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INTRODUCTION

Revivalist Fantasy
ALLITERATIVE NATIONALISM, FROM MODERN TO MEDIEVAL

IN AN 1868 ESSAY on alliterative verse, Walter W. Skeat argued that, to move forward in framing the “rules and laws of English prosody,” literary critics must cast their eyes inward, reconsidering their discipline’s foundational assumptions. Critiquing the “absurd and mischievously false terminology” produced by applying concepts from “temporal” classical verse to the “accentual” English corpus, Skeat urged scholars to generate “genuine English terms” for the study of “English” poetic works. While Skeat is concerned primarily with meter rather than politics, it is telling that he turns to a nationalist rhetoric of uniqueness and authenticity when considering alliterative prosody. Although Skeat’s terminological suggestions did not reshape prosodic studies—we still speak of the *iamb* and *trochee*, for example, rather than Skeat’s “genuine English terms,” *Return* and *Tonic*—his insistence on retooling a classically oriented criticism of alliterative meter led to considerable standardization. Indeed, Skeat’s key claims concerning alliterative verse—that of a four-stress line, with two caesura-divided half-verses, each marked by two major stresses, with the stresses tending to be marked, in various patterns, by alliteration—still form the basic framework within which most literary historians work.

Skeat’s call for literary critical self-critique has been echoed in recent medievalist work. Critics practicing the New Medievalism have turned increasingly to self-reflexive studies of literary criticism’s institutional context. The New Medievalist writing of “the history of medieval studies from within the perspective of the discipline itself” has been aptly described as an “Oedipal” project that directs critical violence against the enduring work of foundational scholar-fathers. Narrating the “family romance” of medieval studies, New Medievalists have foregrounded the epochal nineteenth-century transition from amateur to professional literary criticism and thus have called attention to the often hidden ideological legacy generated by the
institutionalization of literary studies. As I shall argue, nationalism proves the most powerful paradigm of this nineteenth-century critical inheritance.

Tracking the development and continuing impact of the literary historical concept of an Alliterative Revival, *Revivalist Fantasy* participates in such disciplinary history. I will define Alliterative Revivalism as the dissemination of the theory that the Old English alliterative line re-emerged in a mid-fourteenth-century Middle English literary “efflorescence” practiced by a single, nativist “school” that competed with French-influenced, syllabic poets associated with the English South. I will maintain that the Alliterative Revival is a medievalist rather than medieval phenomenon that originates from, and continues to sustain, Western nationalist interests linking British, American, and Continental scholars. Tracing the Alliterative Revival only so far back as the nineteenth century, I will argue that Euro-American nationalists project modern racialism into the Middle Ages, using the fantasy of an atavistic alliterative movement to narrate the rise of a Chaucerian proto-modernity.

In foregrounding critical fantasy, I do not claim an objective vantage point from which the folly of past scholars can be isolated and removed, exposing a stable medieval corpus beneath. *Revivalist Fantasy* has its own desires, which dictate the directions in which I steer criticism after identifying Alliterative Revivalism’s continuing literary historical life. Operating according to the historiographical assumption of the modernity of the Middle Ages—the artificial pastness of which James Simpson traces back to the sixteenth-century epochal “period map” drawn by state and ecclesiastical interests that consolidated themselves by narrating a “negative” medieval past—I will present Revivalist prejudice as a critical horizon within which we continue to receive late-medieval alliterative texts. Revivalist discourse tells a fundamentally nationalist story: linking alliterative verse with a factitious Germanic antiquity, Revivalist critics tie literary and national modernization to the spectacular collapse of a unified alliterative movement. Identifying the Revival as a racialized fantasy, I will demonstrate the ways in which the totalizing vision of a neo-Saxon alliterative movement inhibits us from appreciating the engagement of alliterative poems with matters of current concern. My own critical desires and cultural moment drive both my critique of Revivalism and my recovery of perspectives obscured by a nationalist literary historical lens. I will arbitrarily select poems that speak to my own post-nationalist, anti-imperialist critical priorities. Such arbitrariness is obligatory: since my primary argument is that the Revival is a monolithic narrative that blinds us to alliterative poems’ local contexts, my own story is deliberately multiplex and discontinuous. Redirecting alliterative texts away from the Revivalist fantasy of
a moribund neo-Saxon tradition, I seek to re-open lines of communication between particular alliterative poems and issues of current critical fascination, such as transnational identity (chapter 2), gendered economic power (chapter 3), borderlands culture (chapter 4), and subversive communication networks (chapter 5).

My aim is to identify and thereby disengage layers of disciplinary prejudice that have rendered alliterative texts fundamentally retrograde, by analyzing a racialized rhetoric that sustains a nationalist grand récit. The Alliterative Revival has had a long literary historical life. Offering material evidence of Kathleen Biddick’s observation that “medieval studies is still intimately bound to the fathers” responsible for literary criticism’s nineteenth-century professionalization, Revivalist discourse continues to inflect our reception of late-medieval alliterative texts. This ongoing impact is nowhere clearer than in vexed efforts to escape Revivalist historiography. In his critique of “Old Historicist” investigations of alliterative verse, Ralph Hanna argues persuasively that “identifying the poetry with its verse-form renders it particularly Other in a literary context increasingly dominated by syllabic (and especially Chaucerian) verse” and marginalizes alliterative texts according to assumptions of “defiant regionalism” and “negative reactions to centralizing tendencies.” Yet even as Hanna attacks the limitations of this “Othering” gesture, he participates in an “Old Historicist” insistence on a monolithic and self-conscious alliterative movement: for Hanna, “alliterative poems” are “always concerned” with the socio-political implications of lordship; “alliterative narrative” is “inherently exemplaristic” and “soberly turned towards values which will endure”; and history is for “them”—evidently for all “alliterative” poets—a “longing for a new beginning.” By the end of the essay, Hanna holds that “alliterative poetry” is indeed “Chaucer’s Other,” in terms of “consciousness,” if “not of geography.”

Insisting that the nostalgic pose associated with the alliterative poet is a literary historical rather than literary phenomenon, I will argue that the fantasy of a nativist Alliterative Revival contributes to a nationalist effort to retroactively arrest the play of late-medieval ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities. By manufacturing a monolithic metrical school obsessed with a native past, Revivalist critics consign poets producing alliterative works to a static antiquity against which a Chaucerian modernity is projected. Alliterative verse becomes linked repeatedly with pastness and with death. Much as Hanna reveals a totalizing vision in revising Alliterative Revivalism, so does Christine Chism disclose the continuing influence of Revivalist literary historiography. Chism’s powerful analyses of the social and cultural contexts of alliterative texts are framed by a Revivalist paradigm:
the “single current” Chism pursues in *Alliterative Revivals* is “the revival of the dead and the past performed.” Generations of Revivalist criticism literally cast a pall over the readings, with alliterative poets portrayed as primarily backward-looking, their postmortem eyes turned resolutely toward the Saxon past. As I shall argue throughout this book, the structural metaphor of revival that Chism inherits derives from a nationalist narrative of double death: a doomed fourteenth-century aesthetic movement appropriates the prosody of a doomed Saxon England. By reviving the allegedly native strong-stress line, with the re-animated prosody expiring after its spectacular, but short-lived, literary moment, alliterative poets suffer a second death in Revivalism’s writing of the rise of a Chaucerian English modernity.

If Alliterative Revivalism inflects even such searching studies as Hanna’s and Chism’s, it is because its fantasy is deeply embedded in the discipline, with its nationalist, racialized narrative reproducing itself in numerous literary histories. Each of the elements constituting Revivalist discourse merits terminological discussion. In turning to fantasy as a conceptual tool, I investigate the ideological vision that projects a coherent historiographical picture onto a Middle Ages made to stage English modernity’s rise. Medievalist scholars have deployed what L. O. Aranye Fradenburg calls the “power of fantasy to make history” for various purposes, ranging from the ethical installation of state welfare systems to programmatic nationalist activity. I will locate the rise of Revivalism within the nationalist philological culture in which Middle English studies evolved. If Stephen G. Nichols is correct in arguing that nineteenth-century “romantic historiography” fashions an “essentially ‘modern’ Middle Ages wherein might be discerned the origins and identity of current practices and institutions,” then it is crucial to note that Revivalist criticism writes this modernity into the close of medieval English literary history, with Chaucer winning the field after the final, failed stand of a nativist, provincial poetics.

Alliterative Revivalism turns to ethno-history to manufacture this medieval modernity, picturing a Chaucer who triumphs over purist neo-Saxons by fusing native bluntness with a Francophile sophistication. Such racial logic is a key innovation in post-Romantic literary criticism. As Reginald Horsman demonstrates in his study of the nineteenth-century shift from “environmental” understandings of racial difference to the pseudo-scientific taxonomies of discrete races, blood-based narrative played an integral role in both the British and American brands of imperialism that sustained Revivalist theory. Spawned in this racialized nineteenth century, Revivalism fantasizes the continuation of eleventh-century Saxon–Norman struggles on fourteenth-century metrical battlefields, with neo-Saxon alliterative
poets revolting against French-influenced (though English-speaking) syllabic competitors. While Revivalism depends upon racialist logic, it remains largely aloof from explicit racism. Far from serving to sustain the Anglo-Saxonist ideology key to Anglo-American imperial aggression, the Revivalist narrative ultimately depends upon a barbarization of Saxon identity, whose backwardness is used to highlight the English ascent to a racially hybrid modernity.

Revivalist criticism involves a literary historical writing of English exceptionalism and the deployment of “cultural capital” to “constitute retroactively” a “pre-national” culture on which to ground the modern nation. A fantastically ancient Saxon culture and a nativist artistic rebellion against a syllabic foreignness become the narrative ingredients of a nationalist myth of triumphant aesthetic assimilation. Alliterative Revivalist imagination involves a retrospective installation of what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the “not yet”: much as nineteenth-century historicists display a Western-biased evolutionary model of history that deems non-Western cultures not yet civilized enough for self-rule, so do critics theorizing a doomed reflowering of alliterative verse imagine fourteenth-century Saxons as noble barbarians in need of the civilizing supplement of a French-influenced, but nevertheless English, Chaucer. To build the story of a modern England, Revivalists narrate the meteoric rise and collapse of a medieval one.

Just as Revivalists write a nineteenth-century notion of race into late-medieval alliterative culture, so do they project a modern notion of the nation into the Middle Ages. Throughout this book, I will understand the nation as a fundamentally modern phenomenon, generated by a nationalist ideology that saturated the nineteenth-century development of literary criticism. I will contend that, despite recent efforts to stretch the nation’s history back into the medieval period, we should see the Western Middle Ages as pre-national, with the imperial state a preferable model for late-medieval British literary history. How we are to understand the nation in such a chronology remains controversial. Some discussion of what Walker Connor calls the “terminological chaos” in the theorization of the nation, in which arguments range from a people to a state, and from vaguely contoured, subjective communities to precisely delineated polities, will help contextualize my understanding of Revivalism’s nation as a fundamentally modern construct.

The “notoriously slippery meaning” of the word “nation,” as Kathy Lavezzo notes, precludes us from meaningfully tying this “fantasy”-saturated concept to a determinative etymological analysis. However, it is instructive to examine two related ethno-historical arguments for a medi-
eval nation, which depend on racial and linguistic associations. If we were to rely merely on historical uses, then the word “nation,” as a term connoting a community bound together by notions of common blood—rooted in the Latin natio, for “birth, origin,” and extended to mean “breed, stock, kind, species, race, tribe, set”—would be of great antiquity. The Vulgate Bible offers a particularly influential use of natio in its enumeration of the various descendants of Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen. 10:1–32), in a catalogue appropriated both by medieval genealogists and by nineteenth-century race theorists. If we regard the nation as signifying merely the perception of common birth and culture, then nations must be seen as polities of great antiquity, with roots stretching well beyond historical memory. Influenced by Romantic notions of cultural particularity, some critics emphasize language as the primary force binding individuals into a nation. As in the case of race-based views of national identity, the criterion of linguistic solidarity leads to claims for numerous nations, with each possessing the same primordial antiquity as the language with which it is conflated.

Neither racial nor linguistic bonds produce the nation as I understand the term. I do not mean to discount the importance of ethnic identity in late-medieval Britain, though I do seek to work against a recent trend of extending the nation’s genealogy lineally back into the Middle Ages. I will suggest that, rather than providing space for medieval nations, late-medieval Britain featured a range of non-congruent entities—regional (and imperial) states; transnational communities based on religious and class affiliations; and what Anthony D. Smith calls ethnies, ethnic groups sharing common culture, origin myths, and sensibilities about territory. While modern nations are qualified by ethnic roots, according to Smith, they are nevertheless distinct from these ethnic identities, requiring the homogenizing mechanisms of the bureaucratically centralized, post-Enlightenment, post-industrial state. In suggesting that we speak of ethnic communities and states as separate entities, while seeing religious and class identities as constantly complicating individual political loyalties, I join certain theorists of the medieval nation in critiquing teleological understandings of national development. My focus on empire, for example, aligns my work with Patricia Clare Ingham’s study of late-medieval British political fantasy. While I share Ingham’s vision of a dynamic Britain in which competing visions of community included various combinations of regional and ethnic identities, I differ in choosing to break from the vocabulary of a medieval nation in my investigation of radically other forms of political community that bear uncanny resemblance to the transnational present.
In calling attention to the nationalist motives at the heart of the Alliterative Revival, I rely particularly on two theorists of nationalism. For Benedict Anderson, the rise of a nation like England was part of a second phase of the nationalist age, as nineteenth-century European states produced sovereign and limited “imagined communities” imitative of originally Creole models, with the latter polities formed out of former administrative units of empire. The nation required significant cultural development, as a fixed vernacular gradually became standardized by, and then became the primary vehicle for, print-capitalist culture. Despite this material prehistory, the age of the nation represents a new sociopolitical epoch. Whereas the homogenization of a national print language and the related reduction of other dialects to “regional” status are, Anderson holds, “largely unselfconscious processes,” nationalists regularly make it their business to manufacture a teleology out of such developments. As I shall argue, Revivalist critics use the narrative of an alliterative school’s rise and fall to imagine a metrical civil war that yields a single literary tradition for a late-medieval nation. Revivalists obscure their nationalist motives, stressing radical difference through a racialized dialectics, even as they distract attention from the shared nature of the field in which these ethnic others compete—that of vernacular Middle English. Revivalism’s fantastically aged, nativist neo-Saxons compete with a Francophile but English-speaking Chaucer in a struggle that marks the foundational literary history of England as English. Channeling language’s unique capacity to provide a powerful, but virtual, sense of “contemporaneous community,” Revivalism conflates the English nation with an English language that “looms up imperceptibly out of a horizonless past.”

Revivalist critics insist on such continuity, in order to obscure the post-industrial rupture that, according to Ernest Gellner, produced the nation. Emphasizing the modern nation’s faux-antiquity, Gellner argues that nationalism is “not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself,” but is rather the product of new forms of “social organization” demanded by industrial capitalism. According to Gellner, modern industrial societies, seeking constant market growth, require socioeconomic mobility and cultural homogeneity, each of which is precluded by the primacy of class-based and religious affiliations in the medieval and early modern worlds. While breaking away from the fundamentally class-striated, pre-national past through the cultivation of a general education system, the industrialist-capitalist nation still exploits emotive ethnic attachments. Literary history proves a key channel through which nineteenth-century nationalists exploit ethnicity’s homogenizing power. Producing the evolutionary narrative of a hybrid English
identity generated by competing, racially encoded prosodies, Revivalist critics linked an alliterative movement’s collapse with the imagined rise of an English modernity destined to become the cultural center of a larger and later British imperial state.

In emphasizing Alliterative Revivalism’s nationalist modernity, I do not mean to suggest an absolute medieval–modern divide. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, we need not “choose between continuist and alteritist approaches” as “metanarratives,” insofar as each vision offers useful perspectives in interrelating the medieval and the modern. While I maintain the alteritist view that the medieval nation is a modern projection, I insist on placing late-medieval Britain within an ongoing imperialist history that stretches back at least as far as the era of Edward I. Urging critics to consider the imperial, rather than national, state as the analytical unit for late-medieval English and Scottish political history, I aim to link this pre-modern political world with post-national “Empire,” as seen in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s vision of a global movement beyond static nation-states and into a world of unbounded, corporate, and biopolitical power. In order to indicate the dynamic sense of community formation in the Middle Ages, I avoid use of the term international, which implies a modern, static disposition of uniformly defined nation-states, and instead deploy the term transnational. Drawn from postcolonial critics’ efforts to work against nation-based critical methodologies, the concept of the transnational enables our identification of networks of meaning that defy boundaries traditionally tied to nations. Undoing nationalist Revivalist frames allows us to juxtapose the medieval and post-modern periods’ similarly transnational empires.

Besides forging connections between contemporary and medieval politics, an alteritist view of nationalism works against the marginalization of the Middle Ages in traditional periodization. Medievalist critics have often been wary of alteritist views of the nation, sensing that modernity constructs its identity precisely against a medieval past. In arguing that English nationhood stretches back to King Alfred’s reign, for example, Kathleen Davis contends that Anderson systematically ties modernity to the “decline” of medieval culture, with the “shift” to the nation requiring decisive movement away from medieval dynasticism, transnational religious community, and a “providential” sense of time. While Davis is right to critique Anderson’s generalization that the medieval sense of time is non-calendrical—Geoffrey of Monmouth’s systematic synchronization of British historical events with Roman and Judeo-Christian histories clearly counters this view—it is worth noting that Anderson’s argument for late-eighteenth-century Creole nations undermines traditional literary histories that locate modernity in
the sixteenth century. When we follow Gellner’s even later dating of the nation’s rise, falling well into the industrial nineteenth century, it becomes clear that the modernist theory of the nation allows us to reconfigure traditional literary histories, grouping the medieval, early modern, and Enlightenment periods in a pre-national epoch.

In insisting on Revivalism’s nineteenth-century, nationalist origins, I systematically explore modern literary historical materials as filters through which late-medieval alliterative texts are encountered. Analyzing educational institutions’ powerful role in producing the homogeneity key to the modern nation, Pierre Bourdieu isolates literary history as a key means by which the school system constitutes a “dominant culture” as the “legitimate national culture.” Revivalist discourse participates in precisely this process of “inculcating” the cultural ingredients of the “national image,” by narrating modern English literature’s rise after the ruin of a reactionary, nativist movement. Much as, for Derek Pearsall, the Chaucer associated with the foundations of Englishness is a product of nineteenth-century nationalism bearing little resemblance to the class-conscious and Continentally minded medieval poet, so is the stereotype of the alliterative poet as a neo-Saxon struggling against foreign newness generated by post-industrial, Western nationalism. Gellner’s and Bourdieu’s focus on the education system’s homogenizing effects informs my choice of medievalist materials for analysis. I engage not only with literary historical monuments, such as those of Hippolyte Taine and George Saintsbury, but also with little-known works used in secondary schools or aimed at a general readership that also participated in inculcating the Revivalist narrative. While it would be impossible to give exhaustive coverage of such literary histories, my engagement with a range of Revivalist arguments exposes the mode of reproduction of this nationalist fantasy of opposition and nativism that obscures the various motives driving late-medieval alliterative poems.

As I shall argue, not only the Revivalist vision of an agonistic relation between alliterative and syllabic prosodies but also an emphasis on a self-consciously “alliterative” culture are medievalist rather than medieval phenomena. Only by resisting the Revivalist fantasy of a nativist alliterative school can we re-engage with the poems’ current concerns. Just as we do not read Chaucer as obsessed with a specifically syllabic identity, so should we avoid reading poets working in alliterative meter as primarily focused on prosody. Indeed, almost no medieval evidence exists of the metrical struggle posited by Revivalism. Chaucer produces only a single unambiguous reference to alliterative poetry, when the Parson insists, “But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man / I kan nat geeste ‘rum, ram, ruf,’ by lettre” [But believe you me, I am a Southern man. I don’t know how to
tell stories “fe fi fo,” by letter]. The Parson defines “Southern” literature negatively, distinguishing it from the alliterative line by encoding the three alliterating stresses in the most common alliterative verse-pattern, aa ax, as “rum, ram, ruf.” Chaucer elsewhere makes clear that he sees Britain as a realm with a wide variety of dialects and, indeed, prosodies: knowing that there is “so gret diversite / In English, and in writyng of oure tonge” [such great diversity in the English language and in its orthography], he prays that no one “myswrite” [mis-write] or otherwise “mysmetre” [mis-versify] his text. In referring to alliterative verse, Chaucer’s Parson seems to anticipate Revivalist rhetoric through his reduction of the prosody to a single set of barbaric sounds: rum ram ruf.

However, Chaucer’s Parson is virtually alone in such isolation of an alliterative tradition. While Chaucer’s single snipe at alliterative meter should indeed be seen as part of an effort to magnify his own poetry’s prestige, both the innocuous nature of the attack and its conventionality speak strongly against linking it with a national metrical struggle. The literature-disdaining Parson is hardly an ideal spokesperson for un-ironic literary criticism: indeed, the Parson moves immediately to state that “rym holde I but litel bettre” [I consider rhyme only slightly better] (X.44). Moreover, while the buttressing of identity through a process of “self-alienation” from past “barbarism” has been linked with the early modern “writing of England,” another late-medieval use of the trope elicits evidence against its application to alliterative culture. In the Goldyn Targe, William Dunbar thanks “reverend Chaucere,” along with the Southerners Lydgate and Gower, for bringing the flowers of rhetoric to a Scotland that was before “bare and desolate,” thus improving “our rude langage” and “imperfyte” [imperfect] speech (253–70). If Chaucer’s Parson was tasked with communicating that alliterative verse was barbaric, then Dunbar clearly missed the message, for his “longest and most ambitious work” is the fully alliterative (yet Chaucer-influenced) Tretis of the Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo.

If little evidence exists for Chaucer’s conscious competition with alliterative poets, there is even less in extant alliterative poems. Explicit statements by alliterative poets either about their own or about a competing prosody are virtually nonexistent. The exceptional, indeed singular, status of Chaucer’s Parson’s comment on alliterative verse casts doubt on the Revivalist fantasy of opposed meters locked in mortal combat. The Revivalist assumption of alliterative poets’ regional and linguistic alienation also seems overstated, considering recent work that suggests that a strong sense of dialect emerges only after generations of standardization produced by print culture and its grammars, dictionaries, and stable
literary idioms. With such doubt concerning the primacy of medieval dialectal self-identification, and with so little alliterative evidence of metrical self-consciousness, the Parson’s potshot at alliterative poets seems too slim a piece of evidence to support such militaristic Revivalist visions as Saintsbury’s view of an armed alliterative “rebellion” against the syllabic “foreigner.”

While the Alliterative Revival is a medievalist fantasy, it derives from a medievalism very different from that of nineteenth-century utopianists seeking escape from post-industrial alienation. Examining a late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “medieval revival,” Alice Chandler argues that both “naturalist” and “feudalist” medievalists, hostile to utilitarianism, set about “reanimating the spirit of the medieval past,” in order to locate a “home” absent from a mechanistic, materialistic modernity.64 No such Romantic utopians, Alliterative Revivalists were not fleeing from, but were essentially invested in, the consolidation of the post-industrial nation. Rather than looking to alliterative culture for a more authentic past to inform a morally deficient present, Revivalists imagined a retrograde past as the antithesis of a proto-homogeneous modernity. Manufacturing a national Saxon–Norman struggle that persisted into the fourteenth century, Revivalism highlighted the doomed nature of a unidimensional nativism, with the fantasy of a proto-national race war culminating in the triumph of Chaucer’s hybrid poetics.

Alliterative Revivalists, building upon the racialized literary historical foundations laid by critics such as Taine and Thomas Warton, did not share with nostalgic medievalists such as the Pre-Raphaelites the vision of an ideal medieval order, with neatly organized social classes harmonized by a larger, supervisory Catholic Church.65 Rather, they saw a pre-modern inheritance that provided material useful for the nationalist mythology of cultural continuity. As we shall see (chapter 1), Revivalist racialism emptied the fourteenth-century prosodic proving ground of all competing ethnic identifications save the Saxons and Norman French. As F. V. N. Painter chillingly argues, invading “Teutons . . . supplanted the native Celts as completely as their descendants exterminated the American Indians,” thereby ensuring that in “the character of these Teutonic tribes are to be found the fundamental traits of the English people and of English literature.”66 American Revivalist critics such as Painter, every bit as invested as British scholars in a primordial Saxon Englishness, participated in the construction of an ethno-historical narrative in which a neo-Saxon subculture survived the Norman Conquest, only to disappear into Chaucer’s assimilative English modernity. The evolutionary essence of Revivalism’s nationalist, agonistic literary history could be encapsulated as the conviction that that which
does not kill Chaucer makes modern English stronger. Working against the grain of the more virulent forms of Anglo-Saxonism that sustained racist discourses in both Britain and America, Revivalism valued hybridity over purity, using its narrative of a crushed nativism to portray England as both strengthened and unified by ethnic diversity. While we may cringe at hearing the racist logic of Reuben Post Halleck’s description of Saxon “dough” mixing with Norman “yeast” to make a single English “race” that produced the world’s pre-eminent poetry, hybridity is here valorized in such a way as to distance Revivalism from the Teutonist emphasis on Saxon superiority that Clare Simmons has shown to lead directly to twentieth-century racism.

As we shall see, Alliterative Revivalists insist on the futility of efforts to cultivate a nostalgic, race-based nativism.

Along with ethnic identification, regional difference plays a significant role in my analysis. Recognizing Revivalism’s unremittingly diachronic pursuit of the racialized origins of a single alliterative movement, I will re-engage with alliterative texts as individual poems by conducting synchronic analyses. I have not sought to map out a detailed history of late-medieval alliterative verse; indeed, it is my basic contention that the Revivalist production of a single explanatory model blinds us to the current concerns of poems composed in the meter. In the final three chapters, I propose regional models for exploring select alliterative texts. In referring to alliterative zones I build on N. F. Blake’s revision of a monolithic Alliterative Revival through the conception of “revivals” in the Southwest Midlands, Northwest Midlands, and Scotland, with none “in total isolation” and yet each featuring a unique audience. While I argue that we need to discard the concept of “revival” produced by generations of critics artificially binding alliterative poems to a fantasized Saxon past, I follow Blake’s lead in imagining relatively distinct sociopolitical contexts. I do not suggest that these alliterative zones are finite in either number or location, nor do I attempt to provide exhaustive coverage of alliterative works within a region. Heuristic rather than deterministic, these alliterative zones map out the range of local, regional, and transnational contexts inflecting poems that happen to be composed in alliterative verse. I do not seek to offer the final word on the regions that I assess. My engagement with Yorkshire, for example, a region that could command its own study considering York’s thirteen-line alliterative tradition and the prodigious output of the West Riding scribe Robert Thornton, does not presume a totalizing reading, but serves primarily to enrich our contextualization of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (chapter 3).

Attention to regional difference and instability, along with my focus on empire and transnational class loyalties, undermines Revivalism’s assump-
tion of late-medieval national identity. Theorists of a medieval nation have produced powerful visions of English unity, such as Adrian Hastings’s argument for a late-medieval vernacular literature forging national identity from insular territorialism and from a religious English exceptionalism that dates back to Bede’s eighth century, and Michael Clanchy’s argument that a cultural Englishness surviving the Norman Conquest became the basis for thirteenth-century processes of governmental centralization that treated England as a national territory. My analyses of alliterative poems released from Revivalist filters call such national unities into question. I critique such cultural homogeneity as Hastings asserts, by examining a transnational aristocratic culture that defies attempts to equate English community with the territorial population (chapter 2); and I argue that such elitist interests render the state Clanchy describes as imperial rather than national (chapter 4). As I will systematically maintain, Revivalist critics exploit the powerful narrative appeal of teleological historiography, positing a stable, primordial ethno-linguistic presence as the foundation for a stable English territorial state. While centralizing tendencies can indeed be located, we need to be wary of projecting static notions of English (or Scottish) nationhood back into the medieval period, since regional, class, and religious loyalties overrode the capacity of centralization to produce either territorial or demographic homogeneity. Joining with critics who emphasize such socioeconomic and regional fissures, I work against the retrospective, post-Romantic gaze of a Revivalism that projects national unity into discrete social and cultural historical data. Revivalist Fantasy seeks to redirect our critical attention to the contemporary engagements of alliterative works unconcerned with Revivalism’s ethnonationalist nostalgia.

In chapter 1, I introduce Alliterative Revivalism, tracking its development from the early phase of amateur medievalism to its explicit racialization and regionalization by critics participating in the disciplinary formation of literary studies. I collapse the distinction between critics who see the significant fourteenth-century output of alliterative poems as the resuscitation of a long-dead Anglo-Saxon line and those who interpret that re-animation as an illusion produced by manuscript attestation of an essentially oral meter: each perspective is predicated upon a modern rather than medieval desire for continuity with the Saxon past. Tracing the development of racialist literary history, I argue that Revivalist critics imagine a unified, neo-Saxon alliterative movement that struggled in vain against a syllabic, Francophile South that Chaucer shepherds into modernity. After demonstrating the survival of such a militaristic, monolithic vision of alliterative meter, I turn to Wynnere and Wastoure to explore the limitations produced
by Alliterative Revivalism. Revivalist insistence on Saxon sternness and nationalist nostalgia blinds us to the Wynnere-poet’s sophisticated, playful engagement with transnational issues of class, consumption, and pleasure.

In chapter 2, I explore Revivalist anxiety concerning French culture, arguing that medievalists project Francophobia into a late-medieval period in which transnational solidarities precluded nationalist loyalties. Examining William of Palerne, a fourteenth-century alliterative translation of the twelfth-century Old French Guillaume de Palerne, I explore a ritualized animal allegory that bridges the French and English aristocratic worlds. Working against Revivalism’s ethno-linguistic nationalism, I track the poet William’s use of translation to sustain elitist interests. In becoming animal, whether as werewolves or as dressed in animal skins, these romances’ aristocratic youths ritually mark their social power. William intensifies his source’s elitism due to his anxieties concerning the prestige of Middle English, pressured by his patron’s transnational aristocratic class rather than by any anti-French nativism. William also intensifies female participation in the ritual transformation of each noble youth into the homo sacer; as women wielding clerical power supervise the animalized allegory of aristocratic exceptionalism. Excluding an Eastern prince from the closed circle of aristocratic becoming, William indicates that pan-European cultural ties override anything like nationalist identity, suggesting empire as the model for late-medieval English political identity.

In chapter 3, I turn to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and its transnational context. The Gawain-poet’s milieu transcends the militarized Northwest Midlands, to include a Northeast Midlands bound by bibliographical and economic links, as well as Welsh, Manx, Scottish, and Northern English territories connected by mercenary warfare. Noting Revivalist critics’ tendency to privilege male conflict due to an obsession with a Saxon spirit motivating alliterative work, I investigate critical resistance to the vital roles accorded to Morgan and the Lady. Anxiety about such powerful female figures derives from the considerable legal and economic power open to all English women being magnified by the massive wealth and sparse population of militarist culture. Such economically empowered female agents also stir unease in regionally proximate poems by John Clerk and the Morte-poet. Considering literary critical efforts to reduce the Lady’s and Morgan’s roles through aesthetic fault-finding or doppelgänger fantasies, I conclude that such reactions reveal both medievalist and medieval unease with the socioeconomic instability generated by the English war machine, and that such female empowerment undermines Revivalism’s masculinist, neo-Saxon ethos. Finally, I maintain that Morgan encodes her political pre-eminence through an allegory of ages, disguising herself as an elderly
widow in order to signal her superiority both to her middle-aged emissary, Bertilak, and to her young competitor for transregional power, the young Arthur.

In chapter 4, I explore two alliterative Arthurian romances, analyzing Anglo-Scottish marcher culture as a transnational context obscured by Revivalism’s nation-based literary historiography. Examining two poems in the thirteen-line stanza, the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and the *Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawane*, I investigate borderland sensibilities produced by the collision of the Scottish and English empires, in which shared narratives of imperial aggression and practices such as side-switching belie attempts to link either poem to a single national provenance. I call attention to the *Awntyrs*-poet’s anti-imperialist imagination of Arthurian aggression and assess the ethnic ambiguities of Galeron, Gawain, and Galloway. The poetics of land-grants with which the poem closes highlights the Arthurian war-state’s transnational status. Turning to the ostensibly Scottish *Golagros and Gawane*, I argue that, far from figuring a Scottish love of freedom through a lord’s effort to remain independent, the poet highlights the arbitrariness of imperial Arthurian aggression in a fluid, marcher world. Golagros’s final lordlessness signals the purely romanticized status of his independence in a borderland driven by brutal, transnational expansionism.

In chapter 5, I turn to poems of the *Piers Plowman* tradition that undercut Revivalist claims concerning the geographical and cultural provinciality of late-medieval alliterative verse. Situated in a Southwest Midlands–London nexus that connected an allegedly outlying region with the scribal and administrative circles of the Greater Westminster area, the Langlandian tradition forces us to abandon the center–periphery rhetoric at the heart of Revivalist discourse. While Revivalist critics often link alliterative poets with cultural and technological backwardness, the poets of the *Piers Plowman* tradition prove to be on the cutting edge of communications technologies. I assess a canny conception of book production among Langlandian poets, examining the *Crede*-poet’s recursive media analysis and the strategic use of anonymity for political communication in *Richard the Redeless*. Tracking the narrator’s movement in *Mum and the Sothsegger* from idealism to pragmatism, I explore a systematic deployment of media and authors in a recursive allegory of political discourse. Langlandian poets’ sophisticated understanding of social networks and textual media is obscured by Revivalist efforts to read alliterative poets as neo-primitives looking ever backwards into a moribund, oral, and Saxon past.

In the epilogue, I discuss the literary historiographical implications of undermining Alliterative Revivalism. Arguing that my modernist view of the nation involves an epochal rather than teleological model of historical
change, I maintain that the disengagement of nationalist desires structuring the reception of alliterative texts exposes medieval motivations that often mesh with current critical priorities. By identifying Revivalism’s monolithic discourse (chapter 1), clarifying the transnational context for alliterative poems (chapter 2), and then exploring the diverse local contexts obscured by a reductive Revivalist vision (chapters 3–5), I expose the considerable, yet often unconsidered, weight of nationalist fantasies. It is only by disclosing Revivalism’s racialized and nationalist rhetoric that we can recover what Gabrielle Spiegel calls the “social logic” of literary works as “lived events” that “are essentially local in origin.”81 By identifying and thereby disengaging layers of reductive criticism that have accreted to critical assessments and editions of alliterative texts, I seek to forge dynamic links among late-medieval and current concerns.82 Revivalist Fantasy re-engages with what has been left out of the nationalist fantasy of a doomed, nativist metrical rebellion, re-imagining communities and commitments occluded by the deeply rooted discourse of Alliterative Revivalism.
I N H I S R E V I E W of Turville-Petre’s *The Alliterative Revival*, Blake suggests that “it might not be too much of a paradox to say that the best book on the alliterative revival is likely to be the one which takes as its theme that such a book is unnecessary because it organizes Middle English poetry in the wrong way.”¹ Such a book would at least “allow the author to dwell fairly on the differences as well as the similarities among alliterative poems.”² In critiquing Alliterative Revivalism’s monolithic vision, while exploring contexts foreclosed by nationalist literary historiography, I have intended the simultaneously destructive and creative response envisaged by Blake. The Revivalist portrait of a unified, nativist, provincial alliterative movement proves rooted in nationalist, ethno-historical discourses that evolved along with the Western discipline of literary studies. However fantastical Revivalism appears, it continues to shape our reception of late-medieval alliterative texts, suggesting images of nostalgia, ethnic pride, and, above all, its master narrative of cultural death followed by revival followed by second death.

My assumption of the nation’s nineteenth-century origins might suggest an epochal literary historiography predicated upon the absolute alterity of the Middle Ages. However, it is only regarding national identity and race that I stress medieval–modern difference. As I have shown through my engagement with classism and Western consolidation (chapter 2), female participation in a transnational economy (chapter 3), marcher culture and empire (chapter 4), and the politicization of book culture (chapter 5), alliterative texts are variously caught up in cultural practices of continuing significance. By systematically undoing the layers of Revivalist fantasy that have accreted to alliterative works, I aim to recover the medieval desires and commitments obscured by the literary-historical yoking of poems to an allegedly native Saxon past.
My insistence on the nation’s modernity takes place in the context of a vigorous historiographical debate. Medievalist scholars have offered powerful criticism of modernist theories of nationhood, particularly Anderson’s view of a decisive shift from a dynastic Middle Ages with a transnational religious structure and “sacral” sense of time, to secular, socially horizontal communities, each imagined in the “homogeneous empty time” of print-capitalist culture. Ingham, for example, has powerfully interrogated Anderson’s evolutionary argument that continuously developing capitalist pressures cause the “passing away” of dynasticism and typology, which disappear in the past of a linear model of history. In emphasizing the continuities of pre-modern and current imperial identities, I submit that alternative approaches such as Ingham’s “dialectical” method are vital adjustments required for the application of modernist theories such as Anderson’s. I have sought to isolate the precise aspects of Anderson’s (and Gellner’s) models that contribute to my critique of Revivalism, not the least of which is the discursive coincidence of the nationalist age with the professionalization of literary studies (chapter 1).

I would urge medievalist critics to recognize the epochal, rather than binary, potential of Anderson’s and Gellner’s historiographies. In tracing European national modernity only as far back as the nineteenth century, I adopt a version of modernity that undermines the marginalization of the Middle Ages in periodizations that assume a decisive sixteenth-century shift. Timelines such as Gellner’s post-industrialist rise of nationalism remove the medieval era from isolation, joining it with the early-modern and eighteenth-century periods in a reconfigured, pre-national epoch. Insofar as periodization, as Davis argues, is a “political technique” that always serves current interests, it is unsurprising that the concept of modernity is as ambiguous as it is historiographically inevitable. As we have seen, some medievalist scholars trace a progressively developing English national identity as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period; other critics, using criteria such as Reformation culture or cartography, argue for a sixteenth-century dawn; while others, examining anti-French literary culture or British political union, assert eighteenth-century beginnings. Considering such a variety of narratives of national growth, it seems an oversimplification to view Anderson as unique in constructing Western modernity on the basis of a medieval other. Unless one assumes primordial ethno-national identities that stretch continuously beyond historical memory, one must draw an exclusionary line at some historical point. Anderson’s late-eighteenth-century Creole print-capitalism is no less arbitrary in its explanatory force than Hastings’s argument for Anglo-Saxon religious identity or Greenfeld’s
prioritization of the English Reformation. Moreover, Anderson’s historiography accommodates non-linear readings. By foregrounding technological developments and the cultural effects of the mass migrations that produced Creole consciousness, Anderson identifies a nationalist age while simultaneously implying that decisive shifts in technology and demographics can produce alternative epochs.

With its emphasis on political and technological ruptures in cultural history, epochal historiography can bring postmodern criticism into proximity with the medieval period. Two of the topics I pursue demonstrate how an epochal historiography of nationalism works against alteritist tendencies. When I turn to Anderson to explore the unstable nature of borders in the Anglo-Scottish marches, insisting that the assumption of nation inhibits us from seeing the identity play within such communities (chapter 4), I am motivated in part by a desire to theorize radical return to pre-modern territorial instability. As Hardt and Negri argue concerning the “new physiology” of global politics, the notion that power can be contained within limited sovereign territorial states is already being undermined, with transnational power networks preying upon the very belief in fixed national borders.

The dynamic imperial states of the late-medieval period bear uncanny similarities to such post-national entities. When I focus on the political use of anonymity and multiplicity in Langlandian book culture (chapter 5), probing the “manuscript matrix” that often eludes a print-centered critical tradition, I am driven by a fascination with the similarly unstable nature of manuscript and digital textuality. Tracking the multiplication of texts and the obfuscation of authorial responsibility in Langlandian poems, I hope here to open up theoretical lines of communication between the age of the manuscript and the electronic epoch.

In applying Gellner’s argument that industrial modernity requires a homogeneous society capable of being efficiently mobilized for capitalist production, I highlight both class loyalties and regional distinctions that prove incompatible with the Revivalist fantasy of medieval nationalism. While it would be naïve to claim that modern capitalism utterly levels class distinctions, Gellner’s modernist model offers the crucial insight that post-industrial society organizes itself as if pre-national social hierarchies have been destroyed, with general education programs, nationalist political rhetoric, and nation-wide bureaucracy assimilating all localities into a single market system. Gellner’s insistence on industrialism’s systematic production of socioeconomic entropy highlights the qualitatively different status of medieval classism, thus exposing Revivalism’s imagination of a populist nationalism as a distracting fantasy.
Arguing for a late-thirteenth-century rise of an English nation, Turville-Petre asserts that nationalist loyalties existed alongside both local and transnational identities, such as the Church, with the trans-regional growth of English as the vernacular standard producing a national perspective.\(^{17}\) I would advance two criticisms of this view. While patriotism concerning the English realm has presumably existed as long as has the kingdom, such emotional attachments require a systematic and self-sustaining ideology to rise to the level of nationalism.\(^ {18}\) Moreover, considering the lack of late-medieval mass media and general education institutions to disseminate such an ideology uniformly, I join Pearsall in asserting that medieval invocations of English identity invariably prove local, serving merely to rhetorically reinforce class or regional interests.\(^ {19}\) As seen in William of Palerne (chapter 2), the notion of a nationalist ideology transcending class interests is a medievalist projection: William “Englishes” French material not out of patriotism, but in the service of aristocratic exceptionalism. Besides such overriding class interests, the entities that inspire loyalties in the poems that I explore in this book, such as the imperial war machines of Arthurian romance (chapters 3 and 4), bear little resemblance to the modern nation. Much as the Mum-narrator slips seamlessly from Orléans back to London (chapter 5), much as Galeron of Galloway switches unflinchingly from one side to a stronger (chapter 4), and much as the monarch of Wynnerere and Wastoure unproblematically bears the arms of England and yet rules over French and Germans (chapter 1), late-medieval Middle English poets prove unconcerned with the exclusive loyalties required by modern national identity.

My reflection on regional perspectives also aims to release select alliterative poems from subjection to Revivalism’s fantasy of nationalist nativism and ethno-poetic nostalgia. Convinced that the identification of Revivalist discourse facilitates re-engagement with alliterative texts deracinated by generations of nationalist reception, I investigate contexts that speak to current critical priorities. I propose alliterative zones flexible enough to accommodate social and cultural cross-connections, while simultaneously elucidating regional identities obscured by nationalist models. Analysis of the fissured nature of pre-national political identity proves vital in recovering such local contexts. Rejecting Revivalism’s monolithic contextualization of alliterative poetry, I adopt what Jacques Derrida calls that “interpretations of interpretation” that affirms the ludic potential for manipulating elements, acquired through recognition of the non-totalizable nature of the literary historical field.\(^ {20}\) I advisedly make no effort to provide exhaustive coverage of an alliterative movement or movements. Indeed, I highlight the partiality of my selections of texts and regions because it is
central to my argument that the Revivalist vision of a single alliterative school that could be reconstructed is a limiting fantasy. It is not fantasy itself that I indict—or claim to transcend. In foregrounding the heuristic nature of my regional contextualizations and the arbitrariness of my choices of poems for analysis, I seek to illuminate medieval–modern continuities in alliterative poems, in order to encourage further interested reconfigurations of social and political contexts informing alliterative works.

In insisting on the modernity of nationalist literary history, I assert that nineteenth-century racist logic, rather than medieval ethnic identity, produces the Alliterative Revival. As we have seen (chapter 1), while Revivalism depends upon a modern, pseudo-scientific taxonomy of discrete races, its most immediate, Anglo-nationalist goal prevents it from participating fully in the Anglo-Saxonist racism of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America and Britain. In order to construct its narrative of English exceptionalism, Revivalist theory presents neo-Saxon culture as retrograde, technically inferior, and doomed to fall before a Chaucerian school that embraces and assimilates an imported French culture. Far from idealizing Saxons as a uniquely gifted and indomitable race, Revivalists portray them as second-rate provincials, with limited, if purist, talents. Revivalists aestheticize ethno-historical material to produce a literary history that, while Anglo-centric, appeals through its nationalist rhetoric to various British, American, and Continental critics committed to post-Romantic ethno-national paradigms. That American critics were among the first and most virulent Revivalists (chapter 1) supports Anderson’s hypothesis that the first nations derived from Creole cultures linked by print technologies with imperial ethnic homelands, and also highlights the modern nexus of nationalism and imperialism. Much as a shared sense of Germanic origins and imperial destiny drove both American and English nationalist literary histories, so does the participation of Scottish critics alongside English scholars sustain imperialist visions of an Anglo-centric British antiquity.

In his description of nationalism’s historiographical sleight of hand, namely, that “it preaches and defends continuity, but owes everything to a decisive and unutterably profound break in human history,” Gellner offers what could stand as a summary of Revivalist practice. The Saxon–Norman binary out of which Revivalism constructs its modern England is a fantasy produced by forgetting, performed in the mode of “thinking nationally” that, as D. Vance Smith argues, “obliviates[s]” differences “in memorializing the nation.” Revivalism invokes Saxon–Norman difference only to kill it off, with its primary motivation being the installation of a modern Englishness that postdates the alliterative movement’s defeat by a Chaucer who epochally blended native vigor and Norman style. If Smith is cor-
rect in maintaining that modern nations require an ethnic core (even if factitious) to survive, then Alliterative Revivalism’s post-industrial production of medieval ethnic homogeneity aims to anchor modern national identity. The identification of Revivalist discourse facilitates resistance to such nationalist leveling of the ethnic, regional, and class differences informing individual alliterative poems.

Through his analysis of the diversity of audiences, composers, and traditions of late-medieval alliterative verse, Lawton deems it necessary to note that he does not intend to imply that “there is no such thing as alliterative poetry.” For the polemical purpose of revising the Revivalist model that continues to inflect our reception of alliterative verse, I would suggest that criticism benefits from acting as if there were no such thing as alliterative poetry. A fixation on prosodic identity is the driving force of Revivalism’s nationalist narrative of neo-Saxon nativists collapsing before a successful, because hybrid, Chaucerian poetics. While critics understandably relish the metrical skills of a Chaucer or a Dunbar, they rarely insist on linking such poets with their prosodies, which is precisely what Revivalist scholars do when fashioning monolithic narratives that foreground the choice of alliterative meter. While alliterative prosody is, of course, a recognizable meter, whether used exclusively or in combination with rhyme, I would suggest that scholars have not often enough considered how transparently this verse-form was used. Given the near absence of primary evidence of alliterative self-consciousness (Introduction), it is clear that Revivalism’s prioritization of prosodic difference is a gross imposition of modern literary-historical taxonomy. Much as the notion of a single rhythmic standard for alliterative verse is an anachronistic, post-print production (chapter 1), so does Revivalism’s single alliterative movement provide an influentially reductive frame. By disrupting Revivalism’s nationalist story of a futile reanimation of the Old English past, I have endeavored not only to negate the ongoing impact of such totalization, but also to suggest reconfigured sociohistorical contexts. I have selected poems that figure transnational identities, regional politics, and writing technologies, deliberately replacing Revivalist fantasy with my own set of informing desires, in an effort to re-engage with the current energies animating late-medieval alliterative poems.
Introduction

2. Ibid., xi. By “temporal” and “accentual,” Skeat refers to quantitative and stress-based prosodies, respectively.
3. Ibid., xii.
4. Ibid.
10. See David Matthews’s “material history” of the development of Middle English studies from its origins in eighteenth-century antiquarianism, to its central role in F. J.


16. Ibid., 511; 504; 512.

17. Ibid., 511.


22. On Saxon-Norman struggle in Victorian literary historiography, see Clare A.

23. Horsman links the development of American racialism with efforts to justify dispossessions of Indians understood as savages. According to Horsman, a majority of Americans maintained an Anglo-Saxonist self-perception by the 1848 close of the U.S.-Mexican War (see *Race*, 189–228). I follow Horsman in restricting the term “Anglo-Saxonist” to the sense of medievalist, ethno-historical myths about Germanic origins. I do not use the word to mean a “self-conscious national and racial identity” that “came into being among the early peoples of the region that we now call England,” as do Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles in “Anglo-Saxonism and Medievalism,” their introduction to *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 1–14 [1].


29. In the *Vulgate*, the catalogues of each of the three sons’ descendants, each enumerating various ethnic groups called alternately *nationes* and *gentes*, are followed by the summary statement that it is from the *nationes* of Noah’s three sons that all post-diluvium *gentes* are derived (Gen.10:32). Isidore of Seville follows his definition of “gentes,” which he equates with “nationes” (IX.2.1), with an account of nearly all ethnic genealogies, as traceable to Japheth, Shem, and Ham, in *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum*, ed. William Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), IX.2.2–127. On the early modern spread of medieval genealogies of Noah’s sons, see Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 103–42. On the confluence of geographic, ethnic, corporal, legal, and other forms of differentiation in the hybrid, fluid collective identities of the medieval West, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridxity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 11–42.


13–15. While discrete, stable, (pseudo-)scientifically endorsed races are post-Romantic products, there were clearly medieval modes of ethnic identification that made use of differences in culture and appearance; Smith’s work helps avoid an alteritism that would erase ethnic difference from pre-modernity. On clear cases of ethnic differentiation in Anglo-Norman legislation and in Gerald of Wales’s “area studies” (5–8), along with a critical introduction to a collection of articles theorizing pre-modern race, see Thomas Hahn, “The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 (2001): 1–37.

32. Smith, *Ethnic Origins*, 212; 175.


36. Ibid., 47–65; 45.

37. Ibid., 45.

38. Ibid., 144–45.


40. Ibid., 48.

41. Ibid. See Connor’s argument that ethnic identification underwrites the nation, a fundamentally psychological entity, in *Ethnonationalism*, 90–117.


46. Kathleen Davis, “National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Post-


50. Ibid.


52. See N. F. Blake’s criticism that the Alliterative Revival theory departs from standard literary historical practice by isolating alliterative poems according to meter, in “Middle English Alliterative Revivals,” *Review* 1 (1979): 205–14 [205].


54. Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, in *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson, X.41–42. All citations from Chaucer are from the *Riverside*; my translations. I translate “fe fi fo” to indicate the barbaric sounds in which the Parson encodes non-Southern verse.

55. Most critics believe Chaucer’s Parson alludes to the *aa ax* alliterative long line (with *a* marking alliterating stresses, and *x* marking non-alliterating stresses). However, Blake asserts that the Parson refers only generally to alliterative patterns, which are also found in rhythmical prose, in “Chaucer and the Alliterative Romances,” *Chaucer Review* 3 (1969): 163–69 [165]. John Bowers argues that the singleness of Chaucer’s mention of alliterative verse was not due to unfamiliarity, since alliterative poets competed alongside him in the London book-trade, in *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 15–17.


57. Chaucer’s gesture may be repeated by Philip Sidney, whose singling out of Chaucer for praise in that otherwise “misty time” of medieval English poetry suggests willful occlusion of alliterative (and, of course, all other non-Chaucerian) verse, in the *Defence of Poesy*, in *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 134. That Sidney would have had no knowledge of alliterative verse seems unlikely, considering the fascination with metrical variety that he reveals throughout the *Elegies of The Old Arcadia*. George Puttenham suggests significant literary historical appreciation of alliterative verse in Sidney’s day, listing “that nameles” writer of “Piers Plowman” among the “most commended writers in our English Poesie,” in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589; Menston, UK: Scolar Press, 1968), 74.

civility,” even as it “enforced boundaries of class” (10–11), Helgerson asserts that the “nation-state” can only “constitute” itself by distinguishing itself from its “former self or selves” (22). Helgerson’s class-striated, literally self-conscious England is not a nation in the modernist sense, for it lacks a leveling of socioeconomic ranks, and would require generations of governmental centralization enabled by print-capitalism to thoroughly disseminate a uniform culture; see Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9–12. On medievalist debate concerning English nationhood, and for an argument that medieval, proto-nationalist imaginings were sharpened by self-perception as a uniquely marginal community, see Kathy Lavezzo, Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000–1534 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 8–11.


60. Bawcutt, ed., in Dunbar, Selected Poems, 33–57 [33].

61. Critics sometimes argue that the Gawain-poet refers to the alliterative long line by describing his verse as “wyth lel letters loken” [bound together with loyal letters] (35), though this seems vague enough to refer to any metrically composed—and hence memorable—work (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. William Vantuono, rev. ed. [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999]; my translation). William offers a more suggestive reference with his worry in William of Palerne that his “metur” is not to everyone’s delight; see G. H. V. Bunt’s edition (Groningen, Netherlands: Bouma’s Boekhuis, 1985), 5524; Turville-Petre reads this as anxiety concerning audience resistance to a newly revived prosody, in Alliterative Revival, 24–25.


64. Alice Chandler, A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 195–96; 7–10. Chandler argues that “naturalist” medievalists (e.g., William Morris) looked to a Middle Ages that was more attuned to nature, emotion, and heroism, while “feudalist” medievalists (e.g., Walter Scott) looked to the medieval political order for social harmony and stability missing from modernity (195–96). For a survey of nineteenth-century British applications of medievalism in educational, recreational, social, and political practices, see Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 130–293.

66. F. V. N. Painter, *Introduction to English Literature, Including a Number of Classic Works with Notes* (Boston: Leach, Shewell, and Sanborn, 1894), 3.


68. My formulation here depends on Friedrich Nietzsche’s evolutionary view that “what does not kill me makes me stronger,” in *The Twilight of the Idols* (1889), trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1968), 23. See also Perkins’ speculation that “literary histories are shaped by the pleasures of aggression” (*Is Literary History*., 33).


71. See Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest*, 201–2. Ralph Waldo Emerson shares with Revivalists an alternative, evolutionary view of hybridity, arguing that the English are “collectively a better race than any from which they are derived,” in *English Traits* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1857), 56–58.

72. Blake, “Middle English,” 207. Blake’s specific target for criticism is Turville-Petre’s *The Alliterative Revival*.

73. Hanna argues that “north Yorkshire” is a “generative provincial culture” often “ignored” in analyses of alliterative meter, in “Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,” 55.


77. On the fluid nature of political loyalties in medieval regions, and on scholars’ projection of current geographical understanding of British nations onto medieval po-
political communities, see Davies, First English Empire, 54–88.


82. In interrelating desires in medieval texts with my own critical concerns, I am indebted to much medievalist reflection on negotiating alterity. Carolyn Dinshaw, in critiquing conceptions of the Middle Ages as an utterly pre-modern totality, urges critical vigilance in identifying potential allies in the political work of “coalition building,” in Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 12–21; David Aers reflects on the recovery of medieval labor history erased by New Historicism’s reductive genealogy of modern individualism, in “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject,’” in Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 177–202 [178–79]; and Lee Patterson asserts the “political” nature of all forms of historicism, suggesting that modern desires could never be fully extracted from the interpretation of medieval texts, in Negotiating, ix–xi.

Chapter 1

1. Turville-Petre, Alliterative Revival, 27.

2. William Henry Schofield, English Literature from the Norman Conquest to


10. Ibid., 270. On the criteria for alliterative meter, see Hanna, “Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,” 43–63. Angus McIntosh differentiates alliterative meter from “homomorphic” prosodies, in which lines consist of regular dispositions of stressed and unstressed syllables (i.e., feet); “heteromorphic” lines (such as the alliterative long line) have varying feet and hence variant rhythms; see “Early English Alliterative Verse,” in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry*, ed. Lawton, 20–33 [21–22]. Alliterative verse was not unknown before Percy: some scholars have recognized the strong-stress nature of Old English meter since the mid-sixteenth-century development of Anglo-Saxon studies; see Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 35–50. However, a number of key critics either ignore or misunderstand strong-stress meter: Sidney makes no mention of alliterative verse in his *Defence* (c. 1580), while Puttenham dismisses *Piers Plowman*’s prosody as “but loose metre,” in *Arte*, 74.


13. Ibid., I.ii; I.vi.
16. In commentary on *Piers Plowman* chosen to replace Warton’s analysis, Skeat directly attacks Warton, arguing that “it is untrue that Langland adopts the style of the Anglo-Saxon poets,” and that Langland chose the meter because it was recognizably and “thoroughly English,” in Thomas Warton, *History of English Poetry from the Twelfth to the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, 4 vols., rev. ed., ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (1871; rpt., New York: Haskell House, 1970), 250. Skeat here cites George Perkins Marsh, who argues that Langland’s work is utterly un-Saxon, instead “exhibit[ing] the characteristic moral and mental traits of the Englishman, as clearly and unequivocally as the most national portions of the works of Chaucer or of any other native writer,” in The Origin and History of the English Language (London: Sampson Low, 1862), 303.
22. Ibid.
29. I take this description from Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s analysis of distinct local


32. On the nineteenth-century development of racist Anglo-Saxonism, which shifts from general praise of liberty-loving Anglo-Saxons to a pseudo-scientific doctrine of racial superiority in which Anglo-Saxons are an elite sub-group within an allegedly superior “Germanic” branch of a “Caucasian” race, see Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 25–61.

33. Defining the nation as a community imagined as “inherently limited and sovereign,” Anderson insists that every nation sees its borders as “finite” and its place as situated on a plane with “other nations” (Imagined Communities, 6–7).

34. Marsh writes that “Early English poetry divided itself into two schools,” with one “follow[ing] Continental models in literature,” while “the other sought to recommend itself to the taste and character of the more numerous part of the population, by reviving the laws of Saxon verse, some remains of which still lingered in the memory of the common people” (Origin and History, 276).

35. Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 180–82.


43. Taine, *History*, I.81 [Histoire I.60].
44. The Reformation is accorded a foundational role for a precocious English nationalism, in Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 51–53; and Hastings, *Construction of Nationalhood*, 57–60.
47. Ibid., I.108 [I.120].
48. Ibid., I.120 [I.108].
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., I. 140–41 [I.134].
51. Ibid., I. 134 [140–41].
52. Warner Brothers’ 1938 *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (directed by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley; written by Norman Reilly Raine and Seton I. Miller) stages explicit Saxon-Norman conflict in 1191, with simply dressed, hard-working “Saxons” oppressed by “Norman” nobles prone to feasting and armed tax collection. Resistance to the Norman juggernaut is played out in the forest-zones beyond the reach of the Norman war machine, with Robin Hood highlighting the national nature of his insurgency: “I’ll organize a revolt. . . . And I’ll never rest until every Saxon in this shire can stand up free men and strike a blow for Richard and England.” That Revivalist formulations parallel such cinematic story-telling supports Fradenburg’s view of the profound interrelation of fantasy and scholarship—that “philology also dreams” (“‘So That We May Speak of Them,’” 210).
54. Ibid., I.161–62 [I.161].
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., I. 165; 169 [I.166; 170].
57. Bernhard ten Brink, *Early English Literature (to Wiclif)*, trans. Horace M. Kennedy, 2 vols. (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), I.329; Bernhard ten Brink, *Geschichte der Englischen Litteratur*; ed. Alois Brandl, 2 vol. (Berlin: Robert Oppenheim, 1877), I.411. For all citations from ten Brink, I utilize Horace M. Kennedy’s translation, which was revised by ten Brink (vii–viii), and is a key source for Revivalist use of the term “Revival”; I incorporate bracketed translations from the original German when helpful. *Wiederaufblühen* could be more literally rendered as “reflowering.”
58. Ibid., I.329–30 [I.412].
59. Ibid., I.330 [I.413].
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., I.330 [I.413].
63. Ibid., I.332 [I.415].

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., I.179–80.
70. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., I.100–101.
74. Ibid., I.191.
75. Ibid., I.290–92.
76. Ibid.


80. On the idealization of a Middle Ages “home” by nineteenth-century British medievalist scholars and artists, see Chandler, *Dream of Order*, 10.
82. Ibid., 55.

83. Insisting on the provincial nature of Scottish poet Huchown’s verse, such critics work against what Robert Crawford analyzes as the tendency among modernizing Scottish critics to favor Southern English, in *Devolving English Literature*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 16–44.

84. See Horsman’s argument that the politico-religious histories of England and America predisposed these societies toward racialized historiography, in *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 22–28. If Anderson is correct in locating the nation’s origins in Creole communities, then American Revivalist criticism had the longest nationalist gestation (see *Imagined Communities*, 50–65). Such American interventions may be motivated by what Biddick calls the “lingering magic power” of “English America,” according to which American educational institutions prioritize English history in a joint Anglo-Saxonist imperialism (*Shock of Medievalism*, 59).


87. Amours, after describing the poet’s dialect as of a “Northern” origin that could be either English or Scottish, cites external evidence in placing the *Pistill* in Scotland


92. On the EETS’s early years, and on Furnivall’s nationalist publishing aims, see Matthews, Making of Middle English, 151–57.


94. Ibid., 515–16. Neilson speaks dramatically of the “heroic extreme” to which his opponents Bradley and Gollancz went in “claiming Huchown as English,” in Huchown of the Awle Ryale, the Alliterative Poet: A Historical Criticism of Fourteenth Century Poems Ascribed to Sir Hew of Eglintoun (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Son, 1902), 6.


96. Neilson, Huchown, 14.

97. Ibid., viii.

98. On Francis Joseph Amours, see the anonymous obituary in Scottish Historical Review 8 (1911): 101–4.


102. Ibid., lxxxii.
108. Ibid., lxvii. Chambers presumably means Langland and the *Gawain*-poet.
112. Ibid., 409; 412.
113. Oakden situates alliterative verse primarily in the “west,” with “some activity” in the equally provincial “north,” in *Alliterative Poetry*, II.87.
115. Ibid., 147–49.
116. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival*, 43. Turville-Petre notes that the key exception is *Alexander and Dindimus*, which entered into the “de-luxe” manuscript MS Digby 202 due to a scribe’s mistaken belief that it supplied missing text in the French romance that occupies most of the illuminated manuscript (43). See also John Burrow’s argument that the numerous and materially heterogeneous manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* were marketed for the fifteenth-century “bourgeoisie,” in “The Audience of Piers Plowman,” *Anglia* 75 (1957): 373–84 [377].
122. On Southerners’ movement away from identification with a Norman feudal culture whose serf-holding justified slavery, to a post–Civil War identification with An-


125. Renan argues, “No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgundian, an Alan, a Taïfale, or a Visigoth” [Aucun citoyen français ne sait s’il est Burgonde, Alain, Taïfale, Visigoth], while each such citizen shares the constitutive forgetting of pre-modern traumas; see “What is a Nation?”, 11”; Qu’est-ce Qu’une Nation?, 30.

126. Anderson, Imagined Communities, 201.


128. Ibid., 90.

129. Ibid.

130. See Michelle R. Warren’s analysis of the genealogical critical practice of “strategically deploying ethnic and family resemblance as well as difference” to forge “continuities across time,” in History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 11.


132. Ibid., 179; 183.


134. Ker, Dark Ages, 20.

135. Though there have been debates concerning the possibility of a half-verse with three major stresses, most scholars accept Marie Borroff’s resolution of such stresses as “secondary,” in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 198–203. To my knowledge, only Robert William Sapora, Jr., denies the caesura’s essential role in alliterative verse, in A Theory of Middle English Alliterative Meter with Critical Applications (Cambridge, MA: Me-


137. Standard scansion marks alliterating stresses with the same letter, non-alliterating stresses with an x, and the caesura by a space.


139. Ibid.; italics in original.


144. While he does not discuss Duggan’s database, Barney argues that the “corpus” of late-medieval alliterative poetic material should be “defined precisely” and its “textual status” (including “editorial interventions”) made clear, in “Langland’s Prosody,” 69; 81–82.

145. Texts in alliterative meter typically display variation in stress-patterns. The notable exception is the Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy, a late (possibly sixteenth-century) and very lengthy text (Hanna, “Alliterative Poetry,” 497), which has been scanned as consisting of 99 percent aa ax lines (Oakden, Alliterative Poetry, I.169).


148. Ibid., 16; 18.

149. See Lawton’s survey of literary historical theories of alliterative verse, and his analysis of key evidence for regionalist alliterative movements, in “Diversity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry,” 143–72.


151. Ibid., 73; 92.

152. Ibid., 76.


155. Ibid., I.100–101.

156. Crawford, Devolving English Literature, 18–38.


158. Citing topical references to the 1352 Statute of Treasons and to Chief Justice


163. Ibid., 118; 120; 119.

164. Gollancz, *Good Short Debate between Winner and Waster*, xv; xxiii.

165. All citations from *Wynnere and Wastoure* are from Trigg’s edition; my translations.

166. Trigg, “Israel Gollancz’s *Wynnere and Wastoure*,” 116; 117; 120–21.

167. Ibid., 119; 123.

168. Ibid., viii–xiii; xxiii.

169. Ibid., xxiii–xiv.


175. Ten Brink, Early English Literature, I.354 [I.454].


178. Halleck, History, 47.


183. Speirs sees Wynnere as among the “last English masterpieces of the oral tradition of early Northern poetry,” composed by a poet whose “old-fashionedness” indi-

184. On the dialect of *Wynne*, with localizations ranging from the Northwest Midlands to the Northeast Midlands, see Trigg’s edition, xviii–xxi.


186. On the satirical traditions informing the allegorical figures of *Wynne* and Wastoure, see Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, 1–23.


189. On the transnational nature of Northwest Midlands military culture, see Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 162–91; and see chapter 3 (below).

190. The Garter motto is traditionally phrased as “Honi soit qui mal y pense.”


197. Salter argues against viewing the “revival” as a “local affair,” noting that “clerky poets were probably as well traveled as their noble patrons,” in “Alliterative Revival,” 233.

Chapter 2


2. Ibid., lxxxi; lxvi–vii. For criticism of efforts to assume continuity of Old Eng-


8. Building upon Anderson’s argument that the fixity of languages produced by print-capitalism is a precondition to the nation’s eighteenth-century rise (*Imagined Communities*, 37–46), Hobsbawm asserts that a national standard can be constructed only through a post-print hierarchizing of dialect differences, in *Nations*, 51–63. Susan Crane’s dialect-based view that the English language only begins to suggest “national identity” well into the Lancastrian fifteenth century also challenges Revivalist assumptions of a fourteenth-century nationalism; see “Anglo-Norman Cultures in England, 1066–1460,” in *Cambridge History*, ed. Wallace, 35–60 [55–56]. Turville-Petre exposes the anachronism of linking discrete languages and ethnicities, critiquing “patriotic”
efforts to associate English with “the people,” and Latin and French with the clergy and the “noble descendants of the Norman oppressors”; these languages actually mingled in a single “culture in three voices” (Engeland the Nation, 181).

9. On the nineteenth-century “lexicographic revolution” and the reification of languages as the “personal property” of national entities, see Anderson, Imagined Communities, 83–84.

10. William of Palerne, uniquely attested in King’s College Cambridge MS 13 (dated 1350–75; for a full description, see Bunt, ed., 1–10; 14–19), is a translation of the twelfth-century Old French romance, Guillaume de Palerne, which is uniquely attested in the thirteenth-century manuscript Paris, Arsenal Fr. 6565, ff. 77–157 (Alexandre Micha, ed. [Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990], 7–8).

11. On nationalists’ efforts to conceal the nation’s modernity by presenting languages as “the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind,” see Hobsbawm, Nations, 54. V. C. Galbraith critiques the Saxon-Norman myth by analyzing Saxons’ rapid transference of loyalty to an accommodating Norman elite, with each group sharing Latin as an administrative language, in “Nationality and Language in Medieval England,” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th ser., 23 (1941): 113–28 [120–24]. Considering the complexities produced by class, language, and ethnicity, Galbraith qualifies his view of medieval national identity by adopting a deliberately broad definition of the nation as “any considerable group of people who believe they are one” (113; emphasis in original).


13. Thomas B. Shaw, Outlines of English Literature (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1849), 25. As Galbraith shows, there were indeed medieval efforts to portray the Norman conquerors as zealous to eradicate the English language, though such patriotic accounts begin only in the fourteenth century (“Nationality and Language,” 120–24). William Camden provides an early-modern instance, claiming that Edward III enabled the ascendancy of “our language” by releasing legal scholars from the “bondage” of French, in Remains Concerning Britain (1605; rpt. London: John Russel Smith, 1870), 34–35.


15. Truman J. Backus and Thomas B. Shaw, Shaw’s New History of English Literature together with A History of English Literature in America, rev. ed. (1874; New York: Sheldon and Company, 1884), 25. For Backus’s racialized vision of the survival of Englishness after the Norman Conquest, and of late-medieval attempts to “reviv[e]” the “ancient English style of poetry,” see 35–36; 58–59. Backus, listed as co-author with the deceased Shaw, provides further evidence of Anglo-American linguistico-nationalist collaboration. Backus’s 1884 edition opens with the claim that “in their literary inheritance, the readers of the English language are the richest people that the sun shines on” (17). On Thomas Budd Shaw (1813–62), and on his work’s popularity in America, see Franklin E. Court, The Scottish Connection: The Rise of English Literary Study in Early America (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 155–59. For Backus’s biography, see William S. Pelletreau, A History of Long Island, vol. 3 (New York: Lewis Publishing), 1903, 288–89.

16. Backus and Shaw, Shaw’s New History, 35; 38; 58.

17. Warton, History (1774–81), I.344. Warton merely continues a traditional view
of Chaucer as the “Father of English poetry,” the Lancastrian and Tudor origins of which are analyzed by Seth Lerer, in Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially 3–21.

18. Warton, History (1784–81), I.344. Warton’s instructive Chaucer forms “a style by naturalizing words from the Provencial [sic], at that time the most polished dialect of any in Europe” (I.339).


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 51–55. Moody and Lovett reveal Revivalism’s Norman-Saxon obsession by speaking only to Chaucer’s French influences while disregarding the massive influence of Italian poetry.

22. See also J. J. Jusserand, who turns to Chaucer and Langland to represent the “two races” forming the English “nation.” Though Jusserand speaks of a national metrical “compromise” that produced modern English verse, he has a distinctly one-sided view: Langland, who “rejected” French “rime” and remained with the “past of his kin” by writing in alliterative meter, disappears from the narrative, while Chaucer evolves beyond alliteration to a higher, strictly syllabic modernity, in A Literary History of the English People from the Origins to the End of the Middle Ages (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893), 245; 401–2.


26. Noting William’s status as “possibly the earliest of the alliterative romances,” Oakden offers fairly typical Revivalist disdain, questioning “whether the alliterative meter was a suitable medium for the French original,” since it seems “beyond the power of the English translator to copy” the original’s “polish and grace” and “elaborate play” (Alliterative Poetry, II.38–40). See also Everett, “Alliterative Revival,” 53–54; and Derek Pearsall, Old English and Middle English Poetry (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 156–57.

27. On balancing local contexts with a view to the broader consolidation of Europe, which itself transpired within a global frame, see Patricia Clare Ingham, “Contrapuntal Histories,” in Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern, ed. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 47–70 [55]. Ingham’s “contrapuntal” historiography, which seeks out “distinction” on a fluid field featuring the “complex dynamics of ‘here’ and ‘there,’ ‘then’ and ‘now’” (48), informs my own efforts to balance findings of medieval–modern continuities and alterities.


29. Lawrence Warner speculates that William, otherwise unknown outside of Wil-

30. Gellner argues that late-medieval culture, part of the “agrarian” phase of economic development, is fundamentally concerned with reinforcing and illuminating social rank, with this differentiating function preventing nationalism’s use of culture to “mark the boundaries of the polity” (Nationalism, 20).


34. Bourdieu argues that the “social function” of rites of passage is to “consecrat[e]” the line that differentiates elite participants from those barred from making such crossings, in Language and Symbolic Power; ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 117–18.

35. On English self-consciousness concerning the epoch-making Norman Conquest, see Williams, French Fetish, 20.

36. On the “attraction and terror of shape-shifting” to twelfth-century audiences fascinated with the metaphysics of change, see Caroline Walker Bynum, Metamorphosis and Identity (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 109.


44. Turville-Petre, “Humphrey de Bohun,” 262.
45. Bunt, “Patron, Author and Audience,” 32.
47. Turville-Petre, “Humphrey de Bohun,” 262.
51. All citations from *William* are from Bunt’s edition; my translations.
55. All citations of *Guillaume* are from Micha’s edition; all translations are from *Guillaume de Palerne*, trans. Leslie A. Sconduto (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004). Sconduto’s lineation follows Micha’s.
57. Dunn (ibid.) regards “Aubelot” as relatively unusual and notes that Akarin has links with Saracen culture.
60. The comical deployment of grotesque images of peasants in both *Guillaume* and *William* serves to reinforce hierarchical social visions. For analysis of the use of stereotypical images to provide the “comfort of confirming an audience’s prejudices” and so consolidate class privileges, see Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 43–44. On the cultivation of identifiable features as a means of “entropy-resistance,” countering socioeconomic mobility in the agrarian world, see Gellner, *Nationalism*, 65.
62. Ibid., 39–72.
64. Ibid., 35.
65. In *Guillaume*, Guillaume bids Melior remove the bear skin and so display her “pur” [naked] body (4061–62); William’s translation emphasizes the clothing beneath the skins (2417).
68. Hereafter, when citing both versions, I cite first from *Guillaume* and then from *William*.
69. Bynum, *Metamorphosis*, 109. Bynum argues that hybrids, necessarily conjoining different characteristics in a single visual plane, fuse incompatible categories that “comment” on one another, while metamorphosed figures instantiate a breakdown of categories (29–31). See also Doryjane Birrer, who argues that Alphonse is a “humane” wolf whose wolf-body is as factitious as the lovers’ disguises, merely covering over a reasonable and sympathetic self, in “A New Species of Humanities: The Marvelous Progeny of Humanism and Postmodern Theory,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37.2 (2007): 217–45 [218; 229].
76. On the ritual ends of animalized aristocratic violence, see Agamben’s analysis of the symbolic “power of delivering something over to itself,” in *Homo Sacer*, 106.
77. Ibid., 104–6.
81. See Sheila Fisher, “Taken Men and Token Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green

82. Frederic Madden, ed. William and the Werewolf (1832, rpt.; New York: Burt Franklin, 1970). Madden offers no explanation for his use of only two of the three protagonists in his title, and he even notes that the “original” title, the “Roman de Guillaume de Palerne,” offers no justification for adding the werewolf (vii). Helen Cooper points to one revision of this gender bias, noting that Richard Hyrd entitled the work “Wylyam and Milior” in a 1529 list of romances; see The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 235; 37–38.

83. For Deleuze and Guattari, an anomalous agent always functions as the bridge to the process of becoming-animal that shatters static identity (Thousand Plateaus, 243–44).


90. Agamben defines “bare life” as “the life of homo sacer (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not sacrificed,” in Homo Sacer, 8 (emphasis in original).

91. Ibid., 106–7.

92. In Guillaume, Guillaume, overstimulated by the erotic charge of the disguises, momentarily forgets that Melior is not nude beneath her bearskin (4060–64).


95. The lovers’ putting on the skins of aggressive animals that are also prey ritually sexualizes their bodies in courtly terms. On aggression as key to the “social reproduction of the body” in the self’s “social institution” through orchestrated corporal activities, see Graham L. Hammill, Sexuality and Form: Caravaggio, Marlowe, and Bacon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4–9.


97. In *Guillaume*, Alexandrine reports that “chevrex” [goats] are among the beasts in the kitchen (3014). The “bukkes” [bucks] catalogued in *William* (1684) could be goats or deer, according to the *MED*. That deer are intended is suggested by the qualification that they are of “fair venerye.” In *Guillaume*, Alexandrine inexplicably acquires the skin of a “serpent” (3063) along with the bearskins. The English poet’s omission of the serpent excises a creature alien to venery’s symbolic world.


101. Ibid., 97–99. Fradenburg here connects the corporal risks and pleasures in the medieval hunt with the courtly life constructed from lovers’ physical sufferings in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* (79–112).


103. The blurriness of species borderlines seems evident in William’s supposition that the workmen would take Melior’s choice of a bear as a traveling and sleeping companion in stride.


105. Ibid., 108.


112. Ibid., 54.


117. Chism aptly argues that the more critics produce disciplinary histories of literary criticism, the “less shrill” will sound the nationalist antiquarians who have insisted on an alliterative English “archaism,” in *Alliterative Revivals*, 39.

118. On the contestation among national fantasies competing for communal deﬁ-
tion in medieval Britain, see Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 7–15. Whether or not we assume that the nation is a modern, post-capitalist formation (see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37–46; and Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 139–43), it is clear, as Lavezzo has shown, that fantasies of constitutive sameness and otherness were at work throughout medieval English history, providing material out of which a future nation-state could be constructed; see “Introduction,” vii–xxxiv.


120. On the cultural work performed by sumptuary legislation to render clothing a stable indicator of class, see Crane, *Performance of Self*, 11–15.


123. Micha supplies from a sixteenth-century prose version a passage, missing from *Guillaume*’s manuscript text, in which Felice’s clerk, Moysant, advises her to dress as a deer (*Guillaume*, 191n–92n). Moysant’s rationale—that Felice should be “vestue tout ainsi quilz sont” [dressed just like they are] and so can lie near them and speak “a vostre ayse” [at ease] (191n–92n)—is nearly as opaque as the lack of explanation in earlier versions and suggests reception of the romance’s becoming-animal narrative as ritual.


125. The Greek prince is named Leternidon in *Guillaume* (3362).

Chapter 3

1. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from *Sir Gawain* are taken from Vantuono’s edition; my translations.

2. Scholars typically deploy George Lyman Kittredge’s division of *Sir Gawain* into the Beheading Game (in which Gawain allows the Green Knight to strike at his head with an axe, after having dealt the Green Knight himself one such blow), and the Temptation (according to which each player agrees to give the other each day’s winnings, with Bertilak going hunting on each of three days, while Gawain spends significant time with his host’s wife); see *A Study of ‘Gawain and the Green Knight’* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 7–9.

3. I here replace both Vantuono’s text and my translation with Twomey’s insightful redaction, in “Morgan le Fay at Hautdesert,” in *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorium, 2001), 103–19 [111]. Twomey’s punctuation captures Bertilak’s linkage of his lordly status with subjection to Morgan and suggests that Bertilak is just one of a number of knights in her service.

4. Whereas Vantuono reads “Bercilak,” I prefer “Bertilak,” as it leaves open the possibility that the regional lord of *Sir Gawain* evokes the Vulgate Lancelot cycle’s Berthelai, who engineers the False Guinevere plot whereby Arthur is convinced that his current queen has usurped the rightful place of Berthelai’s mistress, Guinevere’s

5. Most scholars accept Angus McIntosh’s narrowing of the dialect of the Cotton Nero poems to northeast Staffordshire or southeast Cheshire, in “A New Approach to Middle English Dialectology,” English Studies 44 (1963): 1–11 [5–6].

6. One could also stress “Faye” rather than “myȝt,” which would deliver a perfectly acceptable ax ax line, assuming that we place stress on “my” rather than “hous.” Even hypotheses of strict rules governing the disposition of stressed and unstressed syllables in alliterative verse acknowledge some flexibility in stress assignment. Asserting that a “hierarchy of word classes determines which words may appear in metrically prominent positions,” Duggan argues that words from “open classes,” meaning “nouns, adjectives, most verb forms, adverbs ending in -ly or of 2 syllables, pronouns ending in -self,” take “precedence over” words from “closed classes,” identified as “prepositions, some verbs, auxiliaries, pronouns, monosyllabic adverbs” (“Alliterative Patterning,” 77–78). Duggan (77), like Skeat (“Essay,” xvi), insists that stress and alliteration must coincide.


8. On the Northwest Midlands’ sparse population due both to its remoteness and to military service, see Bennett, Community, Class and Careerism, 8–10; 190–91. On the trend toward depopulation in the late-medieval Midlands, see Saul, “Medieval Britain,” 137–42.


13. Ibid., 29.

14. Ibid.

15. See Rowena E. Archer’s extraction of such social realities from the anonymous women inhabiting fifteenth-century records, in “‘How ladies . . . who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates’: Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages,” in Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton, 1992), 149–81 [150–62].

16. On late-medieval estate management by women, see Archer, “‘How ladies,’” 149–81. On the significant social and economic power held by widows in late-medieval England, see Peter Coss, The Lady in Medieval England, 1000–1500 (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998), 56–72. On female economic power in the distribution of wealth in European feudal society, see Jerold C. Frakes, Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women’s Epic (Philadelphia: University of

17. See Salter’s urging of the reintegration of alliterative works with a national culture centered in metropolitan London and spread through aristocratic households, in “Alliterative Revival,” 146–49; 233–37.

18. On legitimacy and symbolic communication, see Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 230; 234.

19. In supervising the removal of the “chorea gigantum” [Giants’ Ring (Stonehenge)] from its location on Mt. Killaraus in Ireland, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Merlin challenges Utherpen-dragon’s men, “Employ your might, men, to take down the stones and we shall see whether your brains yield to brawn or vice versa” [Vtimini uiribus uestris, iuuenes, ut in deponendo lapides istos appareat utrum ingenium uirtuti an uirtus ingenio cedat]. After laughing at their failure, Merlin easily moves the structure to Britain; see Geoffrey of Monmouth, History of the Kings of Britain, 172–75. All citations and translations from Geoffrey are from Reeve and Wright.


22. For Revivalist insistence that the alliterative poet is essentially old, see Shepherd, “Nature of Alliterative Poetry,” 64–65; and Hanna, “Alliterative Poetry,” 501.


25. Ingham, Sovereign Fantasies, 182.


27. On the Gawain-poet’s use of geographical detail to figure multiple regional, ethnic, and gender loyalties, see Ingham, Sovereign Fantasies, 114–24.


30. See Ingham’s analysis of Gawain’s journey as reflecting both English desire to colonize Welsh territory and the complexity of late-medieval ethnic identity, in *Sovereign Fantasies*, 116–21.

31. See Barrett’s analysis of Wirral as a unique region within a larger English imperial frame, in *Against All England*, 137–38.


36. Ibid., 341. See Turville-Petre’s argument that late-medieval poets and chroniclers sought to make English the language of a medieval nation, in *England the Nation*, 1–26.


38. On nationalism involving primacy in tests of loyalties with competing forms of identity, see Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, 102.


42. Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Revival*, 35.


44. Though *Pearl* features frequent alliteration as an ornamental device, and though alliteration often binds stanzas through concatenation, it is not composed in alliterative meter. On the distinction between “heteromorphic” meters, which feature variant feet (as with alliterative prosody), and “homomorphic” poems with relatively regular foot patterns, as in *Pearl*, see McIntosh, “Early English Alliterative Verse,” 21–22; and Hanna, “Defining Middle English Alliterative Poetry,” 43–63.

45. The notion that the manuscript’s four poems were produced by a single author has not been decisively established, though many scholars operate under this assumption. Much of the evidence used to argue for common authorship, such as common themes, linguistic usage, and poetic technique, could be due either to a single redacting hand, or to contemporary poets sharing language and literary taste. On efforts to determine the authorship of the Cotton Nero poems, see Malcolm Andrew, “Theories of Authorship,” in *Companion to the ‘Gawain’-poet*, ed. Brewer and Gibson, 23–33. Much as Revivalism insists on a single frame for alliterative verse, so do single-author hypotheses risk functioning as what Michel Foucault calls the “principle of thrift” that reduces multiplicity by filtering data according to post-Enlightenment, bourgeois individualism; see “What Is an Author?” trans. Josué V. Harari, in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141–60 [159]).


47. On the dialect and manuscript of *Saint Erkenwald*, see Clifford Peterson’s edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 1–11; 23–26. Bennett speculates that the author of *Erkenwald* was a native of the Northwest who moved to
London as a clerical careerist (*Community, Class and Careerism, *233). If the Erkenwald-poet indeed operated from London, he joins Langland in providing evidence that knowledge of an author’s regional origin must often be supplemented by research into relocations throughout a literary career.


49. Oakden traces the “bulk” of late-medieval alliterative verse to the Northwest, in *Alliterative Poetry, *II.87.


51. On the Northwest Midlands as part of a transnational economic zone that included England, Wales, the Isle of Man, and Ireland, see Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism, *108–33.

52. Saintsbury, *History of English Prosody,* III. 101; Hulbert, “Hypothesis,” 405. Hulbert’s aristocratic bias can be seen in his inferring the noble status of Sir Gawain and the Awntyrs from their being “condensed and allusive in style” and “developed artistically” (412).


55. Turville-Petre suggests that we focus on the constructive energies of the Trojans who as “patrounes” become patrons of a Western culture translated from Troy’s ruins, in “Brutus Prologue,” 344.

57. For a survey of anti-militarist anxieties in late-medieval Troy narratives, see Simpson, *Reform*, 68–103; 116–20. The Trojan past features prominently in *Saint Erkenwald*, in which the miraculously preserved body of an upright inhabitant of “New Troie” (25) is uncovered during work on London’s “New Werke” (38; ed. Peterson).


61. On the settlement patterns of Northwest Midlands merchants and military careerists, see Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, 123–33; 188.

62. Everett reveals Revivalist bias against Northwest Midlands culture, arguing that critics must assume an aristocratic household as the immediate context for such a “self-assured” and courtly Gawain-poet (“Alliterative Revival,” 48). Salter calls for a broadening of patronage research to include the numerous individuals in multiplex, mobile aristocratic networks (“Alliterative Revival,” 237). Besides neglecting households lower on the social scale, Salter focuses primarily on London. See Turville-Petre’s argument that the gentry should be seen as the primary consumers of late-medieval alliterative texts, in *Alliterative Revival*, 46–47. Bennett discusses the importance of gentry residents in the Northwest Midlands, in *Community, Class and Careerism*, 75–77.

63. On cultural and economic links between Yorkshire and surrounding areas, including the Northwest Midlands, see David Hey, *A History of Yorkshire: ’County of the Broad Acres’* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2005), 174–76.


65. Cable indicates Oakden’s seminal influence by explaining that the “empirical” genesis of his study of alliterative meter was “Revise Oakden” (*English Alliterative Tradition*, 1; 87–89). On Oakden’s metrical principles, see Barney, “Langland’s Prosody,” 71–72. Thornton’s redaction in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 provides the sole copy of the Alliterative Morte.


67. McIntosh’s localization of the Morte-poet’s dialect, based on his argument that Thornton’s working copy derives ultimately from southwest Lincolnshire, has been widely accepted, though McIntosh does not discount the possibility of an originally West Midlands provenance (“Textual Transmission,” 240). The provenance of the Alliterative Morte may yet be determined through analysis of the base-text used by Malory,


72. Crane, *Performance of Self*, 169. Crane argues that the Green Knight’s actions take the form of a “staged interlude” (168).

73. Lawton, “Unity,” 90.


76. All citations from the *Gest Hystoriale* are from Panton and Donaldson’s edition; my translations.

77. The *Gest Hystoriale* should be included among the “bokes” [texts] that Chaucer’s *Criseyde* proclaims will “shende” [slander] her for her having “falsed” [betrayed] Troilus (*Troilus*, V.1060). After her father Calchas, asked why he is “trewly” a “traitour” (*Gest*, 8109), states that it is better to join the winning side than be “murthert” [killed] (8157), Breisaid [Criseyde], lavished with gifts from Greeks, “lightly ho left of hir loue hote” [lightly she left from her passionate love] and “now is Troiell, hir trew luff, tynt of hir thoght” [now her true love Troilus is forgotten] (8174–77).


81. All citations from the Alliterative *Morte* are from Krishna’s edition; my translations.


83. The internal nature of Arthurian civil war is doubled by the rebellion’s leaders being Arthur’s wife and Mordred. Though Mordred’s “sibreden” [kinship] with Arthur is that of a nephew (*Morte*, 688–91), the fourteenth-century understanding of Mordred was haunted by even more intimate relations. As Elizabeth Archibald shows, Mordred’s intimacy relative to Arthur increased over the Arthurian legendary history, with an incestuous story becoming attached to his birth from the thirteenth century, moving him from Arthur’s nephew to his son; see *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132–33.

84. Geoffrey of Monmouth offers a precedent for such a dangerous Guinevere, if Fiona Tolhurst is correct in holding that Geoffrey, in support of Matilda’s regnal claims against Stephen (r.1135–54), highlights Guinevere’s Roman lineage and portrays her as a potential British empress, in “The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s British Epic and Reflections on Matilda,” *Arthuriana* 8.4 (1998): 69–87 [73–75].


86. Guinevere’s mother similarly indicts the agents of Arthurian expansionism in the *Awntyrs*, suggesting that the female voices marginalized in Bennett’s Northwest Midlands military history find an accusatory voice in the more northerly (and materially vulnerable) Anglo-Scottish borderlands (see chapter 4). On the anti-imperialist focus on civilian suffering in the *Awntyrs*, see Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 186–88.


88. The same marker of power used by the *Morte*-poet to figure Fortune’s female sovereignty is connected with Morgan’s blood even as she is named the “duches doȝter of Tyntagel” [*Duchess of Tintagel’s daughter*] (2465, my emphasis).

90. Ibid., 14–15; 68.

91. For examples, see Hinchman’s argument that alliterative meter is “at its best in describing the din of war, the uncertain swaying of warriors in battle” (History, 22); Schofield’s assertion that “the old alliteration seemed appropriate to patriotic poets for the recounting of their warlike deeds” (English Literature, 253); Everett’s influential view that “poets of the tradition” are “most impressive when describing violent action—battles and storms at sea in particular” (“Alliterative Revival,” 58); and Moorman’s claim that late-medieval alliterative verse is distinctive in exuding ancestral sensitivity to “violence, the deep-seated violence of nature,” the “eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth pagan ethos,” the “vendetta,” and the “comitatus code” (“English Alliterative,” 91).


93. See Lawton’s indictment of “a modern criticism” that “mostly refuses to accept the poet’s own explanation of his plot,” in “Unity,” 89.

94. Fisher, “Taken Men,” 98. While Fisher argues cogently for a “deliberate marginalization” of Morgan (71–72), her contention that the poem undermines the significance of Morgan’s role reproduces previous assumptions of aesthetic faultiness. The Gawain-poet’s careful foreshadowing of Morgan’s pre-eminence undermines such assumptions. See Elisa Marie Narin’s examination of rhetorical techniques that signal Morgan’s supremacy from her first appearance, in “‘Þat on . . . þat oþer’: Rhetorical Description and Morgan le Fay in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” Pacific Coast Philology 23 (1988): 60–66. For an alternative perspective, see Elizabeth Scala’s argument that Morgan’s absence structures the poem, with attempts to resituate Morgan’s centrality at the poem’s opening misrecognizing the narrative’s fundamental “reconfiguration” that follows the revelation of Morgan’s role, in Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 62–68.


97. See Morgan’s deployment of both a messenger-maiden and a maiden tasked with testing her hostage Lancelot’s loyalty, while operating from her woodland holding,
100. See ibid., 79–80.
103. Ibid., 80.
107. Ibid., 211.
110. Ibid.
113. Cicero, *De Senectute*, vi.18 [At senatui quae sint gerenda praescribo et quo modo; Carthaginii male iam diu cogitanti bellum multo ante denuntio].
115. Ibid., 196.
117. Morgan may also seek to highlight her unmarried status, channeling the anxiety-producing singleness that Karma Lochrie sees as triggering Lollard insistence on marriage and critiques of female sexual aloofness, in *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 49–51.


124. Tolkien, Gordon, and Davis, eds., 130n. In the passage upon which Tolkien and Gordon lean, Merlin argues that Morgan “fu bele damoisele jusques a celui terme que elle commencha a prendre des enchantemens et des charroies. Mais puis que li anemis fu dedens li mis et elle fu aspiree et de luxure et de dyable, elle pierdi si otreement sa biauté que trop devint laide” [was a beautiful woman up until the point when she began to learn spells and tricks. But since the enemy had installed himself within her and she was inspired both by luxury and deviltry, she lost so utterly her beauty that she soon became ugly], in *La Suite du Roman Merlin*, ed. Gilles Roussineau, 2 vols. (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996), 1.19–20; my translation. Fries assumes that Morgan’s foul appearance would be known from this “French anecdote” and argues that the Lady is destined to become like Morgan, in “Characterization,” 34.

125. See Heng’s argument that a “masculine” criticism’s desire for mastery leads to a “fantasy of textual closure and command,” in “Feminine Knots,” 500.


129. Cicero, *De Senectute*, xv.55 [et senectus est natura loquacior].


132. Most editors of *Sir Gawain* take this phrase as signifying middle age, interpreting as supporting evidence Bertilak’s “bright” and “beaver-hwed” [beaver-colored] beard (845) and energetic hunting activity. Eiichi Suzuki, however, argues that Bertilak is elderly, in “A Note on the Age of the Green Knight,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 78 (1977): 27–30. On interpretations of this description, see Vantuono, ed., *Sir Gawain*, 193n. Even if the Vulgate Lancelot’s Berthelai the Old is intended by Bertilak, we can imagine that this is some years before his acquiring the moniker.

133. Cicero, *De Senectute*, vi.17 [Non viribus aut velocitate aut celeritate corporum
res magnae geruntur, sed consilio auctoritate sententia].


135. Scala, Absent Narratives, 66. Scala steers criticism away from merely “retrospective” readings of Morgan’s absence from early portions in the narrative, reading her ongoing absence as figuring the “text’s unconscious” (65–66).


137. Morgan’s appearance, while grotesque, differs from the “loathly dame” figure analyzed by Whitehurst, in “Morgan la Fée,” 49. While Morgan’s disguised Elde is unsightly, with “sellyly blered” [wondrously bleary] and “soure” [sour] facial features (961–63), the overall description is restrained in comparison with such extreme loathsomeness as depicted in the Wedding (231–45), or in the hag’s description in Chaucer’s Wife as “fouler” than anyone could imagine (III.999).

138. Bertilak’s story of Morgan’s love-affair may well be a tale designed to deal with the anxiety of Morgan’s unsettling female power, with such gossip explaining Morgan’s need to manage her reputation.

139. In the thirteenth-century Prophecies de Merlin, the Lady of the Lake traps Merlin in a magical tomb (167–68), explaining to him, “Saches vraiement que je t’ai mis ici dedens pour ce que tu aloies disant en tous les lieus ou tu aloies que tu avoies jeu a moi, dont je en fui pute clamee par la bouche meisme(s) Morgein” [Know for certain that I have put you in here because you were going around saying everywhere you went that you had your fun with me, because of which I am proclaimed a whore by the very mouth of Morgan], in Les Prophecies de Merlin, ed. Lucy Allen Paton, vol. 1; 1926 (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966), 169; my translation.


Chapter 4


2. All citations from The Knightly Tale of Golagros and Gawane (hereafter, Golagros and Gawane) are from Ralph Hanna’s edition (produced with material by W. R. J. Barron), Scottish Text Society Fifth Series 7 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008); my translations.

3. Davies, First English Empire, 79–81; 203.

4. Anderson, Imagined Communities, 19–21; 171–73; 188.

5. Ibid., 19.


7. On modern nations’ appropriation of political legitimacy formerly dominated by
religious authorities, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 10–11.

8. Ibid., 145.


15. Ibid., 10; 76–77.

16. Ibid., 76.


18. Hardt and Negri define Empire as an overarching “concept” defined “fundamentally by a lack of boundaries,” aimed at dealing with a globalized economy in which national and ethnic boundaries give way to transnational corporate interests, in *Empire*, xiv–xv.


21. While some post-colonial critics insist that imperialism post-dates the mercantilist capitalism of the sixteenth-century age of European expansion, some emphasize Enlightenment ideologies, and some argue that imperialism is a product of nineteenth-century industrial expansion, post-colonial theorists generally assign imperialism to the modern era. On debates concerning the timeframe for imperialism in post-colonial theory, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 122–27.


23. Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 10. Ingham’s rejection of the goal of locating the modern nation’s “teleological ancestor” renders her methodology particularly powerful for marcher zones. See especially Ingham’s discussion of negotiating common cultural characteristics with political differences in the analysis of “antagonistic intimacies” in the fourteenth-century Anglo-Welsh borderlands (232–33n).

24. Ibid., 5–6.


26. Cohen, introduction to *Postcolonial Middle Ages*, 8. For analysis of the critical possibilities for medievalist literary history opened up by postcolonial criticism, see


28. Ibid., 21.


30. On the rise of the modern nation being tied directly to the diminishment of feudal privileges through the concentration of physical force capital in national armies, see Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State,” in *Practical Reason*, 1–18.


32. Although there is no secure means for dating the composition of the *Awntyrs*, Hanna’s rough estimate of 1400–1430 seems sound (*Awntyrs*, 52). Many scholars’ earlier assessments derive from the presence of early fourteenth-century manorial records in the Ireland MS, to which a copy of the *Awntyrs* was, Hanna explains, only much later appended (50–51; 51n).

33. Rhiannon Purdie dates *Golagros* from between the “early fifteenth century” (when the *Awntyrs* and the Alliterative *Morte* begin to circulate) and 1508 (the date of Walter Chepman and Andrew Myllar’s print), in “The Search for Scottishness in *Golagros* and Gawane,” in *The Scots and Medieval Arthurian Legend*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Nicola Royan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 95–107 [95n].

34. On “chronicle” Arthurian works, see Field, “Romance in England,” 171. For a rejection of the chronicle–romance distinction in the Alliterative *Morte*, and for analysis of the poem’s dialectics of history and poetry, see Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 79–82.

35. Matthews lists textual links among these poems, in *Tragedy of Arthur*, 156–61. Although Matthews’s evidence for textual parallels is unassailable, his argument that the *Awntyrs*-poet borrowed from the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* rests on slim grounds.
(159), since these poems resist certain dating. The Alliterative Morte also resists precise localization and is best conceived within a generally militarized zone including the northern Midlands and the English North (see chapter 3).

36. For Musgrove, the Northwest Midlands are part of the North (see North of England, 118–54).

37. On civilian suffering in the Alliterative Morte, see Matthews, Tragedy of Arthur, 115–50; and Ingham, Sovereign Fantasies, 87–100.

38. On postcolonial theorists’ recent attempts to “dislodge” the “national geographies” inflecting medievalist criticism, see Ingham and Warren’s introduction to Postcolonial Moves, 1–15.


42. The Awntyrs survives in three other manuscripts. The Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 text of the Awntyrs comes from the West Riding of Yorkshire, while the Ireland Blackburn MS Douce 324 copy has been traced to the “south-eastern counties” by Doyle (“Manuscripts,” 97), while Gates describes the Lambeth Palace 491 copy as of the “southermmost” origin (Awntyrs, 15). For full manuscript descriptions, see Gates, ed., Awntyrs, 6–16. Hanna’s claim that the Awntyrs is a composite of two poems (“The Awntyrs off Arthure: An Interpretation,” Modern Language Quarterly 31 [1970]: 275–97) is largely irrelevant to tracing the poem’s codicological history, since all copies present roughly the same text. Hanna’s evidence does not strike me as decisive, since the relatively short length of the text exaggerates the significance of statistical variations (see especially 292–93), while his view of “poetic incompetence” in the latter part of the poem is too subjective (293). Even if one grants Hanna’s arguments for the Awntyrs’s composite origin, the version that has survived was clearly fashioned as a single poem—and, as far as manuscript evidence informs us, it is only as a single poem that the Awntyrs was presented to medieval audiences.

43. For Hanna’s dialectal localization, see Awntyrs, 49. Hanna has recently expressed uncertainty about the Northern English origins of the Awntyrs and has suggested Scotland as a possible origin, in Knightly Tale of Golagaros and Gawane. For Hanna’s regionalization of the Alliterative Morte, see “Alliterative Poetry,” 509.

44. Golagros was among the first works printed by Chepman and Myllar (see Hahn, ed., Golagros, 232).


48. Each of these empires differs from the modern nation in granting the church jurisdictional authority that overlaps with secular power. However militaristic these empires appear, neither ever questions the status of “Christendom” as a second “imagined community,” with individuals subject to an ecclesiastical jurisdiction. On the diminishing power of Christendom as an “imagined community” within expanding vernacular bureaucracies, and on the absence of independent secular communities before the eighteenth century, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 41–42.


50. Purdie contends that the oft-cited approximate date of 1470 reflects “the tendency of scholars to assign any undated Scottish text with a political slant to the troubled reign of James III,” in “Search for Scottishness,” 95n.


52. Ibid., 190.


55. Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*, 188. Ingham, while aligning Arthur with England (162), still leaves the “national” provenance of the *Awntyrs* open to question (184).


61. Such raiding was common in the Anglo-Scottish marches well into the fifteenth century and involved allegiance to local lords rather than national armies; see Brown, Black Douglases, 3–6.


63. This reading is derived from the Ireland manuscript; the other manuscripts offer “errant” [D], “armed” [T], and an omission [L]; see Gates, ed., Awntyrs, 138. Hanna’s text has Galeron described as an “errant” knighte (349).

64. Brown, Black Douglases, 160.


66. Amours, ed., Scottish Alliterative Poems, lxxii. The very title of Amours’s collection silently argues his nationalist view of the Awntyrs. Amours’s claim for a Scottish Awntyrs (which, to my knowledge, no recent scholars accept) contributed significantly to debate about Huchown (li-lxxxii).

67. Ibid., lxxii.

68. On the historiographical need to resist exaggerating the scope of rarefied legal discourses about constitutional change or monarchical centrality, given the overwhelming importance of “personal” relationships in medieval political life, see Smyth’s preface to Medieval Europeans, xii–xiii.

69. On class-based interests in Barbour’s Bruce, see Goldstein, Matter of Scotland, 133–214. Goldstein observes of “heroic poetry” that among its basic ideological functions is impelling “soldiers to wage war to defend an idea” (144). On the Black Douglases’ use of Howlat to cultivate their connection to the James Douglas who carried Robert the Bruce’s heart into battle against Muslim enemies, see Brown, Black Douglases, 128–30.

70. Brown, Black Douglases, 134.

71. J. A. Tuck, “War and Society in the Medieval North,” Northern History 21


74. The Orkneys were pledged to the Scottish Crown by Christian I, King of Denmark and Norway, in a 1468 marriage treaty, after which Scottish kings treated them as Scottish territory; see A. D. M. Barrell, Medieval Scotland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 171–72.


79. Awntyrs, 418; 419–20. Though textual variation makes identification of the entire list of Galeron’s territories impossible, the scribes agree on identifying Carrick, Cunningham, and Kyle, which are located in Ayrshire, just northwest of the powerful lordship of Galloway. For textual variants, see Gates, ed., Awntyrs, 150, and Amours, ed., Scottish Alliterative Poems, 354. On Galloway’s perennial ascendancy over its neighbors, see Barrell, Medieval Scotland, 86–90.


81. Barrell, Medieval Scotland, 86.


85. On Black Douglas respect for Galloway’s distinct customs, see Brown, *Black Douglases*, 60–64; 171–75. The Douglas conquest of the Galwegians is commemorated in Holland’s thirteen-line stanzaic *Howlat*. If Turville-Petre is correct in suggesting that the *Awntyrs* brought the thirteen-line stanza into Scotland (‘‘Summer Sunday,’’ 3), then the *Awntyrs* is also a borderlands text in literary history. On the conquest of Galloway as depicted in the Douglas arms, see Brown, *Black Douglases*, 62–64; and Amours, ed., *Scottish Alliterative Poems*, 303n. On wild men as arms-bearers, see Husband, ed., *Wild Man*, 171–95.

86. On “social logic” and the irreducibly local nature of texts as “lived events,” see Spiegel, “History,” 77.


94. As with the list of lands through which Galeron identifies himself, the lands that Arthur offers to Gawain are not easily identified and display significant textual variation. For variants, see Gates, ed., *Awntyrs*, 188n; for discussion of the difficulty of deciphering the locations, see Hanna, ed., *Awntyrs*, 140n.

96. The Welsh territory of Glamergan [Glamorgan] is the first territory mentioned in all of the manuscripts, followed by the “worship of Wales” as the primary gift; “Gryffeones castelle” [Griffin’s castle] (Lincoln MS) and “Criffones castelle” (in both the Douce MS and the Ireland MS), both unidentified, approximate Welsh orthography; and “Wales” is again mentioned in line 669 of the Douce MS (Gates, ed., Awntyrs, 188–89).

97. See Davies, First English Empire, 79–80.


100. Brown, Black Douglases, 146–51.

101. Ibid.


106. On the waning of Douglas family fortunes as border violence decreased after 1389, see Brown, Black Douglases, 327–32.


109. See the variants to lines 683–85 (Gates, ed., Awntyrs, 190). The Lambeth manuscript also has Gawain refer to “oure” (that is, Arthurian) “lordscip” [lordship]; the Douce manuscript, with its reading of “your,” has surely contributed to the editorial confusion addressed by Gates (228n).


112. The ghost asserts that the knight who will “encroche” [seize] Arthur’s sovereignty will be “crowned” at “Carlele” [Carlisle] (287–88). Malory makes “Carlisle” [Carlisle] the site of the surprise of Lancelot that triggers the Arthurian civil war (Morte, in Works, ed. Vinaver, 675).

113. On Hadrian’s Wall marking the frontier of the “Empire’s jurisdiction,” with its “defensive function” interrelated with an effort to manage “transfrontier traffic,” see


120. Hahn, ed., _Golagros_, 227; 231.

121. See Wales, _Northern English_, 5.


123. The mention of Tuscany is one key textual link shared by the _Awntyrs_ (284), the _Morte Arthure_ (3150), and _Golagros_ (2).

124. Hanna emends from Chepman and Myllar’s “Rome” (57n), following suggestions by Amours (261n) and Hahn (286n).


127. See Anderson, _Imagined Communities_, 164–75.

128. That Arthur is holding court at Carlisle links the Alliterative _Morte_ with a number of northerly Arthurian romances, including the _Awntyrs_. On Carlisle as a site of frequent Anglo-Scottish conflict, see Musgrove, _North of England_, 140–54.

129. On Welsh mercenaries, see Walker, _Medieval Wales_, 62–63.

130. Edward I’s conquest of Wales was completed by 1284; Owain’s uprising, beginning in 1400 and remaining explosive through 1410, could be contemporary with the Alliterative _Morte_. On the Edwardian conquest and Owain’s later rebellion, see Walker, _Medieval Wales_, 111–38; 165–74.

131. Ingham, _Sovereign Fantasies_, 88–89.

132. While Matthews’s assertion that Edward III is the intended figure behind the _Morte_ -poet’s Arthur fits awkwardly with the poem’s decidedly general, non-topical critique of militarism, Matthews argues compellingly for Arthur’s status as an English warlord in the Alliterative _Morte_ and the _Awntyrs_ ( _Tragedy of Arthur_, 178–92). On various efforts to assert an English-dominated unity for imperial holdings throughout a medieval Britain destabilized by competing ethnicities, each of which was complex,


135. Hanna here replaces the printed text’s “lord” with “maister,” on metrical grounds (51n). I restore the text’s reading because the term “lord” seems intended to create a link with Golagros’s introduction as the “lord” who holds the desirable property that Arthur besieges (255–65). A failure in alliteration in this line calls attention to the term, highlighting the diptychal relation of the Arthurian armies’ encounters with provincial lords.

136. This unnamed lord of *Golagros*’s opening encounter displays the aristocratic virtue of generosity, the value of which is only increased by Arthur’s status as both a great conqueror and his “cousing of kyn” [relative] (191).

137. Hahn, ed., *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances*, 291n. Such “routis” are synonymous with the *chevauchée*, a tactic in medieval warfare involving the destruction of goods, and the starvation and plundering of civilians. Such warfare was common in the Anglo-Scottish borderlands, where raids and counter-raids were aimed primarily at villages and outlying farms; see Brown, *Black Douglases*, 138–39. On literary and chronicle evidence that pillaging and property destruction were common practice throughout late-medieval Europe, despite chivalric idealism, see Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 176–85. The *Alliterative Morte* offers numerous examples of Arthur’s brutal campaigns, such as when Arthur overturns towers and “turmentez the pople” [torments the people], making many “wedwes” [widows] worry and wring their hands (3153–55).

138. Considering the popularity of the *Siege of Jerusalem* (clear from the nine extant medieval texts), and considering the northerly origins of the geographic spread of the poem (Hanna and Lawton, eds., xiii–xxxvii; lxvii–lxviii), the *Golagros*-poet may have known the *Siege*-poet’s brutal depictions of the Roman siege and sack of Jerusalem. Chism argues that the *Siege*-poet uses Jews to found a Christian empire, with anxieties about Judaism’s anteriority to Christianity magnifying the violence, in *Alliterative Revivals*, 155–88 (updating her “The Siege of Jerusalem: Liquidating Assets,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 [1998]: 309–40). On anti-imperialist elements in the depiction of divinely-authorized warfare in the *Siege* as mirroring anti-militarism in the *Awntyrs* and *Golagros*, see Randy P. Schiff, “The Instructive Other Within: Secularized Jews in *The Siege of Jerusalem*,” in *Cultural Diversity*, ed. Cohen, 135–51 [137–42].

139. Even as *Golagros* gestures at the brutality of medieval warfare, it also smoothes over such violence with a conventional style of tournament combat common in Arthurian romances. On the pronounced theatricality of *Golagros’s* violence, see Fradenburg,
City, Marriage, Tournament, 182.

140. Hahn argues that Golagros’s defeat is due partly to the happenstance of losing his footing on “an uneven battlefield,” which calls attention to the “honorable conduct” that ensues (Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances, 302n).

141. On chivalry as an ideology that often insulated aristocratic knights from severe violence, while doing little to restrain the destructive practices of pillaging commoners’ lands, see Kaufer, Chivalry and Violence, 169–88.

142. See Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 118–19.

Chapter 5

2. Ibid., 31.
4. Halleck, History, 47.
5. On the influence of Carlyle’s view of Germanic superiority in Britain, and on Nott’s arguments against a single Creation and that interbreeding weakens Saxon purity, see Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 64–65; 129–33.
8. Ibid., 49.
9. Ibid.
10. Saintsbury, History, 1.110.
11. Ibid.
12. I take this phrasing from Christopher Cannon, who introduces technology as a key concern for medieval culture in Middle English Literature: A Cultural History (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 8. While Cannon, discussing writing technology, focuses on medieval confessional narrative as an uncannily modern “technology of the self” (27–35), I will explore a related but contrary movement, whereby book culture enables the self’s multiplication and extension.
13. On Piers Plowman as a “national” poem, see Anne Middleton, “The Audience and Public of Piers Plowman,” in Middle English Alliterative Poetry, ed. Lawton, 101–23; 147–54 [103–4]; and see Burrow’s argument that Piers Plowman alone intended a “Reading Public” that transcended any “specific locality,” whereas the “Revival” was otherwise “a local affair” (“Audience of Piers Plowman,” 373–77).
14. Larry Scanlon argues that this transition presents a “national vision” juxtaposing the “agrarian west” and the “more mercantile, more industrialized southeast,” in “King, Commons, and Kind Wit: Langland’s National Vision and the Rising of 1381,” in Imagining a Medieval English Nation, ed. Lavezzo, 191–233 [200].


18. After London, which dwarfed all other late-medieval British cities in size and wealth, Bristol and York were the two most important towns. On the distribution of population and wealth in medieval towns, see Saul, “Medieval Britain,” 133–37. Simon Horobin argues for a Bristol dialectal origin for both *Richard* and *Mum* in “The Dialect and Authorship of *Richard the Redeless* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 18 (2004): 133–52.


21. Kerby-Fulton and Justice, “Langlandian Reading Circles,” 59–76. On bureaucratic culture and political centralization in late-medieval Britain, see M. T. Clanchy,


23. I take this phrase from Emily Steiner, Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 10.


26. See John Manly, “The Lost Leaf of Piers the Plowman” (EETS o.s. 135b, 1906).

D. S. Brewer, 1992), 1–18 [10–17]; and see Lee Patterson’s seminal analysis of Kane and Donaldson’s reliance on editorial intuition concerning authorial writing habits, in a systematic rescue of Langland’s uniqueness from the “ruins” of scribal noise (Negotiating the Past, 77–116 [97]).

28. Rigg and Brewer maintain that the text in MS Bodley 851 is an authorial draft that pre-dates the A-text; see Piers Plowman: The Z Version, by William Langland (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), 2. Few critics have supported the Rigg-Brewer hypothesis. See George Kane’s virulent reaction, in “The ‘Z Version’ of Piers Plowman,” Speculum 60 (1985): 910–30; Kane’s argument that the “puerile” readings of Bodley MS 851 fail to meet the “Langlandian” standard (920) ironically reinforces Rigg and Brewer’s basic contention that the A-Text improves a Z-Text deemed unready for release by an aesthetically uncompromising Langland. On dating the A-Text, see Hanna, William Langland, 14–17.


30. See Duggan, “Alliterative Patterning,” 85; Duggan also excludes Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede (79).


33. Donaldson, “Piers Plowman,” 245; 244; 241.

34. Ibid., 245.


39. Fradenburg, Sacrifice Your Love, 75–77. Fradenburg urges scholars to eschew fantasies of absolute alterity and instead to channel their inevitably subjective investments into connecting modern and medieval political desires (43–78). For an alternative view, see George Kane’s argument that contemporary political concepts such as
“protest” are “unhistorical” except in clearly Wycliffite works, in “Some Fourteenth-
Century ‘Political’ Poems,” in Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature, ed. 
Kratzmann and Simpson, 82–91 [82].

40. Hardt and Negri, Empire, 150–54. Hardt and Negri here question postcolonial 
critics’ tendency to celebrate hybridity, with “circulation, mobility, diversity, and mix-
ture” proving key to global capital and the logic of Empire (143–51). On postcolonial 
theorists’ over-confidence in determining sites of resistance, see James Holstun, Ehud’s 
76–84.


42. For an epochal analysis of transformations in communications techniques and 
their impact on social relations in the digital age, see Deibert, Parchment, 137–216. 
For comparison of digital and scribal textualities, see David Burnley, “Scribes and 
argument that electronic editions enable reproduction of the “mouvance” of manuscript 
culture that print cannot capture, in “Reading in and Around Piers Plowman,” in Texts 
and Textuality: Textual Instability, Theory, and Interpretation, ed. Philip Cohen (New 
York: Garland, 1997), 25–57 [40–43].

43. Scanlon critiques the view that Langland’s C-revisions reveal a “latent social 
conservatism,” in “Langland, Apocalypse and the Early Modern Editor,” in Reading 
the Medieval in Early Modern England, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews 
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51–73; 238–43 [54–55]. On Lang-
land’s revisions to the C-Text of Piers Plowman, see George Russell and George Kane’s 

44. On rebel appropriation of Piers Plowman, see Justice, Writing and Rebel-
lion, 231–54. Andrew Galloway links Langland’s work with late-medieval communal 
struggles concerning law and authority, in “Making History Legal: Piers Plowman 
and the Rebels of Fourteenth-Century England,” in Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays, 
response to 1381, see Bowers, Chaucer and Langland, 115–22.

45. See William Langland, The Vision of William Concerning Piers Plowman: 
(1867). In each version a knight, while leading a communal plowing project, is moved 
by Piers Plowman’s speech to abandon allegorical for actual plowing. Piers tells him 
that it is his class-based duty to protect the community from “wastoures” [wasters] 
and “wikked men,” and tells him to go and hunt hares and foxes (C.VIII.27–29), leaving 
agricultural labor to peasants.

46. On the topical evidence for dating Crede to 1393–1400, see Barr, ed., Piers 
Plowman Tradition, 9–10. For descriptions of the three manuscripts and two prints in 
which Crede survives, see ibid., 8–10; and Walter W. Skeat, ed., Pierce the Plowman’s 
Creed (EETS o.s. 30, 1867), i–vi.

47. All citations from Mum, and all from Crede, Richard, and the Crowned King are 
from Barr’s edition; my translations.

48. On Langland’s reactions to contemporary socioeconomic conditions, see Helen 
M. Jewell, “Piers Plowman—A Poem of Crisis: an Analysis of Political Instability in 
Taylor and Wendy Childs (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990), 59–80 [63–67]. Anima spiritualizes agricultural labor, glossing “Piers the Plowman” as “Petrus, id est Christus” [Peter—that is, Christ] (B.xv.12, ed. Kane and Donaldson).


50. In what is typically read as an autobiographical insertion unique to the C-text, Will argues to Reason that society should not “constrayne” a clerk to “knaues werkes” [peasants’ labors] and claims that clerks should come only from the classes “of frankeleynes and fre men and of folke ywedded” [gentry and noble men and married people], while “bondemen and bastardus and beggares children . . . bylongeth to labory, and lorde kyn to serue” [bondmen, bastards and beggars’ children belong to a laboring class who serve the land-owning class] (V.54–66). Will proceeds to lament current examples of laborers’ upward social mobility in a passage beginning, “Ac sythe” [However, lately] (53–80), and looks forward to when these patterns will have “ychaunged” [changed] (81). All citations from Piers Plowman, unless otherwise noted, are from Derek Pearsall’s C-Text edition (rev. ed.; Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994); my translations. See Kerby-Fulton’s analysis of the Crede-poet’s and Langland’s C-Text classist rants against self-improving laborers, in “Piers Plowman,” in Cambridge History, ed. Wallace, 513–38 [537].


53. N. Katherine Hayles, Writing Machines (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 30–31. Media Specific Analysis analyzes the inflection of content by medium, tracking how a “rhetorical form mutates when it is instantiated in different media” (31). The Crede-poet’s strategic management of multiple media in critiquing spiritual culture is also seen in his analysis of the ecclesiastical exploitation of individuals’ desire to see their identities etched in stained-glass windows (118–33) and in his social reading of secular patronage and architectural style (192–218).

57. See Knapp’s argument that Hoccleve’s literary sensibilities were shaped by training in the Privy Seal office, where documents accumulated writing as they passed through departments, in *Bureaucratic Muse*, 181–82.


59. The practice of maintenance (the use of liveries and fees to form associations between a powerful individual and retainers, who agree to support the power-broker’s interests in legal and political venues) was the subject of much satirical complaint in late-medieval England; see Strohm, *Hochon’s Arrow*, 179–85.

60. Mabel Day and Robert Steele, eds., *Mum and the Sothsegger* (EETS o.s. 199, 1936), x.


62. See Barr’s discussion of *Piers Plowman* received “not as an ‘auctored’ act of literary play but as a communal work for society,” in *Signes and Sothe*, 22.

63. Day and Steele, eds., *Mum*, x.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.


67. Day and Steele do not significantly distinguish the prosody of the fragments from that of either *Piers Plowman* or *William of Palerne* (xlii-xlvi).

68. Dan Embree discusses layout as a factor dissociating these two texts, in “Richard the Redeless and Mum and the Sothsegger: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” *Notes and Queries* 220 (1975): 4–12 [5].

69. Ibid., 9

70. Day and Steele, eds., *Mum*, ix.

71. Ibid., xii. Barr corrects Day and Steele’s claim that two folios of text have been lost after folio 12 (*Piers Plowman Tradition*, 340).

72. Day and Steele, eds., *Mum*, xii.

73. Ibid., ix–x. The full note reads, “Mum, soth segger id est Taciturnitas, verorum dictrix. Liber est Anglicus, qui incipit ‘Dum orans ambularem presbyteris altari astantibus, Bristollensi in vrbe,’ etc. *Ex venatione Nicolai Brigani*” [ *Mum and Soth Segger*, which means Taciturnity and Teller of Truths. The book is English, and it begins, “While I was walking in prayer by the priests standing by the altar, in the city of Bristol,’ etc. *From the collection of Nicholas Brigham*, in John Bale, *Index Britanniæ Scriptorum*, ed. Reginald Lane Poole and Mary Bateson (1902; Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 479; my translation.

74. Day and Steele, eds., ix. Doyle argues that BL Additional MS 41666 dates “probably” from the “third quarter” of the fifteenth century, in “Manuscripts,” 98.

75. On the dating of *Richard* and *Mum*, see Barr, ed., *Piers Plowman Tradition,*


77. Ibid., 4. Richard the Redeless is uniquely attested in Cambridge University Library MS. L1.4.14 (ff. 107b-119a), a paper manuscript dated to the second quarter of the fifteenth century. The manuscript is a miscellany, with items as disparate as treatises on arithmetic (ff. 127a–148b) and on “physionomic” (ff. 156b–159b), a C-Text of Piers Plowman (ff. 1–107a), Psalms in Latin (ff. 161a–163a), and a “doctrine of Fishing and foulyng” (ff. 173a–174b). For a full description, see Kane and Donaldson, eds., Piers Plowman, 4.

78. Brewer, Editing ‘Piers Plowman,’ 185–86. On the impact of printed editions on later scholarship, see Matthews, Making of Middle English, xvii–xxi; and Stephanie Trigg, Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 109–43.


82. Spiegel, “History,” 84. Richard’s thinly veiled topical references, such as the appearance of Richard II’s executed favorites, Bushy, Green, and Scrope, in puns on “bushes,” “grene,” and “schroup” (II.152–54), are numerous enough to lead Oakden to describe the poem as a “pamphlet of the hour” (Alliterative Poetry, II.61).

83. Barr argues that the text was to remain “secrette” due to “strictures on writing political poetry,” in Piers Plowman Tradition, 252n. See Judith Ferster’s survey of “camouflage” techniques used to avoid constraints on literary speech, in Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 8–9. See also Ann W. Astell’s discussion of the “material” concerns related to audience and circulation in late-medieval political satire, in Political Allegory in Late Medieval England (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4–6.

84. For a critical survey of texts deployed to advise princes, ranging from philosophical to historical treatises, see Richard Firth Green, Poets and Princepleasers: Lit-
erature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 135–67; see also Ferster, Fictions of Advice, 3–35. For both written and iconographic examples of addressing Richard II, see Lynn Staley, Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 118–39.

85. ‘Piers the Plowman,’ Text C, ‘Richard the Redeles,’ and ‘The Crowned King,’ ed. Walter W. Skeat (EETS o.s. 54, 1873), 505n. Skeat has “not the slightest hesitation in ascribing” Richard to “William, the author of Piers the Plowman,” claiming it “must be his, and his only” (cvii).

86. Barr argues that the narrator urges the reader to use his or her “faculty for counsel, together with clerkly help,” to “correct” the text (Barr, ed., Piers Plowman Tradition, 251n). Clanchy’s view that “in manuscript culture reading and writing were separate skills” (From Memory to Written Record, 47n; see also 225–52) supports Barr’s argument that these “clerks” need not represent the king’s administrators: audience members who could read the text might be expected to engage a clerk to write out their corrections.

87. Skeat argues in his edition that this is “really the first line of the Poem, since the Prologue may be looked upon as a sort of preface” (ciii). Barr’s argument that there is no “firm” manuscript “authority” for Skeat’s and Day and Steele’s “insertion” of a “Prologue” before line 88 is unconvincing (Barr, ed., Piers Plowman Tradition, 247n). A red capital is used for the initial letter of the line; such initial red capitals introduce passus 2–4 of Richard, as well as the passus of Piers Plowman immediately preceding Richard.

88. The narrator of The Crowned King similarly addresses his audience: “And ye like to leer and listen a while” [And if it pleases you to learn and listen for a while], then “the soth y shall you shewe” [I shall show you the truth] (13–15), only later referring to the “crouned kyng” of his dream (35). For other examples, see Wynnere and Wastoure, ed. Trigg, 31; and Sir Gawain, ed. Vantuono, 29.


91. Recognizing the “gret diversite / In Englissh and in writing of oure tonge,” Chaucer’s narrator prays in Troilus and Criseyde that no one “myswryte” his “litel bok” (V.1793–96).


93. For a comparison of John But, who added 19 lines to Passus XII of a Piers Plowman A-text, with a Westminster scribe who contributed to the close of an A-text manuscript, see Anne Middleton, “Making a Good End: John But as a Reader of Piers Plowman,” in Medieval Studies Presented to George Kane, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), 244–46. John Bowers speculates that John But authored both Richard and Mum, in “Piers


97. See Elizabeth J. Bryan’s study of the collaborative enterprise of producing the “enjoining” text of Laȝamon’s *Brut* in BL MS Cotton Caligula A.i.ix.38, which reveals a communal process lacking print culture’s fixed author–copyist hierarchy, in *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 3–46. See also Carol Braun Pasternack’s study of scribal collaboration as the norm in a fundamentally intertextual tradition that precluded individual authorship in Old English texts, in *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12–21.

98. See Kerby-Fulton and Justice’s discussion of Westminster scribal habits, as well as their argument that the author and scribe of *Richard* worked in the Chancery, in “Langlandian Reading,” 76–80.


100. Ibid., 181.

101. *Mum* is the sole text in the manuscript, which consists of nineteen vellum leaves and is dated by Barr as “probably” from the “third quarter of the fifteenth century” (*Piers Plowman Tradition*, 22). On the editorial hand in BL Additional 41666, see Barr’s critical notes (291–368). My own analysis of the manuscript leads me to concur with Barr’s view of a “single hand” being responsible for the corrections and insertions (36). Doyle suggests that the manuscript represents preparation for recopying the poem, in “Manuscripts,” 98.


103. The *OED* traces Definition A2 to an allegorical use made in 1562 by John Heywood. The use of “mummer” follows the same trajectory of sound to silence in “mum”: the earliest recorded instance (1440) is “one who mutters or murmurs”; by 1502 a “mummer” is an actor performing the silence of the “dumb-show.”

104. On Bale’s note, see n73 (above). The *OED*’s speculative dating of *Mum* to 1399 would be a decade too early, according to Barr (“Dates,” 205–10).

105. The primary *MED* definition of “mum” (listed under the heading “mom”) includes the “poetic character” Mum. On anxiety concerning mumbling as a dangerous force competing with plain speech, ranging from medieval Titivullus stories to early modern dramatic works, see Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009),
20–31.


107. I take this phrase from Steve McCaffery’s description of the poetic “adventure” opened up by the violent dislodging of sound from meaning, in *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Evanston: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 161–86.

108. Frank Grady exposes the fantasy of such sonically figured politics, arguing that the *Fürstenspiegel* genre’s “mutually reinforcing fictions” are the “presumption that the king’s subordinate has worthwhile advice to give, and that the monarch virtuously desires to follow it,” in “The Lancastrian Gower and the Limits of Exemplarity,” *Speculum* 70.3 (1995): 552–75 [554].

109. As the *Mum*-text is fragmentary, we do not know for how long the narrator’s opening monologue has gone on before Mum’s self-referential interruption.


112. On “entropy-resistance” as the use of identifiable features to consolidate class divisions, and on its dominance in the medieval world and persistence as an obstacle to modern industrialization, see Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 64–67.

113. See Barr’s analysis of Mum as “the personification of the self-interested use of speech,” in *Signes and Sothe*, 80.

114. Day and Steele (*Mum*, xxiv) and Barr (*Piers Plowman Tradition*, 326) link this insistence on a proactive clergy, as well as Mum’s statement that he who knows of a storm and does not warn others to take shelter is “auctor of al the harme and th’ache / And so pryuy to the peynes that peeres induren” [engenderer of all the harm and pain, and responsible for the pain that peers endure] (733–42), with rebellious activities organized against Henry IV.


118. Day and Steele, eds., *Mum*, 120n.

119. Oakden exemplifies the Revivalist reduction of the *Piers Plowman* tradition to works of merely “historical interest,” deeming *Richard, Mum*, and *The Crowned King* merely “topical,” while holding that the *Piers Plowman* that they imitate is “timeless” (Alliterative Poetry, II.61–63). Marsh, who does not mention *Mum*, describes *Richard
as an “imitation” of *Piers Plowman* that is “exclusively political in character” (*Origin and History*, 334). After speaking at length of *Piers Plowman* (301–27) as the key work sustaining the “revived” Anglo-Saxon meter (317), Marsh displays a signal lack of interest in Langlandian poems: he confines his discussion of *Richard* to a single passage of *nautical* interest (334).

120. Simpson argues that legislation, dating from the late 1370s, restricting communication rendered any criticism of the Council politically dangerous, in “Constraints of Satire,” 17–20.

121. The transnational dimension of the *Mum*-narrator’s travels emerges in the treatment of his Orléans visit as an unexceptional stop in his corruption investigation (322–23).

122. Scanlon critiques the view that the B-text moves from a politically self-conscious *Visio* to an apolitical, purely spiritual *Vita*, in “Langland,” 239n–40n.

123. While the Gardener seems a laborer, he hints at his possible legal control, stating “I am gardyner of this gate . . . the grovynde is myn owen” [I am the gardener of this plot . . . the ground is mine] (976).


127. On the *Mum*-poet’s discomfort with the implications of such political philosophy, see Grady, “Generation of 1399,” 220–22.

128. The Gardener’s combination of timeless political wisdom and practical publishing advice suggests that it participates in what Steven F. Kruger sees as polar opposites of the traditional dream vision—both the transcendent moral instruction of the “educative vision” typified by Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* and the gravitation “toward the things of the world” seen in Ovid’s *Amores*; see *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 124–26. Such a unique blend of dream-vision extremes contributes to the jarring effect created by presenting a bag of books rather than a transcription of the Gardener’s speech.


131. See Steiner’s analysis of public availability as key to the *Mum*-poet’s presentation of the archive, in *Documentary Culture*, 178.


133. See Barr’s analysis of the poet’s strategic use of multiplicity, in *Piers Plowman Tradition*, 348n. In terms of medieval literary theory, the *Mum*-narrator can be seen as strategically avoiding the coincidence of attribution and responsibility in the *auctor* by
presenting the transcription of the dream vision as produced by the activities of a *compiler*, who inserts “no opinion of his own” into the work; see Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (1988; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 94–95.


137. Middleton historicizes the ambiguous authorial presence in *Piers Plowman*, observing that, despite his having produced the first “national” poem, Langland appears to disappear in the sixteenth century, supplanted by the fictional Piers Plowman “widely taken to be the center and source of authority for the poet’s powerful innovation” (“William Langland’s *Kynde Name,*” 15–16).

138. See Nichols’s discussion of the “manuscript matrix” and “social context” generating a dialectics of meaning, in “Introduction,” 9; and see Bernard Cerquiglini’s argument that scribal variation is a medieval norm obscured by nineteenth-century philology’s obsession with single, stable authorship, in *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1–11.

Epilogue


2. Ibid.


6. Such a reconfigured timeline, conjoining the medieval and the early modern, argues against Davis’s claim that modernist theories of the nation such as Anderson’s depend upon a “totalizable Middle Ages” (“National Writing,” 613)


9. On Reformation England as the first nation, see Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 29–87; on a range of cultural forms of self-writing, including cartography and jurisprudence, producing a sixteenth-century English nationalist discourse, see Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 1–18.


11. While Hastings criticizes Anderson for emphasizing technology, he himself foregrounds religious identity in suggesting Bede as an origin for English identity (see *Construction of Nationhood*, 26–38). All interpretations of modernity, whether Hastings’s or Anderson’s, are arbitrary.


15. On parallels between manuscript and digital cultures, see Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia*, 137–216; and Burnley, “Scribes and Hypertext,” 41–62. The New Medievalist return to the “manuscript matrix” (Nichols, “Introduction,” 9) would benefit immeasurably from Hayles’s analyses of the dynamic interrelation of text and material context in the digital epoch, in *Writing Machines* (19–33).

16. See especially Gellner’s argument for nationalism’s equation of culture and politics, in *Nationalism*, 20–21.


18. See Newman’s distinction between patriotism, which is of great antiquity and is oriented exclusively toward external threats, and the more systematic nationalism, in *Rise of English Nationalism*, 52–54.

19. Pearsall argues that late-medieval statements of vernacular pride imagined as a general “wave of English nationalism” are just as readily interpreted as “fragmentary, sporadic, regional responses to particular circumstances,” in “Chaucer and Englishness,” 288–89.


24. D. Vance Smith, “Piers Plowman and the National Noetic of Edward III,” in

25. See Gellner’s argument that nationalism “preaches and defends cultural diversity, when in fact it imposes homogeneity,” in *Nations and Nationalism*, 125.

26. Smith, *Ethnic Origins*, 212. Smith insists that a past sense of ethnic homogeneity and territorialism is part of the modern nation (11), producing a temporally complex entity (see 212–14).

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