There is still no full history of aristocratic literary patronage and intellectual life for the later Middle Ages. The various studies of lay culture, literary patronage and educational benefaction have generally been made with an almost exclusive interest in those who contributed in a positive fashion. And while studies of the aristocracy do not wholly neglect the life of the mind, most scholarship still leans heavily toward the political and economic. Aristocratic intellectual life in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has been somewhat slighted. This is partly because of the focus upon the 'new learning' of the sixteenth century. The native roots of the new learning were not very substantial—it being primarily a continental import, brought by foreigners and by Englishmen influenced by activity in the Low Countries, the Rhine, and Italy—and the prior domestic tale is relatively short and simple. With little Renaissance humanism to cover, there is correspondingly little need on the part of English historians for an explanation of the links between social status and cultural patronage.

Another reason for the neglect of our subject is because there was no such institution in England as the private court, no insular

1The nearest approach to a survey of aristocratic intellectual life is by K. B. McFarlane, 'The education of the nobility in later medieval England', in his The Nobility of Later Medieval England (Oxford, 1973), pp. 228-47. In order to accumulate as much data as possible, he includes some who were not members of the peerage, such as Simon Burley (p. 237), John Cavendish (pp. 240-1), and Stephen Scoope (p. 242).

equivalent to the court of Burgundy or the great aristocratic cultural nuclei of the Rhine or of the Italian city states, or to the French chateaux of the sixteenth century. There was really but one court in the realm; it dominated upper-class culture and set the tone for secular patronage and encouragement, to the virtual exclusion of possible rivals. Moreover, the university centres and many of the major diocesan cities, e.g., Lincoln, Winchester, and Canterbury, were well removed from the main foci of baronial domination and had but a minimal interaction with the secular aristocracy. And if the English peers did not maintain private courts and court life, still less did even the greatest of the urban bourgeoisie. Parish churches, secular colleges, and perhaps local primary and secondary schools usually summed up the heights of middle class ambition and pride.

In this paper we are concerned with the approximately 435 peers who were summoned to Parliament between 1350 and 1500, plus their wives. We shall in general take their literacy for granted: that question seems to have been answered beyond reasonable dispute. Nor shall we look at the role or the use of literacy and book learning as service skills, i.e., as forms of intellectual technology of increasing value to the upper ranks of the laity by the fourteenth century. These important aspects of the topic have been explored, and their serious ramifications or consequences are sufficiently clear. We shall not pay attention to patronage of the plastic arts, nor to architecture; literary interests and book bequests suffice for this study. Lastly, we are


not concerned with the foundation of local primary and grammar schools. They were more the product of locally oriented philanthropy, with a spiritual as much as or more than an intellectual end, and their creation was rarely a manifestation of an explicit desire to foster higher education or culture.¹

Instead we shall concentrate on various forms of what may be termed 'literary high culture'. This was very different from literacy in its utilitarian form, just as its patronage and subsidizing were quite removed from local philanthropy and good works. Aristocratic affiliations with high culture were an assertion of class consciousness and class privilege, as surely as they were also forms of economic and cultural aggrandizement. Some peers were more aware of this than others, and they could be quite deliberate and frank about their involvement. Some consciously worked to ape continental models, to collect books and manuscripts, and to commission illuminated manuscripts, because the intellectual road to Paris and Florence took that route. Others simply followed their more modish colleagues without necessarily thinking the process through for themselves. However, whatever the degree of self-perception, when an aristocrat enrolled himself in the world of high culture he was asserting some degree of membership in an international brotherhood. He was demonstrating that intellectually he was now on a par with his sophisticated social equals on the continent, and that he was making this claim through his manipulation and consumption of culture and of the intelligentsia. The bibliophile has different motives from the casual reader, and the active patron of authors is a peculiar phenomenon, quite different from the simple distributor of local largesse. Consequently, our survey of cultural activity is also, if implicitly, interested in self-image and self-advertisement. It touches on the way privilege and wealth set

intellectual and social standards that helped to separate the hereditary aristocracy from lesser folk.

In our effort to assess cultural involvement and its relation to aristocratic identity, we begin with an examination of the more positive activity. Original or semi-original authorship would seem to represent this and a number of our men, plus one woman, made some contribution. Henry of Grosmont, first Duke of Lancaster (c.1300–61) was the author of a powerful and comparatively original work of private piety, the Livre de Seyntz Medicines. This work, possibly undertaken by the Duke as a spiritual exercise suggested by his confessor, has been singled out as 'one of the most remarkable religious works of the fourteenth century'. It was easily the most substantial piece of original writing by any of the secular peers, both in size and in intellectual content. The other major prose composition is the translation of Gaston de Foix's Livre de la Chasse, by Edward, second Duke of York (1373–1415). His English version, with some original contributions and comments, appeared as The Master of Game, and the work enjoyed some repute among contemporaries, though more probably because of the subject's interest than because of Edward's own skills.

A number of late medieval peers tried their hand at verse, and what survives and can be identified is probably only a fraction of what was written. William de la Pole, first Duke of Suffolk (1396–1450), wrote a fair amount of verse in the standard style of late medieval courtly and aristocratic poetry. Suffolk was a friend of Charles of Orleans during the latter's long captivity in England, and his conventional and respectable verse was encouraged by

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3W. A. and F. Baillie Grohman, for a modern (1904) edition. H. S. Bennett, Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century (Oxford, 1947), p. 282. It was 'one of the most popular hunting manuals of the period'.

his much more talented and important French counterpart.\(^1\) By
the standards of the day, Suffolk’s work compared well with the
court poetry of many sixteenth-century peers. John de Montagu,
Earl of Salisbury (1351–1400), also tried his hand at poetry. Though
none of it seems to be extant, Christine de Pisan knew of it and
had some kind words to say about it.\(^2\) Salisbury was a member of
Richard II’s cultivated court circle, and his interest in literature
may well reflect a general concern of the ‘smart set’ of his day for
an intellectual as well as a genteel image.

Translation from Latin or French into English was considered a
form of literary endeavour, even if the translator made few
personal insertions into the work he (or she) was transmitting.
John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (1427–70), was occasionally able to
do such work—in contrast to the other great patron of fifteenth-
century humanism, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who had no
claim to any personal literary work.\(^3\) Tiptoft translated Cicero’s
*Laelius de Amicitia* into English, along with a treatise, *De Honestate*
by Buonaccorso (Accursius). Though the former has been
*adjudged as ‘cramped and rigid … a student exercise’, the latter is
considered to be ‘tolerably easy and fluent’.\(^4\) Anthony Woodville,
Earl Rivers (1442–83), Caxton’s patron, made some of the
translations for Caxton himself. He turned *The Dicts or Sayings of
the Philosophers* into English prior to its publication in 1477, as well
as the *Quatuor Novissima*, printed by Caxton in 1475 or 1476 as

\(^1\) R. H. Robbins (ed.), *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth centuries* (Oxford,
English friend of Charles of Orleans’, *Publications of the Modern Language
Association*, xxxvi (1911), 142–80, with poems from the various manuscripts (pp.
151–80).

\(^2\) McFarlane, op. cit. pp. 241–2. Christine referred to him as ‘gracieux
chevalier aimont dictiez et luy meme gracieux dicteur’ (J. H. Wylie, *History of
England under Henry IV* (Cambridge, 1884), i. 100, n. 2). Suggett, op. cit. p. 229.

\(^3\) H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1475 to 1557* (Cambridge, 1970,

(1926), 495–501: the quote is on p. 501. Lathrop does not accept the attribution
of the translation of Cicero’s Cato or a section of Caesar’s *Gallic War*. J. Tait,
‘Letters of John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, and Archbishop Neville to the
University of Oxford’, *English Historical Review*, xxxv (1920), 570–4. In these
letters Tiptoft recommends a thorough training in Latin for its role in diplomacy.
Memorare Novissima. Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII's mother, may well have translated Book IV of The Imitation of Christ for an edition printed by Pynson in 1504. She supervised many of the projects that she encouraged and subsidized, and it is possible, if not likely, that other works executed under her aegis contain at least portions from her pen or directly dependent upon her suggestions.

But authorship and translation were small parts of the entire story. Patronage of cultural and literary activity far outstripped personal participation, whether we count the number of people involved or weigh the sum of the products. Aristocratic connections with the two English universities, though not particularly widespread or popular, offer a bridge between the work of personal and that of vicarious participation. As regards the former, we know of some secular peers who attended a university. The number is small and the amount of education formally imparted quite modest. And yet the mere presence of even some peers shows that the two worlds were not mutually exclusive. None of the peers, however, had an impressive academic career. We may pass lightly over Thomas la Warre, for he had entered the church and held various rectories, canonries and prebendaries before he succeeded to the Barony of la Warre on his elder brother's death in 1398. He was summoned to successive parliaments from 1399 to 1426, though he was never prominent there, until his death in 1427. William Beauchamp, fourth son of the Earl of Warwick, was originally destined for an ecclesiastical career. He entered Oxford while in his 'teens, after having received a papal dispensation to hold more than one benefice without cure of souls. However, he gave up the intention of pursuing a clerical career and in 1392 succeeded as Lord Abergavenny. Tiptoft, Earl of


3. The biographical material is from A. B. Emden, A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to AD 1500, Oxford, 1957, 3 volumes.
Worcester, and Robert, second Lord Hungerford, both spent time at Oxford. They lived in University College, had their own tutors, and did not receive a degree. Duke Humphrey was probably never a student there, despite the later legends and his benefactions and interests. Richard Woodville, third Lord Rivers (d. 1491), was appointed Deputy Steward of Oxford and in 1480 Steward, but this does not imply academic connections.¹

An interest in higher education might also be revealed through institutional support and foundation. But no secular peers founded colleges or halls at either Oxford or Cambridge between 1350 and 1500. The two Cambridge foundations of Clare Hall and Pembroke Hall had no aristocratic rivals until the early sixteenth century.² In an era when the universities were vociferous about the lack of lay patronage, they seem to have been singularly unsuccessful in attracting upper class money or support.³ The one great exception was not a foundation gift, but rather the library support given by Duke Humphrey to Oxford,⁴ his contribution to what became the Bodleian. Humphrey's donations, plus the books given by Tiptoft, and a few miscellaneous contributions,⁵ is the sum total for several hundred peers, a judgement that may reflect more on the remoteness of academia than upon aristocratic intellectual curiosity.

While institutional patronage had but limited appeal, personal patronage was quite popular. The patron-client relationship could be a continuing and long-lasting one, or it might represent but an

¹For the education of members of noble families, but rarely in the direct line of succession, see my 'The universities and the medieval English nobility', History of Education Quarterly, 1969, 415–37.

²A. Attwater, Pembroke College (Cambridge, 1936); J. R. Wardale, Clare College (London, 1899).


ephemeral link in a world of shifting alliances and of fortune's turning wheel. But we should not be too cynical of what was really but another facet of a hierarchical society in which wealth and power, as well as talent, had been unevenly distributed. Most major English secular authors of the period obtained some reward or remuneration from members of the peerage. In fact, rivalry between culturally ambitious peers might have served to benefit the man of letters. We know how Michaelangelo and Leonardo played their would-be patrons against each other. Chaucer, of course, profited from good relations with the Black Prince, John of Gaunt, the Duchess of Clarence, and others. He received direct stipends and favours in the form of appointments, commissions, and further contacts in and around the court. His own life and his literary products were intertwined with the fortunes and tastes of his patrons, and it is possible to see him as a gifted story-teller who shaped much of his art to appeal to ruling class tastes and foibles. Hoccleve wrote begging poems to the Dukes of York, Bedford, and Gloucester, though we cannot be certain how much return he received for his importunity. Capgrave dedicated works to his major patron and benefactor, Duke Humphrey. Since he also went to Rome on Humphrey's business, the tie in this case may have been a firm one. Lydgate wrote his *Pilgrimage of the life of man* at the behest of the Earl of Salisbury. Trevisa discussed whether to use prose or verse in his translation of the *Polychronicon* with Lord Berkeley. Berkeley's advice seems to come from someone who had thought about this standard literary dilemma. The Earl of Essex asked Benedict Burgh to

1For some interesting work on patronage with a regional rather than an economic or social focus see S. Moore, "Patrons of letters in Norfolk and Suffolk, c.1450", *PMLA*, xxvii (1912), 188–207, and xxviii (1913), 79–105.


4Mathew, op. cit. p. 58: also, p. 76 for Gower.

5Bennett, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, p. 178: Berkeley advised translating the work in prose, for 'comynlich prose is more clere than ryme,
translate Cicero's Cato, and Caxton later acknowledged that the work had been translated into English 'for the erudicion of my Lord bousher'. Osbern Bokenham, a minor East Anglian literary figure, may have made his translation of Claudian's De Consulatu Stilichonis for the Duke of York, to whom he dedicated the work. The extensive patronage offered to Caxton and then to Wynkyn de Worde is perhaps distinct from that offered to individual authors, but in any case the introduction and popularity of printing owed a great deal to the support of the Earls of Arundel and of Oxford and to Margaret Tudor, as well as to Earl Rivers.

In addition to the support of famous and would-be-famous authors, translators, and printers, many a peer commissioned and paid for a new work of literature or for a handsome manuscript of some traditional literary or devotional work. At one extreme of patronage, the Earls of Warwick hired John Rouse to set forth their exploits and genealogy in a mythical account of Beauchamp family history. Most people were content with their own copies of already existing works, though a few of the great collectors and early patrons of humanism might go far afield to collect their books. Some volumes, like Duke Humphrey's copies of Aristotle's Politics or Cicero's Letters, were sought because of their inherent intellectual quality. Others, like the great Lovel Lectionary, were noteworthy for their magnificence. Still others, like the 'great more esy, and more playn to knowe and understonde'. H. N. MacCracken, 'Vegetius in English: notes on early translations', Kittredge Anniversary Papers (Cambridge, Mass., 1913), pp. 389–403: 'Whiche book was translated and turned fro latyn into English at the ordinaunce and byddynge of the worthi and worshepful lord, sire Thomas of Berkeley... (p. 389). Another version of Vegetius was translated in 1458 for lord Beaumont. The Berkeley version will be referred to below, among the handsome manuscripts commissioned by peers; it is now BL Royal MS 18 A XIII.

1 Crotch, op. cit. p. 76; Bennett, Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century, p. 207; id., English Books and Readers, pp. 45–6.
5 BL Harley MS 7026. On f. 4r is an illustration of the artist, John Siferwas, presenting the volume to Lord Lovel.
book' that John Paston assembled, were more comfortable items with a medley of familiar tracts, liturgical snippets, and popular bits of history and romance.\(^1\) Scores of handsome manuscripts, especially made for their aristocratic owners, are extant and can be readily traced and identified. We know, of course, of the whereabouts of some of Duke Humphrey's treasures, as well as of items from the handsome collection of his brother, the Duke of Bedford, purchased in France in the 1420s and 1430s. But lesser figures among the peers have also left some prize items. Among the Royal Manuscripts in the British Library are many such volumes: a *Consolation* by Boethius, written for one of the Lords Berkeley; an English version of Flavius Vegetius Renatus made for another member of that same family;\(^2\) a Book of Hours executed for John Beaufort, Earl of Somerset;\(^3\) some poems by a Canon of Bridlington, dedicated to Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford;\(^4\) a Psalter, written for Bohun and his daughter, future wife of Henry Bolingbroke;\(^5\) a Book of Hours, executed for Thomas, Earl of Ormond;\(^6\) a Book of Ordinances of the admiralty, compiled for Thomas Beaufort;\(^7\) and so on. It is apparent that many peers wished to possess 'coffee table' volumes, and were willing to pay substantial sums for such items. If aristocratic taste was generally old fashioned and conventional, it was apparently not parsimonious.

Apart from the deliberate effort to acquire new works or lavish copies of older ones, a peer might also try to accumulate and transmit whatever came along. The peculiar motives of the erudite or the intellectually flamboyant were not necessary.\(^8\) Though English peers did not cultivate private courts, with pet courtiers and resident artists, they stocked their chapels and

\(^1\) H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England* (Cambridge, 1932, 2nd ed.), p. 113, for a description of such a 'great book'.

\(^2\) BL Royal MSS 18 A XII and XIII.

\(^3\) Royal MS 2A XVIII.

\(^4\) Royal MS 8 C XVII.

\(^5\) BL Egerton MS 3277.

\(^6\) BL Royal MS 2 B XV.

\(^7\) BL Cotton MS Vespasian B XXII.

private chambers with the literary products of such men, as well as with the traditional spiritual volumes. While Duke Humphrey was in a class by himself, with a library of perhaps 1,000 volumes, there were few who could even hope to rival the lesser collections put together by such men as Bedford and Tiptoft. But many aristocrats had a goodly number of volumes in their own hands. We have inventories of at least part of some lesser private libraries, and in several instances we know that the list we have contains but a fraction of the original collection. We can examine in some detail at least a portion of the holdings of Lord Scrope of Masham,\(^1\) of Lady Margaret Beaufort,\(^2\) and of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester.\(^3\) A peer like the Earl of Oxford had at least several dozen volumes—mostly of a religious nature—\(^4\) and an unexceptional if wealthy man like the Earl of Arundel owned at least 5 Breviaries, a Missal, 2 Legends, a Gospel Book, an Epistolary, and 6 Graduals.\(^5\)

Single volumes, usually of some quality, which had once been in noble hands are easy to trace, and both the British Library and the Bodleian contain many such items. Books with autographs of

\(^1\)C. L. Kingsford, 'Two forfeitures in the year of Agincourt', *Archaeologia*, lxx (1920), 71–100.

\(^2\)R. F. Scott, 'On a list of the plate, books, and vestments bequeathed by the Lady Margaret to Christ's College', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, ix (1894–81), 349–67. Almost all the books were mass and service books, though there were legends of the saints, some printed mass books, and some miscellaneous religious volumes. The value of the collection, numbering about 53 items, was placed at £118.

\(^3\)Viscount Dillon and W. H. St J. Hope, 'Inventory of goods and chattles belonging to Thomas, duke of Gloucester, seized in his castle at Pleshy, Co. Essex, 21 Richard II (1397): with their value as shown in the escheator's accounts', *Archaeological Journal*, liv (1897), 275–308. The collection of about 120 volumes included Bibles (with at least one in English), a Livy, a *Bevis of Southampton*, a book on St Thomas of Canterbury (in French), a Book of Job, a Godfrey of Bouillon, a Mandeville, etc. They ranged in value from a few shillings to a Bible worth £3. 6s. 8d. Gloucester's copy of the *Romance of the Rose* may have come from Richard II's library via the king's friend, Richard Stury (E. Rickert, 'King Richard II's books', *The Library*, xiii (1932–3), 146). For Gloucester's books see also *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, vol. vi, No. 372.


\(^5\) *Calendar of the Patent Rolls*, 1399–1401, p. 435. There is a list of books belonging to the late Earl of Huntingdon in *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, vii (1399–1422), No. 130.
former aristocratic owners are readily found. An examination of the catalogue of the National Portrait Gallery’s 1973 exhibition centering around Richard III, for example, reveals how easily books with a nobleman or noblewoman among the list of owners may be gathered. Among many such items in that exhibition relevant here are: a Book of Hours executed for the Beauchamp family and then owned by Richard III; a Visions of St. Matilda, once owned by ‘R. Gloucestre’ and ‘Anne Warrewyk;’ a Wycliffite New Testament with the note ‘a vo’ me ly Gloucestre;’ a version of Tristan with the comment ‘iste liber constat Ricardo Duci Gloucestre’ [in Richard’s own hand]; etc. There were also manuscripts which had probably been specifically commissioned: a book of prayers, executed for Lady Margaret; a volume of miscellaneous pieces of romance, assembled for Earl Rivers; and other such prizes.

This rapid survey of various forms of high literary culture and patronage shows the positive face of aristocratic activity, and had we included royalty itself the story would have been even longer and richer. But one can see how ‘high culture’ was a game played for reasons of status and self-esteem. In England it was, like the hunt, the fortified castle, and the poetry of courtly love, part of the special world of the landed upper class. Its pursuit helped to separate that class from the rest. Literary patronage and book collecting, being almost peculiar to the rulers of society, in turn helped bond such men and women together, both within the realm and with their continental counterparts. Cultural patronage

1 The Stourton family owned a Chaucer (BL Egerton MS 2863), which they signed, on f. 54.

2 Pamela Tudor-Craig, Richard III (London, 1973). The respective items are Lambeth MS 474 (item 51 in the Catalogue); BL Egerton MS 2006 (item 52); New York Public Library, De Ricci MS 67 (item 59); BL Harley MS 49 (item 161); a book lent by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster (item 123); Longleat MS 257 (item 154).

by the hereditary aristocrat was part of the life that subsidized courtly poetry and the international style in the world of the visual arts.

This survey suggests a healthy, if not an overwhelming, level of activity. The peers were well above the level of torpor and boorishness once ascribed to them, though their contributions hardly reach the most splendid peaks of continental patronage (or of those of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England). At least someone among them was engaged in almost all the activities with which we have been concerned, and a few really do stand comparison with the more active European nobles. Among our most active bibliophiles we may note that neither Gloucester nor Bedford had legitimate male heirs, and their collections may have been intended from the very beginning for redistribution through benefaction. Though the Earl of Worcester did leave a son, his biographer believes that he 'found in book collecting the purest passion of his life'. As Professor Lopez has spoken of 'hard times and the investment in culture', so we may be seeing here 'the lack of an heir and an investment in culture'. Facts of fertility and demography might enter our story of patronage, as well as those of taste and wealth. Certainly, in all the aspects we have looked at, we have been dependent upon the activities and inclinations of a few. This does not vitiate our conclusions, but it reminds us that a seemingly healthy survey of group activity may rest very heavily upon the atypical zeal of an active handful. Neither Duke Humphrey's taste nor his enthusiasm was typical of many of his

1G. M. Trevelyan once wrote of the medieval aristocracy: it 'appears as even more uneducated and ill-fitted to rule England than the various ruling classes which have succeeded it' (p. viii of his preface to A. Steel, Richard II (Cambridge, 1941)). Pantin, op. cit. ends his assessment of Duke Henry's Livre de Seyntz Medicines by stating that the work 'shows how unsafe it is to judge by superficial appearances and to condemn a whole class, however unprepossessing' (p. 233).

2Bedford had no legitimate issue, and his first wife had probably died in childbirth. Duke Humphrey left two illegitimate children, a boy named Arthur and a girl fancifully christened Antigone.


peers, and they represent a dubious data base from which to generalize.

Against the glories of cultural history, what antidote can we introduce? In our search for a mean, or a method that allows us to assess such activity we now turn to extant aristocratic wills—a source neither created nor preserved because of any connection with cultural life—and examine them for book bequests. The wills have been preserved in a haphazard fashion, and none happens to be extant for the great bibliophiles and collectors. Thus, any pattern we discover here is apt to be tilted against a concentration upon the atypically active. A will can be as succinct as the testator wished, and we are dealing with documents which often fail to mention books within arm's reach as the testator made his dispositions. Also, items going directly to an heir at law could go unmentioned, and many a book must have slipped through the net for this reason. On the other hand, wills are the most personal documents we have from our subjects. What was important and what one wished to display before others was likely to receive careful mention. While a book named in an inventory was in the owner's possession, one in a will was likely to be a book about which the owner had some special feeling, instructions, or comment.

Table I shows the incidence of wills with and without book bequests from the world of late medieval peers and their wives. While many more wills are extant for the peers—for 38 per cent of all the men, as against but 16 per cent of their wives—only 18 per cent of the male wills mention book bequests, and no less than 48 per cent of the female ones do so. Thus, if we say that leaving a book as a form of bequest was a fairly common form of activity (since it was done by 26 per cent of the peers and their wives with

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1 For another survey of this type see M. Deanesley, The Lollard Bible (Cambridge, 1920), pp. 391–8, an analysis of 7,578 wills written before 1526. They only show an 8 per cent incidence of books (i.e., only 600 wills mention books); compared to this the aristocratic wills are rich ore. S. Thrupp, The Merchant Class of Medieval London (Chicago, 1948) p. 161; about 20 per cent of the wills examined mention books. J. W. Thompson, The Medieval Library (Chicago, 1939), p. 408; in 60 wills in Stafford's Exeter Register (1395–1415) there is an aggregate total of about 138 books.
extant wills), our analysis will focus much more on female behaviour than did the preceding survey. That was mainly about men. Now we are looking at something in which women could and did involve themselves. Their wills may mention more books because they usually outlived their husbands and were then able to dispose of personal goods in a context of considerable personal freedom. Estates were transmitted by the decree of the law, not of the concerned parties, and much of the personal portable wealth would be transferred at the husband’s demise; the women (who were usually widows) were now free to redistribute the remaining personal items as they chose.

Though the book bequests display a kind of sexual bias, Table II

Table II.—Wills with Book Bequests, by quarter centuries

Dying between:

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<th>Period</th>
<th>Men and Women</th>
<th>Extant Wills</th>
<th>Book Bequests</th>
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<td>1350–75</td>
<td>1376–1400</td>
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<td></td>
<td>156</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extant Wills</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
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We can analyse the number of books and the sex of donor for 32 male wills and 42 female ones. Of 23 who mention but 1 book, 13 were men, 10 women; of 31 mentioning 2–3 books, 11 were men, 20 women; of the 20 with over 3 books, 8 were men, 12 women. The respective male–female percentages are 57, 35, and 40 per cent.
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indicates a fairly even chronological distribution. Book bequests became neither more nor less common through time. Fluctuations between the quarter centuries are uneven but rarely of striking magnitude. Neither the invention of printing nor the birth of sixteenth-century humanism had much effect on our data. The men and women of the fifteenth century were not much less bookish, by these criteria, than were their predecessors. Whatever the degree of interest in literary culture and in its artifacts, as revealed by the wills, the tale was not one of 'progress' or 'evolution'. The late medieval pattern held into the early sixteenth century, at least as far as the nobility were concerned. We see an instance of unchanging behaviour and another indication that the effects of printing were slow to alter customary forms of activity.

The wills mostly mention small book collections. Of the 71 men and women who left such bequests, almost three quarters left 3 or fewer books, about a dozen refer to 4–6 books, and only a handful explicitly name 7 or more. A few mention an indeterminate number, but even in these cases a reference to 'oon of my masse books' hardly indicates a library of great size or diversity. The chances are that the 71 nobles were transmitting no more than a few hundred volumes by means of their testamentary bequests.

One value of the will is its precision regarding the intended recipient. The beneficiaries of the bequest were usually lay men and women, in most cases a relative of the testator. Few of these modest private collections and private libraries, whatever the impetus behind their creation or acquisition, were destined to find their way, en bloc, into ecclesiastical or corporate hands. Family tradition was a strong motive for the continuation of lay ownership, and most religious books were readily subsumed within the world commanded by the dying aristocrat. The noble chapel was part of the noble household, as well as of the church, and service and devotional books were an appropriate momento for a favoured secular recipient (though household chaplains and confessors might also receive such bequests). The books mentioned in wills were personal items, often of both sentimental and

intrinsic value, and whether they were of a secular or spiritual subject matter, the indications are that they were bequeathed with deliberation. A phrase like ‘quel libre jay phis use …’ bespeaks an owner’s familiarity with and attachment to his or her possessions.¹ About two thirds of the peers and their wives who left 3 or fewer books, and about half of those with 4–6 volumes, passed all of them on to lay recipients, usually relatives. When we include donors who left bequest to both lay and ecclesiastical recipients, we find that fewer than 25 per cent of our owners gave all the mentioned books to the church. In 23 of 27 cases where the book or books went to a single recipient, it was to a lay person: in one of the other 4 instances, that of Lord Latimer, there was no living issue of his marriage when he came to give his books to the church.

Relatives, of course, form the most common group of recipients. Often the exact link between giver and recipient was mentioned: sons, daughters, wives, husbands, a married daughter along with her husband, a brother or sister, the son and heir, and perhaps a son-in-law were all typical choices. Occasionally the vaguer ‘consanguineae meae’ was used, and some peers went farther afield: a god-daughter, or the heir of the testator’s mother, or a group of grand-daughters. Eleanor, Countess of Arundel, was unusual in passing a ‘book of matins’ to her brother Maurice’s son and his wife Anne.² The book bequests usually appear towards the beginning of wills, among the more deliberate and detailed bequests, rather than further down, where more general considerations seem to predominate. Many of the books had family obits at the back or on blank leaves, and these constituted an important link in the chain between the generations that was continually being forged and reforged by the transmission of such material objects.

By definition, when only 2 or 3 books were mentioned there could be no more than 2 or 3 recipients, at least at the first

²Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC), 3 Stokton. Her brother, Maurice, received silver items with the Hungerford family arms. Eleanor’s third husband had been Lord Hungerford. One of her nephew’s was to receive £10, and another 100 marks if he married with her son’s consent.
transmission. But those peers who left more books could distribute their libraries to a wider range of recipients. Lord Bardolf left his wife all the 6 books he mentions,¹ and the Duchess of Buckingham all 5 of hers to her daughter-in-law—to the exclusion of her own children.² But such a concentration was unusual. Larger collections tended to be broken up. Elizabeth Darcy left some books to the church at Hennings (where her husband, 'her lord', was buried), some to her son Philip, and some to her daughter Elizabeth.³ Lady Bonville divided her possessions between her 3 sons, the Countess of Shrewsbury, and her burial church at Ashby de la Zouche.⁴ Scrope of Masham remembered his mother's heirs (after her death, in fact, for she outlived him by seven years), Cardinal Beaufort, the Bishop of Durham, the Earl of Dorset, his first wife's mother-in-law, Lord FitzHugh, his brothers John and William Scrope, Sybil Beauchamp, his brother Stephen (who was Archdeacon of Lincoln), his sister Matilda, and various ecclesiastical institutions.⁵ Of course, he had an exceptional collection to dispose of, and the circumstances of his death—execution in 1415 for treason—may have played its part. Perhaps more than any other kind of item from among the lengthy inventories of personal goods, the book carried with it an element of personal selection and meaning.

Special conditions surrounding a book bequest are possibly another indication that this was something of note. Lord Bardolf's gift to his wife was for her life only, and then it passed to Dennington parish church, his chosen burial site.⁶ The Earl of Arundel left his books to his heir, and they were then to pass from Arundel family heir to heir, forever, in his memory.⁷ Lady Deincourt left her French copy of a book of The Epistles of the Evangelists to her daughter Alice, and Alice's daughter Margaret

¹ E. F. Jacob (ed.), The Register of Henry Chichele (Oxford, 1938), ii. 599.
² PCC, 2 Logge.
³ Lincoln Registers, Repingdon, ii. 264–7. The books were to go to Hennings, and 'ibidem remaneant'. Philip was to receive a romance and 2 Primers, Elizabeth one Primer.
⁴ PCC, 7 Holgrave.
⁵ Public Record Office (PRO), E 41/364.
⁶ Jacob, op. cit. pp. 599–600.
⁷ Lambeth, Arundel, i. pp. 183b–6b.
was to be the recipient after her mother's demise.\footnote{\textit{A. Gibbons, Early Lincoln Wills} (Lincoln, 1888), p. 160.} Roger de la Warre's French volumes were for his wife's own use, and then went to their eldest son, and after that from heir to heir, never to be alienated from family ownership.\footnote{Lambeth, Whittleseye, 116b.} Elizabeth Darcy left 6 books to her son Philip if he helped her executors carry out her last wishes. \textit{If not}, her brother was to get the books.\footnote{Reepingdon, ii. 264–7. The books were a \textit{Bible}, a 'holy rule', 2 \textit{Primers}, a romance of Lancelot, and another romance called 'Leschell de Reson'.} The Countess of Kent said that after the death of her husband's niece—called her 'sister' in the will—the large \textit{Portiforium} at issue was to be donated for pious purposes.\footnote{Lambeth, Arundel, i. 154a–5a.} Elizabeth Scrope gave her sister the \textit{Primer} and \textit{Psalter} she had received from Margaret Beaufort, 'on condition that she do cause my niece her daughter to be put in indifferent keeping that she may be brought forth virtuously and never disagree unto the marriage to be had between her and John Cutte'.\footnote{\textit{PCC, 19 Maynwayng.}}

Many owners spoke with some pride of their books' antecedents. Lord Latimer's daughter was to receive his \textit{Primer}, formerly the property of Maud Longespee, Countess of Salisbury, though there is no hint of how it had come to the father.\footnote{\textit{PCC, 25 Luffenham.}} Books which descended through the generations of a family were often worthy of special note: Michael de la Pole passed his brother's old \textit{Primer} on to his own son,\footnote{\textit{PCC, 7 Holgrave.}} and Lord Stourton continued the father–son chain which his father had begun with the transmission of his 'good' \textit{Psalter}.\footnote{\textit{Nichols, op. cit. p. 181: 'de remeindre a mes heirs et ainsy de heir en heir….'}} Katherine Hastings left 'a feyre prymar which I had by the yfytur of quene Elisabeth'.\footnote{\textit{PRO, E 41/364.}} The \textit{Portiforium} given by Scrope of Masham to Cardinal Beaufort had come to him from the Duchess of Gloucester,\footnote{\textit{J. Raine (ed.), Testamenta Eboracensia} (TE, i. Surtees Society, iv (1836), 224–6.} while the Duchess' father had given her a \textit{Psalter} meant in turn for her heirs.\footnote{\textit{PRO, E 41/364.}} John of Gaunt owned the Black Prince's \textit{Porteous} (portable \textit{Breviary}), and he was careful to state this when he bequeathed it to his son, the Cardinal.\footnote{\textit{Nichols, op. cit. p. 181: 'de remeindre a mes heirs et ainsy de heir en heir….'}
Lord Scrope of Bolton, who died in 1403, left his son and heir Roger a Missal and a Porteous which Roger then passed on to his son, with the proviso that they were to remain with his heirs forever. At the end of the fifteenth century Lady Scrope took pride in owning and passing to her god-son a ‘premer which King Edward gauffe me’, which was more prestigious and less mysterious than the Earl of Devon’s bequest of ‘une livre Fraunceys qu javoye de Katherine de Bukelonde’.

Another sign of the import and seriousness of the book bequests is the detailed descriptions, of cover or contents, that we often find. Lady Basset gave a Missal with the Colville arms to the parish church at Weston Colville, where it would presumably evoke appropriate admiration. A Psalter, well illuminated and with clasps of gold enamel, was how the Duchess of Buckingham identified one item in her extensive collection, and we are told that many of her books were marked with the Bohun family arms, the white swan. She had a Chronicle of France with the Duke of Burgundy’s arms on the cover, no doubt the spoils of diplomacy. Philip Despenser could not compete on that level, but he could still speak fondly of his Book of the Evangelists, bound in a white cover. The Duchess of York found this kind of identification a convenient way of noting various volumes, and she mentioned a Porteous with golden clasps and covered with black cloth of gold, a copy of the Golden Legend written on vellum, a Porteous with silver clasps, a Primer with silver gilt clasps and a blue velvet cover, and a Psalter with a white leather cover.

What about the books themselves? An hereditary aristocracy is not in general considered to be likely to display great intellectual sense of adventure. As culled from the wills, the contents of the libraries confirm an impression of conformity and uniformity. The

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1 TE, i. 275, and Lambeth, Arundel; i. 204a–5a.
2 TE, iv. 149–54. Five recipients were chosen for different books, and Gonville Hall, Cambridge, was to get velvet vestments with her arms (and those of her first husband, Sir Richard Chamberlaine, KG), plus two altar cloths for the chapel.
3 F. C. Hingeston-Randolph (ed.), The Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter, 1370–1394, i. 380–1.
4 Repington, ii. 275–7.
5 Nichols, op. cit. p. 181.
7 PCC, 25 Vox.
overwhelming proportion of the volumes mentioned are religious—primarily service books, i.e., Primers, Psalters, and the like. The nobles mostly displayed a conventional piety, though they could cater to their tastes with a luxurious paraphernalia of worship. Some form of prayer or service book was the most common item, and when a will mentions but a single volume it is invariably a 'book of matins' or a 'massboke', or 'my litte primer' or 'my grete primer', or a 'portiforium' or 'unum psalterium novum cum hymnario et servicio mortuorum' or a volume 'de placebo et dirige et commendacio', or a 'psalterium glossatum' or 'the matins of St. Mary'. The regional variations in the prayer services also appear: a Missal or Portiforium of York use, books of Sarum use, etc. The Duke of Clarence distinguished between his Portiforium with musical notations, meant for his confessor and chaplain, and that without such notations, destined for a lesser priest in his service. Lady de la Warre gave her 'prynted antyphoner conteynyng the halfe yere' to her burial church. Eleanor Bohun was very precise concerning the destination of the glossed Psalter intended for her daughter Isabel, a nun at London Minories: 'Item psautier veil tanqe a la nocturn de “Exultate” glosez, autre livre novel du psauter gloses de la primer, “Domine exaudi” tanqe a “omnis spiritus laudet dominum”.' Lady Hungerford gave Salisbury Cathedral an 'antiphoner well noted'. Lord Scrope passed a 'book of pater noster', glossed with the matins of the passion, to his daughter. Lady Morley left her 'principall massebook' to her son, and Lord St Amand gave a Bedfordshire chantry priest a mass book, 'written of ij maner handis'.

Though there were many other religious books as well, they were almost always owned in addition to the service books. Discounting items that probably contained retellings of biblical stories, there were about a dozen Bibles. These were usually to

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1 Lambeth, Whittleseye, 100a.
2 PCC, 41 Hogen. She asked to be buried beside her late husband, 'my late beloved'.
3 Nichols, op. cit. p. 183.
5 TE, ii. 184–5.
6 Norwich Consistory Court Register, Jekkys, 50–3.
7 Jacob, op. cit. ii. 411.
stay within the testator's own family, though there were exceptions. Despite our concern with the lay ownership of Bibles, the will remains a laconic source.\(^\text{1}\) All Lady Darcy was moved to say was that she was leaving ‘unum librum vocatus Bybill’.\(^\text{2}\) Scrope of Bolton left two such prizes: his little one at Bolton went to his brother, while ‘my Bybill inprented’ was for the house of St Agatha, Richmond, an institution favoured by his family.\(^\text{3}\) The Earl of Arundel had a two-volume Bible which he wanted kept within the family,\(^\text{4}\) but others, like Lord Thorpe and Lord Latimer, left theirs to ecclesiastical recipients.\(^\text{5}\) Lady Deincourt gave her daughter a book of the Epistles of the Evangelists,\(^\text{6}\) and Lady Despenser passed her great French Bible to Henry IV.\(^\text{7}\)

Other religious volumes reflect late medieval taste for devotional tracts and treatises. The Duchess of Gloucester passed on a Lile of the Fathers.\(^\text{8}\) Lady Basset’s ‘visitatio infirmorum’ and her volume, ‘speculum vitae contemplative’,\(^\text{9}\) Lady Darcy’s ‘librum vocat Sainz Ryall’,\(^\text{10}\) the Countess of Oxford’s ‘de Santo Spiritu’,\(^\text{11}\) and Lord Scrope’s ‘Stimulus Consciencie’\(^\text{12}\) were but some of the spiritual volumes collected and redistributed. Lady Basset left her copy of the Apocalypse to Markby Abbey,\(^\text{13}\) whereas Lady Cobham chose to bequeath her ‘librum vocatum apocalyps’ to a kinsman.\(^\text{14}\)

There were also copies of the works of the Evangelists, not

\(^\text{1}\) M. Deanesley, The Lollard Bible, passim. Also Claire Cross, Church and People, 1450–1660 (London, 1976), pp. 33 ff., and Jacob, op. cit. passim, for similar terse reference to a ‘magna Bibliæ’ (pp. 254, 534).
\(^\text{2}\) Lincoln, Repindon’s Register, ii. 264–7.
\(^\text{3}\) TE, iv. 46.
\(^\text{4}\) Lambeth, Arundel, i. 183b–6b.
\(^\text{5}\) R. Sharpe, Wills in the Hustings Court, London (London, 1889–90), ii. 326–7, and TE, ii. 7.
\(^\text{6}\) Gibbons, op. cit. p. 160.
\(^\text{7}\) Lambeth, Arundel, ii. 108b–9a.
\(^\text{8}\) Nichols, op. cit. p. 183.
\(^\text{9}\) Lambeth, Arundel, i. 195b. She also has a book ‘de placebo et dirige et commendacio’.
\(^\text{10}\) Lincoln, Repingdon’s Register, ii. 264–7.
\(^\text{11}\) Essex Archaeological Society, N.S. xxi (1933–7), p. 264. The books went to her kinswoman, Lady Mohun.
\(^\text{12}\) PRO, E 41/364.
\(^\text{13}\) Lincoln, Repingdon’s Register, 275–7.
\(^\text{14}\) Lambeth, Whittleseye, 114a–16a. The book opened with a miniature of St Paul: ‘in principio libri stat ymago Sancti Pauli.’
included above in our tally of Bibles. There were 6 or 7 copies of the *Golden Legend*, various saints' lives, Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* (including one copy in French), 1 the same author's *Homilies*, a volume of Bede, several copies of the *Decretals*, 2 and miscellaneous items from the works of Bonaventura, Catherine of Sienna, Richard the Hermit (as they identified Richard Rolle's 'Incendium Amoris quem Richardus Hermita composuit'), 3 *The Book of the Revelations of St. Bridgit the Virgin*, a 'de vitis patrum', and a *Book of the Vices and Virtues*. The Duchess of York had, among various treasures, a life of St Matilda and an antiphoner 'with the ruelles of musik in the later ynd [hand]'. 4

Secular books, mostly romances and histories, are less common, though the tally still runs to several dozen volumes. The nobility were still moving in a world of three languages 5 and their wills often distinguish the language of given books, though Lady West simplified it by leaving her daughter-in-law 'alle the bokes that I have of latyn, englisch, and frensch'. 6 French still predominated for secular works of a chivalric or historical nature, but a bequest of Maud, Countess of Arundel is hard to pin down as it is referred to only as 'mon librum Gallicum'. 7 English was more popular for religious and service books in the vernacular. But, again, there were exceptions, though we know that Thomas Berkeley's 'legenda sanctorum' was 'in anglicis'. 8 The odd French volumes included a life of Alexander, a 'Lanselake', 3 or 4 (or possibly more) versions of the Tristan story, an Arthur ('Arture of Bretaigne') a *Brut*, a book of 'Lancaster', 9 and a variety of items

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1 Nichols, op. cit. p. 183.
2 PRO, E 41/364. Scrope included in the bequest to his brother Stephen a book of the *Homilies* of St Remigius and one of Bede's *Homilies*.
3 Ibid.
4 PCC, 25 Vox. The St Matilda was probably in English, M. Deanesley, *Modern Language Review*, xv (1920), 357. Vernacular books are rarely mentioned in wills prior to 1400 and French predominates into the early fifteenth century. For the relative popularity of various church Fathers and secular works, as judged by the number of copies, see F. Wormald and C. E. Wright, *The English Library before 1700* (London, 1958), pp. 88–123.
5 Suggett, op. cit. passim.
7 PCC, 21 Luffenam.
8 Jacob, op. cit., ii. 123–4.
simply referred to as ‘my french chronicle’ or a French romance or a poem of knightly history. Lord Percy’s ‘de natura animalium’ was in French, as was Anne Scrope’s ‘Pistill of Othia’, but Lady Basset’s ‘le sege of Jerusalem’ was in English.

Printed books, of course, are only found in wills from the latter part of the fifteenth century at the earliest. Lady West, who died in 1536, left a ‘prynted’ antiphon and a printed mass book to her son. Lady Bonville bequeathed a printed Mass Book and a printed Porteous to her burial church. We have mentioned Lord Scrope’s printed Bible. He actually left, in a will of 1498, the earliest as well as the largest collection of printed books that were so described. The Bible and another book, ‘also inprented, called Chronica Cronicarum’, both went to St Agatha, Richmond, his chaplain was to receive a ‘portose inprented’, and a priest at Barnhambourne ‘my masse boke inprented’. But such items were still comparative rarities, despite the help Caxton and his fellow printers received from their aristocratic supporters.

Some of the large luxury volumes are identified in the wills, along with items of unusual quality or appearance. An early will speaks of a great illuminated leather book, which sounds sumptuous if imprecise. The Duchess of Gloucester mentioned a Psalter well and richly illuminated, plus an illuminated copy of the Golden Legend. Lady Lisle left a ‘prymmer well lymyned’ to her daughter. Lady Mohun gave her son-in-law a book with ‘painted pictures’, and Lord Thorpe passed on an illuminated Porteous given him by the Bishop of Ely. Lady Beaumont thought well of her book of gold with a picture of the Crucifixion, for she placed its value at £5. Lady Botreaux was exceptionally precise in a bequest to Salisbury Cathedral: an Antiphoner ‘well noted’, with

Sudbury, 81a). This may have been a copy of Duke Henry’s Livre de Seyntz Medicines.

1 TE, i. 57.
2 PCC, 26 Horne.
3 Lambeth, Arundel, i. 195a–b.
4 PCC, 41 Hogen.
5 PCC, 7 Holgrave.
6 PCC, 26 Horne.
7 Nichols, op. cit. p. 183.
8 Kent Archaeological Society, Records Branch, iii. (1914); Kent Sede Vacante Wills, 127–45.
9 Lambeth, Arundel, i. 218b.
11 Essex Archaeological Society, N.S. xx (1930), 7–16.
an image of Jesu, limned in the first letter D with the story of Advent, along with a *Golden Legend* with a table at the end, designed to induce men to reading and understanding.\(^1\) We still cite manuscripts by their incipits, and it may be unfair to suspect that Lord Despenser knew no more of his French romance, left to a friend in the church, than that it began with 'Sire de Chinance',\(^2\) or that Lord Scrope was not conversant with the contents of the prayer book that begin with the matins of St Anne.\(^3\)

What, then, do we learn from the wills, and how does this balance the picture obtained from other kinds of data? We know that wills often mention but a fraction of the testator's books, and sometimes none at all.\(^4\) We may compare the will of the Earl of Oxford who died in 1513 with its bequest of three books, with the inventory of his goods, a document that mentions well over sixty-five volumes.\(^5\) So wills tell but an undetermined part of the whole story. As there was a 'lost literature' of medieval England, so there was a 'lost library' of some bulk. Furthermore, wills mostly provide information about religious books and a few prized histories and romances. They give no hint of that vast store of practical volumes that existed and circulated. Where were all the copies of Walter of Henley,\(^6\) the treatises on how to run an estate, on how to get to Jerusalem or Compostella, on how to hunt, to serve an Archbishop at dinner, on how to avoid the plague and ill humors, etc. In an age of handbooks, of textbooks, of manuals and formularies, surely many great men and their ladies had such items. None appears in their wills. Presumably the practical items

\(^{1}\) Dugdale, op. cit. ii. 207.  
\(^{2}\) Gibbons, op. cit. p. 99.  
\(^{3}\) PRO, E 41/364.  
\(^{6}\) D. Oschinsky, *Walter of Henley and other Treatises* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 10–50, for a description of 84 extant manuscripts containing one or more of the edited treatises.
went, automatically and without need for explicit treatment, to eldest sons, stewards, friends, and household officials.¹

But from this very defect in our source we may draw a moral. If wills are hardly a reliable inventory of books owned, they are an excellent guide to peoples' desire to talk about their books, to direct them to favoured recipients, to boast of their provenance, and to dwell on the glory of their rich bindings and illumination. Women, even more than men, chose to elaborate on such possessions. And since they were usually widows, they sought through the distribution of such tangible items of literary culture to exert benevolent social control from beyond the grave. Some testators said they were giving books in return for prayers. One, as we have seen, hoped her volume would induce men to read of good things. But, more strongly than with the other material objects named in the wills, a book bequest harked directly back to family ties, personal erudition and piety, and the conspicuous consumption of the artifacts of culture. Wills mostly reveal a traditional frame of mind. Except for the few peers already known for their humanistic patronage, few cultural treasure troves appear: few classical authors, no suspect or bold ecclesiastical texts. While upper class demands for new and illuminated manuscripts supported a considerable industry, there is no indication of patronage either bent on exercising intellectual or cultural leadership, or indulging in novel, let alone heterodox ideas. The peers were mostly tried and true sons of their culture and their social hierarchy, as it well behoved them to be, and their book bequests reflect their traditionalism. If they owned their own Bibles, they were mostly able to ignore the egalitarian and antinomian themes others found in those sacred pages.

What do the wills add to our search for a methodology whereby we can assess the sociological role of the aristocracy in the cultural life of their day? It is not easy to say where individual impulses for collecting, using and transmitting traditional volumes blend into the brighter hues we identified above as high culture and intellectual leadership. Margaret Deanesley was struck by the

¹As we know, books are often lost through borrowing and lending: H. S. Bennett, 'The production and dissemination of vernacular manuscripts in the fifteenth century', *The Library*, 5th series, 1 (1946), 176.
‘booklessness’ of the laity of late medieval England, and she reminds us that even among owners (and testators), ‘the devout outnumbered the bibliophiles’.¹ There was no discreet separation of motives on the part of book owners and cultural patrons, as we know. Perhaps in using wills as a foil to the picture we first gained, we have failed to pair real opposites, and our search is more for a median than a mean. On the other hand, it is useful to remember that a survey of typical activity is different from, and much more complicated than, the mapping of high peaks alone. If a few standard bearers set a pace that few others could or would follow—whether the reasons were economic, intellectual, or family—they were not totally isolated, anomalous figures. If few people collected humanist books and religious manuscripts, and endowed the universities, and supported aspiring writers, and composed original verse, at least a great many owned some treasured literary item(s) which they took pains to describe and to transmit to some favoured recipient. The high points were clearly atypical, and we must not construct a sociology of culture that relies solely on them. There was a much lower, and much more densely populated plateau. The concern for the artifacts of literacy and literary culture was real, if moderate. The aristocracy was willing to support and encourage the life of the spirit and of the mind, provided the demands made upon the support were not very great. But the private and pedestrian document, the will, reveals as much about the general level of cultural support as do the exotic contributions that we are eager to tally when looking for the intellectual and social roots of the Reformation and sixteenth-century humanism.