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**TRADITIONAL DICTION AND THE DESCENT OF A MIDDLE ENGLISH
METRICAL ROMANCE: THE *SEEGE OF TROYE***

by

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**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of**

Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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“Traditional Diction and the Descent of a Middle English Metrical Romance: The *Seege
of Troye*”

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of English

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the *Seege of Troye* from the perspective of minstrel romance. The poem descends from Benoit's *Roman de Troie*, although it has features in common with other, lesser-known works in the medieval Troy tradition. The study includes a descriptive bibliography of the manuscripts of the poem, an analysis of oral transmission through evidence of proper-name drift, and a discussion of traditional diction in the composition of the poem. Reference is made to Milman Parry's theory of oral composition in the Homeric corpus, although this theory is modified to fit the context of Middle English romance. Issues of translation and composition are addressed, and the poem is examined as a prime example of a liminal text, whose manuscript tradition spans the spectrum from oral poetics to literary and canonical aspiration. The study concludes with notes on editorial approaches for a new edition of the text.

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Introduction: The *Seege of Troye*

The Troy legend is one of the most enduring stories in any literature of the Western world. Homer's *Iliad* is our oldest version of the story, and his tale has become fundamental to our entire literature. It is not surprising that the English became enamoured of the story of Troy early in their literary history, even going so far as to formulate a genealogy of the earliest kings of Britain from the Trojan diaspora. Even such an English poem as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begins with the legend of Troy:

Sipen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
 Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
 Þe tulk þat þe trammes of treson þer wroȝt

Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe. (1-4)

It seems only natural, then, that the Troy-story would be used as a basis for romance. Of the four Matters of romance (the matters of France, Britain, England and Rome) Troy belongs to the Roman tradition, which is the oldest (Stratyner 366). As with most of the romance material, our Troy tradition descends from a French model. Benoît de Sainte-More wrote his great poem, the *Roman de Troie*, which became the model for all subsequent medieval Troy stories. It is one of these poems, the Middle English minstrel romance known in its manuscripts as the *Seege* or *Bataile of Troye*, that concerns us here.

It is a pleasant coincidence that a poem that ultimately owes its origin to Homer should give us the opportunity to adapt one of the most important theories of Homeric poetry to Middle English studies. Milman Parry's work on oral-formulaic theory sets the tone for all subsequent work on orality; while his theory is not directly applicable its

influence is still felt. Fashions in criticism tend to arise to deal with a particular problem or phenomenon, and are then applied to situations of continually decreasing relevance before being discarded for having outlasted their usefulness. This is perhaps the case with Parry's theory of oral poetics, which was conceived specifically to deal with the composition of Homeric verse and extended to encompass Yugoslavian *guslar*-song (Parry x). The theory was used by Magoun to deal with *Beowulf*, which may have been partially composed orally (McGillivray 13). Then the oral-composition theory was brought directly to bear on ME romances, where it really had no business (McGillivray 19-20). The reason Parry's oral theory must be modified for ME material, as explained by McGillivray, is that these poems were for the most part close translations of Old French material rather than spontaneous compositions. To create an important trope to which we will return, most ME poems are *literate* works – works that presume both literacy and a certain degree of literary aspiration on the part of the poet. But it is important to realize that not all the ME romances are of this literate type. Certain of these poems have long been considered to be coarse or lowbrow (McGillivray 9-10). In short, the “minstrel” romances are assumed to be *illiterate*: lacking in scholarly erudition if not actually composed by illiterates and devoid of literary aspiration. Hence well-meaning scholars have tried to apply the Parry theory of oral composition to save the romances from being condemned as banal, perhaps to put them in the same category as Homer. Unfortunately, Parry's theory does not accurately describe these works, and less zealous reading does not support the theory that these works were composed entirely orally. There exist too many close parallels to source texts, even in the rougher sorts of romances. While it is clear that there is a strong oral element to these romances, they are

sufficiently different from the Homeric material Parry worked with that his theories must be modified before they can be applied to the romance material.

This paper proposes, instead, a theory to deal with these liminal texts (specifically the *Seege of Troye*), romances which sit between orality and textuality. Our theory is grounded in two separate philological undertakings: an analysis of oral-stage transmission drift in proper names (Chapter III) which demonstrates that the *Seege* was not transmitted exclusively through scribal copying, and an analysis of the systems of traditional formulaic diction (Chapters IV and V) which explains how minstrels transmitted the poem and how they could improvise in their performances.

The traditional diction (traditional because as a system it is too complex to be invented for the purpose of composing one poem and has echoes in many other contemporary texts) could have been used to compose entire texts, but this was not the case with the *Seege*. While it is still open to question whether the *Seege*-poet read or heard Benoit's *Roman de Troie* (this is taken up in Chapter II), it seems apparent that he did not make a direct translation like the other ME Troy-stories, and that he wrote at least a small poem to be fleshed out at a later date in performance. This would explain several of the strong similarities between the text's four variants, such as the consistent prologues and order of events. Perhaps he had even read the *Excidium Troiae* as a schoolboy. The only certainties in the *Seege*'s history are that it was transmitted orally and that it was written down at a later stage.

In the course of the paper, I offer a descriptive bibliography of the four MSS (Chapter I). This was made possible by a grant from Carleton University's Department of Graduate Studies and Research to travel to London where all of the MSS are housed.

The physical forms of the various MSS are important to our discussion of their intended uses. Chapter II briefly discusses the sources of the *Seege* and touches on certain other works in the ME Troy tradition. This includes a source-stemma for the *Seege*. Chapters III, IV and V discuss in greater detail the mechanics of oral transmission and traditional diction as they apply to the *Seege*.

Certain assumptions must be made before I start, owing to the limited scope of a Master's thesis. First, I must explain what is meant by minstrels. We must assume that minstrels were traveling performers and occasionally composers. They have been called "gestours" and "disours" (McGillivray 3). They may well have been literate; there is evidence that the Lincoln's Inn MS was used by minstrels as a performance text (Barnicle xiv). Barnicle also suggests that there were, in fact, colleges of minstrels operating in the fourteenth century. What is most important, though, is that minstrels (as a group) would hand down their techniques and knowledge (i.e. the romances) from master to apprentice and father to son. They would, in short, create a traditional diction over a period of years. The evidence concerning minstrels is scattered and vague; it is with these fairly conservative assumptions that I will approach this subject. A more detailed study of English minstrelsy is urgently needed, but it falls outside of my scope.

The other assumption upon which this thesis rests is that the Lincoln's Inn MS is the "best" text of the *Seege*. Barnicle chose it as such for reasons of completeness of line count (xxxix), but I have chosen it for another reason. The L MS is the oldest, and has the most evidence of "minstrel features," both in its text and physical nature (see Ch. I). Despite all of the versions having been written down, the L MS seems to have been the closest to its minstrel roots when it was codified; the other MSS show traces, in varying

degrees, of attempts to make them more literary and to disguise their minstrel roots. The L MS is, therefore, the logical place to look for features of traditional diction, and, as noted in the Conclusion, should form the basis of a new edition of the text designed to highlight its traditional nature. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the text are from the L version.

The *Seege of Troye* is an ideal poem for comparative study, because of its minstrel features, limited number of MSS, and familiar subject matter. It is obvious that the romance enjoyed a certain popularity in the Middle Ages and is therefore a good indicator of tastes in popular literature. There is a great deal to be learned from this poem so long as certain prejudices concerning minstrel romances are overcome; this is best accomplished by careful and open-minded reading and an awareness of historical and social context. Perhaps the most important thing to remember concerning the *Seege* is that it is not Homer and does not pretend to be; every literature must be judged by its own self-consistent standards, rather than by those of another period or genre. It is only to be hoped that this thesis goes some way towards providing a framework for better understanding the minstrel romances.

Chapter I: Descriptive Bibliography

The poem known as the *Seege of Troye* survives in four MSS. They are all of roughly the same length and vary primarily in linguistic detail, although they are not scribal variants, and one MS at least features major literary revision. The original poem probably dates from the turn of the fourteenth century (an approximation based on dialectal evidence), although the MSS are later, there having been a period of oral transmission in the poem's history. Details of the original poem and the oral transmission stage are provided in subsequent chapters; here the concern is with the MS tradition.

The most recent modern edition of the text is by Barnicle for the Early English Text Society, published in 1928. This is a particularly useful edition as it presents the four MSS in a parallel-text format. Its chief failing is the lack of explanation of matters of punctuation, insofar as a diplomatic edition ought to leave the text unpunctuated as it is in the MSS.

Other editions have printed two or three of the MSS in parallel, probably because the editors did not know of the existence of all four variants. Zietsch, Fick, Wager, Hollitscher and Hibler each published one or more of the MSS between 1883 and 1928 (Hofstrand, viii-ix). These editions are mostly turn-of-the-century products of German philology and, as they do not present all the MSS, they are of limited value to us.

The poem was originally a minstrel romance (Barnicle, xxxvi). It has come down to us in written form for a variety of reasons and through a variety of agencies, but the original composition is detectable behind perhaps a century of transmission (the date of composition is assumed to be approx. 1325). It would have been a very performable,

spirited poem, and must have been popular since the various MSS are bound with some of the best-known works of medieval England, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

Descriptive Bibliography:

London, British Library, Egerton MS 2862. Date, ca. 1410-1420. Contents: *Kyng Richard*, ff. 1-44; *Beous of Hampton*, ff. 45-94v; *Sir Degarre*, ff. 97, 95; *Florence and Blanche-floure*, ff. 98-111; *The Batell of Troye*, ff. 111v-134; *Amys and Amylion*, ff. 135-147v; *Sir Egleamoure*, ff. 148-148v (Barnicle xv and personal notes). The MS is of inferior parchment, much stained with grease, mold, water and wine (or possibly blood). The original binding is long lost, and the MS has been rebound in modern leather. The foliation (148 marked folios, marked in the top right corners) has been corrected in pencil to account for earlier errors in binding and missing leaves, but this does not bear on the *Seege*. There is a blank sheet of soft parchment between fols. 97 and 98. The quires are quite irregular in count: 1⁶; 2¹⁶; 3¹⁶; 4⁸ wants 1; 5-10⁸; five singletons, one unwritten; 11-14⁸; 15¹²+1; 16⁶; singleton. The MS is undecorated except for scribbings; space is left for illuminated capitals 3 lines high. The folia are 275 mm x 170 mm, although many are seriously cut down; written area 210 mm x 86 mm, with running titles 10 mm above the text.

London, British Library, Harley MS 525. Date, ca. 1440-50 (Morrill xxxiv). Contents: *Seege of Troye*, ff. 1-34; *King Robert of Sicily*, ff. 35-43v; *Speculum Gy de Warewyke*, ff. 44-53 (Barnicle ix and personal notes). The MS is of inferior parchment, although relatively unstained. Rebound in plain red cloth in 1985. There are 53 folia marked in the top right corners. The latest pencil foliation is best, which seems to have accounted

for two folia before the ink number 7, and thereafter continues according to the formula (ink number)+2=pencil number. There are two hands at work, although only one (the first) pertains to the *Seege*. The capitals are blue, decorated in red, although not all are painted. The decoration is rather rough and ready. The folia are 210 mm x 155 mm; the written area measures 153 mm x 90 mm.

London, Lincoln's Inn Library, Hale MS 150. Date: approximately 1400.

Contents: *Libeaus Desconus*, ff. 1-12; *Merlin*, ff. 13-27; *Alysaunder*, ff. 28-90r; *Bellum Troianum*, ff. 90v-108; *Piers Plowman*, ff. 109-125. The parchment is very flawed, with frequent holes. It is bound in modest leather from the Elizabethan era (Barnicle xi and personal notes). There are 125 folia, and they have been refoliated several times. The MS was rebound and repaired in 1972, and the quiring is impossible to determine because of the excessively tight binding: the volume will only open to 90 degrees, and is very difficult to use as a result. However the rebinding seems to have corrected certain issues with misplaced pages. There is no formal decoration, but there are many sketches in the margins, some of which are quite amusing. The folia are 300 mm x 125 mm.

London, College of Arms, Arundel MS XXII. Date, approximately 1450.

Contents: *Seege of Troye*, ff. 1-8; a translation into English of the *Historia Regis Britannicum*, ff. 9-82. Material is perfect vellum, slightly worm-holed. Bound in old leather with two bronze clasps. There are three leaves of a fourteenth century psalter, the *Seege* and the *Historia*; two paper folia; two folia of ninth or tenth century Gospels; three more leaves of the same fourteenth century psalter. The folia are approximately 330 mm x 270 mm; exact measurements are not available.

The four MSS of the *Seege* are important to our consideration of the intended audience and the delivery of the poem. The MSS are all different, both in the physical layout and binding and in the choice of texts with which they are bound. Two of the MSS (A and H) are obviously intended for reading in a library, and as such are not as relevant to the theory of minstrel recitation and performance, but the texts they are bound with provide clues to the contemporary perceptions of the poem. Two other MSS are of a more utilitarian appearance and may have been used by literate performers as crib-books for their recitations.

The Lincoln's Inn MS is the most important of the variants and the most important performance text. As Barnicle has pointed out, the shape of the MS is particularly suited to portability:

It is a moot question, however, whether Jamys (mentioned in the margins) was a scribe of Wenlock Priory or was a minstrel who carried about in his pouch with him his whole repertoire in the shape of the Lincoln's Inn MS. The peculiar format of the book, 5 inches wide by 12 inches long, and the fact that except for a version of *Piers Plowman* it contains only romances, argue in favour of its being a minstrel book. Moreover, this latter assumption gains greater credence from the fact that the town of Shrewsbury during the Middle Ages was a well-known centre for minstrels, music and monarchs. (Barnicle xiv)

Her theory demands some expansion. First, its physical dimensions (300 mm x 125 mm) are ideally portable but the book is not, as we presently have it, terribly useful to the performer. This is because it has been rebound in the Elizabethan era; little more data exists as to the exact date of binding (Barnicle xi). The most important facts are that

the MS has been rebound and that the binding was done after the MS had been used for some time. The rebinding is obviously much tighter than the original binding, and was tightened further by Ms. Stubbings in 1972 when the book was refoliated (noted in MS). As it currently exists, it is impossible to keep the MS open without using both hands simultaneously (the Librarian at Lincoln's Inn provides a collection of foam wedges and book snakes to keep the MS open without damage from skin oils); assuming that the minstrel or performer was using an instrument this would be an untenable situation. However, as the MS was originally bound more loosely it would have been easy to prop the volume up against something for the performance and then slip it into a pocket or wallet at the end.

Another feature of the Lincoln's Inn MS which has gone largely unnoticed is the quality of the parchment. The material is very poor, with folia of irregular thickness and frequent holes in the middle and edges of the sheets. Certain folia have tears (presumably from excessive scraping) which have been sewn together prior to inscription. All in all the material is so poor that it would not be used for a text for sale. I would theorize that the odd shape of the folia is because they come from the outside edges of the skins of animals; they would need to be only 310 mm high by 250 mm wide to make a bifolium. The parchment-maker would not be willing to discard any possibly saleable material, but this parchment would not be good enough for resale; therefore a minstrel wishing to preserve his works (or, as Barnicle suggests, a College of minstrels (xi)) and not concerned with appearances could take advantage of cheaper, if disfigured, parchment. The shape of the MS, then, might not be determined by performance considerations (a wider volume might still have been easier to keep open) but by simple economics.

That the MS is bound with other “minstrel romances” is surely also significant. This has already been pointed out (by Hunter, in Barnicle xi) but the point deserves repetition. The other poems in the book are *Libeaus Desconus*, *Merlin*, *King Alysander*, and a version of *Piers Plowman*. All of these poems are suitable for recitation, although some would take much longer than others. Hunter hypothesizes that these poems represent not the compositions but the stock-in-trade of the hypothetical minstrel owner, which seems quite probable. As the *Seege* comes in the middle of these poems, a rather unlikely place to put original work (which ought to get either pride of place or be hidden at the back) we can dispense with the idea that the scribe of the book (or the minstrel, if they were separate persons) was the composer of the poem. The illustrations in L are not of a professional character, and give the impression that the book was not treated with any particular reverence by its scribe or owners. The illustrations are, however, quite amusing. Such a book must have been intended for use and not appearance, thus we must assume that it was the property of a minstrel or perhaps a group of minstrels.

The Egerton MS does not come down to us as a complete text; it may once have been a larger volume, or perhaps the collection that we have now represents a rebinding of disparate material. Either way, definitive statements cannot be made about the size and makeup of the text as we cannot know its original appearance. However, its present state does seem to indicate careless handling during its lifetime. The owners (perhaps the original scribe, although this would render it less valuable for sale) were literate and given to scribbles in the margins. While these were unfortunately not, as I had first hoped, of a musical nature, they do tend towards proverbs and snippets of verse. The impression given is that the book was used by students, or perhaps journeymen. Many of

the cut-down margins could be later excisions of vulgar student graffiti. The heavy use, pen in hand, of the volume would seem to indicate that E has been copied a number of times. This can be explained in much the same manner as L: a group of minstrels gathered into a college, whether formal or informal, to preserve and distribute their stock-in-trade amongst their fraternity.

The Arundel MS is a later version of the poem, having evidently gained credibility and *auctoritas* sufficient for it to be used as an introduction to a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*. As such it represents a distinctly literary stage in the evolution of the poem: no longer can it be viewed as a living, breathing minstrel poem, but instead as piece of historiography. The illustrations, illuminations, and sheer bulk of the A MS make it next to impossible for it to have been used by anyone so common as a minstrel. For our purposes this MS represents a dead end in the oral performance tradition of the *Seege* but is still important in defining the changes in cultural perspective which transpired during the course of the *Seege*'s popularity. By dating this MS we can see when the new literate poetry began to take over, in terms of *auctoritas* and prestige, from the older verbal arts.

The Harley MS presents an interesting conundrum. By far the most portable of the MSS, written on poor parchment and largely undecorated, it would appear to be a natural traveling-copy by our criteria; but its text represents a systematic revision of the minstrel material and an attempt to inject further classical learning into a fundamentally lowbrow work (Barnicle xxxvi, xlvii). It has been suggested that the author of the *Speculum Gy de Warewyke* was the scribe of this book (Morrill, cxcii-cxcvi), but this theory is untenable due to a difference in the scribal hands. At ff. 44r a new hand begins

the *Speculum*, leading us to conclude that some relatively learned man redacted the *Seege* and *Robert of Sicily* and then passed on his unbound MS to a colleague who either wrote or transcribed the *Speculum* on the remaining parchment. This book, then, was not made for sale but represents the work of at least two scholars or authors who were both transcribing material (*Speculum*, *Robert of Sicily*) and thoroughly reworking material (*Seege*); what they intended to do with the volume remains a mystery.

At this point I should state that a new edition of the text is urgently needed. The last edition of the *Seege* was made in 1928 and is supposed to be a diplomatic parallel-text edition (its chief failing in this regard is that the editor consistently punctuated an unpunctuated text). While for the serious student and philologist Barnicle's edition will long remain essential, an edited, simple version of this poem would bring a major piece of English romance to the public. Its advantages are several: brevity (as compared to Lydgate's 30,000 line monster *Troy Book*), lightness of tone, ease of dialect and familiarity of subject matter, making it a ready subject for comparative studies.

Chapter II: The Sources

The source-question of the *Seege of Troye* is challenging and multifaceted. The first problem is the great mass of Troy material in the Middle Ages. In 1894, Oskar Sommer made a chart of the relationships between the Troy stories known to him, as part of his introduction to Caxton's *Recueill of the Historyes of Troye*; this table shows at least 24 medieval Troy books (plate facing p. xlvi). This great mass can be narrowed down to a more reasonable set of candidates; the short list includes Homer, Dares Phrygiensis, Dictys Cretensis, the anonymous *Excidium Troiae* (of which Sommer was unaware), Virgil, Ovid, Benoit de Sainte-More and Guido delle Colonne. The *Seege of Troye* emerges as possibly the first version of the Troy story in the English language (Sommer xlvi). It does not descend from Guido, unlike most other English Troy books. The second problem in the study of the descent of the *Seege of Troye* is that it was not translated or paraphrased in the same way that most of the other works in the Troy tradition were. It was, instead, written from memory of Benoit's *Roman* rather than from a book, making it a much stranger story (stylistically and organizationally) than its cousins.

This chapter's goal is narrow: a brief description of the other works in the Troy tradition, concluding with the other English works on Troy. The *Seege* itself is not discussed in this chapter as it appears to be an evolutionary dead end; the rest of the English tradition does not seem to have depended on it to any extent (the conspicuous similarities occasionally evident between the *Seege* and the *Laud Troy Book* can be explained through a combination of shared sources, i.e. Benoit, and a predictable tendency of even literate writers to resort to fragments of traditional diction). Chaucer's

Troilus and Criseyde and the rest of the *Troilus* tradition are not mentioned either, because they do not deal with the entire Troy story (and have probably received more than enough attention already; c f. R.K. Gordon's *The Story of Troilus*). At the end of the chapter are two figures; Figure I is a hypothetical source-stemma which demonstrates the relationships in this chapter, and Figure II is Hofstrand's stemma for the *Seege*. In the next chapter we will consider how the Troy story went from Benoit de Sainte-More to an anonymous poet in fourteenth-century England, and how it came to be written down.

It seems obvious to us that Homer is the origin of the Troy story, or at least the story as we know it now. It was not so obvious to the various poets and historians in the Middle Ages who wrote and sang about Troy; Homer's name was known, but not the content of his poems, and he was not to be trusted:

To hyde trouthe falsely vnder cloude,
 And the sothe of malys for to schroude,
 As Omer dide, the whiche in his writyng
 I-feyned hathe ful many diuers thyng
 That neuer was, as Guydo lyst deuise...
 And feyned falsly that goddis in þis caas
 The worthi Grekis holpen to werrey
 Ageyn Troyens (Lydgate, 265-274).

The vernacular medieval Troy stories claim descent from two dubious sources, Dares Phrygiensis and Dictys Cretensis. These two short pieces of Latin prose claim to be translations of the journals kept by two soldiers, one Greek and one Trojan, at the time of the Trojan War. Although this is almost certainly an invention of later years, the Middle

Ages saw these two as the true and accurate chroniclers of the story and doubted all the authors in our classical canon.

The traditionally-held view of the descent of the medieval Troy story is as follows: Homer; the Homeridae, among whom Dares and Dictys may be included only if their age is given most generously, as they are more likely Hellenistic; Virgil; the *Excidium Troiae*; the translations of Dares and Dictys; Benoit de Sainte-More; Guido delle Colonne; the *Gest Historiale* and the *Laud Troy Book*; Chaucer. Occasionally a scholar takes the time to mention the *Seege of Troye* in passing, but the descent of our poem is rarely discussed. For now we will concentrate on the origin of the medieval English Troy story as a genre, before moving on to the specific descent of the *Seege of Troye*.

Homer's influence on the Troy material is obvious to modern readers, but it must be remembered that Homer did not have a direct influence on Western letters during the Middle Ages. It was not until 1488 that the *Iliad* was first printed, and most of the MSS were in Italian libraries. This means that Benoit, who was the father of the European Troy story, could not have had easy access to them, although he knows of Homer; his critical judgment of Homer's historicity would do a modern critic proud.

Omers, qui fu clers merveillos

E sages e esciētos,

Escrist de la destrucion,

Del grant siege e de l'acheison

Por quei Troie fu desertee,

Que onc puis ne fu rabitee.

Mais ne dist pas sis livres veir,
 Quar bien savons senz nul espeir
 Qu'il ne fu puis de cent anz nez
 Que li granz oz fu assemblez:
 N'est merveille s'il faillit,
 Quar onc n'i fu ne rien n'en vit. (Benoit, lines 45-56)

Guido could potentially have read Homer, but there is no evidence that he knew Greek. His comments on Homer sound much like a memorized sermon on Classical literature from the Christian perspective, and do not seem to indicate a deep knowledge of the poems:

Inter quos suis diebus maxime auctoritatis Homerus apud Grecos eius ystorie puram et simplicem ueritatem in uersuta uestigia uariauit, fingens multa que non fuerunt et que fuerunt aliter transformando. Introduxit enim deos quos coluit antiqua gentilitas impugnasse Troyanos et cum eis fuisse uelut uiuentes homines debellantos. Cuius errorem postmodum poete curiosius insecuti, ut darent intelligi non solum Homerum fuisse uitiorum auctorem, multa deludia in libris eorum scribere presumpserunt (Guido 4).

Guido is the last of the Troy writers who could realistically have read Homer. What the medieval writers did not realize was that their sources, Dares and Dictys, were simply Homeridae whose claim to immortality lay in writing accounts, based on the Poet, which portrayed different parts of the battle of Troy. Their stories could not have been composed without the conceptual and literary framework provided by Homer.

Dares is the next figure in our source-stemma. He was believed to have been a warrior in the Trojan camp (his epithet, Phrygiensis, means Trojan) who wrote an eye-witness account of the war:

So saide a knyȝt þat þer was

Þat was hote sir Daries

He sauȝ þat weore wiȝ-oute faile

And dude write hit ilke a bataile (*Seege* 15-18)

His history was believed to have been translated into Latin by an anonymous scholar, although no trace of the Greek remains. It is most likely that his history in hexameters is a late first-century AD invention made to curry favour with an Emperor, although the version of Dares which has come down to us is more likely from the sixth century AD (Benson 4). There is very little in Dares' nine-hundred-line poem that carries on into the medieval tradition, with one important exception, the story of the Argonauts. This story is not mentioned in Dictys, but is important to all of the medieval variants. He is also missing a Catalogue of Ships, which is unusual in the Troy tradition, which depends very heavily on precisely this kind of biographical and historical material for its air of authenticity. Dares' name seems to have been very popular as a source, probably because of his association with the Trojan forces; the medieval Troy story is much more Trojan-oriented than Homer.

Dictys Cretensis was also rumoured to have been at the battle of Troy, although he was supposed to have fought on the Greek side. Portions of the original Greek do remain (Dictys 134-9) but they are not old enough to have been written in the Mycenaean period; more likely they were first-century AD forgeries (Benson 4). They were accepted

more readily by Nero, for whom the book was transliterated into Greek from Cretan letters, because of his interests in history and literature (Dictys 1) and also because of the less critical historical standards of the time. Dictys' story was widely used but less commonly cited in the medieval tradition. There can be no real doubt that it was the Latin text of Dictys that Benoit used for his *Roman de Troie* (with the exception of the story of the Argonauts from Dares). It would seem that Benoit started with Dares and moved on to Dictys for the body of his text when he discovered that Dictys' treatments of battles were much fuller than those of Dares.

The *Excidium Troiae* is an anonymous work in medieval Latin which seems to have been important to the medieval Troy tradition. Its provenance is uncertain, although it draws on a number of classical sources such as Virgil, Statius, Ovid, Hyginus, and Servius (Atwood xii-xiii). There has been very little work done on the *Excidium*, given that it was first published as recently as 1934. Atwood's work, however, makes it fairly clear that the *Excidium* has a significant bearing on many works including the *Seege*; it accounts for several of the episodes which distinguish the *Seege* from Benoit's poem and which have previously been thought to be the *Seege*-poet's ideas (xxviii). Further study is needed on the *Excidium Troiae* itself and its relationship to the medieval Troy story.

Guido mentions Virgil and Ovid as sources of the Troy story (4), and they surely are, but they do not bear in a major way on the Middle English tradition, and certainly not on the *Seege*. Most likely they are mentioned as an opportunity for Guido to show off his classical learning; Virgil and Ovid might have coloured Guido's prose but did not change the outlines of his story, which he took from Benoit. Benoit does not mention the two Roman poets at all.

Benoit de Sainte-More is the most important figure for the medieval romance tradition of Troy. His *Roman de Troie* (ca. 1150-55) codified the story into the form familiar to readers of Middle English, although the two readily identifiable translations into Middle English (the *Gest Historiale* and the *Laud Troy Book*) come not from Benoit but from Guido, who himself paraphrased Benoit. Benoit was the first to combine the histories of Dares and Dictys into a romance that would suit the tastes of the medieval audience. His long poem leans toward the courtly and chivalrous, incorporating Dares' story of the Argonauts to give romantic motivation and justification for the eventual rape of Helen. The story as put forth in the *Roman de Troie* remained essentially unchanged through the *Seege*, with certain episodes dropping out; this is unsurprising considering the *Roman* has over 30,000 lines and the *Seege* has only 2000.

There exists also a prose version of the *Roman de Troie*, but the only currently available edition (Constans and Faral) lacks any kind of introduction or critical apparatus, and in fact has only one volume while clearly indicating that others were expected to follow, so it is very difficult to make statements concerning it. This is another area in which further study would be helpful, but remains outside of our scope.

Guido (variously known as delle Colonne or de Columnis) made a paraphrase of Benoit in 1287: "Factum est autem presens opus anno dominice incarnationis millenio ducentesimo lxxxvii eiusdem prime indiccionis feliciter" (Guido 276). This book was tremendously popular, as demonstrated by the number of translations it inspired. This must be due to the excitement of the material, since his Latin is at best tepid and uninspired. He occasionally tries to improve on Benoit's French without much success;

where Benoit is concise, Guido is bombastic, and his decision to embellish is only saved by the translator of the *Gest Historiale*. A sample passage demonstrates:

Vait s'en ivers, estez repaire,
 E li termes de cest afaire,
 Qui ne pot mais guaires targier.
 Trestuit, ainz la fin de fevrier,
 Furent li Grezeis assemblé
 A Athenes la grant cité. (Benoit, lines 5569-74)

Tempus erat quod, iam bruma suis exuta pruinis et gelu suo tempore soluto,
 glacies iam liquerat, cum iam, niuibus liquefactis, varii fluuii per uallium concaua
 uarios iam tumescerent in decursus, et pigra hyems, ignei mendica calor, ultima
 terga daret ob uicinium primi veris aduentum, sole sub extremo signo Piscium
 decurrente, dum extremi dies et ultimi Februarii mensis instarent, et mensis ille
 Marcius succederet iam uicinus, cum vniversus Grecorum exercitus, in multa
 classe fecundus, in Athenarum ciuitatis portum totus insimul conuenisset. (Guido
 87-88)

Comyn was by course þat the cold wyntur
 Was wastid & went with his wete shoures.
 ffrosted were faren, and the fell cold;
 The slippond slete slidon of the ground;
 fflodys were fallyn into furse vales,

And into caues be course cleufit the erthe.

Wyndis wastid away, warmyt the ayre;

The rede beames aboue blusshet with hete;

Ver entrid full euyn, eger with all.

The sun in his serkyll set in þe last,

Passyng fro pisshes vnder playn course;

ffeueryere faryn with his fuerse windes

At the metyng of Marche with his mayn droghte.

The grete Nauy of Grekes with a grym oste,

Entrid into Attens, euyn at hor wille;

And holly in hauyn þere houyt þai to-gedur,

ffor to rest in þe Rode & hor rede take. (*Gest Hystoriale*, lines 4029-45)

Despite his literary defects, Guido seems to have made a considerable impact on English poets, including the composers of the *Gest*, the *Laud Troy Book*, and Lydgate himself.

The *Gest Hystoriale*, a translation of Guido's *Historia*, was made about 1385 (Benson, notes to p. 45); it is thus later than the *Seege* itself. It is merely included here for the sake of comprehensiveness, as is the *Laud Troy Book*. The *Gest Hystoriale*, however, can boast some excellent poetry as demonstrated above, and is hence worthy of far more attention than it has received from English scholars. The *Laud Troy Book* is another free translation of Guido, executed at the beginning of the fifteenth century (*Laud Temporary Preface*, n.p.). Both these books suffer, like Lydgate's *Troy Book*, from excessive length and repetition.

The medieval Troy tradition is ultimately descended from a number of Classical models, but the latest writer to have direct knowledge of Dares and Dictys was Benoit de Sainte-More. Guido delle Colonne's prose *Historia* was tremendously influential, inspiring several translations into Middle English. The *Seege*, however, was not influenced by Guido's work, and seems to have descended from Benoit, despite claiming descent from Dares. The *Seege* does not descend from any of the Middle English Troy-stories, but is an independent and potentially earlier tradition. It could, in fact, be the first English version of the Troy story. As the next chapter seeks to demonstrate, it was not merely a translation of Benoit's *Roman* or other Continental sources, but a version composed in English and transmitted through memorization, recitation and improvisation, independently from a written source.

Figure I: Source-Stemma for the *Seege of Troye* Figure II: Hofstrand's Stemma for the *Seege of Troye* (158)

X and Y are non-extant previous versions, i.e. our hypothetical short written poem by the *Seege*-poet (X) and the intervening oral versions (Y). The four variants as we have them (LEAH) can each be said to have been composed by poets, because of the significant proportion of rehandling and original additions in each version. Therefore we refer to the poet of X as the *Seege*-poet, and the “scribes” (as they would ordinarily be called in most other MS traditions) as the L, E, A, and H-poets respectively, or collectively as the LEAH-poets.

Chapter III: Proper Names and the Transmission of the *Seege of Troye*

The *Seege* does not seem to have come down to us in the usual medieval manner, which is to say, it was not translated or paraphrased from another source or amplified and modified from an existing work. This model of literary descent, which we will call the immediate-source model, for the sake of convenience, is assumed in almost all approaches to editing medieval texts (McCarren and Moffat 25-57). What we are referring to as the immediate-source model is exemplified by Eugène Vinaver's classifications of scribal error, all of which assume that the scribe is reading (and perhaps deliberately modifying) a source as he works (McGillivray 20-21). This model anticipates a certain amount of variation between texts because of a number of factors, such as scribal error, dialectal variance, corrupt models, and scribal whim. It therefore predicts that the errors will be, in most cases, easily explicable. The immediate-source model also predicts that errors should be discrete, i.e. if a scribe at one point misreads a proper name he will not necessarily then misspell it for the rest of his document, or might even return to correct his error. This model is not capable of dealing with a situation in which errors (to make an assumption that the hypothetical discrepancies are not intentional) are uniform and consistently applied throughout a work. This is the case in the *Seege of Troye*, where many of the proper names of the heroes are almost unrecognizable from their classical models, but are (in a relative sense, allowing for medieval orthography) consistently presented. In this case, either the scribe must be working from a similarly flawed original (which is not a solution to the problem, as the model still cannot account for the flaws in the original) or the immediate-source model must be rejected or modified.

This chapter presents the evidence for another model of transmission in the Middle Ages. It does not present the model itself; this will come in the next chapter. For now we need only look at the names in the Troy tradition and how they are changed from the classical archetypes to learned or literary medieval variants and at last to the highly irregular patterns in the *Seege*. Our emphasis on the proper noun is intentional. Since the names of places and heroes do not belong to the set of names to which the medieval ear was accustomed, they are more commonly distorted by memory and voice. The principle of the mutation of foreign names is as old as Wolf: “However, several good codices... preserve a name almost unknown to geography, but for this very reason liable to corruption” (62). The example he chooses to emphasize his point is of exactly the same character as many of the errors in the *Seege* or, indeed, the rest of the medieval Troy tradition. When Φηρείη is confused with Πηρείη, it is obvious that the same process went on as when Telamon became Thalamon. Errors in verbs or nouns can be explained in terms of dialect or scribal process, but when the proper name does not appear in the language’s vocabulary at all, then it is only susceptible to error from unfamiliarity or scribal error. Thus the unfamiliar names are the real markers of the descent of the *Seege of Troye*; if the errors contained within them do not match the traditional patterns of translated or consulted works (our immediate-source model) then they must derive from another pattern of transmission. They also transcend barriers of vernaculars, which is essential for a multi-lingual tradition such as the Troy story.

If the *Seege of Troye* had been copied or translated as, for example, Guido did with Benoit or the *Gest*-poet did with Guido, then we could expect the same kinds of accidental variants typical of these activities; a glance at the chart of proper names will

indicate that the variation between Benoit's and Guido's names, or Guido's and the *Gest*-poet's, is very slight indeed. Since this pattern of variation is not the one that we see in the case of the *Seege*, we come to the conclusion that it had a different pattern of transmission. It is exceedingly unlikely that the *Seege*-poet systematically set out to change all of the proper names but not the fundamentals of the story; this kind of modification would be absolutely pointless, not to mention extremely difficult and tedious when faced with a manuscript or manuscripts containing different names. We must then conclude that the *Seege*-poet did not have access to written sources when composing the poem, i.e. that he was working from his memory of the *Roman*.

When we examine the first stage of transmission of the names, from Homer to Dares and Dictys (see Table I), we notice that there is very little variation evident. The main change is the standard Greek-to-Latin ending in the nominative singular -ος to -us. The only exception in our table of names is Οδυσσεύς to Ulysses; it is unclear why this change took place but it had registered at least by Virgil's time. By checking on this one word we can determine whether a later writer has at least been taught Latin literature (if he then read Homer in Greek he might well be likely to use the name Ulysses when identifying Odysseus (Atwood xiii)) before any exposure to Greek. It remains unlikely that any of the medieval Troy writers actually read Homer at all. The name conventions must come from the Latin tradition then, either from Dares, Dictys and the *Excidium Troiae* or from Ovid and Virgil.

Table I:

Homer	Dictys	Dares	Benoit
Ἀχιλλεύς	Achilles	Achilles	Achillès
Αἰνείας	Aeneas	Eneas	Eneas
Ἀγαμέμνων	Agamemnon	Agamemnon	Agamennon
Αἴας	Ajax	Ajax	Aïaus
Ἀλέξανδρος	Alexander	Paris	Paris
Πάρις			
Ἀντίφος	Antiphus	Antippus	Antipus
Ἀρκεσίλαος	Arcesilaos		Archelaus
Ἀσκαλάφος	Ascalaphus		Ascalaphus
		Daretes Frigii	Darès
			Ditis
Διομήδης	Diomedes	Diomedes	Diomedès
Ἐπιστροφος	Epistrophus	Epistrophus	Epistrophus
Ἑκτώρ		Hector	Hector/Ector
	Herculis		Herculès
		Hesione	Esione
			Jason
		Laomedon	Laomedon
		Mennon	Mennon
Μενέλαος	Menelaus	Menelaus	Menelaus
Νέστωρ	Nestor	Nestor	Nestor
	Palamedes		Palamedès
Πάτροκλος	Patroclus	Patroclus	Patroclus
	Peleus	Pelias	Peleüs
	Polyxena	Polixenus	Polixena
Πρίαμ	Priam	Priamus	Prianz
Πρωτεσίλαος	Protesilaus	Protheselao	Proteselaus
Σαρπηδών	Sarpedon	Sarpedon	Sarpedon
	Telamonius	Thelamon	Telamon
Θαλπίος	Thalipus	Thelaphus	Telephus/ Telepolon
		Troilus	Troilus
Ὀδυσσεύς	Ulixes	Ulixes	Ulixes

The names survive the transition to Old French, in some ways a very different language from Latin, relatively unscathed. Agamemnon becomes Agamennon, Ajax becomes Aïaus, Priam becomes Prianz, and Troilus becomes Troilus; all of these are minor changes mandated by the pronunciation of the French language (Atwood xxiv-

xxv). It is obvious that Benoit was a masterful poet working with literary sources, able to sound out the names and make such changes as were necessary to suit the French tongue.

Guido stays with Benoit's names and makes only minor orthographical changes, with one important class of exceptions. Guido begins the process of aspirating the names to fit with his pronunciation. Examples include Eneas to Heneas, Antipus to Anthipus, Proteselaus to Prothesilaus, Telamon to Thelamon, and Telephus to Thelephalus. He also changes Esione, by association with Benoit's Ulixes, to Exione. These are fairly minor changes reflecting the pronunciation of medieval Latin rather than any error in transmission. They are clearly conscious changes made by a conscientious writer who thought he was bringing the names into line with proper convention.

When the Troy material is brought into English by the usual scribal methods (translation and redaction), the degree of variance is roughly comparable to the difference between Guido and Benoit, when we take into account the even greater differences between the English and Latin languages as compared to Latin and French. The main areas of variation between the names in Guido and the names in the *Gest Hystoriale* and the *Laud Troy Book* (see Table II) are vowel interchanges and aspiration changes, and in the case of the *Laud Troy Book*, a consistent problem with reading certain letters. The vowel interchange is very frequent, and corresponds to some of the phonetic changes that the English language was undergoing during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Latin vowels cannot be expected to correspond exactly to the perceived sounds in English, so it is no surprise that the English writers would use their corresponding sounds. As a result, there is frequent interchange of <o> and <a> (Dyomedes to Dyamede, Sarpedon to

Serpidon), <i> and <y> or <e> (Pollixena to Polixena, Palamides to Palomydon) and even <e> or <i> to <o> (Exiona to Oxonie).

Table II:

Benoit	Guido	Gest Hystoriale	Laud Troy-Book
Achillès	Acchiles	Achilles	Achilles
Eneas	Heneas	Eneas	Eueas
Agamennon	Agamennon	Agamynon	Agamenon
Aïaus	Ayax	Aiax	
Paris	Alexander Paris	Alisaunder Paris	Paris
Antipus	Anthipus	Antius	
Archelaus	Archelaus	Archisalus	Archelaus
Ascalaphus	Ascalafus	Ascalaphus	
Darès	Daretes	Dares	Dares
Ditis		Dytes	Dites
Diomedès	Dyomedes	Dyamede	Dyomedes
Epistrophus	Epistrophus	Epistaphus	
Hector/Ector	Hector	Ector	Ector
Herculès	Hercules	Ercules	Ercules
Esione	Exiona	Exiona	Oxonie
Jason	Iason	Jason	Eson
Laomedon	Lamedon	Lamydon	Lamedon
Mennon	Menon		Mennon
Menelaus	Menelaus	Menelay	Menelaus
Nestor	Nestor	Nestor	Nestor
Palamedès	Palamides	Palomydon	Palamydes
Patroclus		Patroclus	Patroclus
Peleüs	Peleo	Pelleus	Polleus
Polixena	Pollixena	Polixena	Pollexene
Prianz		Priam	Priamus
Proteselaus	Prothesilaus	Prothessalon	Protheselus/ Prothesaly
Sarpedon			
Telamon	Thelamon	Telamon	Thelaman
Telephus/ Telepolon	Thelephalus?	Thelaphus	Thelaphus
Troilus	Troilus	Troilus	Troilus
Ulixes	Vlixes	Vlixes	Vlixes

Some of the more surprising changes in the *Laud Troy Book* are due to extreme scribal error; either the scribe's model was very cramped or Wülfing could not properly

read the (admittedly difficult) manuscript itself; but there are consistent substitutions of <u> for <n>, as in Eueas for Eneas (Wülfing, 56) and <d> for <cl>, as in Patroclus for Patroclus. While these changes are surprising, they are perfectly explicable by the immediate-source model; they are clear examples of what Vinaver would call “eyeslip”. There are many other examples of ordinary scribal error with regards to the proper names in the *Gest* and the *Laud Troy Book*. What sets them apart from the *Seege* is that they are errors of reading and writing, rather than errors of comprehension.

The proper names in the *Seege* are distinctly different from most of the rest of the English tradition, and are generally not even self-consistent. Table III summarizes the forms of all four *Seege* variants against Guido and Benoit. This is one of the most confusing questions in the *Seege of Troye*, as it is obvious from study of the proper names that the MSS of the *Seege* were not directly based on one another; in short, there is no direct stemma and all connections are at least one missing generation apart, if we use the immediate-source model. As will be demonstrated later, these errors are more easily accounted for with a different model of transmission.

Table III:

Benoit	Guido	Seege L	Seege E	Seege A	Seege H
Achillès	Acchiles	Achilles	Achilles	Achilles	Achylles
Eneas	Heneas	Eneas	Enyas	Eneas	Enneas
Agamennon	Agamennon	Agaman	Agamon	Gamenon	Agamemnon
Aiaus	Ayax	Ajax	Ajax/Eiax	Ayax	
Paris	Alexander Paris	Alisaunder Parys	Alisaunder Parys	Alysaunder	Alisaunder of Paryse
Antipus	Anthipus	Ancipe/ Ancipe	Ancipe/ Cholophe	Anape/ Accipe	
Archelaus	Archelaus	Archelay	Archillay	Achelay	Archelay
Ascalaphus	Ascalafus	Astolope	Astalape	Askalapi	Askelop
Darès	Daretès	Daries	Daryes	Adryas	Darras
Ditis					
Diomedès	Dyomedes	Tyamedes	Tiamedes	Diamedas	Dyademades
Epistrophus	Epistrophus	Etrop	Ipitrop	Spitrof	
Hector/Ector	Hector	Ector	Ector	Ectour	Ectour
Herculès	Hercules	Ercules	Ercules	Ercules	Ercules
Esione	Exiona	Vsian	Vsion	Vsane	Isyon
Jason	Iason	Jasoun	Iasoun	Jason	Jason
Laomedon	Lamedon	Leomadan	Lamydoun		Lamatan
Mennon	Menon	Manassy	Monassy	Manasy	
Menelaus	Menelaus	Menolay	Menelaye	Menolay	Monelay
Nestor	Nestor	Nestor	Nestor	Nester	Nestor
Palamedès	Palamides	Palamyde	Palmady	Palmyde	
Patroclus		Patrode	Patrode		Padradode
Peleüs	Peleo	Pelyas	Pallaas	Pollyas	Pelles
Polixena	Pollixena	Polluxena	Pollexene	Pollexna	Pollexene
Prianz		Priamus	Priamus	Priamus	Priamus
Proteselaus	Prothesilaus	Prestolay	Prostelay	Protelay	Portislay
Sarpedon		Sarpenor	Sarpynor	Darpinor	
Telamon	Thelamon	Talamon	Thalamon	Tallamon	Talamon
Telephus/ Telepolon	Thelephalus?	Theofele		Talefole	
Troilus	Troylus	Troyle	Troyle	Troylis	Troyell
Ulixes	Vllixes	Vlyex	Bliex	Vlixes	Eluxes

“Agamemnon” varies in its vowels in a standard ME manner, but then in the A version loses its initial vowel, becoming Gamenon. Somehow the scribe of H has restored the name to its original spelling of Agamemnon, which implies that he consulted or had read in the past one of the classical authors, unless we are to understand that he

substituted <mn> for <nn> independently and arrived at the original spelling. Any special understanding of the classical sources is basically ruled out by H's variation on "Alexander Paris," which becomes Alisaunder of Paryse; this misunderstanding is too fundamental for someone who was deeply familiar with the classical material, or indeed with Benoit. This is an error of memory which would not occur if the source-book was before the scribe's eyes, but it is perfectly understandable that a two-word name would be pressed into the standard formula of "Sir _____ of _____." The H-poet, then, was almost certainly a clerk remembering scraps of his education rather than using a library to build his poem.

"Antiphus" is subject to extreme vagaries of memory. Because of some confusion in the earliest stages of the *Seege's* composition, Antiphus appears twice in the Catalogue of Ships. E, surprisingly, tries to remedy the situation by inventing a new hero, Cholophe, for the second occurrence (950) while A does not seem to notice but simply provides two very similar names, Anape and Accipe; it is quite possible that the scribe did not notice the similarity when faced with the overwhelming mass of names. The patterns of phonetic variance are interesting in this name. Somehow the French <ti> of Benoit's Antipus has phonetically mutated to <ci> in ME, leaving us with Ancipe and Accipe (this could also be due to confusion between c and t in uncial script). The name Anape in A seems to be a remembered holdover of Benoit's Antipus, subject to an unusual combination of consonant dropping and vowel change (<i> does not usually mutate to <a>).

"Ascalaphus" undergoes the reverse of the consonant transformation of Antiphus. The <c> of Benoit becomes a <t> for L and E, reading Astolope and Astalape

respectively. Again the vowel substitution is common and dialectally explicable, but the mutation of consonants is unusual. The original *Seege*-poet does not seem to have understood the <ph> in Benoit, rendering it with a <p>; this could not have happened had the model been Guido, who renders the name as Ascalafus. The final <i> in the A version seems to have come from a mutation of the final pronounced <e> or <y> typical of ME name convention, such as Menolay and Archelay.

“Diomedes” suffers two kinds of mutation, one consonant shift (<d> to <t>; cf. Tyamedes, L) and consonant reduplication (Dyademades, H). Both of these are memory slips, or misunderstandings of pronunciation. The sounds <d> and <t> are both alveolars (*Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* 155) and are thus easily confused. The reduplication of the <d> can only be explained by someone receiving the name orally, with some confusion. This kind of confusion is mirrored in H’s version of Patrocles’ name, Padradode.

“Epistrophus” changes radically in each of the three versions of the *Seege* that retain the name. L records Etrop, E has Ipitrop, and A has Spitrof. It is almost impossible to imagine a situation where this much variance could be caused by a misreading or a slip of the eye, but the variants are understandable from an oral perspective. This same kind of confusion of letters and sounds occurs with “Protesilaus”; L has Prestolay in accordance with the pattern of Menolay or Archelay (see Ascalaphus above), E has Prostelay, A has Protelay and H has Portislay. These variations could be explained if all the scribes were dyslexic, but otherwise cannot be errors of reading.

“Hesione,” or Esione in Benoit, undergoes a number of vowel changes. First the initial vowel changes from an <e> to a <u> (Vsian, L; VSION, E; Vsane, A) and then

changes to an <i> (Isyon, H). These changes are, like many of the other vowel changes, probably due to dialect differences between the individual scribes.

“Sarpedon” has only one really surprising change, to Darpinor in A. The two consonants <s> and <d> are not related and it is difficult to imagine a phonetic reason to switch between the two. In this case, some type of genuine scribal error must be assumed, since it is conceivable that <S> and <D> could be confused in an English hand of the time (Thompson, 290-292).

The names in the *Seege of Troye* are substantially different than those in the rest of the medieval Troy tradition. There are a number of patterns of mutation for proper names which are easily explicable by the immediate-source model or by phonetic variance between languages; these include aspiration and vowel interchange as well as examples of eyeslip such as <n> → <u>. The names in the *Seege* seem to have been affected by processes other than these. There are a number of sound changes such as <ti> → <ci> and <d> → <t> which are not common in the other Middle English works, as well as confusions of the overall phonetic structure of some of the names. These changes suggest that the *Seege*-poet did not have access to any manuscripts of any Troy material when composing his work, but instead relied upon his memory of the tradition. Furthermore, this implies that the LEAH-poets were no better supplied with Continental Troy material.

We must then postulate a different model for the transmission of the Troy material from Benoit de Sainte-More to the *Seege of Troye*. If the *Seege*-poet did not have his materials in front of him as he worked, he must have either read the material at some time in the past, or have heard it recited (which implies a trained memory such as

that of a minstrel). In either event we are not dealing with a composition which can be described in a conventional manner, since it relies upon the memory of one poet (the *Seege*-poet, not the LEAH-poets) rather than the eyesight and skill of a number of scribes. The *Seege*'s descent from this original poem to the LEAH versions which we now have is further complicated by having been transmitted by minstrels rather than scribes. In the next chapters we will discuss this new method of descent and the traditional diction which is closely tied to it.

Chapter IV: Preliminary Description of Traditional Diction and Oral Transmission

It is clear, then, that the *Seege of Troye* fits somewhere between the learned literary romances of its day and the oral compositions described by Parry and Lord. It was not written by a poet working with source-books open before him, but neither did it spring from the singer's mouth spontaneously. The *Seege* has both too much and too little of a literary source background to fit these two traditional models of poetry. How, then, was it composed?

The close similarities to Benoit's *Roman* make it an unavoidable conclusion that the first *Seege*-poet knew French. Whether he was a traveler who encountered the poem in France or a stay-at-home who found the poem in England is, by and large, immaterial. The chief questions concerning his relationship with Benoit are: did he read or hear the poem, and how soon after did he compose the first version (now certainly lost) of the *Seege*? Neither of these questions can be answered with absolute certainty, but they demand to be asked.

The first answer is that the *Seege*-poet seems to have heard the *Roman* recited, probably several times, and as the *Seege* seems to be the oldest surviving English work in the Benoit tradition, he must have heard it in French. We cannot be certain what version of Benoit's poem he found, whether it was a condensed version recited from memory by a *jongleur*, or if it was the long poem, in more or less the same condition as we now have it, read aloud by someone in a noble's court. Either form could explain some of the extreme changes suffered by the names in the *Seege*. If the *Seege*-poet had read the poem, which is admittedly not impossible, there should have been some visual memory of the forms of the names. This explanation has one chief difficulty, which is that even

one generation of oral transmission could distort the names into something resembling their present state. We can, however, be certain that the *Seege*-poet did not have Benoit (or any of the other Troy-books) before him as he composed. We must then admire the *Seege*-poet's memory: anyone capable of holding the essential material of a 30,000-line poem in his mind while adapting it to a 2000-line format must be held to have an exceptionally good memory, even in an age more oriented towards mnemonic achievement than ours.

The *Seege*-poet's literacy must be explored before discussing his techniques of composition. It is unlikely that he was an illiterate wandering singer, a Homer of the fourteenth century. First, his text is littered with descriptions of writing; "And out of latyn wel ich wot/ A clerk on englysch þus hit wrot" (21-22), "He dude write hit ilke a bataile" (18). The manner in which he treats writing in the L version is instructive, as explained by Bradbury (103-106). The writing on the ball given to Venus is regarded as somewhat esoteric, to be read only by trained professionals. Does this mean that the *Seege*-poet was a clerk trained in writing, or is the esoteric nature of the craft used to emphasize the mystery of the Elven ladies? The original intention remains unclear, but Bradbury analyzes the passage well in all four MSS and concludes that the attitude towards writing changes through the years of the *Seege*'s descent, from the esoteric to the commonplace, and this process can likely be extrapolated back through the years between our oldest surviving MS (L) and the poem's origin. Since there is a substantial time between the act of composition and our first MS, we must consider that same time span when attempting to discern whether or not the poet could have been literate. England in 1300 was less lettered than 100 years later. If the *Seege*-poet composed on paper, perhaps he was a

member of the aristocracy? While the French were famous for aristocratic poets, and the idea was not unknown in England (e.g. Richard Coeur-de-Lion), the absence of courtly motifs (such as themes of love and fealty) would seem to indicate common birth for the poet. When the rhetorical devices such as “Listeneþ, lordinges, ere ye gange,” and the depiction of the lower-class minstrels at the feasts (and even the feasts themselves, described yearningly as if they had been seen but not tasted) are all considered, we must conclude that, while the poet may well have been to court, he was not noble and did not participate in the rituals thereof as an equal, but observed them as a spectator.

Evidence for the *Seege*-poet’s possible clerical status has also been offered by Bradbury, who contends that the treatment of pagan elements (the Judgment of Paris and the temples of Troy) reflect a religious medieval mind dealing with disturbing pagan material (109). Of course, almost any reasonably devout layman might have treated the material in the same manner, but the handling of the classical names for the Elven ladies implies some kind of education, which, Bradbury contends, was more likely to be clerical in the Middle Ages (108). If the *Seege*-poet was a clerk, however, he must not have remembered his training very well, or was stuck in a situation without recourse to books. A clerk was one of the few people with ready access to literary works in 1300, and his training would probably make him more like Lydgate, composing with pen in hand.

Therefore we have two alternatives: a reasonably literate minstrel who heard the *Roman* at some point in his travels, or a clerk who wrote the *Seege* after reading Benoit. While it is obviously impossible to tell which is the case, given the limited evidence, it is more probable that the *Seege* was not a clerical creation. Its matter is not religious and does not shirk from pagan elements, explaining them in an almost cursory fashion; the

militarism of the poem does not fit well with the aims of the Church; and the poem has been corrupted or modified well beyond the level of error to be expected from trained copyists (we are forced to assume that our text of Benoit is close to the one the *Seege*-poet used). If the minstrel had been educated, he would not necessarily have access to his school-text, and hence could have a flawed memory of the names of the pagan gods (in particular, a clerk well-trained in Latin would not use masculine endings for the names of goddesses, but a poorly-educated minstrel might); he would be more likely to compose for his audience, producing a more warlike poem; and in untrained hands, the poem could easily have achieved its fragmented MS forms.

If the *Seege*-poet was, as Barnicle suggested, a minstrel (as opposed to a clerk), then how did he compose his work? The two commonly understood methods of composition are the Parry-Lord “oral composition” theory and a literary model involving translation or reshaping of material (this includes spontaneous original composition, without translation or redaction, on paper) as Lydgate or Chaucer did. The *Seege* seems to fall somewhere between the two methods of composition; it does not exhibit all of the hallmarks of oral composition as explained by Parry – it does not come from an illiterate culture, and the poet clearly had recourse to writing and written literature – but it also bears signs of having been transmitted orally, rather than spending its entire history as a written text. What was the “moment of composition” for the *Seege of Troye*?

Specifically, if, as previously suggested, there was a small poem composed in greater proximity to Benoit (in time or space, i.e. having just read or heard the *Roman*) which was later fleshed out by minstrels, was there actually such a definite moment? If the minstrel worked without a model text (or texts) then his process of composition must

have been more like a songwriter than a poet; his art was rough and ready, not needing to have an individual stamp of style. The story, rather than the style, was paramount, especially for a relatively uncultured group like the English. This process is neither so disciplined as the Parry school of oral composition, nor so confining as the lone poet working away in a library. The *Seege* is a gregarious and accessible poem, composed by a performer whose livelihood was dependent on his social skills; the influence of his colleagues and contemporaries is greater than that of books. If the *Seege*-poet composed with a pen in his hand, he almost certainly did not learn his craft from books.

Our new model must consider these points. How do we deal with a compositional technique which relies heavily upon formulaic diction and epithets, but does not function in the same manner as the Parry oral technique, and can deal with literary sources rich with *auctoritas* such as Benoit or Dares without becoming either slavish or overly individualistic? What do we expect from such a theory of composition? Obviously it must inform about the poet's background, education and intent, while also explaining his techniques in specific detail, in terms of choice of words and phrases, and what options were available to him. In other words, how and why? Therefore we must break down our model into constituent parts. Matters of background and education, as demonstrated previously in this chapter, must perforce remain largely conjectural, and the poet's intent is a matter of his own heart (although a balance of desires for fame and fortune, or simply renown and food, can be postulated). The poet's diction, on the other hand, can be analyzed, as we have already done with the proper names in the descent of the poem. We must look at how formulae and epithets are used in all four MSS, showing the changes wrought on the hypothetical original poem as well as hinting at the constitution of that ur-

text. This gives us a tool to determine what the *Seege*-poet's options were, and allows us to see what the poet could accomplish within these constraints. Much has been made of the *Seege*'s limitations, its "low art," but this is as much an error of interpretation as that committed by the scholars who wished to remove the more overtly formulaic elements from Homer, not understanding the necessity of these elements to the Poet's art.

Rather than thinking of the *Seege*'s multiple distinct MSS as an insuperable editorial problem, we should think of them as a great advantage in our efforts to understand the composition and transmission of the poem. It might be helpful at this point to bring in the example of *Piers Plowman*'s textual tradition. *Piers* survives in a vast number of MSS (in fact, the best MS of the *Seege* is bound with a version of *Piers*) which have been divided by Skeat into three distinct groups, A, B and C (*Piers* xi). Those groups correspond to three stages of revision by the poet. We have, in effect, witnesses to the authorial transmission of *Piers* as Langland changed his mind about his poem. The situation with the *Seege* is analogous, insofar as we have four groups of MSS (there being no other practical way to divide them) each representing a different and intentional variant of the poem. The difference is that our notions of authorial intent must be changed, since it is clear from even a cursory glance that the four variants were not made by one poet. Rather, we have at least four poets or minstrels who have, quite legitimately, claimed the *Seege* as their own (after all, they were working extensively with the material and, in two cases, performing it) and changed their received material to conform to their current usage. There can be little doubt that the *Seege* was a living poem throughout the fourteenth century, being performed from free recitation (with a manuscript but not enslaved to it) or from memory and continually changing in its details.

The fact that there were at least four separate revisers (i.e. the LEAH-poets) rather than one (i.e. Langland) only changes the means, not the intent: clearly we have in the persons of these later poets at least part of the creative mind behind the *Seege*; if not the originating force, then at least the motive force. Therefore each variant has as much claim to be “the” *Seege* as the other, just as the A, B and C-texts of *Piers* are all equally *Piers*; it is only for purposes of highlighting certain features such as traditional diction that we can elevate one text above the other, as we have with the L version.

It can be demonstrated that the A and H versions of the *Seege* were meant to be kept for posterity as “serious” literature (Barnicle ix-x, xvii). Their MSS are, on the whole, finer and not meant for rough use, and their revisers have reworked the material with the intention of presenting it as a work to be read. The H-poet, in particular, went to considerable lengths to remove the minstrel evidence from the poem (Barnicle xxxvi). This process does not render these two variants useless to us; rather, it makes them more valuable for they provide insight into the medieval perceptions of this type of minstrel romance. Our interest is in the compositional techniques and transmission practices of the *Seege*, and the A and H versions, by deleting some passages and adding others, highlight what the medieval mind perceived as the key differences between the *Seege* and higher literature such as the works of Chaucer or Lydgate.

We must, then, examine the four variants in some detail to describe the composition and transmission of this poem. An analysis of the formulae in the L and E variants can be contrasted with the changes in the A and H versions. A look at the changes of the formulae from variant to variant is also needed, for much the same reason as our examination of proper names in the previous chapter, and much the same

methodology can be applied. By focusing on the names, formulae and epithets, it is hoped that we can discern the difference between the changes brought about by poetic and minstrel transmission and those which are simple immediate-source scribal error or intentional rehandling. Once we have identified the different kinds of changes in the transmission of the poem, we will be equipped to put forward a theory of the technique of composition and transmission used in the *Seege of Troye*.

Chapter V: The Mechanics of Traditional Poetry: The Lincoln's Inn Variant

Formulaic systems are the underlying determinants of traditional diction. The patterns of use and reuse, of progressively greater economy of word and thought, are essential for the poet who composes aloud, as demonstrated by Parry: "Formulary diction... was created by the desire of bards to have ready to hand words and expressions which could be put into heroic verse. The epic poets fashioned and preserved in the course of generations a complex technique of formulae, a technique designed in its smallest details for the twofold purpose of expressing ideas appropriate to epic in a suitable manner, and of attenuating the difficulties of versification" (9). As the tradition of oral composition intersects with the newly-popularized (in England) technology of writing, a modified hybrid technique begins to emerge. While it is no longer the only method of composition, oral poetry retains much of its power because literacy is not universal. In fact, it is only because of the cultural bias of literacy engendered by universal education in the past century and the university literary critics of the previous two that we think of orality as a feature which must be proven rather than assumed. Since, however, it is necessary to *prove* orality (in any stage of transmission) in our text, we must analyze the formulaic systems so evident in this poem.

We do not contend that the *Seege* was composed entirely orally in the manner of Homer. Its literary influences indicate that the *Seege*-poet was most likely literate, and the fact that it exists in MS form is irrefutable proof that its transmission was ensured, at least some time after its composition, by literate people. It is the stage between composition and the fixing of the text that is interesting, though. As the evidence of proper names indicates, the *Seege* was at one point transmitted orally, without recourse to

a written text, and was tremendously changed thereby. But the oral stage of transmission must not be seen as an intrusion on or corruption of the text. The cultural milieu of fourteenth century England certainly was more oral than literate; while many people were literate and more of the bourgeoisie were acquiring the skill and taste of reading, English culture had for hundreds of years been dominated by oral traditions of storytelling (Lindahl 359-362). A poet who was not educated from an early age in a situation removed from the storytelling tradition would, by adulthood, be so imbued with the storytelling technique that it would be a natural backdrop to his composition when he began to write. Even more to the point, a professional minstrel would be trained from a young age to compose and perform in this same storytelling mode. What we have, then, is a traditional method of storytelling, which is dependent on a traditional diction. Even with pen in hand, the poet would think in terms of traditional turns of phrase and formulae. It is then not surprising that the literary adaptation of these features (the original *Seege*, now lost) becomes even more formulaic when passed on orally by the same methods used to tell the stories the original poet grew up with.

It should be emphasized that traditional diction does not explain the variances of proper names in the *Seege*. A poet *writing* in a traditional mode might give a convincing impression of orality – witness the questionable verses in the Homeric corpus, only rejected after intense and scrupulous philology – but could not make such errors as the corruption of proper names documented above. The names exist as they are because of the uncertainty of oral transmission, especially where they are not integral to the verse (Homeric verse has a built-in error-checking device in its firm metre). A poet working from source-texts in the immediate-source model could not make the errors reported in

Chapter III, simply because these errors depend on auditory and vocal factors for their form. The formulae in the text, therefore, do not need to be used as proof of oral transmission, because that proof has been supplied in the form of proper name variances. The formulae are therefore evidence of a traditional diction, which bears equally on the original composition and transmission of the text.

A traditional diction contains several features which separate it from what we perceive as the “normal” model for composition. Since many, perhaps even most, poems in the Middle English tradition (most of which are now lost, and those which survive are *de facto* the ones which were written down, hence the ones with the greatest contact with writing and literacy) would have been composed orally, many of the same identifying features of oral poetry are evident in traditional poetry. These include formulae, tags, epithets, topoi, transitions and addresses to the audience. All of these features are tightly interwoven in the traditional diction and are very difficult to separate out; preliminary definitions with examples will help.

Epithets are generally half-lines, usually following a name but occasionally used in its place, which describe a person or place for metrical reasons. Their description is not necessarily unique or particularly apposite to the person in question. Epithets can be varied to suit the metre, but it is rare for a person who has been associated with an epithet to be described in any more novel manner.

*f*for sir Priamus of troye kyng (1326)

Sir Priamus of troye kyng (1358)

*P*enne spak Priamus of troye kyng (1980)

Formulae exist as a single line, half-line, or rhyme which repeats and can be used in a variety of situations to fill out a line, describe a situation, or quickly present an action which requires little explanation; they convey the essential idea without wasting any words. For example, the following formulae (one half-line, with a variant, and a whole-line formula) convey, respectively, the ideas of the various arms and armour carried by a combatant, and a repeated voyage. Formulae are often selected for their utility within the rhyme scheme, and as such are more common in the second line of the couplet.

Þey leyden by-fore him scheld and spere (1286)

And ȝeue me armure scheld and spere (1308)

He com prikyng wiþ spere and scheld (1798);

And sailedyn agayn ouer þeo flod (94, 128).

Tags are short, essentially meaningless formulae, which are used specifically to fill out the metre or rhyme; they are most common in the second line of the couplet, but will occasionally fill the first half of a line in order to allow a pre-composed rhyme in the second half of the line. They often convey belief, understanding, supposition or rather unimportant and automatic praises or descriptions.

wiþ-oute faile (11, 17, 59, 213, 433, 858, 996, 1212, 1788)

for þeo nones (29, 990, 1062)

wel y-dyȝt (152, 855, 929, 967).

A *topos* is generally a multi-line formula describing a repeated action, situation or juxtaposition of characters. The *topos* is actually a collection of epithets, formulae and tags, but because they are repeated as large independent formulae they can be considered a separate construct of traditional diction.

He dude hit charge wiþ-oute faile

Wiþ mete and drynke and opir vitaile

And al-so prouendre corn and hay

To stedes and to palfrayes (59, 433, 859);

Þat on was pollex þat opir castor

Þat opir talamon þat opir nestor (99, 387, 657);

And an ost stout and good

To passe ouer þeo salte flod (868, 878, 882, 890, 908, 936, 964, 972).

The *addresses to the audience and transitions* are used in a very specific manner.

The audience is addressed directly at the beginnings of sections in an appeal for patience or to describe the actions of the reciter. The transitions are used to delineate the sections of the poem, so that the audience and the performer are both aware of the passage of time, the progress of the story and the organization of the plot (138). As a result, these two devices are often found together.

ffor-þy y wol a stounde dwelle (5)

Listeneþ lordyngis er 3e gange (215)

Lordyngis saun fayle (815);

Þus con ende þeo secounde bataile (816)

Þus endiþ þeo þrydde bataile (1079)

Þus endiþ þeo iiij bataile (1113).

A Brief Note on Metre:

It is necessary to mention the metre of the poem in passing. Parry's theory of oral composition was entirely dependent on the metre of Homeric verse. While the same dependence is not to be observed in the *Seege*, the formulaic elements of the traditional diction often function as a direct result of the metre, filling out lines and forming metrical units. The *Seege* is written in simple rhyming couplets made up of four-stress lines. The metre is in no way to be considered rigid, for it contains many lines both longer and shorter than the norm. Some of these are because the foreign names are generally treated as single-stress words despite their length, and part of this is explained by the highly unusual transmission patterns of the poem. Most of the rhythm is simple and easy to recite once its stressed nature is observed:

Sythén god háde þis wórlð wróu₃t

Héouene and éorþe and ál of nóu₃t

Móny ánturis hán by-fálle

Þat wé no knówen héom nou₃t álle (1-4)

Þrýtty wýnter wiþ-óute fáille

Mén of gréce heolden grét batáile

Wiþ þe kýng of tróye stóut and grým

And át þeo láste þey óuercome hím (10-14)

Stress tends to fall on the first syllable of Germanic words and the later syllables of Romance words.

The L and E versions pay closer attention to the metre than do the A and H versions, although A varies more than H. This is not surprising as it is doubtful that A and H, which were much more literary productions, were ever meant to be recited.

The stress-pattern rhythm of the *Seege* is very conducive to improvisation – rather than having to worry about a syllabic count the minstrel has only to worry about four stresses. This is why this type of metre tends towards the formulaic, simply because it is easy to add half-lines, tags or epithets to a stressed line, there being more “room” for it to “fit”.

The Epithet:

The epithet, like all formulaic systems, is easy to observe but difficult to define. An epithet provides a convenient description of a character which can fill the couplet without taxing the poet unduly; it also conveys, by its repetitive nature, a mental “hook” upon which to hang our perceptions about that character, making identification of and with the character easier. Epithets tend to express a single idea about the subject; this tendency has been detected in the Homeric poems as well, where each hero has a trait or fixed set of traits by which he is described. For example, Odysseus is known as πολύτροπος, πολύμητις, δῖος, διογενής, πολύτλας, which convey cunning, wisdom, *arete*, and his perpetual suffering. By comparison, Menelaos is always referred to as the king, in a variety of phrases. In fact the epithets in the *Seege* are more standardized in their description, tending to emphasize only one attribute rather than three or four linked ones as in Homer. This is due to the nature of ME metre and the resultant differences in compositional technique. The Homeric hexameter demanded a different

epithet for each part of the long line, whereas in ME the epithet can easily be modified to fit in different parts of the shorter line.

There are four main characters with frequently repeating epithet systems. Between them they have a total of 70 lines of epithets (excluding the very common epithet “þe kyng,” applied without name or further description to both Menolay and Priamus). Other, non-repeating epithets make up a further 28 lines, mostly in the Catalogue of Ships. This makes for a combined total of 98 specific epithets, or almost 5% of the lines in the poem. Of these, 49 belong to Menolay and Priamus. Their epithet systems are strikingly similar, which can be explained by the traditional character of the diction.

There are eight different epithets used to describe Menolay, of which four are repeated. They all revolve around the idea of kingship; 23 out of 29 epithets used also include his origins.

þe hyȝe kyng of grece sir Menolay

Sir Menolay of grece kyng (5 times)

Sir Menolay þeo kyng (3 times)

þe kyng of grece (13 times)

þe kyng him-seolf sir Menolay

þe kyng sir Menolay

þe kyng of grece sir Menolay (4 times)

Sir Menolay heore kyng

The fundamental idea behind the epithets is absolutely consistent; in all cases his royalty is asserted and in the majority of cases his homeland is also emphasized.

Priamus' epithet systems are strikingly similar to those of Menolay, because of their comparable positions in the poem and the conservative nature of the verse. In all cases but one he is called "kyng," and in 11 cases Troy is mentioned.

Sir Priamus of troye kyng (3 times)

Priamus þeo kyng (twice)

Þeo kyng of troye sire Priamus

Priamus kyng (3 times)

Þeo kyng of troye (4 times)

Sir Priamus/ Þeo kyng of troye

Kyng Priamus (4 times)

Priamus of troye

Kyng of troenes alle

The similarities between Menolay's and Priamus' epithet systems are so distinct that coincidence can be ruled out. For example:

Sir Menolay of grece kyng (5 times)

Sir Priamus of troye kyng (3 times);

Þe kyng of grece sir Menolay (4 times)

Þeo kyng of troye sire Priamus;

Þe kyng of grece (13 times)

Þeo kyng of troye (4 times);

Sir Menolay þeo kyng (3 times)

Priamus þeo kyng (twice).

It would be a mistake to conclude that one of these was formed by analogy with the other. At the beginning of the poem the first king of Troy, Leomadan, is described using similar epithets:

þe kyng of troye (6 times)

þe kyng of troye sire Leomadan

þe kyng sir Leomadan

Royalty, then, is described by a simple type of epithet. It is highly unlikely that the *Seege*-poet invented such a system for the one poem; instead, these examples represent the traditional epithets for royalty used by the minstrels of the *Seege*-poet's school.

If the modern reader is confused by the fact that Elayne has one of the largest collections of epithets, he may perhaps be forgiven for not realizing that she is in fact Helen of Troy and one of the prime causes of the Trojan War. Surprisingly, her epithet system does not hurl invective or praise her beauty, but dwells upon two of her roles: queen and wife.

Dame Elayne heore qwene

Dame Elayne his qwene (twice)

Dame Elayne þeo qwene

þoure qwene/ Dame Elayne

Dame Elayne þe qwene of grece

Dame Elayne his wyf

Dame Elayne his gode wyf

This has a definite importance to the poem: the *Seege* is not structured as a tale of rape or infidelity, but rather as a series of battles with rather primitive motivations. The Greeks

invaded Troy as a retaliation for a slight of manners by King Leomadan, taking with them the king's daughter Vsian; Alisaunder Paris attacks the Greeks and takes Elayne in retaliation for his grandfather's murder and his aunt's abduction; and the Greek heroes invade Troy to return Elayne to Menolay their king. In all these actions the only mortal woman who acts and influences the proceedings is Priamus' wife, who arranges Achilles' assassination, in a classic case of too little too late. Elayne's epithets must therefore reflect not a conniving schemer or even a beautiful mistress but a rightful chattel of the king of Greece and hence an appropriate medieval justification for the war. The *Seege*-poet has not garbled events by not alluding to her beauty and guile: he has merely constructed his poem in a manner appropriate to the mores and inclinations of his audience, and has conveyed that through the subtlest repeating techniques available to him.

The Catalogue of Ships (848-981) is a densely formulaic section designed to cultivate feelings of awe in the audience and impress upon them the connection with the nobility of contemporary England. Of the 24 minor heroes introduced in the Catalogue, five do not have epithets and two others do not fit the epithet pattern "Sir _____ of _____" or "Sir _____ þe lord of _____". There is another variant on the pattern, which adds "al-so" to the end of the formula. The two exceptions to the pattern are

Sir Astolope þeo gode weorrer

Sir Vlyex a bold baroun

Perhaps these last two had lost their genitive tags by the time the *Seege* was composed and the poet was unwilling to invent a new one, or (perhaps more likely) the names were

lost during an early stage of the poem's oral transmission and could not be reconstructed so other formulae were substituted.

The epithet, then, is not merely another method of providing adjectival and genealogical information about the characters, but is also a complex tool for filling out lines quickly and efficiently. It can also be used with considerable subtlety to convey thematic information which would otherwise require more direct treatment. We have not presented all of the epithets in the *Seege*, because most of them are simply descriptive; but a cursory reading of the text will reveal the variety and frequency of epithet systems, which, as mentioned before, make up a substantial part of the text, perhaps occurring in up to ten percent of lines.

The Formula:

The term formula, used in a specific sense (rather than as any pre-composed repeated part of the verse) can mean any of three types of construction. The first two, epithetic formulae and verbal formulae, will be discussed here. The third, tag formulae, will be dealt with in a later section. We will deal predominantly with repeated formulae here; there is a large amount of obviously formulaic material in the *Seege* which is non-repeating, but it is very difficult to define precisely how such material is formulaic, whereas the repeated material can be seen to be used contextually for similar reasons in different parts of the poem.

Epithetic formulae have many of the same functions as their cousins, the epithets. The chief difference is a matter of general applicability: while "þe kyng" can only be applied to three figures in the poem, "gode werrier" or "noble/stout baroun" can be applied indiscriminately to the majority of the characters in the poem. As a result, a

noticeable contrast is developed between individual epithets, which apply to the three kings and to Dame Elayne, and general epithetic formulae; the former can be used to build up perceptions and expectations about a character, whereas the latter are more suited to the indiscriminate completion of lines.

The majority of epithetic formulae are used to describe human beings, but a few describe their possessions. The previously mentioned “scheld and spere,” while used in describing the outfit of the great hero in battle, specifically describes only his material possessions. Another formula, “... for þe nones/ Of gold seoluer and precious stones” describes, in three different situations, different conventions of wealth. Only one (807) can be said to belong to a positive encounter; the scene is a wedding and the wealth is in the form of gifts given by a king to his nobles (and hopefully to his minstrels as well) which we are led to expect by similar scenes in Homer and *Beowulf* (cf. *Odyssey* XIII.4-15, *Beowulf* 2144-99). The other two scenes are of an almost monastic or ascetic implication; the first (327) is the description of Priamus’ sinful temple of “mawmetry,” and the second is in the description of Hector’s demise because of the lure of material possessions. This type of scene is found in Homer, where many heroes die of their greed, and its peculiar poignance is surely Virgilian, echoing the story of Nisus and Euryalus; but it is easy to see the severe Christian overtones of sin and respect for the soul against material greed. This association is reinforced because of the initial use of the formula in a distinctly pagan context. Indeed the feast-scene where the formula is used is Alisaunder’s wedding to Elayne, which precipitated most of the evils of the Trojan War.

The majority of the epithetic formulae in the poem not only describe people but specifically the heroes. These formulae are adapted to the demands of portraying great men; they all describe physical or mental prowess in some way. For example:

stout and grym

gret chiualrye

mukil myzte

gret lordyng

good werrier

noble man/ noble baroun/ stoute baroun/ good baroun

He wax egre as any lyoun

beo strong in bataile

wiþ gret processoun

gret honour/ wiþ honour

Their function is simple: when describing a hero or group thereof, the poet can insert one of these epithetic formulae (which applies equally well to anyone who might be called a hero) in order to finish a line or couplet. These formulae are not charged with any special meaning but can be applied to a general class of characters in any situation.

The verbal formula deals with actions, movements, and manner. The range of actions described is not that great, but this is caused by a combination of resources and methodology. Given that we are dealing with only those formulaic systems which repeat, and our context is a predominantly martial poem, we should not draw false assumptions when we notice that almost all of our verbal formulae deal with battle. It is, in fact, the nature of battle that lends itself so well to formulaic poetry. The range of actions

conceivable for feats of arms is limited, and it is the heroes' repeated performance of these deeds that moves the poem. Formulaic systems, of course, make the processes of composition and transmission of these sections much easier; since the specific deeds of valour are not the primary concern, formulae are more convenient for conveying a sense of battle and general heroism. The lack of any need for a great dynamic range in the battle-scenes makes the use of formulae even more acceptable, since there is no need for a wide variety of descriptive forms.

Death is a constant part of the martial romance, and there are, predictably, death-formulae. Some of these can be used in other ways (to describe destruction of property, for example) but the formula is a quick way to describe a hero's passing:

buried in grounde/... haden wounde

þat stounde/... þe grounde

feol adoun

It should be noted that these formulae do not convey any sense of loss; death is an inevitable part of the martial *agon*, and it is not for the poet to mourn the dead. Certainly the heroes and their families mourn, but the poet does not express any sense of loss or even pathos. The heroes die and their passing is of consequence only to their friends and families; the only result for the story is that they can no longer affect the balance of power or perform great deeds.

One formula in particular is very interesting. Used to express intense emotion, this formula introduces a particular turn to a convention still in use today:

... on blyue/ his heorte to-brak on fyue

Both times this formula is used it includes the words “on blyue.” Pending a cultural explanation of the term “on fyue,” we must assume that “on blyue” is the essential part of the formula and that “fyue” was the only rhyme available. This comes from association with the standard rhyme “blyue/lyue”, popular in all ME romance (Bradbury, notes to p. 181). There could, however, be an explanation from medieval views on and theories about dolor which would account for the presence of the number five. The formula does not, however, imply the type of sorrow that we expect from the term “heartbreak”; the first time it is used, Alisaunder first sees Elayne and is consumed with adulterous lust for her, and the second time, Ector’s mother is filled with grief about her son’s death and orders Achilles slain by treason. The formula, then, implies a heartache with a deep taint of evil emotion.

Formulae of travel are also quite common:

up and doun/... al þe toun

troye for to wende

And sailedyn agayn ouer þeo flod

And passeden ouer þeo salte fom

to grece to fare

forþ þey goþ

to bataile wende

in-to þeo feld

These are all intertwined with the martial aspect of the poem, for they describe preparations for battle, preparations which are repeated and need not be elaborated unduly.

The verbal and epithetic formulae, taken together, form the nucleus of a system well adapted to the construction and transmission of typical deeds and scenes. When they are combined with other elements of the traditional diction they form the topos, which is one of the most powerful narrative tools available to the traditional poet.

Tags:

Tag formulae do not customarily serve any narrative or descriptive purpose at all. They represent the purest expression of traditional diction. Their only purpose is to facilitate verse composition by providing convenient rhymes in one- or two-stress units. The tags can be divided into three types: limiting, adjectival, and belief descriptors.

Limiting tags do not actually place a limit on how much or how long; instead they describe things in two ways: “of a moderate proportion”:

for þeo nones

a litel stounde

lasse or more

ynouȝ þo

and no mo

ynouȝ

or “of an inclusive nature”:

vche a word

wiþ-oute les

euerilkon

These are used in numerical contexts. They might limit in time (“A noble man for þeo nones”) or quantity (“Þrytty schippes lasse or more”), or they can express universality (“And flou3 away eucrilkon”). These meanings are anything but precise, which is the point: the tags exist to fill out the line rather than to give it sense.

Adjectival tags are similar to epithetic formulae except that they carry even less meaning:

ful hastely

was wo

on lyue

welaway

ilke a lordyng

by-gynneþ to faile

These have very little meaning and less descriptive colour, but again, they fulfill an important function by completing the line and the rhyme. Their function is paralleled by the belief-tags, which serve no narrative function whatsoever, not even description; they exist only to fill in the line or the rhyme.

wip-oute faile

saun faile

wel y-dy3t

wel y-set

ich undirstonde

y-wis

These formulae would seem to indicate a confirmation of understanding or belief (hence their name) but in fact do no such thing; they merely flesh out lines without contributing to the information conveyed therein.

A variant on the belief tag is remarkable for what it suggests about the ultimate sources of the poem. The tag refers to an earlier poetic account of the battle of Troy:

þat tyme/ ... we fynden in ryme

This tag only occurs twice but is used to confirm the *auctoritas* of statements of importance to the plot. The interesting question is not why the tag is used twice, but why it is not used more often; it is one of a handful of references to previous literary sources for the *Seege*, enough to guarantee that the reciters knew their material came from a literary tradition but vague enough to tell us that they were not in close contact with that tradition.

Topoi:

Topoi are interlocking systems of other formulaic elements used to describe a repeated action, scene or group or characters. Their function is not only compositional but mnemonic; the multi-lined topos can function as a refrain for the poem, and serves to remind both the minstrel and the audience about the heroes and deeds they describe. Some examples will serve to illustrate this chorus-like effect; as with many parts of the poem the effect is increased by speaking them aloud where the rhythm becomes more evident.

He dude hit charge wip-oute faile

Wip mete and drynke and opir vitayle

And al-so prouendre corn and hay

To stedes and to palfrayes;

Þat on was pollex þat opir castor

Þat opir talamon þat opir nestor;

... gode and sure

Vitayled wiþ good armure

At this point, in order to facilitate discussion of a section of text of particular importance to the study of topoi, we must quote a fairly lengthy section of text. Read the section aloud to hear the refrain structure:

The Catalogue of Ships, 848-981

Þe kyng of grece wiþ-oute les (848)
 A litel mene mon he wes
 His hed was red his berd al-so (850)
 Þeo hendest knyzt þat myzte go
 And was stalworþe and hardy among
 And him was loþ to soffre wrong
 Þeo kyng him purueyede wiþ al his myzt
 A gret host and wel y-dyzt
 Þeo kyng dude make schipes fyue
 hundred
 So mukil hit weoren þat hit was wondur
 And dude heom charge wiþowte faile
 Wiþ mete and drynke and good vitayle
 Somme wiþ prouandre corn and hay
 (860)
 To stedes and to Palfrayes
 Þeo kyng gedered a ful good rowte
 Of stronge men and of stowte.
 Þeo kyngis broþir, agaman,
 Was a wondur mukil man
 And was Duyk of mestene witerly
 And brouzte wiþ him schipes .L.
 And an ost stout and good
 To passe ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Daries com ful wel y-dyzt (870)

In armes; he was a douzty knyzt.
 An hardier mon bar neuer bones,
 Curteys and large, for þe nones,
 Glad of semblant and knyzt hardy
 And lord he was of parchy.
 He brouzte fyfty schipes gode and sure
 Vytailed wel wiþ good armure
 And an ost stout and good
 To passe ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Polipete of empy (880)
 flour-score schipes he brouzte him by
 And an ost stowt and good
 To passen ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Nestor, þeo lord of Pyle,
 He brouzte wiþ him out of his yle
 A gret ost and al wel y-kore
 And gode schippes foure score.
 Sire Podam of Calapy
 Brouzte schipes foure and þrytty
 And an ost stout and good (890)
 To passen ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Archelay, þeo lord of boys,
 Of al his lond he brouzte þe choys
 Of gode men and hardy
 And brouzte schipes fyfty. (895)

Sir ywayn of cypre al-so (898)
 Brouzte twenty schipes and no mo
 Wiþ mony stout bacheler (900)
 And wenten forþ wiþ glad chere.
 Sir Astolope, þeo gode weorrer,
 He was lord of erkemer;
 Þrytty schipes he brouzte wiþ him
 And an ost stout and grym.
 Sir Prestolay of Manassy
 Brouzte schipes ffourty
 And an ost stout and good
 To passen ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Etrop of Paladyde (910)
 He brouzte his ost him bysyde,
 Wel y-armed in-to þeo tēþ,
 And ffourty schipes al-so he deþ.
 Sir Monstow of Arbadý
 Brouzte schipes ful fyfty
 And an ost wiþ mucche ioye
 To wende wiþ þeo kyng to troye.
 Sir aix of salamayn
 Brouzte his ost wiþ myzt and mayn
 And .XL. schipes gode and sure (920)
 Vytailed wiþ good armure,
 Sir Sarpenor of barbury
 Brouzte schipes fourty
 And an ost stout and gay
 Wiþ al þeo ioye þat he may.
 Sir Polinestor as wel
 Wiþ his lord gon he wel
 And brouzte his ost wiþ streynþe and
 myzt
 And .XX. schipes wel y-dyzt.
 Sir Philete of melebow al-so (930)
 Seoue schipes he brouzte 7 no mo
 And com to grece, as y ow say
 Þer þe grete naue lay.
 Sir tholas of tholy
 Brouzte schipes þreo and þrytty
 And an ost stout and good
 To passe ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir ancipe of alyde
 Com wiþ .XV. schipes hi by-syde

And com to grece, ieo vous dy, (940)
 To passe wiþ þat company.
 Sir Vlyex, a bold baroun,
 Swar þat troye scholde al adoun
 And brouzte his ost, wiþ-owte wene
 And gode schipes .XV.
 Sir theofele of Rode
 He brouzte schipes monye and gode
 And com to grece, y 3ow say,
 Þer þe grete naue lay.
 Sir ancipe of Caladoun (950)
 Þrytty schipes he brouzte al boun
 Wiþ al þe poer of þat ende
 And redy was to troye [to] wende.
 Sir ampedy of Pery
 Ten schipes he brouzte him by;
 Þeo schipes weoren gode and sure,
 Vitayled wiþ good armure.
 Sir edomeyne, þeo lord of grece,
 To wende forþ nolde he nouzt lete;
 ffour score schipes he dude brynge, (960)
 fful wel vitayled in al þyng.
 Sir Ermupil com al-so
 Wiþ .XV. schipes and no mo
 And an ost stout and good
 To passe ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Castor of locry
 Com wiþ gret cheualry
 And was redy [wiþ] swayn and knyzt
 And ffourty schipes wel y-dyzt.
 Sir namply of Palamede (970)
 Com wiþ þrytty schippes large and wide
 And an ost stout and good
 To passen ouer þeo salte flod.
 Sir Prestolay, for-soþe to telle,
 To wende to troye wolde he nouzt dwelle
 And a gret ost brouzte and mare
 And fourty schipes wiþ sayl and ore.
 Þus þey conne alle to-gedres dryue
 Wiþ tweolf hundred schipes .L. and .V.
 Herkenep now to my spelle
 And more of þis y wol 3ou telle. (981)

The constant repetition of the topos “And an ost stout and good/ To passe ouer þeo salte flod” organizes the entire Catalogue of Ships into an extended verse/refrain form, which is well suited to convey the kind of information it contains.

The Catalogue is organized as a series of four-line stanzas (except for Menolay, Agaman and Daries who receive special treatment), which can be broken down into two types. The first follows the pattern of Name, Epithet/ Verb, Number/ Two-line topos. For example,

Sir tholas of tholy
 Brouzte schipes þreo and þrytty
 And an ost stout and good
 To passe ouer þeo salte flod

There is some variation within this type, with substitutions in the first two lines, but the last two lines are always made up of a two-line topos. This type accounts for 58% of the stanzas of the Catalogue of Ships. The other type (which is basically those which do not fit the first type) are made of the same building blocks, which is to say, tags, epithets, names, numbers, verbs and topoi, in a variety of combinations.

The standard two-line topos “And an ost stout and good/ To passe ouer þeo salte flod” undergoes a number of permutations in the course of the Catalogue. These variations are due to rhyme; they are not so numerous as to suggest a deliberate attempt to vary the lines for the sake of originality.

And an ost stout and grym (905)
 And an ost wiþ mucche ioye

To wende wiþ þeo kyng to troye (916)

And an ost stout and gay

Wiþ al þeo ioye þat he may (924)

This is not the only two-line topos which is used in the Catalogue. Others are of similar structure, some incorporating the formula “Vytailed wel wiþ good armure.” These topoi, despite not being identical repetitions, are relatively easy to spot, because they tend to appear every four lines in the text:

... wiþ al his myȝt

A gret host and wel y-dyȝt (854)

A gret ost and wel y-kore

And gode schippes foure score (886)

Of gode men and hardy

And brouȝte schipes fyfty (894)

Wiþ mony stout bachelor

And wenten forþ wiþ glad chere (900)

Wel y-armed in-to þeo tēþ

And ffourty schipes al-so he deþ (911)

And .xl. schipes gode and sure

Vytailed wiþ good armure (920)

And brouȝte his ost wiþ streynþe and myȝt

And .xx. schipes wel y-dyȝt (928)

And com to grece as y ow say

Þer þe grete naue lay (932)

And com to grece ieo vous dy

To passe wiþ þat company (940)

And brouȝte his ost wiþ-owte wene

And gode schipes .xv. (944)

And com to grece y ȝow say

Þer þe grete naue lay (947)

Þeo schipes weoren gode and sure

Vitayled wiþ good armure (956)

ffour score schipes he dude brynge

fful wel vitayled in al þyng (960)

And a gret ost brouȝte and mare

And fourty schipes wiþ sayl and ore (976)

The presence of other elements of formulaic diction is immediately obvious in these topoi. Not all of the topoi follow consistent rules, but it is obvious that they are all formulaic. What is it about them that makes them topoi? It is the presence of certain themes, for lack of a better word: the good ships, the numbers thereof, their provisions, and the reason for the voyage. These combine into a unit which is not necessarily visibly identical to others of its class but is discernible as belonging to such a class. The repetitive stanzaic format of the Catalogue of Ships ensures that these topoi are considered as a group. One can almost see the audience and the performer engaged in a guessing game to choose the next refrain; there are some clues provided (if the number of

ships has not been given within the first two lines, then the topos “And an ost...” cannot be used, and so forth); this sort of audience interaction is fostered by the form of the Catalogue and the nature of the topoi, and would go a long way toward making the Catalogue of Ships a more lively and performable part of the poem.

Addresses to the Audience and Transitions:

These two elements are considered together because they are most often found together. Their function is more structural than any other element in the traditional diction. The transitions serve to highlight the sections of the text and keep the audience aware of the organization behind the poem; this prevents the poem from becoming a confused and confusing mass of battles (or at least makes it a little less confusing).

“They may have been used or omitted at will on each occasion of the singer reciting the poem, at all events they did not need to be written down for a man who knew the poem. Their use was probably to help both the minstrel and his listeners to keep the progress of the tale in mind” (Hofstrand 123). The form of the transition is absolutely formulaic:

Lordyngis saun fayle

Þus con ende þeo _____ bataile

There is, of course, a certain amount of variance, with “endiþ” instead of “ende”, and other minor changes. The transition at line 1512 lacks an address to the audience, and the first transition, at line 214, does not address “lordyngis” first but uses the lords to begin the next section:

y telle 3ow alle wiþ-oute fayle

Þus endiþ þeo forme bataile

Listeneþ lordynges er 3e gange

After the descriptive prologue, the poem proper begins with a quick address to the audience, as if to alert them that the poet is done revealing his sources and will settle into the substance of the poem: “Lordynges in grece a mon þer was” (23). The poem also ends with an address to the audience: “God ȝeue ows alle heouene ioye” (2065). This neatly ties together the nature of the poem, which is a pagan story presented to a Christian audience for their edification and delight. The transitions and addresses to the audience keep the poem quite self-conscious; there is never an impression that the poet is attempting to make his poem anything more than a merry tale of olden times, and the audience is constantly reminded of their place in relation to the story, the performance and the performer.

Changing Perceptions and the Liminal Text: Some Conclusions about Traditional Diction and Editing the *Seege of Troye*

One of the disadvantages of reading a text in an edited form, even with sample facsimile pages, is that one misses many of the vital first impressions to be gleaned from the manuscript. For example, even reading a descriptive bibliography does not convey the feeling of the Arundel MS, the weight and smell, the vibrant colours and the beautiful illuminations, or the careful, studious script of the Harley MS. It is at least in part these impressions which contribute to an overall awareness of the function of each text, an awareness which goes beyond the words and into the mind of the scribe and the circumstances of the texts. Scholars who have worked with manuscripts understand the weight of these factors, and those who have not must necessarily take these things on faith.

The impression given by the H and A MSS, then, is one of tremendous literary application. These are texts with far more *auctoritas* than the obviously minstrel productions of L and E. They are illuminated and re-edited; and they differ markedly in intent and presentation from L and E. These two MSS are intended for a literate audience with literary sensibilities adopted from the Continent, an audience more comfortable with the elaborate erudition of Chaucer than the simple verse of the minstrels. The *Seege* was originally a minstrel poem, but it is apparent that the scribes of A and H (poets in their own rights) wished to transform the poem into a more learned and sophisticated production. Hofstrand gives a fairly comprehensive list of the differences between the L and H MSS (105-140), which include the H-poet's systematic removal of transitions and

addresses to the audience and a reworking of many of the formulae and traditional rhymes. Hofstrand's description of the H-poet is particularly apposite:

We must suppose this scribe to have been a man not exactly schooled in, but fairly accustomed to, the new literary manner and the new language, literary and spoken, which was growing up and spreading from its centre in London. When he hit upon an old minstrel poem, he did not understand the conventions of the trade, the repetitions and slow transitions necessary to enable the audience to follow the tale. Nor did he like the crude language and the time-honoured devices and traditional rhymes, which, for him, had no support in the living language centred in the capital, nor in the usage of the later writings he knew better. He cut out all that, wanting to speed up the narrative in the way possible in a book where, as Professor Sisam puts it, the reader is able to go back to a passage forgotten and to read over again one not fully understood. He introduced passages of his own, enlarging upon the feats of the hero, describing his equipment in language hardly comprehensible to a listener of the humbler sort, and also – as pointed out by Miss Barnicle – trying to depict the beauty of a woman in a manner hardly found in the rough old romances. (Hofstrand, 137-8)

Indeed, the H-poet did not understand the conventions of the old traditional poetry.

While he may well have been able to convincingly ape the minstrel's diction (and did, in places) he did not understand the "why" of the transition, the appeal, and the formula; had he understood this, he would have either done a better job of removing the traces of minstrelsy in his new poem or left them to enhance the character of the work. In his effort to modernize the old poem he produced a bastard work, one which lacks the charm

of the minstrel and the sophistication of the new poets. In so doing, though, he betrayed his prejudices as an aspiring member of the literary elite, demonstrating to us that addresses to the audience, formulae, and transitions were believed to be the most typical and hence, to him, reprehensible features of the traditional diction.

The H-poet, in trying (and failing) to produce a piece of literate art, has unwittingly helped us to see the other versions, particularly L, as true minstrel-works. All of the versions are changed by their contact with literary culture in the form of transcription and scribal transmission, but in the case of L, there is at least an attempt at a transparent copy; there does not appear to be an agenda behind the transcription, other than the desire to keep a poem, in whatever condition, for use and for posterity. As a result we have a slightly-less-imperfect version of the minstrel poem, and hence its traditional diction, than we would, had all of our scribes followed the path of the H-poet.

If we have said all that we can about the traditional diction, it is because the *Seege* is but a small sample of the available corpus of Middle English poetry. It would be sensible to start a survey of traditional diction by examining the rest of the corpus of ME romance – in itself a formidable undertaking – to understand the subject from the same perspective as our work. Of course, the earlier (and consequently, less-favoured by critics and editors) works will be more fruitful in this search, as the tendency to update the poems into literate works obscures traces of traditional diction (McGillivray 5-6). The search could then be expanded, with growing confidence in the varying forms of the formula, to lyrics and other verse forms, and even to Anglo-Saxon and Old French poems to understand the tradition behind the minstrel's diction. Then, by the same process of

reversed logic as we used with the H MS, literate works which poke fun at minstrels, such as Chaucer's *Thopas*, could be examined to see what happens to these traditional features as they are sent up.

Further research on the minstrels is also needed. The evidence we have is tantalizingly vague, coming from scattered references and parallels with other cultures; what is needed is a thorough analysis of the available sources to understand the socio-economic position of the performer and hence the context of his poems. Certain theories regarding transmission from minstrel to minstrel can only be conjecture without some understanding of their organization and operations.

Another pressing need in terms of research on traditional diction is for a new edition of our poem. This presents certain complications which are peculiar to traditional poetry and the *Seege* specifically, and these concerns need to be addressed theoretically before a new edition can be made. The *Seege*'s four variants, with significant dialectal, formulaic and structural differences, renders it almost impervious to ordinary methods of recension. This can be demonstrated by using sample collations using different recension techniques. A collation using standard recension techniques is featured in the Appendix.

The first problem that becomes obvious is that the formulaic character of the verse is damaged by recension. Because each MS reports variations in the formulae, there can be no consistent formula reported unless one MS is assigned considerably more weight than others. The degree of variance between the MSS, brought about by oral transmission, nullifies the error-limiting functions of recension.

Differences in the proper names, which can also be explained in terms of oral transmission, are another problem for the edited text. The editor would have to resolve

this difficulty by arbitrarily choosing one MS as representing the appropriate or correct forms of the names, and none of the MSS have any particular authority in this regard.

The problem of sources further complicates the editor's task with the *Seege*. In translations the editor generally has recourse to the source material in some semblance of what the translator had access to. In our case it is extremely unlikely that the poem was composed in the presence of a MS of Benoit, and the errors in names and deeds which result (to say nothing of the deliberate rehandling of material) make our received text of Benoit of little value as an editorial tool; we are frequently at a loss even to determine what part of Benoit a particular passage in the *Seege* is from. We cannot, then, use Benoit to correct eyeslip or corruption, because the old editing methods no longer apply.

If traditional editing methods do not apply, how should a new edition be made? It is obvious that such an edition is desirable, even if its only goal is to bring new notes and critical awareness to the poem. But if we must abandon our Lachmannian aspirations of proceeding *semper ad fontes*, how do we present the text? The answer lies within the poem's structure and nature.

To edit the four MSS together is to destroy the nature of the poem. A more appropriate approach would be to present a reasonably diplomatic edition of the L text, and use E to fill in the lacunae of the text, enclosed in square brackets (see Appendix). This presents a maximum of lines of the minstrel poem, while preserving intact the dialect and forms of the most important MS. Abbreviations can be silently expanded as they would automatically be in transmission. As an additional resource, H could be appended, as in Barnicle. The line-numbering, for both variants, should follow Barnicle since her method is logical and lends itself well to comparative study. In fact, as

mentioned in Ch. I, Barnicle's edition will continue to be useful to the serious student and philologist for years to come; but the undergraduate does not need four versions, as he will (at best) read only one. Full notes and a glossary would be of greater benefit to the student than the extra space used for E and A.

The most important thing to remember in our examination of the traditional diction in the *Seege of Troye* is that, more than just being an interesting philological detail, it is an important tool for our understanding of ME poetry. We have realized, since Milman Parry, that orality is an alternate mode of literary art, but there has been no real explanation or acceptance of transitional literatures. The *Seege* stands on the threshold between "lewed" and "lered," popular and sophisticated, oral and literate; its importance as a document of change cannot be overstated. By the very nature of oral poetry, we cannot have a precise picture of its workings, but in poems like the *Seege* we can identify the traces of orality which survive the transition to manuscript. It is easy to understand why the L MS contains a poem that went from the literate through the oral and back to the literate: the dominant modes of transmission were changing once again and it became both possible and useful for the minstrel to write down the recited story. Perhaps this happened as late as 100 years after a proto-*Seege* was composed, either with a pen or by spontaneous recitation; but that hundred years saw the increase of vernacular literacy in England, even amongst the middle and perhaps lower classes. This explains how professional reciters would have both the means and the desire to record their poems in writing. They had not, however, aspired to the kind of literary pretension that would try to change a fundamentally oral poem into a literate work of art, and hence we have a

written record of an orally-transmitted work. The poem is the very essence of liminality, and its two chief variants, L and H, show clearly how rapidly the face of English letters was changing in the fourteenth century.

It would be wishful thinking to expect a more perfect record of ME oral poetics than is found in the *Seege*; this is not to claim that it is a perfect work, but rather that the nature of lettered transmission prevents a better record, and so we must make the best of what we have. The system of traditional diction found therein can be corroborated from the hints in other texts, but it is the process of analysis that is most important. Once terms are defined and parameters are set, it becomes much easier to find traces of the traditional diction in other poems. It is important to use diplomatic single-MS editions or facsimiles in this search, as formulaic systems are all too likely to disappear through editorial harshness. But pursued MS by MS, these formulae will become more apparent, and we will be able to understand more about the oral traditions before the advent of widespread literacy, and consequently understand the liminal literature we have used as a tool as well.

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Appendix: Two Collations of the First Fifty Lines of the *Seege of Troye*

These collations represent two different editorial procedures. They are not meant to represent a new edition, as they lack an *apparatus criticus* and notes. They are merely meant to illustrate the differences between a Lachmannian edition of all four MSS and a diplomatic edition of the L MS with lacunae filled in from E.

Lachmannian approach:

- 1 Sythen þat god þis world wrouȝt
 Heuen and erþe and all of nouȝt
 Mony anturis have by-falle
 Þat we ne knowen heom nouȝt alle
- 5 ffor-þy y wol a stounde dwelle
 And þeo bataile of troye telle
 It may not be forȝeten out
 Þe bataile of Troye þat was stout
 ffor such a were as hit was on
- 10 Neuer is nor neuer non
 Prytty wynter wiþ-oute faile
 Men of grece held bataile
 Wiþ þe kyng of troye stout and grym
 And at þe laste þey ouercome him
- 15 So saide a knyȝt þat þer was
 He was hote sir Daries

He sawe þat weore wiþ-oute faile
 And wrot in grew ilke a bataile
 And seotheren a maister of soutil engyn
 20 Turnede hit fro grew into latyn
 And out of latyn wel y wot
 A clerk on englysch þus hit wrot
 Lordynges in grece sum time þer was
 A prince þat hette pelyas
 25 He was nouȝt of grece þeo hyste lordyng
 ffor ouer him was an hyȝer kyng
 And callid was prynce of polpensoun
 And had a neuow þat hette Jasoun
 Jason was fair mon for þeo nones
 30 Styf and strong of body and bones
 Corteis and hende hardy and bold
 Alle folk him louede ȝong and old
 Þeo kyng callid to him sir Jason
 And tolde him þis resoun
 35 Me is don to undirstonde
 Þat þe kynge of troie hap in his londe
 Þeo feirist þyng aboue molde
 Þat is a schepis skyn of golde

- Myȝtest þou wiþ þy coyntiste gyn
 40 And from heom þat skyn wyn
 And brynge to me þat skyn of gold
 Þy trauaile qwyte þe y wolde
 Parfay saide Jason than
 y schal do al þat y kan
 45 And to þeo troens y schal fare
 Tydynges for to spie þare
 And ȝef y may wiþ any gynne
 Brynge y schal þat schepis skyn
 When þe kyng herde he wolde gon
 50 He sente after wryȝtes mony on

L-text with lacunae filled in from E:

- 1 Sythen god hade þis world wrouȝt
 Heouene and corþe and al of nouȝt
 Mony anturis han by-falle
 Þat we no knowen heom nouȝt alle
 5 ffor-þy y wol a stounde dwelle
 And þeo bataile of troye telle
 [It may not be forȝeten al out

Þe bataile of Troye þat was stout]
 ffor such a bataile as hit was on
 10 y wis me nuste neuer non
 Þrytty wynter wiþ-oute faile
 Men of grece heolden gret bataile
 Wiþ þe kyng of troye stout and grym
 And at þeo laste þey ouercome him
 15 So saide a knyzt þat þer was
 Þat was hote sir Daries
 He sau3 þat weore wiþ-oute faile
 And dude write hit ilke a bataile
 And seothen a maister of sotel engyn
 20 Turnede hit fro gryw in-to latyn
 And out of latyn wel ich wot
 A clerk on englysch þus hit wrot
 Lordynges in grece a mon þer was
 A prynce þat hette pelyas
 25 He was nouzt of grece þeo hyzeste lordyng
 ffor ouer him was an hyzer kyng
 And callid was prynce of polpensoun
 And hadde a neuow þat hette Jasoun
 Jason was fair mon for þeo nones

- 30 Styf and strong of body and bones
 Corteis and hende hardy and bold
 Alle folk him louode 3ong and old
 Þeo kyng callid to him sir Jason
 And tolde him þis reson
 35 Me is don he saide to vndurstonde
 Þat þe dyng of troie haþ in his londe
 Þeo koyntiste þyng aboue molde
 Þat is a schepis skyn of golde
 Myztest þou wiþ þy coyntiste gyn
 40 And from heom þat skyn wyn
 And brynge to me þat skyn of gold
 Þy trauaile wqyte þe y wolde
 Parfay saide Jason þan
 y schal do al þat y kan
 45 And to þeo torens y schal fare
 Tidandis for to spie þare
 Bote 3ef y may wiþ any gynne
 Brynge y schal þat schepis skyn
 When þe kyng herde he wolde gon
 50 He sente after wryztes mony on