THE EXPLOITATION OF FRENCH–ENGLISH LEXICAL TRANSFER IN EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

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IT IS ONE of the oldest chestnuts in historical linguistics that many common words in Present-Day English arrived in the language from French and that this lexical transfer took place with greatest intensity during the Middle Ages. The most recent statistical analysis identifies the first half of the fourteenth century as the moment that French imports peak as a proportion of all new English words recorded.[1] Scholarship emphasizes the differences between French to English lexical transfer now and then. When French was one of three languages mastered by the literate—the other two being English and Latin—the exchange of words will have been easier. The cross-labelling of French and English glosses on Latin texts, as well as the frequent switching between English, French, and Latin in administrative writing have been adduced as evidence of the porosity of the boundaries between the medieval languages and of the absence amongst scribes of a clear sense of where each idiom might begin or end.[2]

These important findings result from a decision amongst historical linguists to redirect their attention from literature towards hitherto neglected text types of more pragmatic design. This move has allowed for a clearer reconstruction of the situations of lexical transfer in medieval England at the same time as it has facilitated a reassessment of English scribes' linguistic abilities. The mixed administrative language once viewed as evidence of the poor French and Latin of its wielders can now be appreciated as a direct reflection of the multilingual environment in which they operated, for example.[3] But just as pragmatic texts are unlikely to be entrusted to writers who are intrinsically deficient, so they are not the place where we might expect to find targeted effects resulting from the deliberate juxtaposition of words originating in different languages. I propose that these effects can be engaged in Middle English poetry and that poetry deserves to be taken as a text type apart from the pragmatic documents addressed by the linguists.

1 See Philip Durkin, *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 261.

2 The bibliography on these topics is vast, including important studies by Richard Ingham, William Rothwell, David Trotter, and Laura Wright, some of which are cited below. For a useful summarizing analysis, see David Trotter, "*Deinz certeins boundes*: Where Does Anglo-Norman Begin and End?" *Romance Philology* 67 (2013): 139–77.

3 See, for example, William Rothwell, "Aspects of Lexical and Morphosyntactical Mixing in the Languages of Medieval England," in *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, ed. D. A. Trotter (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 213–32; and Laura Wright, *Sources of London English: Medieval Thames Vocabulary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

My focus falls on the apprehension of French vocabulary in Middle English poetry during the most intense period of lexical transfer from French into English, ca. 1300–ca. 1350. Insofar as is possible, I am keen to recreate the experience of reading Middle English at this time, when so much of English might still be called French. My major resource in this endeavor will be the dates of first attestation recorded for words of French origin in the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*).[4] The more recent the first date of attestation, I suggest, the fresher the loan, and the more available it will be for special manipulation. Numerous objections to this approach should be logged at the outset. The corpus of a historical dictionary can never be complete, so the absence of a quotation for a word prior, say, to 1300, does not mean that the word was never written before then. It is also a truism in historical lexicography that words are used first in speech, then in writing. Then there are problems relating specifically to the design of the *MED*. The dictionary's compilation spans a century (1925–) and advances in lexicography over this stretch are unevenly represented in its entries. The *MED*'s editors are upfront about these limitations, which pertain especially to the dictionary's handling of etymology.[5]

Some of the *MED*'s deficiencies can be remedied by consulting other historical dictionaries, such as the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (*AND*: https://www.anglo-norman.net/), the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français* (*DMF*: http://zeus.atilf.fr/dmf/); and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*: https://www.oed.com). But it is also worth pointing out that one of the *MED*'s flaws serves my purposes. The *MED* tends to draw its quotations from monolingual, literary sources; in this respect, it bears the mark of its earliest debts to wordlists designed to help readers of Chaucer.[6] The disproportionate representation of monolingual, literary writing in the dictionary has attracted criticism from those interested in reconstructing England's multilingual past.[7] It is a boon for me, however, because I am attempting to reconstruct the expectations of readers encountering the kind of text in which the *MED* specializes: the Middle English literary work.

The texts that I have selected for discussion survive in two well-known books dating to the 1330s: the Auchinleck Manuscript, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS Advocates' 19.2.1, which was made at London; and London, British Library MS Harley 2253, which was made in or near Ludlow, in Shropshire.[8] The

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4 *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001). Online edition in *Middle English Compendium*, ed. Frances McSparran et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000–2018), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/.

5 See Robert E. Lewis, *Middle English Dictionary: Plan and Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 12–14. On the more recent history of the *MED*, see Paul Schaffner, "The *Middle English Dictionary* Revenant," *Dictionaries* 40 (2019): 201–19.

6 See N. F. Blake, "The Early History of, and Its Impact Upon, the *Middle English Dictionary*," *Dictionaries* 23 (2002): 48–75.

7 See, for example, William Rothwell, "*OED*, *MED*, *AND*: The Making of a New Dictionary of English," *Anglia* 119 (2002): 527–53.

8 See the online facsimile-edition "The Auchinleck Manuscript," ed. David Burnley and Alison

importance of Harley 2253 for scholars interested in medieval England's multilingual past is immediately evident because the book contains texts written in Latin, French, and English as well as poems combining two or more of these languages. Auchinleck also deserves consideration by scholars of multilingualism, notwithstanding its reputation as a monolingual English book: recent statistical analysis reveals a high density of freshly imported French words in its lexicon.[9] From these books I have chosen four texts that give a sense of the varying ways in which French might be deployed in Early Middle English poetry: *King Richard* and *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* in the Auchinleck Manuscript and *Satire on the Retinues of the Great* and *Annot and John* in Harley 2253.

In what follows, I start by addressing each of these poems in turn with a view to highlighting their exploitation of the mixed English in which they are written. Their debts to French have not passed unremarked in criticism; my analyses will draw on the work of Susanna Fein and Thea Summerfield in particular.[10] I am more original in my decision to consider these four texts together, and this is where the final interest of the study lies: in the demonstration of the different connotations that French might be made to bear in Early Middle English poetry, not only across but also within discrete fourteenth-century contexts. These connotations are especially various, both including and extending beyond the dichotomy of French-as-native and French-as-foreign delineated by Ardis Butterfield in her groundbreaking study of French and English later in the Middle Ages.[11] My conclusions pick out this point

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Wiggins (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland, 2003), https://auchinleck.nls.uk; and *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. and trans. Susanna Fein with David Raybin and Jan Ziolkowski, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014–2015).

9 See Rory G. Critten, Cyrille Gay-Crosier, and Davide Picca, "French Lexis in the Auchinleck Manuscript: A Digital–Philological Approach," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 37, no. 2 (2022): 354–74.

10 See Susanna Fein, "Early Middle English in Trilingual Manuscripts: Eruptions, Collisions, Colloquies," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd ser., 14 (2017): 33–68; and Thea Summerfield, "'And She Answered in Hir Language': Aspects of Multilingualism in the Auchinleck Manuscript," in *Multilingualism in Medieval Britain (c. 1066–1520)*, ed. Judith A. Jefferson and Ad Putter (Turnout: Brepols, 2013), 241–58. On the poetic exploitation of the expanding lexicon of Middle English, with reference to different texts, see too Tim William Machan, "The Individuality of English in the Multilingual Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge Handbook of English Historical Linguistics*, ed. Merja Kytö and Päivi Pahta (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 407–23; and Seth Lerer, "'Dum ludis floribus': Language and Text in the Medieval English Lyric," *Philological Quarterly* 87 (2008): 237–55.

11 See Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). My comments below on the attributed connotations of French align with Butterfield's more recent work, which treats earlier English poetry. See Ardis Butterfield, "Translating Fuzziness: Countertexts," *Common Knowledge* 19 (2013): 446–73. General impetus for my work is also drawn from the selection of extracts presented in *Vernacular Literary Theory from the French of Medieval England: Texts and Translations, c. 1120–c. 1450*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Thelma Fenster, and Delbert Russell (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016). This anthology demonstrates the wide range of connotations that might attach to French in late-medieval English contexts.

in order to develop an argument about the lexical ambitions of early Middle English poetry that might be applied to readings of other contemporaneous texts.

French for the French: *King Richard*

I begin with an example of the use of French within English writing that will be immediately familiar to twenty-first-century readers. In Auchinleck's romance of the third crusade, *King Richard*, the perfidious French king Philip and his soldiers are given speeches that have recent French loanwords in such density that they might be considered early examples of gallic spoof.[12] My examples are taken from the opening of the text, whose survival in Auchinleck is fragmentary. Having arrived in Sicily en route to the Holy Land, Richard has already been double-crossed by Philip and is preparing to attack him in the town of Messina, where Philip has barricaded himself with his soldiers. The French soldiers shout down vulgarities to Richard's Englishmen below:

> Goþ hom dogges wiþ ȝour tayl!
> For ȝour bost & ȝour orgoyl
> Man schal þrest in ȝour coyl! (246–48)[13]

> (Go home dogs with your tails!
> For your boasting and your pride
> You'll get it up the arse!)

The Frenchmen's insult relates to a story according to which the early medieval inhabitants of Dorchester were cursed by Augustine with tails when they proved reluctant to convert to Christianity.[14] What interests me more immediately are the two French loanwords in rhyme position at the ends of lines 247 and 248: *orgoyl* and *coyl*. *King Richard* is assumed to have been translated from a French source that has since been lost.[15] If this is so, then French rhyme words are especially likely to have been kept in English—so *orgoyl* and *coyl* might not have been deliberately chosen for this passage. It remains interesting to think about the possible effects of these words in Middle English poetry, however, particularly in view of the important position that they assume at the end of their lines.

The *MED* can help us to understand how *orgoyl* and *coyl* might have been apprehended by the first audiences of the Auchinleck Manuscript. Of the two words, *orgoyl* appears commoner in Middle English. *MED* s.v. *orguil* lists thirteen quotations, the earliest of which is found in a manuscript that the *MED* dates to 1175–1200.[16] The

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12 What follow builds on commentary in Summerfield, "'And She Answered in Hir Language,'" 250–54.

13 Citations of *King Richard* are by line number from Burnley and Wiggins, "The Auchinleck Manuscript," https://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/richard.html. Translations mine.

14 See P. Rickard, "*Anglois coué* and *l'Anglois qui couve*," *French Studies* 7 (1953): 48–55.

15 See *Richard Coer de Lyon*, ed. Peter Larkin, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), 3.

16 On the *MED*'s system of double-dating by manuscript date and presumed composition date,

word *coyl* seems rarer. *MED* s.v. *cul* n.(1) lists only three quotations, the earliest of which is found in a manuscript that the *MED* dates to 1275–1300; the next most senior quotation is taken from the Auchinleck text of *King Richard*; and the dictionary's lexicographers did not find another example of the word that could be dated before 1400–1425, notwithstanding their aim to find quotations at twenty-five year intervals.[17] Variance in the spelling of *cul* across the three other versions of *King Richard* cited by the *MED*—*cule*, *cull*, *koyl*—also suggests that the word might not often have been met in Middle English contexts.

At the very least, the rhyme words in the French soldiers' taunt are available for a gallicizing performance in which the more recent import, *coyl*, reactivates the French associations of the more familiar word, *orgoyl*. This effect might also be found in longer passages, as in my next extract, also taken from the encounter at Messina, where king Philip attempts to rally his troops:

> Þis yseyȝe þe king of Fraunce
> & seyd "no haue ȝe no dotaunce
> Of þe Inglische cowardes,
> For þai no be bot mossardes.
> Drisses now ȝour mangunel
> & kestes to her tre castel
> & scheteþ to hem wiþ alblast,
> Þe teyled doggen to agast!" (287–94)

> (The king of France saw this
> And said: "have no fear
> Of the English cowards,
> For they are nothing but fools.
> Now, ready your catapults
> And strike at their siege tower
> And shoot on them with your crossbows,
> To strike fear into those tailed dogs!")

In this instance, two of Philip's rhyme words have their earliest *MED* quotation from the Auchinleck text of *King Richard* (see *MED* s.vv. *doutaunce*, *musard*), and, except for *castel*, which the *MED*'s lexicographers first find in the early-twelfth-century *Peterborough Chronicle*, none of the other French rhyme words is regularly attested before 1300.

Historical linguists are keen to point out that modern perceptions of words as French and thus somehow un-English will not automatically have been shared by medieval English people who used French as a second vernacular.[18] All of the words

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that I have picked out in the preceding passages from *King Richard* were already English insofar as they can be found in texts written in the French of England (see *AND* s.vv. *orguil*, *cul*, *dutance*, *musart*). What seems to be happening in *King Richard* is that a differentiation between French and English is being sought for the purposes of the poem, which aims to draw equally clear and corresponding lines between the French and English armies. The francophobia of the romance is impressive; at Messina and elsewhere the French are shown to be arrogant, covetous, and unreliable.

A desire to attribute French to the French and English to the English is made patent in the prologue to *King Richard*, where the author of the work adduces the death of French amongst the English in justification of his work:

> Þis lewed no can Freyns non—
> Among an hundred vnneþe on,
> In lede is nouȝt to leyn.
> Noþeles, wiþ gode chere
> Fele of hem wald yhere
> Noble gestes, ich vnderstond,
> Of douȝti kniȝtes of Inglond. (22–28)

> (These untaught [English] people don't know any French—
> Scarcely one among a hundred does,
> I wouldn't tell a lie.
> And yet, gladly,
> Many of them would hear
> Noble deeds, I think,
> Of doughty knights of England.)

But this neat version of events is belied by sociolinguistic reality. French remained a living language within England at least until the time of the Black Death, and facility in French amongst the readers of romance remained high throughout the later Middle Ages: Middle English translations of French romances did not simply replace their French-language sources, which continued to circulate well into the fourteenth century.[19] Nevertheless, the prologue to *King Richard* establishes a discursive context in which the appearance of the loanwords that I have highlighted can be understood as a marker of nationality. In these moments, it seems, French words are being deployed in English to signal the French identity of their speaker.

French for the English: *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*

The idea that French might belong uniquely to the French was gathering steam in the early fourteenth century.[20] From the vantage point of the twentieth century it is difficult to recapture the novelty of this argument; certainly it was not the only way in which readers of the Auchinleck Manuscript and other contemporaneous books might be invited to imagine French in relation to England. My second Auchinleck example, *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*, manifests a very different concept of the language. In its first part, the text is macaronic, alternating between French and English every two lines. A speaker rails against the damage done to England by broken agreements:

> L'en puet fere & defere,
> ceo fait-il trop souent;
> It nis nouþer wel ne faire,
> Þerfore Engelond is shent.
> Nostre prince de Engletere,
> per le consail de sa gent,
> At Westminster after þe feire
> maden a gret parlement. (1–8)[21]

> (One can do and undo,
> he does this too often;
> it is neither well nor good,
> therefore England is destroyed.
> Our prince of England,
> on the counsel of his people,
> at Westminster after the fair
> assembled a great parliament.)

A charter made of wax has been held so close to the fire that it has melted, and the result of behaviour like this, we are told, is that "tout i va a tripolay" (all goes to ruin) (5–16). The text is completed by a Middle English addition to these macaronic lines in which four wise men offer riddling explanations for England's parlous state (17–98).

 The Sayings of the Four Philosophers is traditionally assumed to refer to Edward II's breaking of the Ordinances that he signed in 1311: this is the occasion for the poem given in Thomas Wright's *Political Songs of England*.[22] Amongst other things, the Ordinances stipulated the exile of Edward's favourite, Piers Gaveston, but by January 1312 Gaveston was back in England, at York, where he was joined by the king.

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20 See the collection of Middle English prologues reproduced in Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 138–43. The interpretation of these familiar passages is often trickier than has been assumed. See, for example, Patrick Butler, "A Failure to Communicate: Multilingualism in the Prologue to *Of Arthour and of Merlin*," in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, ed. Susanna Fein (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016), 52–66.

21 Citations of *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* are by line number from Burnley and Wiggins, "The Auchinleck Manuscript," https://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/philos.html. Translations mine.

22 See *Thomas Wright's Political Songs of England* (1839; reissued with introduction by Peter Coss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 253. See too V. J. Scattergood, "Political Context, Date and Composition of 'The Sayings of the Four Philosophers,'" *Medium Aevum* 37, no. 2 (1968): 157–65.

The Auchinleck poem might be read as giving the barons' version of the story after the fallout attending this instance of royal oath-breaking. By June 1312, Gaveston had been captured and summarily executed, and Edward was plotting revenge.[23] At the same time, *Sayings* engages memories of royal backtracking stretching over a longer period. It both expands upon and adapts an earlier version of the poem's macaronic portion that alludes to events in 1305–1306, when Edward I retracted additional clauses that he had been forced to add to Magna Carta, and in 1309, when Edward II sought papal support to overturn a previous judgement of exile on Gaveston.[24]

The most obvious comment about the connotations of French developed in *Sayings* is that the poem shows the language being used by the English to intervene in matters of English national significance. The contrast with the use of French as a marker of French nationality in *King Richard* could not be clearer. It should be emphasized that the deployment of French in *Sayings* is far from surprising; it reflects the familiar uses of the language for a range of legal and administrative functions in late-medieval England, including petitioning the king.[25] The unoriginality of the poem with regard to its use of French seems worth emphasizing, however, because criticism continues to insist upon a pre-determined connection between the English language and the expression of English identities and concerns as early as the 1330s.[26]

Two subtler points to be made about *Sayings* relate to the anticipated sounds of its French and English lines and to its imagination of the difference between its languages. The structure of the poem shows switching between French and English more obviously than does the embedding of the franglais speeches in *King Richard*. But the poem's form requires the languages to sound the same in its rhymes, which pair French with English words. In the opening eight lines, cited above, French *defere* and *Engleterre* must rhyme with English *faire* and *feire*, and French *souent* and *gent* must rhyme with English *shent* and *parlement*. The two most recent commentators on *Sayings* disagree regarding the realization of these end words. Jennifer Jahner assumes that they rhyme, but Fiona Summerset calls the sound scheme of the poem "fractured."[27]

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23 See Roy Martin Haines, *King Edward II: His Life, His Reign, and Its Aftermath, 1284–1330* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2003), 75–86.

24 See Laura Kendrick, "On Reading Medieval Political Verse: Two Partisan Poems from the Reign of Edward II," *Mediaevalia* 5 (1979): 183–204. For an edition of the earlier poem, see *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, ed. Isabel S. T. Aspin, Anglo-Norman Texts 11 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), 62.

25 See, for example, William Rothwell, "Language and Government in Medieval England," *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 93 (1983): 258–70; and W. Mark Ormrod, "The Language of Complaint: Multilingualism and Petitioning in Later Medieval England," in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), 31–43. On the use of Latin, French, and English in the prosecution of the Barons' War, see too Tim William Machan, *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 21–69.

26 Here my argument joins up with studies of Middle English romance that reveal the nationalist bent of these texts to be already present in their French sources. See Ivana Djordević, "Nation and Translation: Guy of Warwick Between Languages," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 57 (2013): 111–14.

27 Compare Jennifer Jahner, "The Poetry of the Second Barons' War: Some Manuscript Contexts,"

Consultation of the standard handbooks of Middle English and Anglo-Norman phonology helps to pinpoint the issue at hand at the same time as the poem belies a problem with the manuals' approach. Regarding the rhymes in the text's first eight lines, Ian Short tells us that whereas other Old French dialects distinguish between the diphthongs /ai/ and /ei/, the French of England reduces both sounds to /e/, so that *fere* in *defere* (>*defaire*) can rhyme with *Angleterre*.[28] But Richard Jordan tells us that Old English /æʒ/ regularly becomes Middle English /ai/, so that Old English *fæʒer* becomes Middle English *fair*, having the same vowel sound as Middle English *dai*, *mai*, and *lai*.[29] On these accounts, the poem's rhymes on -*fere*, *faire*, -*terre*, and *feire* are not assured. The poem's rhymes on -*ent* are also uncertain. Short tells us that final unsupported dentals are often lost in pronunciation in the French of England, particularly after the thirteenth century.[30] But Jordan asserts that the pronunciation of the voiceless dental stop is held over from Old English.[31] Thus we might expect the final /t/ to have been dropped in French *souent* and *gent* but kept in English *shent and parlement*.

Historical phonologies that rely on rhyme to reconstruct the sounds of a language risk privileging the least reliable evidence: it is perhaps precisely in the moment of rhyming that most flexibility can be expected within and between languages.[32] Still, some thought is probably required to make the phonetic matches required by the rhyme scheme in *Sayings*. Will English be accommodated to French, or French to English? Or will some common ground be found? The picture is further complicated by the sharing of English and French words between the two languages that the poem sorts into English and French lines: *consail* in one of the poem's French portions (line 6) is frequently recorded in English contexts by the *MED*'s lexicographers from 1300; and *parlement* (line 8), in one of the English portions, is a recent French import (see *MED* s.vv. *counseil* and *parlement*).

More clearly than was the case with *King Richard*, the form of *Sayings* indicates that a distinction between French and English is being drawn, but that distinction is frayed. Its rhymes in particular seem likely to sensitize readers of the poem to the closeness of the languages. The presentation of the text in manuscript is apt to encourage reflection of this sort amongst private readers as well as performers and

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English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700 17 (2012): 200–22 at 214; and Fiona Somerset, "Complaining about the King in French in Thomas Wright's *Political Songs of England*," in *The French of Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), 82–99 at 89.

28 See Ian Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, Anglo-Norman Text Society, Occasional Publications 8, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2013), 77–88.

29 See Richard Jordan, *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology*, trans. and rev. Eugene J. Crook (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 117.

30 See Short, *Manual*, 114–19.

31 See Jordan, *Handbook*, 183.

32 See David Burnley, *A Guide to Chaucer's Language* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 108–32. Burnley's analysis includes some discussion of Auchinleck texts.

audiences: there, the poem's B-rhymes are highlighted by bracketing (fol. 105r).[33] The treatment of French alongside English in this fashion allows the poet of *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* to combine the official, political connotations of French with the common appeal that was gradually attaching to English.[34] In contradistinction to the use of French in *King Richard*, here French is presented as a part of the English economy of languages.

French from Below: *Satire on the Retinues of the Great*

Turning now to Harley 2253, I want to examine two texts that offer fresh perspectives on the deployment of French in pursuit of topics that relate less directly to nationality. My third poem, *Satire on the Retinues of the Great*, takes as its target the high-handed behaviour of retainers benefitting from purveyance, that is, from the provisioning that local magnates were obliged to afford the royal household and attendant households on their peregrinations throughout the realm. The result is a rollicking invective in which all the resources of Middle English are put into the service of the text's alliterative line. The poet draws on Middle Dutch and Old Norse as well as French; a special predilection is evident for the administrative French of household accounts: the earliest poetic quotations that the *MED* has for several words belonging to this register are drawn from *Satire*.

As well as facilitating alliteration, the poem's mixed lexicon befits its presentation as an unpaid bill, or *rolle*:

> Of rybauds Y ryme ant red o my rolle,
> Of gedelynges, gromes, of Colyn ant of Colle,
> Harlotes, hors-knaves, bi pate ant by polle—
> To Devel Ich hem tolyvre, ant take to tolle! (1–4)[35]
>
> (Of rascals I rhyme and recount in my roll,
> Of low rogues, grooms, of Colin and of Colle,
> Scoundrels, horse-knaves, by pate and by head—
> Deliver them to the Devil, and offer tribute!)

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33 It might also be pointed out that *Sayings* (fol. 105r) is followed directly in the Auchinleck Manuscript by the Battle Abbey Roll (fols. 105v–107r), which lists the names of the knights who accompanied William of Normandy to England in 1066. That text further complicates the matter of national allegiance where it can be shown to include several imposters who were apparently keen to create their own continental histories in retrospect. See H. M. Smyser, "The List of Norman Names in the Auchinleck MS. (Battle Abbey Roll)," in *Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Jerome Denis Matthias Ford*, ed. Urban T. Holmes and Alex J. Denomy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 257–87.

34 See Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290–1340* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. 11–26. I would add, however, that the use of French in *Sayings* demonstrates that English does not have a monopoly on expressions of national sentiment in the early fourteenth century.

35 Citations of text and translation of *Satire on the Retinues of the Great* are by line number, from *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Fein, 3:218–21. On the mixed language of late-medieval English bills, see Laura Wright, "Bills, Accounts, Inventories: Everyday Trilingual Activities in the Business World of Later Medieval England," in *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, ed. Trotter, 149–56.

Of these words, *rybauds*, *rolle*, and *harlotes* are drawn from French; *pate* may be from French or Latin; and *polle* is taken from Middle Dutch. The *MED*'s selection of quotations for these words suggests that none of them was regularly in use in Middle English before the mid fourteenth century (see *MED* s.vv. *ribaud*, *rolle*, *harlot*, *pate*, *polle*). Line 6 goes on to provide early *MED* quotations for *palefreiours* and *pages*, both from French; a little later, in line 10, the word *tyke* appears to have been imported from Old Norse (see *MED* s.vv. *palefreiour*, *page*, *tike* n.[3]).

The poem also has at least one crux: *gonnylde*, in the line "The gedelynges were gedered of gonnylde gnoste" (5). Fein translates this as "the bastards were assembled from cannon's spark," following the etymology given in *OED* s.v. *gun*, which shows that the Old Scandinavian name Gunilda could be given to cannon. In his edition of the text, Thorlac Turville-Petre suggests that *gonnylde* may refer instead to the Icelandic queen Gunnhild, "who in Icelandic sources has a reputation for gross licentiousness;" alternatively, it may be "a formation of *gonen*, 'to gape, open wide, to desire greedily,' + *ilde* ..., hence 'a woman who gapes (or desires).'"[36]

The lexical invention evidenced in these moments bespeaks a poet and an audience whose sensibilities were philological as well as political. One of the poem's jokes even appears to turn on a knowledge of the debts that English owes—or does not owe—to previous writing in French:

> The Shuppare that huem shupte, to shome he huem shadde
> To fles ant to fleye, to tyke ant to tadde;
> So seyth romauns, whose ryht radde:
> "Fleh com of flore, ant lous com of ladde." (9–12)
>
> (The Shaper who shaped them, shamefully he spawned them
> From fleas and flies, mongrels and toads;
> As stories tell [or: as is said in French], whoever reads rightly:
> "Flea comes of flour, and louse comes of churl.")

Whether the citation referred to in line 11 is assumed to be in line 10 ("to fles ant to fleye...") or, as Fein's punctuation has it, line 12 ("fleh com of flore..."), it is clear that neither of these lines owes much debt to French-language romance—this is how the term *romauns* in line 11 is most likely to have been understood. Alternatively, the word may be taken to refer to French directly, as per my parenthetical addition to Fein's translation. In both French and English *romauns* could be used to distinguish French from Latin (see *MED* s.v. *romaunce*; *AND* s.vv. *romanz*, *romance*).

Wendy Scase shows that *Satire on the Retinues of the Great* draws on a rich tradition of peasant complaint pertaining to the exactions of purveyance.[37] As the poem develops, however, it becomes clear that its perspective belongs not to a peasant

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36 See *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology*, ed. Thorlac Turville-Petre (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1989), 34.

37 See Wendy Scase, "'Satire on the Retinues of the Great' (MS Harley 2253): Unpaid Bills and the Politics of Purveyance," in *Studies in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts in Honour of John Scattergood*, ed. Anne Marie D'Arcy and Alan J. Fletcher (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), 305–20, and *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272–1553* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33–41.

but to a lord who is forced to engage with the retainers of his betters. It is the presumption of these hangers-on that the speaker objects to especially. That presumption is figured in part through the French terms that the retainers are imagined to be speaking when their payment is discussed:

> Whose rykeneth with knaves huere coustage—
> The luthernesse of the ladde, the prude of the page—
> Thah he yeve hem cattes dryt to huere companage,
> Yet hym shulde arewen of the arrerage! (29–32)

> (Whoever settles wages with scurrilous fellows —
> The insolence of the churl, the pride of the page —
> Though he give them cat droppings for their earned board,
> They'd still complain about the balance due!)

The rhyme words here all belong to the lexical field of household accounting, where French was used in oral as well as written contexts into the fourteenth century.[38] The use of *coustage*, *companage*, and *arrerage* in poetry was more innovative, however (see *MED* s.vv. *costage*, *arrerage*, *companage*; and compare *AND* s.vv. *costage*, *arerage*; and *DMF* s.v. *companage*). Fein suggests that the stableboys borrow their master's language in this passage ("raw native colloquialisms are offset by their boss's crisp business French").[39] But it seems to me that it is the young men's assimilation of these words into their everyday speech that irks the poem's speaker. Their piling up in end position draws attention to their use and incites mockery of the low-down speakers who deploy such specialized language alongside the apparently gentry or noble speaker of the poem. This scorn can also be heard in the couching of the French terms of clothing used a little earlier in *Satire* to describe the new fashions in which these young men indulge:

> Nou beth capel-claweres with shome toshrude;
> Hue bosketh huem wyth botouns ase hit were a brude,
> With lowe-lacede shon of an hayfre hude—
> Hue pyketh of here provendre al huere prude. (25–28)

> (Now are horse-clawers shamefully clothed;
> They dress up with buttons as if they're bridegrooms,
> With low-laced shoes made of a heifer's hide —
> They filch all their finery from their fodder.)

Here the recent French loan *botouns* is picked out by alliteration along with the administrative French term *provendre* (see *MED* s.vv. *botoun*, *provendre*; *AND* s.v. *provendre*). Both words assume prime position for a performance of the text that spits them out as items of a lexicon attributed to the text's targets.[40]

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38 See Richard Ingham, "Mixing Languages on the Manor," *Medium Ævum* 78, no. 1 (2009): 80–97.

39 Fein, "Early Middle English in Trilingual Miscellanies," 65.

40 Recent French loans describing dress and apparel are deployed in another satirical poem in Harley 2253, *On the Follies of Fashion*. In that text, a speaker objects to lower class women imitating the fashion of their betters where they adopt *boses* (buns worn over the cheeks), framed by a *bout* (loop) and a *barbet* (cloth band) with a matching *frountel* (forehead piece) as well as a *fauce filet* (faux-silk

The French given to the retainers in *Satire* appears designed to pinpoint a blurring of the ranks that the speaker of the poem finds objectionable. There was a long tradition of associating French with nobility. In another poem compiled in Harley 2253, *Urbain the Courteous*, learning French is identified as the priority of the little boy whose education is addressed:

> Je vueil, tot al premour,
> Que sages seiez e plein de douçour,
> Seiez debonere e corteis,
> E qeu vous sachez parler fraunceis,
> Quar molt est langage alosee
> De gentil honme, e molt amee. (15–29)[41]

> (I want, first of all,
> For you to be wise and full of kindness,
> Gracious and courteous,
> And that you know how to speak French,
> For highly is this language praised
> By noblemen, and much loved.)

There was a long tradition, too, of worrying about upstarts learning French. One of the reasons that Ranulph Higden gives for the corruption of English in his *Polychronicon* (ca. 1327) is the desire of rustics ("rurales homines") to learn French so as to appear more impressive.[42] *Satire on the Retinues of the Great* intervenes at the cross-section of these developments: the rapid import of French words into English; anxiety about upstarts; and the broadening of access to French via its administrative uses.[43] It makes this intervention with special subtlety insofar as it is not clear where our sympathies should lie. Neither the retainers nor the speaker attract much approval, as the speaker himself appears to recognize at the close of the text when he compares his invective to the vomiting of the boys: "Spedeth ou to spewen ase me doth to spelle!" (You spew as speedily as I speak insult!) (37). In the absence of a clear moralizing target, it is the poem's extraordinary lexical inventiveness that imprints itself on readers' minds.

My final example is at once more locally embedded and international in outlook than the three texts that I have considered so far; it can achieve this balance, I suggest, thanks to the lability of French in early fourteenth-century English contexts.

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headband). See *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Fein, 2:108–11; and *MED* s.vv. *boce*, *barbet*, *frountel*, *filet*; *bout* may be of English or French origin. Compare *MED* s.v. *bout* and *AND* s.v. *bout*.

41 Text and translation of *Urbain the Curteous* cited by line number from *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Fein, 3:128–29.

42 *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, ed. Churchill Babington and Joseph Rawson Lumby, Rolls Series 41, 9 vols. (London: Longman, 1865–1886), 2:160.

43 While it is beside my main point here, it is worth noting that stablemen feature amongst the learners of French imagined in the early fifteenth-century *manières de langage*, model dialogues designed to teach spoken French to the English. Like *Satire on the Retinues of the Great*, these texts remind us that the French of England was not solely for the nobility. See Rory G. Critten, *French Lessons in Late-Medieval England: The* Liber donati *and* Commune parlance (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, forthcoming).

World French: *Annot and John*

Annot and John in Harley 2253 is a poem in praise of its speaker's lady, who is compared successively to precious stones, flowers, birds, spices, and romance heroes. In the poem's fourth and fifth stanzas, the geographical scope of the encomium narrows: there the lady is said to be wisest "from Weye...into Wyrhale" (from the river Wye to the forest of Wirral) and a bringer of cures for lovers "from Lyne to Lone" (from the river Lyn, in north Devon, to the river Lune, running north of Lancaster) (27, 33).[44] The territory so defined sits on the Welsh border, where Harley 2253 was made, and the westerly orientation of the text is further confirmed both by its inclusion of the unusual word *wolc* (<Welsh *gwalch*, "hawk") amongst its catalogue of birds (24) and by the roster of heroes with which the poem concludes:

> He is medicyne of miht, mercie of mede,
> Rekene ase Regnas resoun to rede,
> Trewe ase Tegeu in tour, as Wyrwein in wede,
> Baldore then Byrne, that oft the bor bede;
> Ase Wylcadoun he is wys, dohty of dede,
> Feyrore then Floyres, folkes to fede,
> Cud ase Cradoc in court, carf the brede,
> Hendore then Hilde, that haveth me to hede.
>> He haveth me to hede, this hendy, anon;
>> Gentil ase Jonas, heo joyeth with Jon! (41–50)

> (She is medicine with potency, mercy with reward,
> Ready as Regnas to counsel reasonably,
> True as Tegeu in tower, as Wyrwein in fine dress
> Bolder than Byrne, who often challenged the boar;
> As Wylcadoun she's wise, doughty of deed,
> Fairer than Floyres, a pleasure to folks,
> Famous as Cradoc in court, who carved the roast,
> More courteous than Hilde, who takes care of one.
>> She takes care of one, this fair one, indeed;
>> Gracious as Jonas, she finds pleasure with John!)

Regnas and Byrne can be found in the Icelandic sagas and Floyres evokes Floripas in *Sir Ferumbras*. But the bulk of these personages has links to Celtic legend.[45]

At the same time, the text also stretches its readers' geographical imagination far beyond their home turf. In the stanzas on precious stones and spices in particular, the poet evokes objects whose origins might lie outside the Welsh Marches: garnet stones, diamonds, and emeralds, as well as musk, sugar, cubeb, cumin, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves. Part of the exotic atmosphere that these items create

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44 Text and translation of *Annot and John* are cited by line number from *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Fein, 2:120–23, here with additions from the geographical glosses in *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Turville-Petre, 15.

45 The most detailed attempt to identify the names remains that of Carlton Brown in *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), 226–28. On Tegeu, see too Thérèse Saint Paul, "A Forgotten Heroine in Medieval English Literature," in *A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck*, ed. Juliette Dor (Liège: University of Liège, 1992), 247–55.

derives from the novelty of many of the words used to denote them. *Annot and John* provides the earliest quotations for several of these items in the *MED* (see *MED* s.vv. *gernet*, *diamaunt*, *muge*); many others have their first MED quotations in poetry surviving in manuscripts contemporaneous with Harley 2253 (see *MED* s.vv. *rubi*, *coral*, *margarite*, *quibibe*, *gilofre*).

As was the case with the French lexis in the passages that I examined in *King Richard*, all these words have a longer history of usage in the French of England, where they can be found in accounts and inventories as well as lapidaries and romances (see *AND* s.vv. *gernete*, *diamand*, *muge*, *rubi*, *coral*, *margarite*, *cubebe*, *gilofre*). But *Annot and John* sees this lexis deployed for the first time in a new poetic context. The text is an alliterative *tour de force*. Each stanza has ten lines: eight lines with four or five alliterative stresses all rhyming on the same sound are followed by an alliterating couplet on a new rhyme whose first line concatenates with the line that precedes it. Carlton Brown found nothing else like *Annot and John* in his survey of Middle English lyric.[46] This is the context in which the poem's words for precious stones appears, for example:

> Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht,
> Ase saphyr in selver, semly on syht,
> Ase jaspe the gentil that lemeth with lyht,
> Ase gernet in golde, ant ruby wel ryht,
> Ase onycle he ys, on yholden on hyht,
> Ase diamaund the dere in day, when he is dyht.
> He is coral ycud with cayser ant knyht;
> Ase emeraude amorewen, this may haveth myht.
>> The myht of the margarite haveth this mai mere;
>> For charbocle Ich hire ches bi chyn ant by chere. (1–10)

> (I know a lady in a bower as bright as beryl,
> As sapphire in silver, lovely to see,
> As fine jasper that gleams with light,
> As garnet in gold, and ruby well set,
> As onyx she is, one highly regarded,
> As precious diamond by day, when she's adorned.
> She is coral valued by emperor and knight;
> As emerald by morning, this girl has power to heal.
>> The power of pearl this fair girl possesses;
>> I choose her as my precious gem in every way.)

The freshness of the text's lexicon ought to be considered an aspect of its poetic ambition. To my mind, this is where previous discussions of its speaker's sincerity miss the point.[47] *Annot and John* is less about the lady described than the poetic acumen of its speaker and the geographical scope of his imagination.

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46 See Brown, *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, 224.

47 Compare Daniel J. Ransom, "'Annot and John' and the Ploys of Parody," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 121–41; and Theo Stemmler, "The Problem of Parody: "'Annot and John,'" For Example," in *Genres, Themes, and Images in English Literature from the Fourteenth to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Tübingen: Narr, 1988), 156–65.

The poem apportions its interest between its local environment, where the poet's lady resides, and the world of international trade. It pivots between these spheres on the polyvalence of French, which in early fourteenth-century England might be perceived as native at the same time as it afforded access to larger networks of communication. Independent proof of proficiency in French on the Welsh border is uncovered in Michael Richter's examination of the canonization dossier of Thomas Cantilupe, bishop of Hereford (ca. 1220–1282), which records testimonies in the language belonging to both clerics and secular elites in that region.[48] By the 1300s, the reach of French had extended far beyond the territory covered by modern-day France and England, stretching into the Low Countries, the Italian peninsula, and the Eastern Mediterranean: knowledge of French provided access to much of the world.[49]

The important role that French played in connecting England to the rest of the medieval west is indicated in word histories that record French's service as a language of transmission.[50] All the words for the exotic goods listed in *Annot and John* can be identified as "coming from French," but in most if not all cases French has served as a link in an etymological chain that stretches along the commercial routes followed by a particular product. In *Annot and John*, the Middle English words *muge* (musk, line 31) and *sucre* (sugar, line 34) can be traced from Arabic via Spanish and Italian to French, for example (see *OED* s.vv. *musk*, *sugar*). In other cases, French has one among a sea of cognates that is subsequently picked up in England, first in French, then in Middle English, potentially under parallel influence from other languages (see, for example, *OED* s.vv. *diamond*, *emerald*, *cumin*). These word histories demonstrate the centrality of French to world trade, particularly from the perspective of English buyers and sellers, including those in the Harley scribe's Ludlow.[51]

How were words belonging to international commerce perceived in early fourteenth-century England? And how were they apprehended when they were deployed in an early Middle English poem like *Annot and John*? Not yet as English, I would propose, but not as straightforwardly French either, despite the phonological accommodations made to these words that gallicize them. Instead, words like

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48 See Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter: Untersuchung zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zum Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1979), 171–217.

49 See Jane Gilbert, Simon Gaunt, and William Burgwinkle, *Medieval French Literary Culture Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), esp. 1–31.

50 See William Rothwell, "Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice: From Oriental Bazar to English Cloister in Anglo-French," *Modern Language Review* 94 (1999): 647–59. On borrowing from Italian and Iberoroman via French, see too Klaus Dietz "Die frühen italienischen Lehnwörter des Englischen," *Anglia* 123 (2006): 573–631, and "Das frühe iberoromansiche Lehngut des Englischen," *Anglia* 124 (2007): 449–80. Most recently, see Megan Tiddeman, "More Sugar and Spice: Revisiting Medieval Italian Influence on the Mercantile Lexis of England," in *The Multilingual Origins of Standard English*, ed. Laura Wright (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 381–410.

51 On Ludlow's role in international trade, see John Hines, *Voices in the Past: English Literature and Archaeology* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), 85–88.

these might be apprehended as part of an international language of trade, an idiom mixing several languages, old and new.[52] Consideration of this point of language history challenges us to reconsider the prejudices with which we might approach extra-metropolitan literature in the early fourteenth century: the readers of Harley 2253 at Ludlow were connected to the wider world thanks to trade routes that ran through the Welsh Marches; their facility in languages other than English, in particular French; and the literature that they read.[53]

Conclusions

These four examples show four different ways in which early Middle English poets might exploit French lexis in order to depict French identities; to elaborate political critique within England; to develop satirical portraits of characters speaking "from below"; and to stretch readers' imaginations to the corners of the known world. They remind us of the work that must go into defining French as foreign in the early fourteenth century; of the extensive and prolonged use of French in a range of legal and administrative contexts within England; of the penetration of French throughout medieval English society; and of the access that French afforded to lands both within and beyond the medieval west.

　　In one sense, it is not surprising that the texts should differ so broadly in their conception of French. Harley 2253 and the Auchinleck Manuscript were written in different parts of the country for different audiences, and they were themselves the product of broadly sourced compilation. The demonstration via dialectal study that the origins of the Harley Lyrics were dispersed throughout England was an early scholarly achievement and more recent work has speculated on the role played by Hereford Cathedral's highly mobile clergy in the collection of the book's items.[54] Auchinleck also compiles a selection of texts that were composed beyond the scene of its inscription, although in this case the picture has taken longer to come into focus.[55] It should be stressed, however, that the kaleidoscopic perspective on French

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52 On a parallel case, see Maryanne Kowaleski, "The French of England: A Maritime *lingua franca*?" in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. Wogan-Browne, 103–17.

53 See further Rory G. Critten, "The Multilingual English Household in a European Perspective: London, British Library MS Harley 2253 and the Traffic of Texts," in *Household Knowledges in Late-Medieval England and France*, ed. Rory G. Critten and Glenn D. Burger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 219–43. On the sharing of texts across regions that was facilitated by the broad currency of French, see too Keith Busby, "Multilingualism, the Harley Scribe, and Johannes Jacobi," in *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Margaret Connolly and Raluca Radulescu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 49–60 at 59–60.

54 See G. L. Brook, "The Original Dialects of the Harley Lyrics," *Leeds Studies in English* 2 (1933): 38–61; and Daniel Birkholz, "Harley Lyrics and Hereford Clerics: The Implications of Mobility, c. 1300–1351," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009): 175–230. More recently, see too Daniel Birkholz, *Harley Manuscript Geographies: Literary History and the Medieval Miscellany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), esp. 51–93.

55 Most recently, see Jacob Thaisen, "Standardisation, Exemplars, and the Auchinleck Manuscript,"

that I have presented is not solely the product of fortuitous choice from amongst these books' texts.

Similarly contrasting concepts of French are in evidence elsewhere in Harley 2253 and the Auchinleck Manuscript. The use of French lexis to characterize French speakers can be found in Harley 2253 in *The Flemish Insurrection*, for example.[56] But that book also contains the French-Latin macaronic poem, *Against the King's Taxes*, which, like *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*, purports to speak in the English national interest against overweening royal authority.[57] French lexis contributes to an atmosphere of exoticism and wonder in Auchinleck's *Kyng Alisaunder*, where there is a list of spices having many items in common with that in *Annot and John*.[58] French is an aspect of class portrayal throughout the Auchinleck romances, where the Middle English of noble characters is frequently laced with French expressions; and French appears as an international language in Auchinleck's *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, where in defiance of chronology the Saxon princess, Inge, is given a short speech in French to explain her arrival in England.[59]

The poetic corpora of the Auchinleck and Harley 2253 manuscripts show French being made to mean with special clarity: it has been a crucial component of the foregoing argument that the connotations of French lexis in early Middle English poetry are not intrinsic to the words themselves but determined by the contexts in which they are couched. I have also suggested that poets might manipulate these contexts deliberately and that they wrote for audiences that could spot their clever redeployment of recent French loans. In the past, philologists were skeptical of the notion that the origins of Middle English words might be differentiated to suit literary purposes.[60] But in light of what is now known about the longevity of French in late-medieval England, the possibility that French and English might be so artfully distinguished appears less remote.[61] Indeed, the readers for whom trilingual miscellanies like Harley 2253 were made could see the process of lexical transfer happening before their very eyes.[62]

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in *The Multilingual Origins of Standard English*, ed. Wright, 165–90.

56 For analysis, see Fein, "Early Middle English in Trilingual Manuscripts," 63–65.

57 See John Scattergood, "Authority and Resistance: The Political Verse," in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 163–201 at 163–69.

58 See Critten, Crosier, and Picca, "French Lexis in the Auchinleck Manuscript," 366–67.

59 See Summerfield, "'And She Answered in Hir Language,'" 245–50.

60 See, for example, N. F. Blake, *The English Language in Medieval Literature* (London: Dent, 1977), 80–100.

61 In addition to the studies by Richard Ingham cited above, see too Richard Ingham, "The Persistence of Anglo-Norman 1230–1362: A Linguistic Perspective" and Pierre Kunstmann, "Syntaxe anglo-normande: étude de certaines caractéristiques du *XII*ᵉ au *XIV*ᵉ siècle," both in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., 44–54 and 55–67.

62 Ad Putter has shown that manuscripts containing Middle English romances are less often multilingual than manuscripts containing Middle English lyric. See "The Organization of Multilingual

My analyses are not offered in contradiction to the prevailing understanding of the fluid distinction between England's medieval languages described in my introduction. Instead, I view my examples as exceptions to that rule in which the resources of poetry—for example, rhyme, alliteration, and macaronic form—are used to draw attention to aspects of language. Unlike the pragmatic documents that have formed the bedrock of recent historical linguistic research, poetry is a type of writing that allows for more freedom, more artistry, and more drama of effect.

Of course, not all writers of rhymed and alliterative texts exploited French so self-consciously. In some cases, French words may have been apprehended only as an element of Middle English register; Richard Ingham shows that this is most likely the case in his readings of the *Early South English Legendary* and the *Cursor Mundi*.[63] The distinction to be drawn here might be some modified form of the old partitioning of poetry from verse. To quote John Barr, a former president of the Poetry Foundation, where verse can be considered a "tool of affirmation," poetry is more exploratory in its aim to use language "in its full potential."[64] Distinctions of this sort are of course finally in the eye of the beholder. The foregoing argument attempts to show how the careful use of historical dictionaries can help us reconstruct the lexical expectations of those medieval beholders who read and heard what early Middle English writers wrote.

Miscellanies: The Contrasting Fortunes of Middle English Lyrics and Romances," in *Insular Books*, ed. Connolly and Radulescu, 81–100. It does not follow, however, that the audiences of books containing Middle English romances—such as the Auchinleck Manuscript—did not also know French literature. If, for example, as has recently been suggested, Auchinleck was commissioned by Edward III's queen, Philippa of Hainault, then the codex will have met with an audience well-placed to make the kinds of connections that I have been tracing. On Philippa as a potential commissioner of Auchinleck, see Carol M. Meale, "Deluxe Copies of Middle English Romance: Scribes and Book Artists," in *The Transmission of Medieval Romance Romance: Metres, Manuscripts, and Early Prints*, ed. Ad Putter and Judith Jefferson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2018), 91–115 at 96.

63 See Richard Ingham, "Middle English Borrowing from French: Nouns and Verbs of Interpersonal Cognition in the *Early South English Legendary*," in *The French of Medieval England*, ed. Fenster and Collette, 128–39, and "The Diffusion of Higher-Status Lexis in Medieval England: The Role of Clergy," *English Language and Linguistics* 22 (2018): 207–24.

64 Cited from Barr's essay, "Is It Poetry or Is It Verse?," originally published September 18, 2006, hosted at the Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68681/is-it-poetry-or-is-it-verse.

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Abstract: This paper considers the different ways in which early Middle English poetry deploys recent French loanwords. It argues that the associations attaching to these words change depending on the contexts in which they are situated. Focusing on four examples, two from the Auchinleck Manuscript and two from Harley 2253, it shows Middle English poems using French words in order to depict French identities; to elaborate political critique within England; to develop satirical portraits of characters beneath the ranks of the nobility and the gentry; and to stretch readers' imaginations to the corners of the known world. Recent French loans are identified using the first dates of attestation recorded in the *Middle English Dictionary*; an ancillary aim of the paper is to show how historical dictionaries can be used to establish the lexical expectations of medieval audiences. The argument's debts to historical linguistic scholarship are great, but the paper claims that poetry deserves to be considered a text-type apart from the more pragmatic documents that historical linguists now normally treat.