

Addresses to the Audience and Transition in ME Tail-rhyme Romances

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1. Addresses to the Audience

As one of the conspicuous characteristics of formulaic expressions in the Middle English tail-rhyme romances, there is a frequent appearance of addresses to the audience. The occurrence of this figure of speech is normally at the very beginning of each tail-rhyme romance.

Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild begins with:

Mi leue frende dere:
Herken & 3e may here,
 & 3e wil vnderstonde,
 Stories 3e may lere
 Of our elders þat were
 Whilom in þis lond.
 Y wil 3ou telle of kinges tvo
 (Hende Hapeolf was on of þo)
 Pat weld al Ingelond; (1-9)

The poet, first of all, addresses his audience as 'My dear friends', and urges them to listen to him. And he begins to narrate a story in which a hero or heroine makes an appearance without fail. In the romance concerned, one of the heroes is 'hende Hapeolf', one of the two kings. The alliterative word pair 'Hark and hear' is frequently identified. Furthermore, the sentence 'Hark and you may hear' itself is almost fixed and thus conventional in the tail-rhyme romances.

The King of Tars begins with:

Herkneþ to me boþe *eld & 3ing,*
 For Maries loue *þat swete Þing,*
 Al hou a wer bigan
 Bitvene a trewe Cristen king
 & an heþen heye lording,
 Of Dames þe soudan.
 Þe king of Tars hadde a wiue,

Feirer mi3t non ben oliue

Pat ani wi3t telle can.

A douhter Pai hadde *hem bitven,*

Non feirer woman mi3t ben,

As white as feþer of swan. (1-12)

This is a typical opening stanza of the tail-rhyme romances referring to the audience. By addressing the audience as 'Harken to me', the minstrel calls their attention to him. In this first stanza, there are several formulaic expressions and word pairs characteristic of the tail-rhyme romances: an inclusive word pair 'old and young', 'that sweet thing', 'there is no fairer woman than ...', a conventional simile 'as white as feather of a swan', etc. The form 'ying' in the word pair 'old and young' is forced to be so under the necessity of rhyming. The phrase 'that sweet thing' is a eulogy of Mary, which is recurrent throughout all the tail-rhyme romances. A heroine coming up on the stage in the romances is always a lady with supreme beauty. Therefore, such negative comparative constructions as 'fairer might none are alive' or 'none fairer woman might are' necessarily occur. This is a kind of hyperbole, an exaggerated expression. A beautiful lady is always described by the use of a conventional simile ('as white as feather of a swan'). The white feather of a swan was thus used in qualifying a physical beauty of a lady in the tail-rhyme romances.

Octovian commences with:

Mekyll and littill, olde and 3ynge,
Herkyns all to my talkynge,
 Of whaym I will 3ow kythe; (1-3)

The poet's address to all the audience 'mickle and little, old and young' is also recurrent in the tail-rhyme romances. At the very beginning, there are two very popular formulaic expressions. Here again the forced word form 'ying' is identified. Immediately after this address to the

audience continues an Invocation to Jesus Christ. Thereafter, the poet begins his story of an emperor in Rome. From the beginning, this romance abounds in formulaic expressions peculiar to the tail-rhyme romances.

Duke Rowlande and Sir Ottuell of Spayne begins with:

Lordynges, þat bene *hende and Free*,
Herkyns alle hedir-wardes to mee,
 Gif þat it be 3our will.
 Now lates alle 3our noyse be,
 And **herkyns** nowe of *gamen & glee*,
 Pat I schall tell 3ow till. (1-6)

The poet presses listening on the audience as many as twice in this brief passage. The expression 'to let all your noise be and hark' is interesting. The word 'noise' is often used in the word pair 'noise and cry' in ME writings (R. Brunne, Gower, etc.). The audience addressed is qualified by the adjectival clause 'that are hend and free' (= 'courteous and generous'), which has become a very common formulaic expression in the tail-rhyme romances. The poet well understands the decorum. The presence of the alliterative word pair 'gamen and glee' demonstrates that a romance is originally a story presenting joy or pleasure to the audience. This word pair makes a countless appearance at rhyme. Its inverted word order ('glee and gamen') is hardly identified. Line 3 ('If it is your will') is appropriate to be placed at tail rhyme line.

The poet goes on to say as follows immediately after this passage:

Of doghety men I schall 3ow telle,
 þat were full fayre of *flesche & fell*,
 And *Semely appon Sille*.
 And with þaire wapyns wele couthe melle,
 And boldly durste in batell duelle,
 And doghety proued one hill. (7-12)

One sees that the heroes are 'doughty' men who are very fair of 'flesh and fell' and 'seemly upon sill', and they can mingle well in combat, and they dare to duel boldly in battle. And the heroes are finally proved doughty without fail. The alliterative word pair '*flesh and fell*' (= '(human) flesh and skin') stands at rhyme position without any

exception. Line 8 is clearly aimed at a heavy alliteration. Another alliterative formula 'seemly upon sill' is not so frequent in the tail-rhyme romances. With respect to the substantive 'sill', the *OED* explains in detail, and adds 'In ME. poetry sometimes used in the sense of 'floor'¹. The line in question is recorded in the *Dictionary*. This formula occurs copiously at tail-rhyme line, unquestionably suitable for rhyme position.

Sir Cleges starts with:

Will ye **lystyn**, and ye schyll **here**
 Of eldyrs that before vs were,
 Bothe *hardy and wy3t*, (1-3)

The pattern 'listen and (you shall) hear' is also repetitive in ME poetry. The poet says he'll tell a story of 'our elders both *hardy and wight*'. The formulaic expression 'hardy and wight', consisting of words of bravery in battle field, is also much favoured by romance writers. The poet concerned begins a story immediately after this address to the audience:

In the tyme of kyng Vtere,
 That was ffadyr of kyng Arthyr,
 A *semely* man in *si3t*.
 He hade a kny3t, þat hight Sir Cleges;
 A dowtyar was non of dedis
 Of the Rovnd Tabull right.
 He was a man of hight stature
 And therto full *fayre of ffeture*,
 And also of *gret my3t*. (4-12)

The poet thus continues to narrate a story of the cycle of King Arthur wherein is included a knight 'hight' Sir Cleges. A main male character is bound to be 'a seemly man in sight', 'full fair of feature', and 'of great might'. The noun 'feature'(11) in the formula 'fair of feature' with the sense of 'bodily shape, proportions' is recorded as the third citation in the *OED*. One sees that the term is a word internalized in alliterative construction. The formula 'seemly in sight' is bound to occur at tail-rhyme line with hardly any exception. The prepositional phrase 'of great might' stands at rhyme position without fail.

Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle begins with:

Lystonnyth, lordyngus, a lyttyll stonde
Of on that was *sekor and sounde*
And *doughty in his dede*. (1-3)

In these brief lines, two popular alliterative formulas appear: 'sicker and sound' and '*doughty in dede*'. The former refers to the mental attribute of a main character, meaning 'sure and sound (of judgment, for example)'. The alliterative formula '*doughty in dede*' (= 'brave in martial behaviour') is innumerable recurrent at tail rhyme line in the tail-rhyme romances. Probably this formula is one of the most favoured in that genre of literature.

The poet concerned uses in succession many conventional formulaic expressions immediately after the address to the audience:

He was as *meke as mayde in bour*
And therto *styfe in* euery *stour*,
Was non so *doughty in dede*.
Dedus of armus *wyttout lese*
Seche he wolde in *war and pees*
In mony a stronge lede.
Sertaynly, *wittoutyn fabull*,
He was wytt Artter at the Rounde Tabull,
In romans as we reede. (4-12)

The main character is 'meek as maid (in bower)' and 'stiff in stour'. It is a little interesting that the simile '*meek as maid*' is referred to a male character. The alliterative formula is typically characteristic of romances of Northern districts. Here again, the formula '*doughty in dede*' occurs at b-line. The two prepositional phrases 'without lease' and 'without fable' with the sense of 'certainly, truly, indeed' is bound to stand at rhyme position. Line10 is clearly circumlocutory, but this arrangement of parallel expressions is recurrent in the tail-rhyme romance group. One sees again the appearance of the reference to the original source at the final line of the first stanza.

Such addresses to the audience do not always occur at the opening passage of all the tail-rhyme romances, but do casually halfway.

Guy of Warwick includes:

Now **herken, & 3e may here**
In gest, 3if 3e wil **listen and lere**,
Hou Gij as pilgrim 3ede. (44-1~3)

In this brief passage, three popular phrases are observed: 'hark, and you may hear', 'in gest', and an alliterative word pair '*list and lere*' (= 'listen and learn'). So, this passage seems to be a typical example of an address to the audience.

In the same romance continues an address to the audience:

'Lordinges, listen now to me,
BoPe 3ong & eld.
Pis kni3t, þat 3e se now here,
Haþ taken batail in strong maner,
Al for to *fi3t in feld*. (183-8~12)

Two popular formulas often seen in the romances are here: 'young and old' and 'fight in field'. Both formulas are appropriate enough to be placed at tail-rhyme line, because they belong to 'old' information. The less common form 'eld' for 'old' is solely due to the exigency of rhyming ('*eld : feld*').

In *Amis and Amiloun* after a brief description of the outline of the story, the poet addresses the audience:

And in what lond þei were born
And what þe childres name worn
Herkeneþ and 3e mow here. (22-4)

The poet asks the audience to listen to where the characters were born and what their names were. The rhyme '*born: worn*' is also recurrent.

We see another appearance of the reference to the audience in this romance:

Now, hende, herkeneþ, & y schal say
Hou þat sir Amiloun went his way;
For no-þing wold he spare. (1189-91)

For sche was gentil & auenaunt,

Hir name was cleped Belisaunt,
As 3e may lið at me. (427-9)

The verb 'lithe' (<ON *hlyða*, to listen) here is recorded as the sixth citation in the *OED*. This verb is often used in the alliterative word pair 'listen and lithe'. The heroine in this story is 'gentil and avenant'. The adjective 'avenant', though obsolete now, is used of the physical quality of human beings, meaning 'handsome, comely, graceful; pleasant'.

Furthermore, in this tail-rhyme romance appears the following passage:

Now, hende, **herkeneþ**, & 3e may **here**
Hou þat þe doukes douhter dere
Sike in hir bed lay. (517-9)

Here as well, the writer addresses the audience by the use of an absolute form 'hende'. The alliterative formula 'hark and hear' is already fixed and popular.

In *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild* as well, the poet addresses the audience after a brief description of a story he is to narrate:

Hende, & 3e me **herken** wold,
þe childer name, as it is told,
Y wil þou reken aright: (25-7)

The word 'Hende' positioned initially is a substantival usage of an adjective: Courteous ones. This adjective is 'applied conventionally, chiefly to ladies or persons of noble rank.'² The poet promises to tell a story 'aright' (= 'right(ly), exactly'). The verb 'reken' (ModE. 'reckon') means 'to place or name things in order'³. In actuality, the poet enumerates the names of one 'child' after another: Haprof, Tebaude, Apelston, Winwold, Gariis, Wihard, Wicard and his brother Wikel. In the above passage appears an indirect reference to the original ('as it is told'). The reference put at rhyme position is recurrent in the tail-rhyme romances.

The King of Tars includes:

& hou þe soudan of Damas
Was cristned for þat ich cas,
Now herken, & 3e may here. (706-8)

This is an instance where an address to the audience is put at the end of the stanza. The contents to be listened to are described before this direct address.

The same pattern continues in the same romance:

Hou þe soudan gan hem aseyle,
& what þai hete, *wipouten feile*,
Now herken & 3e may here. (1084-6)

The popular rhyme phrase 'without fail' (= 'assuredly, truly') is observable here as well. The rhyme word 'fail' tends to rhyme with a word related to war somewhere within each stanza. In the passage above 'fail' rhymes with 'assail'. Thus, the word 'batail(l)e' (battle) rhymes frequently with '(without) fail(l)e'.

Furthermore continues the same pattern in the same romance:

& hou þe Sarra3ins þat day
Opped heuedles for her pay;
Now listen & 3e may liþe. (1102-4)

The address to the audience ends here with the much favoured sentence, which is appropriate in occurring at tail rhyme line. The alliterative 'list and lithe' is again observed here. Generally, the verb 'hear' occurs at rhyme position, but in some cases, another verb of hearing 'lithe' does here, chiefly due to the exigency of rhyming.

One paragraph ahead therefrom appears another address to the audience:

Now herkeneþ to me boþe *eld & 3ing*
Hou þe soudan & þe king
Amonges hem gun driue; (1099-1101)

The inclusive phrase consisting of antonyms ('old and young') stands at rhyme position, as might be expected. The form '3ing' is of course a rhyme form under the exigency of rhyming.

In *Sir Eglamour of Artois* appears the following passage immediately after the passage of the first stanza:

In Artas he was geten and born,
And all his elders hym beforn ---
Lestenyth! I wyll yow say. (13-5)

The poet puts an address to the audience immediately after an Invocation. In this second stanza one sees the presence of the tautological word pair 'gotten and born'. In addition, the inverted word order ('him before') of a preposition and a pronoun is observed. Under the exigency of rhyming, such structural inversion is not a rare case, but is widely identified in ME poetry.

In the same romance continues an address to the audience:

Lestenes, lordynges, both *lefe and dere*:
What armes þe child bare 3e schal he,
And 3e wyll vndyrstond. (1030-2)

The pattern 'Listen, and you will understand' is also often observed. Here in this passage a popular word pair 'lief and dear' occurs at rhyme position. The line 1030 is a passage of a heavy 'l-' alliteration.

In *Athelston*, the writer addresses the audience soon after an Invocation:

Lystnes, lordyngys þat ben hende,
Off falsnesse, hou it wil ende
A man þat ledes hym þerin. (7-9)

The poet never forgets to address the audience by the use of the adjectival clause of praise 'that are hend'.

In *Sir Amadace* appears as follows after the passage of 230 lines:

The stuard thoghte hit was agaynus skille,
Butte he most nede do his maistur wille:
Now listun and ye may lithe. (271-3)

The address is put at the last line within the same passage or at tail-rhyme line. Here as well the much favoured

alliteration 'listen and lithe' is observed.

After the lapse of some 360 lines, another address continues:

Listuns now, lordinges, of anters grete,
Quyll on a day before the mete,
This felau come to the yate. (634-6)

The presence of the adverb 'now' seems to bear the echo of a colloquial speech.

In *Duke Rowlande and Sir Ottuell of Spayne* appears as follows:

Pe Sara3ene spake with stowte vesage:
"**Herkenys now** to my message,
& I schall tell 3ow tyte: --- (202-4)

Instead of the writer, however, the character himself addresses. The way of speech itself is quite similar to that of the writer of each tail-rhyme romance. The rhyme word 'tyte' with the sense of 'at once, soon' stands at rhyme position with hardly any exception.

Furthermore continues an address in the same romance:

Now, lordynges, for to rede 3ow righte
thies kynges names what þay highte,
Pe sothe I will 3ow tell. (781-3)

Of much notice is that the imperative verb 'hark' is unmentioned. One could understand that the verb might be hidden behind the address 'Now, lordings'.

In *Torrent of Portyngale* appears as follows after the passage of a fifth of the whole lines:

Harkyn, lordes, to them came wo,
He and hys squyer partyd in two,
Carfull men then were they. (513-5)

In such an address to the audience, 'lords' are mentioned at one time, and 'lordings' at another. This is mainly because of the meter and rhythm of the line. With respect to the substantive 'lording', the *OED* mentions: 'Frequent as a form of address, rarely *sing.* = Sir!, frequent in *pl.* =

Sirs!⁴

In the same romance continues an address to the audience:

And **listonyth, lordis**, of a chaunce,
Howe he lefte his countenaunce
And takyth hym armes gay! (1104-6)

In this address constituting a light alliteration, a light echo is felt.

Furthermore continues this figure of speech in the same romance:

And ye **now** will **liston a stound**,
How he toke armes of kyng Calomond,
Listonyth, what he bare. (2167-9)

The repetition of 'listen' seems effective. 'Listen a stound' is replaced by 'listen a while' now and then.

Let's direct our attention to the following passage:

Lorddes, and ye wol lythe,
The chyldyr namys I woll tell blythe,
Here kyn, how they were me told; (337-9)

Clearly this is an address to the audience, but there is no imperative verb 'listen'. The conjunctive 'and' leading the clause succeeding to it is interpreted as 'if', a linguistic phenomenon often identified in ME poetry. Yet, this passage seems appropriate as an address to the audience, surrounded by two-fold use of the verb 'listen'.

In *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, comes an address to the audience after the first three stanzas of the story:

Wolde ye **lythe** Y schoulde yow telle
Of þe wondurs þat there befelle
Abowte in cuntreys ryght: (40-2)

The substantive 'wonder' bears the sense of 'a surprising incident'⁵. Its derivative 'wonderly' (an adjective) is also observed not infrequently in tail-rhyme romances.

In *Sir Gowther* as well, an address to the audience occurs halfway:

The duke gard prycke aftur sex;
Tho child was yong and fast he wex ---
Hende, harkons yee. (112-4)

At the final line within the same triplet occurs the address 'Gracious people, hark ye'. A light alliteration seems to be aimed at.

In *Syr Tryamourre*, this figure of speech appears so soon within the first stanza as follows:

A gode ensaumpull ye may lere,
Yf ye wyll thys story **here**
And herkyn to my stevyn. (10-12)

Though not in direct address to the audience, the tautological and alliterative word pair 'hear and hark', making up of the form of enjambment, is also worthy of our notice. The rhyme word 'stevyn' (= 'voice') is invariably attended by its rhyme fellow 'heaven' somewhere within the same stanza.

The instances discussed thus far are not all, but direct addresses to the audience appear here and there at proper intervals in each tail-rhyme romance. The romance writers seem to have been well versed with the effectiveness of the use of such figure of speech. The poets had to attract the attention of their audience without a moment's break, so this kind of simple address was essential to them. Even today, such addresses to the audience seem necessary, in the case where the audience is less educated or the attention of the audience is loose or desultory. The formula 'listen to me' is normal today, needless to say. The type 'Hark to me' at the beginning of each romance is a conventional technique of a medieval romance writer asking for the attention of his audience.

2. Transition or Change of Topic

In Middle English tail-rhyme romances, the frequent use of transition or change of topic is also one of the major characteristics in developing a story. 'The medieval poet believed in clear transitions, which left no doubt in his

listeners' minds as to what they had just heard and what they were about to hear. As a rule, the lines of transition are nearly identical.⁶ Ruth Crosby quotes the following from French and English as typical examples:

Or lairons de Renart a tant
Et si diromes d'un serjant. *Renart* 115-116

Now off this lete we be
And off the kyng speke wee. Richard 1114-15

It is true of the tail-rhyme romances as well. Such instances are presented hereafter.

Ipomadon includes the following transition after the description of the beginning of the tournament in the morning:

Leve we now this folke there
And off the knyght speke we more
That dwellys wyth the quene: (2991-3)

The writer leaves the spectators of the tournament 'there', and proposes to speak more of the knight who dwells with the queen. This is a typical wording of transition.

The Romance of Emaré includes:

At þe mayden **leue we**,
And at þe lady fayr and fre,
And speke we of þe emperour. (70-72)

At þe emperour **now leue we**,
And of þe lady yn þe see,
I shalle be-gynnge to telle. (310-12)

Leue we at þe lady, clere of vyce,
And speke of the kyng of Galys,
Fro þe sege when he come home. (740-42)

Leue we at þe lady whyte as flour,
And speke we of her fadur þe emperour,
Thar fyrste þys tale of y-tolde. (946-8)

One finds that transition has a fixed pattern, that is, 'We

leave at ~, and we speak of ~'. The frequent use of transition seems to be closely connected with an address to the audience, because, we think, both figures of speech serve to attract the attention of the listeners, who are prone to become distracted or desultory.

Lybeaus Desconus includes:

Nowe rest we here a while
Of Sir Otys de Lyle
And tell we forthe oure talis,
Howe Lybeous rode many a myle
And sey awntours the while
And Jrlande and in Walys. (1269-74)

Here a new wording comes into being in place of the previous wordings: 'Now we rest here a while, and tell forth ~'.

The King of Tars contains:

Nov late we ben alle her morning,
& telle we of þat maiden 3ing
Pat to þe soudan is fare. (373-5)

Here the formula 'We leave' has changed into 'We let be', quite equivalent in meaning.

Amis and Amiloun holds:

Lete we sir Amiloun stille be
Wip his wiif in his cuntre---
God leue hem wele to fare---
& of sir Amis telle we; (337-40)

The poet, after a long explanation of Amiloun, declares to start a story of Amis, his brother. The pattern 'We let ~ be, and tell of ~' still continues.

Ipomadon includes:

Ipomadon now leve we here
And speke we of the lady clere
That is strangely stade ... (1766-8)

The poet leaves the story of Ipomadon and proposes to speak of the 'lady clear' who is 'strangely staid'. Regrettably, the last three lines of this stanza are missing. And again one meets with transition in this romance:

Leve we now this folke **there**
And off the knyght **speke we** more
 The dwellys wyth the quene: (2991-3)

The writer makes a slight change of an adverb (from *here* to *there*).

Torrent of Portyngale includes:

Leve⁷ we now of Torrent thore
And speke we of thys squyer more:
 Iesu hys sole fro hell shyld! (585-7)

The poet, after a long narration of Torrent the knight, proposes to tell of his squire. He asks, first of all, Jesus to 'shield' the squire's soul from hell. This is also a well-used technique in the tail-rhyme romances.

Le Bone Florence of Rome includes:

Leve we Syr Emere **in the stowre**,
And speke more **of** the emperowre,
 How they on a bere hym dyght,
 And how þey broght hym to þe towne
 Wythowten belle or procescyon,
 Hyt was a drery syght. (793-8)

Here, the concrete place is indicated instead of such adverbs as *here* and *there*.

The Earl of Toulouse includes:

Leue we now þe Emperour **in thought**:
 Game ne gle liked hym noght,
 So gretly can he grille!
And to the Erle **turne we again**,
 That þanked God wyth all hys mayn,
 That grace had sende hym tulle. (163-8)

The poet leaves the Emperor in 'thought', and turns again

to the Earl. The Emperor is now in 'thought', because 'neither *game* nor *glee* pleased him'. The prepositional phrase 'with all his main' serves exclusively as a rhyme phrase in the tail-rhyme romances. Here again, the normal word order 'till him' has changed into its inverted one 'him till' under the exigency of rhyming.

Transition continues 310 lines thereafter:

Let we now the Erle alloon,
And speke we of Dame Beulyboon,
 How sche was caste in care. (478-80)

The poet proposes to let the Earl alone, and speak of how Dame Beulyboon was cast in sorrow.

Again transition continues 320 lines thereafter:

Leue we now thys lady in care,
And to hur lorde wyll **we fare**,
 That ferre was hur froo. (805-7)

The poet leaves the heroine in sorrow and goes on to say of her lord who is farther away from her. Under the exigency of rhyming, the normal word order 'from her' has changed into an inverted one 'her from'.

Syr Tryamourre includes:

Of the quene **let we bee**,
 And thorow the grace of the trynyte
 Grete wyth chylde sche was!
And of kyng Arduus **speke we**,
 Farre in hethennes ys he
 To were in goddys grace; (127-32)

The romance writer stops narrating a story of the queen, who is now 'greet' with child, and proposes to speak of king Arduus, who is now farther away in a heathen country in order to make war in god's grace.

Again transition continues some 340 lines thereafter:

Leue we styll at the quene,
And of the greyhound **we wyll mene**
 That we before of tolde; (472-4)

The verb 'mean' here, obsolete now, means 'to speak,

tell', used intransitively and chiefly accompanies a preposition 'of'. This usage is northern or Scottish.

In order to express transition or change of topic, the verb 'leave' is found to be used most commonly in the tail-rhyme romances. The verb concerned is thus used in the course of narration in order to break off in a narrative, in general, accompanying the preposition 'of', sometimes 'at'.

In *Duke Rowlande and Sir Ottuelll of Spayne* as well appears transition:

thus Oggere Daynas **dueled there**
 & *heled es* of his hurtes Sare,
 In þe ladies persoun.
And of his felawes speke we mare,
 how þat þay full harde handilde ware,
 thies two knyghtes of renoun. (997-1002)

The narrator says that we leave Ogier Daynas there and heal his sore hurts, and speak more of his fellows how ...'.

This figure of speech makes frequent appearances in other types of romances than a twelve-line stanza romance. Several instances are presented below:

Guy of Warwick (poem of heroic couplet) includes:

Now wille we of Gij duelle,
& of his lyoun ichil 3ou telle;
& of his lyoun, hou he fard: (Auchinleck 4239-41)

Lete we now of Gij be stille:
 More **3e schul here 3if 3e wille**
 Of þat maiden, hou sche was nome: (Auchinleck 4789-91)

The pattern 'Let ... be still' is also repetitive in the romances at large.

Kyng Alisaunder (heroic-couplet poem of 8,021 lines) includes:

Lete we now Alisaunder in pays ride,
And speke we of wonders þat ben beside.
 Listneþ of *wonders*, and sitteþ in pes! (4841-3)

The writer leaves King Alisaunder in 'riding in peace', and proposes to speak of 'wonders', a term peculiar to the romances. He goes on to say an address to listen to a story of 'wonders' he is going to narrate.

Sir Beues of Hamtoun (a poem of tail-rhyme stanza from the first line to line 474, one stanza consisting of 6 lines, and thereafter a poem of heroic couplets continues to the last ending with line 4620), of which Chaucer mentions in *Sir Thopas*⁸, includes many times:

Let we now ben is em Saber
& speke of Beues, þe maseger! (1345-6)

Now reste we her a lite wi3t,
& speke we scholle of Brademond. (1708-9)

Let we sire Beues þanne
& speke of Iosiane, (3117-8)

Now lete we be þis Ascopard
& speke of Beues, þat rit forþward (3615-6)

Now lete we be of þis leuedi
And speke of Beues & of Terri. (3709-10)

Now let we be of king Yuore
And speke we of Ermin þe hore, (4005-6)

Now sire Beues let we gan
And to sire Saber wile we tan⁹. (4039-40)

Let we now Beues be,
& of þe stiward telle we, (4323-4)

In this romance, one sees this figure of speech occurs at proper intervals. It seems that the writer inserted such a change of topic in order to attract the attention of his audience once for a while.

William of Palerne (an alliterative long-line romance of

5,540 lines, West Midland dialect) includes many passages of transition:

but **from** þe cherl & þe child **nov** **chaunge** we **oure**
tale,
For **i wol** of þe werewolf a wile **nov** **speke**. (78-9)

The writer says 'now we change our tale from.... and I will now speak of ...'. For the first time, the first personal pronoun 'I' is used instead of 'We'.

but trewely of hem **at þis time** þe tale y **lete**,
of þemperour & þe bold barn to **bigynne to speke**.
(382-3)

The writer himself proposes to 'begin' to speak of the emperor and the 'bold barn' (a conventional alliterative word pair).

More to telle of hire þis time trewly i **leue**,
telle i wil of þe beres what hem tidde after. (1762-3)

.....; --- **leef we now here**,
& **a while to** þe werewolf **I wol a-3en turne**,
þat þe tale toucheþ *as telleþ þis soþe*. (1836-8)

The writer here refers to the source on which the tale is based ('as this sooth tells').

Nou3 leue we of hem a while & speke we a-noþer;
For of þe witti werewolf **a while wol I telle**. (2447-8)

Here the change of the personal pronoun 'we' into 'I' is identified. The writer of this romance repeats 'I speak *a while*'. He seems to have been aware that his audience is liable to be weary if he goes on to tell for long. In addition, the adverb 'now' is often used in these contexts. It is clear that the use of this word was necessary to direct the attention of the audience. It is very effective from the point of stylistics.

Finally, on the occasion of closing our paper, we'd like to quote Ruth Crosby's apt explanation: 'The obvious transition, like the direct address to an audience, is a necessary accompaniment of work to be orally delivered.

Just as today we are less offended by a bald transition when we are listening to a sermon or a lecture than when we are reading to ourselves, and may often be grateful for it, so it must have been in the Middle Ages. The writers of romances, knowing the conditions under which their work would be presented, took pains to mark carefully the points at which they passed from one subject to another. The medieval listeners could not glance back a few pages if they lost track of the story for a moment. They must then have been grateful for the often recurring lines that told them just what had happened and what was coming next.¹⁰ Thus we have until now ascertained what Ruth Crosby says by illustrating and discussing many instances which seem appropriate in each context. Such a figure of speech, as we have found with no doubt, was an essential device in order to proceed a story for the sake of the understanding of common people in the Middle Ages. This figure of speech, transition or change of topic, which may seem a peripheral device to the modern reader, was in fact an important tool or a 'hub'. It may perhaps occupy a part of the important aspects of the language of tail-rhyme romances, not a peripheral linguistic phenomenon. That is why this literary device of transition is recurrent ubiquitously here and there in ME writings including tail-rhyme romances.

When we read and re-read these stories, we have finally come to feel pleasant rather than tired even when we meet with the frequent use of such a figure of speech. It does not stand in the understanding of the flow of a story of common people, but seems even a comfortable tool to help them understand with ease. The continual presence of such figure of speech in each stanza within each tail-rhyme romance makes up an excellent piece of cluster. Just as Ruth Crosby aptly says, the lay people in those days could not follow the flow, if they had lost track of the story. The romance writers, accordingly, well understood how to attract again the attention of their audience when their attention disperses away. It was necessary that the romance writers inserted such conventional figure of speech at proper places at proper intervals. The same is also true of the use of direct addresses to the audience. Both literary figures of speech seem to be two among the most important devices in advancing a narrative or story in a romance. Not only the romance writers but also such great poets as Chaucer and Gower used

these kinds of literary devices. We see that both major poets and minor poets have shared in having these figures of speech in common.

Notes

- 1 *OED*: sill q.v.
- 2 *OED*: hende 6.
- 3 *OED*: reckon q.v.
- 4 *OED*: lording q.v. *MED*: 7.(a) As a term of polite address used by persons of humbler station to their superiors; by poets, minstrels, or storytellers to readers or audience; sir, --- usually pl.; (b) gentlemen; --- as a term of gracious or friendly address by a superior or an equal.
- 5 *OED*: wonder q.v.
- 6 Ruth Crosby, 'Oral Delivery in The Middle Ages', *Speculum* 11 (1936), 106
- 7 *OED*: leave q.v.
- 8 'Men speken of romances of prys,/ Of Horn child and of Ypotys,/ Of Beves and sir Gy,/ Of sir Lybeux and Pleyndamour --- / But sir Thopas, he bereth the flour / Of roial chivalry! (*Sir Thopas* 897-902)
- 9 This unusual ME word is the past participial form of the verb 'take' for 'taken'. This word form exclusively appears at rhyme position in the Middle English romances at large.
- 10 Ruth Crosby, *ibid.* 107

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