THE BOB-WHEEL AND ALLIED STANZA FORMS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH
AND MIDDLE SCOTS POETRY

DISSERTATION

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By

Hugh Kirkpatrick, B.A., M.A.
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The purposes of this study were to formulate a definition of the "bob-wheel" stanza in which a number of Middle English and Middle Scots poems were written, to inventory and describe these works, with special attention to the structure of individual stanzas, to identify the genres, the periods, and the dialects in which they were written, and to trace their origin and development between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The tripartite bob-wheel stanza contains a frons of a given number of lines, a bob-line, usually of one or two stresses, and a cauda, in which line length and number of lines are shorter than in the frons. Allied forms may lack the bob or may contain more than one bob; in some, the bob is the final line. Forty-seven poems, including religious and secular lyrics, carols, romances, political and social satires, didactic works, and dramatic pieces, were studied. Poetry of various genres in Old French, Provençal, Anglo-Norman, and medieval Latin was surveyed in order to determine whether the bob-wheel stanza developed out of any of these sources, or arose independently.
According to the evidence, the usually held theory that the bob-wheel stanza developed directly from Old French models is inaccurate. No direct correspondences between Middle English bob-wheel verse and contemporaneous Romance poetry appeared, although many similarities were found. Closer resemblances exist between Middle English bob-wheel verse and the medieval Latin poems, both religious and secular. The strongest influence on the peculiarly English development of the bob-wheel stanza appears to be not Continental Romance but Latin poetic technique.

The popularity of the bob-wheel stanzas in the North and Northwest Midland, Northern, and Scottish dialects has caused some critics to assume that these stanzas were first used in those areas, but the chronology and dialectology of the poems indicate that most of the earliest work in the form was done in the Southern and Kentish areas. It was only later in the period that the form became most popular in the North. Saintsbury's conjecture that the bob-wheel may be the first regular stanza in Middle English is corroborated, but his assumption that it was first used in the Northern Sir Tristrem may be invalidated by the presence of this Southern material: the question is clouded by the difficulty of dating Sir Tristrem.

Many of the bob-wheel poems are heavily alliterated, but only in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the combination of rhymed stanzas and alliterative technique entirely
successful. These poems represent a transitional stage between the earlier alliterative verse and the rhymed stanzaic poetry which eventually supplanted it.

Possible reasons for the abandonment of the bob-wheel stanza toward the end of the Middle English period include its intrinsic difficulty, the influence of Chaucer, who ridiculed it in "Sir Thopas," and the growing popularity of stanzas characteristic of the early Renaissance. The bob-wheel, however, influenced the development of other anisometric stanzas which originated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it retained its vogue in Scotland until the time of James I and VI.

The dissertation includes a general introduction of the topic, chapters on the influence of Latin and Romance stanzaic structure, a chronological survey of the bob-wheel poems, and a conclusion in which theories concerning the origins, development, and decline of the form are discussed.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Edwin H. Guest, in his *History of English Rhythms*, the first attempt at a truly comprehensive survey of the metrics of English poetry, appears to have been the first to have used the terms *bob* and *wheel* to identify those elements of English stanza construction which form the subject of this study:

Besides the staves which originated in mixed and continuous rhyme, there are others, which have sprung from the use of the Wheel and Burthen. By the latter of these terms I would understand the return of the same words at the close of each stave, and by the former the return of some marked and peculiar rhythm.

The *bob* is a very short and abrupt wheel or burthen, and it seems to have been borrowed from the Troubadour. The name has been used by some of our classical writers, and—to quiet the fastidious reader—and to—has been sanctioned by Johnson.¹

From Guest's time until the present, these terms have been used by historians of English metrics to refer to a particular type of stanza construction which gained popularity during the early Middle English period, declined in use in England toward the close of the fourteenth century, and continued as the vehicle for various kinds of poetry in

¹Edwin Guest, *A History of English Rhythms* (1838), new edition, revised by Walter W. Skeat (London, 1882), pp. 575-6. See the appendix to this study for a discussion of the etymology of the terms "bob" and "wheel."
Scotland, well into the Renaissance. A definition of the type of stanza thus identified will be given shortly, and a representative example appears below. This is the second stanza of a lyric dating from the first quarter of the fourteenth century, which appears to be a lament on the death of Edward II. The poem will be discussed in Chapter IV; meanwhile the following lines will give the reader a general idea of the structure of the typical bob-wheel stanza:

Denede dale & downe for dryft of the deer in drede;
ffor meche murthe of mouth the murie moeth made.
I ros & romede & sey roon raches to-_ede;
Thei stalken vnder schawe, schateredden in schade.
& Lordes lenged & ladies, Leces to lede,
With grithele grehoundes, gode to game & glade.
& I cam to the game ther gromes gone grede,
& at a water wilde I wonde ouer han wade
Ther was
I stalked be the strem & be the strond,
ffer I be the flod fond
A bot doun be a lond;
So passede I the pas.

The research described in this paper was undertaken in an attempt to answer such principal questions as these: what were the origins of the stanza forms in Middle English which contained the elements which Guest referred to as bobs and wheels? In what works, and what types of works, do these elements occur? Are they importations from abroad, are they derived from the indigenous Latin poetry of the period, or are they intrinsically English in origin?

Through a survey of all accessible poems containing the bob-wheel elements, I have attempted to identify these features: (1) the genres which made most use of them, including lyrics, both religious and secular, romances, moral
and didactic works, satirical and topical poems, and religious drama; (2) the historical periods in which these works appeared; and (3) the dialects of Middle English in which they were written.

Not all of these questions have been answered; perhaps the most interesting—that of origins—may be unanswerable. The Middle English poets, with the notable exception of Orme, did not preface or conclude their works with statements about their sources, their models, or their methods, and until the nineteenth century there were no literary detectives to cast any light on these questions. Working at a distance of up to seven hundred years, one is often reduced, in attempting to answer many of these questions, to such responses as "possibly," "perhaps," or, occasionally, "probably."

A question equally as difficult to answer as that of origins is that of conclusions: what reasons led to the abandonment of the bob-wheel forms toward the close of the Middle English period? Here one enters a realm of almost pure conjecture; although some suggestions about this problem will be offered at the conclusions of this study, they are no more than suggestions.

Yet in spite of all these limitations, I believe that some new light can be cast on these questions. Thus at the conclusion of this study I offer a theory as to origins, a survey of development, and a few notions concerning the reasons for the dying out of a poetic form which was the
vehicle for a number of interesting minor works and drew the attention of two of the major poets of England during the Middle Ages.

A working definition of the bob-wheel stanza form is needed, one which will be at once more comprehensive and more precise than Guest's. The term "bob" is recorded as early as the seventeenth century by the Oxford English Dictionary (s.v.), as referring to "the refrain or burden of a song (as if a pendant to each stanza)." The parenthetical analogy relates to earlier definitions of the word, as a kind of pendant or appendage such as the weight on the end of a clock pendulum, or the plummet at the end of a plumb-line. The seventeenth-century examples cited clearly refer to either a regularly recurring refrain, in which meter and rhyme are unvarying, but exact wording changes, or a recurring burden, in which identical words recur at the conclusion of each stanzaic element in a poetical composition. The material under examination in the major part of this study is characterized by the refrain, rather than the burden, although the relationships between the two are often very close, as will be evident on consideration of the medieval carol.

For the purpose of this study, the bob may be defined as a line of verse principally characterized by the fact that it is shorter (that is, it contains fewer syllables and fewer stresses) than the group of lines which precede it.
A bob, or bob line, as found in Middle English verse, may contain one, two, or three stresses, since that which characterizes it is not the exact number of stresses in the line, but the fact that the line itself is noticeably shorter than those which go before it, and usually those which follow, as well. In the poems to be examined, the bob is a type of refrain, not a burden, although the distinction is sometimes not an easy one to make.

The Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "wheel," makes no conjectures as to the origins of the use of the word in a prosodic context, and its first citation is to Guest; but its definition is more precise than is warranted by the evidence of the wheels extant in Middle English poetry:

A set of short lines, forming the concluding part of a stanza, usually five in number, varying in form and length, but generally having the first line rhyming with the last, and often the intervening three rhyming with each other; the first line in some types is very short, and is then called the bob.

A reservation is necessary at this point: the number five is not a general rule, and perhaps does not even predominate. Moreover, for the purpose of clarity in identification, I shall refer to bob-wheel verse, implying the presence of one or the other feature, or both. For it will appear that some of the material to be examined contains both bob and wheel; some contains only the bob; and some contains only the wheel without the bob. In the following discussions, then, the term bob-wheel is used generically
and does not imply that both elements are necessarily present.

Two additional terms are often used in discussions of these poems, both of them used by Dante in his discussion of the form of the canzona. The Latin term *frons* refers to the first part of a stanza, including all the lines preceding the bob or the wheel; the term *cauda* is used to describe all of the lines of the stanza following the *frons*, including both the bob and the wheel, if both are present. A few other terms familiar to students of metrics will be defined as they are needed during the course of the discussion.

To summarize the bob-wheel stanza form, it consists of an introductory section containing a set number of lines (with one notable exception), which are usually isometric—of equal length. Then there may follow a very short line, the bob, sometimes consisting of as little as a single syllable. Then there may follow a group of two, three, or even more lines, of the same length as those of the *frons*, or shorter. These are also isometric, and are termed the wheel. The bob may be present or omitted, likewise the wheel; in some poems the bob follows the wheel rather than preceding it. In the example which appears on page 2, the *frons* includes the first eight lines; the *bob* is the ninth

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line, and the last four lines make up the wheel. The ninth, or bob line, plus the wheel, together make up the cauda.

These definitions have been made as general as possible in order to accommodate all of the several variants of the bob-wheel stanza.

Areas of interest in Middle English studies have varied in direction during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The editing and publishing of texts preoccupied the late nineteenth century, and with good reason. In recent years, interest has centered on studies of symbolism, iconography, and allegory, while at all times the philologists have interested themselves in dialect study, a field which only recently has engaged the attention of the scientifically trained linguist. The study of Middle English prosody received most attention during the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, and has fallen out of fashion, to some extent, since that time. This is especially true so far as the specialized field of stanza construction is concerned. Aside from Guest's pioneering work early in the last century, little of any value was done until Bernhard ten Brink's Early English Literature, which appeared in English in 1883. Another German work, Kaluza's Short History of English Versification (1911), gives some attention to the Middle English stanza.

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3Bernhard ten Brink, Early English Literature (to Wiclif), translated by Horace M. Kennedy (New York, 1883). The German original appeared in 1877.
forms. At the same time, Jakob Schipper's *History of English Versification* (1910) offered a more detailed discussion; less exact but perhaps more insightful observations are found in George Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody* (1908). Somewhat later is Oakden's study of *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English* (1930, 1935), which is invaluable as a source of information about alliterative poems in the bob-wheel form. Since that time there is a surprising dearth of material, as most of the commentaries on Middle English verse simply repeat the conclusions and conjectures of earlier writers. At least one of these, to be discussed in another context, is, I believe, a misinterpretation in need of correction.

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4 Max Kaluza, *A Short History of English Versification*, translated by A. C. Dunstan (London, 1911). This work first appeared in German (Berlin, 1909), as *Englische Metrik in Historischer Entwicklung Dargestellt*.


7 J. P. Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English: The Dialectical and Metrical Survey* (Manchester, 1935); published as one volume, *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English* (Manchester and New York, 1968). Since in the single-volume each original volume is paginated separately, my citations will include volume and page numbers.
In discussing meters and stanza form, I am indebted to a very helpful handbook by Joseph Malof, *Manual of English Meters* (1970), which gives a clear and succinct presentation of a very complicated subject.⁸

In this study I have been able to rely on printed texts, and have not attempted the study of manuscripts. Fortunately, in the area to be investigated there is nothing that one untrained in paleographic work can add to the quest for the best text of any given work. The editions published by the Early English Text Society and the Scottish Text Society have been invaluable, but certain more modern editions of some works have been used whenever available. I make no attempt to offer any proposed emendations of text, principally because such minutiae, important as they are, barely touch upon the topic under examination.

Although much of the poetry to be discussed is of the Middle English alliterative school, I do not attempt to add anything to what Oakden and others have said in their specialized studies of this topic. Moreover, the details of scansion or alliterative practice in individual lines, and of rhyming techniques, are seldom pertinent to this topic.

In planning the structure of this work, it was necessary to make a difficult decision, whether to present the critics' comments and theories on the origins and development of the

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bob-wheel stanzas along with the body of poems to be examined, or to consolidate an account of the work of the historians and critics, and present it before examining the poems themselves. In favor of the former procedure, there is the fact that the critic obviously bases his theoretical statements on his examination of various passages of text: his book is inevitably studded thickly with numbers of extracts illustrating his speculations and conclusions. Thus I might have followed his example and presented the work of the critics at the point where it is best illustrated by the textual examples.

On the other hand, such a procedure makes for difficulty in grasping the individual critic's general ideas as a whole. The problem becomes evident through a reading of, say, Schipper's *History of English Versification*: he presents a great amount of textual material and a great amount of very valuable commentary; but because the latter is dispersed throughout the entire study, it is not easy to gain either an overview of his general theories of English versification or a grasp of his view of such specific questions as the nature of the bob-wheel stanzas. The same difficulty is present in the work of the other critics cited above.

For this reason I propose, at this point, to sketch very briefly the history of critical theory and comment concerning the bob-wheel stanza form, beginning with Guest, who at the opening of the nineteenth century was the first to
name, inventory, and describe all of the bob-wheel examples which were then known. To this task he devoted no fewer than twenty-eight pages of his massive volume.⁹

Guest sees the ultimate origin of the bob-wheel stanza in the burthen (hereafter I modernize his spelling to burden), a short repeated refrain or "tag," concluding each stanza of the medieval and Renaissance carols. In the following chapter, more will be said of the carols. Guest, however, found and quotes a much earlier example, a Latin baptismal hymn of the sixth century,¹⁰ for which he claims "advantages so obvious, that we might expect to find the burden a device well-known and familiarly used in the rhythmical system of every language."

There are, he continues, no clear examples of the shortened end-line in Old English; but he finds a related device in the familiar recurrent end-line of the sections of the Old English Deor:

Thaes ofereode: thisses swa maeg.

Guest's Middle English examples of the bob-wheel stanza, drawn largely from the political and topical songs of the period, appear in my own chapter on the bob-wheel stanza in the first half of the fourteenth century. His remarks on the bobs and wheels hardly extend beyond indicating their presence, and he offers no clear-cut theory of their origins. Guest's preoccupation in this part of his work is the possible

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⁹Guest, pp. 605-33. ¹⁰Guest, pp. 605-6.
origin of the Short Meter, Long Meter, and Common Meter folk stanzas.

In 1882 Guest's work was edited and reprinted by Walter Skeat, whose editorial additions were largely confined to the correction of some of Guest's errors in translating Middle English and to the addition of references to texts and commentaries which had appeared during the intervening fifty years. The publication of Skeat's edition provoked this unflattering comment from Max Kaluza, the German medievalist:

The first full survey of English prosody by Edwin Guest, A History of English Rhythms, London, 1838, contains much material, but it also proceeds from false assumptions. It is also so complicated that it is of little use for a clear knowledge of the evolution of English prosody. It is little altered in the second edition, edited by W. Skeat (1882).11

Kaluza's strictures are not entirely unfounded, as Guest's work is prolix, rambling, and poorly organized. It is more seriously marred, throughout, by his insistence on his own individual theory of the nature of English verse and the proper method of scanning it. Guest maintained that true English poetry has always been stress verse rather than foot verse or syllabic verse, and thus he rejected the traditional techniques of scansion as inadequate and misleading.12

The flaw in his position lies in his rigidity and unwillingness to compromise: English poetry derives from many sources.

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11Kaluza, p. 10. 12Malof, passim.
and retains characteristics of many, and to impose one system of scansion on the entire corpus leads inevitably to great difficulties. Guest's unyielding position is revealed in the very title of his work, which he describes as a history of rhythms rather than of meters.

The more urbane Saintsbury, in his own comprehensive treatment of English prosody, likewise finds fault with Guest. Saintsbury's own Classical orientation, together with his fondness for the poetry of the Romance languages, makes his attitude a predictable one. Nevertheless, in spite of its disorganized loquacity and its limited approach to the subject, Guest's work is interesting and, to an extent, valuable to the modern student, whose attention it fully merits.

Bernhard ten Brink's *Early English Literature*, which first appeared in German in 1877, was published in an English translation by H. M. Kennedy in 1883. It was for many years a standard work of its type, and is still a fine example of the painstaking German scholarly works of the period. The attention which ten Brink devotes to the bob-wheel stanza is not extensive, but what he says is worthy of attention on two counts.

The first of these is his rationale for the stanza form found in the early romance of *Sir Tristrem*, which has the stanza form abab abab \_ bc \_ . Of its origins, ten Brink observes:
The basis of this strophe is four Alexandrines with six accents each, which are divided by the middle rhyme into eight short lines; to these is added, after a metre with one accent, a fifth Alexandrine, also divided.\textsuperscript{13}

This analysis would derive the \textit{Sir Tristrem} rhyme scheme from such a prototype as this: $\text{aaaa}_6 \text{ b}_1 \text{ b}_6$, the prototype being a group of Alexandrines. The matter will receive further attention in connection with my discussion of \textit{Sir Tristrem}, but at this point it might be mentioned that, for ten Brink's hypothesis to be valid, it is necessary that the first hemistichs of the Alexandrines should have their own crossed rhyme in couplets, so that, when they are divided, the $\text{abab}_3$ scheme will be the result.

The second point of importance, again to be dealt with later, is that of the amount of alliteration present in \textit{Sir Tristrem}. Ten Brink does not mention its presence or absence in this romance, but the question is important with reference to the supposed relationship with the Alexandrine lines. Ten Brink appears to postulate that the bob-wheel form, in \textit{Sir Tristrem}, at least, derives ultimately from an alliterative Alexandrine line. Evidence against this hypothesis, which has been repeated by Kaluza, will be discussed when \textit{Sir Tristrem} is examined.

A point of lesser interest in ten Brink's commentary is his discussion of the verse experiments of William of Shoreham, notably his long and technically interesting poem

\textsuperscript{13}ten Brink, pp. 240-41.
De Septem Sacramentis. William has been so neglected by other historians that even ten Brink's uncomplimentary reference to his not always successful prosodic experiments is welcome: "It would be hard to point out another poet in whose work form and contents are so entirely at variance, as William de Shoreham."\(^{14}\) It will be evident when William's bob-wheel poem is examined that his choice of an essentially lyric form in which to present theological discussion results in an effect which approaches the ludicrous.

Jakob Schipper's Englische Metrik in historischer und systematischer Entwicklung dargestellt, a monument of painstaking German scholarship, appeared in three volumes between 1882 and 1889. Fortunately for the English reader, Schipper published in 1895 a one-volume condensation of this work, Grundriss der englischen Metrik, which he later translated and published as A History of English Versification (1910).\(^{15}\) Both of these works were difficult to obtain until recently, when the English version was reprinted. Like much of the work of the Germans in the area of English language and literature during the nineteenth century, Schipper's treatise is much more valuable for its commentary on the Old and Middle English periods than for what it says of the Renaissance and later periods. Schipper gives a full discussion of the various forms of the long and short lines which make up the bob-wheel forms, and he is particularly helpful in

\(^{14}\) ten Brink, p. 281.  
\(^{15}\) See n. 5, above.
discussing the alliterative element present in much of the 
bob-wheel verse. He follows ten Brink in deducing the 
Middle English three-stress line, as found in some of the 
bob-wheel poems (e.g., Sir Tristrem) from a broken 
Alexandrine.\textsuperscript{16} His inventory of the Middle English bob-wheel 
works is not complete, and his examples are drawn mainly 
from the political songs of the early fourteenth century. 
Despite these shortcomings, Schipper's work is still of 
interest to the student of Middle English prosody, owing 
partly to his careful presentation and analysis of a great 
number of examples of a variety of stanza forms.

The first of George Saintsbury's three volumes entitled 
\textit{A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the} 
\textit{Present Day}\textsuperscript{17} appeared in 1908 and bears all of the sometimes 
engaging and sometimes annoying characteristics of his highly 
individual style. Although Saintsbury's treatment of the 
bob-wheel stanza is not extensive, it is interesting for his 
conjecture that the \textit{Sir Tristrem} stanza may be the first 
regular stanza in English poetry. This question will be dis-
cussed in consideration of the poem itself. His answer to 
the question as to the origin of the bob-wheel style is not 
original, as will be seen, and has been echoed by others:

\begin{quote}
It comes from the elaborate stanza fashions of 
Northern and Southern France (it is not ours to 
attempt to settle whether the former were derived 
from the latter or not), and its object, conscious 
or unconscious, is twofold. The poet on the one
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16}Schipper, pp. 206-08. \textsuperscript{17}See n. 6, above.
hand desires to put himself under even stricter tutelage and supervision—to get farther from equivalence and syllabic variety than Nicholas of Guildford [in The Owl and the Nightingale] had done; and he desires—not quite according to knowledge perhaps—to get more of the new musical accompaniment of rhyme. The "bob," or short-line pivot, became extremely popular, especially in mixed metrical and alliterative verse.  

Saintsbury may be entirely correct on both points: Sir Tristrem may include the first regular stanza form in English and may be Continental in origin. However, he neglects the possibility of influence from Medieval Latin. No other critic hazards the surmise that the Sir Tristrem stanza may have been such a pioneering effort; as is the case with much of what Saintsbury adduces, his imaginative insight carries him farther than the more detailed but less imaginative studies of the German critics were able to go.

J. P. Oakden's two volumes on the alliterative poetry of the Middle English period have long been recognized as the most comprehensive study of Middle English alliterative verse in general, and his thorough inventory and commentary on the alliterative rhyming stanzas of the period is invaluable to the student of the bob-wheel poetry of the time. His view concerning the rise of the rhymed alliterative school, if such it can be called, is as follows:

To sum up the results of this chapter, we may say that in the north there arose a group of poets who had inherited the alliterative tradition, though it must be acknowledged that it

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18 Saintsbury, p. 95. 19 See n. 7, above.
reached them in a mangled form; these poets were conscious artists, copying French forms and effecting a marvellous compromise between the older and the newer schemes of verse.  

A critic’s emphases are unavoidably influenced by his predilections, and Oakden’s attraction to the alliterative school results in his neglect of the smaller body of non-alliterative bob-wheel poems of the Middle English period. It is also noteworthy that Oakden evidently did not accept the presence of an alliterative element in *Sir Tristrem*, which he entirely fails to mention. Had he followed Kölbing in classifying *Sir Tristrem* as an alliterative romance, even though the alliterative element is obviously ornamental and not structural (and even though it is not at all apparent on first look), his theory as to the development of the alliterative school might have been very different from what it is.

In *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature*, Janet M. Smith devotes a chapter to the stanza forms found in Scottish poetry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, identifying ballades, rondeaux, motets, and other French forms borrowed into Middle Scots, as well as the bob-wheel,

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20 Oakden, I, 228.


whose origins she finds in French songs and lyrics of the earlier Middle Ages. This scholar also neglects the possible influence of Latin verse on the bob-wheel stanza, nor does she find any exact counterparts of the English bob-wheel in the Old French stanza patterns. However, she makes no claim for direct borrowing of forms from Old French into Middle Scots, in spite of the often very close political and literary relationships between the two countries:

They [the bob-wheel stanzas] are quite common in French, and were very popular in Middle English. There they were associated with the alliterative tradition, and thence they were borrowed by Middle Scots. It is not likely that the Scottish poets looked for them in France.  

This summary of the major critical contributions to the theory of bob-wheel stanza development includes works which span a period of slightly under one hundred years, from Guest's general treatment to Oakden's highly specialized work, in 1935. From that point up to the present day there are no studies which deal with Middle English stanza construction in any detailed fashion. The interest in prosody, metrics, and stanza analysis which is evident in the works mentioned above apparently declined during the middle of the current century, and it is only very recently that studies in Middle English prosody have attracted renewed interest, largely through the work of the generative-transformationalist grammarians. An interesting study in this area, which should

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23 Smith, pp. 157-58.
be consulted by the student whose interest lies in the area of modern linguistics, is "Chaucer and the Study of Prosody," by Morris Halle and S. J. Keyser.\textsuperscript{24} The thrust of this and other work by the linguists, however, is in the direction of analysis of the individual line of Middle English poetry. Since the present study deals with larger units of poetic construction, it is not necessary to make further mention of this new approach other than to express the hope that it will make a material contribution to our knowledge of Middle English poetics, a subject which merits continued attack on any productive front.

The organization of the major part of this study is as follows: in the chapter which follows, the possible influences of various Romance poetic schools (including Old French, Anglo-Norman, Provençal, and Latin) on the development of the bob-wheel stanza will be investigated. Chapter III will present a view of a number of various genres of Middle English verse: secular and religious lyrics and carols of various types. Chapter IV deals with the period of experimentation which occurred during the first half of the fourteenth century, and Chapter V deals mainly with the work of two of the great poets of Middle English. The first, the Pearl Poet, worked superlatively well in the bob-wheel form, in \textit{Sir Gawain and the Green Knight}, while the other,}

Geoffrey Chaucer, poked immortal fun at some of the verse techniques of the inferior romances of the century. Chapter VI deals with the fifteenth century, in which the largest mass of bob-wheel verse was produced, and with the degeneration of the form in the early sixteenth century. The final chapter represents an attempt to consolidate the material previously presented and to view it as a whole, to draw some conclusions about the origins of the bob-wheel stanza form, and to suggest some reasons for its disappearance from English verse with the beginning of the Renaissance.
CHAPTER II

LATIN AND ROMANCE INFLUENCES

The poetry of Old English makes no use of stanzaic divisions. The alliterative verse proceeds, line upon line, sometimes broken by spaces in the manuscript, perhaps marking units "in the action or in the poet's thought," as in the poetry of the Old French writers.¹ The latter, however, making use of rhyme or assonance, were able to make a sharper distinction between the elements of the poem, by variation in these features. As previously remarked, there were no such means available in Old English to mark the beginning and end of divisions within the poem, except for the Rhyming Poem, the only example of the use of rhyme in Old English.

Therefore it seems evident that stanzaic division must have been an importation dating from sometime in the period in which English poetry came to be strongly influenced by the French, roughly from the year 1000. However, there is little evidence of stanzaic forms in Old French previous to the early years of the thirteenth century,² although

(1) undoubtedly much verse from early periods has been lost, or was never recorded in manuscript, and (2) stanzaic divisions, in both the earliest French and the earliest English poetry, appear in verse of a predominantly lyrical character: when lyrics appear, stanzas appear, and these stanzas depend for their existence on two poetic features—rhyming patterns and varying line length.

Without entering into the controversy between those who see in Provençal poetry the genesis of the medieval French lyric and those who would not assign so high a place to the lyricists of the Midi, it is yet possible to observe that the lyric development of Provence appears to have begun at an earlier date than that of Northern Europe. It is not necessary to review the short but glorious history of Provençal poetry, from its beginnings with the reign of William IX of Aquitaine (1071-1127) to its untimely death in the early years of the thirteenth century, when the crusade against the Albigensian heresy so disrupted the life of the feudal courts of the South that the courtly lyric tradition, no longer maintained by the generous support of its noble patrons, first turned in the direction of the religious lyric, and later, as the langue d'oc lost ground to the langue d'oil, passed into literary history.\(^3\)

\(^3\)Fernand Mossé, in his Handbook of Middle English (Baltimore, 1968), mentions the importance of the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henry II, in 1152, as marking "the beginning of the influence of the Provençal troubadours in England" (p. 200). Eleanor was the grand-daughter of William IX, mentioned above.
But the poetry of Provence, from its earliest years, is characterized by skillful use of rhyme (Provençal was a language to which rhyme came easily), and by a rich variety of stanza forms. The stanza of William IX which follows is simple enough in its construction, but it should be noted that the rhyme of lines four and six reappears in the same lines of each of the eight stanzas of the poem. The entire composition is an example of the form usually called a vers; according to F. Brittain, it is identical with the more familiar chansò, except for its name.\(^4\)

\begin{quote}
Farai un vers de dreyt nien:
non er de mi ni d'autra gen,
non er d'amor ni de joven,
i de ren au,
qu'enans fo trabatz en durmen
sobre chevau.\(^5\)
\end{quote}

The syllabic scansion yields three lines of octosyllabics, a four-syllable line, another line of octosyllabics, another line of octosyllabics, a four-syllable line, another line of octosyllabics, a four-syllable line.

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\(^4\) Fred Brittain, *The Medieval Latin and Romance Lyric to A.D. 1300*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1951), p. 14. "The strophic forms in all but one of Guillaume's songs have been traced (by Spanke, Chailley, and others) to religious sources and analogues" (p. 14).

\(^5\) Frederick Goldin, editor, *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères* (Garden City, New York, 1973), p. 24. ("I will make a vers of exactly nothing; there'll be nothing in it about me or anyone else, nothing about love or youth or anything else. It came to me before, while I was sleeping on my horse."—Golding's translation). According to Brittain (p. 14), the form of this poem coincides exactly in meter and rhyme with a conductus of St. Martial.

At this time, the conductus was a religious choral composition of no set form. The close relationship which Brittain sees, in these pages, between the Provençal secular stanza forms and those of the Church's poetic texts is of interest in view of my contention that the English bob-wheel form may owe much to the stanza forms of the liturgical poetry.
another short line; the short lines carry their rhyme through the succeeding stanzas. The scansion can be represented thus: \( aaa_8 b_4 a_8 b_4 \).

An echo of this arrangement will be heard as late as the nineteenth century, in the "Burns stanza" of

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wee, sleekit, cowrin', tim'rous beastie,} \\
\text{O, what a panic's in thy breastie!} \\
\text{Thou need na start awa sae hasty} \\
\text{Wi' bickering brattle!} \\
\text{I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,} \\
\text{Wi' murdering pattle!}
\end{align*}
\]

It should not be assumed that this model was derived directly from the reading of Provençal texts, since the pattern, adopted by the Scots of the late Middle English period, persisted in Scotland until the days of Burns.\(^6\)

Janet Smith maintains in her study of French influence on Scottish poetry that the rime-couée stanza, first used by William IX, "gave rise to the 'bob and wheel' strophes."\(^7\)

The examples which she cites are not convincing, and will be examined shortly, in the discussion of the Old French congeners of the bob-wheel stanza.

It is necessary to make clear the distinction which calls forth my exception to Miss Smith's otherwise excellent treatment of the French influence on Scottish verse. She is

\(^6\)W. F. Henley and T. F. Henderson, editors, The Centenary Burns (Edinburgh, 1896), I, 336-40, correctly point out that such stanzas as that quoted above are clearly derived from the rime couée, or tail-rhyme stanza, which had its influence on the development of the bob-wheel stanza.

\(^7\)Janet M. Smith, The French Background of Middle Scots Literature (Edinburgh, 1934), p. 157, n. 6.
perfectly correct in that *rime couée* is the progenitor of tail-rhyme: the Old French examples which she cites are made up of a *frons* of five lines of octosyllabics, followed by a *bob* of four syllables, and a *cauda* of a non-rhyming pair of octosyllabics. However, the definition I have adopted for the bob-wheel stanza requires that the bob be followed by a group of lines shorter in length than those of the *frons*, and that there be some kind of rhyming relationship among the lines of the *cauda*. It is the fact that, in the Provençal and Old French examples, the *cauda* lines lack the feature of being shorter than the lines of the *frons*, or that they lack the feature of a rhyming relationship, which makes the difference between these *rime couée* stanzas and those of the Middle English bob-wheel stanzas. And, as I hope will become clear, this particular feature of the bob-wheel stanza is not found in the Continental poetry of the Middle Ages.

To touch again upon the vexatious question of the relations between Provençal and Old French, I believe that not even the most dedicated enthusiast of Provençal will deny the reality of a close inter-relationship between the lyric development of the two cultures. Granted this much, it is now possible to consider some examples from Old French in which the connections with Provençal forms will be readily apparent. The following stanza from an anonymous *chanson de toile*, a type of song sung by women busy at such tasks as
spinning or weaving, shows the use of a concluding refrain or burden:

Quant vient en mai, que l'on dit as lons jours,
Que Franc de France repairent de roi cort,
Raynauz repaire devant el premier front,
Si s'en passa lez le mès Erembor,
Ainz n'en deigna le chief drecier amont
E! Raynauz amis!  

In the remaining stanzas, the fair Erembor swears that she has not broken faith with the handsome Count during his absence, and the two sit down together "en un lit point a flors," where "lors recommencent lor premières amors."

This lyric is characterized by the use of assonance, the agreement of final vowels, rather than by rhyme (note the repetition of the vowel o), and by the presence of the refrain "E! Raynauz amis!" which concludes each of the six stanzas. The first five lines of each stanza are decasyllabic, and the refrain contains half as many syllables. The resemblance to the carol, with its unvarying refrain, is obvious. However, more was to be made of the refrain, both in French and in English.

It was possible, for example, to retain the bob-line refrain while moving its position and varying its text. This signal advance is seen in the following, the first of four stanzas of a typical chanson of the fifteenth century:

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8 Woledge, p. 83. ("When the time is come in May, which we call the month of long days, that the Franks of France come back from the king's court, Raynauz rides back first, in the forefront, and he has passed by the house of Erembor, but never deigned to lift up his head. Ah! Raynauz, my love!"—Woledge's translation).
Dempuis que j'adray bon temps,
J'en ay le cueur tout admorty;
J'ay esté en langueur longtemps
Depuys que malheur m'abatay:
Prendre me fault autrre party
Pour mieulx avoïr,
Ou autrrement je suis banny
Pour toute douleur recepvoir.

Another similar chanson is begun by the following stanza, the first of five in which a lover laments the excessive jealousy of her watchful husband.

Mauditz soyent ces mariz jaleux
Qui sur leur femmes font le guet!
Ilz font aux pouvres amoureux
Souvent endurer chault et froit.
Car jalouzie et le quaquet
Des envyeulx
Ont maint appointement defait;
Mais ilz n'en scauroyent valoir myeulx. 9

A more sophisticated use of the bob line occurs in the following, the first of eight stanzas celebrating the adoration of the servente for his lady. The manuscript has a musical setting for the poem. The stanza has a double bob, the first line of which contains four syllables and the second, six; the first rhyme is abandoned with the first bob

9Gaston Paris, editor, Chansons du XVme Siècle (Paris, 1875), pp. 15-17. ("Since that time when I lost my love, my heart has been all amort; long have I endured sorrow, since the time when misfortune struck me down: I should take another love, to better my lot; else I am an exile, bearer of every sorrow."--My translation). This and the following example are two of those cited by Miss Smith as giving rise to the Middle English bob-wheel stanza. As is evident, the form does not fit the definition given previously, as it lacks the feature of shorter lines in the cauda.

10Paris, pp. 17-18. ("Cursed be these jealous husbands who keep watch over their wives. So often they make poor lovers endure heat and cold. For jealousy and the gossip of the envious have ruined many a rendez-vous, whose worth they cannot possibly imagine."--My translation).
line, and the second carries the second rhyme on to the conclusion.

Ma chère dame que je desire tant,
Souffrez que soye vostre loyal amant:
Tout mon vivant
Autre ne serviray;
Je suis a vous et toujours je seray.11

Rather obviously, such a chanson as the following must have been accompanied by dancing. The single or double bob line has now become a four-line group, followed by a concluding longer line, and this five-line group is repeated at the end of each stanza.

Resjouissons nous, tous loyaulx amoureux,
Chantons ensemble tout d'un vouloir joyeulx
A la venue de ce doulx temps d'esté;
Esperons donc ung chacun d'avoir mieulx,
Et ne soyons plus melencolieux
Puisque nous suymes mis hors d'aversité:
   Reculés vous,
   Soucy, de nous;
   Arrière! arrière!
   Faisons grant chère
Sans estre recuillyé de vous.12

It is important that in this example appears one of the distinctive features of the bob-wheel stanza: the cauda,

11Paris, pp. 47-8. ("My dearest lady, whom I desire so greatly, let me be your loyal lover: All my life I shall serve none other; yours I am and yours I shall remain."—My translation).

12Paris, pp. 47-8. ("Now let us be joyful, all loyal lovers; let us sing together with a joyful will at the coming of this sweet summertime; let us hope for better things for each of us, and let us be no more melancholy, since we are now out of adversity: worry, back away from us; get behind us! get behind us! Let us rejoice without your presence [that of worry] among us!"—My translation of the first six lines; I am indebted to Prof. Arthur J. Gionet, of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures of North Texas State University, for the English version of the remainder).
although it consists of only one line, contains fewer syllables than does the frons.

These three examples all have musical settings in the manuscript. These songs can be seen as secular carols, dance songs which were to become so popular in England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as to call forth such cautionary tales as Robert Mannyng of Brunne's tale of the Dancers of Colbek.

Two more dance songs, accompanied with music, show an anisometrical pattern. The first, a chanson dramatique, has often been reprinted:

Por coi me bait mes maris?
   Laisette!
Je ne li ai rienz mesfait
Ne rienz ne li ai mesdit.
Forst c'acoller mon amin,
   Soulette.
Por coi me bait mes maris?
   Laisette!13

The last two lines of the above are a refrain, found at the end of each stanza.

The second, a Provençal lyric by Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, is an estampida (cf. Fr. estampie), known to be a dance form, although the nature of the dance is unknown.

13 Pierre Aubry, Trouvères and Troubadours: A Popular Treatise, translated by Claude Aveling (New York, 1969), pp. 34-5. ("Why does my husband beat me, the worn-out wretch; I've done nothing against him, or said bad things about him ever! I only put my arms around my lover, and that was in private. Why does my husband beat me, the worn-out wretch?"--Translation by F. Golding, p. 410). Aubry prints the musical setting found in the manuscript.
Kalenda maya
Ni fuelhs de faya
Ni chanz d'auzelh ni flors de giaya
Non es quem playa.
Pros domna guaya.
Tro qu'en ysnelh, messatgier aya
Del vostre bel cors quem retraya.
E jaya
Em traya
Vas vos, domna veraya;
E chaya
De playa
L'gelos, ans quem n'estraya. 14

In favor of the thesis that "Resjouissons nous," above, belongs to the carol genre, there is the plural number ("Now let us be joyful,"), the theme of rejoicing at the advent of summer, and musical setting of a refrain continued throughout. These peculiarities powerfully suggest some kind of antiphonal performance, perhaps men and women alternating, or one line of dancers advancing while a second line retreats.

It is possible to see such lyrics as these as the progenitors of the Middle English bob-wheel stanza, especially if the elements of music and dance are kept in mind. Such secular carols as these, bound up in music and dance, may well have played their part in the formation of the bob-wheel stanza.

14 Aubry, pp. 43-5. ("Neither the first of May, nor the first leaf on the beech, nor the song of the birds, nor the gladiolus in flower, can rejoice my heart, noble and beautiful lady, until I can see a swift messenger arrive, bringing words of comfort from you to this love of mine, until I can throw myself at your feet, and until I can see, before I leave you, my jealous rival struck down by the lightnings of your wrath."—Alfred Jeanroy's translation into Modern French; English translation by Claude Aveling).
The closest linguistic influence from the Continent during the Middle English period was the imported language of the Conqueror and his followers, which has, more for geographic than linguistic reasons, been dubbed Anglo-Norman.\(^{15}\) It is unnecessary to dwell on the tremendous effect which the collision of Old English and Norman French produced on the language itself, but in the literary area, the effects were not always so marked: for example, the Normans had only a very slight influence on the English lyric tradition. Gaston Paris attributes this to the Norman character, hard-headed and rationalistic, caring little or nothing for lyric effusion:

C'est qu'en effet l'esprit normand n'a rien de langoureux, pas plus qu'il n'a rien de chimérique, rien de mystique ou de romanesque. Ce qui le caractérise avant tout, c'est l'ordre, la clarté, la raison aiguisée d'esprit, avec un certain réalisme et positivisme.\(^{16}\)

This verdict on such Anglo-Norman poetry as has survived is echoed by Vising: "... lyric poetry, other than religious, hardly exists in Anglo-Norman literature. It must be

\(^{15}\)Anglo-Norman was of course only one of several dialects of Old French. Purely for the sake of making a convenient distinction, however, I use "Anglo-Norman" to mean that Old French dialect spoken and written in the British Isles after the Conquest; under "Old French" I include the remaining Continental dialects.

A good summary of the process by which Norman French became the official language of England, together with an outline of the linguistic features which differentiate it from other Old French dialects, is found in Johan Vising, Anglo-Norman Language and Literature (London, 1923), pp. 8-33.

\(^{16}\)Gaston Paris, in La Littérature normande avant l'annexion, quoted by Vising, p. 36.
acknowledged that the scanty poems on love and other lyrical subjects . . . are very poor as literary productions."\textsuperscript{17}

The modern reader may find that the most interesting area of Anglo-Norman literature is the metrical romance, of which almost a dozen examples have survived. Nothing in them points to any kind of prosodic experimentation or innovation, however; all are written in the familiar Old French Alexandrines, or octosyllabics. It is a point of interest that one of them, Tristran, is almost certainly a source of the later North Midlands \textit{Sir Tristrem}, one of the two Middle English romances in bob-wheel stanzas. But the Anglo-Norman \textit{Tristan} furnished the English writer with story material only; the form of the English poem owes nothing to the octosyllabics of its French relative.

A far from complete search of the printed Anglo-Norman texts has revealed a few examples of stanza form which are of interest to this study. The following is a fragment of twenty-five six-line stanzas, of which the first is representative:

\begin{verbatim}
Mult est li diables curteis:  
Les plus riches suprent angois  
De ces que Deus parti en trois  
Pur tenir la terre et les lais 
    En leauté,  
Pur alever partut sainte Cristienté\textsuperscript{18}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{17}Vising, pp. 37-8.

\textsuperscript{18}Printed by Paul Meyer, "Mélanges de poésie anglo-normande," \textit{Romania}, IV (1875), 388-91. Meyer dates this from the first half of the thirteenth century. ("There are many courtly devils; often the richest gain supremacy over
Scanned syllabically, the stanza pattern of this fragment is "aaaa₈ b₄ b₁₀". It would be treading on dangerous ground to view this syllabically scanned stanza from the point of view of the Middle English pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, but if one does so, the result is to make the fifth line into a two-stress bob. Although the subject matter is different, it is possible to hear in the repetitive rhyme of the bob line faint echoes of the secular dance songs such as the "Resjouissons nous" quoted above.

The song which Thomas Wright entitled "The Song of the Church" dates from 1256, and was evidently written by a cleric who was indignant at the taxes which Henry III had levied on the clergy:

Or est acumpli a mën acient
La pleinte Jeremie, ke oï avez suvent;
ke dit cument set sule
cité pleine de fule
Plurant amerement,
ore est sansz mariag
e mis en taille,
La dame de la gent.
Cest est seint eglise trestut apertement,
Ke est ja hunie e tut mis a vent
E si est maumise, nus veum cument.
Ele gent e plure,
n'a ad nul ke sucure
De sun marement.¹⁹

those whom God has divided into three estates, to hold the earth and the laws, in true faith, to lift up the Christian faith everywhere."--My translation). Meyer, in a note, explains the reference to the three estates: the clergy, nobility, and peasantry.

¹⁹ Thomas Wright, editor, Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to that of Edward II (London, 1839), pp. 42-6. ("Now is accomplished, as I perceive, the plaint of Jeremiah which you have often heard, who tells how this
These examples of Old French, Provençal, and Anglo-Norman secular lyrics are characterized by stanzaic division, the presence of rhyme, and a regularly recurring succession of bob lines. All of these elements are, of course, present in the Middle English bob-wheel stanzas, and none are found in the Old English poetry of pre-Conquest days. While it is certainly justifiable to assume that these Romance stanza forms played a part in the creation of the bob-wheel form, it should also be borne in mind that none precisely resembles the bob-wheel form found in early or late Middle English.

Middle English poets, however, were in contact with yet another linguistic source which may well have had a part in the creation of the bob-wheel stanza. The language of religion, and of much of the cultural life of Europe, was Latin, and a large amount of material, both secular and religious, survives in that language. The religious verse, larger in quantity than the secular, will be discussed first.

The everyday life of medieval man was so bound up with the liturgical cycle of the Church that it is not possible to consider the poetics of the Middle Ages without taking into account that immensely rich repository of verse which makes up a significant part of the Church's public devotions:

solitary city full of people, bewailing bitterly, is now without marriage, and put in contribution is the lady of the people. That is holy church very evidently, who is now disgraced and all put to sale; and truly is she in ill case, we see how. She laments and weeps; there is none who helps her out of her desolation."—Wright's translation).
the hymns which form an early period made a part of the daily offices of the monastic houses, and the rhymed sequences which gradually made themselves a part of the central service of Sundays and holy days, the high mass.

Long before the period with which this study deals, the tradition of Latin quantitative verse had been abandoned; an exotic import during the period of Greek influence on Latin poetics (c. 240 B.C.), the quantitative metric had supplanted the native accentual, or Saturnian meter, holding sway throughout the Golden and Silver Ages. Commodian, the first poet of the Church, probably lived and wrote during the middle of the third century A.D., and in his work can be seen the decay of the quantitative system and the re-establishment of the older accentual verse.20

By the time of Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530-609), the typical rhythm of the Medieval hymn had established itself as catalectic trochaic tetrameter, at first without rhyme:

Pange, lingua, gloriosi proelium certaminis,  
Et super crucis tropaeo die triumphum nobilem  
Qualiter redemptor orbis immolatus vincerit.21

The *Pange Lingua*, one of the earliest of the distinctly quantitatively metrical hymns of the Church, held its place in the Good Friday liturgy until recent years.

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20 F. Brittain, pp. 2-9, passim.

21 Mathew Britt, *The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal* (New York, 1936), p. 126. ("Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle, sing the ending of the fray; Now above the cross, the trophy, sound the loud triumphant lay; tell how Christ, the world's redeemer, as a victim won the day."--Percy Dearmer's translation).
By the seventh century, the element of rhyme had produced such hymns as the well-known Creator Alme Siderum, an Advent hymn in monorhyme (all lines of each stanza rhyming on a single sound), with the metrical and stanzaic arrangement known as Ambrosian: "... the rhythmic syllabic character of the poetry of Ambrose marks in reality the beginnings of Romance versification, not because it was not known before him, but because of his constant adherence to the system."\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{verbatim}
Creator alme siderum,
Aeterna lux credentium,
Jesu redemptor omnium,
Intende votis supplicum.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{verbatim}

Of interest as an adaptation of a Church form to a non-liturgical use is the following Ut Quid, Jubes, written in exile by the German monk Gottschalk (c. 805-869), in response to a young monk who had asked him to write a song:

\begin{verbatim}
Ut quid jubes, pusiole,
Quare mandas, filiole,
Carmen dulce me cantare,
Cum sim longe exsul valde
Intra mare?
O cur jubes canere?\textsuperscript{24}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{22}Brittain, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{23}Britt, p. 95. ("Creator of the stars of night, thy people's everlasting light, O Christ thou saviour of us all, we pray thee, hear us when we call."--John Mason Neale's translation).

\textsuperscript{24}Brittain, p. 83. ("What is it you ask, my boy? what is it that you demand of me, my son? That I should sing a sweet song, who have been so long exiled across the seas? O why do you ask me to sing?"--My translation).
Of the ten stanzas of the poem, the first six end in the same line, and the monorhyme in e is maintained throughout. The bobbed fifth line, with its two stresses, is in contrast with the regular tetrameter of the remaining lines.

The hymn-writers of the Middle Ages, knowing little of the rules of quantitative verse which had governed the poets of the Golden Age, and strongly influenced by the "poetry of the common people"—rhythmic or accentual—attempted a compromise between the quantitative principle, as they understood it, and the rhythmic. The hymns of Saint Ambrose correspond fairly closely with the quantitative rules of Horace, but as the centuries passed, accentual verse gradually but surely replaced the quantitative style. It was still possible for the churchmen of the Middle Ages to draw up schemes of scansion based on the Greek meters, but in actuality they scanned their meters on accentual principles. There were developed eight "scales," or metrical measures, into which all of the medieval Latin hymnody can be classified. Of most interest in the development of Middle English stanza form is the so-called "Sapphic strophe," well illustrated by the hymn for the feast of St. John the Baptist:
Ut queant laxis resonare fibris
Mira gestorum famuli tuorum,
Solve polluti labii reatum,
Sancte Joannes.  

In the Sapphic strophe there are two of the ingredients of the bob-wheel stanza: the presence of accentual rhythm and of a final line which is shorter than the three preceding ones (the first three lines each contain eleven syllables, and the fourth, five). Fr. Britt gives eight medieval examples of hymns in the Sapphic strophe.

About the year 1140 Bernard of Morlaix composed his famous poem of more than three thousand lines, the De Contemptu Mundi, well known in part through John Mason Neale’s translations. Bernard made abundant use of rhyme, and the shortened last line of "Ut queant laxis" now appears as the

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25 Britt, p. 113. ("That thy servants may be able to sing thy deeds of wonder with pleasant voices, remove, O holy John, the guilt of our sin-polluted lips."—Britt’s translation).

This hymn is attributed to Paul the Deacon (720-799), and is best known for the fact that the Benedictine Guido d’Arezzo (995-1050), noting that each half-line of the text begins on a note a tone higher than the preceding, used the initial syllables of the half-lines in his system of teaching sight-singing. The initial syllables of the first six half-lines—ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la—are the ancestors of the modern system of teaching singing by solfège.

The singing lesson which Hortensio gives to Bianca in The Taming of the Shrew, III, 1, clearly shows that the old Guidonian method was well understood in Shakespeare’s England. A modernized version of the ancient system, largely the work of the Englishman John Curwen (1816-1880), is still widely used in England and America for teaching sight-singing. A variant system, no longer in use, is found in the first edition of the Bay Psalm Book to contain music (1700), and in the "Sacred Harp" singing collections and other "shaped-note" hymnals widely used in the Southern Mountain states throughout the nineteenth century.

26 Britt, passim.
second of the four lines of each stanza as well. The
dactylic hexameters may give the impression of doggerel to
the modern reader, but the poem held its popularity through-
out the Middle Ages.

Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt;
   Vigilemus!
Ecce minaciter imminet arbiter,
   Ille supremus.

Imminet, imminet, ut mala terminet,
   Aequa coronet,
Recta remuneret, anxia liberet,
   Aethera donet.27

In view of ten Brink's conjecture that the three-stress
English line may have developed from the dividing of a
twelve- or thirteen-syllable line at the caesura, the fore-
going stanzas are repeated below, so arranged:

Hora novissima,
   Tempora pessima sunt;
   Vigilemus!
Ecce minaciter
   Imminet arbiter,
   Ille supremus.

The leonine rhyme, thus more visible, lends some weight
to ten Brink's theory, in the similarity of the stanza to
the tail-rhyme form which was to become popular both in
France and England, and in lyric verse as well as in a large
group of romances.

27 Britt, p. 351. ("The world is very evil; the times are
growing late; be sober and keep vigil; the judge is at
the gate. The judge that comes in mercy, the judge that
comes with might, to terminate the evil, to diadem the
right."—Neale's translation).
Although the major portion of the medieval Latin verse which has survived is found in the liturgy of the Church, it would be erroneous to suppose that versifiers in Latin had no other outlet for the poetic urge. There also survives a corpus of Latin lyrics, evidently composed simply for the pleasure of creating poetry, and dealing with both religious and secular themes. One manuscript collection in particular, containing poems of both types, "was found in the Hof-Bibliothek at Munich in the beginning of the last [i.e., the nineteenth] century; it had come there with other flotsam after the dissolution of the monastery at Benedictbeuern in Upper Bavaria."28 The Latin title given to the first (1847) edition of this collection to be printed has served since then to identify it as the Carmina Burana, product of the vagantes, or wandering clerks of the Middle Ages, whom Helen Waddell has studied in The Wandering Scholars.29 Although contemporary interest has been directed to the secular verse in the collection, the manuscript also includes an interesting group of poems on religious themes.

From the point of view of stanza form, this collection shows a considerably greater degree of freedom than is present in the Church hymnaries. The example which follows in part is an exorcism of demons, which shows amazing freedom

in its composition. Length of line varies from fifteen down to two syllables; rhyme proceeds mainly in couplets and quatrains, although there are snatches of tail-rhyme here and there; and it is impossible to divide the verse into any kind of repetitive stanza form, as none of the five stanzas bears any particularly close resemblance to any of the others. But at the same time, the arrangement appears to be by no means a haphazard one.

Omnis creatura phantasmatum
que corroboratis principatum
serpentis tortuosi,
venenosi,
qui traxit per superbiam
stellarum partem tertiam
Gordan,
Ingordin et Ingordan,
per sigillum Salomonis,
et per magos Pharaohis,
omnes vos coniuro,
omnes exorcizo,
per tres magos Caspar,
Melchior et Balthasar,
per regem David,
qui Saul sedavit,
cum iubilavit, 30
vosque fugavit.

The Benedictbeuern Manuscript has been ascribed to the close of the thirteenth century, and study of its contents reveals clearly that by that time popular Latin verse had

30 Waddell, Medieval Latin Lyrics, p. 210. ("Every phantom creature, ye who hold the principality of that twisted venomed snake who drew with him in his proud wake one third part of heaven's stars, Gordan, Ingordin, and Ingordan; by the seal of Solomone, by king Pharaoh's wise enchanters, by the names of the Wise Men, Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar; by David who gave peace to Saul, and harping banished forth you all . . ."--Waddell's translation).
become completely quantitative in accent, relied steadily on rhyme, and was regularly stanzaic in form, making abundant, but not universal use of a variety of line length, including lines so short as to be thought of as bob lines. In fact, all of the materials of the Middle English bob-wheel stanza are here present in the Latin verse of the period. In spite of the common ascription of the bob-wheel stanza's birth to French and other Romance forms, it is possible, with a great deal of plausibility, to maintain that the influence of the Latin poetry of the period may have been an equally powerful influence.

It will appear in a future section of this study that some of the earliest bob-wheel verse in Middle English was political and satirical in nature. Thus it is interesting to find such poems extant in England in the middle of the thirteenth century, but written in Latin. The following extract is from "A Song Against the Bishops," dated by Thomas Wright from about the year 1250:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Licet aeger cum aegrotis,} \\
\text{Et ignotus cum ignotis,} \\
\text{Fungar tamen vice totis,} \\
\text{Jus usurpans sacerdotis:} \\
\text{flete, Syon filiae,} \\
\text{praesides ecclesiae} \\
\text{imitantur hodie} \\
\text{Christum a remotis.}
\end{align*}
\]

31 Wright, pp. 44-6. ("Although sick with those who are sick, and unknown with those who are unknown, yet I will assume all characters in turn, usurping the right of the priest; weep, ye daughters of Sion, the bishops of the church at the present day are but remote imitators of Christ!"—Wright's translation).
The use of rhyme, and the anisometric stanza form, are characteristics of the later bob-wheel verse, whose origins, I believe, lie in the Latin and Romance stanzas of the types presented above.

In this chapter I have attempted to show examples of the kind of poetry, in other languages, from which the Middle English bob-wheel stanzas probably evolved. Examples from Old French, Provençal, and Anglo-Norman have provided abundant evidence that the materials for the English bob-wheel form were at hand in England by the middle of the thirteenth century. However, I have also attempted to show that much of the same material, if not all, was also available in the form of the contemporary Latin secular and religious poetry.

It is not necessary, however, to make a definite choice as to the likely origin of the English bob-wheel verses. Almost certainly both influences were at work, and it is not possible to gauge the relative importance of each. In the next chapter will be examined a miscellaneous collection of carols, lyrics, and other short poems in Middle English, which show some of the native materials that were at hand and in use during the period.
CHAPTER III

MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRICS AND CAROLS

The medieval texts in languages other than English (Old French, Provençal, Anglo-Norman, and Latin) include a number of stanza forms which are similar in nature to the bob-wheel stanza, but none which are identical. Thus it is not possible to point to any particular poem in another language as the possible source for the English form, although it is obvious that the considerable amount of experimentation in stanza form which characterized the lyric poetry of the Romance and Latin writers is also found in Middle English as well.

Much of the matter to be considered in this chapter cannot be precisely dated; in no area of Middle English literature are problems of dating more difficult than in that of the shorter lyrics. Moreover, attempts to classify the material according to dialectal, and therefore geographic, area, are likewise difficult. These problems are less evident in dealing with longer works, and with those of a political or topical nature. Hence the material in this chapter is not necessarily presented in chronological order, as that in the succeeding chapters will be. The purpose of presenting the poems in this manner is to show some general
trends and tendencies rather than to give a specific chronology.

An important question to be settled is the definition of the type of lyric to which the descriptive carol is applied. Writers on the subject are divided on many aspects of the question, but three broad characteristics of the carol are generally accepted: in the early stages of its development the carol was associated in some manner with the dance; the structure of the poem includes an unvarying refrain, or burden, occurring before the first stanza, interpolated between each succeeding stanza, and found again at the close of the song; and, generally, the carol commemorates some religious occasion in the calendar of the Church year, although a small number of these lyrics are almost or wholly secular in tone, generally celebrating the coming of spring.

The difficulty of defining the genre is reflected in the work of Richard L. Greene, who devotes ten pages to a review of a number of uses of the word, finally concluding with an entirely formal definition: "a song on any subject, composed of uniform stanzas and provided with a burden."\(^1\) This burden he has previously defined as a "chorus, to be sung (or considered as sung by a reader) before the first stanza and repeated after that and all succeeding stanzas."\(^2\)


\(^2\)Greene, p. xxii.
Within these limits may be included a wide variety of song forms, stanzaic in nature, not necessarily peculiar to any single season of the year, and not necessarily devotional in tone.

Greene views the English carol of the Middle Ages as essentially an indigenous form, owing little to Continental influences; the French noël, for example, he believes to date from the latter part of the fifteenth century. A much more important influence, he finds, is that of the Latin hymns, phrases and lines which form a part of the large number of macaronic carols. These Latin tags are very often drawn from the liturgical proses, or sequences, poetic elaborations of the last note or two of the alleluia which was the last word of the Gradual, the anthem sung between the chanting of the Epistle and Gospel of the high mass. The melismatic (i.e., many notes sung to one syllable) character of the melodies of these Graduals, and especially the elaborate melodic patterns which were fitted to the final alleluia, led eventually to the addition of Latin words and phrases to them, to replace or to be added to the syllables of the alleluia. Eventually, the custom of adding such extraneous material as these alleluia verse endings, and of making them longer and longer and more and more elaborate, led to the suppression of almost all of the proses, or sequences, by the Council of Trent (1545). But by this time, their influence on non-liturgical song had long been established.
It is not the Latin content of the carols, however it found its way into these lyrics, that is the chief concern at this point, however, but the presence of the burden, the unvarying chorus sung before the first verse and after each succeeding verse. Although the bob-wheel stanza is not characterized by an unvarying refrain, the resemblance of the short bob and the succeeding wheel, often shorter than the lines of the frons of the poem, is such as to warrant an inference that the structure of the carol may well have been an influence in the formation of the typical bob-wheel stanza. The following macaronic carol from the late fifteenth century is a good example of the form:

Now syng we right as it is, (Burden)
Quod puer natus est nobis.

This babe to vs now is born, (Stanza 1)
Wonderfull werkes he hath wrowght:
He wolde not lesse that was forlorn,
But agayn he hath vs bowght.
   And thus it is,
   Forsoth, ywys,
   He asketh nothyng but that is his.3

Disregarding the burden, it is important to note that the last three lines of the foregoing are identical through all of the four stanzas of the lyric. This may in fact be regarded as a type of bob-wheel, even without the typical very short bob line. A more striking resemblance to the typical bob-wheel form is seen in this second example from the fifteenth century:

Blyssid be that lady bryght
That bare a chyld off great might,
Withouten peyne, as it was right,
Mayd mother Marye.

Goddys sone is borne;
His moder is a maid,
Both after and beforne,
As the prophycy said,
With ay!
A wonder thyng it is to se,
How mayden and moder on may be;
Was there neuer nonne but she,
Maid moder Marye. 

In the five stanzas of this carol, the fifth line,
"With ay!" is repeated in each, the succeeding three lines rhyme, and the last line ends in the word "Marye."

Another fifteenth-century example is the following, which has often been anthologized, in view of its remarkable dramatic qualities. Although usually considered a religious lyric, it is, structurally, a member of the group of carols. There are four stanzas, dealing with the events of the Passion and the emotional state of the Virgin Mary on the death of Christ.

Sodenly afraide,
Half wakyng, half slepyng,
And gretly dismayde,
A wooman sate weepyng.

With fauoure in hir face ferr passying my reason,
And of hir sore weepyng this was the enchesone:
Hir Soon in hir lap lay, she seid, slayne by treason.
Yif wepyng myght ripe bee, it seemyd than in season.

4 Greene, p. 29. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. poet. e.l.
"Jhesu!" so she sobbid;
So hir Soon was bobbid,
And of his lif robbid,
Saying thies wordes, as I say thee:
"Who cannot wepe, come lerne at me."

The words sobbid, bobbid, robbid occur in the fourth
through the seventh lines of each stanza; the final line of
all but the last is the same, but the last has the highly
dramatic variant, in the last two lines:

"Who cannot wepe," this was the laye,
"And with that word she vanysht away."

Here we are very close indeed to the typical bob-wheel
stanza, since the lyricist has varied the last five lines of
the stanza, while preserving not only the final sounds of
each line but also the stanzaic structure.

Another example of the carol is an interesting para-
phrase of the Vexilla Regis, the Good Friday liturgical hymn
sung during the procession bearing the Blessed Sacrament
from the Altar of Repose, where it has remained overnight,
to the high altar of the church, to be consumed by the
celebrant during the "mass of the presanctified," the abbre-
viated eucharistic rite used on the one day in the year when
communion bread may not be consecrated.6

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5 Greene, p. 121. John Rylands Library, Manchester, MS 18932.

6 Greene, pp. 189-90. Nothing attests more strongly to
the centrality of this beautiful hymn in the ancient Good
Friday liturgy than Dante's parody of it in the first line
of the last (34th) canto of the Inferno: "Vexilla regis
prodeunt inferni." ("The banners of the king of hell go
forth."
The English carol, a print from the year 1550, makes use of the first line of the Latin hymn in the burden, thus:

Now syng we, as we were wont: (Burden)
"Uexilla Regis prodeunt."

The eleven stanzas of the carol do not follow the sense of the Latin hymn; rather, they are in the form of an address by Christ to the faithful, beginning

The kinges baner on felde is playd;
The crosses mistry can not be nayd,
To whom our Sauyour was betrayd,
   And for our sake,
Thus sayyth he:
"I sufre for the;
   My deth I take."\(^7\)

The address of Christ continues until the last stanza, which is in the form of a prayer for God's grace.

Each of these stanzas is made up of a three-line frons, followed by a four-line cauda. There is no connection of rhyme between the two elements, nor is there in any of the carols in Greene's collection.

Of the 474 carols printed by Greene, the foregoing are the only ones which contain any elements of the bob-wheel form. All date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It thus appears that there was no early influence of the carol on the development of the bob-wheel form; on the contrary, it might equally well be said that the bob-wheel stanza had some influence on the development of the carol stanzas.

\(^7\) Greene, p. 189.
In his discussion of the possible origins of the carol, Greene neglects, to a degree, the association of these lyrics with dancing, certainly in their Continental form. Chambers' chapter on "The Carol and Fifteenth-Century Lyric" gives a more adequate discussion of the dance element, particularly the sometimes unrestrained popular revelry which came to be a part of these dance-songs and led eventually to their condemnation by certain of the Church fathers. Chambers gives a very practical and plausible explanation of the utility of the repeated burden, as a signal to the dancers to change the step or the figure in some manner, like the function of the "caller" in a modern square-dance.

To summarize: although no direct relationship between the carols and the bob-wheel stanza can be demonstrated, it is possible to consider the stanzas of the two genres as closely related. The uneven line length of some, if not all, of the carols is a regular feature of the bob-wheel form, and the repeated burden, usually shorter than the remaining lines of the stanza, can be seen as a kind of unvarying bob-line. But it does not seem possible to ascribe the origin of the bob-wheel stanza solely to the influence of the carol; rather the latter, like the similar uneven-line stanzas of Provençal, Old French, and Latin, is best considered to be

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but one of several contributing influences whose individual contribution cannot be precisely assessed.

The religious lyric, very often so closely allied to the carol, in theme and structure, can sometimes be differentiated from it only with difficulty. The published collections of Middle English lyrics include many examples containing lines of equal length, but these present no problem in the attempt to identify close relatives of the true bob-wheel stanza. The great difficulty is in dealing with the anisometric stanzas: when one of these contains a burden, it becomes, on Greene's criterion, a carol. However, the following lyric lacks the burden element and is definitely anisometric in construction. This "Springtide Song of the Redemption," as Brown has entitled it, affords a good example of the difficulties encountered in determining the true nature of the stanza structure of some of these lyrics. The first stanza, as printed by Peter Dronke, appears as follows:

Somer is comen and winter gon,
This day biginniz to longe,
ond this foules euerichon
ioye hem wit songe.
So stronge
kare me bint,
al with ioye that me fint
in londe
al for a child
that is so milde
of honde.

Carleton Brown, English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century (Oxford, 1932), pp. 108-11. The poem is in form a reverdie, a lyric celebrating the return of spring.
The text as printed by Brown combines lines 5 and 6, as they appear in the manuscript. Dronke, however, identifying the rhyme songe/stronge, divides the two, producing a stanza of eleven lines rather than ten. Each stanza of the poem thus begins with a Common Meter quatrain with crossed rhyme, followed by (1) a single-stress bob line, (2) a two-stress, and then (3) a three-stress line, rhyming; then (4) a single-stress bob, (5) a dimeter rhyming couplet, and (6) a final single-stress bob. This elaborate scheme can be abbreviated thus: \( a_4 b_3 a_4 b_3 b_1 c_2 c_2 d_1 e_2 d_1 \). This poem dates from c. 1250 and is written in the Southern dialect.\(^{10}\)

As Brown points out, this poem is similar to a couple of macaronic lyrics of the same century, both of six stanzas. The first:

Of on that is so fayr and bri\(\_t\)
velud maris stella,
Bri\(\_t\)er than the day-is li\(\_t\),
parens et puella,
Ic crie to the, thou se to me,
Leuedy, preye thi sone for me
tam pia,
That ic mote come to the,
maria.\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\)Brown, p. 108. For Dronke's rearrangement, see Peter Dronke, "Two Thirteenth-Century Religious Lyrics," Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honor of Rossell Hope Robbins, edited by Beryl Rowland (London, 1974), pp. 392-406. Here and elsewhere I have replaced Middle English "thorn" (\(p\)) with \(th\), in the interest of a simpler typography, since the alteration does no damage to the sense of the passages quoted. Br. Mus. MS Egerton 613; Southern dialect [see John E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English (New Haven, Conn., 1926), p. 527.]

\(^{11}\)Brown, pp. 24-5. See Wells, p. 532.
This stanza rhymes $a_4 b_3 a_4 b_3 c c_4 b_1 c_3 b_1$, and the doublebob feature resembles that in the foregoing, although the bob lines are separated by only one line of three stresses, instead of a couplet of two. This lyric is also c. 1250 and also in Southern dialect. The indebtedness of the Latin tags to the *Ave maris stella* is quite plain.

The other macaronic mentioned by Brown is extremely similar to the above, except for the two-stress couplet preceding the final Latin tag, giving a rhyme scheme of $a_4 b_3 a_4 b_3 c c_4 d_1 e e_2 d_1$.

Seinte mari, moder milde,  
  mater salutaris,  
  feirest flour of eni felde,  
  uere nuncuparis,  
thorou ihesu crist thou were wid childe;  
thou bring me of my thoustes wilde  
   potente  
that maket me  
to dethe tee  
   repente.  

The macaronic religious lyrics found in Middle English show a characteristic which has a bearing on the development of the bob-wheel stanza form: this is the brevity of the Latin tags, seldom longer than one or two stresses. Wehrle gives many examples of these stanzas in mixed languages, in which, for the most part, the Latin phrases are quite brief. It is possible to assume that the macaronic poems owe much of their stanza structure to that of the Latin hymns from

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which they borrowed; in turn, it is possible that these poems were an influence contributing to the purely English bob-wheel stanzas.

Perhaps this kind of composition served to jog the memory of the reader or hearer: usually the Latin tag is drawn from a familiar hymn or sequence. Presumably the succession of words and phrases from a well known liturgical source served to call to mind the entire stanza, or perhaps the entire hymn, from which the little phrase was taken. Very often the English poem is a paraphrase, or an amplification, of the Latin hymn from which the tags are drawn. In any case, the effect on the pious reader may have been similar to that produced by the variety of poetic bits and pieces which T. S. Eliot introduced into The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday: a whole complex of associations is brought to mind by two or three words with which the reader is familiar.

A less complicated non-macaronic Passion lyric from the fifteenth century contains a concluding wheel without a bob, and has no fewer than twenty-three stanzas, of which the following is the first:

Now herkyynnis wordis wunder gude,
How Ihu crist hang on the rude;
With lufly speche and myld mude,
He schew till man
How he fra hell,
With panis fell,14
Oure saulis wan.

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The remaining stanzas follow a familiar pattern: from the cross Christ addresses mankind with a call to repentance; the last stanza is a prayer to Christ.

Another poem on the same theme, with a more complicated stanza pattern, is the following, which begins with a burden of either five or six lines, dependent on whether one chooses to read the second line as containing an internal rhyme, as Brown does, or to make this into a dimeter couplet, as preferred by Luria and Hoffman. The principal interest of the poem, however, is not the burden but the four remaining stanzas, of which the form is \( aaaa_4bbb_3cc_4 \). A certain kinship may exist between this unusual structure and the single-bob stanza form, in that lines 5-7 may make up a lengthened bob of three lines, rather than one, followed by a two-line wheel of the same length as the frons. Below are the burden and the first stanza in the form given by Luria and Hoffman:

15 Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, *Middle English Lyrics* (New York, 1974), pp. 209-10. Also reprinted in Brown, *Fifteenth Century*, pp. 156-8. Br. Mus. MS Harley 4012. This was an "indulgenced" poem, as shown by the head- and end-notes printed by Brown. The head-note is as follows: "Ho-sumeuer saith this praier in the worship of the passion shall haue .C. .ere of pardon." The end-note reads, "Who-sumeuer saith this devoutly hathe grauntid be divers Bisshopis saing at the laste end fiue pater nosters and fiue Aues .CCCCCC. dayes of pardon." The granting of an indulgence for the devout recitation of a prayer-poem is not unusual, but the contrast between the hundred years of the first, and the six hundred days of the second, is interesting.
wofully araide
    My bolde, man
    ffor the ran,
Hit may not be naide,
My body blo and wanne,
Wofully araide.

Beholde me, I pray the, with all thyne hole reson,
and be not hard hertid, for this encheson
That I, for thi saule sake was slayne, in good seson,
Begilid and betraide by Iudas fals treson,
    Vnkindly intretid,
    With sharp corde sore fretid,
    The iues me thretid,
The mowid, they spittid and dispisid me,
Condemned to deth as thu maiste se.

A stanza structure even more closely resembling the bob-wheel is encountered in the following fourteenth-century Northern lyric on the Five Joys of the Virgin Mary. The rhyme scheme throughout is \(a_{a}a_{b}b_{2}b_{6}\). The first of thirteen stanzas follows:

Haile be thu, mari maiden bright!
Thu teche me the waies right;
I am a sorful dreri wight,
    als thu mai se
Quer I sal in the hard pine of hel be.\(^{16}\)

A most interesting example of unusual stanza structure in the religious lyric is the English paraphrase of the Angelus ad Virginem, the Latin hymn which Chaucer's miller speaks of "hende Nicholas," the Oxford clerk, as singing:

"And Angelus ad virginem he song;/And after that he song the Kynges Noote" [Canterbury Tales, I(A), 3216-17].

\(^{16}\) Carleton Brown, Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century, 2nd ed. rev. by G. V. Smithers (Oxford, 1952), pp. 44-6. Göttingen University MS Theol. 107. Wells, p. 537. The first line of this first stanza contains five stresses, but the remaining twelve all have four.
The manuscript of the hymn which Nicholas sang dates from the second half of the thirteenth century, according to Brown and Wells, and includes the Latin text, a Middle English verse translation in the Southern dialect, and the Gregorian melody as well. Study of the two versions is complicated by the fact that in the manuscript the lines are run on from one to the next, with no attempt to show any division between them. The version given by Wooldridge, although furnishing both the English and Latin texts and the plainsong melody, does a disservice to the English text by printing it in ten-line stanzas; Brown, however, corrects the line arrangement by assigning the English stanzas twelve lines each. The Latin and English versions of the first stanza appear below:

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17 Brown, Thirteenth Century, pp. 75-6; H. E. Wooldridge, editor, Early English Harmony from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century, 2 vols. (London, 1897), I, plate 34; II, 69-71, containing English and Latin texts and plainsong melody, with facsimile of the manuscript source (Br. Mus. MS Arundel 248). I have not been able to discover the liturgical use of this hymn. It may have been an office hymn for the Annunciation, but the Benedictine diurnal, now at least, makes use of the Ave Maris Stella for this occasion, as well as for the other feasts of the Virgin. Frank L. Harrison, Music in Medieval Britain (London, 1958), p. 169, quotes the use of St. Mary's College, Aberdeen, in the fifteenth century, as requiring the Angelus ad Virginem to be sung daily at 6 p.m., between Vespers and supper, but describes it, along with the Salve Regina and the Sub Tuam Protectionem, as an antiphon, not a hymn. G. M. Drevs and C. Blume, editors, Analecta Hymnica (Leipzig, 1886-1922), VIII, 49, label it a sequence hymn whose text first appears in a Cluniac missal.
7 Angelus ad virginem
7 Sub intrans in conclave,
7 Virginis formidinem
7 Demulcens, inquit Ave.
8 Ave, regina virginum
8 Celi terregue dominum
8 Concipies et paries
3 Intacta,
6 Salutem hominum;
7 Tu porta celi facta,
6 Medela criminum.

Gabriel, fram evene-king
Sent to the maide swete,
Brouthe thire blisful tiding
And faire he gan hire greten
Heil be thu ful of grace a-rith
For godes sone, this euene
lith,
For mannes lou en
Wile man becomen,
And taken
Fles of the maiden brith,
Manken fre for to maken
Of senne and deules mith.

Comparison of the two versions shows that the English
author evidently was attempting a close imitation of his
Latin original; if lines seven and eight of the English
stanza are written as one, the stanza structure is identical
with that of the Latin. However, the rhyme in lines seven
and eight justifies Brown's division into two.

Scanned syllabically, the Latin stanza appears as fol-
lows:

abab_ ccd_ e\_ e\_ c\_ e\_ c\_.

The English version, scanned by stresses, and including the
extra line, is as follows:

a_ b_ a_ b_ c_ d_ a_ b_ c_ d_ e_ c_.

Oral reading of the Latin stanza reveals, on comparison
with the Middle English version, that the English writer was
closely following the accentual pattern of the Latin. In
doing so, he produced a bob-wheel stanza: a single-stress
line followed by a three-line group, each having three
stresses. Thus this specimen assumes great importance in the
study of the relationship between Latin hymnody and English
religious poetry of the period, as it presents solid evidence for the influence of the Latin hymnody on the development of the bob-wheel form.

Evidence for the popularity of the Angelus ad Virginem is found in Chaucer's reference. As a graceful paraphrase of Luke 1:28-38, passim, the little Latin poem may have taken its place among many others which found use not only in the liturgical offices but in private and informal devotional exercises as well. The Latin poem evidently was well known; its stanza form would have been familiar, and hence subject to imitation in English. This is not to say that this particular Latin sequence hymn was the genesis of the bob-wheel stanza, but that the possibility of influence is certain. I have not been able to establish so strong a possibility among the Old French, Provençal, and Anglo-Norman lyrics which have been examined, nor among the other Latin poems which I have seen.

In this chapter several types of religious lyrics have been presented, any or all of which may have influenced the genesis of the vernacular bob-wheel stanza: the carol, with its repeated burden, usually shorter than the remainder of the stanza lines; the Latin hymn directly translated into English, the translation preserving some features of the Latin stanza form; and several religious lyrics which appear to be influenced in structure by the Latin hymnody. There is also the possibility of influence from the macaronic
religious stanzas, characteristically making use of Latin
tags of shorter length than the English lines.

It is a striking feature of the often very beautiful
body of late Middle English religious lyrics that a vigorous
spirit of experimentation was evidently at work. The variety
of stanza forms is remarkable, and many are of great com-
plexity. The links observed between the vernacular lyrics
and the Latin poetry of the Church are, I believe, of more
significance in the development of English stanza form than
some critics have thought. The tantalizing question remains:
which body of poetry was more instrumental in the evolution
of this variety of Middle English forms, the Latin hymns and
sequences, or the Continental secular lyrics? It is a query
which cannot be answered; if the influence of Latin religious
poetry on English religious lyrics appears to be stronger
than some have thought, Romance secular verse also has
considerable effect. There remains, however, the question
of what influence the Middle English secular lyric had on
the bob-wheel verse form.

No genre of Middle English verse has had more attention
during the past generation than that of the secular lyrics.
Such novel critical approaches as the iconographic and the
allegorical have yielded valuable insights to the exegist.
From the prosodist's point of view, however, not so much has
been done. Moreover, examination of the secular verse does
not yield a great deal of material of interest to the
prosodist; octosyllabics and septenaries and various types of tail-rhyme are present in abundance, but evidently the more complicated bob-wheel stanza did not attract the poets of the secular lyrics.

Two early secular lyrics, while they do not show the bob-wheel form, reveal a spirit of experimentation which led to some interesting results. The first, the well-known "Now springes the spray," is a chanson d'aventure, in East Midland dialect, a representation of the type described by Helen Sandison. Miss Sandison followed Chambers in giving a French name to a form which Old French scholars generally divided into two types: the chanson dramatique and the pastourelle. The chanson d'aventure combines features of both types: from the chanson dramatique comes such elements as "the love-lament of a young girl, the happy talk of meeting lovers . . . the predominance given to the woman's point of view," and the dialogue form of the narrative, all of which predominate in "Now springes the spray." From the pastourelle comes the familiar element of the encounter of an errant knight with a charming shepherdess or peasant girl, usually concluding with the nobleman's winning the love—or at least the favors—of the lowly maiden.

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18 Helen E. Sandison, The Chanson d'Aventure in Middle English (Bryn Mawr, Pa., 1913).
19 Sandison, p. 1.
20 Sandison, pp. 4-6.
"Now springes the sprai" consists of three seven-line stanzas, together with a three-line burden rhyming $a_2b_4a_c$. The $a$-rhyme is repeated in the first line of the first stanza, whose structure is $a_4b_2a_4 bb_2b_4a_2$; thus the final rhyme leads into repetition of the burden. The second stanza, however, replaces the $a$ rhyme with another, until lines six and seven, when it returns, as it likewise does in the final stanza. Moreover, the device of concatenation, or iteration, the linking of stanzas by rhyme, is used between the second and third stanzas, where a note-swot rhyme of lines one and four, stanza two, appears again in the same lines of stanza three.

These features, considered altogether, give to this little lyric an air of experimentation, as if the poet were trying the effect of various devices; the concatenation, the burden, and the contrasting effect of four-stress and two-stress lines. Although it is not possible to see this as a bob-wheel poem, the effect is similar, if the burden is repeated after each stanza, as it should be.

Now springes the spray. (Burden)
All for love ich am so seeke
That slepen I ne may.

Als I me rode this endre day (Stanza 1)
O my pleyinge,
Seih I whar a litel may
Bigan to singe:
"The clot him clinge!
Wai is him i louve-longinge
Shall libben ay."21

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I have found few other short secular lyrics containing elements of the bob-wheel. The most interesting is a "Responcio" printed by Chambers and Sidgwick, a trilingual macaronic in French, Latin, and English, in tail-rhyme. This complicated linguistic exercise is more remarkable for its spirit of experiment than for its success. Here is the second stanza:

Jeo vous pry sanz debat
That ye wold of mine stat
Audire.
Sertefyes a vous jeo fay,
I wil in time when I may
Venire.22

The experimental tendencies mentioned above, which characterized the development of the lyric during the Middle English period, may, as I have mentioned, be based on imitation of the contemporary Continental vernacular lyrics or the Latin religious or secular verse of the time. A third possibility which may be considered is that this expansion of formal experiment may be caused by the developments which the English language was undergoing during the period. Although the shock of the Norman-French linguistic invasion was a deep one, the native resilience of the mother tongue was sufficient to withstand it. As English regained its equilibrium, perhaps the time became ripe for poetic inventiveness in such areas as diction, line construction, and stanza design.

22 E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick, editors, Early English Lyrics (London, 1907), pp. 18-19. Cambridge MS Gg. iv.27.
What is most likely is that all of these factors were at work. Whatever the relative importance of each of them may be, it is evident that similar developments were going on during the period in the area of more lengthy compositions—verse narrative, as in the romances, the didactic and satirical poems, and the extended religious poems which emerged during the last quarter of the thirteenth and throughout the fourteenth centuries. The chapters which follow will present a survey of the bob-wheel stanza forms during these periods.
CHAPTER IV

1250 TO 1350

The Middle English poems in bob-wheel stanzas were produced during the period beginning, roughly, at 1250 and ending around 1500. The century from 1250 to 1350 may be regarded as one of development, while the following hundred years saw the production of most of the major works in the form. Subsequently, interest in the bob-wheel passed from England to Scotland, where it continued in use, together with some newly developed and characteristically Scottish stanzas, at least until 1600.

This chapter is concerned with the development period, about which far less exact chronological data is available than can be found for succeeding periods. Much is conjectural, and little is exact. In these pages, attention will center principally on the enigmatic romance Sir Tristrem, in Northern dialect, and upon a group of religious and political poems in Southern dialect; these works are apparently the first to be conceived in the true bob-wheel stanza form.

Sir Tristrem is the only English poetic version of the story of Tristran and Yseut; while it is negligible from the point of view of literary excellence, it is of great
importance to the study of Middle English stanza form. According to Saintsbury,

Still more dwelling is necessary on the more elaborate stanza forms. What may be their oldest example, Sir Tristrem, is already written with some exactness on a very complicated model. The staple, as in [King] Horn, is the six-syllable line, with the iambic rhythm much more clearly expressed and closely observed.¹

Saintsbury's reservation about the age of Sir Tristrem reflects the long and complicated controversy concerning its date, the essentials of which are available in McNeill's introduction to his edition of the text and in Anna Billings' summary guide to the romances.² Although some of the earlier students of the work, including Sir Walter Scott, tended to place the romance early in the thirteenth century, more recent studies have moved the date forward; this movement, however, cannot be continued past 1328, since Robert Mannyng makes reference to the work in his Rhyming Chronicle, completed in that year. Mannyng is rather obviously referring to a work well known at the time; it therefore appears that Billings' choice of the last decade of the thirteenth century is a sound one.

Establishment of a probable date for the romance assumes added importance in view of Saintsbury's additional comment:


And here we have, possibly for the first time, except, as has been said, in the . . .
Proverbs of Hendyng, our first regular stanza. The effect is not very good; the short lines, as has been said, do not suit English as a staple; the rhymes come with excessive frequency; and the stamp and twirl of the final triplet, though an added grace, is a grace of a somewhat boarding-school fashion.3

Saintsbury believes the stanza to be derived from "the elaborate stanza fashions of Northern and Southern France,"4 but without adding detailed evidence. How sound is Saintsbury's characterization of the form as "the first regular stanza"? The answer to the question involves the accuracy of dating some of the other works to be considered, and in the final analysis may not be discoverable.

The unique Middle English version of the Tristram legend survives in the Auchinleck Manuscript, and according to Kolbing, the first to prepare a modern edition, the dialect is Northern. It is composed in 3,344 lines divided into eleven-line stanzas, of which the following is typical. It describes the early upbringing of young Tristram, who was reared by Rohand, his father's steward, after the father had been treacherously slain in battle against his unjust lord, Morgan:

Now hath rohand in ore
Tristrem and is ful blithe.
The child he set to lore
And lernd him al so swithe;
In bok, while he was thore,
He stodieth euer, that stithe.

3 Saintsbury, I, 95. 4 Saintsbury, I, 95.
Tho that bi him wore
Of him weren ful blithe.
That bold,
His craftes gan he kinhe
O^aines hem when he wold.

Of the 304 stanzas, all but ten rather closely follow
the pattern abab abab₃ c₁ bc₃. The single-stress bob intro-
duces a two-line wheel linked to the bob by the c-rhyme, and
to the frons by the b-rhyme. This, one of only two examples
of an eleven-line bob-wheel stanza, lacks one of the charac-
teristics of the form as it later developed in its most
elaborate fashion: the two lines of the wheel are of the
same length as those of the frons, rather than being shorter.
Critical opinion of the success of this difficult form is on
the whole unfavorable. McNeill remarks that "the brevity of
the verses, and the limited number of the rhymes, render
this strophe a form of considerable intricacy, and one by no
means easy for a poet to work in." Saintsbury's reservations
have been noticed; A. B. Taylor speaks of "doggerel verse";
and, in another connection, Saintsbury refers to the
"complicated and bizarre" stanza form.⁵

As the concern of this study is with form and not with
deeper literary values, it is not necessary to pass judgment
on Tristrem's merits as a work of art in comparison with


those of the Continental treatments of the legend. Renwick and Orton characterize the English romance as "unmoral, distinctly popular in tone, apparently having been intended for recitation to the masses."\(^7\) Dieter Mehl, in his study of the English romances, accounts for the "unusual style" of the poem on the ground of the poet's striving for brevity. One of the French versions of the legend runs to over three thousand lines and contains only a fragment of the whole, while Gottfried von Strassburg's German version contains almost twenty thousand lines. The English *Tristrem* is one-sixth as long, but the English versifier paid a heavy price in coherence and clarity when he condensed his narrative so drastically. Mehl's unflattering verdict is that "Few Middle English poems come off so badly when compared with other versions, as *Sir Tristrem* does . . . ."\(^8\)

It is in discussing this poem that ten Brink puts forward his hypothesis concerning the origin of the *Tristrem* stanza and, by implication, of the other bob-wheel forms in which the *frons* consists of even numbers of three-stress lines:

The basis of this strophe is four Alexandrines with six accents each, which are divided by the middle rhyme into eight short lines; to these is

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added, after a meter with one accent, a fifth Alexandrine, also divided.\footnote{9}

This assumes that four Alexandrines containing double cross-rhyme were broken at the caesura, resulting in a frons of eight three-stress lines, rhyming abab abab. A single-stress bob was added, plus a final Alexandrine divided as were the preceding group.

It is possible that such was the origin of the stanza, but the hypothesis necessarily assumes a closer connection with the Alexandrine than may actually have existed. Of course, this theory cannot account for the development of bob-wheel stanzas containing frons lines of more than three stresses and many examples of four-stress lines in the frons can be found.

Perhaps the fundamental difficulty in ten Brink's assumption is the implication that cross-rhymed trimeter couplets might not have developed independently. However, in view of the fairly large amount of Continental, Latin, and native English poetry of the period in which three-stress lines are found, it appears more logical to trace Sir Tristrem to such origins as these rather than to derive it by a rather complicated process from a longer line: is it not equally reasonable to suppose that English verse evolved short (i.e., three-stress) lines as easily as the longer Alexandrines?

\footnote{9}Bernhard ten Brink, Early English Literature (to Wyclif), translated by Horace M. Kennedy (New York, 1883), pp. 240-41.
Ten Brink's theory also raises a problem of chronology: according to Schipper, the first use of the Alexandrine in English was in Mannyng's Chronicle (1328). If this is the case, were the English versifiers who first conceived the notion of splitting the six-stress line working with Alexandrines which have now disappeared, or did the idea of such a division come directly from the French, where the Alexandrine came into use, according to Holmes, probably not much earlier than 1177? The entire question appears to be largely unresolvable, but in view of the difficulties which ten Brink's theory creates, it appears possible that a simpler hypothesis of indigenous development of the three-stress line might be more credible.

Mehl points out the similarity of the rhyme scheme of Sir Tristrem to the second of the lyrics in MS Harley 2253 ("Middelerd for mon wes mad"); but the crucial bob line is lacking.

Kölbing finds alliterative links between the bob and the last line of the frons in about 105 of the 304 stanzas of Sir Tristrem; and some use is made of an idea-linking

12 Mehl, p. 173.
technique by which the wheel lines introduce a new idea which is then taken up and developed in the following stanza.\textsuperscript{14}

An important question concerning this romance is that of the amount of alliteration present. McNeill claims for it "an elaborate system of alliteration,"\textsuperscript{15} but neither system nor elaboration is readily apparent, although Kölbing devotes several pages to a catalogue of alliterative pairs. His conclusion, however, is that the alliteration is purely ornamental, not structural in function.\textsuperscript{16}

Against Kölbing's findings may be set the fact that Oakden, throughout his exhaustive survey, makes no mention at all of \textit{Sir Tristrem}, although his attempt was to make an exhaustive inventory of all poems in Middle English which contained alliterative features.\textsuperscript{17} Close examination of the lines, following Kölbing's suggestions, does reveal the presence of many sound-similarities, but it is possible to question the existence of such an elaborate pattern as is found in many other works of the period.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Sir Tristrem, mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen, und Glossar}, Vol. II of \textit{Die Nordische und die Englische Version der Tristran-Saga}, edited by Eugen Kölbing (Heilbronn, 1878), xxxvii-\textonehalf{i}. \\
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Sir Tristrem} (McNeill), p. xlvi. \\
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Sir Tristrem} (Kölbing), pp. xlvii-li. \\
\textsuperscript{17} J. P. Oakden, \textit{Alliterative Poetry in Middle English}, 2 vols. (New York, 1968), I.
In another connection, Kölbing objects to ten Brink's theory of the origins of the bob-wheel trimeter frons by pointing out that, if the Sir Tristrem stanza results from dividing the Alexandrine, then we should expect to find alliteration between the pairs of lines: 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, 7 and 8, and 10 and 11. Since his statistical analysis does not show this result, Kölbing holds, the relationship of the three-stress lines in the romance to the alliterative Alexandrine cannot be sustained.\(^\text{18}\)

The question of whether Sir Tristrem is the oldest stanzaic poem in Middle English, as well as being the oldest in bob-wheel stanzas, was not definitely answered by Saintsbury, it will be recalled; so much depends on very clouded questions of chronology that a clear-cut answer is not possible. If Sir Tristrem dates from the last decade of the thirteenth century, as some have surmised, it is contemporary with a group of popular poems on topical themes, some of which can be dated with a high degree of exactness because of their very topical nature. They span the period between Simon de Montfort's rebellion in 1263, and the death of Edward II in 1327. All show a remarkable degree of experimentation in stanza construction, not always with very successful results; and all display the characteristics of the bob-wheel stanza. The question will be discussed later in this study, but a preliminary observation would be that there

\(^{18}\)Sir Tristrem (Kölbing), p. 11.
is considerable likelihood that the genesis of the bob-wheel lies with this group of poems, and not, as Saintsbury conjectures, with Sir Tristrem. The pieces, now to be examined in roughly chronological order, were not mentioned by Saintsbury in his history of English poetics.

The civil war of 1263, when the knights, led by Simon de Montfort, were pitted against the barons, loyal to Henry III, was ended by Henry's defeat at the battle of Lewes. Henry's unpopularity was shared by his brother, Richard of Cornwall, as revealed in the following poem called "Richard of Alemaigne," since Richard had in 1257 been a candidate for Holy Roman Emperor.

Richard is castigated in an anonymous song dating from the last years of Henry's reign, possibly 1264 or 1265. There are eight stanzas in Southern dialect, with the rhyme scheme $aaa_4 b_3 cb_4$. The fifth line of each stanza ends in the same sound, and the two final lines of each are identical. Thus this poem might be called a political carol, if such a thing is possible. Stanza One is as follows:

```
Sitteth alle stille ant herkneth to me:
The Kyng of Alemaigne, bi mi leaute,
Thritti thousent pound askede he
For te make the pees in the countre,
Ant so he dude more:
Richard, thah thou be ever trichard,
Trichen shalt thou never more.19
```

The form of this stanza appears to be a transition between the carol with short burden and the bob-wheel form, and it seems particularly well suited to its subject matter.

In 1306, not half a century after the battle of Lewes, Edward I was locked in the war with Scotland. At the battle of Methven, in this year, the English captured Sir Simon Fraser, who was hanged in London a little more than a year after the same fate had befallen William Wallace. The incident called forth another anonymous ballad, directed against the Scots. I quote below the last stanza, since the first is not metrically regular as compared with the others:

The traytours of Scotlond token hem to rede,
The barouns of engelond to brynge to dede;
Charles of fraunce, so moni mon tolde,
with myht & with streynthe hem helpe wolde,
His thonkes!
Tprot, scot, for thi strif!
hang vp thyn hachet ant thi knyf,
whil him lasteth the lyf
with the longe shonkes.\(^{20}\)

The rhyme scheme is aaaa\(_4\) b\(_1\) ccb\(_3\), making this a clear and very early example of the bob-wheel stanza form.

Farther on in MS Harley 2253 is the mocking "Satire on the Consistory Courts," so titled by Wright and later by Robbins, who calls it "one of the earliest of a continuing series of attacks and satires on the venality of those

concerned with administering the law."^{21} It is the Church law and its servants which are satirized; a poor peasant is hauled into court on a paternity suit, the embarrassed but strident Meg, the plaintiff, is brought in, crying out for marriage, and the narrator loses his case—but, as he bitterly points out, only for lack of cash to lay out in bribes. Chaucer's Summoner immediately leaps to the reader's mind: quite evidently, there was much in the Church court system which was in need of reform even in Chaucer's youth.

Here is the fourth of the five stanzas, each of which contains eighteen lines, in an extremely complicated structure:

\[
\text{Ther stont up a 3 eolumon, 3 eth with a yerde,}
\text{and hat out an hēh that al 3 the hyrht herde,}
\text{ant cleopeth Magge ant Malle.}
\text{and heo cometh bymodered ase a mor-hen,}
\text{ant scrynketh for shome, & shometh for men,}
\text{uncomely under calle.}
\text{heo biginnith to shryke, & scremeth anon,}
\text{any saith, "by my gabbyng, ne shal hit so gon,}
\text{ant that be on ou alle;}
\text{that thou shalt me wedde & welde to wyf."}
\text{ah me were leure with lawe leose my lyf}
\text{then so to fote hem falle.}
\text{shal y to fote falle for mi fo?}
\text{3e, monie byswyketh heo swo.}
\text{of thralles y am ther thrat,}
\text{that sitteth swart & for-swat;}
\text{ther y mot hente me en hat}
\text{er ich hom go.}^{22}
\]

Robbins calls this "essentially a series of three six-line tail-rhymed stanzas," and perhaps that is the best solution.

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^{22} Wright, p. 26.
to the scansion problem. To this one may add that the last of these tail-rhyme groups is shorter than the first two, producing a kind of wheel effect which is emphasized by the envelope rhyme of the last six lines. The rhyme scheme is

aa\textsuperscript{4}b_2 cc\textsuperscript{4}b_2 dd\textsuperscript{4}b_2 ee\textsuperscript{4}b_2 ffggg\textsubscript{3} f_2.

As Oakden notes, "it is very significant that it is written in a complicated alliterative form; there is no question of the popularity of alliteration among the lower classes even as early as the reign of Edward I."\textsuperscript{23} Most of the bob-wheel alliterative poetry comes at a later date than this, which dates from the period 1272-1307. Another detail not mentioned by Robbins or Oakden is the word-linking observed between lines 12 and 13 of each stanza. In the stanza just quoted, the link involves the words fote falle, and this practice is carried through all of the stanzas.

The complication of this form is to a degree unexpected in a song which bears all the hallmarks of a popular ballad. Yet the songster manages his technical problems with skill, so much so that the problems and their solutions are visible only on close examination. Whatever his audience, the poet was undoubtedly a skilled craftsman, as well as a keen and satirical observer of the human condition.

Another ballad from MS Harley 2253 is the five-stanza diatribe which Wright entitles "Against the Pride of Ladies," and which Oakden dates c. 1272-1307, calling attention to it.

\textsuperscript{23}Oakden, II, 11.
as a "novel experiment," since it makes use of medial rhyme at the caesura in all of the lines of the frons. Moreover, alliteration is freely used in ornamental fashion, in the wheel as well as in the frons, but the one-stress bob line has no alliterative resemblance to either the frons or the wheel. The text of the ribald second stanza is as follows:

Nou hath prude the pris in everuche plawe;
By mony wymmon unwis y sugge mi sawe,
For 3ef a ledy lyne is leid after lawe,
Uch a strumpet that ther is such drahetes w1 drawe;
in prude
Uch a screwe wol hire shrude
Thah he nabbe nout a smoke hire foule ers to hude.  

The rhyme scheme, aaaa₄ b₁ cc₃, is not fairly represented by this stanza, in which the final line undeniably contains four stresses, not three; in the remaining stanzas, however, there clearly appear to be three stresses in the final verse. Oakden admits the difficulty of scansion, and finally dismisses the resulting form as "more pleasing to the eye than to the ear."  

It would be possible, on the basis of the interior rhymes in the first four lines of each stanza, to break each of them into two two-stress lines, but there seems to be little advantage in doing so. Once again there appears the problem of the proper "notation" of the poem, to borrow a word from the language of musicology.

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The reign of Edward II ended with his murder in 1327, upon which began the fifty-year reign of Edward III. Very soon after 1327 appeared what Wright called a "poem on the evil times of Edward II," consisting of a series of Alexandrines followed by a single-stress bob and a concluding Alexandrine rhyming with the bob. The first stanza follows:

Whii werre and wrake in londe and manslauht is come,
Whii hungger and derthe on eorthe the pore hath undernome,
Whii bestes ben thus storve, whii corn hath ben so dere,
\[ \text{e that wolen abide, listneth and } \_e \text{ muwen here the skile.} \]
I nelle li\text{\`e}nen for no man, herkne who so wile.\(^2^6\)

The rhyme scheme is aabbc, not a very pleasant arrangement, as the contrast of the long Alexandrines with the single-stress bob produces a jerky and unmusical effect. Not all of the experiments which took place in this genre of poetry were successful, and many such unpleasing arrangements were evidently not tried more than once or twice.

The composition just described was a condemnation of the rule of Edward II, but his death produced a remarkable poem in his praise. Wright entitled it "Alliterative Poem on Fortune," but it is perhaps better known by the title of "Summer Sunday." The poem begins with six stanzas, each containing eight rhyming alliterative long lines, followed by a single-stress bob and a wheel of three three-stress lines, plus a final two-stress line. After the sixth and

\(^2^6\) Wright, pp. 322-45.
seventh stanzas, there is interpolated a versus of eight irregular lines, varying between three and four stresses; and following the eighth there is a concluding stanza best described by Robbins:

Note the inverting of the normal stanza pattern of eight long lines plus five short into an envelope of eight short plus five long lines, ending with a slow, dirgelike movement that fits perfectly with the melancholy scene described in the closing lines.  

In this surprisingly elaborate poem are present, in addition to a complicated stanza form, heavy alliteration, used ornamentally, and linking alliteration, whereby the alliterating sound of the bob echoes that of the preceding line. Moreover, each stanza is linked to that which follows by iteration between the final line of the first and the first line of the succeeding stanza. The rhyme scheme is abab\_4 c\_1 ddd\_3 c\_2. This is the first stanza as printed by Robbins:

Opon a somer soneday se I the sonne  
Erly risinde in the est ende;  
Day daweth ouer doune, derk is in towne,  
I warp on my wedes, to wode wolde I wende,  
With kenettes kene that wel couthe crie & conne,  
I hiede to holte with honteres hende.  
So ryfly on rugge roon & raches roonne  
That in launde vnder lynde me leste to lende--  
And Lenede.  
Kenettes questede to quelle,  
Al-so breme so any belle;  
The deer daunteden in the delle,  
That al the downe denede.

This poem, like the "Satire on the Consistory Courts," is in Midlands dialect, but while the "Consistory Courts" is in Northeast Midland, "Summer Sunday" is written in West Midland.

Two delightful non-political poems of the middle of the fourteenth century are written in a form closely resembling that of "Summer Sunday." The Pistill of Susan, a charming account of the Apocryphal story of Susanna and the Elders, appears in Northern dialect dating from about 1350, and The Quatrefoil of Love, so entitled by Sir Israel Gollancz, a dialogue between a maid and a turtle-dove who turns out to be a remarkably apt apologist for religion, is dated less precisely as between 1350 and 1400, and is written in Northeast Midland dialect.

The Pistill of Susan, very recently re-edited by Alice Miskimin,\(^{28}\) exists in no fewer than five manuscripts, but through a detailed analysis of variants, Miss Miskimin has confirmed the Northern origin of the poem. She concludes a detailed discussion of the stanza structure of the poem with a more favorable verdict than others have passed on the bob-wheel stanza form:

The various rhythmical and alliterative patterns within the lines, and the additional factor of four intertwined rhymes (ababababcdcdc) in each stanza combine to produce a deliberately

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formalized effect, symmetrical without being repetitious, irregular but not rough. The Stanza is in fact well suited to the segmental development of the Latin prose narrative: each stanza separates off a well-defined unit of the action, grouping the verses into the 13-line measure, just long enough to hold the story together. The tail-rhyme stanza, for example, would have been more likely to disintegrate it.29

The sixth of the twenty-eight stanzas, quoted below, displays heavy ornamental alliteration, concatenation of the bob with the preceding line, and bob-wheel stanzaic structure, all of which are uniform throughout. Miss Miskimin has printed the text with numerous brackets to show her emendations, but since these do not add to the interest of the work for our purposes, I omit them.

In the seson of somyr with Sybl & Iane
She greithed til hir gardyn that glode so grene
Ther lyndes and lorers lent vpon lane,
The saveyne & Cipresse & sicamours shene
The palme and the popeler the perry the plane
The Iwnipre gentill ioyning bytwene
Thewyd with thevethorn thryvying to sene
So thight
Ther were popyniayes prest
Nightyngales vp on nest
Blithe briddis of the best
On blosmes so briht.30

The abab abab4 c1 dd3c2 rhyme scheme is identical to that of "Summer Sunday," although in many stanzas the wheel lines bear two, rather than three stresses. Miss Miskimin believes that the structure of "Summer Sunday," with its "weight of alliteration and repetition, . . . mechanical meter," and excessive alliteration, more closely resembles

that of the wheel stanza to be examined later, which became popular in Scotland in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries as the vehicle for romances such as Golagrus and Gawain, Rauf Coilsear, and The Awntyrs of Arthur. It is true that the versification of "Summer Sunday" does not equal that of Susan in finish and technique and that the later Scots romances are not distinguished for prosodic artistry; but the resemblance appears to be one of chance rather than of design.

The Quatrefoil of Love, which appears in two manuscripts, is, according to Gollancz, its editor, in Northern dialect, although Oakden places it in Northeast Midland. Gollancz's dating toward the middle of the century has not been questioned. The poem, which consists of forty stanzas of thirteen lines each, follows the conventional formula of the narrator who overhears a maiden walking in a beautiful orchard, despairing of finding an earthly lover who will be true and faithful. A voluble turtle-dove hears and answers her plaint, and preaches a lengthy sermon on the life and Passion of Christ and the virtues of His mother. He makes use of the quatrefoil, the four-leaved clover, to symbolize (1) the Trinity and (2) the Blessed Mother, thus adapting Saint Patrick's use of the shamrock to teach the doctrine of the Trinity. The style of the poem is inferior to that of Susan; the garden, the maid, and the other attendant

31 Amours, passim.
circumstances are reduced to no more than a vehicle for the sermon; and the maiden's obedient acceptance of the moral lesson is perfunctorily handled in the concluding stanza.

The opening stanza is as follows:

In a moruenyng of Maye when Medowes sall spryng
Blomes and blossomes of brighte colours,
Als I went by a welle on my playing,
Thurgh a mery orcherd bedande myn hourres,
The birdis one bewes bi-gane for to synge,
And bowes for to burgeon and belde to the bouses,
Was I warre of a maye that made mournyngge,
Sekande and syghande amange thase floures
   So swete.
   Scho made mournyngge ynoughe,
   His wepynge dide me woughe,
   Vndir a tree I me droughe,
   Hir will walde I wete.32

Gollancz and Oakden scan the wheel lines as having two stresses, while Miss Miskimin finds free variation between two and three. The rhyme scheme is abab abab\_4 c\_1 ddd\_2 c\_2; or the d-lines may be assigned three stresses from time to time. Although the stanzas are heavily alliterated throughout, there is, aside from Stanza 1, no alliterative or iterative linking between frons and bob, or between bob and wheel. The stanza form, quite similar to that of Susan and "Summer Sunday," is one of thirteen lines, a number which will reappear often in the examination of the poems to be considered in the following chapters.

However, at about the same time that Susan and The Quatrefoil were being written, a parish priest in a distant part of England was experimenting with another type of bob-wheel, a much shorter form composed on a different basis from that of these two poems, or of any of the other bob-wheel poems surviving from the period. The poems of William of Shoreham survive in a unique manuscript dating from the earlier half of the century. William, or Don William (he was a parish priest) was a Kentishman, rector of the parish of Leeds in Kent, not the Northern city. Internal evidence dates his life and work as between 1320 and 1350.33

His manuscript includes seven religious poems, only the first of which is important to us. It is a work of no less than 2,240 lines, entitled De Septem Sacramentis, almost as long as all of William's other works combined. In it he systematically treats the nature, efficacy, and laws governing all of the seven sacraments, although perhaps his vocation as a parish priest is evident in his discussion of matrimony: more than six hundred lines are devoted to its laws, limitations, and restrictions. As his editor says, Don William was no cloistered scholar or mystic, but one "who had the cure of souls; who knew the spiritual wants as well as the capabilities of those that lewed be; and who,

as a faithful shepherd, earnestly endeavoured to minister to
them to the best of his ability."  

As his editor admits, William was not a poet by nature;
moreover, "the stanza chosen proves a very ill-suited instru-
ment for a rather prosy discourse."

Nonetheless, however
he may have arrived at it, William appears to have created
a stanza form not made use of by any of his contemporaries
or by any English versifier of later date. The first two
stanzas of De Septem Sacramentis are as follows:

Sonderliche his man astoned
In his owene mende,
Wanne he not neuer wannes he comthe
Ne wider he shel wende;
And more,
Thet al his lyf his here imengde
Withe sorwe and eke withe sore.

And wanne he deithe, ne mey me wite
Woder he cometh to wisse;
Bote, as a stock ther lithe thet body,
With-thoute alle manere blisse.
Wet wheneste?
And hondred winter ef a leueth,
That his lyf mid the lengeste.

This poem holds a consistent rhyme scheme throughout:
\[x_4^a_3 x_4^a_3 b_1 c_4 b_3\] (I use the "x" to indicate lines which have
no rhyme within the stanza). The introductory quatrains, the
frons of this short stanza, is clearly a Common Meter form,
a Septenary, and, in view of the lack of rhyme between lines
one and three, may be called a ballad stanza. To this William

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34 William of Shoreham, p. xv.
35 William of Shoreham, p. xvi.
attached a one-stress bob, followed by a wheel of one more Septenary, linked to the bob by rhyme in the second line of the Septenary.

The significance of this not very successful innovation lies in the use of both a frons and wheel which are anisometric. So far as I can determine, this is a unique attempt to make use of a group of uneven lines in the first as well as the last elements of the bipartite stanza.

Shoreham's other poems do not show such metrical innovations: two are in ballad stanza, three in six-line tail rhyme, and one is in doubled ballad stanza. Alliteration is entirely absent, and the poems are impeccable examples of pure Kentish dialect. William's use of the ballad stanza is no innovation; "Judas," for example, may date from the thirteenth century. But the coupling of the septenary with the bob-wheel seems to have been William's idea alone; at least, no other examples have survived.

The Kentish dialect is in itself significant. Because of the proliferation of bob-wheel forms in the Midlands, the North, and Scotland, it is tempting to see the form as having something intrinsically Northern about it. The presence of William's perfectly adequate, if uninspired bob-wheel verses, however, makes unavoidable the conclusion that the form was not confined to the Northern areas of the island. It is not possible to ascertain how William came into contact with it, but in view of the thoroughly Southern nature of

\[37\] Wells, p. 312.
his dialect, one may believe that experimentation with the bob-wheel form was fairly widespread during the first half of the fourteenth century and not at all confined to one particular dialect area.

The variety of experiments with the bob-wheel which survive from this period testify to the interest of its poets in trying out a variety of stanza forms. Some, such as the "Satire on the Consistory Courts," made such demands on the versifier that even the most inventive of poets could scarcely cope with the rigors of technical requirements; others, such as that of William of Shoreham, may have been isolated experiments in out-of-the-way places, not destined to attract wider attention. Others, such as The Pistill of Susan and The Quatrefoil of Love, were the vehicle for very attractive and well-wrought compositions. In most of the pieces considered in this chapter it is obvious that alliteration, once the backbone of English verse, has now been reduced to a subordinate and entirely ornamental role. During the second half of the fourteenth century, however, the two elements of rhyme and alliteration, bound together in a highly unusual pattern, would become the vehicle for one of the finest poems of the Middle English period, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. This and several less well known works make up the subject of the chapter which follows.
CHAPTER V

1350 TO 1400

The large amount of material extant in bob-wheel stanzas dating from the last half of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries is not equalled in volume by what remains from the second half of the fourteenth. In the previous chapter no fewer than eleven poems of varying quality were examined, but in this there are no more than three to be discussed. Although it would be unwise, so long as the possibility of further manuscript discovery remains, to hypothesize that a period of experiment in stanza design came to an end around 1350, it is nevertheless true that after that point less was produced than during the earlier half of the century.

However, one of the few works which date from the period now to be discussed is one of the great landmarks in Middle English literature and certainly the finest poem produced in the bob-wheel form in any period. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the only surviving attempt to combine two traditions, the alliterative and the rhyming, without actually fusing them. Another work of importance, in an entirely different vein, is one of the finest satires in all English literature. Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas ridicules not only the content but the form of the metrical romance; in several
stanzas very sly but very telling ridicule is aimed at the bob-wheel stanza and its congeners, as will be seen.

The least of the three pieces composed between 1350 and 1400 does not warrant a great deal of comment. An anonymous poem "Of Sayne Iohn the Euangelist," found in a Lincoln Cathedral manuscript and dated by Oakden as c. 1375, is a very pious Northern work in fourteen stanzas of fourteen lines each, heavily alliterated, with the rhyme scheme abab abab ccd ccd. The first stanza is quoted below:

Of all mankynde that he made, that maste es of myghte,  
And of the molde merkede and mesured that tyde,  
Wirchipede be thou Euangelist with euer-ilke a wighte,  
That he wroghte in this werlde wonnande so wyde.  
Louede be thou lufely lugede in lyghte.  
To life any in lykyng that lorde the relyede,  
That in Bedleme was borne of a byrde bryghte,  
That barne brynge vs to blysse thare beste es to byde;  
To byde in his blysse,  
Thar he es, and his  
Dysciples ilkone.  
Whare myrthe may noghte mysse,  
That waye thou vs wysse,  
Euangelist Ihon.

In this composition, the bob-wheel arrangement is varied by omission of the bob line following the eight-line frons, where it is replaced by what most resembles a six-line tail-rhyme stanza of two-stress lines. This cauda is linked by concatenation to the frons by repetition of "blysse" in the

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2 Perry, p. 97.
last line of the frons and the first of the cauda, or wheel. The initial line of the wheel does not alliterate in all of the stanzas, but when it does, the pattern is set by the word borrowed from the previous line, as in the example above.

This poem, technically competent but otherwise unremarkable, makes use of alliteration not as a structural but only as an ornamental feature, as the careful pattern of rhymes and the use of a rigidly established stanza structure provide in abundance the formal elements of poetic composition.

The entire question of the role which alliteration plays in the development of the bob-wheel stanza form must in fact be considered at this point, since the major work of the period, within the limits of this investigation, provides a unique resolution of whatever conflict may have existed between the alliterative and the rhyming traditions. Up to this point we have seen a number of pieces in which ornamental alliteration is present, but Sir Gawain and the Green Knight combines functional alliteration with rhyme, uniform stanza structure, and ornamental alliteration, in an imaginative experiment which was never repeated in English, but which gave us one of the finest, if not the finest, of the metrical romances.

It was during the fourteenth century that the Middle English metrical romance attained its highest development and, presumably, its greatest popularity. Originally a
French importation, the genre was not slow to make itself at home in England, following a twofold path of development, so far as form was concerned. Historically, the older of the two types, that which makes use of rhyme, bears the closest resemblance to the French originals; the native English alliterative tradition did not make itself felt in the area of the romance until after the rhyming pattern was well established. A few examples will suffice to establish this. 

King Horn, in short couplets, is dated from the second quarter of the thirteenth century, and is metrically entirely French, in spite of its English subject matter. Horn Childe and Rimenhilde, written in another Continental pattern, the twelve-line tail-rhyme, appears as early as the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Havelok, in octosyllabics, dates from the period 1280-1300.  

On the other hand, the purely alliterative type of metrical romance appears to have developed later than the rhyming type: the three alliterative Alexander fragments date from approximately 1340, one hundred years after King Horn. Slightly later appear William of Palerne (c. 1350),

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3 In this chronology I follow Wells, Oakden, Anna H. Billings (A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances, New Haven, 1901), and W. L. Renwick and Harold Orton, The Beginnings of English Literature to Skelton, 1509 (London, 1966), all of whom are in general agreement on the development of the metrical romances.
Joseph of Arimathea (c. 1350-60), the Destruction of Troy (c. 1350-1400), and the Destruction of Jerusalem (1370-90). 4

Well before the appearance of the structurally alliterative romances, it is clear that various attempts at a fusion of the two styles were made: Oakden lists a number of examples, beginning with "On God Ureisun of Ure Lefdi," c. 1200-1225, in which the alliterative long line is rhymed in couplets. Rhymed alliterative poems in stanzas date from the close of the thirteenth century and include such examples as the "Satire on the Consistory Courts," discussed earlier. 5

The two streams of creativity ran together during the hundred-year period between, say, 1275 and 1375; but the differing natures of the two made inevitable the overwhelming of the alliterative tradition by the rhyming. How is it that this was so?

Let it be assumed, for the sake of developing a possible answer to the question, that to define the concept of "poetry" in English we assume the presence of certain formal features, in the absence of a necessary number of which poetry does not exist. The formal features found most consistently in English verse are (1) alliteration, (2) stress pattern, (3) measured length of line, in various arrangements, and (4) rhyme, usually marking line terminations, but sometimes dividing the individual line into smaller segments.

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4 Oakden, pp. 153-80, passim. 5 Oakden, pp. 103, 111.
Now, in purely alliterative verse, such as the Old English, alliteration, coupled with a stress pattern, made up the sum of the formal features of poetry. If the limitation on stress is removed, the result is alliterative prose; the same is true if the line-length feature is removed. In such a case, alliteration becomes only an unnecessary ornamental feature. It is the combination of alliteration, patterned stress, and measured length of line (in this case, measured by stresses) which constitutes, formally speaking, the poetry of Old English.

After the Conquest, however, two new features entered the field of English poetry: rhyme and stanza patterns. It is a peculiarity of rhyme that it appears to over-ride alliteration as a defining feature of English poetry, making the latter redundant as an element defining the poetic line. Once arrived at this stage of redundancy, alliteration becomes purely an ornament, to be used or not at the discretion of the poet. The same process may be observed in the development of blank verse during the Renaissance. When the regular stress pattern of iambic pentameter became established as the defining element of poetry of a certain type, rhyme became an ornamental feature used at the poet's option; he needed only to retain the features of stress pattern and line length in order to create verse.

These ideas are not intended in any way to furnish a theory of the formal characteristics of English verse of any
period, but offer only a possible approach to the problem of accounting for the decline and disappearance of the alliterative style during the late Middle English period. As Oakden has pointed out, alliteration, used only as an ornamental technique, eventually became so over-used and misused that it produced nearly meaningless clashing of sounds, uncomely and unpoetical, and eventually fell from its former place, first as a necessary element of poetry, and later as a desirable ornamental feature.

The Pearl Poet (to accept the common authorship of Pearl and Sir Gawain), however, was far removed both in time and in temperament from any view of alliteration as solely an optionally available ornament. In Pearl, for example, he produces a triumph of the rhymed alliterative style, unaided by the anisometric stanza forms. And in Purity the poet further restricted himself, eschewing both rhyme and the virtuosic stanza-linking techniques of Pearl and relying solely on alliteration. It is tempting to imagine this genius, steeped in the alliterative tradition, setting himself to meet the challenge of rhyme in yet another way, and answering it with the highly individual solution which we find in Sir Gawain.6

The romance numbers one hundred and one stanzas, clearly divided into four fitts, although not so numbered in the manuscript. Within each of these divisions it is easy to find the stanza divisions, simply by beginning a new stanza at the close of each bob-wheel segment. As a consequence of this technique we find in Part I, twenty-one stanzas; in Part II, twenty-four; in Part III, thirty-four; and in Part IV, twenty-two. It is in the structure of these stanzas that the poet's artistry is most clearly revealed, as he met the challenge of the conflicting traditions, which reach their point of sharpest and most fruitful impingement in this poem.

No doubt drawing on the technique of the alliterative long-line poem without stanzas (e.g., Purity), and on the device of long lines arranged in groups of generally fixed length (e.g., Pearl), the poet looked farther afield to some of the bob-wheel forms extant during the period (as for example, Sir Tristrem), and proceeded to combine all of these elements into his own unique fusion of techniques. Thus he produced the Sir Gawain stanza, which has a frons of varying length, composed of unrhymed alliterative long lines, followed by a bob of one stress and a wheel of four cross-rhymed lines rhyming with the bob: a\_1 baba\_3. The alliteration is carried down into the wheel, two of the three stresses usually alliterating, but irregularly.\(^7\)

\(^7\)The alliterative techniques are thoroughly dealt with by Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study* (New Haven, Conn., 1962).
The bob-wheels of each stanza are perfectly regular, but the length of the frons is subject to no apparent pattern. As a matter of possible interest, below are listed the mean (i.e., average) and median lengths of the stanzas in each fitt.

TABLE I

MEAN AND MEDIAN LINE LENGTH IN SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Lines in frons</th>
<th>Fitt</th>
<th>Entire Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median number*</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The mean is the average number of lines, found by dividing the total of all the lines in all of the several frons by the number of stanzas; the median is the mid-point number of lines, indicating that within each fitt half of the frons are shorter and half are longer. The coincidence of the two measures indicates that the range between short and long frons is very narrow.

The shortest frons is found in Fitt I, stanza 2, with only twelve lines; the longest is in Fitt II, stanza 18, with thirty-seven. This stanza is disproportionately long, since the next longest (Fitt III, stanza 8) contains a frons of only twenty-nine lines.

In this free yet structured fashion, the Pearl Poet achieved his blending of the rhyming and the alliterative traditions, by a unique experiment which yielded the most successful results. It is important to notice just how the
process of fusion was carried out—not by combining the two formal features within the line, but by a process of separation: the alliterating *frons* stands on its own but is linked, by the formally essential but often not semantically meaningful *bob*, to the rhyming wheel, which carries forward the action and at the same time furnishes a highly satisfying feature of closure to each stanza.

Perhaps only by such measures as these can the two "opposing" features, rhyme and alliteration, be brought into close contact, without risk that the alliterative feature will lose its structural distinction. If indeed, as seems to be the case, structural alliteration loses its individuality when combined into rhyming lines, then the Pearl Poet's solution to the problem may be the only possible one by which alliteration can maintain its primacy when in close contact with rhyme. In view of the success of the experiment, it is puzzling, at first glance, that other works in this form have not survived; but consideration of the difficulties involved in first mastering and then thus combining the two techniques leads to the belief that the poem is unique because the poet was: to conceive of the possibilities of such a form and then to be able to work in it are the marks of a poet who is not imitated because there is likely no one who is equal to the task.

If it is possible to think of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as the high-water point of the metrical romance, and,
together with Pearl, as the culmination of the alliterative revival, then it is necessary to anticipate a falling off thereafter. Some of the works to be discussed in the following chapter, including a group of romances, very clearly show that a decline was taking place, both in effective use of the alliterative bob-wheel stanza and in the quality of the form and content of the metrical romance, generally considered.

It is evident that to at least one sophisticated man of letters alive during the time of the Pearl Poet, the metrical romance and its formal trappings had entered a time of decline. Ironically, Geoffrey Chaucer produced one of the finest examples of the metrical romance in the Knight's Tale; shortly afterward, in two hundred lines of the funniest doggerel ever written, he proceeded to demolish the whole genre of the rhymed romance. Few who read the "Tale of Sir Thopas" today can ever thereafter approach tail-rhyme romance with absolute emotional gravity.

Yet Chaucer's parody would not be mentioned in this study were it not for one singular circumstance; in four of the thirty stanzas describing the deeds of the doughty Sir Thopas, Chaucer breaks into the bob-wheel stanza form. As Thopas rides out on his quest, he is suddenly stricken by "love-longynge" for an elf-queen—any elf-queen, whoever she may be:
"An elf-queene wol I love, ywis,
For in this world no womman is
Worthy to be my make
In towne;
Alle othere wommen I forsake,
And to an elf-queene I me take
By dale and eek by downe!" 8

Here Chaucer uses a rhyme schem aa^b^ c^ dd^ c^, which is remarkable only in the fact that there is no other occurrence of this particular form in the period. Not content with this, he writes three more stanzas in the following form:

Into his sadel he clamb anon,
And priketh over stile and stoon
An elf-queene for t'espye,
Til he so longe hath riden and goon
That he found, in a pryve woon,
The contree of Fairye
So wilde;
For in that contree was ther noon
That to him durste ride or goon,
Neither wyf ne childe." 9

In these stanzas the scheme is aa^4-b^3 c^1 dd^4 c^3. This represents a group of two tail-rhyme groups of three lines each, a one-stress bob, and a concluding tail-rhyme group in which the final line rhymes with the bob. Again, there appears to be no other example of this particular stanza in Middle English.

After a return to the Romance Sixes in which most of the fragment is written, Chaucer waits until the end of the

9 Chaucer, p. 165.
First Pitt of the tale, which he concludes,

His spere was of fyn ciprees,
Thar bodeth werre, and nothyng pees,
The heed ful sharpe ygrounde;
His steede was al dappull gray,
It gooth an ambil in the way
    Ful softly and rounde
In longe.
Loo, lordes myne, heere is a fit!
If ye wol any moore of it,
    To telle it wol I fonde. 10

Here the scheme is aa₄b₃ cc₄b₃ d₁ ee₄d₃, another unique type not found elsewhere. Like the others, it is based on the tail-rhyme pattern with added bob and wheel, the wheel being also a tail-rhyme pattern.

Harry Bailey anathematizes Chaucer's tale as "rym dogerel," and such indeed it is; but in the space of one hundred lines, the poet has produced three versions of the bob-wheel stanza not found elsewhere. Is this sheer virtuosity, or is he echoing a number of stanza forms which have been lost with the passing of the centuries? According to Mrs. Loomis,¹¹ the earliest editors of the Canterbury Tales even conjectured that some omissions may have been made in the manuscript, thus accounting for the bob lines and the abbreviated wheels of these stanzas. Others have recognized the satire for what it is, but have not been able to identify its object or objects.

¹⁰ Chaucer, p. 166.

Mrs. Loomis argues for the "strong presumption" that Chaucer had access to the Auchinleck Manuscript, which contains Horn Childe, Guy of Warwick, Beves of Hamptoun, and most significantly for the formal structure, Sir Tristrem. As she indicates, Sir Tristrem is, with the exception of Sir Gawain, "the only known Middle English romance to contain" the bob-wheel stanza. But she lists no other parallels to Sir Tristrem (i.e., in content or organization) than this.\textsuperscript{12}

It is well known that Chaucer makes no attempt, here or elsewhere, to "geeste 'rum, ram, ruf' by lettre." His entire poetic technique rests solidly on rhyme, and no artist of the Middle English period ever excelled his quiet virtuosity in it. The reference to the alliterative technique which he puts in the Parson's mouth may or may not be a mocking one; if it is satirical in intent, however, then the Parson's next line must also be interpreted thus, and in it he avows, "God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre."\textsuperscript{13} It is doubtful, I believe, that Chaucer intended any particular attack on alliterative verse any more than upon rhyme. The object of satire in "Sir Thopas," after all, is not the form of the romances so much as their content: perhaps the outworn tail rhymes and the happily invented versions of bob-wheel are secondary objects of his ridicule. This observant worldling found that in 1387, or thereabouts, the themes and

\textsuperscript{12} Loomis, pp. 489-90. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{13} Chaucer, p. 228.
forms of the romances were not only well worn but were outworn. Among these forms he tosses in the bob-wheel stanza as having become, from the point of view of a Londoner and writer in East Midland dialect, a kind of joke.

Yet, as Mrs. Loomis points out, the only surviving romances in bob-wheel which antedate "Sir Thopas" are Sir Tristrem and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Did a sizable body of material perish without any trace, and was the bob-wheel stanza the vehicle for any of this matter? Otherwise, how can one account for the bob-wheels in "Sir Thopas"?

The second half of the fourteenth century gave the world the finest of the Middle English metrical romances, and the finest of satires on the genre. Though such poems were written well into the fifteenth century, in general the later work suffers by comparison with that of the earlier period. During the 1400's, the bob-wheel, continually subject to experimental modification, continued in use, enthusiastically adopted by the Scots, who almost made it their own, persisting in their devotion to it long after it had fallen into disuse in the South.

During the same period, the bob-wheel and allied forms are used in a type of literary production which becomes very important: the religious drama. The chapter which follows will survey the occurrences of the bob-wheel in both purely poetic and in dramatic use during the fifteenth century and will continue the history of its decline into the earliest days of the Renaissance.
CHAPTER VI

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

Often considered a backwater in the stream of English literature, the fifteenth century, it is true, offers little of great worth in comparison with the achievements of the fourteenth. The period is best thought of perhaps as one of germination, during which the Renaissance was being brought to birth. English poetry did not die with the death of Chaucer, but some of the best work was done not in England but in Scotland, by those who were proud to call themselves followers of the greatest of the "makaris," Geoffrey Chaucer.

Paradoxically, the veneration in which the Scots held Chaucer did not lead them to eschew poetic forms which he himself evidently held in low esteem—as witness "Sir Thopas."

During this period, it was the Scots who did most with the bob-wheel and other allied verse forms; thus this chapter will have more to say about the Scots than about the English.

It was during this period that another genre flourished which has not yet been discussed, and during these years its written record was established. The religious drama has its roots in much earlier days, but the manuscripts which record it are of the fifteenth century, for the most part. The plays which survive include a number in which experiments were made with various of the bob-wheel stanza forms; Oakden
notes the growing popularity of the bob-wheel stanza during the latter half of the fourteenth century, and suggests that its vogue in the North, from whence come the majority of the dramatic manuscripts, may have led to its being picked up by the anonymous playwrights who produced the cycles of mysteries and the morality plays. Although only a suggestion, it is supported by the remarkable luxuriance of stanza forms found in the York and Towneley cycles, both dated from the last years of the fourteenth century but still performed well into the fifteenth.

In the York cycle it is possible to identify three types of stanzas with double bobs and three with single bobs. Among the latter are the Tilemakers' play (number 33, portraying the second trial of Christ before Pilate), which uses a twelve-line stanza with single bob: \( \text{abab bc} \text{bc}_3 \text{ d}_1 \text{ cc}_3 \text{ d}_3 \). The Butchers' play (number 36, the Burial of Christ) makes use of the thirteen-line single-bob stanza \( \text{abab bc} \text{bc}_3 \text{ d}_1 \text{ eee}_2 \text{ d}_3 \). This play, moreover, uses the iterative technique as a stanza-linking device. Alliteration is present, in varying degrees, in more than half of the forty-eight plays.

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Lucy Toulmin Smith, the editor of the text, tabulates twenty-one different stanza types.

The Ludus Coventriae, or Hegge Plays, are introduced by a Proclamation of 528 lines, of which the majority are organized into a thirteen-line stanza form. Seven of these (stanzas 1, 5, 13, 17, 19, 26, and 35) are reminiscent of the Pistill of Susan and the Quatrefoil of Love: abab abab\textsuperscript{4} c\textsubscript{1} dddc\textsubscript{2}. The remainder of the thirteen-line stanzas are in various arrangements, tending to be more isometric than the bob-wheels in the seven listed. The first stanza of the Proclamation will serve as an example:

\begin{quote}
Now gracious god groundyd of all goodnesse  
as thi grete glorie nevyr be-gynning had  
So thou socour and saue all tho that sytt and sese  
and lystenyth tooure talkyng with sylens stille and sad  
Ffor we purpose js pertly stille in this prese  
The peopyl to plese with pleys ful glad  
now lystenyth us louely both more and lesse  
Gentyllys and 3 emanry of goodly lyff lad  
this tye  
we xal ou shewe as that we kan  
how that this word ffyrst began  
and how god made bothe molde and man  
Iff that 3e wyl abyde.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

Another major cycle, the Towneley, or Wakefield plays,\textsuperscript{4} includes an interesting variety of stanzas: an alliterative Burns stanza, \textsuperscript{\textit{aaa}}\textsubscript{4} b\textsubscript{1}a\textsubscript{4}b\textsubscript{2}, is found in number 14, the Veneration of the Magi; and number 20, the Conspiracy to Betray

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Jesus, includes two types of bob-wheel stanza, abab\textsubscript{4} c\textsubscript{1} dddc\textsubscript{3}, producing a thirteen-line form similar to others already described. Number 15, the Flight into Egypt, includes a variety of arrangements of the thirteen-line base, such as abab\textsubscript{3} aab aab\textsubscript{3} c\textsubscript{1} b\textsubscript{3}c\textsubscript{2}. Number 12, the First Shepherds' Play, runs aaaa\textsubscript{4} b\textsubscript{1} ccc\textsubscript{2}b\textsubscript{2}; however, the first four lines have internal rhyme and might be rearranged as abab\textsubscript{2} c\textsubscript{1} ddd\textsubscript{2}c\textsubscript{1}, producing another thirteen-line stanza. This same scheme is present in number 3, the play of Noah, except that the wheel lines all contain two stresses only. The well known Second Shepherds' Play, composed in a nine-line stanza, may be expanded as follows, on the basis of internal rhyme in the first four lines: abab abab\textsubscript{2} c\textsubscript{1} ddd\textsubscript{2}c\textsubscript{2}, making another thirteen-line form. Since the variations in stanza structure are many but the variants are quite similar, perhaps it is not necessary to multiply examples of these forms.

This summary of the dramatic forms must include mention of two moralities. The Castle of Perseverance\textsuperscript{5} is one of the Macro Plays, the prologue to which contains twelve stanzas in abab\textsubscript{4} c\textsubscript{1} ddd\textsubscript{2}c\textsubscript{2}. The number of stresses in the first c-line usually is one, but sometimes two; and the stresses in the d-lines vary in number from two to four, and from stanza to stanza. The second of the moralities, the

fragmentary and puzzling Dux Moraud,\textsuperscript{6} has thirteen-line stanzas in the now familiar abab \textsubscript{a} \textsubscript{b} \textsubscript{a} \textsubscript{b} \textsubscript{c} \textsubscript{1} dddc\textsubscript{3}.

Very generally, these plays probably date from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth centuries. Elaborate stanza structure in pieces meant presumably to be memorized and declaimed may indicate a belief of the writers that such stanzas were easier to memorize than more regular stanzas; or they may simply indicate either a taste for experimentation in stanza form or a careful following of some kind of stanzaic convention. In any case, they are a testimony to the widespread diffusion of these forms, especially in the North, and to their adaptation to a wide variety of uses.

Turning back to non-dramatic poetry, it is appropriate to mention here the work of John Audelay, Shropshire priest of the first quarter of the century, who left a considerable body of poetry in a single manuscript.\textsuperscript{7} His editor believes that "Audelay's fondness for elaborate stanzaic forms was not matched by unusual skill in the making of rhymes."\textsuperscript{8} Of more than fifty poems which he composed, seven are in the thirteen-line form abab cdcd\textsubscript{4} e\textsubscript{2} fff\textsubscript{e}\textsubscript{2}, the last line often


\textsuperscript{8}Audelay, p. cciii.
having three instead of two stresses. His first poem in-
cludes this representative stanza on the five senses:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thi V wyttis thou most know;} \\
\text{Thonke thi God that land ham the;} \\
\text{Thi heryng, thi seyng, as I the schewe,} \\
\text{Thi syt, thi smellyng, here be iij;} \\
\text{Thi touchyng, thi tastyng, here V be,} \\
\text{To reule the withyn thi leuyng.} \\
\text{God hath the graundid ham graciously} \\
\text{Hym to loue ouer al thyng;} \\
\text{His wyl hit is.} \\
\text{if thi V wyttis here byn well spend} \\
\text{Thi God thou shaltno afend,} \\
\text{Bot bryng thiselfe to good end,} \\
\text{Into heuen blys.}
\end{align*}
\]

Audelay was evidently fond of the thirteen-line form,
as six more pieces are written in this or a similar style.
Several have a rhyme link between the first quatrain and the
second; abab bcbc_4_. He also composed a number of attractive
carols, prefixing them in the manuscript with a frankly
commendatory couplet: "I pray 3ow, syrus, boothe moore and
las,/Syng these caroles in Cristemas." The carols are
traditional in form, each beginning with a two-line burden
followed by a number of stanzas on the pattern abab_4 xx_3 x_2.
The x-lines uniformly rhyme with the last word of each line
of the burden couplet, thus closely following the carol
pattern as discussed by Greene. It is interesting that
Audelay should have been attracted to both the carol form,
with its unchanging burden, and the bob-wheel stanza, which
in so many ways is similar to the carol form.

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The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne is, with one unimportant exception, the last of the poems written in England in the bob-wheel style, and the last to be presented in this study, as the remaining material from the fifteenth century and later appears to be Scottish in origin. The Awntyrs is of special importance, however, in that its stanza form was used in several Scottish works of the fifteenth century and later, to be discussed shortly.

This romance dates from the second half of the fourteenth century; Billings' conjecture of 1380 is not disputed by later writers. (I have chosen to discuss it in this chapter rather than in a previous connection because of its relationship with the other Scottish works to be considered at this time.) It exists in no fewer than four manuscripts, of which Amours prints two, in parallel columns.11

There are 702 lines in fifty-five stanzas, each containing thirteen lines, of which the first stanza is representative:

In Kyng Arthure tyme ane awntir by-tyde,
By the Terne Wahethelyne, als the buke tellis,
Als he to Carelele was commene, that conqueroure kyde,
With dukes, and with ducheperes, that with that dere duellys,
For to hunte at the herdys, that lange hase bene hyde;
And one a daye thay tham dighte to the depe dellis,
Ti felle of the Femmales, in the Foreste wele Frythedode,

Faire in the fernysone tyme, by frythis and fellis.
Thus to the wode are thay wente, the wlonkest in wedys,
Bothe the kynge and the quene,
And alle the doghety by-dene;
Syr Gawane, gayeste one grene,
Dame Gavenoure he ledis.\textsuperscript{12}

This stanza contains a frons of nine lines, composed of
two quatrains and a single line the purpose of which is to
tie into the rhyme at the end; then comes a group of four
rhyming two-stress lines, the final line picking up the
rhyme with the last line of the frons, thus: ababab c_4 dddc_2.
Occasionally the last four lines have three stresses, not
two; they may or may not alliterate, but the frons lines
generally do. There is iteration between lines eight and
nine (although it is not present in the first stanza, quoted
above), and between the last line of the stanza and the first
line of the following one. The first half of the poem is
much more regular in observation of these features than is
the second.

As a poem, \textit{The Awntyrs off Arthure} suffers from its
author’s ill-advised attempt to combine two disparate in-
cidents in one narrative. The first is the appearance of a
hideous apparition to Arthur and Guinevere; it proves to be
the ghost of the queen’s mother, who comes to beg that
masses be said for her soul. She preaches virtue, foretells
the fate of the Round Table, and hints at the manner of
Arthur’s death. In the second incident, a knight in white

\textsuperscript{12}Amours, p. 117.
armor, Sir Galrun of Galway, appears at the royal supper table, challenges Sir Gawain and vanquishes him, but spares his life. Galrun is eventually admitted to the Round Table, and Guinevere orders the masses duly said for her mother's soul.

The next romance to be considered, Golagrus and Gawain, is part of the purely Scottish material which forms the bulk of the fifteenth-century corpus. This is also the first item surviving only in a printed text, by Chepman and Myllar, Edin-Borough, in 1508, although it is mentioned by name in the Asloan Manuscript index (1515). According to Amours, this probably refers to the print, and not to an earlier manuscript source. The piece is generally assumed to have been composed between 1450 and 1500.

The form of this romance is the same thirteen-line stanza found in the Awntyrs off Arthure: abab abab c₁ ddd₃c₂. This is another stanza in which the poet goes directly from the frons to the concluding wheel without the intervening short line. There are 105 stanzas, heavily alliterated; this is the first:

In the tyme of Arthur, as trew men me tald,  
The king turnit on ane tyde toward Tuskane,  
Hym to seik our the sey, that saiklese wes said,  
The syre that sendis all scill, suithly to sane;  
With banrentis, barounis, and bernis full bald,  
Biggast of bane and blude bred in Britane.

13 Amours, p. xi.  
14 Amours, p. xi.  
15 Billings, p. 171.
Thai walit out werryouris with wapinnis to wald,
The gayest grumys on grund, with geir that myght gane;
Dukis and digne lordis, douchty and deir,
Sembillit to his summovne,
Renkis of grete renovne,
Cumly kingis with crowne
of gold that wes cleir.  

A long controversy centered on the possible authorship of **Golagrus and Gawain**, involving the two legendary Scottish figures, Huchown of the Awle Riale, and Clerk of Tranent. The evidence seems insufficient for either ascription, and modern critics have largely avoided the entire question.

**Golagrus and Gawain** has an Arthurian theme, and a two-part structure, as has the **Awntyrs off Arthure**. The hero of both sections is Sir Gawain, who in the first, by his courtly bearing and courtesy, secures food and reinforcements from a surly lord who has refused to aid Sir Kaye. In the second section, Gawain vanquishes Golagrus, another proud knight, but gallantly permits him to appear to have won the battle so that his honor will appear to be unstained. Golagrus eventually submits to Gawain and Arthur and is richly rewarded by the King. The outline of the romance, according to Gaston Paris, is borrowed from the French **Roman de Perceval**, but the form of **Golagrus** in no way resembles that of the French.

The last metrical romance of the group of poems under consideration, **The Tale of Rauf Coilgear**, is to the modern

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16*Amours*, p. 1. The scansion given on the preceding page is that of Billings (p. 171) and Wells (p. 63). Oakden (I, p. 217), however, scans the stanzas abab abab c4 dddc3.
reader perhaps the most attractive of this group, and one of
the more engaging of all the medieval romances. This poem
also exists only in print and not in manuscript. It is
mentioned by Douglas and Dunbar and thus presumably was
well known prior to the date of its printing. The date
generally assigned to it is 1475-1500, and the dialect is
unmistakably Scottish.

Various conjectures have been advanced as to authorship,
but none has been agreed upon. Technically, the piece
belongs to the "matter of France," since the Emperor
Charlemagne figures in the narrative; but no French source
has been found for the plot, which is the familiar one of
the king who disguises himself and visits a peasant. Rauf
is a charcoal-burner who entertains the king unaware and is
later rewarded, not for his courtly manners, but for his
rough and ready peasant honesty. He goes on to vanquish a
Saracen knight, and is made marshall of France, enjoying the
favor of the emperor.

The poem is written in the thirteen-line stanza abab
ababc dddc, like the others described immediately above.
The long lines are generally alliterative, but only about
one third of the short lines show alliteration.

17Amours, pp. 82-114. 18Amours, p. xxxv.
19Billings, p. 83.
This is undoubtedly a "popular" romance, which would have made its appeal not to the court but to the village and town. The twelfth stanza shows honest Rauf's courteous but uncouth manners:

Sone was the Supper dicht, and the fyre bet,
And thay had weschin, I wis, the worthiest was thair:
"Tak my wfye be the hand, in feir, withoutin let,
And gang begin the buird," saith the Coil3ear
"That war vnsemand, forsuith, and thy self vnset;"
The King profferit him to gang, and maid ane strange fair.
"Now is twyse," said the Carll, "me think thow hes forget."
He leit gyrd to the King, withoutin ony mair,
And hit him vnder the eir with his richt hand,
Quhill he stakkerit thair with all
Half the breid of the hall;
He faind neuer of ane fall,
Quhill he the eird fand.20

There are no other metrical romances in this fifteenth-century group of Scottish writings in the bob-wheel stanza, and there is only one other poem of approximately equivalent length. The **Buke of the Howlat**, by Sir Richard Holland, of whom very little is known, is a vision poem with a detailed allegory which no one has interpreted satisfactorily.21 Holland was evidently a strong partisan of the Douglas clan, and must have composed his poem between 1449 and 1452; beyond these facts, little more is known. Janet Smith sees in the work influences from the French, as well as from

20 Amours, p. 87.

Chaucer's Parlement of Foules, but these influences are active upon the content rather than the form. Renwick and Orton join G. Gregory Smith in referring to the essential "daftness" of the poem: "Holland may have had an allegorical purpose, but he enjoyed the possibilities of the genre as Chaucer did, and, unlike Chaucer, allowed them to run away with him." The poem appears in both the Bannatyne and Asloan manuscript, and the best modern edition is that of Amours.

The Buke of the Howlat is written in seventy-seven stanzas of thirteen lines, rhyming abab abab c_4 dddc_2, the same arrangement as in the three pieces just described. It too is heavily alliterated. Stanza thirty-one is quoted below; the last two lines may be remembered by some:

Off the douchty Dowglass to dyte I me dress;
Thar armes of ancestry honorable ay,
Qhilch oft blythit the Bruse in his distress,
Tharfor he blissit tha blud bald in assay.
Reid the writ of thar werk, to our witness;
Furth on my matir to muse I mufe as I may.
The said perseverantis gyde was grathit, I gess,
Brusit with ane grene tre, gudly and gay,
That bure branchis on breid blythest of hewe;
On ilk beugh till embrace,
Writtin in a bill was,
O Dowglass, O Dowglass
Tender and trewe!

Two poems in the comic Middle Scots tradition, both ascribed, on dubious grounds, to James I (1394-1437), show

23 Renwick and Orton, p. 453.
24 Amours, pp. 60-61.
an attempt to combine the Common Meter quatrain with the bob-wheel stanza. "Peblis to the Play" and "Chrystis Kirk on the Green"\textsuperscript{25} have the rhyme scheme $a_4 b_3 a_4 b_3 c_4 b_3 c_4 b_3 x_1 y_3$. Throughout the poems the bob line is independent of the rhymes of the other lines, and the final wheel line is identical in all stanzas of each: in "Peblis" it is "Of peblis to the play," and in "Chrystis Kirk" it is "At Chrystis Kirk on the grene." Alliteration is consistent throughout each poem. Although the ascription to James I is doubtful, the possible dates of composition, the first quarter of the century, are agreed on.\textsuperscript{26} The ten-line stanza with its four septenaries, bob, and recurring refrain, lends itself well to satiric use. In both poems, the object of the satire is the earthy amusements of the Scottish peasantry.

Before considering the work of the four great Scottish followers of Chaucer, Henryson, Dunbar, Douglas, and Lyndesay, it is necessary to digress in order to look at one last English lyric of the fifteenth century. It is anomalous in two ways: it is a highly developed example of the


bob-wheel form, and it is separated by a long time interval from the English examples already mentioned, coming either at the end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth. The piece, known by its first line, "O excelent suffereigne, most semely to see," appears in the Rawlinson Manuscript C.813 and is printed by Robbins. It is the only English lyric which I have found dating from this period. Stanza one is as follows:

O excelent suffereigne, most semely to see,
bothe prudent & pure, lyke a perle of prise,
also fair of fygure & oreant of bewtye,
both cumlye & gentyll, & goodly to aduertyse;
your brethe ys swettur then balme, suger, or lycoress. 
I am bold on yow, thoughghe I be nott able,
To wrytte to your goodly person whyche ys so ameable by reason.

for ye be bothe fair & free
therto wysse & womanly,
trew as turtyll on a tree with-owt any treason.

As Robbins says in his note, "in all these formal lyrics, there is abundance of clichés." The second and third stanzas continue the inventory of the lady's physical attractions, the fourth expresses the writer's hope for a successful suit, and the fifth and sixth, renewing his protestations of love, put the entire composition into the framework of a letter to the beloved, begging for a favorable reply.

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28 Robbins, p. 269.
The poem is obviously the work of an untalented amateur; the language and imagery are, for the period, trite and hackneyed, and the verse is uneven and uninspired. The rhyme scheme can only be synthesized by examination of all the stanzas, since each contains numerous irregularities; but it is, more or less, abab bcbc_4 d_1 eee_4 d_3. The wheels are very irregular in line length. The principal consistencies in this piece of amateur doggerel are stanza length (twelve lines), and the presence of a seven-line frons, a single-stress bob, and a four-line wheel.

Coming late in the period, and so inferior in both content and form, this must be an amateur's attempt at a form which had long been used by more skilled poets. The roughness of the form, in this case, is not a sign of an early stage in development, but of the writer's lack of prowess.

Among the Scottish writers of the fifteenth century, the work of Robert Henryson in the bob-wheel form is next to be considered. Henryson's work, in general, has been described as characterized by "a gentle middle-aged quietude. . . . Of all the Scottish Chaucerians, he is the least rhetorical and the likest to his master in his more sober moods." But the stern moralist of The Testament of Cresseid is absent in the nonsensical burlesque of "Sum Practysis of Medecyne," his only venture into broad satire. The poem occurs in the Bannatyne Manuscript, and, according

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29 Renwick and Orton, p. 454.
to Kinghorn, is likely to be an early work. (Henryson's birth- and death-dates are uncertain, but are approximately 1425-1500). The Middle Scots dialect adds to the outlandish tone of the satire on a daft physician, who is the speaker:

Guk, guk, gud day, ser, gaip quhill ye get it!  
Sic greeting may gane weill gud laik in your hude.  
Ye wald deir me I trow, becauss I am dottit,  
To ruffil me with a ryme, na ser, be the rude,  
Your saying I haif sene and on syd set it,  
As geir of all gadderin glaikit nocht gude  
Als your medicyne by mesour I haif meit met it.  
The quhilk I stand ford ye nocht understude,  
Bot wrett on as ye culd to gar folk wene.  
  For feir my lougis wes flaft  
Or I wes dottit or daft  
Gife I can ocht of the craft  
Heir be it sene.\(^{30}\)

Henryson has taken the thirteen-line stanza and varied the conclusion by introducing a three-line wheel with a concluding bob; or, alternatively, he has omitted the bob following the *frons* and concluded the section with a shortened line such as often follows the wheel. The rhyme scheme, by either interpretation, is abab abab \(c_4\) ddd\(_3\)c\(_2\), and ornamental alliteration prevails throughout the seven stanzas.

The Middle Scots genius for comic verse is carried on in the work of William Dunbar, generally accounted the greatest of the Scottish Chaucerians, although his work spans a much wider range than that of Henryson. From the solemn death knell of the "Lament for the Makaris" through the Chaucerian allegory of *The Golden Targe* to the realistic and

earthly satire of "The Twa Merrit Wemen and the Wedo," Dunbar's genius ranges; but none of his poems has a more human and appealing quality than the gently satirical and richly comic "Ballad of Kynd Kittock." The attribution of this piece is doubted by some; although it is found in the Bannatyne Manuscript among a group of pieces attributed to Dunbar, this particular poem lacks the specific attribution although the Scottish anthologies generally list it as his work. C. S. Lewis has reservations, based on considerations of Dunbar's general stylistic characteristics. Lewis finds that the tone of the poem is not in accord with that of the remainder of Dunbar's work:

This poem, anonymous in the manuscript, and in the old print [Chepman and Myllar, Edinburgh, 1508], has been attributed to Dunbar, but there is an indulgent twinkle of the eye in it, a gentleness amid its fantasy, which seems to me foreign to his temper.31

The stanza form of the ballad is that of "Sum Practysis of Medecyne." The first is quoted below:

My gudame wes a gay wif, bot scho wes ryght gend,
Scho duelt furth fer in to France, apon Falkland Fell;
Thay callit her Kynd Kittok, quhasa hir weill k kend:
Scho wes like a caldrone cruke cler under kell;
Thay threpet that scho deit of thrist, and maid a gud end.
Efter hir dede, scho dredit nought in hevin for to duell,
And sa to hevin the hieway dreidles scho wend,
Yit scho wanderit and yeid by to ane elriche well.

31Lewis, p. 70.
Scho met thar, as I wene,
  An eft, rydand on a snaill,
  And cryit, "Ourtane fallow, hail!"
  And raed ane inche behind the taill,
  Till it wes neir evin.32

Lewis summarizes the second stanza thus:

She stopped at an ale house near Heaven for the
night, arrived at the gate next morning something
the worse for wear, and managed to steal in with-
out St. Peter's notice; which was the worse for
him since, during her seven years' residence as
Our Lady's hen-wife, she 'held him in strife.'33

But the good dame looked out of heaven one day and caught
sight of the ale house. As "the aill of hevin wes sour,"
she sneaked out for a drink. Intercepted at the gate by
St. Peter, she received a great clout on the head from him,
but made her escape nevertheless:

Than to the aill hous agane scho ran, the pycharis to pour,
  And for to brew and baik,
Freidis, I pray yow herftfully,
Gif ye be thristy or dry,
Drink with my Guddame, as ye ga by,
  Anys for my saik.34

Dunbar has shortened the ninth line into a two-stress bob
rhyming with a two-stress concluding bob: abab abab4 c2
ddd3c2. From the point of view of technique, it is interest-
ing to compare "Kynd Kittock" with "Sum Practysis of
Medecyne," where the meter is much more regular and much
less dependent on alliteration to mark the stress pattern.

32 William Dunbar, The Poems of William Dunbar, edited
  by W. M. McKenzie (Edinburgh, 1932), pp. 169-70.
33 Lewis, pp. 70-71.
34 Dunbar, p. 170.
Gavin Douglas (c. 1474-1522), the third of the great Scots Chaucerians of the fifteenth century, produced the first verse translation of the Aeneid of Virgil into English; his Eneados exists in five manuscripts dating from 1513, and in numerous prints, the first dated 1553. The Latin text is rendered by Douglas in ten-syllable iambic couplets, but he also added a prologue of his own before each book. Lewis says of these,

The Prologues have a threefold interest, as poems, as criticism, and as familiar self-portraits of the artist. His habits both in winter and summer, his reading, his difficulties as a translator, his haunting consciousness that a man is not made a bishop in order to translate Virgil, and the excuses which he makes to himself, are here all faithfully set out.36

The prologues are in a variety of meters: the eighth is a thirteen-line stanza form, again without an interior bob, the shortest line being the last one: abab abab c

dd_{3}c_{2}. Saintsbury is not kind to it:

If it were not for its vigour, which is considerable, and perhaps for its historical interest, which is not small, this would be a rather awful example. . . . Alliteration is pushed to the over-dose of five syllables in a single line. . . . It is impossible that, on such a system, the alliterating word should not be preferred to the appropriate; and it is at least very probable that in the dearth of appropriate words, words grossly inappropriate will be dragged in, and if necessary, invented.37

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36 Lewis, p. 87.

37 Saintsbury, pp. 276-7.
The reader may judge for himself: here is the first of the fourteen stanzas:

Of dreflying and dremys quhat dow is it to endite?
For, as I lenyt in a ley in Lent this last nycht,
I slaid on a swevynnyng slummerand a lite,
And sone a selcouth sege I saw to my sycht,
Swownand as he swelt wald, soupyt in syte,
Was nevir wrocht in this warld mair wofull a wicht;
Ramand, Resson and rycht is rent be fals syte,
Frendschip flemyt is in Frans, and faith hes the flycht,
Leys, lurandry, and lust, ar our laid starn;
  Peac is put outh of play,
  Welth and weilfar away,
  Luf and lawte baih tway
    Lurkis ful darn.38

By Douglas' time, it is evident, the thirteen-line stanza had established itself firmly enough in Scotland, but the interior bob line was often replaced by a line of equal length with the first eight, introducing a new rhyme and linked to it by the final line, after the intervening wheel; the wheel was, usually, three lines in a shorter meter than the eight-line frons. However, in the last example from a major Scottish poet of the period, Sir David Lyndesay, in the opening stanza of his long morality, Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis (1553), makes use of the interior bob.

The Father and founder of faith and felicitie,
That oor fassioun formed to his similitude,
And his Sone, our Sauiour, scheild in necessitie,—
That bocht oow from baillis ransom rude,
Repleadgeand his presonaris with his hart-blude,—
The halie Gaist, gouernour and grounder of grace,
Of wisdome and weilfair baih fontaine and flude,
Gif oow all that I sie seasit in this place.

38Douglas, I, 447.
And scheild ow from sinne,
And with his Spright ow inspyre,
Till I haue shawin my desyre.
Silence, Soueraine, I requyre;
For now I begin.39

This is a rather symmetrically formed stanza, in which the
two-stress bob is echoed at the end by another two-stress
line in rhyme with it: abab bcbc₄ d₂ cee₃ d₂.

At his point, toward the middle of the sixteenth cen-
tury, the bob-wheel stanza, even in the altered forms which
it assumed in Scotland, begins to disappear from the litera-
ture of Middle Scots. The conservatism of the Scots versi-
fiers, which matched their conservatism in language, con-
tinued in a somewhat paradoxical way: as the English poets
of the same period came under the Italian influence, and in
a sense reduced the proliferation of elaborate stanza forms
which had characterized the earlier centuries, the Scots
continued the late medieval tendency to free experimentation
with all sorts of "cut and broken" verse, as James I and VI
was to point out as late as 1584. (His essay on the art of
verse-making will be discussed in the concluding chapter.)
Little of this late material, however, is of interest to the
modern reader: aside from a quick look at the work of such
men as Alexander Montgomerie (1556-1610), Alexander Scott
(1525-1584), and Richard Maitland (1496-1586), the amateur

39 David Lyndesay, Ane Satyre of the thrie Estatis, in
Commendation of Vertew and Vitvperation of Vyce (London,
1865).
of Scottish poetry is content to see a long break between
the last of the Chaucerians and the work of Robert Burns.

One Scottish development, however, is a most interesting
offshoot of the bob-wheel stanza. Several poems appeared
during the sixteenth century in a very curious stanza form
known as the "Banks of Helicon Stanza," or alternatively,
the "Cherry and the Sloe Stanza," because of two poems bearing
these titles which gained a remarkable degree of renown
in Scotland. "The Banks of Helicon" is an anonymous pastoral
which remained popular up until the nineteenth century, and
"The Cherry and the Sloe," by Alexander Montgomerie, first
printed in 1597 but extant in manuscript prior to that date,
gained equal popularity. The first stanza of "The Cherry
and the Sloe" is a typical example of the stanza form:

About ane bank, quhair birdis on bewis
Ten thousand tymes thair nottis renewis
Ilk hour into the day,
Quhair merle and mavis might be sene,
With progene and with phelomene,
Qhilk causit me to Stay.
I lay and lentt me to ane buss,
To heir the birdis beir;
Thair mirth was so melodious
Throw nature of the yeir:
Sum synging, sum sprynging,
So heich into the skye;
So nimlie and trimelie
hir birdis flew me by.

This oddest of stanzas consists of a French Six group,
a Common Meter quatrain, and then, unexpectedly and not quite

40 Alexander Montgomerie, The Cherrie and the Slae
(Edinburgh, 1597), n.p. Rpt. Amsterdam, 1971 (Da Capo Press,
The English Experience series, no. 338).
happily, a quatrain whose first and third lines are "perhaps the chief thing in English deserving the name of amphibrachic if the lines be taken as wholes: but it very much tempts one to split them and to arrange four of them as a sixain of very short lines (part monometer catalectic)."\(^{41}\)

The change which Saintsbury describes "attuned itself very well to Scottish taste," but Lewis terms it "a very unhappy innovation" whose "tumble-home is unendurable in a prolonged narrative, and still more in a prolonged debate."\(^{42}\) The modern ear is likely to be displeased with the clashing gear-shifting effect of the amphibrachs, and the mind marvels at the technical demands made on the versifier. Yet Richard Maitland, whose name is mentioned above, produced a poem of fourteen stanzas of this type, with this comprehensive title: "Ane Ballatt of the Creatioun of the World, Man, his Fall and Redemptioun, maid to the tone of The Bankis of Helecon." Lewis' reservations about the fitness of the form for prolonged narrative are fully understandable on a reading of the poem; and the notion of undertaking to sing it is even stranger. Yet the Scots Musical Museum (1803), largely edited by Burns, prints four stanzas of "The Cherry and the Sloe" set to a "Tune, the banks of Helicon";

\(^{41}\)Saintsbury, p. 284.

\(^{42}\)Lewis, p. 111.
apparently the tune was popular and was made use of for the
singing of such stanzas as these.\textsuperscript{43}

With these developments the history of the bob-wheel
stanza comes to an end; and the question of its influence,
if any, on the poetry of the Renaissance is beyond our scope.
The typical bob-wheel stanza of eleven, twelve, or thirteen
lines appear to have perished in England by the fifteenth
century, and by the sixteenth in Scotland. However, if the
bob-wheel can be thought of as an ancestor, if not the
ancestor, of stanzas of unequal length of line and unequal
arrangement, then perhaps it cannot be denied that its in-
fluence is traceable in such early seventeenth-century
classics as this:

\begin{verbatim}
Goe, and catche a falling starre,
    Get with child a mandrake roote,
Tell me, where all past yeares are,
    Or who cleft the Divels foot,
Teach me to heare Mermaidies singing,
    Or to keep off envies stinging,
And finde
    What winde
Serves to advance an honest minde.
\end{verbatim}

But the question of the influence on the bob-wheel on the
verse of the seventeenth century must be left to the students
of that period, who, it is to be hoped, will find it not so
difficult to answer as to respond to Donne's demands.

\textsuperscript{43} The Bannatyne Manuscript, edited by W. Tod Ritchie
(Edinburgh, 1928), pp. 27-33; James Johnson, editor, The
The concluding chapter of this study will offer a brief overview of the works already discussed, in the attempt to identify trends and tendencies, and, finally, will present some theories concerning the origins, progress, and decline of the bob-wheel stanza from the beginning of the Middle English period until its close.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have presented a chronological review of the available examples of the bob-wheel stanza which I have been able to find in the published records of Middle English and Middle Scots poetry. The theories and conclusions advanced in the pages which follow are limited by the availability of a corpus; however, a search of the bibliographies leads to the belief that the works included represent most, if not all, of the available material.

The texts considered date from the middle of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth, and include a wide variety of genres: secular lyrics, satirical and comic poems, political songs, religious lyrics, romances, didactic and theological works, and dramatic pieces. They appear in these dialects: Kentish, Southern, East, Northeast, West, and Northwest Midland, Northern, and Scottish. Some make use of alliteration and some do not; some contain both bob and wheel, and some have the wheel only. Thirty-two different items are considered, although it is difficult to give a precise number, since several are dramatic works in a variety of forms. Chaucer's "Sir Thopas" is not included in this total, nor in the following discussion, since it
represents, not an example of the style, but a parodic re-
action against it.

Granted these reservations, the table which appears on
pages 134-135 is instructive concerning the history of the
bob-wheel stanza, and the conclusions and suggestions which
follow appear to be warranted by the chronology and dialec-
tology shown graphically therein. The time covered in this
study has been divided into fifty-year periods, beginning at
1250 and ending at 1500, and the dialects are those commonly
accepted as those of Middle English.

The period from 1250 to 1300 may be regarded as a forma-
tive one; reference to the table will show that the prepon-
derance of bob-wheel poems at the time lies in the Southern
dialect area. The circumstance adds support to the theory
that French and Provençal models were important to the
developing phase of the bob-wheel form. As London was the
cultural and political center of the island, so it might be
expected that cultural innovations from the Continent would
have their effects first in the South rather than in the
more remote North and West. At the same time, the theory of
Latin influence is not negated by this notion; if the South
was the cultural center of the island, then knowledge of
Latin, and Latin poetry, should have been at a higher level
in the South than elsewhere.

In the Southern dialect, during this early period, there
are three religious lyrics: "Gabriel, from Even-King,"
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<td>Summer Sunday</td>
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"Of One That Is So Fayr and Bright," and "Somer Is Comen and Winter Gon." All of these are in the bob-wheel form, and one of them, as noted, is a close translation of a Latin hymn. However, the Southern group of the period also includes the political satire on Richard of Alemaigne, a topical piece which probably owes much to the carol for its origins, and which is certainly not in the same cultural track as the religious pieces. In this dialect, at the same time, there is the "Satire on the Pride of Ladies," which has the added feature of alliteration. This is the only one of the seven pieces in Southern dialect in alliterative verse, but the remaining two pieces in this period all are characterized by the device: the Northeast Midlands "Satire on the Consistory Courts" and Sir Tristrem, in Northern dialect. Here one must make his own decision: is Sir Tristrem a strongly alliterative poem, or is it not? On the one hand, Kölbing cites many examples of alliteration; on the other, Oakden omits all reference to the poem. It is commonly agreed that it is early; Saintsbury's guess that it may represent the first regular stanza in Middle English has previously been discussed.

At the same time, there is the evidence of the early "Gabriel, from Even-King," borrowing from the Latin for its stanza form. "Gabriel" has a twelve-line stanza form with bob and wheel; Sir Tristrem is in alliterative eleven-line
stanzas, also with bob and wheel. The dialects of the two poems are far removed from one another.

The dialect difficulty is not resolved by consideration of the "Satire on the Consistory Courts," from the same period, in Northeast Midland, in alliterative stanzas but without the bob line. Moreover, the stanza includes no fewer than eighteen lines in an elaborate rhyme scheme, showing influence of the tail-rhyme tradition.

Considering what is to follow, it would be easy to ascribe the genesis of the bob-wheel stanza to the religious and political or satirical poems of the period, in the Southern dialect—were it not for the presence of the Northern Sir Tristrem and the Midlands "Consistory Courts" poem. Nonetheless, of the seven poems dating from this period, five are Southern; thus, quantitatively, the preponderance of the evidence is fairly strong for a Southern origin, in spite of the question of Sir Tristrem.

The first half of the fourteenth century finds the bob-wheel poems concentrated in the south, with very few examples from any area—a total of four, as contrasted with the seven pieces from the earlier era. The Southern dialect is represented by the two political songs, "Simon Fraser" and "The Evil Times of Edward II." The latter is balanced by the West Midland "Summer Sunday," an elaborately wrought elegy in which a remarkable number of poetic devices are put to use. This is the first poem in the entire group to use the
thirteen-line stanza, combined with alliteration and the single-stress bob.

In fact, just about all of the features associated with the bob-wheel stanza are found in "Summer Sunday": the thirteen-line stanza with frons of eight alliterative four-stress lines rhyming abab abab; the single-stress bob, forming part of a cauda including three three-stress rhyming lines, concluded with a two-stress line rhyming with the bob. This may be regarded as the epitome of the bob-wheel; other stanzas have this or that feature and lack another, but "Summer Sunday" includes all of those that are typical, and if a "norm" can be found for this type of structure, this is it, and others can be thought of as departures from it.

The concatenation in the poem is not a feature common to most of the group, and the alliteration, as Oakden remarks, "is crude. . . . The author is mainly concerned with adding as much alliteration as possible, and there is apparently no acquaintance with traditional practice."¹ As the corpus of poems is examined, it becomes evident that although the alliteration in those rhyming poems which have it may be smoother in some than in others, it is always an ornamental feature, sometimes used with skill and sometimes not, but never a wholly structural feature of the poem.

Only in *Sir Gawain*, where the alliteration is integral to the *frons*, do we find it used "in accordance with traditional practice."

The only verse in Kentish dialect which is part of the corpus comes during this period, in the poem by William of Shoreham on the *Seven Sacraments*. Could his not altogether successful seven-line bob stanza have been inspired by the political bob-wheel songs of the earlier period? It is possible to think so, to think that a Kentish priest would be more likely to imitate the forms of the South rather than one commonly associated with the North or the Midlands.

At the beginning of the second half of the fourteenth century, the bob-wheel becomes the property of the Midlands and Northern dialects, and the South, including Kent, is heard from no longer. There are two examples from the Midlands, *The Quatrefoil of Love* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and from the North no fewer than seven pieces, including the dramatic excerpts.

*The Quatrefoil* repeats the "Summer Sunday" stanza, with a *frons* of eight alliterative lines abab abab, the single-stress bob, and the wheel of three three-stress lines in rhyme, closing with a two-stress line rhyming with the bob. The poet is fond of part-alliteration, carrying over the alliteration of the second half of a line to the first half of the next. Stanza linking is not present, and the alliteration is more deftly handled than in "Summer Sunday." Could
this be because the poet, writing in Midlands, was more familiar with the old tradition?

The *Pistill of Susan* (Northern dialect) has the same stanza structure, but the alliteration is excessive and patently ornamental, not structural. Similar forms are found in the Towneley and York plays of the period, but in *Dux Moraud*, the morality fragment, there is an innovation: the thirteen lines of the stanza have three stresses, not four, with the exception of the single-stress bob.

"Saint John the Evangelist" represents a departure in structure from the majority of the works considered thus far; while increasing the stanza length to fourteen lines, the poet has omitted the single-stress bob in line nine and added a six-line wheel ccd ccd₂, making up a fourteen-line stanza which shows the influence of the tail-rhyme school. The experiment was not repeated by others.

Although the tendency of this Northern verse is increasingly in the direction of the stanza of thirteen or fourteen lines, there is at least one example of the religious lyric in short stanzas during the period: the "Song of the Five Joys,"² which combines the alliterative tendencies of the North with the stanza form favored by the early lyricists of the South. This is in fact the last of the shorter stanza forms to be considered, since the thirteen

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and fourteen-line patterns prevail in the North until the end of the Middle English period. Is it possible to maintain that the school of religious lyric writers favored a shorter stanza than did those who treated other themes?

The *Awntyrs of Arthure* is the first poem to use the thirteen-line form with wheel but with no bob. The single-stress bob, usually in line nine of the thirteen-line stanza, is here replaced by another four-stress line with a new rhyme, introducing a wheel of two-stress lines. In the fifteenth century, this form became very popular as the vehicle for both romances and didactic works.

The dramatic works of this period show a great variety of stanza forms, some of which have been described; but the recurrence of the thirteen-line stanza with bob and wheel should be stressed. One might question the practicality of such elaborate forms in material designed to be memorized and declaimed in public, but evidently the complex arrangements of lines presented no insuperable obstacles to the actors in the plays. Since these plays were not, as a rule, the work of single, known writers, but were largely anonymous and communal in their origin, it is possible to believe that the vogue of the bob-wheel stanzas in the North during this period may have been so considerable as to produce imitation among the writers of the plays. The forms found in the manuscripts of other kinds of works may have influenced the journeymen who created the dramas.
It is obvious that "Sir Thopas" parodied the romances of the period; the question is, which ones? For the object of parody in Chaucer's bob-wheel stanzas, there is extant only Sir Tristrem, whose bob-wheels only slightly resemble those included in Chaucer's parody. But Chaucer was not necessarily parodying any one Northern romance, or group of them; he may well have had in mind a larger body of Northern and perhaps Midlands literature, and not just a particular group of romances. And again, as Wells reminds the reader,

But that Chaucer was making . . . any . . . single romance his butt, is little acceptable. Apparently he wrote in an off-hand fashion, from his general impressions. . . . Clearly, the object of the variations was not to illustrate the various romance stanzas, or to exhibit Chaucer's capacity in handling verse-forms. The poet let himself go in the spirit of the mood, exuberantly running on here, and adding a quirk there, as facility in rime or the swing of the jingle invited.3

This important half-century, containing more works in the bob-wheel form than any of the other periods under discussion, is indelibly marked by the presence of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which many would call the finest romance of the Middle English period. Prosodically, it remains an anomaly in that its mixture of alliterative long line and bob-wheel cauda is not found in any other poem of the period. It may indeed be an attempted fusion of the two traditions; as such, it was successful, but it was not

3 John E. Wells, A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500 (New Haven, Conn., 1926), pp. 706-7.
repeated. In spite of the excellencies of the older tradition, as so beautifully displayed here, it inevitably gave place to the newer rhyming school.

During the fifteenth century appeared the poems of Audelay, a morality play (The Castle of Perseverance), the Ludus Coventriae cycle, and the Middle Scots romances in the bob-wheel form. Audelay's poems show a slight reworking of the thirteen-line bob-wheel form, adding one or two stresses to the bob line and an extra stress to the final line: the effect is to produce a more symmetrical stanza by giving the bob and the last line the same number of stresses. Audelay's work, non-alliterative, is slightly out of the mainstream, in which alliteration now runs strong. Both of the dramatic pieces, the Ludus Coventriae and The Castle of Perseverance, contain arrangements of the thirteen-line stanza, use heavy doses of alliteration, and vary the rhyme scheme and the number of stresses in bob and final line.

Of the two Scottish satirical poems, "Chrystis Kirk on the Grene" is the more interesting, metrically, making use of septenaries for the *frons* and of a burden line as the last of each stanza, and thus harking back to the old carol tradition. Both of these poems show the comic possibilities of the bob-wheel form, especially when the comic effects of the Scots dialect are exploited.

Holland's *Buke of the Howlat* makes use of the thirteen-line stanza without bob, like that of the *Awntyrs off Arthure*. 
This pattern appears again during the period 1450-1500; but the bob-wheel form comes back in the poems by Dunbar and Lyndesay.

My survey of the extant bob-wheel poems comes to an end here, in 1553, with Lyndesay's satire. This date is well after that of the introduction of printing into the island, and only five years before the accession of Elizabeth I. The conservative Scots were slow to give up a form which had been abandoned by the English nearly one hundred years before, and variations on the bob-wheel appeared in Scottish verse until the days of Burns. The form assumed an increasing amount of artificiality, however; and today only the most devoted Scot will claim great things for the literature of his country during the period between the passing of the great fifteenth-century poets and the days of Robert Burns.

The conservatism of the Scots is demonstrated by James I and VI, who, as late as 1584, discusses and illustrates the Scottish thirteen-line stanza without bob in Ane Schort Treatise, Containing Some Revlis and Cautelis to be Observit and Eschewit in Scottis Poesie. James recommends the stanza for a particular kind of verse: "For flyting, or Inuectiues, vse this kynde of verse following, callit

Rouncefallis or Tumbling verse." He then quotes the first stanza of Montgomerie's *Flyting of Polwart and Montgomerie*, first printed posthumously in 1629.

James also mentions the "Banks of Helicon Stanza" in his inventory of forms, with a remark indicating that Scottish inventiveness in stanza form was still active in 1584:

Lyke verse of ten fete, as this foirsaid is of aucht, ye may vse lykewayis in loue materis: as also all kyndis of cuttit and brokin verse, quhairof new formes are daylie inuentit accord- ing to the Poetes pleasour . . . .

By James' time, the days of the metrical romance had long passed, and evidently the stanza favored by the Scots as the vehicle for romance had come into use for the satirical "flyting" verse which remained popular during the king's lifetime.

The preceding pages have offered a summary of the directions which bob-wheel verse took during the period of popularity in the two kingdoms, between the middle of the thirteenth and the end of the fifteenth centuries. The evidence presented earlier concerning the possible sources of the form as it came to be used in England and Scotland,

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5 Smith, p. 223. For the use of "rouncefallis," see Smith's note, p. 407, although he is unable to furnish a satisfactory account of the term.

6 Montgomerie's poem, published in the complete edition of his works, was not available to me.

7 Smith, p. 224.
together with this review of its career in Middle English, leads to some general conclusions as to origins, development, and decline of the form.

In the first chapters of this study, evidence was introduced to show that the bob-wheel stanza may have had, not a single origin, in the elaborate stanza forms of French, Provençal, and possibly other Continental lyrics, but a double beginning, in which the influence of Latin verse took part. The parallels between some of the early Middle English lyrics and their counterparts in Latin verse are sufficient in number and strength, I believe, to justify the assumption of such a double origin. And the lack of precisely similar parallels between the English single-bob stanzas and the Continental texts examined strengthens this hypothesis.

Rhyme and stanza pattern were undoubtedly innovations in England during the early Middle English period, but it appears unduly restrictive to ascribe their appearance solely to the influence of contemporary Romance verse, neglecting the possibility of contributions from the Latin sources, both religious and secular.

I believe, furthermore, that the evidence presented is strong in favor of the indigenous origin of the bob-wheel stanza, and that the form should not be regarded as an importation either from contemporary Continental, Anglo-Norman, or Latin sources. Certainly there are abundant examples of a wide variety of anisometric stanzas in all three of these
schools of verse, but I have found none which closely resemble the Middle English bob-wheel as defined in the introductory chapter of this study. Thus if Saintsbury was in error in thinking of the Sir Tristrem stanza as the first in Middle English (in view of the difficulty of dating the poem, and the early dates of the political songs), his judgment appears accurate in that the stanza form, as used in Sir Tristrem and the other early pieces, may well be the earliest in Middle English.

The question of the possible role of music and dance in the development of these stanzas is not only difficult but also very critical, if one attempts to deduce the origins of the bob line from the short burden or refrain of the English carol, or the French lyric intended for dancing. Although there are strong associations between many of these French and Provençal lyrics and music and dance, such a link is not so easily seen among the pieces written in Middle English. However, examination of the texts of the carols surviving from the period, with their short burdens, often of no more than one stress, tempts one to believe that, in some manner, a musical association may have existed between the early examples of the bob-wheel pattern and the popular songs of the period. An allied association with a musical setting is apparent in the English version of the "Angelus ad Virginem," ("Gabriel from Even-king"), lending some indirect support to the association of words and music.
When we come to consider the development of the bob-wheel form, aside from its possible origins, however, we are on much surer ground. Reference to the tabular arrangement of the material (pages 134-135) reveals much, even though it raises a problem which may not be solvable: that of the place of Sir Tristrem in the chronology of the bob-wheel form. Setting this difficulty aside for the moment, and considering the evolution of the bob-wheel examples studied earlier, it is possible to assume that the form first came into use in the short secular pieces of the second half of the thirteenth century and that these poems are concentrated in the area of the Southern dialect. There are three religious lyrics and two political songs dating from this period, in Southern dialect; if we add the two political songs dating from the first half of the fourteenth century to these, we have a substantial group of short pieces—seven in all, of which four are political or satirical in tone and three are religious. The close geographical proximity of the Kentish area to that of the Southern dialect permits us to include the Seven Sacraments of William of Shoreham in this group, as generally Southern in nature, thus yielding a group of pieces of varying lengths—from six to twelve lines—all of which, except for the "King of Alemaigne," are characterized by the bob-wheel feature. One might go farther by mentioning the logic of a Southern origin, if it could be shown that Norman cultural influence was initially strongest
in the South. Certainly it can be maintained that the South tended, during the Middle English period in general, to be more innovative in language and literature than the more conservative North; so such a conjecture is not entirely without a foundation in history.

It is not possible, however, to push very far an argument for Southern influence, based on its innovativeness, as a study of the chart shows that the most innovative of all the Middle English dialects produced nothing creative in the bob-wheel form. Southeast Midland, the language of Chaucer's London, evidently had no interest in the bob-wheel forms except a satirical one, as witness "Sir Thopas." Generally speaking, the Southern dialect may be regarded as more innovative than the Northern; but Southern is surpassed in this aspect by Southeast Midland. Whatever the reasons for the early development of the bob-wheel in the South (including Kent), it is not possible to ascribe this development to a degree of sophistication not possessed by the capital city and its environs.

Of this Southern group, we note one example of alliterative verse: the "Satire on the Pride of Ladies," is anomalous in possessing this feature. At the same time, Oakden asserts that the poem is "metrically crude; and there is no acquaintance with traditional practice."\(^8\) It is possible accordingly to see this satire as an experimental effort by

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\(^8\) Oakden, II, 224.
a versifier not a part of the Midlands and Northern development which followed these Southern pioneering efforts, and thus not accustomed to the old alliterative tradition.

In the period 1250-1350, there are two Midlands bob-wheel productions, the elaborate and not entirely successful "Satire on the Consistory Courts," from the earlier part of the period, and the metrically very polished "Summer Sunday," from the later part. Oakden also calls this a "crude" effort, but the skillful use of concatenation and the well managed stanza structure do not support his strictures, which, however, are directed against the alliterative technique used more than against the other features of the poem.

In brief, the century from 1250 to 1350 shows a Southern beginning, with some examples from the Midlands, which also add the feature of alliteration. Were it not for the presence of Sir Tristrem, it would be tempting to trace from this Southern origin a shift to Midlands dialect areas, followed later by a developing vogue in the North and in Scotland. But the Northern romance, with its eleven-line bob-wheel structure, with some degree of alliteration present, but hardly apparent to some observers, makes it impossible to regard the bob-wheel stanza, in its early phases, as uniquely a Southern development. A solution to the enigma simply does not appear, although one obvious possibility is the loss of some significant bob-wheel material stemming from other dialect areas than the South. In any case, the
presence of the Southern examples, roughly coeval with the Northern romance, tends to weaken Saintsbury's hypothesis that the Tristrem stanza may be the first regular stanza in Middle English.

To return, for the last time, to ten Brink's theory that such stanzas as the three-stress Tristrem type were created by the division of native Alexandrines into two half-lines, I repeat my belief that the evidence shows that, although such a process may have taken place in the development of such a poem as Sir Tristrem, it can have had no part in the formation of stanzas of the bob-wheel type in which the frons lines are of four or more stresses. Moreover, in view of the prevalence of alliteration in most of the corpus under study, it seems more logical to see the old alliterative long line as the ultimate basis of the bob-wheel frons line, even though the alliterative devices in most of the group are obviously used ornamentally and have no structural utility.

The period from 1350 to 1400 shows a heavy concentration of material in the Northern dialect area, with an evident preference for the thirteen-line stanza. Such poems as these are also related to the Quatrefoil of Love, from the Midlands, in their preference for the thirteen-line stanza, with single-stress bob. However, during the same time, the Awntyrs of Arthur provides the first example of what was to
be the favorite Scots variant of the form: the thirteen-line form without short bob.

The second great anomaly of this chronology appears with Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, which may indeed be viewed as an attempt to fuse two traditions: the alliterative and the rhyming-stanzaic. The effort at fusion, if such it was, apparently produced no general trend: Sir Gawain remains a tour de force with no imitators. Very likely, few if any other poets of the period possessed the dual skill at rhyming and alliterative verse which would be required to produce a work showing mastery of both techniques.

Chaucer's parody, as we have seen, argues that some material from the period may have been lost, since it is not easy to identify exactly what his bob-wheel stanzas are intended to parody.

Toward the close of this period, and during the following, the examples of Northern dramatic works which have the bob-wheel stanza are probable evidence that this largely folk-produced art form derived its technical features from the other genres prevalent at the time and in the North. Such fine examples as the Second Shepherds' Play, taken together with Sir Gawain, the Quatrefoil of Love, and the Fistill of Susan, make this period the high-water point of literary excellence in bob-wheel verse: there is no such group of outstanding poems in this form in any other part of the Middle English era.
At this high-water point, however, the English began to abandon the bob-wheel form, and the Scottish production in the style never attained the excellencies of the English works of the fourteenth century. Only in Dunbar's "Kynd Kittock" and the charming romance of Rauf Coilegear does the Scottish work begin to rival the English of the earlier period. The loyalty of the Scots to a form which the English evidently discarded persisted well into the Renaissance.

Why did the English, more culturally advanced than the Scots, lose interest in the bob-wheel stanza? There are several possible explanations, all of which may play their part. To begin with, the form is technically demanding, requiring considerable ingenuity in order to prevent the single-stress bob from degenerating to the status of a semantically empty filler serving only a metrical purpose. Again, Saintsbury's aesthetic strictures, as cited in Chapter IV, should be recalled: "The effect is not very good; the short lines, as has been said, do not suit English as a staple; the rhymes come with excessive frequency; and the stamp and twirl of the final triplet, though an added grace, is a grace of a somewhat boarding-school fashion."9 In short, the bob-wheel stanza, as well as being difficult to manage in English, is aesthetically less pleasing than

many other stanza structures, which have retained their popularity for longer periods.

Finally, two other influences should be borne in mind: the first is that of Chaucer, who consistently preferred isometric stanza structure rather than uneven line length, and changed the course of English prosody by focusing on the five-stress line rather than one of three or four beats. It is significant that, although we have seen examples of the bob-wheel stanza in the work of the Scottish Chaucerians such as Dunbar and Lyndesay, the great part of their verse followed other forms.

The second influence which, somewhat later, contributed to the gradual abandonment of the bob-wheel style, came in with the Renaissance, and is best exemplified by the work of such pioneers as Wyatt and Surrey. The Italian influence, while not all-pervasive, was strong enough to sweep aside not only the tumbling cascades of Skeltonic verse but also the more carefully organized bob-wheel style. Only in Scotland, geographically remote from the cultural innovations of London, and tending, partly on nationalistic grounds, to cling to the old ways, did the old forms persist. It is ironic that when James' Rewlis and Cautelis appeared in Edinborough, Songs and Sonnets had been in print, in London, for almost thirty years, and the new style had completely overshadowed the old.
A final judgment of the aesthetic worth of the poetry produced in the bob-wheel's tradition cannot be a highly flattering one, as witness the evidence of literary history: few if any of these works are now read, even by the literary historian, in any spirit other than that of curiosity. The bob-wheel poems have left little imprint on the pages of English literary history, except that they, together with other Middle English anisometrical forms, contributed to the persistence of anisometrical stanzas throughout the succeeding centuries. Their rise and decline in popularity, however, provide an interesting chapter in the history of Middle English prosody, a history which has as yet not received sufficient attention from scholars and critics.
ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORDS "BOB" AND "WHEEL"

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the etymon of "bob" is a matter of conjecture only. A possible candidate is the Irish baban, meaning a tassel or cluster. The word is first recorded in English in 1340, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with the meaning of "a bunch, or cluster, of leaves or flowers." A citation from 1601 carries the meaning, "a rounded mass or lump at the end of a rod," and other significances of this sort (the weight at the end of a clock pendulum, an ear-bob, as in the present-day usage, or some other kind of rounded body) are cited by the O.E.D. from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

"Bob" was used to mean the burden, or refrain, of a song, as early as 1606. A group of usages dating from the previous century centers on the concept of a blow with the fist, a buffet, or a light tap; this use can certainly be dated earlier than the sixteenth century, however, in view of one of the religious lyrics cited in Ch. III of this study (p. III, 5: "So hir Soon was bobbid"), which dates from the fourteenth century. Also from the sixteenth century comes a Scots usage to describe certain kinds of dances (1550).
It is extremely unfortunate that Guest did not identify the passage in which Johnson used the word in the poetic sense, nor any of the other "classical writers" who, he maintains, made use of the term.

Another possibility exists in the area of campanology—specifically, the practice of change-ringing on peals of church bells. As used by Stedman, the seventeenth-century pioneer in the systematization of the art, the term refers to a commonly practiced method of allowing one of the bells in the peal to "make the bob," that is, to depart from the ordinary course of combinations and permutations and to remain, roughly, in the same place while the other bells are following their regular course.

The modern sense of something cut short or fore-shortened, as the short tail of the bob-cat, or bobbed hair, does not seem to be as ancient as some of the other significations, although the term "bob wig," a short wig with the hair at the back turned up in curls, dates from 1688, and the word was used for a docked horse's tail in 1711.

Many of these possibilities are tempting, but in view of the fact that the term "bob" is not recorded in the study of prosody until Guest's use of it (or at most a century earlier, accepting his statement concerning Dr. Johnson and the "classical writers"), it is my own conjecture that the term first was used in the sense in which it is understood in this study sometime during the eighteenth century, at the
earliest, and probably by association with the signification of something abruptly shortened, such as the docked horse's tail—or the abbreviated line of poetry.

There are many fewer lines of conjecture available when we come to deal with the possible etymology of "wheel," as used in Guest's sense. Note that Guest makes no claim that any writer earlier than himself had made use of the term to identify the concluding lines of a poetic stanza. The idea of a wheel, of course, connotes a regular motion, with the concept of recurrence: that is, the rotation of a wheel past a given point will regularly bring any given point on the wheel back to the stationary point, with each rotation. It is possible that Guest was struck by the regularly recurring cauda, especially if its individual lines are shortened, and mentally compared its periodic recurrence to the rotation of a wheel. This is highly conjectural, it is true; but in default of more concrete evidence, it is not possible to offer more than conjecture in reply to a question which may not be answerable.
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