or *Troilus and Criseide* along with extracts of the *Fall of Princes*, since they perceived a sort of conformity among their works and not a sense of discontinuity. Lydgate himself was a Chaucer admirer, especially as regards his use of the language: “of owre language he was the lodesterre” he says in the Prologue of the *Fall of Princes*. Secondly, we have to observe that during the 15th century, the title of poet was bestowed on those people who showed a particular ability in the use of language, so poetry was considered along the same lines as rhetoric. In this contest, Chaucer, Lydgate and Gower were seen as the models to emulate: in 1470 George Ashby called them “maisters” and Lydgate is seen as the “Primier poetes of this nacion⁶⁵”. Of course, the reputation of Lydgate has changed in the course of time and his importance reconsidered. The 19th century critics have torn to pieces his production. Joseph Ritson wrote: “This voluminous, prosaic, and drivelling monk ... in truth and facts these stupid and fatiguing productions which by no means deserve the name of poetry, and their still more stupid and disgusting author, who disgraces the name and patronage of his master Chaucer, are neither worthy collecting (...) nor even worthy of preservation (...)”⁶⁶. Generally speaking, his style began to be

64 Edwards (1983): 15. Notice that these data are slightly different in Renoir (1967): 2.

65 Schirmer (1952): 255

66 Schirmer (1952): 256, citing *Bibliographia poetica* (1802, p.87) written by Ritson.

considered quite tedious, repetitive, not captivating and his production was identified with the word “verbiage⁶⁷”. Toward the end of the 19th century his fame disappeared completely and his figure was consigned to oblivion: it is sufficient to think to the fact that he is not known by the majority of the people these days.



Fig. 5 J. G. Murray's portrait of John Lydgate. Published in 1820 in *The lives of eminent & remarkable characters, born or long resident in the counties of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk*

III.4 FOCUS ON THE *VERSES ON THE KINGS OF ENGLAND*

III.4.1 THE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF THE TEXT

Generally speaking, the contents of the *Verses* (in every of its versions) are insufficient to consider it an historical text: each stanza describes in a limited number of lines who the king is, his right to rise to the throne, his years of reign, where he is buried, etc. It is believed that these details could derive from the information contained in the Lazamon's *Brut* and Hidgen's *Polychronicon*. Moreover, the short length of the stanzas ensured its oral transmission (it was very likely read aloud on some particular occasions) and its use for didactic purposes, since it was easy to memorise⁶⁸. However,

⁶⁷ Renoir (1967): I, citing *Six Medieval Men and Women* (1955) of H. S. Bennett.

⁶⁸ Mooney (1989): 258. A copy of the text survives in a schoolbook (Oxford, Lincoln College MS Lat 129). Furthermore, Lydgate had already written other didactic texts (such as, *Dietary* and *Stans Puer ad Mensam*) with

besides these, which are functions that we can call “ancillary”, the aim of this text is mainly political: the continuous changes that the text have suffered during the centuries, with the addition of new stanzas or the complete distortion of some of its lines, display that it was systematically modified according to the period and to the king who needed support.

The first manuscript which reports the Lydgate's *Verses* is believed to be the Bodleian Library MS Bodl. 686. It might be dated 1429-1430, according to some internal evidences and some coincidences with other works. The poem was probably commissioned in 1426 by the Duke of Bedford⁶⁹, soon after the death of king Henry V, when Henry VI was knighted at age of 4⁷⁰. Another thing which supports this date of composition is the fact that Lydgate, in the same years, was required to translate a French poem, originally written by Laurence Calot and called *The Title and Pedigree of Henry VI*. Lydgate mentioned some of its parts also in his text⁷¹, although the two works have to fulfil different functions: the Calot's work aims to persuade the French people that Henry VI could be the right king even for them, whereas the Lydgate's *Verses* seems to reassure the English people about the fact that Henry VI would have been a great leader, as his father was, and that he would have maintained the control over France (so the audience is completely different). In fact, the death of Henry V had been unexpected and happened when he was still young (35 years old). During his reign, he opened a new phase of the Hundred Years' War invading Normandy and conquering almost the whole region, then he guaranteed the stability within the nation acting firmly against the domestic danger (such as the Lollard dissatisfaction). So, his figure enjoyed a widespread appreciation and the inheritance left to his son was surely heavy. Therefore, the purpose of the noble families of that period (Beaufort, Gloucester, Bedford, Beauchamp) was to use the literary propaganda to hearten the English people. The choice of Lydgate seems not to have been fortuitous: he had already written poems for political purposes and among them, we may cite the

which the *Verses* often appears in some manuscript, maybe because they were believed to bear the same function.

69 The poem was very likely commissioned to Lydgate by John, the I duke of Bedford, who belonged to the Lancaster family. He was the third son of Henry IV and acted as regent of France for his nephew, Henry VI, when he was too young to rule.

70 The following stanza [Mooney (1989): 257] talks about Henry VI with an hopeful and positive feeling towards his future government and without mentioning his achievement as king. This could mean that it was written early during his reign, between 1422 and 1429 (1426 is the most probable dating):

[þe] Sixte herry broȝt forth in al vertu,
By iust title born by enheritaunce,
A-forn provided by grace of crist ihu
To were two corones in Engelond and in ffrance,
To whom God hath geve soueraine suffisaunce
Of vertuous lyfe and chose him for his knyȝt,
Longe to reioyse and regne here in his riȝt.

71 Mooney (1989): 257. “These two are the only work in praise of Henry V which suggest that he could stand among the Nine Worthies. The “Title and Pedigree” reads, “for which he may among þe Worthie Nyne/Truly be set & reconed for oon,” echoing Lydgate's “Kings” from MS Bodl. 686, “Worthi to stonde amonges þe Worthi nyne.” (...).

already mentioned translation of Calot's *The Title and Pedigree of Henry VI*, three texts written for the Henry's coronation, the *Triumphal Entry into London, 21 February 1432*⁷², etc. The use of this text as a political instrument continues over the years as showing from the changes of the later versions which are adapted to the political context and the king to flatter. The BL Harley 2251 and Add. 34360, for example, were written to please Edward IV, while other versions evoked the Lydgate's poem, but showed a completely different style, metre and content⁷³.

III.4.2 THE VERSION IN ROYAL MS 18 D II

This version of the poem is a late redaction of the Lydgate's *Verses* and appears with the title (which is written in red and placed at the end of the manuscript) “The reignes of the kyngis of Englande”. We are almost sure about the fact that the poem was added to the manuscript by an unknown scribe during the reign of Henry VIII, when Henry Percy possessed the book. If we consider the original version of the *Verses*, we can find several modifications in this redaction, which mainly concern the length of the poem (which continues until the reign of Henry VIII – never mentioned before) and the addition of totally new lines (which are not always respectful of the metre). The rhyme scheme followed by Lydgate is normally the one invented by Chaucer: the *rime royal*. It implies the use of seven-line (iambic pentameter) stanzas which follow the scheme A-B-A-B-B-C-C. This pattern was particularly useful in medieval poetry because it allowed to “divide” the stanza in a tercet and two couplets (A-B-A; B-B; C-C) or in a quatrain and a tercet (A-B-A-B; B-C-C). In our case this scheme is not always followed.

Our work on this redaction can be considered as a sort of “comparative interpretation” of the text. It consists mainly in the transcription of the poem, which was made following the images of the manuscript available on the British Library website,⁷⁴ and, then, in the comment of the text. Since we were not able to find existing editions, there could be mistakes owed to some difficulties in interpreting the abbreviations or the single words. For the rest, the transcription has tried to be as faithful as possible to the manuscript, however improvements and different interpretations are always possible. In addition to that, we chose to insert two different kind of annotations to avoid

72 MacCracken (1911) identifies these and other texts placing them in a section called “Political Poems”.

73 Mooney (1989): 263, 277-278. She cites these versions in a different part of her study considering them a separate work, written by anonymous and therefore called the “Anonymous *Kings of England*”. So, according to her, there are manuscripts which report the Lydgate' *Verses* and other manuscripts which report the anonymous *Kings of England* (they are separately listed). Other scholars (Renoir, MacCracken) instead tend to consider them as redactions of the Lydgate's *Verses*. We are following this last vision, since, it is not the scribe what we are focusing on here, but rather the contents of the extant versions (one in particular) and the linguistic features.

74 http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_18_d_ii_f181r

confusion: the endnotes, for illustrating the content of the stanzas (giving explanations about what the scribe wrote and his historic references) and the footnotes which clarify some linguistic issues.

The following points need to be borne in mind to understand the transcription:

- round brackets () contain the expansions of the abbreviations;
- in the manuscript there is a dot at the end of each line. We decided to report it here in the transcription, but it does not have to be considered as a traditional full stop (very likely it marked a pause for those who had to read or declaim the text in front of other people);
- angle brackets < > contain the doubtful and problematic parts. We preferred to transcribe everything – even those words or letters about which we are not completely sure – instead of leaving blanks;
- square brackets [] contain the expunged parts, which we believe to be scribal mistakes that do not actually have to be considered;
- capital letters normally are not present in the manuscript, however we have chosen to add them where we think they are needed (such as, at the beginning of the proper names, places, gods, saints, cities, etc.).

III.4.3 TRANSCRIPTION

ff. 181r-183v

181 r.

In this litill tretis men may se and be In(tro)dustryde .

To the reynge of the kingis of Englande and ther namys with all .

From Willia(m) (the) Conquero(r) to this day if they take hede .

Of ther vertuo(u)s of ther vicis it makithe a breue rehersall .

Of them whiche shall folow for a memoriall .

And also it dothe tell wher euery kinge dothe ly .

From kinge William (the) Conquero(r) VII to the VIII kinge Henry⁷⁵ .

The fyrst William myghty duke of Normandy .

⁷⁵ This “preface” describes shortly the content of the verses and it is a completely new addition to the text. The characters of this section are bigger than the rest, as it looks in the scanned images of the manuscript.

As aunciente Croniculis⁷⁶ makithe mencyon .
By just titill and conquest gat the monarchy .
Of Englande sum tyme callede brutes Albyon⁷⁷ .
He put downe kinge Harrode and take possession .
One and twenty yeres completely the crowne bare he .
Layde at Caynne in his sepulcre as men may seⁱ .

Next in ordoure and by successyonn .
The secunde William Ruffus⁷⁸ his sonne was kyng .
Whiche towarde God had bot litill deuocionn .
He destroyede chyrches of new and olde beldingis .
To make a large forest pleasande for his huntyng .
XIIIJ⁷⁹ yeres he raynede ysshew had he nonne .
In Wynchester he lyethe in his sepulture under a marbill stoneⁱⁱ .

His next broder and yongest the fyrst kinge Henry .
Accordynge to his fadyrs Will was crownede & resseyued unction .
Who(se) eldest brother Robert Duke of Normande .
Began fyrst agayne hym to make in Surrection .
After broghte to amite and left all descencion .
Thre and twenty yeres the saide Henry dyd bere crowne & septure .
And at Redynge he lyethe in his sepultureⁱⁱⁱ .

His cosy(n) (the) first Steuyn whan the fyrst Henry was dede .
Towarde this realme of Englande began to crosse his sayll .
William Archbisshop of Canterbery set upon his hede .
Aright precieuse crowne but be his wronge counsell .
XIX yere withe sorow grete besynes and travayle .
He bare his crowne all way in aduersite .

76 In other version of the *Verses and* elsewhere in this manuscript, the word “chronicle” is substituted with the words “books” or “writing” (for example, in Harley MS 372 and later in the stanzas about Henry II and Henry III).

77 *Albion* is the ancient name used to identify the island of Great Britain. Nowadays, its use is mainly poetical.

78 *Rufus* because he probably was red-haired.

79 In this manuscript the Roman numerals are reported differently from what we are accustomed to: at the end of some of them there is often a sign, here transcribed as a “J”. We decided to report it to be faithful to the original, but we chose not to consider it in the count of the years.

At Feuersam abbay in his sepulture lyethe he^{iv} .

181 v.

Henry the secunde sonne to the empres .
was crownede next a full manly knyght .
as bookis olde playnly dothe expresse .
In whose tyme the stare of clarge moste light .
Saynte Thomas of Canterbery was martyrede for holy churches right .
Of whose dethe the saide Henry was suspecte partly .
At Fownt Euerarde he lyethe in his sepulture honorably^v .

Richarde his sone next to hym by successyonn .
Ffirst of the name stronge valyant and notably .
Was crounede kinge of Englande callede Cueurdelyon⁸⁰ .
Withe Sarsyns⁸¹ hedis seruede in the Holy Lande at his tabill .
Slayne at the Castell of Caluyke by dethe full lamentabill .
In the counte of Lemons he raynede but IX yere .
His hart is beryede at Roone bysore the hy altare .
His body at Founte Euerarde lyethe at his fathers sete .
Callede henry the secunde as yet was moste mete^{vi} .

Richarde the first dyede withoute yssew there for his brother John .
Raynede after hym whiche enterede in to Fraunce .
And loste by negligens all Normandy Anonne .
This londe enterdytede was by his mys gouernance .
And as it is put in Cronyculis of Remembraunce⁸² .
XVIIIJ yere of this realme of Englande kinge was he .
He lyethe in his sepulture at Worsyster poysonde for his cruelte^{vii} .

80 He was called *Cœur de Lion* because of his generosity and his ability as soldier.

81 *Saracen* as generic word to identify Muslims.

82 We think that *Cronyculis of Remembraunce* is a way to explain that this is what they traditionally said about him. This seems to be displayed by the fact that in other manuscripts (such as the Harley MS 372) we find the line “And as it is put in remembraunce” without any reference to any book in particular.

Henry the thryde his sonne IX yere of age .
At Glossestre was crownede kinge as irede .
Longe ware he had whyte his Baronage .
Specially he delitede in prayer and almus dede .
XLVJ yere he raynede in vere dede .
And layde in his sepulture at Westmynster by recorde of writinge .
The day of Saynte Edward⁸³ martyr made and kinge^{viii} .

The fyrst Kyngedwarde with the shankis longe⁸⁴ .
Sone to the thryde Henry a full nobill knyght .
He wan Scotlande magre the Scottis stronge .
And all wayllys in dispite of ther force and myght .
Duriunge his lyfe he manteynede trouthe and right .
XXXV yere of Ynglande he was kyngedwarde .
He lyethe in his sepulture at Westmynster for whos sowle <þe mo(n)ke doþ rede and sy(n)ge> ^{ix} .

182 r.

Edwarde the Secunde callede Carnaruan .
Whiche loste that his father wan .
Succedithe after and to make alyanncce .
As the cronakillis rehers canne .
Mariede Ysabell the daughter of the king of Fraunce .
For Thomas of Lancasters dethe on him fell vengeanncce .
XIX yere he hyld crowne and regallite .
And leyde in his sepulture at Glosyter as booke speafy^x .

The thirde Edwarde Sonne to the secunde cowarde fowlyd born at Wyndsor .
Whiche in nobilnes & knighthode had so grete price .
Trew Inheritoure of Fraunce and his eyres for euyr more .
He bare in his Armis quarterly thre floure delyce .

83 The tomb of St. Edward the Confessor (also king of England from 1042 to 1066) is placed in Westminster Abbey. However, in Harley MS 372 it is reported St. Edmond Rich, who was Archbishop of Canterbury (1233-1240) and who is effectively celebrated on the 16 of November, which is also the death-day of Henry III.

84 He was called *Longshanks* because he was very tall for that period.

He gat the towne of Calyce by his prudent deuyce .
This nobill prynce was the fyrst foundar of the ordoure of the Garter .
Whiche he foundede in honoure of God & saint George (þe) blissed martyr .
LIJ yeres in Englande he dyd rayne .
And at Westmynster in his sepulture he lyethe certayne^{xi} .

Richard the secunde after his grandfather dyd rayne .
Sone to the blake prynce Edward in whose faders tyme was grete plente .
First Anne daughter to the kynge of Beyme whiche was emperor of Almayn⁸⁵ .
He maryede after Ysabell the fraynche kyngis dought(er) i(n) cronydis ye mayse.
XXIJ yere he Inyoyede his ryalte .
At Langlay fyrst layde in his sepulture so stode the case .
After by Henry the V to Westmynster translatede he was^{xii} .

Withoute yssew dyede Richarde the secunde and Henry (þe) fourth dyd optayne .
A famous knyght of goodly port and semlynes .
After his exyll whan he cam home agayne .
For his offencis all his lyf he travelled in wars & grete seknes .
XIIIIJ yere the saide Henry raynede as the Cronykillis expres .
And layde in his sepulture at Cantyrbury in that holy place .
God of his tender mercy do his sowle grace^{xiii} .

The V Henry of knyghode the loode stare .
Wyse polyte [k]⁸⁶ manly playnly to determyne .
Right fortunat p(ro)uyde in peace and in ware .
Gretly expert in marciall disciplyne .
Worthy to stande in honoure amonge the worthis IX⁸⁷ .
Raynede IX yeres who so lyft to haue regarde .
& lyethe in his sepulture at Westmynster not far fro(m) saint Edward^{xiv} .

85 *Almayn* normally means Germany, in this case the reference is to the Holy Roman Empire in general.

86 The last letter of this word is recognisable as a *k*, however its insertion lends the word a wrong meaning. Comparing this line with that in Harley MS, we suppose that this word might be translated as *polite* (in the Harley MS we find *riht*) to keep the same meaning. For this reason, we believe that the *k* is a scribal mistake.

87 The *Nine Worthies* were nine exemplar personalities of the Middle Ages, who embodied the virtues of chivalry. Only those men with great qualities were considered worthy to belong to them.

182 v.

The VI Henry his sone was after hym fosterde in allvertu .
By just titull and by inheritaunce .
By grace affore prouyde of Criste I(es)hu .
Towere and crownes bothe in Englande and in Fraunce .
Aboue erthly thingis all god was in his remembraunce .
What vertuus lyfe he led his myraculis now declare .
XXXIX yere he bare dyadym and septime .
In Wyndesore college of the Garter he lyethe in his sepulture^{xv} .

After Henry the VI goddis campyonn and trew knyght .
Edward the IV⁸⁸ obteynede septime and crowne .
From the hy plantagenate hauynge titule and right .
XXIJ yere the saide Edward flowede withe wysdome riches (and) renowne .
Grete welthe and plente in his dayes all penery put downe .
All cristyn princes were glade withe hym amyte to make .
Whiche onely w(ith) a loke made Fraunce and Scotlande to <Duake>⁸⁹ .
In the College of the Garter where he gouernoure was and hede .
He chase the place of his sepulture for his body to be beriede i(n) whe(n) he was dede ^{xvi} .

After Edward the IV Richard the III his broder in vadit the crowne .
Of insasyote inynde II yere & II mounthes reynede he .
The goodly ysshew of kinge Edward his broder he diect & put downe .
What become of his brothers ysshew is no certeyne .
In his conscience he had cause to gruge for his grete eytremyte .
To a goode ende <comyth neuyn & couatyse>⁹⁰ lackynge pite .
At Bosworth felde he was slayne moste mysarably .
His body brought to Laceystr at the frere mynors in his sepult(ure) dothe ly ^{xvii} .

After Richard the thrid the VII kynge Henry .
By dessent and mariage of grace .

88 In the manuscript, this Roman numeral is reported wrongly as IIII. We decided to report it in the correct form.

89 The transcription of the word *duake* (maybe “duke” in modern English) is not sure.

90 Even in this line, the abbreviations do not allow to understand fully each word.

Obteynede Septure and crowne withe tryumph and glore .
 Whan the white rose and the rede flowrede in one place .
 Seyssede was al rankcor discorde non myght be .
 The white as principall is puere withoute excepcyonne .
 The rede throw loue and p(ar)fyte charite .
 Bothe the flowres in one sent hathe joynede for to be .
 He drove oute deuysyons rancore and debate .
 He ordorede this realme of Englande in peasabill state .
 For his princelly excellens bothe louyde & had in drede .
 A more prudent prince in Inglonde was neuyr none .
 For his wysdome callede the secunde Salamon⁹¹ .
 Grete rewthe it was in a prince so excellent and wyse .

183 r.

That one faute shulde subdue so many vertuus by av(ar)yce .
 XXIIII yerere he reynede all his emmys he dyd subdue .
 He chase the place of his sepulture in Westmynster & gaif his soule to (Cr)ist Ih(es)u^{xviii}.

 After the VII Henry the VIII Henry his sone oure kyng .
 By right and titill <he>⁹² succedithe to the crowne a prynce moste gracios .
 Oute of the white rose and the rede his ryall byrthe dothe sprynge .
 The whyt moste pure the rede moste varuant is .
 Whiche kyng from the kyng & quene of all flowres springith w(ith) flaur moste <ga>⁹³.
 From all eytremyte he hath delyuerde us .
 God graunte to hym grace of his mercy full benygnyte .

91 Henry VI is compared to Solomon, who embodies the wisdom (especially in the Middle Ages). In the Bible is reported, among the others, the episode known as the *Judgement of Solomon* (1 Kings 3:16-28) which is the example of his wisdom. We briefly recount it here: two women, both mothers of two infant son, claim that, after the death of one of these children, the mother of the dead child should have exchanged his son with the other one to make it believe that the living son was hers. Solomon has to decide which woman between them is the mother of the baby still alive. To discover it, he proposes to cut in halves the baby with a sword and give one half to a mother and one half to the other one. At this point, the true mother of the living baby accepts to leave his son to the other woman rather than cut him in two parts, whereas the other woman wants to follow the king's decision. Solomon understands that the true mother is the one who does not allow his son to be hurt and gives her the baby.

92 We hypothesize that the meaning of this abbreviation is *he* (the following verb bears the third person inflectional ending), however we do not even know for certain whether it is a real abbreviation or not.

93 This word is put between inverted commas in the manuscript, but it is not clear why. Moreover, even the meaning of the word is difficult to comprehend.

Longe to injoye his septure withe honoure and felicite^{xix} .

The reignes of the kyn gis of Englande⁹⁴:

III.4.4 COMMENT

In this section we will try to highlight the points which, in our opinion, could give an idea of the political stance of our scribe, once ascertained that this text bears mainly political meanings. To facilitate the operation, we will also resort to comparison between this text and the version contained in Harley MS 372⁹⁵, which is believed to be a copy of the Lydgate's one⁹⁶. Of course, the Harley manuscript does not consider the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII, but also this peculiarity can reveal itself useful.

First of all, we start considering the introduction written by the copyist. The first stanza is a newness and has never been included before, it appears to be a sort of preface to the treatise (this part is highlighted and in a way detached from the rest) in which the scribe himself tells us the aim of his work: talking about the noteworthy happenings of the kings of England from William the Conqueror to the Henry VII – since Henry VIII is governing when he is writing – and the place where they are buried. These general contents continue with the tradition, as also the previous versions are based on these general rules, so we may say that this part was added by the scribe for clarify reasons, but it does not bear substantial indications (if it was not present, it would not make any difference). Most of the stanzas of the poem are showing the same contents of the Harleian version, therefore we are going to underline the cases in which the differences are present:

- the stanza about Stephen I displays the addition of the adjective “wronge” (*his wronge*)

94 The title of the poem is collocated at the end and written in huge characters in red. Notice that the title “The reignes of the kyngis of Englande” is slightly different from “Verses on the kings of England” which is the title normally used when this Lydgate's poem is considered. Actually, we bumped into other titles referred to this work, such as “The Kings of England sithen William the Conqueror” (Harley MS 372) or simply “Kings of England” when it is treated generally. The title does not indicate necessarily that the content are different, but we believe it depends on the will of the copyist.

95 In order to assist the reader in understanding our references, we have added this edition of Harley MS 372 in the Appendix. It is also available in MacCracken (1911): 710-716 where, however, it displays also stanzas for earlier kings (this is the reason why it is very likely a revised version). The part which is interesting for us starts from William the Conqueror, so the preceding stanzas – from king Alfred the Great to Harold II – have not been considered and therefore are not reported in the Appendix.

96 Mooney (1989): 277. According to this scholar, this manuscript (Harley 372, leaves 51-53) is one of those – among the thirty-three she analysed – which transmits for certain the original version of Lydgate's *Verses*, so we used it for our comparison, starting from the stanza about William the Conqueror until the end.

counsil) when the scribe talks about William, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Our impression is that the scribe does not have a good opinion about his actions and his influence towards the king (William is not a good advisor for Stephen). As a consequence, the reign of Stephen of Blois is remembered as a reign filled with adversities, sufferings and trials.

- In the stanza on Henry II the line *of whose dethe the saide Henry was suspecte partly* is not omitted, whereas elsewhere it is. The line is an explicit reference to the fact that Henry was considered responsible for the death of Thomas Becket. Despite the fact that the proof against the king were quite incontestable and the issues between them well recorded, our scribe seems to take a stand against Henry.
- The stanza about king John contains some negative words, such as *negligens* and *mysgouernannce* which usually are not present (in Harley 372, the first one is absent, while the second one appears simply as *gouernaunce*, without any negative evaluation about the king's government). Basically, the king is considered as an incompetent, since the loss of territories in France is attributable to his mismanagement.
- The stanza about Edward II presents the addition of a new line (*whiche lost that his father wan*). Even though the episode recounted is not positive for the king (the loss against the Scottish), all things considered, the scribe does not express about Edward an opinion as negative as the one about John.
- In the stanza about Edward III, the additions are basically the last three lines where the scribe reminds us of the foundation of the Order of the Garter. This episode could be disregarded, but its insertion maybe is needed to praise even more his figure.
- The stanza about Henry VI is more or less identical to the one in Harley MS 372 in its first part, the only difference we have noticed is that, since it has been written later, the adjective *yovyn* (which is present in Harley MS 372) is omitted and the information about the duration of Henry's reign and his place of burial are added.

As concerns the remaining parts that these two manuscripts share, the differences are not significant (they affect the spelling of some words, but not the contents of the stanzas). Starting from the reign of Edward IV, instead, the Royal MS 18 D II displays a series of totally new stanzas (we already said that Harley MS 372 ends mentioning Henry VI) which we are going to examine. Generally speaking, it may be noticed that in this part – which is new and, therefore, the result of the work of the scribe himself, who could not enjoy any previous model of inspiration⁹⁷ – the stanzas are longer

⁹⁷ This is true at least for the stanzas which deal with Henry VII and Henry VIII, whereas lines about Edward IV have been already written by other scribes before.

than usual. This means that, while in the preceding stanzas there is a visible attempt to follow a rhyme scheme pattern, which tries to respect the metre used originally by Lydgate (at least in the number of lines per stanza), now we have to face four stanzas which seem quite different in length⁹⁸.

- The first stanza of the “new” section is dedicated to Edward IV: his figure is recounted in an extremely positive way (he is described as the bearer of wealth, prosperity and wisdom) and his military skills are extremely praised.
- On the contrary, the following stanza about Richard III, in our opinion, does not convey a good image of the king. The scribe does care to let us know that the crown prince was Edward V (although he does not write a stanza for him, who was effectively crowned but “ruled” for only two months) and not Richard III. It seems an attempt to discredit the king, who, differently from the others before him, had not the right to become monarch. Moreover, the hint about the disappearance of the little monarch (*what become of his brothers ysshew is no certeyne*) contributes further to this. The defeat at Bosworth Field is called *mysarably*, which means that not even his death in battle served to make him change his mind about the king.
- The stanza about Henry VII is the longest of the poem and it is extremely eulogistic of the king's virtues. He appears to be a sort of “divinity” who has changed the fate of England: thanks to him, the conflicts between the Houses of Lancaster and York are ended, he embodies the best virtues of both parts, he has brought peace and stability and his extraordinary wisdom makes him comparable even to Solomon. All the enemies of England have been subjugated by him.
- The last part about Henry VIII in our opinion fulfils the same function of the stanza about Henry VI in the Harley manuscript, that is to celebrate the new king – putting trust in him after the great reign of his father – and to convince the English people on his virtues.

So, we may say that the focus of the poem is on Henry VII (even because his stanza is very long) and the aim of our scribe is to exalt his figure attributing to him the same features – we may say without overstating – of gods and exalting his talents, qualities and virtues. Moreover, the knowledge of episodes of the Bible, the reference to Thomas Becket, St. George and the Holy Land (which is not mentioned in Harley MS 372) indicate that our scribe was very likely a Catholic

⁹⁸ Actually, the scribe of Royal MS 18 D II does not follow the Lydgate's pattern, since he inserts lines “randomly”, where he thinks they are needed, without thinking about the metre. However, in the first part of the poem – until Henry VI – the stanzas are more akin with one another.

clergyman with a deep acquaintance with the events recounted.

From a linguistic point of view, this text does not show many features which allow us to collocate it geographically. Its historic subject makes it quite repetitive during the descriptions of the kings, so it is not easy to find its peculiarities. In any case, we have tried to identify its dialectal features and to focus our attention on those which may be indicative, looking in particular for pronouns, verbal endings, gender markings, phonological features and vocabulary. Even in this case, we have often used the Harley MS 372 to highlight the differences between the two versions.

- The pronouns display always the *th-* form in the plural, showing an advanced stage in the development of the language. We do not have to forget that the scribe writes at the beginning of the 16th century – so in a phase between the end of the ME period and the beginning of EModE⁹⁹ – and that the *th-* form is a Scandinavian borrowing which at first is present only in the North. The preface, which the scribe put at the beginning, is very useful in this sense, otherwise we would not have had examples of plural pronouns in this text (*ther, them*).
- The OE *hw-* appears always as *wh-* (*what become of his brother ysshew is no certeyne*), such as in East Anglia. Elsewhere (such as in Scotland), the *qu-* form was more frequently used.
- The third-person singular of the present indicative display the *th-* ending and not the *s-* ending (*succedithe, makithe, dothe, lyethe*, etc.), whereas in the past form the *-ed* ending is regularly used (*callede, raynede, enterdytede*, etc.). The infinitives display the *to+verb* form without the ending *-n* which is typical of some regions (East Midlands). We cannot talk about the plural endings of the verbs and the past/present participles, since they are not present in the text. The verb *to be* is inflected more or less in the same way of the Present-day English, that is, *was* for the past form and *is* for the present form. The future tense is expressed, in the only case present, with *shall* (*of them whiche shall folow*).
- The use of the verb *do* sometimes seems quite excessive. Often, it happens to find it in the affirmative statements both in the past and in the present form (*And also it dothe tell wher euery kinge dothe ly; thre and twenty yeres the saide Henry dyd bere the crowne&scepture; as bookis olde playnly dothe expresse; etc.*). Besides being used to give emphasis to the whole utterance, this kind of construction gains great popularity in the 16th century suggesting that there may have been the tendency to generalise *do* in all the VPs when there was no other auxiliary present¹⁰⁰. Maybe this reason could explain its constance presence

99 The Early Modern English is a phase of the English language which approximately starts with the Tudor dynasty – around the end of the 15th century – until the end of the 17th century.

100Rissanen (1999): 240-241. If this tendency had become the rule, the English VPs would have been regular, because

here.

- The text displays a great use of prepositional constructions, suggesting the almost complete loss of the inflectional endings. However, in our opinion, some cases are not so clear. At the end of some nouns governed by prepositions, the text displays the addition of *-e* which could mark also the dative or genitive case (*with honoure and felicite; by recorde; of knyhode the loode stare*, etc.). This feature is not present in Harley MS 372. However, we do not know for sure if this *-e* is a real inflectional ending, since it is very present. We find it both in the spelling of some words that in the Harleian manuscript display the use of *-i* (*after/aftir; brother/brothir; enterdytede/entirdited; ware/werr*, etc.) and at the end of many words, the most of which are verbs in the past form (*callede; put downe; destroyede, raynede; crownede*; etc.). It is also possible that not all of these *-e* should have been pronounced, however we can only hypothesise it, since we know neither its function nor its origin. Moreover, our scribe displays also the use of *-y/-j* in place of *-i* (*Albyon/Albion; alyannce/alliaunce; hylde/heeld; John/Iohn; by/bi*, etc.). All these features could simply indicate that our copyist is accustomed to using a language which is more developed (and more close to Modern English, as we can see) or also an habit in his writing (but we are not able to connect these changes with a region in particular).
- The vocabulary is quite rich and displays a variety which is absent in Harley MS 372. The scribe writes using many adjectives and adding details which are normally omitted, for this reason, the stanzas are longer than usual. He intends to make the poem more engaging, “romanticizing” some aspects (the lines which recount the place of burial of the kings, for instance, are more impersonal in Harley MS 372¹⁰¹) without caring of the metre so much. Besides the addition and the spelling disparities, the words or constructions completely substituted by the scribe appear, even in this case, closer to Modern English. Perhaps, they have been simply updated to make the poem more “contemporary”. Among these, we have noticed the use of the verb *maryede* instead of *weddid*; *towarde God* instead of *to Godwarde*; *Archbisshop of Canterbury* instead of *Therchebisshopp*; the use of the word *yssew* (“issue”) to indicate the descendants, the infrequent presence of the *thorn /p/*, which instead is present in Harley MS 372, although in only two similar lines (*Buried at Cane, thus seith þe cronycleer* and *Buried at Wynchestir, þe cronycle ye may reede*).

they would have displayed an auxiliary even in the present and past tenses, with no need to inflect the main verb.

I do see/I did see > I see/I saw

101 Compare, for example, these lines about Richard I: *Lith at Wincester deied of poyson* (Harley MS) and *He lyethe in his sepulture at Worsyster poysonde for his cruelty* (Royal MS).

So, this version of the text appears to be linguistically very complicated. The features it displays vary a lot, therefore it is impossible for us to establish its exact place of origin. Its characteristics, in fact, often contradict themselves: the *th-* form for the pronouns could lead to Scotland, but the *wh-* form for “what” is not Scottish, but rather East Anglian and the *-s* ending for the third-person present indicative is completely absent (while in Scotland it is well-established); the vowel *-e* is very common in the Kentish dialect, but Kent is too far from Scotland (if we want to try to consider this as the variety used by the scribe) to justify a connection of this sort or a potential influence of both these dialects on the writer.

What we know for sure is that John Lydgate was born in Suffolk – that is in East Anglia – and that his style was modelled on Chaucer. The language used by Chaucer belongs to the so-called “London English” – which combines the Midlands dialect with the Kentish dialect: this could be also the variety of our scribe, perhaps not exactly the London one, but at least it seems to be a dialect from the south-east of England. The language spoken in that area is the result of the combination among the dialects spoken in the nearby regions, thus it is normal to find here the features of many different regional varieties. In addition to that, it is also possible that the writing of a poem with political meanings and clear references to the kings was assigned to someone based in London – therefore, close to the court – and well-informed of what he was about to write.

Surely these considerations, which are only hypothesis based on our own studies and evaluations, will may always be modified on the base of new researches.

APPENDIX

THE KINGS OF ENGLAND SITHEN WILLIAM CONQUEROR¹⁰²

HARLEY MS 372 ff. 52v-53v

This myghti William Duk of Normandie,
As bookis olde make mencion,
Bi iust title and bi his chyualrie,
Maad kyng bi conquest of Brutis Albion,
Put on Haralde, took possession,
Bar his crown ful xxj yeer,
Buried at Cane, thus seith þe cronycleer.

Nexste in ordre bi succession
William Rufus his son, crownyd kyng,
Which to Godward had no deuocion,
Destroied cherchis of newe & olde beeldyng
To make a forest plesant for huntyng,
xiiij yeer bar his crown in deede,
Buried at Wynchestir, þe cronycle ye may reede.

His brothir next, callid þe first Herry,
Was at London crownyd, as I fynde,
Whos brodir Roberd, Duk of Normandy,
Gan hym werreye, the cronycle makith mynde,
Reconciled, al rancour set behynde,
Ful xxxi[ij], bi recorde of writyng,
[Yeres] he regned; buried at Redyng.

His cosyn Stephan, whan first Herry was ded,

¹⁰²MacCracken (1911): 710-716. As it is explained in MacCracken's "The minor poems of John Lydgate", the version reported is very likely "a revised version, with stanzas also for earlier kings", so even though the title refers to William the Conqueror (as the original version does), the first king mentioned is not him. Since this version of the poem is often quoted, we have decided to report it here to facilitate the comprehension of what we have written. As it has been already said, the part which we are interested in starts from king William I, so the preceding stanzas have been omitted.

Toward Ynglond gan to crosse his sail.
Therchebisshopp sett vpon his hed
A rich crown, beyng of his conseil;
xix yeer with soruh and gret trauail.
He bar his crown, hadde neuer rest,
At Feuersham lith buried in a chest.

Herry the Second, son of thempresse,
Was crowned next a ful manly knyht
As bookes olde pleyntyly do expresse,
This forseide Herre bi froward force & myht
Slouh Seyn Thomas, for Hooly Cherchis right,
Yeeres xxxv regned, as it is made mynde,
At Fount Euerard lith buried as I fynde.

Richard his son, next bi succession,
First of that name, strong, hardy & notable,
Was crownyd kyng, callid Cuer de Leon,
With Sarsyn hedys seruyd at his table,
Slayn at Chalus bi deth lamentable,
The space regned fully of ix yeer,
His hert buried at Rone at hih auter.

Next Kyng Richard regned his brothir Iohn,
Aftir sone entrid in-to Fraunce,
Lost al Ange and Normandye a-noon,
This londe entirdited bi his gouernaunce,
And as it is put in remembraunce
xviiij yeer kyng of this region,
Lith at Wircester deied of poyson.

Herry the iij his sone, of ix yere age,
Was at Gloucester crowned, as I reed;
Long werr he hadde with his baronage,

Gretly delited in almesse-deed,
Ixx yeer he regned heer in deede
Buried at Westmynster, bi record of wryting,
Day of Seynt Edmond, marter, maid & kyng.

Edward the First, with the shakes long,
Was aftir crowned that was so goos a knyht,
Was Scotlond, maugre the Scottis strong,
And all Walys despyt of al ther myht;
Duryng his lyff meyntened trowth & riht,
xxxv yeer he was heer kyng,
Lith at Westmynster this trowth and no lesyng.

Edward his sone, callid Carnarvan,
Succedyng aftir to make his alliaunce,
As the cronycle weel reherse can
Weddid the douhtir of the kyng of Fraunce,
On Thomas Lancaster bi deth he took vengauce;
xix yeer heelde heer his regaliye,
Buried at Gloucestr, bookis specifye.

The iij^{de} Edward, born at Wyndesor,
Which in knythode had so gret a pris,
Enheritour of Fraunce withoute mor
Bar on his armys quartle iij flour delis,
And he gat Caleis bi his prudent devis,
Regned in Ynglond lj yeer,
Lith at Westmynstre, thus seith the cronycler.

Sone of Prynce Edward, Richard the Secound,
In whos tyme was pes and gret plente,
Weddid Queen Anne of Bewme, as it is found,
Isabell aftir of Fraunce, who list see,
xxij yeer he regned heer, parde;

At Langley buried first, so stood the cas,
Aftir to Westmynster his body caried was.

Herry the iiij^{te} next crowned, in certeyn,
A famous knyht and of greet seemlynesse,
From his exil whan he cam hoom ageyn,
Trauailed aftir with werr & gret siknesse;
xiiij yeer he regned, in sothnesse,
Lith at Cantirbury in that hooly place.
God of His mercy, do his soule grace.

The Fifte Herry, of knyhtod lood[e]sterr,
Wis and riht manly, pleynty to termyne,
Riht fortunat preevid in pes & werr,
Gretly expert in marcial disciplyne,
Able to stonde among the Worthi Nyne!
Regned x yeer, who so list han rewarde,
Lith at Westmynster nat ferr fro Seynt Edwarde.

The Sext Herry, brouht foorth in al vertu,
Bi iust title, born bi enheritaunce.
Afforn provided, bi grace of Crist Ihesu,
To wer too crownys in Ynglande & in Fraunce,
To whom God hath yovyn souereyn suffisaunce
Of vertuous liff, and chose hym for his knyht,
Long to reioissh and regne heer in his riht.

Explicit.

- i WILLIAM I or THE CONQUEROR was the first Norman king to rule over England. He became king on Christmas Day 1066, after the Battle of Hastings when his predecessor Harold II (the last Anglo-Saxon king) died. He ruled 21 years and died in 1087 after an injury received in Mantes (a French city that he conquered in the same year). His body was buried in the church of St. Stephen at Caen (Normandy).
- ii WILLIAM II or RUFUS was the third son of William the Conqueror. He ruled over England from 1087 to 1100 (13 years). According to the scribe, he had “little devotion towards God”, maybe because he had several quarrels with the Church: in 1089 when Lanfranc (Archbishop of Canterbury) died, he stole the Church's revenues on which he could not claim any right. Then, he had problems also with Anselm (the new Archbishop) about economical/religious questions and eventually forced him to exile in 1097. The reference to the destruction of the churches to create a forest may be a reference to the New Forest in Hampshire (created actually by William I) where Rufus died during the hunting (it is not clear whether it was an accident or not); his body was later carried to Winchester. He never had children (it is possible he was homosexual) and never married.
- iii HENRY I was the fourth son of William the Conqueror and Matilda. He reigned for 35 years (and not 23 as the scribe reported). He became also Duke of Normandy after having defeated his brother, Robert Curthose, in the Battle of Tinchebray. He died in December 1135 and his body was buried at Reading Abbey, which was founded by himself.
- iv STEPHEN OF BLOIS was king of England from 1135 to 1154 (29 years). He was the nephew of Henry I (his mother Adela was the daughter of William the Conqueror) and he grew up in his court – his father Stephen, Count of Blois, died soon during the Crusade – . The scribe here called him “his cousin” but there is surely a mistake: if it is referred to Henry I (who precedes him in the narration), it should be “his nephew”, whereas if it is referred to Matilda, it should be “her cousin” (Matilda was the daughter of Henry, but there is not a reason to speak of her in the first line, since she was never mentioned before. Thus, this hypothesis is less probable). The William cited here is William the Corbeil (Archbishop of Canterbury from 1123 to 1136) who supported the rise to the throne of Stephen in place of Matilda, despite having sworn to Henry I that he would have endorsed his daughter (the reign of Stephen was distinguished from the dispute between him and Matilda). When his older son Eustace died in 1153, he agreed to recognise Henry II (son of Matilda) as his heir. He was buried at Faversham Abbey (Kent) along with his wife and his son.
- v HENRY II is the first king of England belonging to the House of Plantagenet/Angevins. He ruled from 1154 to 1189 (35 years). He is called the “son of the empress” because his mother Matilda became empress when she married Henry V, king of Holy Roman Empire. During his reign, he came into conflict with Thomas Becket, insomuch that he was suspected of his death in 1170 (Becket was murdered by four knights inside the Canterbury Cathedral. He is recognized as saint and martyr). Henry died in his castle in Chinon and was buried at Fontevraud Abbey.
- vi RICHARD I or LIONHEART is the first son of Henry II and ruled in England for ten years (1189-1199) and not nine as reported by our scribe. He was protagonist of the Third Crusade against Saladin in the Holy Land, even though he was not able to conquer Jerusalem. He died on 6 April 1199 in Château du Châlus-Chabrol (in the Limousin region) after receiving a fatal wound. His heart was carried to Rouen and his body interred at Fontevraud Abbey. His marriage with Berengaria of Navarre was unsuccessful, so he did not leave legitimate children.
- vii JOHN also called JOHN LACKLAND was the youngest son of Henry II and brother of Richard. He rose to the throne in 1199 and reigned until 1216 (17 years). During his reign, England lost the control over the Duchy of Normandy after the defeat in the Battle of Bouvines (1214) against Philip II of France. Moreover, once he came back in England, the feudal barons forced him to sign the *Magna Carta* which extended their rights and limited the power of the king. His death was caused by the dysentery, thus he was not poisoned as it was believed at the time. John was buried in Worcester Cathedral.
- viii HENRY III, the first son of John, was proclaimed king at Gloucester when he was only 9 years old. He

reigned for fifty-six years (and not forty-five as the scribe wrote). During his reign he had several issues with the barons (mainly due to the annulment of the Provisions of Oxford, which compelled Henry III to accept a new form of government where his power was under the control of a council formed by twenty-four members – twelve selected by the king and twelve by the barons) eventually resulted in a civil war against Simon De Montfort, their leader. The quarrel (Second Barons' War) was solved by Edward (the next king). After his death, Henry was buried in Westminster Abbey.

- ^{ix} EDWARD I or LONGSHANKS is the first son of Henry III. His reign lasted thirty-five years (1272-1307), during which he subjected Wales to English rule and assert his power over Scotland (even if he could not conquer it completely). He died on 7 July 1307 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.
- ^x EDWARD II or CAERNARFON is the son of Edward I. He reigned from 1307 to 1327 (20 years and not 19 as reported by the scribe). He “lost what his father had won” because he was badly defeated in the Battle of Bannockburn against the Scottish army and Robert Bruce: in only one day Scotland was able to achieve the independence. Not only did Edward lose the power over Scotland but also his political power, favouring Thomas of Lancaster, who was his cousin and the leader of the barons' opposition against him. Edward married Isabella of France (daughter of Philip IV king of France) and they had four children. He died in the Berkeley Castle and then was interred at Gloucester Cathedral.
- ^{xi} EDWARD III, son of Edward II, was born in the Windsor Castle in 1312. He remained in charge for fifty years (and not fifty-one) from 1327 to 1377. He started the Hundred Years' War against France and Philip VI, conquering Calais in 1346. He is also remembered because he created the Order of the Garter, the highest order of chivalry in UK, dedicated to the image of St. George. Edward was interred at Westminster Abbey, London.
- ^{xii} RICHARD II, son of Edward of Wales (known as The Black Prince), reigned over England after his grandfather for twenty-two years (1377-1399). He married twice: the first time with Anne of Bohemia, daughter of Charles V (Holy Roman Emperor) and then with Isabella of Valois, daughter of Charles V of France. Despite this, he died without descendants. After his death, he was initially buried in King's Langley Church and then moved by Henry V to Westminster.
- ^{xiii} HENRY IV became king after his cousin Richard (his father was John of Gaunt, who was son of Edward III) once he came back from the exile (Richard II had decided to banish Henry from England for ten years to avoid a bloody conflict between him and Thomas de Mowbray, duke of Norfolk). When he returned in England (along with Thomas Arudel), Richard was in Ireland, thus Henry could start a military campaign in Cheshire and declare himself king of England. He had not the right to become king, so he was an usurper twice: when he imprisoned Richard II (who died in prison) and when he overstepped Edmund de Mortimer (heir presumptive of Richard, who preceded Henry in the line of succession). He is the first king from the Lancaster branch of the Plantagenets. After his death, he was buried at Canterbury.
- ^{xiv} HENRY V ruled nine years (1413-1422). He was the son of Henry IV and Mary de Bohun. During his reign, he continued the Hundred Years' War against France, winning in the Battle of Agincourt. This allowed him to become heir apparent to the French throne and marry Catherine of Valois, daughter of Charles VI of France. He died unexpectedly when he was 35, he was buried at Westminster.
- ^{xv} HENRY VI is the only son and heir of Henry V. He became king when he was only nine months in 1422 and ruled until 1461 (thirty-nine years of reign). He was crowned even in France where reigned “de iure” from 1422 to 1453. His reign was characterised by the War of the Roses: Edward IV (House of York) with the aid of Warwick deposed Henry VI in 1461 (after having reached London) and proclaimed himself king with the name of Edward IV. The Lancaster exponent rose again to the throne in 1470, but this reign lasted very little. Henry was captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London where he was murdered (the legend said that it was the future king Richard III to kill him); he was buried in the St. George Chapel at Windsor.
- ^{xvi} EDWARD IV reigned from 1461 to 1483 with a brief suspension of five months in 1470, when Henry VI

was restored king during the War of the Roses. When the Yorkist branch prevailed he became king, so he is properly considered the first Yorkist king of England. He was the son of Richard Plantagenet, duke of York, and Cecily Neville. During his second reign he declared war on France, but the two parts mediated and signed the Treaty of Picquigny. Then, he supported the attempt of Alexander Stewart (duke of Albany and brother of James III of Scotland) to become the king of Scotland. However, despite the occupation of Edinburgh and the capture of James, Alexander eventually refused to take his brother's position. Besides his victories in war, he was also admired for the achievements in the financial field (he invested in trading companies). He died in 1483 and was buried at St. George Chapel at Windsor.

- ^{xvii} RICHARD III, as it is correctly reported by our scribe, ruled only for two years (1483-1485). He was the brother of Edward IV, but after his death, he did not have the right to become king. Edward V (son of Edward IV) was entitled to be the next king of England, but he was immediately excluded. In fact, shortly before his coronation, it was announced that the marriage between his father with Elisabeth Woodville was invalid, therefore he was an illegitimate child and ineligible for the throne. Thus, Richard became king and, since Edward V (along with his brother Richard) disappeared completely, several legends circulated about the so-called “Princes in the Tower” (Richard III would have murdered both of them in the Tower of London. This fact is not sure, but the remains of two children were founded in 1674 and then moved to Westminster Abbey). Richard III was also the last king of England to die in the battlefield (Battle of Bosworth Field against Henry Tudor), his body was interred at Leicester Cathedral.
- ^{xviii} HENRY VII is the forefather and therefore the first king of the House of Tudor (identified here as the House that was able to join the two roses – the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster – as its emblem shows). He reigned for twenty-four years (1485-1509) after having defeated Richard III at Bosworth Field (episode which calls a halt to the Wars of the Roses). Actually, Henry descended from the Lancaster branch, but to assure the peace within the reign, he married Elisabeth of York, honouring a pledge he had made two years before at Rennes. He is considered a wise man: he tried to maintain peace and economic stability (so he avoided conflicts against France and Ireland – which was always on the side of Yorkist during the war –), signed trade agreements with several nations (France, Italy, Denmark, Netherlands etc.) and used the army of the arranged marriages to protect England (his daughters Mary and Margaret married respectively Louis XII of France and James IV of Scotland). Henry died At Richmond Palace of tuberculosis and was buried at Westminster Abbey.
- ^{xix} HENRY VIII ruled over England from 1509 to 1547. The scribe did not write anything about the reign of this monarch, so we suppose that it wrote his version of the text at the beginnings of his reign. Maybe the intent of the copyist corresponds to the Lydgate's one at the time that he wrote his own version for Henry VI: wishing the king good years of government and reassure the English people after the great reign of Henry VII.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the pages of this thesis, I have tried to present the interpretation of John Lydgate's *Verses*, according to the Royal MS 18 D II. Actually, the work on this text has taken a slightly different path than the one initially planned: the choice of an unedited and unheard of poem should have been oriented towards a linguistic investigation which allowed me to collocate it geographically in a dialectal area, being ground basically on those features I have described in the first and second chapter. However, after having studied the text, I realised that the linguistic features that the text provided were insufficient in order to find its specific dialectal variety and, above all, that they were often in contradiction. This does not mean that the analysis of the specimens and the linguistic context of Middle English has been useless. It needed to point out the total lack of a Standard language and the consequent presence of a multitude of dialects, which were all considered appropriate as vehicles for the written language. However, contrary to what happened with the specimens I recounted above, it appeared quite arduous to me to collocate this text in a precise part of England.

During the draft of the thesis, I realised also that the contents and the writing style of the copyist were both very interesting and worthy of consideration (especially when compared with the version of the *Verses* available in Harley MS 372): the huge changes that this texts suffered, and that caused the creation of a great number of its versions, provide for the political function that this poem had in all the medieval period. The addition or omission of lines and stanzas have never been fortuitous, but, as my comparison tries to display, often entail the personal judgements of the copyist towards the kings themselves. We can consider him more a writer than a scribe, since he tends to “fictionalise” the events, including details which could be omitted since they were historically not substantial.

In addition to that, I underlined also the fact that the style of the second part of the poem (which is actually the most original) does not follow the preceding versions, whereas in the first part the contents are more compliant, at least, with the Harley version.

In spite of everything, I have reached some linguistic conclusions which I think are reasonable, since they are based on those few objective elements I noticed studying the manuscripts and the related context. They can be recapped as follows: (a) the origin of John Lydgate – born in Suffolk, East Anglia; (b) the role of Chaucer – a Londoner – and his language used as model by Lydgate himself and other poets in that period; (c) the features that the London dialect – which has always

been a “mixed dialect” – displays; (d) the date of composition (during the Tudor dynasty); (e) the fact that the topic of the poem is strictly linked to the life of the court.

All these elements have brought me to think that very likely this version of the poem might be placed in an area around London or, more in general, in the south-east of England, where the linguistic context was very complex and, therefore, it might justify the presence of a such changeable language. Moreover, the date of composition – which is set around the first half of 16th century, at the beginning of the reign of Henry VIII – would justify the use of a language which is, in my opinion, closer to PDE in its vocabulary.

As regards the contents and the aim of this poem, both this and the previous versions of the texts have been employed for political purposes. The Royal MS 18 D II is focused on Henry VII: his figure is extremely praised for his wisdom and virtues, even more than the preceding kings. Some of them are, instead, badly judged by the scribe, with stances and allusions which are quite explicit. Moreover, the comparison with the Harley version allowed me to understand the reassuring function of the text towards the English people, so that the image of the young king (Henry VIII in this case, Henry VI in the Harley MS) is equated with the kings previously praised and immediately considered worthy of the same faith.

In conclusion, the part of the thesis that only had to act as a support of what already explained in the previous chapters (which are more descriptive) has eventually become the centre of my work. I hope that this text might be read considering the linguistic context in which it is placed, without forgetting yet the philological features which characterise the *Verses* and differentiate this version from the others and more ancient versions of the poem.

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