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The text of the "ABC of Aristotle" in the 'Winchester Anthology'

Ian Cornelius
icornelius@luc.edu

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Abstract: The Middle English *ABC of Aristotle* is an alliterative abecedary poem that survives in fifteen manuscript copies dating between the mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The most eccentric copy, bearing the greatest number of unique textual variants, is in London, British Library, Additional 60577, a commonplace book and miscellany of verse and prose known today as the 'Winchester Anthology'. The Winchester copy of the *ABC of Aristotle* is distinguished from all others by changes to vocabulary, idiom, and prosody. The result is a unique redaction, illustrating the kind of literary composition that could be expected to grow out of late medieval English grammar schools. The Winchester redaction also expresses a shift in prosodic allegiance. The traditional alliterative line is subtly reshaped into an accentual-syllabic form.

Key terms: alliterative verse, Middle English, manuscripts, scribal redaction, textual criticism, prosody, grammar school

1 Introduction

The *ABC of Aristotle* is a short Middle English poem of moral instruction, written in unrhymed alliterative verse and counseling moderation in all things.[1] The reader is warned to avoid extremes of behavior, affect, and character; these warnings are ordered alphabetically, allotting one line to each letter of the alphabet. The line for letter *A* illustrates the general pattern: *To amerous, to auntrous, ne angre þe not to myche* '[Be not] too amorous, [nor] too daring; do not get too angry'

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*Corresponding author: Ian Cornelius, Loyola University Chicago
E-Mail: icornelius@luc.edu

(Förster 1900: 302, l. 13). The title is given in the opening lines of the prologue, where readers who desire wisdom and *worshyp* 'honor' are urged to study the letters *Of the A.B.C. of Arystotle* (Förster 1900: 301, l. 1, 3). The anonymous poet summarizes his message in a one-line conclusion: *A mesurabull meane way is best for vs alle* 'A measurable mean way is best for us all' (Förster 1900: 303, l. 34). The poem is known to survive in fifteen manuscript copies, four of which transmit the prologue (*DIMEV* 6654 = *NIMEV* 4155), while eleven lack it (*DIMEV* 6054 = *NIMEV* 471, 3793).[2] These copies attest to about seventy-five years of active circulation, from the mid-fifteenth century to the early sixteenth.

By its content and form, the *ABC of Aristotle* is affiliated with courtesy books and elementary pedagogies of literacy, associations confirmed by the manuscript collocations of surviving copies. Several manuscripts transmit the poem in the company of versified advice in table manners, diet, deportment, and parenting (Rust 2003: 66–67). One miscellany – the manuscript at the center of the present study – contains a substantial collection of grammar-school materials.[3] Although the *ABC of Aristotle* is an undistinguished specimen of English alliterative verse, it survives in an intriguing range of contexts, warranting closer study. Among un-rhymed English alliterative poems, only *Piers Plowman* and the *Second Scottish Prophecy* are preserved in greater numbers of copies.[4]

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2 The *NIMEV* entries have several errors. *NIMEV* 4155-3 conflates two independent copies of the poem in London, British Library, Harley 541 and gives an erroneous folio reference to the second copy (for fol. 238, read fol. 228). London, British Library, Additional 60577 is recorded twice, as both 471-2 and 3793-8. *NIMEV* 471 should be merged into 3793 the two copies listed under 471 do not share the same incipit and are not textually similar. *NIMEV* also omits one copy, New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya 61 (= *DIMEV* 6054-11). *DIMEV* entries are accurate, but the sixteen copies listed by *DIMEV* represent only fifteen witnesses to the text: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 384, fol. 3 is a detached continuation of the text in London, British Library, Harley 1304, as Förster (1900: 297) and *DIMEV* editors recognize. Förster (1900: 300–301) wrongly states that Cambridge, University Library, Ff.5.48 is without prologue; *DIMEV* and *NIMEV* record this copy accurately.
3 See Section 3, below. Another item of pedagogical interest is the *Questions by-twene the Maister of Oxenford and his Clerke*, a dialogue in Middle English prose, translated from the Old English prose *Solomon and Saturn*. The *Questions* immediately precedes the *ABC of Aristotle* in London, British Library, Harley 1304 (fols. 100r–102v). On this work, see Utley (1972: 738–739, 897).
4 See Weiskott (2020) and bibliographies referenced there. For the *Second Scottish Prophecy*, a mixed-form work beginning in cross-rhymed quatrains, see Weiskott (2020: 347) and *DIMEV* 6398, 6399, and 6400. The "Erthe upon Erthe" cluster of texts and the *First Scottish Prophecy* (*DIMEV* 6434) are also noteworthy in this connection, as widely circulated poems with alliterative affiliations. See Pope (2018) and Weiskott (2021: 84–85).

2 The Edition by Max Förster

Förster (1900) collated and analyzed the readings of the eight copies known to him. This remains the only effort at a critical edition. Rust (2003) transcribes the copy in London, Lambeth Palace, 853 and reports selected variant readings from other copies, but seems not to be aware of Förster's editorial work and does not attempt a critical analysis of the text. While the Lambeth manuscript is among the earliest of the surviving witnesses, it transmits an idiosyncratic text that forms a poor basis from which to assess the wider textual tradition. For textual study, Förster (1900) remains the more useful treatment, despite Förster's comparatively limited knowledge of the textual record.

For his base text, Förster selected London, British Library, Harley 541, fol. 213r–v, a choice that remains good. Where Förster adopts a reading from another copy, the emendation is flagged with an asterisk. The prologue is beset by textual problems that need not concern us here; in the abecedary portion, there are twenty-three asterisked emendations, an average of just over one per line. The textual surgery is, however, less pervasive than implied by a simple count. Six of the twenty-three emendations are non-substantive corrections to spellings.[5] Two emendations supply, from other copies, a word lost from the base text on account of physical damage along the inner margin of the leaf.[6] Eight emendations, the largest group, restore the negative conjunction *ne* in anaphora.[7] This conjunction is supported by most copies and usually improves the meter at those points where it occurs. The suppression of *ne* in the base text and several other copies may be attributed to the modernizing linguistic preferences of late fifteenth-century copyists. Of the remaining emendations, five adopt the majority reading at points where the reading of the base text is isolated and derivative.[8] By excising the textual idiosyncrasies of the base text, these emendations simply restore the pre-

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5 These are 13a *auntrous*, 17a *elenge*, 17b *ernestfull*, 28b *queme*, 33a *wylde*, and 34b *alle*. These emendations are unnecessary and at odds with W. W. Greg's subsequently (1950–1951) formulated rule of copy text. Suffixed *a* and *b* in line references refer to the first and second half-lines (a-verse and b-verse), respectively.

6 These are 13b *myche* (Förster prints *ymche*, a typographic error) and 30b *brode*. Individual letters are also lost at the right edge of lines 31 and 32.

7 Conjunctive *ne* is restored at 14a, 16a, 19a, 22a, 23a, 23b, 28a, and 33a.

8 See Förster's textual apparatus at 22a *kynde*, 22b *tatches*, 25b *nor*, 30b *ne*, and 31b *toylous*. The transposition in line 22a is shared also by New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya 61, a copy Förster did not know. London, British Library, Additional 36983, another copy Förster did not know, agrees with Förster's base text at 30b, reading *ner* for conjunctive *ne*. The editorially rejected readings of the base text at 22b, 25b, and 31b are without parallel in the copies that came to light in the twentieth century. None has a credible claim to represent the original form of the poem. The

sumptive readings of the archetype. References to the 'archetypal text' in subsequent discussion are to this version.

Just two emendations remain to be discussed. The first occurs in line 18, which Förster prints as *To ferd, ne to famulier, but frendely of chere* 'Too timid nor too sociable, but friendly in attitude'. The reading *ferd* 'timid' is transmitted in two copies, spelled *ferde* (London, British Library, Harley 1706 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B196); Förster's base text reads *ferse* 'fierce', in agreement with most other copies. Both *ferse* and *ferd* are plausible contraries to *famulier* 'sociable, outgoing'. Förster is correct that the two copies transmitting *ferd* are textually unrelated, yet both copies have comparatively large numbers of unique unoriginal readings. It is possible that the two copyists (or the copyists of their respective exemplars) independently made the same substitution of similar spellings. Förster (1900: 299–300) postulates the opposite direction of variation and argues for the originality of *ferd*, but his arguments presume that the poem originated in the northern dialect region. A southern origin is inherently possible, especially after the success of *Piers Plowman*.[9] I incline to accept the majority reading *ferse* in this instance.

A final emendation, likewise questionable, occurs in line 30, which Förster prints as *To straunge, ne to steryn, ne stare not to brode* 'Too aloof, nor too stern; do not stare too freely'. Förster's emendation *steryn* 'stern' is eclectic with respect to substance and conjectural with respect to spelling. Three copies transmit the spellings *sterne*/*stern* (Cambridge, University Library, Ff.5.48; London, British Library, Harley 541, fol. 228r) or *sturne* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. Misc. c. 66). These three copies supply lexical support for Förster's emendation. The spelling *steryn* is transmitted in no copy of the *ABC of Aristotle* but has currency in alliterative romances, including the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and *Wars of Alexander* and Robert Thornton's copy of the *Awntyrs of Arthur*. Förster (1900: 300) prefers this spelling on grounds of dialect and as a plausible ancestor of *steryng*, an ambiguous form transmitted in eight copies, including Förster's base text. Two further copies have the forms *styrryng* and *stirynge*. Whether spelled with a root vowel of *e*, *i*, or *y*, these forms may represent the present participle of either *MED stēren* v. (1) 'steer, guide' or *MED stiren* v. 'set in motion, move'. *MED* records contextually appropriate senses for both verbs; the half-line *To straunge, ne to steryng* may be translated as '[Be not] too aloof, nor too meddling/irksome'. The variant *stern* could have arisen by homoeoarchic substitution

base-text's spelling *taylous* in 30b is presumably a mechanical error, induced by attraction to the word *talewyse*, later in the same verse.

9 See the comments on literary geography in Turville-Petre (2018: 1–3).

of an easier reading. Emendation seems unjustified; as in the case of 18a *ferd*, I would restore the reading of Förster's base text.

Although I have focused on two dubious emendations, Förster's edition is not unsound. On the contrary, a review of his substantive emendations tends to confirm their authority. 18a *ferd* and 30a *steryn* excepted, Förster's text is a plausible representation of the common ancestor of the eight copies known to him and a serviceable basis for assessing the seven copies that have subsequently come to light. None of the copies that have come to light since 1900 challenge Förster's choice of base text, for none transmits the prologue.[10] Several of the new copies are nevertheless of textual interest. (In the following surveys of substantive variants, I include transpositions of words and phrases but ignore variation between *to*, *ne to*, and *nor to* in anaphora.) Three of the copies unknown to Förster are the product of careful copyists. I find few or no unique errors in the copies of this poem in Cambridge, Trinity College, O.2.53, Dublin, Trinity College, 509, and New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya 61. Moreover, these three copies share several errors with one another, sometimes joined by London, British Library, Additional 36983. The variational groups formed by these copies might be a worthy topic for future study.

One of the copies known to Förster contains twenty-eight lines transmitted in no other copy.[11] The unique lines are intruded between the prologue and the abecedary; they are disposed mostly into another abecedary and they differ from the common text in thematic focus and formal construction.

The single most eccentric copy is in London, British Library, Additional 60577, a book known today as the 'Winchester Anthology'. First recognized by Edward Wilson (2000), this copy consists of the abecedary portion only, without the prologue, and it has unique lines at the beginning and end. In the lines shared with other copies, the Winchester copy has some thirty-four unique substantive variants. The next most eccentric copy is London, British Library, Harley 1706, with seventeen unique substantive variants.[12] The aim of this essay is to examine the character, textual affiliations, and genesis of the Winchester redaction.

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10 Nor is Cambridge, University Library, Ff.5.48 a compelling alternative. This copy transmits the prologue (a fact misreported by Förster; see n. 2, above) and usually retains anaphoric *ne*, yet it is not, in other respects, more correct than Förster's base manuscript. Both copies have suffered small amounts of text-loss through physical damage.

11 This copy is split between two books, with the majority of the text in London, British Library, Harley 1304 (see n. 2, above). For text and commentary, see Förster (1900: 307–310; 1906: 373) and Rust (2003: 67).

12 I exclude the regular expansive rewording *To*] *Be not to*, 17 times at the beginnings of lines in London, British Library, Harley 1304 (continued in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 384). This copy has few other unique variants in the lines it shares with other copies.

3 The 'Winchester Anthology' and its *ABC of Aristotle*

The book that now bears the shelfmark Additional 60577 in the British Library entered modern scholarly discourse in 1979, when its existence was announced in a Sotheby's sales catalogue. A commonplace book and miscellany of items in English, Latin, and some French, Additional 60577 was compiled between about 1477 and 1487 by an anonymous monk of St. Swithun's Priory, Winchester, whence the moniker 'Winchester Anthology'. Its initial claim to attention was as an early witness to literary humanism in English. A print facsimile was promptly produced (Wilson and Fenlon 1981); in an introduction to the facsimile, Wilson documented humanist features of the script of the main scribe and listed the contents of the volume – 229 items in all.[13] The single most significant item is perhaps an otherwise unknown English verse translation of the Prologue and Book I of Petrarch's *Secretum* (Wilson and Wakelin 2018). In a review of the print facsimile of this miscellany, Derek Pearsall acknowledges its "forward-looking" and humanist aspects but holds that "the dominant impression is of the continuity of medieval monastic literary interests" (Pearsall 1983: 162). The compiler recorded several poems by John Lydgate. There are also several items connected with medieval grammar schools: these include a collection of *vulgaria* (fols. 67–77), primer materials (fols. 120–180), and numerous Latin proverbs filling originally blank pages.[14] The copy of the *ABC of Aristotle* likewise expresses the compiler's traditional and pedagogical interests, rather than forward-looking humanist ones.

The poem is entered on fol. 56v in the hand of the main scribe (see Figure 1, below, p. 418). It has the codicological status of infill, written on a blank at the end of a booklet whose principal contents are the translation of Petrarch's *Secretum*, John Lydgate and Benedict Burgh's *Secrees of Old Philisoffres* and Earl Rivers's translation of *The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*. My transcription follows the conventions articulated in Parkes (1969: xxviii–xxx). Scribal punctuation is retained and the scribe's use of majuscules is not regularized; a letter omitted by the scribe is supplied in rounded brackets; an interlinear addition by the scribe is recorded within square half-brackets; superscripted *t* in the abbrevia-

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13 A complete set of color images of the 'Winchester Anthology' is now available at <https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_60577>. Soper (2017) identifies three detached leaves.

14 See Wilson and Fenlon (1981: 13–14); Pearsall (1983: 162–163); and Wilson and Wakelin (2018: xxi–xxii). The *vulgaria* are printed in Orme (2012: 257–291). The opening leaf of the *vulgaria* is among the leaves identified in Soper (2017).

tion for *with* is retained in that form and barred *-ll* is recorded with the phonetic symbol for dark *l*; other abbreviations are expanded in italics. The '+' at the head of the first line represents a square cross at this position in the manuscript. The rhyme-words of the final couplet are joined with a brace against which the scribe has entered the nomen sacrum *xpc* ('Christus'), omitted in the transcription.

+ C(r)ystys crosse be oure spede : w^t grace m*er*cye i*n* aⱡ oure nede
A   to amerous to aventurous avyse or ye au*n*swere .
b   to busye to bolde bowrde not to broode .
C   to crewelle to cacchynge care nott to soore .
D   to dulle to dredefulle drynke not to deepe .
e   to eylynge to excellente loke v*er*tue ye sewe .
F   to fresshe to freyle false felowshippe eschewe .
G   to gry*m*me to grounfulle goode gouernau*n*ce suffyce .
H   to homelye to hastye hewe not to hyghe .
I   to Iangelynge to Iapeynge neu*er* w^t thy mays*ter* .
K   to kynde ⌐ne¬ to knappysshe beware of knavysshe tacches .
l   to lyght to liberalle looke or than leepe .
M   to Merye to Mornefulle good mesure ys a meene .
N   to Nyce to nyghefulle nygardshipe ys naught .
O   to owterage to ovyrtwarte Obedyente youe bee .
P   to prevye to perte praysse you at partynge .
Q   to queynte ne to bolde questyons to enquere .
R   to ryatouse to rewthefulle rewle you by resone .
S   to spendynge to sparynge spende in dewe sesone .
T   to tempre welle y*our* tales and kepe welle y*our* tunge .
V   to vowle or to vayre avyse you or ye wedde .
X   to Cryste pray we where soo wee bee .
.   That we may lerne thys . A . B . C .

The poem may be translated as follows. Words supplied in the translation are placed within square brackets.

'May Christ's cross be our helper with grace [and] mercy in our every need.
A   [Be not] too amorous [nor] too daring; think before you answer.
B   [Be not] too anxious [nor] too bold; do not jest too freely.
C   [Be not] too cruel [nor] too grasping; do not worry over-much.
D   [Be not] too dull [nor] too fearful; do not drink excessively.
E   [Be not] too dejected [nor] too exalted; take care to follow virtue.
F   [Be not] too vigorous [nor] too weak; avoid false fellowship.
G   [Be not] too severe [nor] too scolding; let good governance suffice.
H   [Be not] too meek [nor] too rash; hew not too high.
I   [Be not] too gossipy [nor] too joking – never with your superior.
K   [Be not] too gracious nor too crude; beware of vulgar habits.
L   [Be not] too cheerful [nor] too generous; look before you leap.
M   [Be not] too merry [nor] too mournful; a mean is a good portion.

N [Be not] too foolish [nor] too annoying; stinginess is worthless.
O [Be not] too outrageous [nor] too contrary; be obedient.
P [Be not] too privy [nor] too open; be gracious at leave-taking.
Q [Be not] too clever nor too forward in asking questions.
R [Be not] too unruly [nor] too sorrowful; rule yourself by reason.
S [Be not] too prodigal [nor] too frugal; spend in due season.
T [Remember(?)] to temper your tales well and guard well your tongue.
V [Be not] too rude nor to fair; consider before you marry.
X To Christ we pray, wherever we be
   That we might learn this ABC'.

The poem opens with an end-rhymed couplet, written on one line by the scribe, and it closes with another end-rhymed couplet. These couplets appear in no other copy of the *ABC of Aristotle* but they would be familiar to all readers. In the late Middle Ages, young children learned the alphabet in the form of a prayer that began very much like the opening line of the Winchester *ABC of Aristotle*, with the words "Christ's cross be our speed" or a similar formula.[15] The square cross belongs to the same pedagogical context. In medieval primers, the alphabet is routinely preceded by a cross – the primer later in the 'Winchester Anthology' supplies an example (fol. 120r) – and the alphabet itself came to be known as the "cross row". These features of the Winchester text inscribe the poem within the context of medieval grammar schools.

In the analysis that follows, I shall refer to Winchester's abecedary lines by their letter (e.g., "line A"), not the corresponding line number in Förster's edition. This is done to facilitate cross-reference to the transcription above. The Winchester text omits the letter *W* (most other copies have a line for this letter) and supplies a line for *X* (it is the only copy to do so). The final couplet treats the letter *X* as Greek *chi* and a logogram for 'Christ', cleverly joining the alphabet to the envelope of prayer.

With few exceptions, the abecedary lines of the archetypal text of the *ABC of Aristotle* are structured by the syntactic formula "Too X nor too Y, and Z not too much/often", where 'X', 'Y', and 'Z' are moral qualities or character traits, each beginning with the same letter. In the Winchester copy this pattern is retained, with one exception, in the first halves of lines A–V, and throughout the length of lines B, C, and D. The exception is line T, where *tempre* 'temper' must be a verb. The syntax of the second halves of lines is more varied than in the first half and more varied than in the corresponding segments of the archetypal text. Eighteen of the Win-

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15 Orme (2001: 246–254) and Rust (2003: 65–66) supply examples. See, more generally, Alexandre-Bidon (1989).

chester copy's half-lines – nearly half the poem – are unique and fully rewritten, sharing no stave-word with the corresponding line in any other copy of the poem.[16] By the same metric, only three half-lines are fully rewritten in Harley 1706, the copy with the next highest number of unique variant readings.

4 Genesis and Textual Affiliations

Who was responsible for the Winchester redaction of the *ABC of Aristotle*? Pearsall speculates that some of the unique items in the 'Winchester Anthology' could be "the compiler's own work" (1983: 163). He also argues that the deviant text of John Lydgate's "Thoroughfare of Woe" and certain other poems in the 'Winchester Anthology' might be the product of memorial reconstruction, rather than of copying from an exemplar; and he observes that an abecedary is a good candidate for memorial transmission, given the mnemonic properties of the alphabet (Pearsall 1983: 163). A hypothesis of memorial transmission cannot be ruled out in the case of the *ABC of Aristotle*, but it leaves salient features of the text unexplained. First, Winchester's readings occasionally suggest that the redactor knew a particular scribal version of this poem. Second, readings unique to Winchester yield a poem more coherent and artful than its putative exemplar.

Since so much of the Winchester copy is rewritten, this copy shares few variants with others. Discussion will be facilitated if the relevant copies are listed, with sigla:[17]

A1 London, British Library, Additional 36983, fol. 263r–v
A2 London, British Library, Additional 37049, fol. 86v
H2 London, British Library, Harley 541, fol. 228r
H3 London, British Library, Harley 1304, fol. 103r–v, continued in Oxford, Bodleian
        Library, Douce 384, fol. 3r
H4 London, British Library, Harley 1706, fol. 94r
L   London, Lambeth Palace, 853, pp. 30–32
R   Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B196, fol. 110v
O   Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. Misc. c. 66, fol. 26br
        (the recto of a slip pasted in after fol. 26)

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16 In the second halves of lines A, E, H, I, L, N, O, and R, and in both halves of lines F, G, S, T, and V, the Winchester text shares no stave-word with the corresponding line in any other copy of the poem.

17 Sigla follow Förster (1900: 296) and Rust (2003: 75), where possible. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. Misc. c. 66, a copy unknown to Förster, is Rust's C, but this sigil was assigned by Förster to Cambridge, University Library, Ff.5.48 (a copy whose readings do not bring it into discussion here).

The Winchester copy itself is Rust's sigil A3. A3 and R are the only two copies to omit the final line of the archetypal text, *A mesurabull meane way is best for vs alle* 'A measurable mean way is best for us all' (Förster 1900: 303, l. 34). These two copies join H2 and H3 in omitting a W line.[18] Other variants involving the Winchester copy are as follows (in each case the reading before the bracket is that of Förster's text):

line B   *to bold ne to besy*] *to busye to bolde* A3 H2
line B   *large*] *brode* A2 A3 H3 H4 O
line D   *oft*] *deepe* A3 H2
line K   *ware*] *beware of* A1 A3 H2 H4 L R

Two of these variants augment alliteration, which the Winchester redactor often did independently (see Section 6, below). The variant *ware/be ware of* is chronological in character and could be expected to arise independently at multiple points in the textual tradition. As evidence of genetic affiliation, none of these variants is at all compelling. Yet, in two further instances, lines rewritten in Winchester agree in part with another copy, in both cases H2. In line Q, *questions* appears only in Winchester and H2:

Förster: *To queynt, ne to querelous, but queme wele þi maister*
           'Too clever nor too quarrelsome, but please your master well'
H2:   *to queynt to querelous to quesytife of questions*
           'Too clever, too quarrelsome, too inquisitive concerning questions'
A3:   *to queynte ne to bolde questyons to enquere*
           'Too clever nor too forward in asking questions'

The Winchester redactor could certainly have arrived at the word *questions* without prompting, but there is another unique A3H2 variant in the previous line:

Förster: *To preysyng to prevy with prynces ne with dukes*
           'Too praising [nor] too privy, with princes nor with dukes'
H2:   *to preysyng to pert ne to prevy w^t pryncis ne w^t peris*
           'Too praising, too open, nor to privy with princes nor with peers'
A3:   *to prevye to perte prayse you at partynge*
           'Too privy [nor] too open; be gracious at leave-taking'

The word *perte* 'open' appears only in A3 and H2. In H2 the word is intruded into the received line-structure. In A3 the line is recast and its metrical and semantic

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18 O fuses lines V and W, showing access to an exemplar with both. Förster (1900: 298–299) notes that the textual state without line W could be original, yet he also observes that line W is present in those copies whose texts are in other respects the most accurate. This observation is supported by the copies that have come to light since his study.

balance restored. *Prevye* and *perte* form a satisfying contrast between opposed character traits. *Preysyng*, the first of the character traits in the a-verse of H2, supplies the nucleus of a new b-verse, incorporating a proverbial phrase attested elsewhere in fifteenth-century English records (Section 5, below); the original b-verse is jettisoned. The textual transformations required to convert H2's line into that of Winchester are consistent with transformations seen elsewhere in the Winchester copy. H2 perhaps preserves the reading of Winchester's exemplar in this case.

In aggregate, the unique A3H2 agreements in lines B, D, P, and Q, and their shared omission of line W, justify a closer look at the manuscript bearing the text H2. Harley 541 is a collection of miscellaneous and originally independent booklets, mostly sixteenth-century or later, but two of which date from late in the fifteenth century. The fifteenth-century leaves have been mounted individually by modern conservators, but the boundaries of production units are evident in the disposition of paper stocks, scribal hands, and textual contents, and in the wear of outer leaves. The two booklets are evidently independent in origin. Sutton and Visser-Fuchs (1994: 100) speculate that they were joined by the sixteenth-century antiquary John Stow. Each bears a copy of the *ABC of Aristotle*.

The first booklet probably originated as two sheets folded quarto; seven leaves remain (fols. 207–213), bearing a watermark of the type Ochsenkopf/Tête de boeuf, similar to Briquet 14198. On the final leaf (fol. 213r–v), there is a copy of the *ABC of Aristotle* with prologue. This is the copy employed by Förster as base text; it need not concern us further.

The second booklet (fols. 214–229) consists of sixteen leaves of uniform stock with watermarks of the type Main/Hand similar to Piccard 1262 (dated 1479). The outer faces of initial and final leaves are worn and soiled. Sutton and Visser-Fuchs (1994: 86) describe these leaves as a "booklet [...] bought as a single unit from a stationer or scrivener of London" and containing, upon purchase, a standard list of the mayors of London and lists of other City *notabilia*, with plenty of interleaved blanks to accommodate the buyer's additions and memoranda. During the 1480s and 1490s this pamphlet was in the household of the London merchant Sir Thomas Frowyk (d. 1485), where several hands collaboratively extended the list of London mayors into a skeletal chronicle of current events and filled blank pages elsewhere in the pamphlet with more London *notabilia*, Sir Thomas's swan's mark, and four verse items including a copy of the *ABC of Aristotle*.[19] The other verse items are a unique Christmas carol (*DIMEV* 3763), a drinking song

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19 A facsimile of fol. 228r, bearing the text of the *ABC of Aristotle*, is printed in Rust (2007: 77). I thank Eliora Horst for drawing my attention to this photograph.

(*DIMEV* 893), and a unique prayer to the Virgin Mary for sleep (*DIMEV* 6130). These have each been printed often in modern anthologies. The hand responsible for the *ABC of Aristotle* is probably responsible also for some of the added London materials earlier in the pamphlet. Like A3, H2 has the core abecedary only, without the prologue. Several variants unique to H2 suggest that H2 itself was not the exemplar of A3. The clearest is in line D, where A3 has *dulle* 'dull', agreeing with all copies except H2, which has *doolfull* 'doleful'. This implies that the exemplar of A3 was nearer the archetype than H2 is.

In my discussion of Winchester's textual affiliations, I have reverted from Pearsall's hypothesis of memorial reconstruction back to standard analysis of (written) textual transmission. The few variants that Winchester shares with other copies do not so much exclude the memorial hypothesis as emphasize that, in a culture that uses writing, memory itself is dependent on written text. If the Winchester redactor once knew a text of the *ABC of Aristotle* like that of H2, the words *prayse*, *prevye*, and *perte* were perhaps the ones from the P-line that he retained in memory, and he re-composed around those remembered words. A second point follows: the Winchester *ABC of Aristotle* expresses a literary intention. It reads less as an effort to reassemble a partially remembered textual object than as a renewed exercise in verse-making.

5 Lexis, Phrasing, and Proverbial Expressions

At a basic level, the raw materials of a poem are its words and phrases; the Winchester redactor re-built the poem from new materials. There are over forty new lexical items (that is, lexical items not in the archetypal text), including several rare or otherwise noteworthy words and senses. *Cacchinge* is not well attested in the sense 'greedy, grasping', inferable for the adjectival usage of this word in line C (*OED* s.v. *catching* adj., 1; cf. *MED* s.v. *cacchen* v., 3(a)). *Grounfulle* ('scolding[?]'; Winchester line G), unrecorded in the *MED* and *OED*, probably derives from *MED groin* n.(2), 'censure, reproach; rebuke, complaint'. (The spelling *groun* is recorded by *MED c.* 1460.) Alternatively the intended form may be *gromful* 'angry, distraught', with an erroneous extra minim. (The simplex *grame* 'anger, grief' remained current in the fifteenth century). *Knappysshe* ('crude'; Winchester line K) is represented in the *MED* by a single quotation, as a variant reading in Chaucer's "Manciple's Tale" (*MED* s.v. *knāpish* adj.). *Nygardshipe* ('stinginess'; Winchester line N) has fewer than ten quotations in the *MED*, all fifteenth-century (*MED* s.v. *nigardship(e* n.). The spelling *nygheful* (Winchester line N) is peculiar; it perhaps represents *MED noiful* adj. 'bothersome, annoying'. Several of the less common words, including *groin* and *nigardship*, are recorded in *Promptorium*

Parvulorum, a fifteenth-century Latin-English dictionary.[20] These patterns of attestation raise questions about the pragmatic and functional dimensions of the poem. Perhaps it had a role in building a child's vocabulary.

The second halves of lines show that the activity of the Winchester redactor was not limited to fitting new stave-words into a received syntactic frame. He also wove proverbs and proverbial phrases into his text. Several of the half-lines unique to the Winchester copy are paralleled in Bartlett Whiting's *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Whiting and Whiting 1968). The clearest example is perhaps Whiting's "First loke and aftirward lepe; Avyse the welle, or thow speke" (L435), which supplies a parallel for the second halves of lines A and L: *avyse or ye aunswere* 'think before you answer' and *looke or than leepe* 'look before you leap', respectively. Similarly, Winchester's *loke vertue ye sewe* 'take care to follow virtue' (line E) is paralleled in Whiting's V49 *Who sueth vertu, vertu he shal leere*; Winchester's *prayse you at partynge* 'be gracious at leave-taking' (line P) is an exact match for Whiting P39; and Winchester's *avyse you or ye wedde* 'consider before you marry' (line V) is paralleled in Whiting W167 *wedding wolde have goode avysement*. Each of these half-lines is unique to the Winchester copy. They supply another connection to medieval grammar schools, where proverbs were employed in teaching elementary Latin composition. English proverbs in *vulgaria* could serve as set texts, to be translated into Latin. Lawler (2011: 51–62) discusses a large fifteenth-century collection of Latin proverbs, arranged alphabetically by keyword to facilitate reference consultation by students and their teachers. The redactor's use of proverbs and proverbial phrases is analogous to the use made of the prayer-formula "Christ's cross be our speed" in the opening couplet (Section 3, above), and illustrates, at a basic level, a practice of composition by rhetorical *inventio*.

6 Prosody

Revision extended to the verse form. As re-composed in the 'Winchester Anthology', the *ABC of Aristotle* is organized by prosodic norms different from other copies of the poem. Revisions within the abecedary twice introduce end-rhyme (*sewe/eschewe* and *resone/sesone*, in lines E/F and R/S, respectively) and often disrupt the pattern of alliteration. Lines E and I lack alliteration in their second halves. Lines Q and T are also deficient in alliterative pattern, yet the general

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20 Another example is *jettyng* 'swaggering' (*MED* s.v. *ǧetten* v.), in line I of the archetypal text (Förster 1900: 302, l. 21). This word is not transmitted in the Winchester copy.

tendency was towards amplification of this feature. In the archetypal text of the *ABC of Aristotle* and in most unrhymed alliterative verse in Middle English, the last stave in the line is usually mute, without alliteration. This final stave alliterates only once in Förster's text, in line H: *To hasty to hardy ne to hevy yn thyn herte* 'Too hasty, too resolute, nor too heavy of heart'. H2 retains that line and introduces variants that yield alliteration in the final stave of lines D, P, and Q (Section 4, above). In the Winchester text, the final stave alliterates eleven times in total. The reviser seems to have thought that more alliteration is better.

By extending alliteration, the Winchester redaction moves the poem away from the norms of alliterative verse. Other changes move the poem towards the main stream of English accentual-syllabic verse. The new couplets at beginning and end are the most obvious indication of the reviser's formal preferences: these are written in short, alternating-stress, four-beat verse.[21] The redactor's preferences are also evident in lines shared with other copies, for these are subtly smoothed out and re-balanced.

Middle English alliterative verse employs two basic rhythmical patterns in its second half, exemplified by the b-verses *whan sófte was the sónne* 'when the sun was mild' and *as I a shép wére* 'as if I were a sheep'.[22] In the first basic pattern, an extended dip falls between the two lifts. In the second pattern, the extended dip precedes the first lift and the lifts may be separated by a single unstressed syllable, usually containing weak *-e*. The pattern with an extended dip between lifts is always the more frequent one, yet the second pattern (with extended dip before the first lift) is a hallmark of the verse form throughout the Middle English period. It is represented in Förster's text in three b-verses: *and ware knáves tátches* 'and beware of knaves' vices' (K), *but as máner ásketh* 'except as custom requires' (M), *nor to néwe-fángle* 'nor too trendy' (N). In each of these half-lines, an extended dip precedes the first lift; the two lifts are accordingly compressed together, separated by a single weak syllable in the first two cases and directly clashing in the third case (unless weak final *-e* in *newe* remains syllabic, as it generally is in Chaucer's verse). Each of these verses was revised out in the course of transmission. The first two half-lines are sites of variation in H2, though their basic metrical shape remains legible.[23] In the Winchester copy only line K remains approximately intact,

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21 The short four-beat line, ubiquitous in Middle English records, is sometimes described as 'dolnik'. See Duffell (2008: 24–25, 65–66, 79–80, 85) and Cornelius (forthcoming).
22 I quote, with regularized spelling, the first two b-verses of *Piers Plowman* B (Burrow and Turville-Petre 2018). Two descriptions of this meter are Cornelius (2017: 7–17) and Minkova (2009).
23 The H2 variant in line K was given above (Section 4). In line M, H2 and most other copies intrude *gode* 'good' before *maner*.

and its received lexico-syntactic structure is vulnerable to prosodic re-interpretation as another kind of meter.

Individual lines of the Winchester text may be read as alliterative verse, but the general effect is more nearly that of "template meter", a metrical form analyzed by Thomas Cable (2009) with reference to alliterating lyrics of London, British Library, Harley 2253. In those poems the unpredictable rhythms of alliterative verse are smoothed into an anapestic-dactylic rhythm that swings across the length of the line. The reworked meter observed by Cable in the Harley lyrics is not unique to them. The traditional alliterative meter is similarly tamed in other rhymed alliterative poems of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, from *Susannah* to the flyting verse of the Scottish court of James VI (Weiskott 2016: 103–106; Cornelius 2017: 130–146). In the sixteenth century, some alliterative prophecies were adapted into rugged tetrameters (Weiskott 2021: 76–85). The Winchester *ABC of Aristotle* participates in the same general development. Without the clashing stresses and heavy or crowded a-verses characteristic of alliterative verse, most lines of the Winchester redaction read as a balanced pair of two-beat units with a double or triple offbeat between beats:

> to ámerous to avénturous / avýse or ye áunswere
> to búsye to bólde / bówrde not to bróode
> to créwelle to cácchynge / cáre nott to sóore

The caesura, marked by a virgule above, remains a strong structural feature of the verse line, where it may introduce a virtual offbeat, separating beats that would otherwise clash. Line B supplies an example of this. Where lines admit a five-beat reading, the extra beat is most often contributed by the second half-line and it surfaces out of a trisyllabic dip:

> to Mérye to Mórnefulle / good mésure ýs a méene
> to Nýce to nýghefulle / nýgardshípe ys náught

Trisyllabic dips are perfectly acceptable in alliterative verse (Inoue and Stokes 2012), and the lines just quoted can be projected into approximately that meter. Yet the construction of surrounding lines tends instead to activate an accentual-syllabic prosody. In line N, a rough alternation of beat and off-beat extends straight through the line. An iambic-trochaic rhythm is also found in the opening half-lines of D, F, G, and L. In line F, rhythmical alternation helps to demote an alliterating word immediately after the caesura:

> to frésshe to fréyle / false félowshíppe eschéwe

Within this general prosodic context, the second half of line K – the sole relict of the rarer type of alliterative b-verse – may undergo an accentual-syllabic reinterpretation:

> to kýnde ne to knáppysshe / bewáre of knávysshe tácches

The archetypal form of this b-verse was *and ware knáves tátches*: the verse opens with a disyllabic dip (trisyllabic if *ware* is allowed an archaic inflectional *-e*) and the lifts are separated with the weak inflectional syllable *-es.* By contrast, the rewritten Winchester half-line introduces full vowels, in the form of the preposition *of* and suffix *-ysshe*. By spacing out the word stresses, these syllables tend to favor rhythmical alternation. An alliterative reading of the half-line remains available in theory, but the general prosodic context is against its realization. The alliterative verse has morphed into a different kind of meter.

7 Conclusion

By incorporation of proverbial expressions, sporadic rhyme and amplified alliteration, more regular rhythm, and new opening and closing lines, the Winchester *ABC of Aristotle* has some claim to be considered a new composition. With regard to form and theme, the rewritten poem is more coherent and more artful than its nearest textual relation. It also shows how the renovation of a literary work may involve a shift in focus, away from the formal practice that organized a previous state of the text. The identity of the redactor is probably not recoverable. What can be said with confidence is that the *ABC of Aristotle* is consonant with the pedagogical interests of the compiler. Christopher Cannon (2016) argues that the texts and practices of elementary literacy instruction were pervasive influences on the major English-language poets of the late Middle Ages. The Winchester *ABC of Aristotle* is a modest little poem that illustrates – perhaps more directly than Cannon's examples from Chaucer, Langland, and Gower – the kind of literary composition that could be expected to grow out of late medieval English grammar schools.

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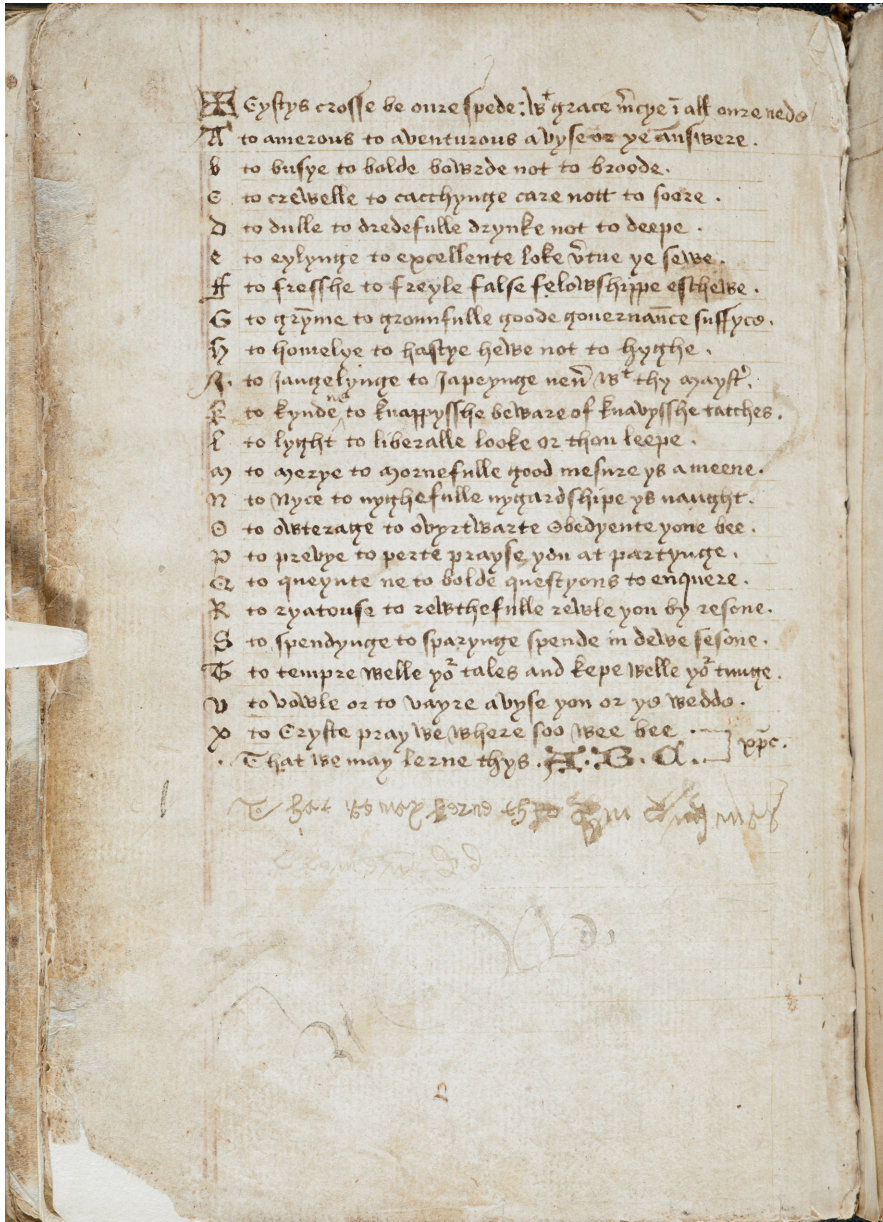
Figure 1: London, British Library, Additional 60577, fol. 56v: The *ABC of Aristotle* © British Library Board