

Slain Dogs, The Dead Man and Editorial Constructs

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Propagandist verses produced during the ‘Wars of the Roses’ can throw important light on popular perceptions at the time. Unfortunately, editorial perceptions have sometimes obscured, rather than elucidated, an author’s intentions. Some of the poems collected in Rossell Hope Robbins’s invaluable *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*¹ (hereafter *HP*) by editors who believed with Robbins that ‘History illuminates Literature’. In his introduction Robbins claimed that ‘This approach can produce rewarding results.’² He gave two unconvincing examples of his own. In their different ways they demonstrate the dangers of fitting fancied historical relevance to a literary production. From *HP*, no. 49, which attacks the general degeneracy of the times – ‘Wymmonis wyttes ar full of wynd’; ‘Now prelates don pardon selle’; ‘The comonys love not the grete’, and so on, – Robbins picked out lines 41-42: ‘He ys lovyd that wele can lye / And thevys tru men honge’, to associate them with a story in ‘Gregory’s Chronicle’. Nothing else in this trite effusion suggests that its author had any specific references in mind.

Still more improbable, but consequential, was Robbins’s interpretation of an incident reported in Robert Bale’s chronicle.³ Bale described how in the night of 19 September 1456 the heads of five dogs had been set up on the standard (public water conduit) in Fleet Street with verses issuing from their mouths, at a time when the duke of York was staying in the adjacent palace of the bishop of Salisbury. Robbins tried to connect the incident with riots in London nearly five months earlier, for which he thought that York was responsible. The verses themselves survive in a copy made by the Yorkist chronicler, John Benet.⁴ In the erroneous belief that Benet was pro-Lancastrian, Robbins concluded that the verses were a ‘semiofficial’ attack on ‘Edward’ (read Richard), Duke of York.⁵ Almost all subsequent historians have accepted his view without examining its basis.

More often, Robbins uncritically adopted dates and identifications proposed by previous editors. For example, in *HP*, no. 78, ‘The Ship of State’, otherwise ‘Stere welle the good shype’, which celebrates Lancastrian control of the government in early 1459, the ship’s mast is the young Prince Edward, replacing the old and defective one. Robbins (p. 356) accepted Frederic Madden’s identification of the ‘crased’ mast as William, Duke of Suffolk, died 1450. Clearly Richard, Duke of York, was meant, while the ‘false shrews’ said to fear the prince were dissident Yorkists. A prime instance of editorial insensitivity to literary context occurred with the jesting love-song in question-and-answer form that appears as *HP*, no. 35, entitled by Robbins ‘The Roses Entwined’ and dated 1486. Almost certainly it was the popular song whose accompaniment George Cely learnt from the Calais harpist, Thomas Rede, in 1474, when it was known as ‘O Freshest Flower’.⁶ The flower in question is a rose, standing for the ‘prince’ on whom all three singers have set their affections. When they discover the coincidence they conclude by singing, ‘Joyed may we be / Oure prince to se, / & rosys thre’ – three roses in one person. But a series of editors have maintained that the song must have been composed to celebrate the birth of Prince Arthur, son of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. We shall consider six other poems which, in one way or another, have suffered from editorial attempts to illustrate ‘literature’ by reference to ‘history’. We suggest that the more fruitful approach is to give primacy to the text and treat ‘literature’ as illuminating ‘history’.

Five Dogs

Robbins first published ‘The Five Dogs of London’ in an article in 1956.⁷ His idea that the verses targeted the duke of York might have been very different had he known of the version of the same incident given

¹ Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, New York 1959. Unless otherwise stated, quotations will be taken from this work, but punctuation and capitalisation will be altered without notice, *u* and *v*, *i* and *j* normalised and *th* and *y* or *gh* used for thorn and yogh.

² *Ibid.*, pp. xxxiii-iv.

³ R. Flenley, ed., *Six Town Chronicles of England*, Oxford 1911, p. 144.

⁴ Trinity College Dublin (hereafter TCD), MS E.5.10, ff. 22v-23r, formerly MS 516, ff. 20v-21r.

⁵ *HP*, p. xxxii.

⁶ National Archives (PRO), C.47/37/11, f. 3r-3v.

⁷ Rossell Hope Robbins, ‘The Five Dogs of London’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 71 (1956), 264-68.

in John Benet's chronicle.⁸ Benet's account differs from Bale's in two essentials. Benet says nothing about the presence of York and, unlike Bale, states specifically that the display was the work of *curiales*: law students and apprentices-at-law from the Inns of Court – a group of what we might term 'student political activists'. In his account of the events that had led to the Yorkist victory at St Albans on 22 May 1455 Benet also went out of his way to mention that many London students from the Inns of Court (*multi Curiales de London*) were among the defeated Lancastrian forces.⁹ The implication is that the gruesome spectacle of the dogs' heads was mounted by a set of Yorkist sympathisers who were engaged in a quarrel with rival Lancastrian supporters and were reminding them of the fate that had befallen their comrades in the battle the year before.

In a mix of defensiveness and bravado, the verses convey the warning that the fate of the dead soldiers represented by the five dogs awaits anyone now inclined to take up arms in the same cause. The fifth dog is made to summarise that message with the saying, *Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum*, 'Happy the man made wary by the perils of others'. When the thirteenth-century historian Matthew Paris quoted the same line he also cited a Latin distich to the effect that history can repeat itself: yesterday's bad news may be tomorrow's as well.¹⁰

It has not been previously observed that the *curiales* of September 1456 got their idea of setting up dogs' heads with verses in their mouths from Psalm 58/59, with its plea by the guiltless to be saved from 'men of blood' who lie in wait for them with hostile intent: 'Behold, they lie in wait for my soul: the powerful have gathered against me although I am innocent of any wrong-doing. ... They will return at evening, hungering like dogs, and go about the city. Behold, their mouths speak and there is a sword in their lips'.¹¹ The psalmist's theme is reflected in the verses which Benet copied. The first four run:

Colle *primus canis Londonis*:¹²

Whan lorschype fayleth, gode felowschipe awaylth [‘avales; falls away’].
My mayster ys cruell and can no curtesye,
For whos offence here am Y pyghte.
Hyt ys no reson that Y schulde dye
For hys trespace & he go quyte.

Grubbe *2us canis*:

Offte beryth the sone the faderis gylte.
None so gylteles as Y comppleyne
For ones that Y barkyd ageynys the mone¹³
Wyth myghty force here was Y sleyn --
My tyme was come, my defenys ys done.

Lugtrype *3ius canis*:

The tunge breketh bone yit in hym is none.
For fawte of curasse my throte was cutte.
Y cryed for helpe, Y was not herde.
Y wolde my mayster hadde provide my butte [‘deliverance’] –
Thys hadde Y for hym to my rewarde.

Slugge *4us canis*:

Off folowyng aventerous [‘risky’] the jugement is jeperdous.
Wat planet compellyd me or what signe
To serve that man that all men hate?
Y wolde hys hede were here for myne

⁸ G.L. and M.A. Harriss, eds, 'John Benet's Chronicle for the years 1400 to 1462', *Camden Miscellany* 24, Camden Society 4th Ser. (1972), pp. 151-252, p. 217.

⁹ 'Benet's Chron.', p. 213. That Benet meant 'law students' by his *curiales* is clear from his later description (p. 222) of a riot in which armed *curiales* erupted from the Inns on Fleet Street.

¹⁰ Reyner Wolfe, ed., *Matthaei Paris, Anglia Historia maior*, London 1571, p. 525.

¹¹ Vv. 3-8 (Vulgate text). All translations from Latin are our own.

¹² Added on same line: *Quinque in munere occisi fuerunt anno domini M^l ccc^o lvi^o*.

¹³ The sense is 'engaged in a hopeless enterprise' rather than 'complained without effect': cf. the Second Shepherds' Play, where the first shepherd claims that he can reproduce the angel's song and the second shepherd jeers, 'Can ye bark at the mone?': A.C. Crawley, ed., *The Wakefield Pageant in the Towneley Cycle*, Manchester 1958, p. 61 (line 662).

For he hathe caused all thys debate [‘dissension’, or specifically, ‘battle’].

Two of the dogs’ headings or *moralités* could be taken to support Robbins’s impression that the dogs represented slain Yorkists and that York must be ‘that man that all men hate’; the leader who had gone quit when some of his followers were killed and somehow ‘caused all this debate’. Colle’s reference to failing lordship and loss of influence could indeed fit York’s position in September 1456,¹⁴ while it has been proposed that when Grubbe states, on biblical authority, that ‘Oft beareth the son the father’s guilt,’ the reference was to York’s father, executed for treason against Henry V in 1415.¹⁵ But for a Yorkist like John Benet ‘that man that all men hate’, who ‘hathe caused all thys debate’, would be instantly recognisable as Edmund Beaufort, ‘the wicked duke of Somerset’, who had shamefully lost all Normandy by his negligence¹⁶ and twice nearly ruined England when he gained control of the government. The hero of Benet’s account was ‘the most noble duke of York’. Somerset’s ‘tunge’ led to broken bones, and to lost lives, when he persuaded Henry VI that York was plotting to seize the rule. York and his associate lords were forced to take arms to defend themselves from this false accusation of disloyalty and tried to remove Somerset from Henry’s side. When the Yorkists met the royal forces at St Albans on 22 May 1455, Somerset, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and Thomas, Lord Clifford, met a well-deserved death. The duke of Buckingham was wounded, as were his son and Somerset’s son and heir, Henry. The earl of Wiltshire fled from the battle, with great disgrace. ‘And so all those on the duke of Somerset’s side were killed, wounded or at least despoiled’, Benet summarised.¹⁷ For a Yorkist sixteen months later it was Somerset whose lordship had come to an end at St Albans and whose ‘fellowship’ had lost power. Colle’s master who went ‘quit’ may have meant the earl of Wiltshire, but John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, was among those who arrived too late to take part in the battle.

Grubbe’s ‘Offte beryth the sone the faderis gylte’ is of key importance to the verses. For Yorkists in 1456 the relevance was wholly contemporary. Although, in their view, the Lancastrian lords bore all the blame for the events leading to St Albans and their defeat there, the sons of Somerset, Northumberland and Clifford wanted revenge for their fathers’ deaths. The victorious Yorkists made a doomed effort to prevent any come-back when, in July 1455, they hastily pushed through parliament a bill that put all the guilt for the dispute onto the Lancastrian side and decreed that bygonos should be bygonos. There must be no recriminations and no redress might be sought by the losers.¹⁸ But although in Yorkist eyes the sons of the dead Lancastrian leaders might share the guilt of their fathers, they refused to let bygonos be bygonos and fierce rancours persisted.

In February 1456 Henry VI personally dismissed York from his second protectorship. The queen and her Lancastrian protégés steadily regained influence until, shortly before 19 September, the king and the queen moved to Coventry, signalling a concentration of royal strength well away from London and the waning of any Yorkist influence in King Henry’s counsels. So one of the many objections to Robbins’s impression that ‘The Five Dogs’ was pro-Lancastrian is just that Yorkists, rather than Lancastrians, feared reprisals in September 1456. Lancastrian dominance at court would be emphasised in early October when Henry held a great council at Coventry in which Shrewsbury was appointed treasurer of England in place of York’s brother-in-law, Henry, Viscount Bouchier. As chancellor, Bouchier’s brother, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, was now replaced by William Wainfleet, Bishop of Winchester. Some time after 13 October the court then moved to Chester, on the queen’s advice, says Benet, ‘because she held a hatred for London’. It is at that point in his chronicle that Benet goes back to 19–20 September and introduces the incident of the five dogs – as the kind of thing that caused the queen’s dislike and distrust of Londoners?

The *moralité* of the fifth verse, assigned to ‘Turn-bull’, sums up the message that was given by the first four dogs: ‘Beware of engaging in a risky undertaking and don’t incur our fate!’ The import of his further

¹⁴ Robbins cited for the sense of ‘when lordship faileth, good fellowship availeth’, the proverbial ‘Love and lordship like no fellowship’. Far more apposite is ‘When lordechype ys loste & lusti lekyng withall / When felichepe fayleth & frendechepe dothe falle / Then can Y no comfort but cry & call / “Spes mea in Deo [est]”’: Richard Leighton Greene, ed., *The Early English Carols*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1977, no. 341.

¹⁵ Eg. P.A. Johnson, *Duke Richard of York, 1411–1460*, Oxford 1988, p. 177.

¹⁶ ‘Benet’s Chron.’, pp. 202, 203, 206. ‘Somerset hath eten Fraunce and Normandie’ said bills posted in London in (?) May 1451: Roger Virgoe, ‘William Tailboys and Lord Cromwell’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 55 (1973), 459–82, pp. 470, 480.

¹⁷ ‘Benet’s Chron.’, p. 214.

¹⁸ James Gairdner, ed., *The Paston Letters*, 6 vols, London 1904, no. 299. ‘[T]o the which bill mony a man groged full sore nowe it is passed’, reported Henry Windsor. Windsor also reported a ‘grete grugyng’ between Warwick and Ralph, Lord Cromwell, who had been chamberlain of the king’s household and so controlled access to Henry. Warwick accused him of being the ‘begynner of all that journey [‘battle’] at Seynt Albones’.

words has gone unrecognised. So far from offering editorial guidance on it, Robbins rendered three lines unintelligible by two misreadings of the manuscript and one misinterpretation. Some linguistic analysis is needed and Benet himself seems to have corrected a false start when he came to write the word *weyis* in line 3. ‘To’ must be inserted before it to make syntactical sense.

Felix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum.

The blasynge starne his late constellacion

Ys pleynly determyned [to] weyis [b]atayle.¹⁹

To seche [‘seek’]²⁰ a remedye Y holde hyt geson

[‘unproductive; useless’]

And yn rancour wyth owte remedy ys none awayle.

The poet was here constrained by the dictates of rhyme and metre and there is the further difficulty that his language contains northern elements, as in the earlier *awayl[e]th*. Thus *starne* is a northern form of *star*. ‘The blasynge starne’ was the comet whose appearance is recorded in January-February 1456, when what it portended was much discussed in parliament.²¹ *Constellacion* must here mean ‘celestial influence upon events’²² and *weyis* be the northern verb *to wise*: ‘to guide; rule over’, or ‘reveal’. The suggested meaning is therefore, ‘the influence of the comet is plainly ordained [*determyned*] to direct the course of battle’. As one poet expressed it, ‘The planetes wark nothyng in veyn / But as thei be ordent so must thei reygne’.²³ The author seems to be implying that in any new contest the Yorkists are bound to come out on top. It is useless to seek any cure for that divinely appointed situation and therefore pointless to pursue grudges which cannot be redressed. The verses conclude with the, now rather cryptic, couplet:

Maysterys taketh for no grewe [‘grief’]²⁴ thewgh that we be dede

For they wylle walke be your sleve²⁵ in dyspyte of your hede.

‘Masters, do not treat it as a grievance that we are dead, for ‘they’ [unidentified] will walk past²⁶ your sleeve in scornful defiance of your head’.

Robbins, holding that ‘History illuminates Literature’, was himself the victim of History – an accident of publishing history – when he first printed ‘The Five Dogs of London’ in 1956 and included it three years later in *Historical Poems*. Benet’s Latin chronicle was not published until 1972, so Robbins knew only Robert Bale’s report of the incident. In that the relevant entry runs:

Item the xix day of September [1456] in the nyght tyme wer sett upon the standard [‘conduit’] in Fletestrete afore the Duk of York being ther than lodged in the Bisshop of Salisbury place certain dogges hedes with scriptures in their mouthes balade wise which dogges wer slayn vengeably the same nyght.

This entry immediately followed Bale’s account of civic riots in London in the previous April, in the upshot of which three men were hanged ‘for a rising and riflyng that was made upon Lumbardes’. ‘The peple sore grucchid’ that they were executed.²⁷ At first Robbins tried to fit the verses into this perceived context, and thought that when the poem presented the five slaughtered dogs as hapless victims of their cruel masters the reference must be to the ‘five’ executed looters. Perhaps the dogs were given their names? After they had been hanged at Tyburn, he imagined, their heads would have been severed and placed, ‘according to custom’, on London Bridge. Bale’s statement that the duke of York was staying in Fleet Street in September (which Benet does not mention) led Robbins to deduce further that the duke

¹⁹ MS *latayle*.

²⁰ Robbins misread *soche*, ‘such’.

²¹ Gairdner, *Paston Letters*, no. 322. Benet and some other chroniclers may have erred in dating the appearance to June.

²² Cf. *OED*, quotations from Gower, *Confessio* (1393), ‘it is constellacion Which causeth al that a man dothe’ and Elyot (1531), ‘He cursed his fate or constellation’.

²³ Greene, *Carols*, no. 334.

²⁴ Robbins glossed ‘not a whit’, which makes no sense.

²⁵ Robbins misread *fleke*. Under *Sleve* the *Middle English Dictionary* quotes Charles of Orleans, ‘From deth Y kepe not now astert / Though that he stood right even here at my sleve’.

²⁶ An alternative reading would make *walke* a northern variant of *Wake*, so ‘keep watch beside’.

²⁷ ‘Bale’s Chronicle’ (see Flenley), pp. 143-44. Bale did not explain why they ‘grucchid’. John Bocking, writing to John Paston on 8 May, clarifies the situation. The authorities – the mayor and the duke of Buckingham and other lords – tried to have the arrested offenders indicted of felony. In an act of civil disobedience a jury of their fellow-citizens refused to find them guilty of more than trespass. Later Bocking reported that ‘ij of the *trespasers*’ (emphasis added) had been hanged on 10 May and proclamations issued for the keeping of the peace: N. Davis, *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford 2 vols, 1971, 1976, nos 548-49.

must have instigated the riots of April and failed to protect his 'hirelings' when they were arrested. Four months later, he conjectured, Lancastrian propagandists cunningly used the incident to discredit York in the eyes of the pro-Yorkist Londoners. (Strange, in that case, that they made one of the 'hanged' men say that his throat had been cut.) Later Robbins abandoned the worst of these illogicalities but still stated that the display 'was apparently designed to isolate Edward [*sic*], Duke of York, from his London supporters'. Further adducing that because Benet copied a partisan Lancastrian poem of early 1459²⁸ he must have been a Lancastrian himself, Robbins even asserted that 'there is no question' that 'The Five Dogs' was intended 'to embarrass' the duke of York.²⁹

Subsequent historians have accepted Robbins's *diktat* and taken it as equally incontestable that 'The Five Dogs' attacked the duke. Very little Lancastrian propaganda survives, so a supposed example was welcome. Thus V.J. Scattergood wrote (also before Benet's chronicle was published):

Dating certainly from 1456 come some interesting verses evidently written by a Lancastrian supporter who lived in London. Supposedly spoken by servants who had been sacrificed to [York's] ambitions, these verses are forthright in their condemnation of York. ... The directness of these verses and the particularly sensational way in which their author chose to publicise them show that he had the objective of discrediting York in the public mind.³⁰

Later writers introduced variations. Although R.A. Griffiths cited both Bale and Benet for the circumstances in which the verses appeared he was evidently unaware that the text was well known and made his own guess about its message:

On more than one occasion [*sic*] during the autumn of 1456, lawyers were responsible for affixing provocative verses to the standard and aqueduct in Fleet Street, most pointedly in front of the bishop of Salisbury's house when the duke of York was in residence. Although their content is unknown, one suspects that they were hostile to the duke at a time when his relations with the court were deteriorating sharply.³¹

In his study of Richard, duke of York, P.A. Johnson declared, 'In early September York was ... treated to a particularly savage propaganda spectacle. The heads of five dogs were impaled outside his lodgings in Fleet Street, each carrying a scurrilous verse in its jaws'.³² John Watts followed Griffiths: 'anti-Yorkist bills, posted in London ... implied that the duke's downfall was assured'.³³ While apparently recognising that the verses were Yorkist, Michael Hicks put his own spin on them and tried, rather obscurely, to connect them in some way with activities by York's retainers in Wales: 'That the government ... blamed York's agents [for these] rather than the duke himself explains the resentful but obscure verses attached to the five dead dogs left outside York's London residence on the night of 19 September'.³⁴

Placing the verses in a different context, and giving primacy to the author's wording, we have argued that, on the contrary, 'The Five Dogs' was the spontaneous work of a particular group of Yorkist sympathisers who feared that Lancastrians planned to avenge their defeat at the battle of St Albans. They are historically important because they date from a time that is otherwise ill-documented.

What John Benet termed 'the great dissension' between York, Salisbury and Warwick on the one side and the sons of Somerset, Northumberland and Clifford on the other was eventually assuaged, for the time being, by an Act of Concord brokered by the queen in March 1458. A year later an adherent of the Lancastrians notably celebrated a government in which Yorkists had no part. 'Stere welle the good shype' (*HP*, no. 78)³⁵ describes the ship of state 'dressed in hys kynde' – naturally and properly equipped – with a complement of Lancastrian lords. The dissident Yorkist leaders eventually fled to exile and were attainted of treason in the parliament held at Coventry from 20 November to 20 December 1459.

²⁸ TCD, MS E. 5.10, ff. 30r-31r, *H.P.*, no. 78. Unnoticed by Robbins, 'Benet's Chron.' is in the same ms., ff. 132-188.

²⁹ *HP*, pp. xxxii-xxxiii, 355. Robbins still associated the verses of 19 Sept. with the earlier affrays.

³⁰ V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century*, London 1971, p. 178, and similarly p. 26.

³¹ Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: the Exercise of Royal Authority 1422-1461*, London 1981, p. 796.

³² Johnson, *Duke Richard of York*, p. 176.

³³ John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, Cambridge 1996, p. 336, n. 316. The historian William Huse Dunham liked to joke that when historical writing is 'source-based', the source is often another historian.

³⁴ Michael Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, Oxford 1998, p. 130.

³⁵ Robbins ignored Benet's careful dating of '1458, Dominical Letter G', which puts it between 1 Jan. and 25 March 1459, new style.

The Canterbury Ballade

Biblical allusions have been missed in the undoubtedly Yorkist poem that was composed in anticipation of their return. This poem is embedded in a chronicle continuation that was almost certainly the work of the same writer, probably a cleric.³⁶ Robbins named it ‘Ballade Set On The Gates of Canterbury’ because it is said in the manuscript to have been posted on the gates of Canterbury shortly before Warwick, with his father, the earl of Salisbury, Edward, Earl of March, William Nevill, Lord Fauconberg, and others, landed in late June. It is a poetic exposition of the manifesto that the exiles had also issued in advance, which the chronicle rehearses verbatim.

Rudolf Brotanek’s study of the poems in Trinity College Dublin, MS 432 (now MS D. 4. 18) included the ‘Canterbury ballade’ as an appendix.³⁷ His sometimes idiosyncratic views strongly influenced Robbins and, in turn, William Marx in his new edition of the chronicle. Thus from Brotanek came the idea that the ballade had been composed in Canterbury and at once displayed there ‘shortly before 28 June’. It seems more likely that both the ballade and the exiles’ manifesto were composed in Calais, or in Dublin, where York took refuge, well before they were published in England. The poet introduces his verses with seeming obscurity:

In the day of faste and spirituall afflixion,
The celestiaall influence of³⁸ bodyes transytory
Set asyde -- alle prophecyes and all commixtion
Of jumentys sensuall -- to ofte in memory
I reduced to mynde the prophete Isay.
Consideryng Englund to God in grevous offence,
With wepyng ye this text I fonde in his story:
*Omne caput languidum et omne cor merens.*³⁹

To support the narrow time-frame that he envisaged, Brotanek fancied that ‘the day of faste and spirituall afflixion’ must refer to the vigil of Whitsunday – 31 May in 1460. In fact the *terminus a quo* offered by the author is 27 February, because he is echoing the wording of Joel 2.2, *Nunc, ergo, dicit Dominus, convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro, in ieiunio et in fletu et in planctu*, from the liturgy for Ash Wednesday. The ‘celestiaall influence of bodyes transytory’ and all prophecies that can be set aside relate to Joel’s predictions that the day of salvation will be accompanied by earthquake and the darkening of sun, moon and stars.

Appropriate to the poet’s purpose was the prayer, ‘Spare, O Lord, spare thy people and do not give thine inheritance to reproach’, because he, like Joel, was heralding a coming day of deliverance – in his case the restoration of Yorkist rights of inheritance and the rescue of England from the *fili scelerati* – the Lancastrian lords -- who had brought it into distress. Evidently when he wrote he expected that day to arrive before 24 June. The ‘beasts’ responsible for the state of England and the penury of Henry VI would be paying the reckoning at that quarter day:

Tho bestys that thys wrought to mydsomer have but a myle,
But ever morneth Englund for ham that be hens.

Not Robbins but a much earlier editor was responsible for the odd idea (adopted by the editors of both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary*) that ‘to mydsomer have but a myle’ meant ‘are somewhat mad’, apparently by false association with the midsummer madness mentioned in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

Brotanek also misled Robbins and Marx when he tried to fit actual personages to passages that sustain no such interpretation. This is clearly so in line 4 of stanza 7. The stanza lists the ills that the time has come to remove: ‘*Tempus* ys come falshede to dystroy. ...*Tempus euellendi* the fals hunter with his horne’. After trying in vain to find a lord who had a horn as his badge, Brotanek settled for supposing that the false hunter was the Lancastrian treasurer, the earl of Wiltshire. Like Robbins (p. 370) and Marx

³⁶ William Marx, ed., *An English Chronicle 1377-1461: A New Edition*, Woodbridge 2003, pp. 86-88, Commentary, pp. 146-48. Quotations will be taken from this edn, re-punctuated where necessary. Robbins took his text (HP, no. 88) from the edn by J.S. Davies, *An English Chronicle*, Camden Society 64 (1856).

³⁷ Rudolf Brotanek, *Mittelenglische Dichtungen aus der Handschrift 432 des Trinity College in Dublin*, Halle 1940. Henceforth Brotanek.

³⁸ Brotanek, followed by Robbins and Marx, destroyed the sense by emending to ‘on’. It is the influence exerted by the planets that is meant.

³⁹ Isaiah 1.5.

(p. 148), he missed the biblical reference that makes the false hunter represent disinheritance. Two men appear in the Old Testament as notable hunters: Nimrod and Esau, *vir gnarus venandi*. Evidently the poet expected the reader to recognise that ‘the false hunter’ was Jacob, whose name could be interpreted as ‘the supplanter’ and who impersonated Esau, the genuine hunter, to usurp their father’s blessing.⁴⁰

In similar fashion, Brotanek, followed by Robbins and Marx, thought that the first line of stanza six referred to some prelate who was dead when the poem was written. This inspired many attempts to identify the bishop meant. Instead, the poet is criticising the priesthood in general. The biblical Jonathan has gone beyond recall and there is no one to fill his role as intercessor for York, the modern David. The present-day clergy fear that if they should act as go-betweens they could be deprived of their rich benefices:

Jonathas ys ded that David shuld restore⁴¹
 To the presence of the kyng, unyte to make:
Murum pro domo Israel. Presthode dar no more
 Put hymself forth, his fat benefyce he shulde forsake.
 Mercyfull God, it ys tyme Thow for us awake!
Mercenarius fugit ne wylle make resistance
 He fereth the wolf that wolde hys bonys crake.

Instead, says the poet, the clergy have abandoned the sheep to the wolf, like the hireling shepherd in John 10. 12-13. Whereas the rest of the ballade closely reproduces the complaints of the Yorkist manifesto, this stanza seems to reflect the author’s personal view. Interestingly, when the chronicler himself comes to describe the preliminaries to the battle of Northampton on 10 July, he says that various bishops had been sent to King Henry to plead the Yorkist case.⁴² Among them was an emissary from the archbishop of Canterbury, who deceitfully urged the king’s side to fight, ‘as they sayde that were there’. On another occasion the same man was dispatched by the commons, ‘but pryvyly departed away’. The only bishop named is ‘the Bysshop of Herforde, a Whyte Frere, the kyngis confessoure’, who, says the chronicler, was subsequently imprisoned for failing to intercede as requested. The bishop of Hereford in 1460 was the Carmelite friar John Stanbury, a former officer of the royal household who was made bishop of Bangor in 1448 and translated to Hereford in February 1453.⁴³

The Dead Man’s Greeting

The copyist of the only manuscript in which the ballade now appears⁴⁴ may have mistakenly joined it to the six-line verse with which he concluded it and which in his exemplar ended with the specific address, ‘To the ryght worshypfull cyte of Caunterbury’. It is true that the verse repeats the theme of the ballade – the wicked disinheritance of York and his adherents and their imminent rescue of England – in a way that is both more allusive and more populist. It runs:

The deed man greteth yow well
 That ys just, trew as steele,
 With verry good entent:
 Alle the reame of Englund
 Sone to louse from sorowes bond
 Be ryght indifferent judgement.

We can leave Brotanek for the present, after mentioning his wildest attempt to make History illuminate Literature. He proposed that the dead man who was about to save England from sorrow was the poet himself, wrongly rumoured to have died when, Brotanek thought, the earl of Wiltshire took vengeance on the commons of Kent.⁴⁵ William Marx thought that ‘the dead man’ was the resurrected Christ. Robbins espoused Brotanek’s absurd explanation.

⁴⁰ Genesis, chap. 27. The hunter’s horn, if not there simply for the rhyme scheme and as a natural adjunct to a 15th-c. huntsman, is the biblical symbol of strength and power.

⁴¹ *Shuld*: conditional indicating unrealised expectation or obligation.

⁴² Marx, *Eng. Chron.*, p. 90.

⁴³ *HP*, p. 353. This was the ‘frere Stanbury’ of l. 22 in *HP*, no. 76, on the death of Suffolk in 1450.

⁴⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Lyell 34, ff. 203r-204r. The comparable portion of the other extant text of the chronicle, National Library of Wales MS 21608, is lost.

⁴⁵ Brotanek, p. 204, cited *HP*, pp. xxxvii-viii.

This dead man whose identity must have been obvious to contemporaries appears in a range of Yorkist pieces to baffle editors. *HP*, no. 44, 'The Cock of the North', a jumble of prophetic utterances, has in lines 37-38,

Than shall Troy untrew tremble that dayes
For drede of a dede man when they here hym speke.

Robbins (p. 310) thought that this time the speaking dead man was Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, murdered in 1447. On the other hand, in lines 53-60:

Then shall Saxons chese theym a lord
That shall rewle hem rightfully and bryng hem undere
A dede man shall make by-twene hem a-corde ...
He that is ded and buryed in sight
Shall ryse agayn and lyve in lond
In confortyng of a yong knyght
That Fortune hath chosen to be here housbond,

'The dead man here may allude to King Arthur, whose prestige is thrown to the side of the Yorkists'.

The version of a dice prophecy copied by Benet (*HP*, no. 46) promises 'a new king at a new parlement' once traitors have been set aside and the double-tongued (*bilingue*) 'clere schent', adding that 'When dede men ryse that schal be moch wondur, / The rede rose and the floure de lyce the lockes [read 'stockes'] schal undur'. Benet explicated this in terms appropriate to the accession of Edward IV. Robbins, however, commented (p. 316) 'Since prophecies have heralded most disturbances, one might speculate ... whether this has any reference to the 1381 Revolt'. (!)

Robbins did not realise that the set of political verses that he had incongruously included as no. 122 in his *Secular Lyrics*⁴⁶ clearly reveal the identity of 'the dead man' who in Yorkist political mythology oversaw the fortunes of Duke Richard and his descendants. In pageants staged at Coventry in April 1474 to welcome Edward IV's heir, the three-year-old Prince Edward, Edward the Confessor addressed the child as

Nobull Prynce Edward, my cossyn & my knyght
And very prynce of oure lyne com in dissent.
I, Seint Edward, have pursued for your faders imperiall right
Wherof he was excluded by full furius intent.

'That that was oures is now in your faders hand', concluded England's royal saint.⁴⁷

Twelve Letters Shall Save All England

'Edward', the renowned 'kyng most ryall' who mediates in affairs on behalf of the Yorkists, also features in a set of prophetic verses from the same date as the 'Canterbury Ballade' and its 'Dead Man's Greeting'. In this poem, *HP*, no. 91, which Robbins misleadingly entitled 'Twelve Letters Save England', a mystical lady embroiders twelve letters which 'shall save all England' with the triumphant return of the Yorkist leaders in mid-1460. The poet describes, by title and badge, the four Yorkist leaders of that date: York, March, Salisbury and Warwick. There is also, however, a fifth personage, identified only as 'Edward':

E. for Edward whos fame the erthe shal sprede:
Because of his wisdom named prudence ['foresight']
Shal save all Englonb by his manly-hede
Wherfore we owe to do hym reverence.

This revered figure appears again in lines 61-68, as 'the olde' (in the singular) whose death in 1066 had severed him physically but not spiritually from 'the young' – the exiles of 1459-60 who claimed him as patron saint of their line.⁴⁸ It is Saint Edward's will that they are carrying out:

⁴⁶ Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, Oxford 1952, from the Coventry Leet Book.

⁴⁷ In another of the pageants King Richard [II] also stressed that 'The right lyne of the royall blode ys now as itt schulde be'.

⁴⁸ F. Madden, 'Political Poems of the Reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV,' *Archaeologia*, vol. 29 (1842), proposed that some of the exiles were in Ireland and some in Calais. Scattergood, while arguing that a poem of early July 1460 had been updated in 1461, speculated that originally 'the young' – March and Warwick – had been on their way to fight at Northampton, while 'the old' – York and Salisbury – were respectively in Ireland and London: *Politics and Poetry*, p. 192.

Now have I declarede these xij letters acordyng
 To theire condicions, where thei ryde or gone,
 Though thei be disseverid, the olde from the yinge,
 Theire entent & purpos corden all in oone –
 That is to destroy treson & make a tryall
 Of hem that be fauty & hurten full sore,
 For the wylle of Edward, kyng most ryall:
 That is the moste purpos that we labor fore.

False historical hindsight caused Robbins to suppose that ‘Edward, kyng most ryall’ must here refer to Edward IV and so to date ‘Twelve Letters’ decisively to ‘soon after July 1461’ (read ‘June?’), despite all the problems this involved. Why, for instance, would a poet writing at that date present York and Salisbury as alive and undefeated, so that he could say of Salisbury (the ‘Eagle’) that ‘Ther was never byrde that bred undre sonne / More fortunat in felde than that birde hathe be’? Why, especially, would he identify the man who was by then king as merely York’s son and earl of March?⁴⁹

M. for Marche, trewe in every tryall,
 Drawen by discrecion, that worthy & wise is;
 Conseived in wedlok & comyn of blode ryall,
 Joynyng unto vertu, excludyng all visis.

Edward the Confessor is not the only link between ‘Twelve Letters’ and the ‘Canterbury Ballade’ and its ‘Dead Man’s Greeting’. As Robbins and others have noted, where the ballade’s penultimate stanza praises March, ‘whos fame the erthe shall sprede’, Salisbury, ‘named prudence’, Warwick and Fauconberg, ‘a knyght of grete reverence’ – ‘Jhesu ham restore to theyre honoure as thay had before’ – ‘Twelve Letters’ applies the same descriptive epithets solely to ‘Edward’. In both poems Warwick is a defensive shield.⁵⁰ Which author cribbed from the other? Or was one versatile polemicist responsible for both productions?

That such political poems were widely disseminated is shown by the existence of another version of ‘Twelve Letters’ which had suffered alteration and distortion in the course of (oral?) transmission.⁵¹ Since it refers to York and Salisbury in the past tense it may have been recycled to adapt the original political prophecy to the situation at a later date.

Awake, Lords, and Take Good Heed

A wide range of dates has been proposed for the rather rough-and-ready verses of *HP*, no. 87, ‘Take Good Heed’, otherwise ‘Awake Lords’, written at a time when ‘the rose, the lion, the eagle and the bear’ were high on fortune’s wheel. February 1454, May 1455 and between July and December 1460 have all been put forward as possible dates.⁵² Robbins tentatively settled for Brotanek’s dating of late 1457 to early 1458, ‘when Lancastrians and Yorkists were seemingly reconciled’ by the ‘Accord’ made in March 1458. The argument is unsustainable. It rested chiefly on Brotanek’s unfounded belief that the Stafford knots mentioned in line 34 ceased to be worn after the death of Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham, in the battle of Northampton in July 1460:

For many that were the chayne on hir sleve
 Wold ful fayne youre lyves bereve
 And som that were the ragged bottis [‘staffs’]
 Had lever were the Stafford knottis.

⁴⁹ Robbins’s note (*HP*, p. 379) that ‘it is possible (with Furnivall) to misidentify Edward as both earl of March and duke of York’ reflected his habitual confusion over York’s Christian name, along with F.J. Furnivall’s notion that the poem celebrated the acknowledgment of York’s claim to the throne in late 1460, so that ‘Edward, kyng most ryall’ should be emended to read ‘Richard’.

⁵⁰ Kingsford was mistaken in thinking that they specifically ‘glorify’ Warwick: C.L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, Oxford 1913, p. 246.

⁵¹ Lambeth Palace, MS 306 f. 134r, cf. *HP*, pp. 379–81. F.J. Furnivall printed it, offering the date ‘Ab. 1465’, in *Political, Religious and Love Poems*, Early English Text Society, o.s. 15, (1866).

⁵² *HP*, p. 367.

But of course the Staffords and their retainers continued to use the badge after that, as Salisbury's son, John Neville, inherited the eagle (more properly a griffon's head) in the family crest. Moreover, in 1457-58 Lancastrian supporters were most unlikely to feel any obligation to adopt the badges of their rivals and certainly did not swear obedience to them as the author claims in lines. 13-16:

Trust not to moche in the favour of youre foos
For thei be double in wirking, as the worlde gos,
Promysing feithfully obeisaunce to kepe,
But perfite love in theire hertis is leyde for to slepe.

This time no commentator has suggested that 'Awake Lords' might have been composed after the accession of Edward IV. The poet's concern that now the Yorkists are dominant they will put unwise trust in their former enemies echoes Friar John Brackley's fear in October 1460 that the ascendant Yorkists of that time would treat former Lancastrian supporters with undue favour.⁵³ Brackley gave a verse by verse exposition of Ecclesiasticus 12, with its warning never to trust a proven enemy: *Ne credas inimico tuo in aeternum*, mentioning that he had formerly preached in St Paul's on the same text. The author of 'Awake' also reflects it. But supporters of the newly successful Yorkists and their new king in the spring of 1461 had even more cause to suspect the loyalty of quondam Lancastrians – the *bilingue* of Benet's dice prophecy (above, p.8).

There are three reasons for dating the poem to that period. Firstly, if 'the lion', as generally stated, referred to John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, whose badge was a white lion, J.R. Lander doubted whether he had come out in support of Warwick and the other Yorkists before December 1460.⁵⁴ With Warwick, however, he was in command of the Yorkist force when, fighting in the name of King Henry, it was defeated by the queen's forces at the second battle of St Albans on 17 February 1461. More importantly, two items in 'Awake' must put the date after January 1461. Their significance has been missed. Lines 38-40 clearly refer to the deaths of York and Salisbury on 30 December 1460:

By counsel goode yit take goode hede,
For a Cristmas gestenyng, as clerkis rede,
At on-set stevyn is quyit in dede.

Robbins, whose comments on this poem were again much influenced by Brotanek's, took these lines to be somehow 'ironical' and, reading 'in dede' as the meaningless tag 'indeed', rendered the sense as 'Some rash adventure or word can be repaid to us Yorkists quite unexpectedly'.⁵⁵ The meaning is surely that 'at an unscheduled hour Christmas hospitality is requited in death'. The 'gestenyng' may reflect the rather unlikely story given in a set of strongly Yorkist 'brief notes' compiled at Ely.⁵⁶ According to this, Henry, duke of Somerset was captured by the duke of York at Pontefract Castle but was offered a truce until the Thursday after Epiphany, 10 January. Breaking the sworn peace, Somerset hid with his army in a forest and rushed out upon York. York, Salisbury and two of their sons were killed.

Lines 5-6 put the poem's date further forward, by making hypocritical Lancastrian sympathisers say 'in theire assemble' (the common council of London?):⁵⁷

It is a wondre thyng
To se the Rose in wyntre so fressh for to spryng',
And many barked atte bere that now be ful styll.

With Edward's acclamation in London on 3 March 1461 the Rose that had died in winter with Richard, Duke of York, had sprung afresh with his son and the author of 'Awake' could consider that, in the capital at least, 'Fortune hathe set you hye on hir whele'. Erstwhile Lancastrian supporters might find it expedient to express a new loyalty to the dominant Yorkists and their followers, but the situation was unsettled. The poet adjures his fellow Yorkists, 'Of youre disposicion tellith not every man' and expresses fears for his own safety:

⁵³ Gairdner, *Paston Letters*, no. 426, 24 Oct. 1460. For instance a group of the Pastons' enemies in Norfolk had sued to March, Warwick and Salisbury for the letters of protection that were issued on 23 July 1460: *ibid.*, no. 410.

⁵⁴ J. R. Lander, *Crown and Nobility, 1450-1509*, London 1976, p. 301. In Dec. 1459 Norfolk swore allegiance to Henry and his son at the Parliament of Coventry. 'Only in 1461 did he fully champion the Yorkist cause'.

⁵⁵ *HP*, p. 369.

⁵⁶ Keith Dockray, ed., *Three Chronicles of the Reign of Edward IV*, Gloucester 1988, p. 154.

⁵⁷ Robbins (*HP*, p. 367) was mistaken in thinking that an assembly must refer to a meeting of parliament.

Miche is in my mynde, no more is in my penne.
For this shuld I be shent, might som men it kenne.

It required the hard-fought but ultimately crushing Yorkist victory at Towton on 29 March to offer Edward security on the throne. Before that a popular propagandist for the Yorkist cause might well warn against Lancastrian turncoats who secretly

hopen & tristen to here of a day
To se the rose & the lion brought to a bay
With the egel & the bere that worthi be in fight:
From that infortune preserve you God Almighty.

Willikin's Return

'Awake Lords' was addressed exclusively to Yorkists and expressed Yorkist concerns. *HP*, no. 82, 'Willikin's Return', is a Lancastrian production, composed during Henry VI's brief readeption from 13 October 1470 to 14 April 1471. It is cast in the form of a traditional Christmas carol. Linguistic elements suggest that the composer was a northerner. Henry VI's chamberlain, Sir Richard Tunstall, who is singled out for mention, was himself a Yorkshireman. Was the carol perhaps sung at Christmas 1470 in Tunstall's household?

As early as August 1460, Friar Brackley, an ardent admirer of the earl of Warwick, had feared a possible falling-out between Warwick and the earl of March.⁵⁸ The last, decisive breach occurred some ten years later. In July 1469 Warwick quietly married his daughter Isabel to Edward's brother, George, Duke of Clarence. (To adapt a phrase from the Roman historian, Sir Ronald Syme, in default of a son much may be done with daughters). Next year he intrigued with Louis XI of France, who at length persuaded the exiled Queen Margaret to agree to a marriage between Prince Edward and Warwick's younger daughter, Anne, on the understanding that Warwick and Clarence would restore Henry to his throne. Louis would provide troops to accompany Margaret and Prince Edward when they staged the necessary invasion of England and a Lancastrian England would assist Louis against the duke of Burgundy. The knot thus tied with Henry was a three-fold one, involving Warwick, Clarence and Louis.

'Willikin's Return' survives in a unique copy, British Library, Additional MS 19046, folio 74r. It was untidily written on an almost-blank page by the 'Jones' who identified himself in a cramped addition to the last line: 'fy Amen q[uo]t Ionys'. At the top of the page another writer had previously started to copy the burden of an orthodox Christmas carol: *Conditor alme siderum eterna lux c[redencium]*.⁵⁹ The text will be given here as it stands in the manuscript, with expanded abbreviations in italics and punctuation and some capitalisation supplied. Cancelled miswritings are ignored.

Nowell nowell nowell nowell
& cryst save mery yglon & speedyt⁶⁰ well
tyll home sull Wylekyn this joly gentyl ['gallant, noble'] schepe ['ship'].
All to houre combely kyng Hary thys cnat ['knot'] ys knyht
therefore let us all syngen nowel.

Nowell nowell nowell nowell
& cryst save mery y[n]glon[d] & speedyt well
tyll home sull Wylekyn thys joly gentyrl mast.
All to my lorde prynce, *that never* was caste ['overthrown'],
therefore let us all syngen nowel.

Nowell nowell nowell nowell
& cryst save mery y[n]glon[d] & speedyt wel
tyll home sull Wylekyn thys joly gentyrl nore ['oar'].
All to my lorde cha[m]berlayne, *that never* was fors[u]ore ['forsworn'],⁶¹

⁵⁸ Gairdner, *Paston Letters*, no. 416, misdated Oct.

⁵⁹ Greene, *Carols*, no. 122 C.

⁶⁰ First *e* substituted for a second *p*.

⁶¹ Robbins and Greene, *Carols*, p. 477, glossed *forsore* as 'badly afflicted,' but a combination of the intensive prefix *for-* with the verb *to sore* is extremely improbable.

therfore let us all syngen nowell.

Nowell nowell nowell nowell
& cryst save mery y[n]glon[d] & speedyt well
tyll home sull Wylekyn thys joly gentyll sayle.
All to my lorde fueryn that never dyd fayle,
therfore let us all syngen nowell.

Scattergood conveniently summarised Robbins's view of the poem, which derived from Greene, who had published it in the first edition of his *English Carols* in 1935. Warwick and his supporters landed unopposed at Dartmouth on 25 September 1470 and Warwick declared himself publicly in favour of Henry VI. 'It must have been shortly after this that a contemporary Lancastrian carol writer celebrated him as the restorer of England's rightful king'. 'Warwick is here referred to as "wylekyn".' (Greene said, "Wylekin" is probably Warwick'). The verses 'celebrate Warwick's prospective joining with Edward, Prince of Wales ("my lorde prynce"), John Neville, Marquess of Montague ("my lorde chamberlayne") and with "my lorde fueryn" who has so far resisted identification'.⁶²

'Lord Fueryn' is a scribal ghost which investigators have hunted in vain. The original probably read either *all to my lorde sueryn (suoryn?)* and so meant 'all sworn to my lord', or *all to my lorde soueryn*, 'sovereign'. Crucially, Robbins had inherited one false identification from Greene, who acknowledged the help of C.W. Prévité-Orton. Montagu was not the king's chamberlain in 1469-71. That office was held by William, Lord Hastings, until he joined Edward IV in flight on 2 or 3 October 1470. After Henry's redeption on 13 October the new chamberlain of the king's household was the staunchly Lancastrian Tunstall. So the carol cannot have been composed as early as September. And Warwick had, of course, arrived before October. He retained his official position as great chamberlain of England, but even his most enthusiastic supporter could not have claimed that he was never forsworn, to either King Henry or King Edward.

The identification of Wylekyn as Warwick was tendentious in the first place, because to equate a mere subject with the ship of state would be treasonable. Nor would former Lancastrian exiles like Tunstall be inclined to afford Warwick such eminence. In fact the idea that Wylekyn could be Warwick rests wholly on a misreading of the poem and a disregard for its syntax. The first four lines form one sentence: Christ is asked to save England *tyll home sull Wylekyn, thys joly gentyll schepe*. The subject of the next sentence is obviously not Wylekyn but the knot all (i.e. 'wholly, entirely') tied with King Henry and our reason for singing 'noel'. Greene and Robbins, however, inserted a comma between *schepe* and *all*, instead of a full-stop. The other verses have been similarly mispunctuated. What the poet says is that the absent Wylekyn is England's ship, its mast, its oar and its sail. Pending his arrival we are all to hail, whole-heartedly, the compact with Henry, the absent prince who has never been 'cast', the lord chamberlain who was never forsworn and my lord (Sir Richard Tunstall again?) who never did fail.

Who, therefore, was the 'Wylekyn' whose advent was urgently awaited, not least by Warwick, after Henry's resumption of the throne? On whom did the salvation of the new régime depend? One absence was so important that contemporaries would have recognised the poet's subject no matter how fanciful the name he offered.⁶³ The marriage between Edward of Lancaster and Warwick's daughter Anne took place in France in early December. On 17 December a warrant to the exchequer under Henry's privy seal ordered payment of £2,000 to Warwick to pass to France with ships and men to bring home the queen, 'our most dear and entirely beloved wife, and our son the prince'.⁶⁴ In that winter season Edward was desperately needed to come as a new Rose 'fressh for to spryng' or the 'fayre mast' that he had been for the author of 'Stere welle the good shype' in 1459. He would be a much more credible representative of the Lancastrian monarchy than poor shambling Henry and his personal presence would greatly encourage resistance to the expected invasion by Edward IV. Wylekyn can only be Prince Edward – the 'prynce that never was caste' – to whom 'let vs all syngen nowel'. It was Robbins's erroneous punctuation that gave Scattergood the impression that 'Wylekyn' is coming home 'all to my lorde prynce' – 'in order to join him'. The prince was not 'home' but in France and it was *his* home-coming that was anxiously expected.

⁶² Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, p. 199.

⁶³ If the author invented the name the best guesses are that 'Wylekyn' was a diminutive of *willy*, 'benevolent' or *will*, 'homeless; wandering'. But Greene (*Carols*, p. 477) conjectured that the carol was closely modelled on (was 'a close parody of') an unknown folk-song. If that were so, the hypothetical source could have featured a 'Little William'.

⁶⁴ A.R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents, 1327-1485*, London 1969, p. 306.

The arrival of Edward of Lancaster and his company was delayed, first while troops and ships were assembled, and then by bad weather in the Channel. Edward of York got to England first. He landed on 14 March 1471 and on 14 April defeated and killed Warwick at the battle of Barnet, where once again he captured Henry. On the same day Queen Margaret and Prince Edward finally reached England, only to suffer the *mal journée* of Tewkesbury on 4 May.

The Lily White Rose

In their earnest search for historical references a series of editors contrived to miss all the clues in ‘The Lily White Rose’ (Greene, *Carols*, no. 432; *HP*, no. 34). This is a two-part song, preserved with its music in a Tudor song-book. Two verses give the setting for a burden that is a tour-de-force for an accomplished woman singer. That she is depicted as a ‘comly quene’ seated in a garden which conspicuously contains a white rose and sings ‘This gentill day dawes and I must home gone’ immediately suggests that the scene is set in late 1475 or January 1476, when Margaret of Anjou was about to go home to France after Edward IV had arranged, on 2 October 1475, to ‘ransom’ her to Louis XI in exchange for £10,000. After being captured in the wake of Tewkesbury, Margaret had spent four years in England as a ‘state prisoner’, while accorded the honour due to her rank. On 13 November 1475 she was placed in the custody of Thomas Thwaytes to await her escort to France by Sir Thomas Montgomery. Eventually Montgomery handed her over to officials of Louis at Rouen on 29 January 1476.⁶⁵ It seems likely that while awaiting her transfer Margaret was kept in Calais, where Thwaytes was treasurer. If so, her presence in the town would have created great interest. Although ‘The Lily White Rose’ was not necessarily written at that time, it is tempting to speculate that it might have been in Calais that it was composed and first sung. The lyrics should be quoted in full:

In a gloryus garden grene
 Sawe I syttyng a comly quene.
 Among the flouris that fressh byn
 She gadird a floure &, set [‘planted’] betwene,
 The lyly whighte rose me thought I sawe.
 The lyly whighte rose me thought I sawe
 & ever she sang:
 ‘This day, day dawes.
 This gentill day, day dawes.
 This gentill day dawes
 & I must home gone.
 This gentill day dawes.
 This day, day dawes.
 This gentill day dawes
 & we must home gone’.

In that garden be flouris of hewe:
 The gelofir gent, that she well knewe,
 The floure de luce she did on rewe [‘placed in order’]
 & said, ‘the white rose is most trewe
 This garden to rule be ryghtwis lawe’.
 The lyly whighte rose me thought I sawe.
 & evyr she sang:
 This day, day dawes, &c.

As so often, different editors here proposed a variety of dates and identifications. F.J. Furnivall printed the song in 1868, dating it to 1464 and identifying the ‘comly quene’ as Elizabeth Woodville. In 1891 H.B. Briggs hedged his bets and proposed that it might have appeared in early 1461 when Edward IV was proclaimed king (and the only queen of England was Margaret), although perhaps the allusion to a fleur-de-lis might indicate 1471, ‘when the King of France was helping the Lancastrian party’.⁶⁶ Greene, dating the song 1486 and identifying the queen as Elizabeth of York, did not explain why the fleur-de-lis was mentioned or how a composer could safely make Henry VII’s wife say that the White Rose ruled

⁶⁵ C.L. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth*, 2 vols, London 1924, vol. 2, pp. 157-58.

⁶⁶ H.B. Briggs, ed., *A Collection of Songs and Madrigals of the Close of the Fifteenth Century*, London 1891, cited *HP*, p. 299.

England by legitimate right. Ignoring the wording ‘this *gentill* day’, while noting that in the early sixteenth century the song was a prime favourite of minstrels under such names as ‘The Joly Day Now Dawis’,⁶⁷ Greene got round one problem in his interpretation by declaring that the burden had no logical connection with the stanzas but ‘plainly belongs to the medieval theme of the *aube*, or lovers’ reluctant parting at dawn’ and was probably borrowed from some earlier and more popular song on that theme.

Robbins for his part did not wholly exclude Elizabeth Woodville but because he had been led to suppose that the musical setting was too sophisticated to be much earlier than the end of the fifteenth century he preferred to think that the song celebrated the marriage of Henry VII.⁶⁸ To support that view he swept aside the strongly pro-Yorkist references as ‘almost casual’ and described the flower names as an ‘artificial folksong series’. But besides the much-emphasised white rose of York, only two flowers are mentioned: the *geloфир* – gillyflower or clove pink – which was the device of Edward’s queen, Elizabeth Woodville,⁶⁹ and the fleur-de-lis, which stood, of course, for Margaret with reference to her distinguished royal French lineage. By making the queen place *on rene* – ‘in (sequential) order’ (*OED*, s.v. *Ren* sb. 1) – the *geloфир gent* and the *floure de luce* the composer has Margaret yielding precedence to the queen who has taken her place. Robbins, however, further disguised the sense by glossing *did on rene* by the syntactically impossible ‘took pity on’.

It may well be that none of the editors cited could envisage any correspondence between the defeated queen whom a Yorkist song-writer presented in compassionate terms and the one whom historians of their own time depicted as a virago – ‘unpopular from the start’; ‘self-willed and imperious’; devoid of conciliatory manners; ‘implacable’ and ‘vindictive’.⁷⁰ As it is, ‘The Lily White Rose’ joins ‘The Five Dogs of London’ to illustrate how a text can be misread to fit editorial preconceptions. Once opinions have become established, however, they can be hard to shift.⁷¹

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⁶⁷ Gavin Douglas, *Eneados* (1513). A few years earlier William Dunbar mentioned that ‘Now The Day Dawis’ was a favourite of ‘commone menstrallis’: cited Greene, *Carols*, p. 479, *HP*, p. 299.

⁶⁸ *HP*, p. 298. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry*, p. 215, elaborated that the song ‘is most likely a celebration of Elizabeth’s suitability as Henry VII’s queen’.

⁶⁹ Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, ‘The Device of Queen Elizabeth Woodville: a gillyflower or pink’, *The Ricardian*, vol. 11 (1997), pp. 17-27.

⁷⁰ C.L. Kingsford, ‘Margaret of Anjou’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn, 29 vols, Cambridge 1910-11.

⁷¹ A much earlier version of this article benefited from the criticisms of a reader who was intent on upholding received beliefs at every point.