

## DESCRIPTION AND CONTENTS OF MS DIGBY 102

## 2.1 PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

The Poems are preserved in a single manuscript in the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford as Digby 102,<sup>1</sup> in which they occupy fols. 98r–127v. The description of the manuscript here given is based on Russell & Kane (1997, p. 16) and autopsy.<sup>2</sup> The Poems are preceded by an incomplete C-text of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (fols. 1r–97v), starting in the middle of Passus II, l. 159. Immediately following the Poems, on fols. 128r–135v, is a metrical paraphrase by Richard Maidstone of the seven Penitential Psalms, under the rubric *Septem psalmi penitentiales*. Maidstone, a Carmelite friar and confessor to John of Gaunt, wrote his English paraphrase of the Penitential Psalms in the late 1380s. Judging from the fact that no fewer than twenty-one manuscripts of the text are still extant,<sup>3</sup> the Maidstone Psalms must have enjoyed a wide readership, boosted undoubtedly by the penitential revival of the times among the laity, and the inclusion of the Penitential Psalms in vernacular primers. Editions have appeared of seven of the twenty-one Maidstone Psalms manuscripts, but not of the version in Digby 102.<sup>4</sup>

The closing text, on fols. 136r–139r, is an anonymous Debate of the Body and the Soul, in English verse, but with the Latin title '*Disputacio inter corpus et animam*'. The Digby version of this poem appeared for the first time in print in Linow (1889, pp. 67–105), together with three other versions. Linow decided against a critical edition (pp. 21–22) because of the numerous mutual anomalies and

<sup>1</sup> Madan & Craster (1922, no. 1073).

<sup>2</sup> The description given by Russell & Kane is inaccurate in places. The codicological collation omits one quire (5<sup>8</sup> instead of 6<sup>8</sup>), and mistakes the two last leaves of quire 20 for fly leaves. In the list of folios bearing quire numbers, '68a' against quire 12 should read '68a' (the number 12 being quite clear), and '107a' should read '106a'. The list of folios bearing catchwords omits fol. 91b. The number of 'English poems on political and religious themes' [i.e. the Poems] is given as 23 rather than 24, presumably as a result of the omission of no. 1508 (for poem XIX) from the *IMEV* listing of the Poems in Brown & Robbins (1943). The size of the text frame is given as 150 x 100 mm and the number of lines per page as 35 throughout the manuscript, both presumably meant as averages, rather than actual figures.

<sup>3</sup> See *NIMEV*, p. 132, no. 1961.

<sup>4</sup> For full bibliographical particulars about manuscripts and editions see Muir (1970, pp. 388, 540–41) and Morey (1999, pp. 177–80). Two frequently referenced editions are of London, British Library, MS Additional 39574 ('The Wheatley Manuscript'), fols. 15v–45r (See Day, 1921, pp. xii–xiii, 1959), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A 389, fols. 13r–20v (see Edden, 1990, pp. 47–137).

deficiencies in the five extant manuscript texts. As far as I am aware, no attempt at a critical edition has been made since.

All texts are written on vellum leaves measuring 220 x 155 mm. At the front are two blank vellum flyleaves, one originally a paste down, the other a free flyleaf. The text quires are preceded by two original blank vellum leaves. A paste-down paper leaf affixed to the inner surface of the back board has a concise table of contents in a cursive hand, probably written in, or soon after 1632, when the codex received its Digby binding (see below). The text reads:

Ploughmans visions  
 Theologicall Tracts  
 The 7 Penitential Psalm's in Lat. and Engl. with some short meditations  
 Disputation betw. Soul and Body

The manuscript collation is as follows: ii + two + [1,2] 3–6<sup>8</sup> 7<sup>4</sup>(lacks 4) 8–14<sup>8</sup> 15<sup>8</sup>( lacks 7) 16–20<sup>8</sup> 21<sup>4</sup> + ii. The text frames measure 150 x 90 mm as far as fol. 121v, and 155 x 95 mm from 122r onwards. The number of lines on a page varies between 30 and 40. All quires are regularly numbered, from 3 to 21. It is safe to assume that the missing quires 1 and 2 accommodated the missing portion of the *Piers Plowman* text.<sup>5</sup> There is no trace of quire or leaf signatures (used to facilitate the internal arrangement of a quire), possibly as the result of cropping. The catchwords,<sup>6</sup> on the other hand, appear regularly, except at the last quire (15) of the *Piers Plowman* text and at quire 21 at the end of the codex. The absence of a catchword at the end of the last quire of a text is one indication that the end of a 'production unit', or 'booklet' had been reached.<sup>7</sup> Another significant feature signalling the end of a production unit is the *caesura*: a blank leaf at the end of the last quire, often cut away.<sup>8</sup> Both quires (15 and 21) lack a catchword and both end with two blank leaves. One of the two final leaves of quire 15 has been cut away. On the basis of this evidence it is reasonable to assume that originally there were two production units, one unit containing the *Piers Plowman* text, while the other unit comprised the texts of the Poems, the Penitential Psalms and the *Disputacio* text. These two production units were then

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<sup>5</sup> Russell & Kane (1997, p. 16 n. 117) estimated that the two quires could not have been eights (i.e. containing eight leaves), and that a four and a six were most likely.

<sup>6</sup> The first word[s] of a new quire on the last folio of the preceding quire to ensure that quires are arranged in their proper order before binding.

<sup>7</sup> The term 'production unit' was introduced by Kwakkel (2002a, p. 4) for 'a group of quires that formed a material unity at the time of production', and 'were copied in one go by either one or more scribes'.

<sup>8</sup> The absence of a catchword and the existence of blank leaves (often cut away) at the end of the last quire of a text, are two of the features identifying a 'booklet' (roughly the equivalent of a 'production unit') as listed by Hanna (1996, p. 30).

bound together to form what Kwakkel terms a ‘usage unit’.<sup>9</sup> It is plausible that the two production units were meant to form a usage unit right from the start. For one thing, the *mise-en-page* of the two units bears close similarity, as do the penwork and the treatment of the capitals. For another, the *Piers Plowman* text and the Poems are executed in one hand (see section 2.3), and both poetic texts were written across the page like prose.<sup>10</sup> Prior to binding, all quires of the two production units were consecutively numbered, presumably to make sure that the two units were bound in their proper order. The first two quires must have got lost, since the first quire in the manuscript’s present state bears the number 3. The resulting truncated codex was foliated at some later time, possibly when it received its present binding in or shortly after 1634. The case for Digby 102 as a usage unit has also been argued on grounds of textual coherence. Coleman (1981, p. 98) qualifies Digby 102 as a deliberate religious-political compilation. Bergström-Allen (2002, p. 6) sees Digby 102 as ‘a mixture of religious texts’ and a ‘miscellany of entirely “devotional” materials.’ The same point is argued by Edden (1990, p. 12). Still, textual coherence alone does not answer the question at what point of time these texts were bound together to form the present codex. The physical analysis of Digby 102 described above demonstrates that it forms not only a composite, but also that it was probably meant to be a usage unit right from the start.

The codex shows no objective evidence of the time of its origin, but it was almost certainly written somewhere around 1425. The script is typical of the early years of the fifteenth century, as will be demonstrated in section 2.2, while the last of the twenty-four Poems must have been composed not earlier than 1422 and not later than 1427, as will be argued in section 2.3.

The manuscript is bound in brown calf, the upper and lower boards bearing an embossed gold-stamped oval device with the legend

#### INSIGNIA+KENELMI+DIGBY+EQUITIS+AVRATIO

Kenelm Digby’s name and motto also appear in writing at the top of fol. 1r. There are no other indications of ownership. The manuscript is one of a collection of 233 volumes, five rolls, and a bound catalogue of the collection, which Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–1665) received by bequest in 1632 from Thomas Allen, his teacher and benefactor at Gloucester Hall (now Worcester College), and which

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<sup>9</sup> Kwakkel (2002a, pp. 5–6; 2002b, pp. 14–15).

<sup>10</sup> Kwakkel in his study of a collection of Middle Dutch manuscripts points out that several of the codices analysed contain production units meant to be compiled from the start, and identifies the signalling features of this procedure (2002a, p. 4; manuscript examples: pp. 264, 275).

Archbishop Laud persuaded him to donate to the University of Oxford in 1634.<sup>11</sup> The manuscript is now in a poor state. The lower board is detached, the back is missing and the sewing is breaking down. The two hinged clasps are missing as well, with only their brass board fixtures remaining.

## 2.2 EXECUTION OF THE TEXT

Just as the three other texts in the manuscript, the Poems are written in long lines like prose, which was not uncommon for stanzaic verse. Some scribes still followed the practice established in the early Middle Ages of writing the stanzas of a hymn like prose. The hymn stanzas were sung to the same recurring melody, and since the melodies were familiar, the text could be written out like prose.<sup>12</sup>

The Poems, including the marginalia, are written in a single hand. The basic script is Anglicana, with influences of Secretary. The hand shows all the distinctive letter forms of Anglicana: the two-compartment *a*, with a large upper lobe extending above the level of the other linear letters; *d* with a looped ascender; a two-compartment figure 8 form of *g*, long forked *r*, *w* like two looped *l*'s, and circular *e*.<sup>13</sup> There is an overlay of some Secretary traits, however: angular broken strokes and cusped 'horns' on the heads, lending some of the angularity or 'prickly' appearance of the Secretary form to what was basically still Anglicana script. This variety of Anglicana is typical of the early years of the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Parkes (1969, p. xvi) remarks about the Anglicana, as it had developed around the turn of the fifteenth century, that it 'settled down into the kind of handwriting which could be used not only for writing documents but also as a cheap book hand', a qualification that Digby 102 satisfies.

Punctuation is largely limited to division marks between verse lines and between stanzas. The verse line division is a black *punctus elevatus*, to use Parkes' terminology,<sup>15</sup> on which subsequently the rubricator alternately placed a red *punctus elevatus* and a red *virgula suspensiva* (*l*). The alternation has

<sup>11</sup> See Madan & Craster (1922, p. 69), Craster (1952, p. 97) and Rogers (1991, p. 91). The three sources cited give different, at any rate confusing, figures as to the number of manuscripts which Digby donated to the University of Oxford.

<sup>12</sup> See Parkes (1992, pp. 98–99). He only gives instances from Continental texts (p. 148 n. 20), and mentions the *Piers Plowman* text in Digby 102, like the Poems written across the page as prose (pp. 104, 150 n. 67, 200–201 [plate 23]), but to make a different point. He argues that the treatment of alliterative verse in England was influenced by the (binary structure) of psalm verses, 'affording a familiar and authoritative precedent for the treatment of such vernacular verse, using layout and punctuation to signal its structure'. Unfortunately, Parkes makes no mention of such influence on other verse forms.

<sup>13</sup> See Parkes (1969, pp. xiv–xv) and Petti (1977, p. 14).

<sup>14</sup> See Parkes (1969, p. xxii, pl. 2 (ii) and Petti (1977, p. 15, pl. 9).

<sup>15</sup> See Parkes (1992, pp. 42–43, 306–307).

nothing to do with rhyme or syntax,<sup>16</sup> as III.(21) shows. Line 3 is missing, but the alternation continues just the same till what is properly line 5. Putting a *virgula* at the end of that line, the rubricator apparently realized that he was out of step and would end the stanza with a *punctus elevatus* instead of a *virgula*, as in the previous twenty stanzas. So he changed step: in line 6 he followed up with another *virgula*.

Initials were used to mark the beginning of each new poem, with to the right the rubricated title, inserted inside the text block and arranged over one or two lines, according to the length of the title. The initials are two or three lines high, with the exception of the capital ⟨I⟩'s at the beginning of poems II and XXIII, which are seven lines high and placed in the margin instead of inside the text block. All initials were executed in blue with red penwork and ornamenting frills ascending and descending the left margin and, depending on the position on the page, along the top or bottom margin.

The stanzas are separated by a black double *virgula* (//), as a direction for the rubricator to insert a pilcrow or paraph (¶),<sup>17</sup> in alternatively red and blue. Occasionally, the rubricator missed out on a //, as for instance between XIII.(1) and (2), (18) and (19), and between XXIV.(8) and (9). In XVI the rubricator mixed up the paraph colours at stanzas 8 (blue instead of red) and 9 (red instead of blue), which threw the alternation out of kilter, and Kennedy into confusion (2000, p. 134 n. 24).<sup>18</sup> Figures are placed between dots, as for instance in the title of XVI. The frills at the end of some of the titles, clearly inserted as space allowed, must be interpreted as space-fillers, in the face of Parkes' warning that they can be misidentified with a variant of the '7'-shaped *positura*, or end-of-section mark.<sup>19</sup>

The colours must have been added in several stages. On fols. 119v and 120r (halfway quire 18) the titles in red of two poems are missing,<sup>20</sup> as well as the red verse line division marks (not the red pilcrows, as Kail says [p. vii]). Also missing, to complicate matters, is the major initial (in red *and* blue) marking the new poem on fol. 119v, whereas fol. 120r has an initial capital with its colours complete. Kail's conclusion that fols. 119 and 120 were turned over together, therefore needs qualification. It is what

<sup>16</sup> Where Kennedy (2000, p. 134 n. 24) remarks with respect to the line endings in XVI that 'there seems to be no rationale to the choice of one of these (i.e. *virgule* and *punctus elevatus*) over the other', she might have added 'except that they were deliberately meant to alternate'.

<sup>17</sup> See Parkes (1992, pp. 43–44, 305, 307).

<sup>18</sup> The rubricator's mix-up at stanzas 8 and 9 led Kennedy (*ibid.*) to refer to the blue stanza paraphs in XVI as 'inconsequential' and (apparently) the red paraphs as 'rhetorical punctuation'.

<sup>19</sup> See Parkes (1992, p. 43).

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Macray (1883, col. 117) did not notice the absence of these two titles. Hence he lists twenty-two, instead of twenty-four Poems in his catalogue. Kail in his edition gave these two Poems titles of his own devising: 'God's Appeal to Man' (XIX) and 'How Man's Flesh Complained to God against Christ' (XX). Nuttall (2007, pp. 128, 129), apparently unfamiliar with the original manuscript text, assumes that Kail assigned titles to all twenty-four Poems.

may have happened only if the poem titles and division marks were done jointly in one ‘red only’ operation, whilst the major initials and the pilcrow were done jointly in a separate ‘red and blue’ colouring process. Fols. 119 and 120 in that case could indeed have been turned over together in the course of the ‘red only’ operation, whilst in the ‘red and blue’ run the rubricator missed the initial capital on fol. 119 altogether, because the scribe hardly, if at all, indented the margin to make room for the initial, as in all other instances.

New verse lines begin with a small capital.

### 2.3 THE DATING OF THE POEMS

About the date or dates of origin of the twenty-four Poems in Digby 102 nothing can be said with absolute certainty. No dates are given in the Poems themselves, and the mention of one or two historically verifiable events merely provides a *terminus ad quem*, demonstrating that the relevant poems were necessarily written after the occurrence of these events. Kail made a bold effort to put a date to the Poems on the basis of internal historical evidence. He came to the conclusion that the Poems ‘contain allusions to parliamentary transactions and to other affairs, by means of which we are able to fix their dates’ (p. x). It is perhaps useful here, after a hundred years, to put Kail’s analysis to the test.

In six out of the twenty-four Poems,<sup>21</sup> Kail traced passages which he ascribed to parliamentary business transacted in 1399, 1401, 1404, 1406, 1410 and 1414, as documented in the Rolls of Parliament covering these years (*Rotuli Parliamentorum*, 1832).<sup>22</sup> Between the years 1399–1414 four more parliaments were convened (in 1402, 1407, 1411, and 1413), with respect to which Kail was apparently unable to detect any references. At any rate, they went without comment in Kail’s analysis. In the last eleven Poems, XIV to XXIV, Kail did not trace any parliamentary business either, but he was able to identify four Poems<sup>23</sup> which he associated with non-parliamentary political and religious events, which occurred in 1407, 1413, 1417, 1419 and 1421.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in Kail’s analysis, fourteen Poems would appear to contain no allusions at all to any concrete events, political or otherwise.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Poems I, III, IV, VIII, IX, XIII.

<sup>22</sup> Vol. III, pp. 433–34, 442, 444, 456–57, 459–60, 468, 470, 525, 527–28, 591, 594, 623–24, 626–27, 644–45; vol. IV, pp. 21–24, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Poems XII, XIV, XVI, XVIII.

<sup>24</sup> Kingsford (1913, p. 233) observed that the political poems in the Digby 102 collection were ‘written with only a general reference to events of the time’, and that Kail was in fact ‘reading too much’ into these pieces. Nevertheless, without further argument, Kingsford, with Kail, puts the Digby poems down to the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

<sup>25</sup> Poems II, V, VI, VII, X, XI, XV, XVII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV.

The passages which Kail identified as referring to parliamentary business are in themselves not conclusive. The subject matter is always of a rather general nature, dealing with popular *topoi* of which one finds numerous instances in political and religious prose texts and verse of the time.<sup>26</sup> The themes touched upon in the Poems contain warnings against tyranny, slanderers, flatterers, corrupt judges, and greedy and dissolute clergy; admonitions to keep the peace; condemnation of people who clip money, use false weights and pass unjust sentences. These are all of them topics that appear time and again in Middle English complaint literature. What does lend credibility to Kail's hypothesis that these topical subjects in the Poems allude to petitions of the Commons in parliament is the fact that in the Poems these topics appear in the same order, and at roughly the same intervals as the parliamentary debates in which they are supposed to have taken place.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the four poems which contain the non-parliamentary occurrences signalled by Kail also follow the order in which they actually occurred over time, and dovetail nicely with the timetable of the parliamentary themes. Of the fourteen 'undatable' poems in Kail's scheme, eight are interspersed between the 'datable' poems, while the remaining six are found in a solid cluster at the close of the series.

If the time-scheme thus established is accepted as valid, we may broadly distinguish three periods in which the Poems were written. The first fifteen years covered the years 1400 to 1414, during which the writer's main interest lay with Parliament and its affairs. Then followed a slightly overlapping period, from 1413 to about 1421, when his parliamentary interests had come to a halt, but when he was still acutely interested in political affairs both at home and abroad. The religious and devotional issues which in his earlier period had roused the author's occasional interest came to occupy him completely in the third period. As I will argue in section 3.1.2, the turning point was 1421 when he withdrew from worldly occupations to lead a contemplative life. This period may have covered the years 1421 to 1428, if we assume that the writer continued the year-on-year rhythm of the preceding poems. Such periodicity is, however, no more than conjectural, since none of the poems XIX to XXIV provide the slightest clue connecting them to any dateable event.

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<sup>26</sup> Examples of religious 'abuse' poetry are the anonymous *Piers the Plowman's Crede* (Dean ed., 1991, pp. 1–49) concerning the regular clergy, and *The Plowman's Tale*, also anonymous, about the secular clergy (Dean ed., 1991, pp. 51–114). Popular political and social 'abuse' themes are for instance found interspersed throughout Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* (Blyth, 1999) and in the anonymous *Mum and the Sothsegger* (Dean ed., 2000). See also Peter (1956, pp. 41–103) on the nature and themes of moral complaint in Medieval England, and Scattergood (1971, pp. 299–349) on verse complaints in the wake of changes in social values, quoting liberally from the Digby Poems.

<sup>27</sup> See the 'Table of Dates' in Appendix 1. Robbins (1975, p. 1417) approaches the timing problem along the same lines, albeit on scantier evidence; he also arrives at the conclusion that there is 'strong evidence for Kail's identification' of some topical subjects in the Poems with specific parliamentary deliberations.

## 2.4 THE DIALECT OF THE POEMS

In section 2.3 I concluded that, in confirmation of Kail's reasoning (pp. x–xxii), the Poems must have been written in the course of the first quarter of the fifteenth century. At that point in time the diversity in written Middle English since the days of the Conquest was still very much in evidence. In which particular dialect the author wrote the Poems we have no means of knowing. The text that we have at our disposal in Digby 102 provides clues as to the provenance of the copyist (or the place where he received his training as a scribe), or of the exemplar from which he transcribed the text, rather than the provenance of the author. Kail (pp. ix–x) thought it 'probable that the writer lived in the western or in the south-western midland'.<sup>28</sup> Robbins (1975, p. 1416) sought the basic dialect in the East Midlands, 'perhaps round Derbyshire'. Neither of the two commentators added supporting arguments for their opinions. With *LALME*, the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (McIntosh *et al.*, 1986), we now have at our disposal the tool by which to arrive systematically at a reliable dialect allocation that was not yet available to Kail and Robbins. At the heart of *LALME* is a large collection of manuscripts of known regional provenance. The scribal usage of each manuscript is typified in a so-called 'linguistic profile' (LP), consisting of the scribal forms of a standard set of linguistically discriminant items: the so-called 'questionnaire'. Each scribal form in the manuscript LP is plotted on a so-called 'dot map'. Each dot map thus records the distribution and frequency of all occurrences of a particular scribal form or set of forms. Grey dots mark the locality of all LPs, black dots mark the actual occurrences. *LALME* provides the editor of any late Middle English text not incorporated in the *LALME* sample of anchor texts with the tools to assess its regional origin. In principle he may adopt the same procedure as outlined above: construct an LP of his text, identify in *LALME* the dot maps of the LP items concerned, select the dot maps showing cohesive and clear-cut occurrence clusters, and ideally find the area of common occurrence of the selected forms.

I accordingly started the approximation of the dialect domain of the Poems with the construction of a linguistic profile of the text – in other words, the construction of a selective index of the dialectally significant scribal forms of the text. I did not for this purpose use the main 'questionnaire' of *LALME*, building an LP 'from scratch'. Instead, I grafted the LP of the Poems onto that of the *Piers Plowman* text immediately preceding the Poems in Digby 102, and already localized as one of the *LALME* anchor texts.<sup>29</sup> Appendix 2 lists the scribal features of the *Piers Plowman* text as shown in the *LALME* LP, and

<sup>28</sup> Kail presumably meant 'the copyist' rather than 'the writer'.

<sup>29</sup> 'Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 102. MS in one hand. ff. 1–97: *Piers Plowman* C-version. LP 7770. Grid 387 243. Worcs.' (*LALME*, vol. 1, p. 147). In a discussion of the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts elsewhere in *LALME*, the editors describe the area of provenance of the C-versions (among them the

in parallel the scribal features of the same items as found in the Poems. The resulting composite LP allows of a ready comparison of the scribal features of the Poems with the dialect of a text that (a) had already been localized in *LALME*, (b) immediately precedes the Poems text in Digby 102, and, most importantly, (c) had been copied in a hand that is indistinguishable from that of the scribe who copied the Poems text.<sup>30</sup> I arrived at this conclusion on the basis of a character-by-character inspection *in situ* of the two texts. Prof. Michael Benskin, who kindly agreed to inspect the manuscript, considered, whilst not carrying out a detailed morphological analysis, that there was nothing to suggest that more than one scribe was involved: ‘continuity rather than discontinuity is what impressed me’.<sup>31</sup> His conclusion is in line with Kwakkel’s observation, where he discusses paleographic identifications, that ‘the *aspect* of a scribal hand, the impression the script makes, is usually unique for a specific copyist’.<sup>32</sup> Russell & Kane’s unequivocal statement (see note 30 above) that they found ‘an unmistakable change of scribe at fol. 128a’ (i.e. where the Poems end), by implication confirms my conclusion that the two scripts are paleographically indistinguishable. However, the absence of absolute proof that the text of the Poems was copied by the scribe whose provenance had already been established in *LALME* as that of the Malvern area required independent dialectological justification in a comparison of the scribal features of the *Piers Plowman* text and the text of the Poems.

The next phase in the process of approximating the dialect domain of the Poems involved the elimination from its LP all insufficiently attested forms as unreliable for diagnostic purposes. Eliminated for that reason were *eni* (2x), *beth* (1x), *lasse* (4x) and *wes* (1x), although they temptingly feature very prominently in the South-west Midlands, the linguistic domain of *Piers Plowman*. Strictly speaking, *wes* (III.142) was not a candidate for inclusion for another reason, as the form appears only for rhyming purposes (*wes-pes*), where *pes* is inevitable as part of the consistently recurring stanzaic refrain. Elsewhere in the Poems only the form *was* appears. *Arn*, although decidedly lacking sufficient attestation, was

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Digby 102 text) as ‘concentrated in the south-west Midlands (especially South Worcestershire and South-east Herefordshire, i.e. the Malvern Hills)’ (*LALME*, vol. 1, p. 24).

<sup>30</sup> With respect to the scribal hand, the *LALME* description in the previous note is slightly confusing. It suggests that the whole of Digby 102 is in one hand, which is not the case, since, in the words of Russell & Kane (1997, p. 16), there is ‘an unmistakable change of scribe at fol. 128a’, that is to say commencing with the text of the Penitential Psalms. Alternatively, the *LALME* description may mean to say that only fols. 1–97 with the *Piers Plowman* text are in one hand. Russell & Kane (1997, p. 16) leave a shade of doubt about *Piers Plowman* being written by one scribe, as they found that within that text the script of fols. 36a–70b ‘differs strikingly in being much smaller than that of the passages surrounding it’, observing at the same time that the smaller script is ‘of the same character’. Possibly, the confusing note in *LALME* may have deceived Bergström-Allen (2002, p. 6), when he states that the whole of Digby 102 (‘a diverse mix of texts’) was ‘written by one hand’.

<sup>31</sup> Private e-mail correspondence, December 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Kwakkel (2002a, p. 7).

eliminated for a different reason. *Arn* is typical for Norfolk, hardly in evidence anywhere else (dot map 120), and as an isolated occurrence in the Poems it qualifies as a relict form. Incidentally, *ham* and *knawen* should also be labelled as exotic relicts, being exclusively Northern and occurring only once in XXIV.210 and 212, respectively. From the list of sufficiently attested scribal forms I then eliminated all forms whose distribution pattern in the dot maps lacked a diagnostically significant focal area. What resulted was a limited set of forms, each of which showed a cohesive, thickly dotted geographical cluster within an otherwise evenly scattered distribution pattern.<sup>33</sup> The most significant are *ech(e)* (dot map 86), *mony* (91), *moch(el)* (103), *wole* (164), *wolde* [*sg.*] (170), *from* (176), *panne* (190), *nou3t* (288), *worche-* (315), *whenne/whanne* (343), *noper* (479), *bren(-)* (970), *3ate(s)* (1000), *hauen* (1011). As it turned out, the thickly dotted focal areas in each of the relevant maps form a geographic ‘fit’<sup>34</sup> around the Malverns in South-west Worcestershire. The ample attestation of the forms in the text, together with the significant geographic co-occurrence of the clusters, justify the conclusion that the scribal dialect of the Poems originated in the Malvern area on the South-western border of Worcestershire. It should be mentioned at this point that the Malverns constitute the area that Kail in 1904 pronounced as the probable area of provenance of the text of the Poems. Another conclusion to be drawn from the delimitation process described above is that Derbyshire cannot possibly serve as the dialect’s home land, as Robbins presumed. The decisive factor here is the domain of *ech(e)*. This form is thoroughly attested in the Poems, with 75 occurrences spread throughout the twenty-four pieces, without any variant spellings. The dialect locality of *ech(e)* is sharply limited to the area South of a virtually straight line from the Wash in the East, passing just North of the Worcestershire Malverns into Herefordshire in the west. The clear-cut demarcation boundary of *ech(e)* on the dot map, together with the high occurrence frequency and even spread in the text, gives sufficient stability to the conclusion that Derbyshire as the area of origin of the Poems is well ‘beyond the pale’. Further evidence derives from the fact that no fewer than seven scribal forms of the LP of the Poems are not found at all in the Derbyshire area: *eche* (each), *3ut* (yet), *thow* (though), *ey3en* (eyes), *owe* (own), *moche* (much) and *di3e* (die), while another five forms in the Poems are of only rare to very rare occurrence in Derbyshire: *eny* (any), *pan* (than), *pou3* (though), *er* (before) and *deye* (die).

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<sup>33</sup> Drawing the lines bounding the core domains of forms in the dot maps, to some extent had to be a matter of judgement, depending on the patterning of the dots in each particular map. Due care was taken to see to it that the core domains were so assigned only if they did not show unattested dots.

<sup>34</sup> See *LALME* (vol. 1, pp. 10–12) for a description of the ‘fit’-technique. In essence it is a method of establishing the area of common occurrence of a number of linguistic forms by registering them, each on top of the other, on an overlay of tracing paper. Benskin (1991, pp. 9–26) describes the technique in much greater detail.

Two conclusions may be drawn from the above observations. One: it has been established beyond reasonable paleographical doubt that the texts of *Piers Plowman* and the Poems in Digby 102 are executed in the same scribal hand. And two: it has also been demonstrated on dialectological grounds that the two texts belong to the same geographical area, the Malverns. Yet, as the composite LP in Appendix 1 shows, the scribal features of the two texts are not in every respect identical. Here two explanations, concurrent rather than alternatively, offer themselves. In the first place, allowance must be made for a considerable degree of variation within the scribe's own dialect. 'Within a single scribal dialect, for any given item, two or more forms may occur as functional equivalents'.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, a medieval scribe was not at all bound to leave the language of his exemplar unchanged like a modern copyist. A scribe might convert his text consistently into his own dialect, replacing the forms of his exemplar by his own preferred usage. Or he might faithfully copy his text *literatim*, making no changes to the usage of his exemplar, irrespective of his own preference. Or, a third possibility, a scribe might partially copy faithfully from his exemplar and partially follow his own usage.<sup>36</sup> In the present instance, if the scribe was a 'translator' who was wont to copy his exemplar consistently into his own dialect, the composite LP of the *Piers Plowman* and the Poems texts would not have shown any mutually exclusive variant forms. As an alternative, the LP at first sight presents a plausible case for a *literatim* scribe who worked from two different exemplars wholly disregarding his own usage. However, in that case the spelling variants as shown in the LP of the Poems should have been consistent throughout the twenty-four Poems. As it is, he copied poem XXIV with ten anomalous variants, spelled uniquely different from the spelling of the same forms in any of the other poems. All scribal variants appear to be fairly evenly spread over the twenty-four pieces, with the exception of eight, which occur exclusively in poem XXIV, and two which feature exclusively in the other twenty-three. The relevant form variants are: *from* (vs *fro* and *fram* [1x] in all other pieces), *a3eyn* (vs *a3en*, *a3ens* and *agaynes*), *sen*, *strengthe* (vs *strengþe* and *strengþ*), *wher* (vs *where*), *bot* (vs *but* and *bote*), *ey3en* (vs *ey3e* and *eyen*), *tylle* (vs *tyl*). Conversely, *when* and *whan* are wholly absent in XXIV, where *whenne* and *whanne* are dominant. The two Northern forms *ham* and *knawen*, also exclusive for poem XXIV, do not count, being mere relicts (see above). If the scribe was a true mirror-copyist, a rare phenomenon in itself, the abrupt change in spelling after poem XXIII would suggest that he transcribed poem XXIV, as the only piece from a set of twenty-four, from a different exemplar, which in its turn was also transcribed by a mirror-copyist. Such a concurrence of exceptions is of course possible, but highly unlikely. The most plausible conclusion seems to be that the scribe was a 'mixer', who partially copied faithfully from his exemplar and partly followed his own

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<sup>35</sup> Benskin & Laing (1981, p. 75).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 56, and Laing (2004, p. 52). Laing dubs the three types of copyist the 'Literatim', the 'Translator', and the 'Mixer'.

spelling notions. The forms that are identical in *Piers Plowman* and the Poems would then stem from the scribe's own usage, whereas the mutually exclusive forms originate from the respective exemplars of the *Piers Plowman* and the Poems texts. For instance, as can be seen in the composite LP, the scribe used the form *lyue* in his copy of *Piers Plowman* and in his copy of the Poems, in addition to *libbe* in *Piers Plowman* and *leue* in the Poems. In other words, the exemplars of the two texts had a mutually exclusive form for 'to live'. These two variants faithfully reappear in the scribe's respective copies, in addition to the scribe's own variant in both copies, whilst all three variant forms: *lyue*, *libbe*, *leue*, fit into the same dialect continuum of South-west Worcestershire. Other combinative patterns of variant forms can similarly be traced to the respective exemplars or to the scribe's own usage. For instance, as the composite LP in Appendix 2 shows, 'yet' appears as both *3ut* and *3it* in the Poems, but only as *3ut* in *Piers Plowman*. The inference here is that the unique variant *3it* in the Poems text stems from its exemplar, while *3ut* in the Poems and in *Piers Plowman* follows the scribe's own usage, whether or not this variant happened to coincide with that of the exemplar. By the same token, a single identical form in both texts, for instance *here* for 'her', was either a consistently faithful copy of the same single form in both exemplars, or the result of the scribe's own usage, whether the exemplar(s) had the same or a different variant form.

The assignation of variant forms either to the scribe's own usage, or to the respective exemplars of the *Piers Plowman* and the Poems texts, as just discussed, is also relevant in considering the possible existence in the Poems of traces of yet another linguistic variant, known as Chancery English.<sup>37</sup> If the author of the Poems was a Chancery clerk, as argued in section 3.1.2, traces of so-called Chancery English may possibly be found in the preserved text of the Poems. For such an analysis to be valid, two conditions must be satisfied. First, the exemplar of the preserved text must be a holograph. If the exemplar was itself a scribal copy, the problem would become practically unmanageable. As it happens, there is a direct link between the Malvern area, where the Poems text was copied, and Westminster, where the author worked and lived. In section 3.1.2 it is argued that the author of the Poems *worked* as a Westminster Chancery clerk, but *lived* as a Benedictine inmate within the precincts of Westminster Abbey, which counted the priory of Great Malvern among its subservient cells. This circumstance makes it at least conceivable for us to assume that the scribe of the Poems copied the text straight from the authorial holograph. The second condition for a valid analysis is that the preserved text must contain variant forms definitely assignable to the authorial exemplar. The underscored forms in the LP of the Poems in Appendix 2 all represent such variants, and are thus available for comparison with any

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<sup>37</sup> See Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2006, pp. 274–75, 286–87) for a discussion of the Chancery variety of English as a formative factor in the development of standard English in the course of the fifteenth century.

contemporary text showing the variety of English used by Chancery clerks. The Poems were written between 1400 and 1428 at the latest,<sup>38</sup> and might therefore be conveniently compared with the earliest form of Chancery English, Henry V's 151 so-called Signet Letters, which were written between 1417 and 1422.<sup>39</sup> A factor impeding ready comparison, however, is that the quite early variety of Chancery English in the Signet Letters still showed considerable regional variation. This has been demonstrated in an, admittedly limited, case study of the representation of the three forms of the third person plural pronoun: 'they', 'them' and 'their', in the Signet Letters.<sup>40</sup> These three items were shown to be represented with respectively seven, five and six variant forms. The one variant in the Poems that allows of comparison: *pei*, is thus only one of seven variant forms of 'they' in the Letters, which hardly qualifies as significant to ascertain beyond doubt the presence of early Chancery English in the Poems. A comprehensive comparative analysis of the two texts required for this purpose, however, is beyond the editorial scope of the present study.

## 2.5 EDITORIAL POLICY

### 2.5.1 THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The Digby Poems are preserved in only one copy. This fact relieves us from the stemmatic difficulties attending the editing of texts preserved in multiple copies, 'the commonest situation with Middle English material and the one in which editorial problems are most likely to arise' (Hudson, 1977, p. 39). Unique survival still does not relieve us from the problem of deciding how a medieval text, unique or otherwise, should be presented to the modern reader. The issue needs the prior consideration of the question what purpose or purposes such an edition should serve. Most modern editions of Middle English texts seek the virtually impossible of serving several masters at once: the paleographer, the philologist, the linguist and the literary historicist.<sup>41</sup> Serving a multiplicity of masters inevitably leads to compromises, usually referred to as 'editorial'.

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<sup>38</sup> See section 2.3 on the dating of the Poems.

<sup>39</sup> Fisher *et al.* (1984).

<sup>40</sup> Heikkonen (1996). It should be noted that there is a difference of scholarly opinion as to the driving force(s) behind the development of standard English. Where Heikkonen signals that 'Henry V is claimed to have had a strong influence on the development of this standard variety [of Chancery English] by his adoption of English as the language of his transactions', Horobin & Smith (2002), in their discussion of the written standardization of Middle English (pp. 34-36) state that 'the standardization of spelling seems to have been a by-product of the general elaboration of English, and not the result of a centrally controlled codification', in other words 'a communicatively driven response to the set of functions which English developed during the course of the fifteenth century.'

<sup>41</sup> See Gerritsen (1963, pp. 274-75) and Hudson (1977, p. 38).

As I have set out in my introduction to the present edition, my purpose with the present edition of the Poems is to open one more window upon the social scene in late-medieval England, as it presented itself to an educated, keenly interested contemporary observer. This is an equally impossible ambition, according to modern deconstructionist theory:

Historical being is always deferred: it is not a presence but an *effect* of presence created by textuality. There is no *hors texte*, and in trying to restore the historical real we enter into a labyrinthine world that not only forecloses access to history in its original form but calls into question its very existence as an object of knowledge. Writing absorbs the social context into a textuality that is wholly alienated from the real.<sup>42</sup>

Labyrinthine the deconstructed world is indeed. In a vicious circle it leads inescapably back to what it denies as an ‘object of knowledge’: the text, as the unique means of taking cognizance of the author’s interpretation of his social environment. Writing, in its post-Saussurian sense of merely constituting an arbitrary system of linguistic signs, may carry nothing else but a ‘socially construable meaning rather than an image of reality’, where ‘meaning is produced by the internal relation of signs to one another, rather than by reference to extralinguistic phenomena’.<sup>43</sup> Yet, it is the only backtracking route available to us. Fortunately, philological theorists concur with this line of thinking. The New Historicists among them recognize that ‘all texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in that world, with which they entertain often complex and contestatory relations’. And so ‘we should ... seek to locate texts within specific social sites that themselves disclose political, economic and social pressures that condition a culture’s discourse at any given moment’.<sup>44</sup>

If the Digby Poems can thus be seen as a social document, they may legitimately be transcribed for the sole purpose of producing a text that is accessible to the modern reader as exactly that: a social document. If, as has been pointed out authoritatively before, it is in practice irreconcilable with semiological-linguistic requirements for a transcript to say exactly what it says in the manuscript,<sup>45</sup> there is thus no need to justify infringements upon the base text as ‘compromises’, nor as the arbitrary outcome of ‘editorial practice’. They are the logical consequences of the main purpose of this edition, that is to present a social document.

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<sup>42</sup> Patterson (1987, p. 59). See also Spiegel (1990, pp. 59–86).

<sup>43</sup> Spiegel (1990, p. 61).

<sup>44</sup> Spiegel (1990, pp. 77 and 85, respectively).

<sup>45</sup> Gerritsen (1963, p. 274).

## 2.5.2 PUNCTUATION

Editorial infringement upon a medieval text is most forcefully felt where modern punctuation is used. This is especially true if the base text has no punctuation whatsoever, as is the case in the Poems (apart from the marks between verse lines and stanzas). Norman Blake, among others, argues persuasively in favour of abstaining from the use of modern punctuation.<sup>46</sup> His main point is that ‘the modern editor’s approach is ... to imply that there is only one possible meaning and his punctuation strives to make that meaning obvious to his readers.’ Medieval writers, on the other hand, ‘would have allowed their audiences to understand what they had composed in rather diverse ways.’ However, where a medieval reader would grasp these diverse meanings, a modern reader, when faced with the unusual syntactical structures that constraints of versification forced upon the poet, will grasp a meaning only after laborious analysis. In view of my editorial purpose as stated above, I have taken this analyzing task upon myself, expressing the result by means of syntactical, modern punctuation.

In my edition, deviations from Kail’s usage of punctuation are frequent, but do not cause differences in meaning. A striking difference is that Kail systematically marked the characteristic metrical caesura of the Middle English iambic tetrameter<sup>47</sup> with a comma, which makes the style seem jerky. Even though the caesura typically corresponds to a syntactic break, it does not automatically warrant a comma. German punctuation usage may have played a role,<sup>48</sup> but occasionally it would seem that if Kail had not placed a comma, it would have benefited the natural flow of the verse line. For instance, in XIV.(1), the caesural commas in the first four lines are defensible, but would not be missed when left out in the remaining ones. Below are Kail’s and my versions:

The herrere degre, þe more wys ;	The herrere degre, þe more wys;
Þe gretter worschip, þe noblere fame ;	Þe gretter worschip, þe noblere fame.
Þe herrere degre, þe more nys ;	Þe herrere degre, þe more nys;
Þe gretter foly, þe more blame.	Þe gretter foly, þe more blame.
After foly, folweþ þe shame ;	After foly folweþ þe shame.
Repreued of frendis, and scorned of fo,	Repreued of frendis and scorned of fo,
After þy dede, ressayue þy name.	After þy dede ressayue þy name.
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.	Eche man be war er hym be wo. (XIV.(1))

In XIII.73–74, to give another example, the comma in l. 74 in Kail’s edition is awkward: ‘Who skorneþ hem þat telleþ hem wit, / Is rebelle to God, þat repreueþ reson’, where ‘þat repreueþ reson’ is a subject clause to be linked up with ‘who’, rather than a relative clause to be linked up to ‘God’.

<sup>46</sup> Blake (1977, pp. 66–74).

<sup>47</sup> See section 3.3.1 for a discussion of the metrical structure of the Poems.

<sup>48</sup> Josef Kail presumably hailed from Austria. See Kail (1889), signed ‘J. Kail, Wien’.

The manuscript marks between the verse lines have not been reproduced in my edition, nor have the stanzaic pilcrows of the manuscript, which have been replaced by stanza numbers. Unlike in the manuscript, in the present edition the poems are numbered.

### 2.5.3 SPELLING

Abbreviations and contractions have been silently expanded. Underlining or italicizing them would not have served my stated editorial purpose (see above).

As usual in late-medieval texts, final *-e* offers a special case. The scribe of the Poems indiscriminately either writes out final *-e* or adds a downstroke or horizontal line to the final consonant(s). The downstroke or flourish appears on *d*, a straight line over *l*, *p* and *n*, and through *h* (*h̄*), a wavy line through *ll* (*ll̄*). To expand or not to expand? Kail avoided the choice in his edition by scrupulously printing all the relevant symbols. The choice is indeed not an easy one.<sup>49</sup> By the fifteenth century, final *-e* had largely ceased to be pronounced. In verse texts, however, it lingered on for reasons of rhythm, metre or rhyme. Not unexpectedly, in verse in its written form scribes were ambivalent in their use of final *-e*, and the scribe of the Poems was no exception. In addition to being ambivalent, he exhibits the same spelling inconsistency in the use of final *-e* that makes him write without qualms *she biddep*, *she biddes* and *she biddis* in three consecutive lines (XXIV.51–53). A few examples may serve to illustrate the point.

In poem XXIV (a Complaint of Job) the name of the Lord appears thirty-two times. Twenty-one times it is written without, and eleven times with a flourished *d*. Rhyme, rhythm nor metre give detectable occasion to such variation. The rhyme scheme of XXI.(4) makes the scribal flourish on the *d* of line-end *bond* (l. 32) either meaningless or merely inconsistent (*bond*: *stond*, *hond*, *lond*). Clearly meaningless, anyway as a mark indicating final *-e*, is the stroke through *ll* in *elles* in VII.79. A reverse case can be found in XVIII.(19), where crossed *ll* in line-end *generall* must be deliberate, to make the word fit the stanzaic rhyme scheme – albeit with single *l* only – (*generale*: *specyale*, *spirituale*, *temperale*). There does seem to be some sort of rationale behind the use of a final *-e* mark in the case of *will*, which has a crossed *ll* only and consistently as an auxiliary, and never has a crossed *ll* as a full verb or as a substantive. No consistency can be found, however, in the use of that other word of extremely frequent occurrence, and appearing in four different forms: *al*, *all*, *alle* and *all* with crossed *ll*. They are indiscriminately used as pronoun, adjective, and noun, both in the singular and in the plural.

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<sup>49</sup> Arntz (1981, pp. xli–xliii), in a discussion of the editorial treatment of abbreviated final *-e*, convincingly demonstrates that the practice varies widely and is resolved differently for individual manuscripts. See also Nijenhuis (1990, pp. 75–76).

The conclusion must be that in the manuscript final *-e* is either written out or marked with a symbol or omitted, without any discernable consistency. Since other spelling variations are transcribed in this edition as they appear in the manuscript, final *-e*, too, is transcribed as in the manuscript, the different symbols being uniformly represented as *e* following the marked letter.

The ampersand is rendered as *and*. Initial *ff* has been transcribed as *F*. Kail starts off with reproducing double *f*, but he begins to falter in poem X, and from poem XII onwards transcribes as *F*. The yogh (*ȝ*) has been retained, as has the scribal use of *u*, *v* and *y* (but the superscribed dot which in the manuscript invariably appears over the *y* has not been reproduced).

Verse lines always open with a small capital ('versal'), as in the manuscript. The large, rubricated capitals at the beginning of each poem appear in this edition as ordinary capitals. Word-initial capitals appearing (rather indiscriminately) elsewhere in the text have been retained. The names of the persons of the Trinity have been capitalized in this edition.

Word division has not been modernized, because the scribal practice does not make the text unreadable. Kail hyphenates (*to-morwe*, *a-nother*) but is not always consistent, e.g. *hym-self* in III.113, but *hym selue* in XII.97.

Marginal annotations such as *nota* and *veritas* have likewise been reproduced in the margin.

#### 2.5.4 EMENDATIONS AND ADDITIONS

Emendations and additions in my edition have been placed within square brackets, and are explained in the Textual Notes.

#### 2.5.5 GLOSSARIAL DEFINITIONS

The marginal glosses alongside the text of the Poems, as well as the definitions in the glossary at the back of this edition, are largely based on the *MED*. One obvious reason for consulting the *MED* was to spot-check a definition illustrated by one of the 1596 *MED* quotations from the Poems. A limited number of these quotations are double-counts, and even one or two triple-counts, because serving to illustrate more than one word from the same quotation. In some isolated instances such overlap has led to a difference in interpretation, duly pointed out in the Notes following the relevant poem.

