Alliteration of the Versions of "Piers Plowman" in Its Bearing on Their Authorship

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Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Oct., 1922), pp. 403-409

Published by: Modern Humanities Research Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3714281>

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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.

ANOTHER LATIN MANUSCRIPT OF THE 'ANCREN RIWLE.'

In the *Modern Language Review* for April, 1919, I pointed out that an unnoted Latin manuscript of the *Ancren Riwle* was to be found in Merton Coll. MS. 44, of the early fourteenth century. The following quotation from the new catalogue of the Royal MSS. of the British Museum will prove that a duplicate of this text is to be found in Royal MS. 7 C. x. (art. 4): 'Treatise in eight parts (the last is incomplete) without title, on the "regula interior" for anchorites. A copy is at Oxford, Merton Coll. MS. XLIV, ending at the same point. Beg. '*Recti diligunt te*. Canticorum primo: Verba sunt, etc.'

The manuscript in question is written in the early sixteenth century on paper. The fragment given of the eighth book is not indicated separately, though the others are, and though it is no more than a few sentences (breaking off very abruptly), the scribe seems not to recognise its incompleteness. He ends as follows: '...ideo non debetis eucharistiam sumere nisi quindecies in anno.' 'Telos' is written in the same hand at the bottom of the page.

B.M. Royal MS. 7 C. x. makes the fourth Latin text of the *Ancren Riwle* known. Its survival is the more fortunate because, of the other three copies extant, the Cotton MS. is badly burnt, and the Magdalen MS. entirely omits the eighth book.

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LONDON.

ALLITERATION OF THE VERSIONS OF 'PIERS PLOWMAN' IN ITS BEARING ON THEIR AUTHORSHIP.

In Middle English alliterative verse a striking peculiarity has been noticed, namely, that the alliteration often falls on unstressed syllables, either prefixes or prepositions or similar words which are naturally subordinated in stress to a following word. This was first pointed out by Professor Skeat in his Essay on Alliterative Poetry in Volume III of the *Percy Folio*, 1868, and in the Preface to *Alexander and Dindimus* (Early English Text Society, 1878). When investigating this phenomenon with a view to tracing its connexion with the pronunciation of the words in

question¹, I found that it cast an interesting light on the problem of the authorship of the three versions of *Piers Plowman*.

In general, the whole *corpus* of unrhymed alliterative poetry follows much the same practice in the choice of the alliterating syllable; e.g. the prefixes *con-*, *per-*, *pro-* always alliterate; words beginning in *def-*, with the exception of *defence*, *defend*, always alliterate on the root; words beginning in *rel-* alliterate on the prefix; though the prefixes *be-* and *for-* frequently alliterate, *to-* and *with-* only do so when forming adverbs or prepositions, and so on. But certain peculiarities can be noted, which divide certain works. For example, in *Richard the Redeless* there is no alliteration of the prefix *be-*, and none of prepositions, both of which characteristics are marked features of all parts of *Piers Plowman*. Again, *Morte Arthure* can be distinguished from *Troy Book* (cp. Dr Giles in *Cambridge History of Literature*, Vol. II, p. 118) by its use of second-half lines where the two stresses seem to fall on the prefix and root of the same word, e.g. 1377 'that thus hym *persuade*,' 3559 'I *salle* it *revenge*' (a feature also of the rhymed alliterative poems); by its frequent shifting of the alliteration from the third to the fourth stress of the line, e.g. 2202 'He *broches* *euene* *thorowe* the *byerne*, and the *sadille* *bristes*'; and by its alliteration of the adverb *so* in such lines as 136 'so *Crist* *mott* *me* *helpe*.'

Professor Manly divides *Piers Plowman* into five parts, which he attributes to as many different authors, namely, Passus i to viii of the A-text (A₁), Passus ix to xii. 55 of the A-text (A₂), xii. 56-117 of the A-text (John But), the B-text (B), and the C-text (C). Now the work done by the reviser of the A-text falls into two parts: first, the revision and expansion of A. i-xi (Passus xii being omitted from the revised version in B), and secondly the continuation of the poem. I propose to divide the B-text here, calling the first-part B₁, and the second, i.e. Passus xi-xx, B₂; for it is especially between these two parts that I have noticed striking differences of alliteration.

The alliteration of prepositions, etc. is a much more marked feature of B₂, and after it of A₁ and C, than of A₂ and B₁, as the Appendix to this note shows. Also, it may be seen that in the different sections different prepositions alliterate. In the case of the following words in particular, the uses of the sections can be distinguished:

and alliterates 7 times in B₂, and once only in A₁, B₁, and C respectively².

¹ In an unpublished thesis on 'Early Middle English Word-Stress Investigated on the Basis of the Unrhymed Alliterative Poems,' London, 1921.

² That is to say, except where the line in C is taken over from B₂. The same is to be understood of all references in this note; they denote the text in which the word *first* occurs.

before alliterates in A₁ (twice), B₂ (4 times), C (5 times); but not in A₂ or B₁; note especially C. iii. 100 'And fastingdayes to frete by-for noon, and drynke,' which is altered from B. ii. 95 'ar ful tyme were.'

but alliterates in B₁ (twice), B₂ (7 times), C (4 times), but not in either part of the A-text, except the doubtful Pr. 63. In the case of such a line as A. viii. 70 'bote he habbe neode,' there is no word following *but* which has more right to the alliteration. C. iii. 141 'bote 3e a-mende the sonnere,' is altered from A. ii. 95 = B. ii. 127 'by god that me made!'

for plays an important part in distinguishing between the sections. It alliterates in A₁ (10 times), B₂ (15 times), and C (11 or 12 times), but not in A₂, and once only in B₁. Note especially A. vii. 2 'That mihte folwen us vch a fote forte that we come there,' which becomes in B₁ 'thus this folke hem mened,' and again in C 'for drede of mys-tornynge.' Again, A. viii. 32-3,

Pore widewes that wolde beo none wyues aftur
Fynde suche heore foode for godes loue of heuene,

is telescoped in B₁ into

Pore peple and prisounes fynden hem here fode,

and again expanded in C into

Poure puple bedredene and prisones in stockes,
Fynde hem for godes loue.

fro(m) alliterates in A₁ (3 times), B₂ (twice), and C (5 times); not in A₂ or B₁.

save alliterates in B₂ only (4 times).

to alliterates in A₁ (twice), A₂ (4 times), B₂ (11 times), and C (5 times); but not in B₁, hence distinguishing sharply between B₁ and B₂.

while alliterates in A₁ (3 times) and A₂, but nowhere else; note A. vii. 51-2,

'Ich a-sente, be seint Iem!' seide the kniht thenne,
'For to worche bi thi word while my lyf dureth,'

ingeniously altered in C to

and my wyf bothe.

with alliterates in A₁ (7 times), B₁ (12 times), B₂ (19 times), and C (8 times); but only once in A₂, just at the point where the lines attributed by Professor Manly to John But begin. Its increasing popularity as an alliterating word is shown by A. vii. 18,

And 3e, loueli ladies with oure longe fynGRES,

¹ In such cases there is, of course, always the possibility that the line in C comes from an unprinted variant of A. In the lines quoted under *for* below, C seems to be based on a form combining A and B.

which becomes in C

And 3e worthly wommen with 3oure longe fynGRES ;

and also A. viii. 29,

And wikkede wones wihly to amende,

which similarly becomes

And wikkede weyes with here good amende.

It may also be noted that B₁ alters A. viii. 59,

To waxen or to wonien whether god lyketh,

into

That neuere shal wax ne wanye with oute god hymselfe.

Hence, from an examination of the Appendix, we may say that the principal alliterating words are: in A₁ *for, from, so, while, with*; in A₂ *to*; in B₁ *by, with*; in C *before, by, for, from, so, to, and with*. In B₂ practically all alliterate, the only important exception being *while*. Specially striking is the absence of alliterating *for* and *to* in B₁, compared with their frequency in B₂. The sharp distinctions drawn between the different sections seem to me to constitute a not unnegligible argument in favour of multiple authorship.

As regards the alliteration of words compounded with prefixes, the chief prefixes which concern us in *Piers Plowman* are the Romance prefixes *de-* and *re-*, and the Germanic prefix *be-*. Among words compounded with *de-*, there is great variety of use in B₁, B₂, and C; but B₂ is the only text where the alliteration differs in the same word, the cases being 'defende,' xv. 19, 'defende,' xvi. 246; 'departen,' xx. 138, 'departable,' xvii. 26. In A₂, with one exception (*defoulen*, xi. 60), these words alliterate on the prefix (*defendyth*, xii. 19; *distruith*, x. 76; *destroyede*, xi. 280; *disputyng*, ix. 108); in A₁, with one exception (*dilytede*, i. 29) on the root (14 cases in all). The only word common to A₁ and A₂ is *defend* (cp. xii. 19 with vii. 81).

Practically all words compounded with *re-* alliterate on the prefix. Again the only single word which alliterates on both prefix and root is found in B₂, namely *recover*, on the prefix in xviii. 350, xix. 239, and on the root in xix. 156. Besides this we have root-alliteration in *reprove*, xii. 138, xviii. 149, and *resemble*, xvi. 214. The only root-alliterating word not in B₂ is 'repugnen,' C. i. 136, where the B-text reads 'inpugnen'; this may well be a scribal variant.

Words compounded with what have been called the 'heavy' prefixes alliterate on the prefix, with some five exceptions. Again, B₂ supplies the only examples of the same word alliterating on both prefix and root, namely, *confess*, on prefix in xi. 76, xv. 558, xvii. 295, and on the root

in xi. 53; *conform*, on the prefix in xi. 175, xiii. 208, xv. 337, and on the root in xiii. 213.

From the alliteration of the Germanic prefixes I do not find any conclusion to be drawn, except that A_2 is the only section of the poem which shows no variation in single words. Words compounded with *be-*, though on the whole alliterating on the root, show great variation; e.g. in A_1 *begin*, *behold*, *belief*; in B_2 *behind*, *before*, *beneath*; in C *before*, *belief*, *beseech*; in B_1 *believe* alliterates twice on the prefix and twice on the root. But all words in A_2 , namely *become*, *befall*, *beginning*, *belief*, *beseech*, *betake*, alliterate on the root alone.

It is, of course, quite likely that a poet would, in the course of years, change his practice in these particulars. It is evident, as we can see from an examination of the latest poems, that the tendency of the alliterative school as time passed was to discard prefix-alliteration, and a similar tendency may be expected in the work of an individual. Something of the sort may in fact be traced in the *Troy Book*, and also in *Piers Plowman* itself, in the case of certain words beginning with *de-*. But in *Piers Plowman* the most striking fact about the use of romance prefixes is that only in one part, namely B_2 , did the poet consider himself free to change the alliterating syllable in a single word; neither in A, B_1 , or C is this done. In the case of the prepositions also, although a poet might very conceivably alter his practice in the matter of allowing them to alliterate, it is not likely that he would at different periods employ different selections of alliterating prepositions.

In both cases, it is between B_1 and B_2 that the distinction is clearest, most strikingly in the alliteration of the prepositions *for* and *to*. The variety of alliteration found in B_2 divides it from all the other texts, and this characteristic is not developed in C as one might expect if all the parts were due to the same author. A_1 and A_2 again differ in their use of prepositions, especially *for* and *with*, and in the alliteration of words in *de-*. A_2 and B_1 are distinguished by the alliteration of *to* in the former, and *by*, *but*, and especially *with*, in the latter. For so short a passage as the half canto attributed to John But, this method cannot give any result, although it is striking that *again* alliterates on *g* in xi. 150 and on the spirant in xii. 60. But as regards the rest of the poem, I think it can be definitely stated that the evidence of the alliteration of *Piers Plowman* points towards its being the work of five different hands, and that this evidence is most constraining where it differentiates that part of the B-text which is a revision of the A-text from the later cantos continuing the work.

APPENDIX.

Prepositions, Conjunctions, and Adverbs alliterating in *Piers Plowman*.

(With respect to the lengths of the different parts, A₁ is 1833 lines, A₂ (including Passus xii) 751, and B₂ 4035. B₁ I estimate at about 1100–1200 lines; the length of C is extraordinarily hard to ascertain, owing to the manner in which it adopts the B-text with slight alterations, but roughly it may be said to consist of about 2000 or more lines.)

- about* B₁: Pr. 178
B₂: xiii. 347; (?alliterating on vowel) xv. 278; xx. 190
- above* B₂: xi. 134
- afore* B₂: xvi. 45
- again(st)* A₂: xi. 150; (? John But; alliterating on 3) xii. 60
B₂: xix. 356
- amid* B₁: x. 408
- among* B₁: v. 260
B₂: xi. 236; xiii. 229, 259; xiv. 26, 158
C: v. 26
- and* A₁: iii. 249
B₁: ii. 83
B₂: xiii. 336; xiv. 25; xv. 409; xvii. 319; xviii. 118; xix. 238, 392
C: viii. 173
- as* A₂: ix. 100
B₁: (?) x. 309
C: xix. 68
- at* B₂: xiv. 57; xviii. 342; xix. 77
C: (!) xi. 241 (or on *ys*)
- before* A₁: iii. 179; v. 230
B₂: xi. 303; xiii. 65, 73; xv. 297
C: iii. 100; x. 322; xvi. 140; xviii. 31; xix. 49
- beside* B₂: xvii. 72
- between* A₂: x. 196
- but* A₁: (?) Pr. 63
B₁: v. 395; vii. 84
B₂: xi. 64, 197; xii. 29; xv. 118; xviii. 252; xix. 402, 467
C: iii. 141; vi. 52; xviii. 8, 32
- by* A₁: ii. 95; vii. 152
B₁: Pr. 165; v. 149; x. 250
B₂: xi. 249, 319; xii. 201, 236; xiii. 317, 369; xx. 95, 240
C: vii. 169; x. 32, 222; xviii. 29, 57, 283; xxi. 111
- ere* B₂: xix. 146, 390
- for* A₁: ii. 175; iii. 66; iv. 25, 41; vi. 14, 48; vii. 2, 81; viii. 33, 78 (*For* obviously omitted)
B₁: v. 496
B₂: xi. 63, 68, 113, 286, 346; xv. 477; xvi. 162; xviii. 430; xix. 66, 141; xx. 57, 251, 330, 365, 381
C: i. 7, (?) 107; iv. 88; vi. 27; vii. 46; viii. 308; x. 258; xi. 256; xii. 279; xviii. 35; xxii. 205; xxiii. 38
- fro(m)* A₁: v. 29; vi. 16; vii. 174
B₂: xiv. 15; xvi. 174
C: vi. 111; xi. 22; xvi. 237; xvii. 197; xx. 80
- if* A₁: v. 236

- in* A₁: i. 120; v. 153
A₂: x. 44
B₂: xi. 327; xvi. 170, 207; xvii. 102; xx. 277
- near* B₁: vi. 301
- of* B₁: (?) v. 633 (perhaps originally *of the poukes ponfolde*)
B₂: xiii. 296; xv. 565; xviii. 122
C: xix. 219, 231; xx. 98
- on* C: xiii. 207
- save* B₂: xiii. 124; xix. 185, 434; xx. 265
- sith* B₂: xiv. 142; xvii. 31; xx. 136
C: x. 115; xx. 245
- so* A₁: iii. 92; v. 22, 122; vi. 113; viii. 23
A₂: ix. 102; xi. 295
B₁: v. 376; x. 75
B₂: xiii. 205; xv. 47, 153, 288, 489; xvii. 35, 158
C: iv. 246; xi. 38; xii. 297, 301; xiv. 203; xix. 96; xx. 33, 106
- to* A₁: vii. 197; viii. 1
A₂: x. 141; xi. 62, 162; xii. 24
B₂: xi. 291, 393; xiii. 96, 125, 431; xvi. 147, 148; xvii. 76; xviii. 238;
xix. 232; xx. 7
C: iii. 124; x. 262; xi. 181; xiii. 187; xix. 177
- under* B₂: xvii. 102
- when* A₁: iii. 102; v. 69
B₂: xi. 226; xiv. 62; xviii. 412
C: v. 52; vii. 160, 302
- where* A₂: ix. 105; xii. 40
B₂: xi. 338; xvii. 53; xx. 3
C: xiv. 34
- whether* A₁: viii. 59
- while* A₁: ii. 74; iii. 29; vii. 52
A₂: xi. 101
- why* A₂: xi. 74, 81
- with* A₁: ii. 30; iii. 148, 252; iv. 19; v. 25; vii. 89; viii. 84
A₂: xii. 56 (? John But)
B₁: Pr. 22; ii. 90; iii. 74, 234, 238, 348; iv. 33; v. 476; ix. 113; x. 355,
403, 429
B₂: xi. 111, 163; xiv. 27, 292; xv. 125, 286, 446; xvi. 105, 120, 146, 203,
244, 272; xvii. 53, 69; xviii. 228; xix. 347, 368; xx. 167
C: iii. 199; ix. 9; x. 31, 135, 196, 250; xix. 261; xx. 232
- within* B₁: x. 149
- without* A₁: iii. 220
B₁: vii. 55
B₂: xvi. 99; xvii. 231.

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SPENSER'S 'MUIOPOTMOS.'

In 1914 Mr Percy W. Long contributed an article on the above poem¹ to which I returned recently when restudying Spenser's minor poems. Mr Long suggested that the allegory obviously underlying this delight-

¹ *Mod. Lang. Review*, vol. ix, p. 457.