

TALKING WITH THE TAXMAN ABOUT POETRY: ENGLAND'S ECONOMY IN "AGAINST THE KING'S TAXES" AND WYNNERE AND WASTOURE

Brantley L. Bryant
Sonoma State University

"THE LAW THAT makes my wool the king's is no just law" ("Non est lex sana quod regi sit mea lana"), proclaims the anonymous Anglo-Norman and Latin poem whose editorial title, "Against the King's Taxes," reflects the depth of its antipathy to royal exactions.¹ This eighty-five line macaronic poem, probably composed in the late 1330s, rails against the extortions of wool collectors, the pride of the great, and the process of tax granting.² Addressing itself directly to God and implicitly to an already

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¹ Isabel Aspin, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, Anglo-Norman Texts XI (Oxford, 1953), pp. 105–15. I have used modified versions of Aspin's translations throughout. I have also consulted *Facsimile of British Museum MS. Harley 2253*, introduced by N. R. Ker (London, 1965).

² On the dating of "Taxes," see Aspin, *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, pp. 104–7; Carter Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna

agitated and alienated readership, the poem begs for justice in a series of prayers and curses, evoking the image of Doomsday as an apocalyptic corrective to social injustice. It opposes the allegedly corrupt system of parliamentarily sanctioned royal taxation to the transcendental truths of Christian morality.

Written at least a decade later,³ the Middle English *Wynnere and Wastoure* imagines England's economy more expansively.⁴ While "Taxes" bases its polemic arguments on Christian eschatology's threats and rewards for individual souls, *Wynnere and Wastoure* invests itself in the collective economic good of the realm. Imagining England's wealth as a single shared treasury, the later poem seamlessly integrates moral and economic principles in an enactment of the political *status quo*. Whereas "Taxes" laments the injustice of parliamentary tax grants, *Wynnere* presents us with an idealized poetic representation of the same process.

These two texts provide some of the most richly detailed poetic treatment of the English economy in the fourteenth century, but they tell us the most when put in comparison. Their marked differences provide insight into the genre of political poetry and the relationship between political thought and poetic creation in this period. Each poem has been identified with national economic distress; "Taxes," with relative certainty, has been connected to the discontent over Edward III's war finance in the late 1330s, and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, less precisely and with significantly more scholarly disagreement, to later fourteenth-century debates over

Fein (Kalamazoo, 2000), pp. 21–109; John Scattergood, "Authority and Resistance: The Political Verse," in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, pp. 163–201, especially 163–69.

³ Debates on the dating and context of *Wynnere and Wastoure* are discussed by Stephanie Trigg in her edition for the Early English Text Society (Oxford, 1990), pp. xviii–xxvii. For more detail, see notes 4 and 5. Throughout, I will refer to the poem itself as *Wynnere and Wastoure*, occasionally shortened to *Wynnere*, and to its titular characters in modern spelling as "Winner" and "Waster."

⁴ My discussion of *Wynnere's* conception of national economy draws from Lois Roney's in "Winner and Waster's 'Wyse Wordes': Teaching Economics and Nationalism in Fourteenth-Century England," *Speculum* 69 (1994), 1070–1100. I clarify my relation to Roney's argument below and in note 49. D. Vance Smith has recently noted the overlap of household and national economic concerns in the poem in *Arts of Possession* (Minneapolis, 2003), pp. 72–107. In relation to post-plague labor regulations and the poem, see Kellie Robertson, *The Laborer's Two Bodies* (New York, 2006), pp. 39–45.

royal expenditure and post-plague control of wages.⁵ Such topical identifications can partially locate our readings of the poems, but the poems do more than react to given circumstances or comment upon crises; this paper stresses that “Taxes” and *Wynnere* themselves provide insight into the perception of national issues in this period. Their contrasting portrayals of England’s economy, achieved through fundamentally different configurations of the eschatological and the worldly, evince two distinct poetic reactions to parliamentary control over England’s trade and public finance. “Taxes” has been identified by J. R. Maddicott as a poem of “social protest,” a polemic, vituperative form of political poetry prone to harsh moral criticism of authority.⁶ To Maddicott’s assessment, we can add that “Taxes” is particularly opposed to the national economic interventions authorized in Parliament; as we shall see, it characterizes taxation as pillaging of the poor and parliamentary tax granting as a sham.⁷ On the other hand, *Wynnere* discusses national economy less divisively. The later poem is shaped by an alternate set of expectations and assumptions that can be called “Public Wealth.” This emergent mode of economic discussion opens broad imaginative and argumentative possibilities, comprehensively imagining England’s wealth as a shared storehouse whose stewardship imposes moral obligations.

Tied to the parliamentary compromise between Crown and populace that “Taxes” so vigorously attacks, Public Wealth could best be described

⁵ On the context of “Taxes,” see Janet Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350–1400* (London, 1981), pp. 79–84; G. L. Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance in Medieval England to 1369* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 250–52; Scattergood, “Authority and Resistance,” pp. 163–69. On that of *Wynnere*, in addition to Trigg, above, see Thomas H. Bestul, *Satire and Allegory in Wynnere and Wastoure* (Lincoln, Neb., 1974), 46–81; Scattergood, “Winner and Waster and the Mid-Fourteenth-Century Economy,” in *The Writer as Witness*, ed. Tom Dunne (Cork, 1987), pp. 39–57. In this paper I accept these scholars’ more general contextualizations of *Wynnere* rather than Thorlac Turville-Petre’s argument that *Wynnere* refers specifically to the Black Prince’s negotiations with Cheshire in 1352–53, put forth in “*Wynnere and Wastoure: When and Where?*” in *Loyal Letters*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (Groningen, 1994), pp. 155–66.

⁶ J. R. Maddicott, “Poems of Social Protest in Early Fourteenth-Century England,” in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Dover, 1986), pp. 130–44.

⁷ The intensity of the attack on Parliament in “Taxes” is brought out in David R. Carlson’s reading of the poem in *Chaucer’s Jobs* (Palgrave, 2004), pp. 20–22.

as an imaginative matrix. An “imaginative matrix” is a formulative force in the production of texts, not a specific theory or concept. J. G. A. Pocock defines “languages” as the linguistic possibilities for the discussion of a given topic in a given period and thus “the matrices within which texts as events occur.”⁸ To follow Pocock, the imaginative matrix of Public Wealth is an idiom within the larger language of fourteenth-century politics, a particular way of discussing economic concerns in poetic creation and political debate. It draws equally upon what we would label economics, politics, and ethics and is shaped by the institutions and practices of fourteenth-century English representative government. Public Wealth’s core is the assumption that the varied resources used in the economic activity of the realm—coin and bullion, agricultural production, commodities—constitute a common treasury whose status directly affects England’s fate. If these resources are protected, the realm prospers; if the resources are damaged, the realm suffers. These resources are seen as belonging to the realm as a whole, prone to abuse by sectional or factional interest, even by the Crown; the Crown can legitimately lay claim to these resources only to act for the common good. Every agricultural, military, or commercial action affects the realm’s wealth for good or ill—by augmenting it, properly using it, or wasting it. Those who protect these resources act for the good of the realm, while those who squander or damage them are dangerous to the polity.⁹

Public Wealth shapes a range of fourteenth-century texts, from intricately literary poems that imagine economic issues to ostensibly objective parliamentary petitions that demand policy change (while implicitly performing imaginative work through their evocation of the realm’s

⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, “Texts as Events: Reflections on the History of Political Thought,” in *Politics of Discourse*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 21–34, 28. My method in this essay also owes much to Helen Barr’s discussion in *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 1–9 and *passim*.

⁹ Discussing fifteenth-century mercantile texts, notably the *Libelle of Englysshe Polycye*, J. L. Bolton identifies an “[i]dea of national prosperity,” an assumption present in “the welter of debate and polemic about the [English] economy in the Later Middle Ages” that “[prosperity] was not a question of an individual or group benefiting from this or that action, but that the country’s wealth might be increased.” My argument observes an earlier, less specifically mercantile manifestation of this kind of thinking, and conceives of it as a generative force for texts. J. L. Bolton, *Medieval English Economy 1150–1500* (London, 1980), pp. 329–31.

economy). Texts shaped by Public Wealth analyze and evaluate economic policies, surveying the realm's prosperity. Public Wealth enables such texts to imagine a wide and confusing variety of developments—in trade, diplomacy, finance, and taxation—as parts of a comprehensible whole and to measure economic policies against the apparently objective standard of the common good. Through comprehensively depicting the realm's economy, texts of Public Wealth imply their authority in economic decisions. Such a discursive formulation accepts and engages with the assumptions about representation and national finance at the heart of parliamentary practice in this period.

Political Society, Parliament, and Poetry

As G. L. Harriss has argued, an emergent “political society” played a key role in government, state finance, and law in England's later Middle Ages.¹⁰ This society was made up of what we can, as a term of convenience, label the “middle strata,” those English subjects above the peasantry but below the magnates. Harriss numbers among them “middling landowners” and those “on their way” to that status, the “gentleman bureaucrats” who administered law and government, “clergy and their officials,” and “urban merchants and substantial citizens.” Though the groups that made up these strata had a range of political and economic interests, they were united by their common participation in government, service as officials or parliamentary representatives, and vested interest in law and policy.¹¹ The middle strata of late medieval English society are also closely associated with the production and consumption of much of the literature remaining to us from this period—Geoffrey Chaucer being perhaps the most notable example of a middle-stratum writer.¹² Members of these groups were the

¹⁰ G. L. Harriss, “Political Society and the Growth of Government in Late Medieval England,” *Past and Present* 138 (1993), 28–57. For a classic assessment of the middle strata, see Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, paperback edition (Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 288–319.

¹¹ Harriss, “Political Society,” 33–34.

¹² Key studies on this topic include Anne Middleton, “The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*,” in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge, 1982), 101–54; and Paul Strohm's chapter “Chaucer and the Structure of Social Relations,” in *Social Chaucer*, paperback edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), pp. 1–23.

consumers of both "Taxes" and *Wynnere*. If we accept Carter Revard's conclusions, British Museum MS Harley 2253, in which "Taxes" appears, was the household book for the Ludlow family of Stokesey, Shropshire. During the time when the poem was copied into the manuscript, the family's head, Sir Laurence, was a former MP and collector of the wool subsidy.¹³ A similar kind of middling landowner with a career in service, Robert Thornton copied *Wynnere* into British Library MS Additional 31042 for his own use some time before his death in 1468.¹⁴ Though his involvement in office and government is less extensive than Ludlow's, Thornton also served as a collector of a Parliamentarily imposed exaction, a fifteenth and a tenth of movable property, in 1453–54.¹⁵ Just as these middle-strata consumers of texts were involved in the surveillance and control of England's financial systems, the poems associated with them show intense interest in economic questions. "Taxes" rejects, whereas *Wynnere* embraces, the terms of the public discussion of national finance in Parliament.

The role of the parliamentary Commons—representatives of the shires and boroughs of England—developed irregularly and gradually from the late thirteenth century on, but the aggregate result was greater involvement of the middle strata in questions of national finance.¹⁶ By 1340, it was formally recognized that the Crown needed the consent of the Commons in Parliament to exact the large national levies on movables, customarily set in 1334 as a fifteenth from shires and a tenth from specified taxation boroughs and royal demesne lands.¹⁷ The parliamentary Commons also struggled to assert their control over the granting of indirect taxation on trade, such as additional customs and subsidies on commodities.

¹³ Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," pp. 63, 78–79.

¹⁴ George R. Keiser, "Lincoln Cathedral MS. 91: Life and Milieu of the Scribe," *Studies in Bibliography* xxxii (1979), 158–79; John J. Thompson, *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 1–5; Trigg, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, xiii–xviii.

¹⁵ Keiser, "Life and Milieu," p. 164.

¹⁶ In this broad sketch I follow the theses of Harriss from *King, Parliament, and Public Finance* and T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977). In this section, I am especially grateful for the suggestions from the readers for *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*.

¹⁷ A. L. Brown, *The Governance of Late Medieval England 1272–1461* (London, 1989), pp. 70–77; Harriss, "The Formation of Parliament, 1272–1377," in *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. G. Davies and J. M. Denton (Manchester, 1981), pp. 29–60; W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III* (New Haven, 1990), p. 164.

In exchange for these grants of taxation, the Commons fought for and attained the right to redress of grievances from the Crown. It became routine for the Commons at Parliament to submit lists of *commune* petitions: formal requests for the correction of legal or financial problems, given in the name of the Commons as a whole for the good of the realm, that were answered by the king and council.¹⁸ In this regard as well, 1340 was a turning point. During a “parliamentary crisis” over Edward III’s war taxation, Harriss argues, the Commons “first emerg[ed]” as political actors who used their powers of tax-granting to assure redress of grievances in their interest.¹⁹

In the 1350s, post-plague labor shortages led to an even more open acceptance of the routines of taxation among the middle strata that constituted the parliamentary Commons. The Commons aligned their financial interests with those of the Crown against newly mobile and assertive peasants and artisans.²⁰ During this period, as Harriss observes:

[The Commons were] coming to regard taxation not so much as something grudgingly paid to the King under an inexorable obligation for purposes which he determined, but as a charge on communities in the interests of government and the governing class. . . . *The taxes became, in a sense, theirs as well as the King’s*; in granting them they participated in government and they were beginning to take a greater interest in their disposal.²¹

The parliamentary Commons varied their strategies, interests, and affiliations considerably throughout the fourteenth century, but their actions show a consistent acceptance of the central parliamentary arrangement of grants of taxation adjudged necessary for national good given in exchange for redress of grievances.

¹⁸ Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, pp. 358–75; Maddicott, “Parliament and the Constituencies,” in *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, pp. 61–87; Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III*, pp. 61–63; Doris Rayner, “The Forms and Machinery of the ‘Commune Petition’ in the Fourteenth Century,” *English Historical Review* 56 (1941), 198–233, 549–70.

¹⁹ Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, p. 259.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 333–34.

²¹ Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, p. 343 (my emphasis). On acceptance of taxation, also see W. M. Ormrod, *Political Life in Medieval England* (London, 1995), p. 92, who also remarks on the oppositional stance of “Taxes.”

This routine of parliamentary taxation was justified by appeal to shared assumptions about community and representation. The political attitudes of the thirteenth century, in which national taxation developed, dictated that the king could not request taxation from the entire realm without gaining the realm's assent, according to the Roman Law maxim "quod omnes tangit ab omnibus approbetur" ("what affects all must be approved by all").²² To gain this assent, the king summoned the Commons as representatives of their localities. The ideological identification of parliamentary representatives with the *communitas* of the realm would remain crucial for the validation of parliamentary decisions. As J. G. Edwards has observed, late-thirteenth-century summonses to Parliament used a variety of formulae to stress that the parliamentary Commons would be answering authoritatively for all of the inhabitants of their counties or boroughs.²³ By the early fourteenth century, the standard wording of parliamentary summonses requested that MPs come with "full power" (*plena potestas*) to commit their localities to taxation. A fourteenth-century legal-procedural parliamentary handbook, the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*, clearly illustrates the assumptions about representation and community that were imagined to legitimate parliamentary process.²⁴ The *Modus* states that two shire knights of the parliamentary Commons "qui veniunt ad Parliamentum pro ipso comitatu, maiorem vocem habent in Parlamento in concedendo et contradicendo, quam maior comes Anglie" ("who come to parliament for the shire have a greater voice in granting and denying [aids to the king] than the greatest earl of England") because of their representative power. It goes on to say that all things granted or denied in Parliament must be confirmed by the Commons, "qui representant totam communitatem Anglie" ("who

²² Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, p. 3–48, "The Formation of Parliament," pp. 40–43.

²³ J. G. Edwards, "The *Plena Potestas* of English parliamentary Representatives," reprinted in *Historical Studies of the English Parliament*, ed. E. B. Fryde and Edward Miller (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 136–49; Michael Prestwich, *The Three Edwards: War and State in England 1272–1377* (London, 1980), pp. 119–20.

²⁴ Nicholas Pronay and John Taylor maintain the *Modus* is an uncontroversial encapsulation of widely held assumptions about Parliament, in opposition to an earlier view that saw the *Modus* as a biased, factional treatise. They suggest it is a legal treatise that saw "complete acceptance" during the period in *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 25–30, 30. On the *Modus*'s discussion of the parliamentary Commons, see Pronay and Taylor, pp. 38–41.

represent the whole community of England”) and not by the magnates, “quia quilibet eorum est pro sua propria persona ad Parliamentum et pro nulla alia” (“because each of these [magnates] is at parliament for his own individual person and for no one else”).²⁵ In practice, the public involved in economic discussion was only slightly expanded through the growing participation of the middle social strata in Parliament, but in the routines of Parliament the imaginary public came to include the entire realm.

With the parliamentary Commons drawing their power as grantors of taxation from representative ideals, the Crown, the magnates, or factions within the Commons themselves had to phrase requests for their support in terms of the good of the nation.²⁶ When considering demands for direct taxation, the Commons (or those seeking to influence them) were called on to weigh the needs of the realm and the available wealth of their constituents. This arrangement encouraged them to conceive economic issues in a broadly collective sense, even when their motivations remained grounded in private interest. Discussion of indirect taxation through customs, depending as it did on patterns of trade, necessitated a similarly collective conception of economic relationships with other countries. Through petitions, the Commons not only reacted to questions of taxation, but made their own demands and suggestions about the regulation of economic activity.

This brief account of parliamentary ideals leaves aside many questions about the actual practice of Parliament that are open to debate by historians: to what extent did the Commons actually wield power? Were they simply a “rubber stamp” for royal policies? Did the Commons act independently or were they guided by the Lords?²⁷ But what is clear, and most at stake for our interpretation of “Taxes” and *Wynnere*, is the availability of Parliament as an institutional occasion for thinking nationally about economics. The increasingly public nature of discussions of national finance—spoken in the name of the realm, for the good of the realm—made space for a discursive formation like the Public Wealth of *Wynnere*, with its panoramic view of national economy. “Taxes,” on the other hand, strains against these parliamentary conceptions through its zealous dismantling of representative rhetoric.

²⁵ Pronay and Taylor, *Parliamentary Texts*, p. 77; translation on pp. 89–90.

²⁶ Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, pp. 314–20.

²⁷ On questions about the actual power of the Commons, see, for example, Prestwich, *Three Edwards*, pp. 119–22.

Death and Taxes

Social protest poetry is deeply engaged with the particulars of political life; in contrast with other kinds of complaint poetry, the attacks of social protest poems are detailed and precise.²⁸ Yet social protest poetry's political engagement also amounts to a kind of disengagement; its divisive and inflammatory rhetorical moves are quite different from the unifying and consensus-seeking formulations shaped by Public Wealth. Social protest poetry's angry tone, its refusal to accept the ideological foundation of taxation, and its tendency to think at the level of universal Christian morality rather than the good of the realm all indicate the fractious, oppositional relation this poetry adopts towards the parliamentary routine. Poems of social protest do not speak in the name of an idealized conception of England's collective good; rather, they imagine an England divided between, on the one side, the righteous poor and their pious benefactors and, on the other, the damnation-bound rich and their lackeys.

"Taxes," exemplifying these tendencies, depicts the taxation for Edward III's wars as an unjust and damaging series of abuses.²⁹ Preparing for his bid for France, Edward attempted to "mobilize the financial resources of the realm on a massive scale."³⁰ In 1337 Parliament granted him a tenth and fifteenth for three years. Edward also arranged to exploit indirect taxation by giving a wool monopoly to English merchants in return for a loan.³¹ But the various systems of wool collection set up by Edward before his 1338 departure for the Continent proved difficult to sustain once he was abroad, especially with subjects already agitated by the "unprecedented" three continuous years of taxation.³² This breakdown sparked a political controversy in Parliament from 1339 to 1341. On one side Edward and the courtiers who accompanied him to war pressed for further tax collection to answer the urgent needs of a military campaign, while on the other the lords of the governing home council urged Edward to refrain from imposing more burdens on the discontented populace.

²⁸ Maddicott, "Poems of Social Protest," pp. 140–42.

²⁹ For taxation and crisis in the late 1330s, see Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, pp. 231–312; May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century 1307–1399* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 152–81; Scattergood, "Authority and Resistance," pp. 164–65.

³⁰ Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, p. 235.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 235–36.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

The restrained financial policies of the lords of the home council drew the support of the parliamentary Commons, and both groups united to resist royal exactions. "Taxes" has been seen as sympathetic to the cause of the Commons and the home council, since it decries the damages done by taxation; the Harley scribe may have interpreted it as such when copying it into the household book of a middle-strata family with ties to Parliament.³³ But the poem's attacks on parliamentary representation would still be potentially unsettling to those with a vested interest in government, in contrast to the uncontroversial acceptance of the national economic *status quo* we see in *Wynnere*.³⁴

"Taxes" begins by lamenting that Edward III has crossed over the sea to pursue his wars. Subsequent stanzas complain about the high level of taxation and also about the rampant corruption that aggravates its effects. The poet then warns the rich ("les grantz") who avoid paying the tax that they will be punished at Judgment Day for their actions. The poet finishes his discussion of taxation by praying for the deliverance of the common people, warning that they will soon have nothing left and be moved to revolt. Two stanzas then note the trouble caused by the lack of coin in the kingdom, another complains of the expenses of the king's army abroad, and a final stanza begs God to intervene.

Although social protest poetry draws from the long-established genres of estates and venality satire, it eschews abstract statements in favor of detailed discussion of contemporary abuses.³⁵ Maddicott notes the contrast between the long tradition of "world upside down poetry," with its ambiguous pronouncements such as "Vulneratur karitas, amor egrotatur, / Regnat et perfidia, livor generatur" ("Charity is wounded, love is sick, perfidy reigns and hatred is born"), and the specific grievances named in "Taxes."³⁶ Its third stanza describes contemporary national taxation and the damage it causes to the "commune" people:

³³ Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," p. 74.

³⁴ Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, pp. 250–52.

³⁵ Maddicott, "Social Protest," p. 142. Also see Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, p. 67.

³⁶ The quotation is from "Vulneratur Karitas," in Aspin, *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, pp. 149–56, probably from the thirteenth century, cited in Maddicott, "Social Protest," p. 141; translation mine.

Ore court en Engleterre de anno in annum
 Le quinzime dener, pur fere sic commune dampnum;
 E fet avaler que soleyent sedere super scanum,
 E vendre fet commune gent vaccas, vas et pannum
 Non placet ad summum quindenum sic dare nummum. (11–15)

Now runs in England year after year / the fifteenth, and thus brings
 common harm; / And it makes those go low who used to sit on
 benches, / and makes the common people sell cows, vessels, and
 clothing. / It is not pleasing thus to give the fifteenth to the last
 farthing.³⁷

“Taxes,” as Maddicott observes, locates its complaint both in place (“en Engleterre”) and time (“ore”).³⁸ It describes the taxation of those years, the repeated (“de anno in annum”) fifteenth (“quinzime dener”), and it draws attention to the financial hardship these taxes cause for the “commune gent” who are forced to sell their possessions.³⁹ It may also allude to the difficulties of a higher social class through its cryptic mention of the decline of “those who used to sit on benches.”⁴⁰ The poem states other grievances with more pathos and shows little concern about the consequences for all of society (if indeed the “benches” comment can be taken as such); it concerns itself almost exclusively with the plight of the taxed. The collection of taxes is particularly unjust, the poem claims, because tax collectors embezzle the money and thus the people are oppressed (“gravatur”) and damaged (“sincopatur”) (16–20). According to the poem, the collection of wool in particular “burdens” (“greve”) the “simple people,” and through such collection the people are destroyed (21). The wool collection is described with an image capturing both the fraud of the wool collectors in measuring collections and the burden placed on the people: it is a “pondus . . . falsum” (“false weight”) that is bitter (“constat amarum”) to the unwilling donors (30).

³⁷ Aspin, *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, p. 109; translation mine, based on Aspin’s.

³⁸ Maddicott, “Social Protest,” p. 141.

³⁹ Scattergood, “Authority and Resistance,” p. 165.

⁴⁰ Maddicott, “Social Protest,” p. 141; and Scattergood, “Authority and Resistance,” p. 165, suggest that this line might refer to Edward III’s widespread dismissal of officers in 1340.

These specific complaints serve as ammunition for an attack. "Taxes," like the other poems of social protest, is hardly interested in meekly expressing grievances in the hope of reform. With outraged laments and appeals to Christian eschatology, the poem angrily indicts the current system of taxation, questioning parliamentary assumptions about representation and consent. "Taxes" claims that since the rich ("les grantz") can avoid paying taxes through bribe and influence, their grant of taxation is "polluted with vices" ("viciis pollutum") and "wickedly done" ("male constitutum") (41–45). If other, more publicly minded texts back the representative assumption that equates the parliamentary Commons with all the people of the realm—the parliamentary Commons with the "common" people—the poet of "Taxes" stresses the difference between "les grantz" who go to Parliament and the inhabitants of the localities they purport to represent. "It does not grieve the great to grant the king such tribute," "Taxes" claims, "for the simple have to give all of it" ("Rien greve les grantz graunter regi sic tributum / Les simples deyvent tot doner. . .") (41–42). Such lines show that the poem has no tolerance for the niceties of consent and necessity. Taxation is nothing more than coercion and theft: "[t]o take the goods of the poor against their will is plunder" ("Res inopum capta nisi gratis est quasi rapta") (60).⁴¹ Since, in the poem's view, parliamentary grants of taxation do not express the people's decision, taxation itself is invalid and unjust. The poem refers to the current national taxation as "such perversity" ("talem pravitatem") (36). This taxation is a threat to the souls of those who enact it. "He who takes the silver of the needy without cause is sinning," the poet proclaims ("Qui capit argentum sine causa peccat egentum"), also implying in this line that Parliament improperly judged the war effort to be a worthy "causa" for taxation (35). "To say the substance of the case," the poet says, playing on legal language, "[all of this] is like robbery" ("A dire grosse veritee est quasi rapina") (59).⁴²

"Taxes" claims that the wool collection is not "dear to God" ("Deo carum") (23). This line is characteristic of the poem's approach, for it is through comparison to strictly conceived Christian morality that "Taxes"

⁴¹ Aspin's edition has "capita" for "capta," but the manuscript shows "capta" in facsimile.

⁴² Aspin, *Anglo-Norman Political Songs*, 114, note to l. 27. *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, s.v. *verité*, online at the *Anglo-Norman* online hub, <http://www.anglo-norman.net/sitedocs/main-intro.html>.

most aggressively attacks those whom it sees as responsible for the taxation (23). It disrupts political consensus by shifting it into a narrower register of penitential discourse.⁴³ The poem itself is a prayer, calling in its opening line on “God, King of Majesty” (“Dieu, roy de magesté”) and continuing in this devotional vein throughout, begging God to right the injustices it describes; its last line incorporates the format of a prayer into its poetic structure, internally rhyming the “solamen” sought with the final word “amen.” In this political prayer, “Taxes” works the language of legal reform and political action into series of curses and invocations. The tagline of its first stanza embodies the poem’s hopes that devotional intensity and moral judgment will rectify political problems: “Let curses be given to the false, so that the king may be saved” (“Rex ut salvetur falsis maledictio detur”) (5). The poem asks God to “take pity on your people, through divine grace / So that the world may be saved from such destruction” (“De vostre pueple eiez pitee, gracia divina, / Que le siecle soit aleggee de tali ruina”) and to “have vengeance” (“vengeaunce en facez”) on the people who oppress the poor (56–57, 83). These prayers are somewhat unnecessary, we might think, for the poem suggests that the rich are already set to receive punishment for their oppressive exactions. The “great judgment shall come, the great day of wrath” (“vendra le haut juggement, magna dies ire”), the poet says, and the rich who do not change their habit of living off of the goods of the poor will then be destroyed (53). Fracturing the assumed unity of parliamentary representation, the poet reminds us of the drastic separation soon to occur between England’s worthy poor and her filthy rich, quoting Matthew 25:34–36, “The king says ‘away’ to the damned and ‘come near’ to the good” (“Rex dicit reprobis ‘ite,’ ‘venite’ probis”) (55). The poem’s repeated evocation of God’s kingly and royal aspects, indeed, downplays the authority of the earthly king, who is depicted as something of a dupe, a young, guileless figure manipulated by evil counselors (36–40).

Consideration of the relation between the poem and the probable owner of its manuscript helps reveal the unusual political position of social protest verse like “Taxes.” Sir Lawrence Ludlow, apparently the owner of MS Harley 2253 at the time of the poem’s copying, would have

⁴³ Tison Pugh, “‘Falseness Reigns in Every Flock’: Literacy and Eschatological Discourse in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381,” *Quidditas: Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 21 (2001), 79–103, 91–92.

found parts of the project in "Taxes" congenial. Ludlow probably took the side of the home council during the constitutional crisis of 1340–41, as Carter Revard points out, because of his ties to the Earl of Arundel, one of that faction's stalwarts.⁴⁴ As such, the poem's criticism of bad royal counselors and poor financial decisions might have struck Ludlow as a useful expression of the home council's broad agenda to reduce royal exactions. However receptive Ludlow might have been to this aspect of the poem, he would less immediately have accepted the inflammatory statements in "Taxes" about parliamentary representation, statements that not only question the abuses of the system (in which case he could have imagined himself as one of the righteous) but that attack the system itself. The poem's claims that taxes are little more than theft and its rigid moralization of political action challenge the premises of financial distribution, representation, and collective good on which parliamentary authority, and Ludlow's public career, depended. Perhaps these claims were overlooked, since their virulent and rigidly moral aspects made the poem's attack on the court's policies more intense. Perhaps, even, the poem's religious questioning of the good of politics served a devotional purpose. "Taxes" appears near the end of the Harley manuscript, in a section composed largely of devotional material; it directly follows a series of Latin questions used to examine the faith of the dying. The questions, originally written for cloistered religious but available in Harley for lay use, end with the statement "The one to whom the above shall be said before death shall not taste eternal death" ("Cui hec premissa ante mortem dicantur mortem non gustabit in eternum").⁴⁵ "Taxes" could be read as serving a similar devotional purpose, encouraging meditation on the moral aspects of a political career.

But notwithstanding such possible uses, the tendencies of social protest poetry to pit rich against poor and to speak to an isolated audience of the morally justified render it strikingly inadequate for the creation, exploration, and imagination of political consensus that so often was the concern of middle-strata writers and readers. Social protest poetry's association with voicing the complaints of the poor would become more

⁴⁴ Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," pp. 78–81.

⁴⁵ Text transcribed in Ker, *Harley Facsimile*, xv. The second part of the line quotes from John 8:51. On the questions for the dying, see Michael P. Kuczynski, "An 'Electric Stream,'" in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, pp. 123–61, 146.

problematic throughout the century. The poetry of social protest was not written, of course, by the truly disenfranchised; "Taxes," cast in a traditional Latin satirical verse form, is probably the work of an educated ecclesiastic.⁴⁶ It seeks, nevertheless, to speak on behalf of, or even in the voice of, the "commune gent."⁴⁷ "Taxes" may have been a disturbing juxtaposition of the political and the penitential for a reader such as Sir Laurence Ludlow. Its identification with the poor and disenfranchised could only grow more disconcerting as the middle strata aligned with the Crown to control an increasingly assertive peasantry in the labor legislation of the early 1350s.

Imagined Economies

Another sometime tax collector, Robert Thornton, would have found no such oppositional stance in *Wynnere* as he copied it into his personal collection of romance and devotional materials, MS Additional 31042, near the middle of the fifteenth century. Scholars disagree on the poem's dating, extrapolating from a series of topical references. Some argue for a specific date of 1352–53, while others, notably Stephanie Trigg, have suggested the wider range of 1352–c. 1370.⁴⁸ It is generally agreed, though, that the poem addresses concerns of England's troubled post-plague economy. Treating a topic similar to that of "Taxes," and invested to a certain degree with the sense of urgency in "Taxes" and with its attention to Christian morality, *Wynnere* nevertheless imagines the English economy very differently. Lois Roney has drawn attention to the way that the poem depicts the interrelation of the various "economic transactions

⁴⁶ Maddicott, "Social Protest," pp. 134–36. Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 62–65. The poem is in the goliardic stanza *cum auctoritate*, a somewhat antiquated though still current form dating to the twelfth century, often used for satirical attacks on prelates; see Paul Gerhard Schmidt, "The Quotation in Goliardic Poetry: The Feast of Fools and the Goliardic Strophe *cum auctoritate*," trans. Peter Godman, in *Latin Poetry and the Classical Tradition*, ed. Peter Godman and Oswyn Murray (Oxford, 1990), pp. 39–55.

⁴⁷ Scattergood, "Authority and Resistance," p. 167.

⁴⁸ Trigg, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, xxv. On dating and context, see notes 3, 4, and 5 above.

of everyday national life."⁴⁹ We can pursue the implications of Roney's observation about the poem's totalizing economic vision to see how *Wynnere* is created within the politically charged matrix of Public Wealth.

The poem begins by lamenting the instability of society in abstract terms ("nowe alle es witt and wyles") (5) and predicting that the end of the world draws near (1–30).⁵⁰ By using the tropes of political prophecy, this prologue draws attention to the seriousness and social relevance of the poem's subject matter.⁵¹ The prologue's tone, its castigation of moral failures, and its reminder that "Domesday" is nigh are all quite in line with "Taxes," but the poem's approach will soon change entirely. In the next section, the speaker recounts traveling through an idyllic landscape, in which he falls asleep and experiences a dream vision that takes up the largest part of the poem. This sequence of wandering and dream vision evokes the structure of a *chanson d'aventure*, a genre Anne Middleton has associated with instructive poetry offering a range of interpretations instead of one rigidly defined lesson, most notably employed in *Piers Plowman*.⁵² *Wynnere's* initial pairing of stark jeremiad and serendipitous journey prepares the reader for its open-ended discussion of England's fate.

In his dream vision, the speaker observes two battle-ready forces: the army of Winner, composed of the pope, lawyers, the four orders of friars, and merchants; and the army of Waster, composed of squires, bowmen, and men-at-arms. This imminent battle draws the attention of a king, who summons the leaders of the armies to his tent. Asked to explain their quarrel, the leaders break out into debate. Winner objects to Waster's

⁴⁹ I draw on Roney's claims that *Wynnere and Wastoure* suggests a shared pool of resources, her observations about the presence of national and household levels of economy at work in the poem, her identification of the significance of the figures in Winner's army with the international flow of money, and her suggestion that the poem can be understood in comparison to English ideas about trade and bullionism.

⁵⁰ Citations are from Warren Ginsberg's edition from *Wynnere and Wastoure and the Parlement of the Thre Ages* (Kalamazoo, 1992), online at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/ginwin.htm>. See note 3 for the conventions of spelling in references to the poem.

⁵¹ Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, pp. 61–62; Scattergood, "Winner and Waster," p. 43.

⁵² Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*," p. 115. Scattergood points out the relevance of Middleton's statement to *Wynnere and Wastoure* in "Winner and Waster," p. 46.

frivolous spending, while Waster attacks Winner's avaricious gathering of goods. At the end of their discussion, the king commands the two to separate, ordering Winner to settle at the richly appointed papal court and Waster to take his home in the bustling markets and taverns of London's Cheapside. The poem's action and the dialogue of its allegorical characters evoke the economic concerns of post-plague England: the regulation of expenditure, the cultivation of land, and the control of labor and wages. Eschewing the threatening theological maxims of social protest poetry, *Wynnere and Wastoure* makes many of its jabs at contemporary issues through the dialogue of its debaters, and through the disjunctions and ironies that arise as they disagree.⁵³ Since assessing the poem's perspective on specific policies depends on interpreting the cues given by the behavior of the dream-vision's central characters, scholarly interpretations have differed. Are Winner and his enemy meant to illustrate reprehensible economic abuses or contrary extremes that prove advantageous if properly harmonized? Does the king's ambiguous judgment on the two suggest an ideal example to be followed or give proof that the king cannot or will not reconcile the two enemies?

The poem's most important implications about economics, however, are conveyed through its vivid imagination of a national economy within which its king and disputants act and about whose flows and fluxes they debate. The poet, shaping his text within the matrix of Public Wealth, envisions the realm sharing a pool of resources, accessible to the king but primarily affected by the actions of Winner and Waster, who embody the interests and power of the middle strata. Scholars have disagreed about the precise identification of the two figures. Some have seen Winner as a merchant and Waster as a small landowner and war veteran, and the resulting debate as an expression of anxiety about growing mercantile influence.⁵⁴ But the two figures are not so easily separated into distinct classes: Winner discusses the husbandry of land, for example, while Waster becomes involved in the mercantile exchange of Cheapside.⁵⁵ The

⁵³ Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, pp. 18–20.

⁵⁴ Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, pp. 48–50; Scattergood, "Winner and Waster," p. 50.

⁵⁵ Barr, *Socioliterary Practice*, pp. 20–21. Thomas L. Reed, Jr., recognizes the possibility of assigning the two characters to separate estates, but then notes that the identity of the two is in fact "a little too slippery to pin down"; *Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution* (Columbia, Mo., 1990), pp. 264–65.

blurred affiliations of the figures readily suggest the unwieldy range of groups in Harriss's "political society" who made up the Commons in Parliament, and the poem significantly puts these figures in control of England's resources.⁵⁶ The very framing of *Wynnere and Wastoure* is an economic argument: the assertion of the right and responsibility of middle-strata subjects to manage the nation's shared resources. The contrast with "Taxes" is striking. Gone is the authoritative voice of moral indignation and the division of England into righteous and sinners. *Wynnere* exemplifies a completely different mode of economic discussion, one whose willingness to imagine the distribution of England's wealth with all of its attendant practical problems, to extend its moral examination from the high principles of justice and charity to less theological questions of efficiency and conservation, bespeaks a comfortable acceptance of parliamentary routine.

The kingdom of the dream vision is clearly an analogy for England. Its king's tent bears the motto of Edward III's order of the garter, and the king, probably to be seen as Edward himself, wears richly decorated clothing that incorporates the order's "gartare of ynde" (94). As Roney observes, the description of the tent stresses English identity: the tent is decorated with "Ynglysse besantes" ("decorative coins") and the order's motto is written "appon Ynglysse tonge" (61, 67).⁵⁷ A "hathell" attends the king, probably Edward's son, the Black Prince; this character wears the heraldic expression of his father's dynastic ambitions: the quartered arms of France and England (77–81).⁵⁸

As with the poem's evocation of its English identity, its examination of economy combines precise contemporary detail and suggestive allegory. The two armies drawn up for battle represent the dynamics of the realm's economy, evoking England's place within international trade and

⁵⁶ On the blurring of gentry and mercantile interests and identities, especially in Parliament, see Gwilym Dodd, "Crown, Magnates and Gentry: The English Parliament, 1369–1421," (PhD thesis, York, 1998), pp. 104–7; Ormrod, *Reign of Edward III*, p. 166; Smith, *Arts of Possession*, pp. 21–25; Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, pp. 292–94.

⁵⁷ I use glosses from the Ginsberg edition (n. 50, above) occasionally supplementing them with my own. On identification of the figures, see Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, pp. 68–69. For Englishness in the poem, see Roney, "Wyse Wordes," p. 1066.

⁵⁸ Note to lines 78–80 in Ginsberg.

personifying the flows of wealth into and out of the country.⁵⁹ D. Vance Smith, as part of an argument about heraldry and economics in the poem, notes that the armies are gathered in a clearly bounded “static field”; such a gathering of economic forces within this clearly defined area amounts to an act of accounting, grouping aspects of national economy together into a surveyable spectacle for the poem’s speaker and the poem’s readers.⁶⁰ The gathered armies, described in a monologue by the messenger sent by the king to stop the fight, are a virtual checklist of the country’s military rivals and trading partners, an inclusion that demonstrates the poem’s keen awareness of England’s place within larger economic and political structures. Observing the armies, the messenger wonders at their size:

For here es all the folke of Fraunce ferdede° besyde, *assembled*
 Of Lorreyne, of Lumbardye, and of Lawe Spayne;
 Wyes° of Westwale°, that in were° duellen; *men; Westphalia; war*
 Of Ynglonde, of Yrlonde, Estirlynges° full many. *Hanseatic merchants*
(138–41)

All of these groups play major roles in English trade and foreign policy; the Lombards are noted, even notorious, merchants and bankers, while the “Estirlynges” of the Hanseatic League are also important trade partners with England.⁶¹ Notably, both Lombards and Hanse merchants resided within England, a situation clearly pointed to in the poem’s picture of penetrated borders and a mass of aliens in England. The mixed makeup of the armies suggests that England is one participant in an international network of trade, inextricably tied to its allies, business partners and tributaries, even to its enemy, “Fraunce,” just as the mention of “Ynglonde” is here included within the long list of nations.

If the messenger’s initial remark evokes the broad context of international trade and competition, his description of units in the armies focuses

⁵⁹ Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, pp. 70–72; Roney “Wyse Wordes,” p. 1093.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Arts of Possession*, pp. 86–87.

⁶¹ For the Lombards, see Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*; and Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, passim. On the Hanseatic merchants see Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 141–43, 191–92. For the residence of foreign merchants in England, see Alice Beardwood, *Alien Merchants in England, 1350 to 1377, Their Legal and Economic Position* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), pp. 3–25. In general, see also Caroline Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, paperback edition (Oxford, 2005), pp. 84–117.

on the specific flows of wealth within and outside of the kingdom. Looking at Winner's army, the messenger first sees the pope, whose banner bears bulls sealed with "a sad lede"—"sad" suggesting not only the weight of the lead seal but also the lamentable drain of wealth from England's church through papal letters of provision and ecclesiastical exactions (146).⁶² The lawyers bear a banner that evokes the documentary vehicles of economic transactions; its "bende of grene" brings to mind the green wax used to seal documents requesting money for judicial penalties or debts (149).⁶³ The lawyers are a markedly domestic presence in Winner's otherwise boundary-crossing army, being "ledis of this londe that schold oure lawes yeme (protect)"(152). Their inclusion suggests the connection, perceived by contemporaries, between legal revenues and the collection of money for the king's war efforts.⁶⁴ Next follow the four orders of friars, whose banners evoke antifraternal tropes; the Franciscans in particular are presented as hungry for wealth in the messenger's aside, "I wote wele for wynnynge thay wentten fro home" (161). Last come merchants. As Roney observes, the section on merchants specifically mentions export trade (in wool) and import trade (in wine), drawing attention to the flow of wealth in and out of England.⁶⁵

The list of Waster's army is short and, especially in contrast to the length of Winner's, striking in its brevity: "And sekere one that other syde are sadde men of armes, / Bolde sqwyeres of blode, bowmen many" (193–94). This brief description evokes the expenditure of national

⁶² *Middle English Dictionary* online edition s.v. 'Sad' 4c. University of Michigan Digital Library Production Service, licensed through Columbia University, <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu.arugula.cc.columbia.edu:2048/m/med> (last updated 18 December 2001); William E. Lunt, *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939–62), 2:334–37; W. A. Pantin, "The Fourteenth Century," in *The English Church and Papacy in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. H. Lawrence (Phoenix Mill, 1999), reprint, pp. 183–93; Ronald Butt, *A History of Parliament: The Middle Ages* (London, 1989), pp. 313–14.

⁶³ John Rastell, *Termes de la ley*, 1761 edition from *Early English Books Online*, page 98. Ginsburg, ed., *Wynnere and Wastoure*, ll. 149–55 n. Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, p. 72.

⁶⁴ Certain fines and judicial fees were a traditional source of royal revenue, and Edward III "appreciated the contribution which the profits of jurisdiction could make to his war finances"; Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, p. 401. For a general discussion see Harriss, *King, Parliament, and Public Finance*, pp. 401–10.

⁶⁵ Roney, "'Wyse Wordes,'" p. 1096.

resources on war, the major drain of England's wealth throughout the century. The wording here used, "men of armes" and "bowmen," shifts from the language of romance to the technical vocabulary of the new contractual system of army-raising.⁶⁶ Repeatedly on indentures specifying wages and in the discussions of Parliament, troops to be hired are categorized as "men of arms," or "archers," two accounting categories for differently armed warriors who received different levels of wages. A clear late example comes in the Parliament of 1383. Hugh Despenser's offer to lead an army into Flanders (in what was to be the ill-fated "Despenser Crusade") mentions that if the king grants Despenser the revenues of various taxes and subsidies, he will be able to assemble ".iij. mille homes d'armes et .iij. mille archers, bien mountez et arraiez" ("three thousand men-at-arms and three thousand archers, fully mounted and equipped").⁶⁷ On the poem's field, the forces that pursue profit ("winning") are marshaled under Winner, while the major source of national expenditure ("wasting") is associated with Waster.⁶⁸

The description of the two armies, attentive to the flow of wealth through trade and other forces, sets up the context for the debate between Winner and Waster, in which the poet portrays the wealth of England as a set of goods shared by the two figures. Moving from international to internal flows of wealth, the poem now examines the particularities of domestic economy. Roney has drawn attention to several passages that,

⁶⁶ See Brown, *Governance*, p. 91; A. E. Prince, "The Strength of English Armies in the Reign of Edward III," *English Historical Review* 46 (1931), 353–71.

⁶⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all citations and translations from the Parliament rolls come from *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson, et al. CD-ROM. Scholarly Digital Editions (Leicester, 2005) (hereafter *PRME*). The Parliaments I cite are translated, edited, and introduced by Mark Ormrod (for 1337–77); Geoffrey Martin (for 1377–79); and Chris Given-Wilson (for 1380–1421). For ease of reference, I will cite the old *Rotuli parliamentorum* volume, page, and item numbers, which are also used in the CD-ROM edition. The Despenser passage is in *PRME* III.146.11. For other examples of the use of these categories in the Parliament rolls, see II.107.8 (on raising troops), II.352.168 (complaint of the behavior of Lord Neville's contractually raised troops), and III.91.18 (estimation of the size of English forces).

⁶⁸ Although Winner's army creates wealth through mercantile activity, Winner's and Waster's armies both do some damage to England's prosperity. Winner's army drains wealth through pursuit of profit by lawyers and church, whereas Waster's army drains wealth through profitless military expenditure. See Roney, "Wyse Wordes," pp. 1093–94.

taken together, imply that Winner and Waster work as two sides of an economic “transaction,” the one accumulating and the other consuming.⁶⁹ Winner complains, for example:

All that I wynn thurgh witt he [Waster] wastes thurgh pryde;
I gedir, I glene, and he lattys goo soone;
I pryke° and I pryne,° and he the purse opynes. *pin; stitch
together* (230–32)

England’s wealth, “all” that Winner gathers and Waster consumes, is conceived as a wide variety of agricultural goods, commodities, and precious metals. The poet’s inclusive definition of the “wealth” or “goods” shared by the titular debaters is made clear in Waster’s tirade against Winner’s hoarding:

And hase werpede° thy wyde howses full of wolle sakkes- *filled*
The bemys benden at the rofe, siche bakone there hynges,
Stuffed are sterlynges undere stelen bowndes—
What scholde worthe° of that wele if no waste come? *become*
(250–53)

“That wele,” the wealth that Winner has amassed, is made up of traded commodities (“wolle sakkes”), agricultural produce (“bakone”), and coinage (“sterlynges”), perhaps also, by implication, the “wyde howses” in which these things are stored. The poem clearly conceives of a single, shared store of resources made up of various kinds of goods.

A later parliamentary record, also shaped within the matrix of Public Wealth, provides an analogue for this kind of holistic conception of the realm’s wealth, attesting to the durability, adaptability, and utility of this mode of discussion. The Parliament of November 1381 was the first to be held after the Rising that summer; in it the king and council charged the Commons to identify the causes of the rebellion to avoid further disorder.⁷⁰ The Commons begin their answer by drawing attention to “the

⁶⁹ Roney, “Wyse Wordes,” p. 1085.

⁷⁰ PRME III.99.8. See Butt, *Parliament*, pp. 377–80. Also Given-Wilson, “Richard II: Parliament of November 1381, Introduction,” in PRME. Smith’s reading of the statute *De victu et vestitu* as analogous to *Wynnere and Wastoure* would seem to offer another example of the similar shaping of the poem and parliamentary texts by

great poverty in the kingdom at present, which is empty of riches and of all other wealth, considering what had been in the kingdom before, and this has come about for many reasons” (“... avoir bone consideracioun al grant poverttee dedeins le roialme au present, q'est tout voide de tresor et de tout autre bien a regarde de ce q'ad este en la dite roialme pardevant, et q'est avenuz par moultz encheson”).⁷¹ Among the reasons, the Commons name the drain of money from the realm through imbalanced trade, the expenses of the king's wars, and the French attacks on English property. They also cite the decline in the price of commodities such as wool, tin, and lead, “to the great impoverishment of the whole realm” (“... a grant empoverissement de tout le roialme”) and finally the great “expenses” (“coustages . . . plus outrageuses”) of every estate of society. Taking on the role of advocates of the nation's wealth, the Commons engage in an imaginative project quite similar to that of *Wynnere and Wastoure*, conceiving of various economic activities, including trade, taxation, war finance, and even personal expenses (“coustages”), as interrelated parts of one process, all contributing to the increase or decrease of the nation's wealth.

Wynnere and Wastoure not only expansively portrays the realm's wealth but seeks to impose pragmatic standards on its production and control through appeals to religious principles. Unlike the relation of economics and morality in “Taxes,” where economic oppression occasions a moral lesson of apocalyptic scale, the debaters in *Wynnere* bring their moral and religious arguments back to questions of economic mismanagement. Winner repeatedly accuses Waster of neglecting his lands. Wedding religious precepts to economic ones, he warns that this neglect will lead both to dearth in this world and pain in the next. He also blames Waster for selling his land to pay for his luxury and feasting, exclaiming “For siche wikked werkes wery the oure Lorde! (May our Lord curse you)” (285). Then he claims that God's precepts should encourage his bibulous opponent to

Teche thy men for to tille and tynen^e thyn feldes; *fence in*
Rayse up thi rent-howses, ryme up^e thi yerdes, *clear*

Public Wealth; Smith, *Arts of Possession*, pp. 104–6.

⁷¹ I have changed the translation for PRME III.102.26. PRME has “. . . other wealth because of what has already occurred and arisen in the said kingdom for many reasons”—I take “a regard de” as a comparison of circumstances, not a causal.

Owthere hafe as thou haste done and hope aftir werse—⁷²
 That es first the faylynge of fode, and than the [hell] fire aftir,
 To brene the alle at a birre° for thi bale° dedis. *in an instant;*
wicked
 (288–92)

Waster for his part impugns Winner for his obsessive saving of goods:

Let be thy cramynge of thi kystes° for Cristis lufe of heven! *chests*
 Late the peple and the pore hafe parte of thi silvere; . . .
 For and° thou lengare° thus lyfe°, leve° thou no nother, *if; longer;*
live; believe
 Thou schall be hanged in helle for that thou here spareste°; *lock*
up, confine
 For siche a synn haste thou solde thi soule into helle . . . (255–60)

Winner claims it is a sin to neglect agriculture, while Waster says that hell is the reward of those who hoard goods instead of distributing them through charity. “With oure festes and oure fare we feden the pore,” Waster claims (295). He presents his charity, however, as a pleasant corollary to his imperative that goods and coin must be returned to the central pool of the kingdom’s wealth through expenditure; it is a kind of medieval trickle-down economics. Waster observes several times that consumption maintains price levels and, thus, social hierarchy. He notes that if no beasts or fish were killed, prices would drop and there “Schold not a ladde be in londe a lorde for to serve” (388).⁷³ The two figures’ views about consumption and distribution are based on an integration of economic principles and Christian morality that removes the latter element’s potential for radical social critique.

While “Taxes” attacks the principles of parliamentary taxation, *Wynnere* works them into its poetic imagination of national economy. Except perhaps for the reference to men-at-arms in the army catalogue, *Wynnere and Wastoure* does not discuss taxation explicitly; rather, it symbolically portrays the dynamic of national taxation in the relationship of the two

⁷² “Otherwise, have what you have earned, and expect misfortune.” My gloss, based on Ginsberg’s notes.

⁷³ This passage of course has bearing on post-plague control of labor; see Robertson, *Laborer’s Two Bodies*, pp. 41–42.

titular figures and the king. The king functions as judge, peace-keeper, and war-leader while Winner and Waster are stewards of the wealth of the realm. Critics have stressed the close connection of the king with the two figures to further the argument that Winner and Waster are embodiments of Edward III's unwise (or unjust) economic practices,⁷⁴ but closer analysis suggests that this personal relationship is analogous to the ideal political relationship imagined between Crown and parliamentary Commons.

Each of the two rivals enjoys an affectionate and mutually beneficial relationship with the king. Early in the dream vision the king's messenger asks Winner and Waster to stop their fight and accompany him, and they respond:

Wele knowe we the kyng; he clothes us bothe,
 And hase us fosterde and fedde this fyve and twenty wyntere.
 (205–6)

When they arrive before the king, they kneel. Taking their hands and asking them to rise, the king says, "Welcomes, heres, as hyne of our house bothen" (212). In this patron-client relationship, the king provides clothes and food for those who serve as his "hyne," or household servants. In return for the support of Winner and Waster, the king keeps the peace and adjudicates their disputes.⁷⁵

The king's obligation to keep the peace, in fact, sets in motion the plot of the dream vision. Seeing the two armies on the field, the king tells his messenger to stop the fight, "For if thay strike one stroke stynte thay ne thinken" (107). The messenger informs the armies that by the "usage" of the realm no one rides in a warlike fashion ("with baner") except for the king (124–31).⁷⁶ The messenger's choice of words evokes contemporary

⁷⁴ Bestul, *Satire and Allegory*, pp. 73, 79–80; Scattergood, "Winner and Waster," p. 79.

⁷⁵ The relation evoked here is simplified, perhaps even rusticated, because the word "hyne" often referred to agricultural workers (*MED* online, s.v. "hyne").

⁷⁶ Scholars have suggested a relationship between this section and the 1352 statute of treasons, for example Scattergood, "Winner and Waster," p. 51. It is likely, however, that this section more generally invokes the king's role as peacekeeper instead of referring specifically to the 1352 legislation. On the topicality of the statute, see Trigg, *Wynnere and Wastoure*, xxiv–xxvi.

concerns over public order expressed in Parliament; no one, he says, should “lede rowte in his [the king’s] rewme . . . / . . . his pese to disturb.” “Rowte,” *route* in Anglo-Norman, is the word commonly used in parliamentary records to complain of large, pseudo-military gangs of bandits and robbers. In the Parliament of 1348, for example, a Commons petition complains that it is “notoriously known throughout the counties of England that robbers, thieves, and other criminals travel and ride on foot and horse in great routs through all the land” (“notoirement soit conuz par touz les Countees d’Engleterre, que robbeours, larons, & autres mesfesours, a pee & a chival vont & chivachent a grant route par tote la terre”).⁷⁷ The messenger’s speech evokes the king’s role as maintainer of public order. Although Winner and Waster seem eager to shed blood, readers from the middle strata of society would appreciate the king’s prevention of conflict.⁷⁸

If the dream-king’s behavior suggests the role imagined for Edward III in the dealings of Parliament, his commands to Winner suggest the acknowledged role of the parliamentary Commons as the grantors of national taxation for the profit of the realm. The king tells Winner:

And wayte° to me, thou Wynnere, if thou wilt wele chefe, *look;*
 prosper
 When I wende appon werre my wyes° to lede; *men*
 For at the proude pales° of Parys the riche *palace*
 I thynk to do it in ded, and dub the to knyghte,
 And giff giftes full grete of golde and of silver,
 To ledis° of my legyance that lufen me in hert. (496–501) *men*

As Gardiner Stillwell long ago observed, the king’s command to Winner to “wayte” to him metaphorically suggests a royal request for financial aid for the war effort, since Winner has been represented as a gatherer of

⁷⁷ PRME II.201.6. For later examples, see III.42.44, III.83.38. The PRME translators take “grant route” as “in rapid succession” (as per the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* online, s.v. *rute* (2)); however, it is more likely to refer here to riding in a large, illegal grouping. See, for example, the Middle English uses in MED online s.v. “route (n.) 1.”

⁷⁸ The parliamentary Commons’ preoccupation with public order is stressed in most of the standard historical literature. See, for example, Ormrod, *Political Life*, pp. 119–29.

wealth throughout the poem.⁷⁹ The king's promises of titles and treasure may be the poet's depiction of an ideal application of national wealth: Winner's contribution to the king's enterprise will win him even more treasure and status. The wealth of the realm will "wele chefe" if it follows the king. Since the poem breaks off after two more lines, we are missing any final address that the king may have made to Waster, but it is possible that it might have been a similar request for aid. Thomas L. Reed, Jr. has suggested that the action of this section, the king's request for the appearance of Winner and Waster and his subsequent judgment, suggests "actual patterns of royal and parliamentary conduct," but we need not read the poem's depiction of parliamentary practice so literally.⁸⁰ *Wynnere* idealizes the central parliamentary compromise, the grant of resources and support in exchange for good governance—here personalized as economic contributions given in exchange for peace-keeping and the moderation of quarrels.

The dream vision of *Wynnere and Wastoure* thus offers an example of a narrative created within the matrix of Public Wealth. Winner and Waster conduct their debate about the merits of spending and saving in the context of a shared store of wealth composed of goods, resources, and coin. This store of wealth, manipulated by and exchanged between the two, can be only indirectly controlled by the king through his demands on its owners, made in tacit exchange for his wise judgment and governance. Public Wealth offers *Wynnere and Wastoure* the representational opportunities of imagining England's economy on a wide scale through symbolic action, and that imagination itself constitutes an implicit argument about the proper order of the kingdom. *Wynnere's* political intervention, unlike the indignant protests of "Taxes," takes the form of the detached observation—detachment enacted literally by the speaker's separation from the poem's central action—that the movement of England's wealth is the responsibility of the middle strata.

⁷⁹ Gardiner Stillwell, "Wynnere and Wastoure and the Hundred Years' War," *English Literary History* 8 (1941), 241–47.

⁸⁰ Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, 266.

The Economics of Political Poetry

Observing the difference in the treatment of economic issues between "Taxes" and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, we can see their contrasting engagement with parliamentary conceptions of national economics. Such a difference could be related partially to their position within the chronology of developing parliamentary process; "Taxes" was written before the events of 1340 that Harriss identifies as a watershed for the political consciousness of the parliamentary Commons, before the plague and the subsequent social disturbances that, Harriss also argues, led the Commons to take a more proprietary attitude toward national taxation.⁸¹ But such a strict relationship between context and poetic content does not adequately acknowledge the work the poems do in creating distinctive, forceful interpretations of England's economy. Although a more detailed examination of the specific political circumstances at work in the time of each poem's composition might give us a more precise understanding of the poems' particular references, the poems themselves already offer significant evidence. They demonstrate the sheer range of contemporary conceptions of parliamentary activity.

The poems' differences complicate our understanding of the category of political poetry. "Taxes" and *Wynnere* are part of a large body of anonymous verse over whose attribution, dating, and influence scholars have long puzzled.⁸² Some have suggested that social protest poetry is the undeveloped, unsophisticated ancestor of later, more elaborate poetry touching on sociopolitical subject matter. Maddicott, though cautiously refraining from making a definitive statement about social protest poetry's further development, suggests an evolutionary view when he states

⁸¹ See n. 19, 20, above.

⁸² These are collected by Thomas Wright, *Political Songs of England: From the Reign of John to That of Edward II* (Camden Society, 1839) and *Political Poems and Songs*, 2 vols., (Rolls Series, London, 1859 and 1861); they are also collected in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York, 1959). For additional discussion, see Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 58–156; Thomas L. Kinney, "The Temper of Fourteenth-Century English Verse of Complaint," *Annuaire Medievale* 7 (1966), 74–89; Rossell Hope Robbins, "Middle English Poems of Protest," *Anglia* 78 (1960), 193–203, and "XIII. Poems Dealing with Contemporary Conditions," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, vol. 5, ed. Albert E. Hartung (New Haven, 1975), pp. 1385–1536; John Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (New York, 1972).

that *Piers Plowman* will give protest poetry's topics "far more eloquent expression."⁸³ Janet Coleman more clearly suggests a linear development in her chapter on the subject in *Medieval Readers and Writers*. The poetry of "social unrest," as she terms some of these poems, is the first to show a strain of "realism," or "naturalistic reportage of events," in place of the abstract conceptions of earlier satire. In such an interpretation, this early political poetry functions as "a channeling medium, a tradition that is used but elaborated upon and then transformed by Gower, Langland, and Chaucer."⁸⁴

In the case of "Taxes" and *Wynnere* proposed here, however, we can see a deep divide between two pieces of "political poetry." Examining the economic assumptions of these political poems reveals a heterogeneity in this body of texts, differences not just of chronology, intensity of complaint, or level of sophistication, but profound differences in how they conceive of the links between economy, morality, and political action. Distinctions as pronounced as those we have observed between "Taxes" and *Wynnere* emphasize the polyvocality of this massive topical grouping of texts. The poetry of social protest cannot be seen as part of an unbroken progression on the way to the poetry of the "common voice." Poems such as "Taxes" represent one way of poetically and conceptually negotiating the relationship between individual welfare and the common good. A significant conceptual break separates the poetry of social protest and poems such as *Wynnere and Wastoure* that are shaped by Public Wealth. The topical unity that leads to essays on "political poetry" should not mask the fundamental divisions between these texts. In contrast with "Taxes," *Wynnere and Wastoure* rests on, and promotes, assumptions about community and representation that social protest poetry ignores or denies.

⁸³ Maddicott, "Social Protest," p. 144.

⁸⁴ Coleman, *Medieval Readers and Writers*, pp. 67, 125.