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Making Histories
Locating the Belfast Fragment of the Middle English Prose Brut

▶ A recently discovered fragment of the Middle English Prose *Brut*, from the Special Collections department of Queen's University, Belfast, illuminates the diverse production methods used in the *Brut* corpus. As part of this process, the author investigates the origins of the unique textual interpolation contained in the Belfast *Brut* fragment. Through comparison with the Dartmouth *Brut*, the author suggests some of the different approaches *Brut* producers took when tasked with "making history."

There is no better corpus of literary manuscripts than the Middle English Prose *Brut* with which to begin to trace the lineaments of fifteenth-century book history. The numerous surviving copies allow us to track the emergence of new cultures of manuscript book production in this period, from delineating technological trends in the manufacture of books to unearthing developing patterns of consumer demand. Mapping the production history of the *Brut* might even suggest a movement from bespoke commissioning scenarios into something that looks like commercial reproduction for aspirant gentry and mercantile clienteles. Although we should be careful about aligning new production rationales in manuscript book-making with a predictable progression in technology and demand that leads inextricably to the age of print, we nevertheless need to attend closely to the varied means through which manuscript books came into being. The following discussion aims to cast light on a small fragment (excuse the pun) of the *Brut*'s multiplex production history.

The online publication of the manuscript now known as Dartmouth College, Rauner Special Collections Library, Codex MS 003183 opens up this codex to scholars who might not be able to make the journey to New Hampshire, and enables the kind of comparative work that will allow the crucial story of the production history of the *Brut* to be told. The following discussion will describe another new discovery in

the Middle English Prose *Brut* corpus, and then contrast the production values this discovery indicates with those that are suggested through examination of the Dartmouth *Brut*. If more repositories begin providing free and open access to high quality digitized manuscript facsimiles, then book historians will be aided immeasurably in the task of culturally mapping the complex and barely understood processes through which texts were sought, commissioned and produced in the late Middle Ages.

A Surprise Discovery

The discovery that underlies this paper was facilitated by a very simple but fundamentally significant process of digitization. Those familiar with Queen's University's Special Collections Department know that, whilst housing a number of fascinating collections, it does not hold much in the way of primary materials of interest to scholars of Middle English literature—or so I had always thought. So when, from the comfort of my office, I was looking through a newly digitized Special Collections catalogue in the slightly forlorn hope of finding some material that could be profitably employed as part of the MA "Medieval Research Methods" course, I had quite a surprise. As part of Brett MS 3, a box of miscellaneous twelfth- to eighteenth-century documents, was a catalogue entry that left me feeling stunned and somewhat sheepish.

The item marked Brett MS 3/12B was what the cataloguer claimed was a single leaf from a copy of the Middle English Prose *Brut*.[1] Within moments I was looking at the actual parchment leaf, scarcely able to believe the cataloguer's description was accurate. I had good reason to be both surprised and to nurture a feeling of mild embarrassment, for I had recently spent a number of months working on the *Imagining History Project*, an AHRC-funded study looking at this very text, with the aim of providing a database of online descriptions of all the manuscripts of the Middle English versions of this *Brut* chronicle. Experience of the *Brut* corpus, and my familiarity with the extraordinary bibliographic work on the text by Lister Matheson, meant that I knew that scholars of Middle English historiography, including the Belfast-based *Imagining History* team, had no idea of the existence of Brett MS 3/12B. Here was a fragment evidently known to a Belfast archivist but, because it had previously only been catalogued on a physical index card, unknown to wider scholarship.

The next task was to attempt to trace the codex from which the leaf emanated, if indeed it was still extant. The detailed database of manuscript descriptions in the *Imagining History* website was useful for

excluding books that could not have been the source of the rogue leaf. The lack of images from the actual manuscripts, however, meant that a certain identification was not possible with this resource. As more and more libraries provide digital scans of their medieval books, and furthermore, allow their images to be used for scholarly purposes (something that is being advocated by proselytizers for open access to digital images, such as William Noel, Director of The Special Collections Center and The Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies at the University of Pennsylvania), this kind of identification might soon become possible from home or office.[2] A database such as *Imagining History* might provide links to images in their institutional digital repositories, or even include them as part of the database itself. As it was, when the *Imagining History* project was planned, purchasing the rights to manuscript images would have been the only option, and because those rights would often have been only temporary, it had been deemed too much of an expense for a transitory resource.

Using instead the repository of *Brut* manuscript microfilms collected by the *Imagining History Project* (a resource now also housed by the Special Collections library at Queen's University), it became clear that the Belfast Middle English Prose *Brut* fragment was once part of the book now known as British Library MS Harley 266. This is a copy of the *Brut* that opens with the reign of Edward I (Chapter 161 in Brie's edition).

Judging from the quire signatures which begin at *a* in Harley 266, Matheson suggested that the text *may* have begun at this point, though he prudently recorded, "the evidence is not conclusive" (96). Professor Matheson was correct to be guarded, for the Belfast fragment is the last leaf from the gatherings which once preceded Harley 266, and the scrap of text suggests that this was once a complete copy of the *Brut*.

A number of codicological features had suggested that Harley 266 began with the reign of Edward I. A seventeenth-century hand, probably that of the antiquary Sir Simond D'Ewes, has penned a new heading on folio 1r and has attempted to make the manuscript look as whole as it ever was by scraping away the original chapter numbers and supplying new ones. D'Ewes also improvised at the very beginning of what was now the first chapter of his truncated book, probably scraping away the final few words of Chapter 160, the heading to the new chapter, and also erasing the first few words of Chapter 161—"And after this king Henry" (a phrase revealing that we have just heard about Henry III). Instead, he added: "After the death of kyng Henry regned his sone Edward" (Harley MS 266, f. 1r). D'Ewes thus attempted to create an

impression of completeness in a book that probably came to him with its first tranche of gatherings already missing—gatherings that had once concluded with the Belfast fragment.[3]

A New Interpolation to the Middle English Prose *Brut*

As it happens, the single leaf of the *Brut* in Belfast could not have turned out to be any more interesting. It provides access to a previously unknown variant in the textual tradition of the *Brut*. The fragment preserves a section of text from the end of Chapter 159 up until a few words before the end of Chapter 160, where in most versions of the *Brut* we learn of the death of Henry III, and then receive an exposition of Merlin's prophecy in light of the historical events that took place during the king's reign. The report of Henry's death is usually preceded by a short account of Prince Edward leaving for the Holy Lands: "And Edward, Kyng Iohnes sone of Britaigne[. . .] & meny oþer lordes [. . .] token her way toward þe Holy Land ; and the Kyng Henry deide in þe mene-tyme at West*minster*, when he had ben Kyng lv ȝer & ix wokes" (Brie 177). Other than some signs of scribal error and slight changes in wording, the text in the Belfast fragment is generally true to this so-called Common Version of the *Brut*. However, the news of Henry's death is preceded by an episode that does not occur in any other known copies of the Middle English Prose *Brut*, including those manuscripts genetically grouped with Harley 266:[4]

> ¶ And when þis knyght wos þus slayne þey toke þᵉ
> body and boyled hit. And browht his bonys into En-
> gelond . into þᵉ abbey of hayles. and byried him a fore þᵉ
> hey auter . wiþ grete solempnite and wyrchippe ¶ &
> in þis mayne tyme . dayde kynge Harry at westmy*n*ster
> when he had be kyng . lv . yer . and xix wykes[.] (recto, lines 1–6)

The text in the Belfast fragment thus represents a previously unknown interpolation.

The addition clearly refers to the death and subsequent interment of Henry d'Alamayne, who was killed in 1271 in Viterbo, Italy, as he returned from the Holy Lands. Henry, the son of Richard, the first Earl of Cornwall and cousin to Prince Edward, was murdered in front of the high altar during Mass by the brothers Guy and Simon de Montfort, an event that became notorious across Europe (Madicott 370–71). Indeed, Guy de Montfort is found among the tortured souls in the seventh circle of Hell in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*—here described through Belfast's own Ciaran Carson's translation:

Mostrocci un'ombra da l'un canto sola,
dicendo: "Colui fesse in grembo a Dio
lo cor che 'n su Tamisi ancor si cola." (12.118–20)

He pointed out one spirit all alone:
"That one by God's sanctum stabbed the heart
that by the Thames drips blood still unatoned."

Henry's bones were eventually buried at Hailes Abbey, an institution founded by his father (indeed, his father would also, in turn, be buried beside him there). His heart, according to many sources, was interred at Westminster, beside the tomb of Edward the Confessor (see Vincent).

The events surrounding the death and burial of this famous noble were well chronicled and there are a variety of sources that may have supplied the extra material in the Belfast fragment. Nicholas Trivet's *Annales sex regum Angliae* records the incident very briefly, merely noting that Henry was murdered by Guy de Montfort during mass (Simon is not named), and that the atrocity occurred in Viterbo (Trivet 277). The Middle English adaptation of Trivet's *Annales* in Harvard University, Houghton Library MS Eng. 938 expands on his account, speculating upon the familial grudges that led to the murder:

Thys harry whan he harde his masse at Viterbe in the churche of seynt Laurence was there sleyne by Gy of Mountfort for cause that the Emperour Richard the ffader of that harry had consented for to outlawe that Gwy oute of Almayne. Or elles as other men sayen for cause that thys harry pronounced in Iugement hys exyle and Outelary and exyled hym by the recorde of Iugement. (f. 87r)

Neither Trivet's original nor the Middle English adaptation offer a record of Henry's interment. John Capgrave, writing in the mid-fifteenth century, mentions the burial, but the description lacks any notable details:

In the LIII. ȝere of this kind deied Herry son to Richard emperoure of Alymayn. He deied at Viterb ; but he was caried into Ynglond ; his hert was biried at Westminster, and his body at Hayles. (Capgrave 161)

The *Flores historiarum* carries slightly more information, and provides a version of events most commonly found in English chronicles. As one might expect from this Westminster chronicle, it expands on the details relating to the entombment of Henry's heart, recording that it was placed in golden casket and buried next to Edward the Confessor:

> Ossa istius in monasterio de Hayles, quod pater ipsius a fundamentis in Anglia construi fecerat, sunt sepulta ; cor vero ipsius in cuppa deurata juxta feretrum sancti Edwardii in ecclesia Westmonasterii honorifice collacatur. (Laud 3: 22)

> His bones were buried in the monastery of Hailes, which his father had built in England from the ground up; his heart, however, is placed honourably in a golden casket next to the tomb of St Edward in the church of Westminster.[5]

None of these sources, however, carries exactly the same attributes as the description in the Belfast fragment—most notably, those precise factoids that Henry's body was boiled to extract his bones and that these were buried before the high altar in Hailes.[6]

Comparison with these other accounts of the postmortem arrangements for Henry makes clear that the Belfast fragment neglects the widely transmitted detail that Henry's heart was buried separately in Westminster. The chronicle of Hailes Abbey itself, dated to ca. 1300, likewise omits this information while recording other unique details. Although the Hailes chronicle and the Belfast fragment differ, they undoubtedly share a number of similarities:

> Eodem anno duo Sathane satellites videlicet Symon et Guydo de Monte Forti, cum consilio et auxilio comitis Rufi cuius filiam idem Guydo duxerat in uxorem, apud Viterbiam iii idus Martii nobilem virum interfecerunt Henricum videlicet de Alemannia, cuius caro ibidem sepelitur inter duos papas, ossa vero eius omnia delata sunt in Angliam et demum apud Heiles honorifice tumulata (Cotton Cleopatra MS D. iii, f. 47r; edited in Blount).

> That same year, two attendants of Satan, that is, Simon and Guy de Montfort, with the counsel and help of Count Rufus, whose daughter that same Guy had taken as his wife, at Viterbo, on the third of the ides of March, killed the noble Henry, namely of Germany, whose flesh is buried there between two popes; but his bones were all brought to England and were at last buried honourably at Hailes.

Like the Belfast fragment, the Hailes chronicle elides any mention of Henry's heart. Moreover, whilst there is no explicit mention of the boiling of Henry's corpse to remove the flesh in the Hailes chronicle, this is implicit in the text: his bones, we are told, were brought back to Hailes, whilst his "flesh is buried there [in Viterbo] between two popes." This detail is also found in the annals of Hailes that occur after the chronicle

in British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra D. iii (f. 73r), where the description of the events surrounding Henry's death and burial seem to be an abridged version of the one presented above.[7] Furthermore, these accounts are consistent with the information on a plaque still preserved in San Lorenzo Cathedral in Viterbo, which marks the spot where the flesh of "Enrico di Cornovaglia" (Henry of Cornwall) was interred. Within several years of his death, Henry's remains would have indeed shared the Cathedral with two popes: Alexander IV (d. 1261) and John XXI (d. 1277) were both buried in San Lorenzo in Viterbo. A number of chronicle accounts, including both the annals of Hailes and the Westminster *Flores historiarum*, as well as the chronicle of the Abbey of St. Werburg in Chester, include a verse which apparently accompanied a painted depiction of Henry's death in the church of San Silvestro in Viterbo.[8]

It is possible that the details relating to Henry's interment in the Belfast fragment came from a local source like the Hailes chronicle—or if not from Hailes Abbey itself, then from another house in the region. Indeed, the information that Henry's bones were buried before the high altar (a detail that has not been discovered in any other contemporary source, including the Hailes Abbey text) might even have come through local knowledge rather than through consultation of a written chronicle source. Indeed, a tantalizing clue is suggested by dialectal study of the scribes who penned Harley 266 and the fragment that was once part of this book.

The Scribes of the Belfast Fragment/Harley 266

The Belfast fragment and Harley 266 preserve the writing of three distinct hands. A study of these scribes provides many clues which help us to understand just what kind of production it was that they combined to copy.[9] As I turn to my conclusion below, reflection upon the *modus operandi* of these scribes will provide an opportunity to contrast the Belfast/Harley book with the Dartmouth *Brut*—manuscripts that, I contend, were made according to quite distinct production values.

The Belfast fragment preserves a changeover between two hands. The scribal switch occurs on line 17 of the recto side, a few sentences into Chapter 160 (Fig. 1).

Scribe A writes in a rounded *Anglicana media* script, providing his own headings in a stiffer, more formal *Anglicana*. It is a practiced book hand that looks slightly anachronistic in this production—a hand trained in and maintaining methods of writing that are reminiscent of scripts from the early and first quarter fifteenth century. Scribe A's
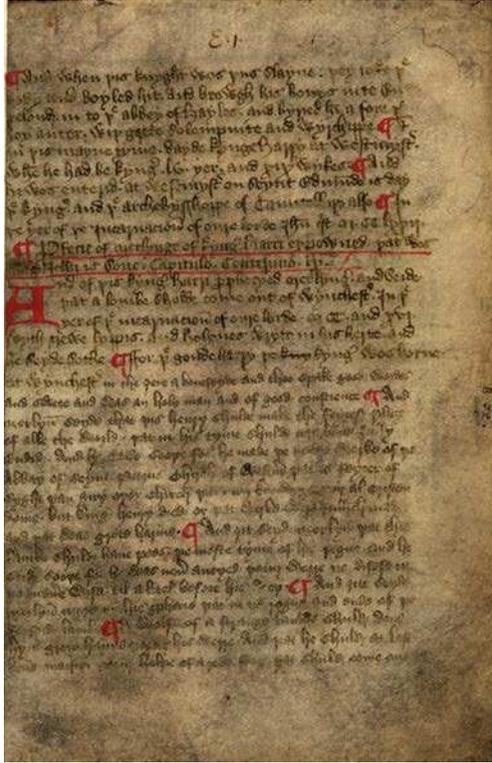
Fig. 1. Brett MS 3. 12.B (changeover from Scribe A to B, from "in the ȝere aboue-
seyde"), reproduced courtesy of Special Collections, Queen's University of Belfast.

smooth graphs give way to the main scribe of Harley 266, Scribe B, who
completes the unfinished chapter on Merlin's prophecy in the Belfast
fragment, and goes on to pen folios 1 to 127v of Harley 266. This
scribe's hand is more current than the first, mostly deploying *Anglicana*
graphs, particularly at the beginning of his stint, but gradually incorpo-
rating many more characteristically Secretary graphs and becoming less
calligraphic as the stint progresses. Where Scribe A's script is rounded,
Scribe B's is angular (particularly at the beginning of his stint), a differ-
ence most evident when contrasting the way each scribe pens letterforms
with lobes, such as *o*, *a*, and *g*.

   As mentioned above, the quiring of Harley 266 begins at *a* in the
first gathering. This is a clue, perhaps, that a new exemplar was being
utilized at this point, or even that Scribe B was completing a job that
had, for whatever reason, been abandoned by Scribe A. However, there

is a significant problem with the idea that there was no cooperation between the two scribes. Scribe A makes a further fleeting reappearance in the main text of Harley 266: he picks up catchwords that appear at the end of Scribe B's stint on folio 127v, penning a mere six lines of text on folio 128r. Perhaps significantly, the quiring begins again with *a* at this point. Scribe B had finished his stint during the account of the Siege of Caen with the catchwords, "At the last," which are duly the first words in Scribe B's abortive 6 lines of text. Although Scribe B's catchwords link to Scribe A's text, a unique textual lacuna is created. Several lines of text including King Henry V's command that a man called "Springhose" be buried in the Abbey of Caen have been omitted (see Brie 384, lines 4–9). This textual gap may suggest that the scribes had miscalculated somehow, or that they were working from an imperfect exemplar.

There is further evidence that the scribes were cooperating on their project when one looks at the catchwords. Two scribes have copied the catchwords. The first pens them in a large, angular, ostentatious script, and has boxed the words within various improvised cartouches. The script is clearly that of Scribe B. The other examples are penned in a smaller and much more reserved hand; a rounded, unfussy *Anglicana*. This, almost certainly, is the hand of Scribe A. The fact that he is penning catchwords on gatherings completed by Scribe B signals cooperation between the two, even if the scripts produced by these men suggests they were of different generations—Scribe A deploying a script of the first half of the fifteenth century, perhaps even of the first quarter, and Scribe B, a script that might be dated to the third quarter, or later.

The third scribe (Scribe C) completes the book. He writes in a competent but significantly more cursive and uncalligraphic script than the others. Again it could be argued that this hand belongs to a different generation than Scribe A; Scribe C's loose handwriting is much less appropriate to book production than the others. Nevertheless this scribe does conform to some of the production features that marked the stints of A and B. This scribe imitates the 32 lines per page used by his predecessors and something of the decorative habits, underlining headings with red ink and employing red initials at the beginning of chapters (although he pens two- rather than three-line capitals). Intriguingly, with some of the chapter headings in Scribe C's stint, where a larger, more formal script is employed, there are some hints of the angular graphs utilized by Scribe B.

Scribe C pens a number of dialectally locatable forms that strongly suggest origins in the Gloucestershire region. Forms such as *worle* ("world"), *hare* ("their"), *whoche* ("which"), *ham/ tham* ("them"), and

thare ("there"), are particularly helpful in isolating the scribe in this region.[10] There is not enough text to get an accurate sense of Scribe A's dialect but there are certainly enough forms to suggest a Southwestern profile, with a Gloucestershire profile entirely possible.[11]

Scribe B provides a greater mix of orthographic forms that perhaps signal a greater toleration of the spelling variety he found in his exemplars, and thus making him more difficult to locate. Nevertheless, it is still the case that he does include regionally localizable spelling forms that might, taken together, help place him in Gloucestershire—forms such as *woche* ("which"), *hem/ ham* ("them"), *heye* ("high") and *soche* ("such").[12] The possibility that the book that these scribes worked on was produced in Gloucestershire is interesting in respect of the interpolation discussed above since Hailes Abbey is itself situated in the county.

It is now difficult to define the exact relationship between the Belfast / Harley book and its sources. Perhaps the makers of this book were able to access local chronicle sources held by the abbey or another local institution in which the events had been recorded. The dialectal evidence suggests that the Henry d'Alamayne interpolation was a piece of local history that the book's producers believed should be included in the more general *Brut* account of British history—an "omission" that needed to be rectified. The scribes' relative proximity to Hailes is unlikely to be coincidental.

Material Production Values

Medieval books were, of course, made according to diverse production standards in respect of investment in decorative features (including the use of colors or gold in providing illuminated initials or border decorations that might range widely in quality), or the dimensions of the text block in comparison to the leaf size and other such tangible characteristics that represent what might be termed "material value." In terms of these sorts of production features, the Belfast / Harley codex provides some interesting contrasts with those of the Dartmouth *Brut*. The former book was made with a stricter sense of economy, but by people well-schooled in making books containing literature, and perhaps with even better connections for procuring interesting texts. The Harley book has leaves measuring approximately 227 x 160 mm, and is thus significantly less impressive than the 293 x 194 mm size of the Dartmouth book, which compares more closely in its grander size (and in general production standards) with contemporary, and probably commercially produced copies of the *Brut* such as Huntington MS HM 136. The

Belfast/Harley producers employed a significantly greater proportion of the leaf, creating a text block as broad and very nearly as long as that in the Dartmouth codex. The comparative waste of blank parchment in the Dartmouth codex should be understood as what Ralph Hanna has called "a form of excess," revealing a less parsimonious attitude from the producers and thus patron of the book (884).[13]

The chapter headings also provide an indication of differing production values in terms of material quality. Chapter 160 in the Belfast fragment, "Prophecie of Merlynge of kyng Harri expowned . þat was kyng Iohnis sone," is marked by a three-line red initial without any flourishes; the chapter heading itself is penned in a more formal script than usual, but in the same ink, with the chapter number included as part of the heading; the heading is underlined in red ink (see Fig. 1). This treatment of chapter headings is maintained throughout Harley 266. Plainly wrought red paraphs mark subdivisions in the long lines of prose throughout the item. Again, in respect of these features the Dartmouth codex maintains a higher decorative standard, with alternating red and blue three-line initials, adorned with pen-work flourishes, and with headings supplied in red ink, rather than being merely underlined (see Fig. 2).

Additionally, the Dartmouth text opens with a painted border decoration of gold and colors, undoubtedly applied by a professional limner and comparable to Huntington MS HM 136. The Belfast / Harley MS almost certainly never had this kind of illumination, if its extant decorative standards were applied throughout the missing sections of the book. Although the Dartmouth codex does not represent the highest standards in bookmaking, it was an object that was intended to impress in a manner the Belfast/ Harley book was not.

Conclusion: Making Histories and Textual Production Values

The material features of the Belfast / Harley book were thus far from deluxe; this was a workaday book that was not produced to be a materially impressive object. The text contained in the book, however, is significantly more interesting than its plain production features. Harley 266 was understood by Lister Matheson to have been a book that utilized two exemplars. First, a Common Version to 1377, full continuation, stage 3, which Scribe B follows to its conclusion on fol. 91 (CV–1377 f.c. Stage 3; Matheson 93–97). After several blank sides, suggesting a change of exemplar, the scribe continued from a Common Version to
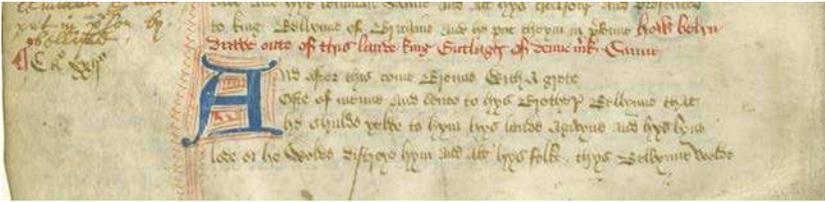
Fig. 2. detail from Dartmouth College, Rauner Codex MS 003183, fol. 15v, reproduced courtesy of Dartmouth College Library.

1430 including John Page's poem on the Siege of Rouen (CV–1430 JP:A; Matheson 138–45). Scribe B's stint will only go as far as the 1417 siege of Caen—and the 1430 continuation will be completed by Scribe C, who was in all likelihood utilizing the same source text as Scribe B.

The text copied by Scribe B from folio 93 onwards, as recognized by Matheson, is anomalous among the other examples of the CV–1430 JP:A, leading him to reason it was drawn from an exemplar that held a "textually early version . . . for a number of its readings are superior to those preserved in the other extant texts of group A" (138). Certainly, up until the reign of Henry V, the Harley text appears to be textually and structurally distinct from other copies of the *Brut* containing this version. Comparison of the text written by Scribe B against both CV-1430 JP:A and a variety of Common Versions to 1419 (CV-1419) reveals that the Harley text has passages and headings from both. Sometimes, its textual and structural features accord much better with CV-1419; elsewhere, it adds details not found in either the CV-1419 or the CV-1430 JP:A (Henry V's return from Agincourt to London being one notable example). Moreover, it contains a number of idiosyncratic features found in neither. The text in the Harley MS represents a production that either is accessing an earlier, original source for the 1430 continuation, or, as hinted at by the evidence of the Belfast fragment, the scribes were adapting an early version of the continuation to 1430 against other historiographical sources. Indeed, it is perhaps the case that this text represents the results of both operations.

Producers of the *Brut* went about the business of "making history" in a variety of ways, and the incredibly complex reception and production history of the text frequently testifies to heterogeneous impulses. The huge number of surviving manuscripts bespeaks an incredible demand for these books of historiography, a demand that may have even stimulated mass production scenarios of sorts (albeit on an *ad hoc* basis), as described in Linne Mooney and Lister Matheson's research on

the Beryn scribe. Scribes, rubricators, and limners were among the book artisans cooperating to supply *Brut* books for a middling, aspirational audience who desired a copy of a text that surely earns that problematic epithet "popular." Compromised and imperfect texts might be produced under these circumstances, when the efficient and mechanical reproduction of text took precedence over scrupulous attention to making the best possible book of history. The proliferation of the damaged exemplar employed by the Beryn scribe and his associates as they reproduced multiple copies of a *Brut* with a tranche of missing text demonstrates this point. Mooney and Matheson's research into the copies of the *Brut* co-produced by the Beryn scribe has revealed how an exemplar with a large and significant lacuna was "mass produced" to fulfill what appeared to be a pressing public demand for the *Brut*. Despite the relatively broad dissemination of the Middle English Prose *Brut* these producers do not seem to have had the necessary socio-literary connections to secure a better exemplar that would allow the fault to be remedied.

Here lies a crucial point in understanding the production of English literature in the age before print, when speculative reproduction of a text in anticipation of a sale became the standard model in English book manufacture. Exemplars of Middle English literary texts were generally in private or institutional hands rather than being held in the "industry": that is, by the people who manufactured books containing Middle English literature. Texts were loaned for reading and copying among fellow members of affiliations that were formed through social connections; such social networks of people of similar status and with shared cultural tastes simultaneously provided the conduits through which literature was disseminated. It is perhaps the case, therefore, that a well-connected gentleman would have found it easier to secure a new exemplar of the Middle English Prose *Brut* through his friends and affiliates, than it would have been for a scribe or stationer to procure a copy of the text.

Beth Bryan's study of the Dartmouth *Brut* chimes with Mooney and Matheson's research into the Beryn scribe in that it similarly signals a concern among book-makers with the construction of a saleable commodity rather than with the integrity of the text being produced. In her study of the two rubricators of the Dartmouth codex she traces a number of errors where headings have been incorrectly supplied, in manners that suggest the scribes worked somewhat mechanically, rather than with an intimate knowledge of, or sympathy for, the text (215–18). In Bryan's plausible "workshop" (219) setting for the Dartmouth codex, the rubricators are shown to not only make errors but to improvise chapter head-

ings. Improvisation is something to be expected in the production of manuscript books, but it is important to note that these improvisations were *always* contractions, attempts to abbreviate headings the scribes were tasked to copy. Such truncated headings might be understood as shortcuts born from a commercial imperative rather than representing an aim to produce the best possible text (218). Bryan's discussion of the missing four years of material relating to the reign of Henry IV in the Dartmouth codex and other manuscripts containing Abbreviated Versions to 1419 (AV–1419) is perhaps telling in this regard (220–23). As a remedy to the lacuna, a reviser (whose text spawned several stemmata in the *Brut*'s convoluted genealogy) has merely altered regnal years within the text in an attempt to obfuscate the fact that material was missing—in Bryan's words, the scribe was supplying a "cosmetic solution" to the problem of the missing text (223). Although subsequent producers were also aware of the lacuna, they were either unable to locate another exemplar to remedy the fault, or perhaps, they simply didn't care that much beyond producing a "cosmetically" pleasing historical text instead of a complete and accurate version of the *Brut*.

The sheer variety of inter-spliced forms of the Middle English Prose *Brut* within its labyrinthine corpus and the evident impulse among the texts' producers to provide continuations from other sources, or to graft *Brut* material onto other historiographical writings, demonstrates that other producers of the text were concerned to supplement and augment this vernacular history. Such producers of the *Brut* were dedicated to making histories as well as they could, and possessed both the connections and inclination to consult further sources in the process of manufacturing their books. The more one looks into the text contained in the Belfast / Harley book, the more signs there are that the producers of this plain book were attempting to fulfill that laudable aim.

Notes

1. See my earlier note and the *Brett Manuscript Collection* (3). The definitive bibliographic guide to the Middle English Prose *Brut* remains Lister Matheson's; this essay is dedicated to the memory of a great Scotsman. I would also like to record my thanks to Deirdre Wildy, the terrific Head of Special Collections and Archives in Queen's University, Belfast, not only for the rapid access she permitted me to Brett MS 3/12B, but also for her support of teaching initiatives that utilized primary materials in the Special Collections department.

2. For a sense of William Noel's mission to open up digital repositories, see his interview in the *TED blog* (""The Wide Open Future of the Art Mu-

seum") and the linked TED talk on the Archimedes palimpsest ("A Wide Open Future").

3. According to Matheson, Harley 266 was copied from exemplars containing two versions of the text (Common Version 1377 full continuation stage 3, and the Common Version beyond 1419, including John Page's poem; Matheson 95–96, 137–38). For a biography of Sir Simond D'Ewes, see Blatchly.

4. Matheson notes that none of the witnesses to this textual group (CV-1377 f.c. stage 3) can have been directly copied from another extant manuscript (97).

5. My thanks to Dr Nicky Tsougkarakis, Edge Hill University, who provided the translations of the Latin chronicles discussed in this essay.

6. The practice of boiling a body in water or wine in order to remove the flesh, and thus facilitate the transportation of human remains over long distances, was relatively common in medieval Europe; the process was coined as *mos teutonicus* by the Florentine chronicler Boncampagno da Signa who associated it with German aristocrats in particular. Danielle Westerhof provides the closely contemporary example of Louis IX of France, who after dying in Tunis in 1270 had his flesh and bones separated in this way so that his bones (and heart) could be returned to France (78–79).

7. My thanks to Stephen Kelly and Kath Stevenson (Queen's University of Belfast) for supplying me with images from the book.

8. See the entry for 1270 in Christie.

9. To avoid confusion with the now fragmentary Harley 266, I will use the phrase "Belfast / Harley book" to refer to the once complete codex, which included the entirety of Harley 266, the passages now preserved in Brett MS 3 12.B, and others now missing.

10. See the dot maps in the newly digitized edition of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*.

11. As I wrote in the *Notes and Queries* article, "Scribe A has characteristics which suggest he might be from a [. . .] Westerly county, perhaps from anywhere between the Severn Estuary region in Gloucestershire to somewhere in Hampshire" (189).

12. In this I correct my previous suggestion that the scribe may have learned literacy in a county closer to London (Perry 199).

13. Hanna makes this argument with respect to Bodley 953, a manuscript commissioned by Sir Thomas Berkeley.

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