

## *The Necessity for Two Peters of Blois*

R. W. Southern

In the letter-collection of Peter of Blois there are many letters which throw light on the writer's development as a scholar, author and man of affairs. Among them there are two which illuminate his struggle between a desire for literary fame and his call to a life of serious religious dedication. But though the general theme is clear, the two letters have received two widely differing interpretations. The purpose of this essay is to examine these interpretations, and to show that only one of them is consistent with the facts. If this is correct, it has some important consequences for the literary history of the second half of the twelfth century. But before coming to this wider problem, it is necessary to examine the contents and occasion for the two letters which are the source of the problem.<sup>1</sup> In the printed edition, and in all the manuscripts in which they both appear, the two letters in question, *Epp.* 76 and 77, follow one another in reverse chronological order. The earlier of the two (*Ep.* 77) appeared in the earliest collection of his letters, which the writer made in 1184, and it reappears with considerable changes and additions to the text in all the later editions of the collection for which the writer was himself responsible. The later of the two letters (*Ep.* 76) first appears in the fourth edition of the letter-collection, which the author made in about 1198, and so far as I know its text never varied.

A late appearance of any letter in the sequence of the writer's editions of his letter-collection is not necessarily an indication of a later date of the particular letter. But this is the normal reason for a letter's late appearance, and in this case (as we shall see) there can be no doubt that *Ep.* 76 was written about ten or more years after *Ep.* 77.

We may be sure that, in placing them together, the author wished them to be understood in relation to each other. Why he should have put them in reverse chronological order is more open to speculation, but (for reasons which will become apparent as we proceed) he may have wished the reader to understand

<sup>1</sup> For the texts of the two letters, see Migne, *PL*, 207, cols. 231-39. For an account of the various editions of the letter-collection made by the author, see R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 113-23, 129-32.

the attitude expressed in the later letter before approaching the very different outlook of the earlier one. We cannot of course be sure of this, but there is a great deal of evidence in his later works that his change of attitude was very important to him, and there are many symptoms of it in his writings. However, whatever the precise intention of the chronological inversion, the conjunction of the two letters is an essential part of their message. The thread which holds them together is their contrasting attitude towards the person to whom they are addressed, and the piquancy of the situation arises from the addressee having the same name as the writer: he too is Master Peter of Blois.

In all discussions of the letters before 1963, it was – perhaps too readily, but also I think rightly – supposed that the Peter of Blois to whom they were addressed was a real and different person from the writer. But in 1963 Professor Bezzola suggested that the addressee in both letters was the writer himself, and that the two letters were exercises in self-portraiture. The second of these statements is true whether or not the addressee is the same person as the writer, but it is true in a contrary sense: in Bezzola's view, the writer is arguing about two different threads in his own character; but, on the view which I shall put forward, he is displaying a real change in his outlook which has caused a change in his attitude towards the recipient of the letter, who (if we take the account he gives of himself in the two letters at their face value) had been his master, and whom he had at first admired, and from whom he had increasingly dissociated himself.

Bezzola in 1963 put forward his view of the two letters very tentatively. But in 1976 Professor Dronke took up Bezzola's suggestion and developed it with great assurance and skill in introducing a valuable and widely ranging edition of a considerable body of late twelfth-century poetry, which he attributed to the letter-writer.<sup>2</sup> I shall hope to show quite conclusively that the view expressed by Bezzola and developed by Dronke is mistaken. But I may add at once that I think the value of Dronke's editions and explanations of the poems is enhanced rather than diminished by what I believe to be the true situation, which – to put it briefly – is that only very few of the poems which he lists were written by the letter-writer. There is a lot of ground to cover before we can get to that conclusion.

The first step is to prove that two Peters of Blois existed, and that one of them wrote to the other the letters with which we are concerned. This is not in

<sup>2</sup> See R.R. Bezzola, *Les origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en occident (500-1200)*, 3 (Paris 1963), *Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études*, vol. 319, pp.41-42. Peter Dronke's account of the question is in his 'Peter of Blois and Poetry at the Court of Henry II', *Mediaeval Studies*, 37 (1975), pp. 185-235, where he develops Bezzola's view with confidence and with widely ranging consequences both for the letter-writer's poetic production and personality and for the courtly environment in which he lived. Dronke's paper is divided into two parts: first, a series of texts, with translations and comments; second, an appendix containing 'a tentative bibliography of the poetry of Peter of Blois'. The pieces in the appendix are listed alphabetically and numbered, and it is to these numbers that I refer in what follows.

fact very difficult but the evidence must be taken step by step, and these steps are worth taking because several important issues depend on disentangling the various threads. In particular, the character of the letter-writer, his intellectual horizons and development, the aims and nature of his letter-collection, as well as the character of another considerable author with the same name but with very different interests and abilities, will all emerge from the inquiry. Indeed there are so many issues involved in this apparently simple task of analysing two letters in a well-known letter-collection that it will be impossible to do more here than touch on the major issues in this brief account of the problem.

To understand the problem it is necessary first to understand the development of the letter-collection in which the two letters appear. In the study which I have mentioned above, I have distinguished **five main stages** in the growth of the collection during the lifetime of its author, and I shall here repeat only those facts which are relevant to the present problem. In its **earliest form** the letter-collection was made by the author himself in 1184. At this stage the collection contained **only the earlier of the two letters, Ep. 77**, in which the writer described himself as **archdeacon of Bath**. Since he had obtained this position in 1182, we can without much doubt date the letter **1182-4**. We may also notice that he describes the recipient as **'his dearest master'**. These are details which deserve to be taken seriously, because one of the writer's aims in making his collection was to teach budding letter-writers to take great care in the details of correct nomenclature.

Bezzola and Dronke argue that the two letters are pure make-believe, and in support of this view Dronke mentions doubts that have been raised in the past about the genuineness of many of the letters. Yet the fiction which is now suggested is quite different from the falsifications detected by earlier critics. All previous doubts about the historicity of some of Peter of Blois's letters have arisen either from accepting as genuine letters which were not in the collections formed by the author himself in his lifetime, or from a failure to recognise the author's practice of altering the texts of earlier letters in the later recensions of his collection. The purposes of these additions were either to add quotations from the Bible or the classics in order to give the doctrines which he wished to inculcate greater weight, or to modify or omit doctrines or opinions of which he no longer approved. For example, in later life he turned against the study of Roman law, against King Henry II and against service in the royal administration. These changes of mind are all reflected in later modifications in the texts of his letters on these subjects. To get back to the original text it is necessary to remove these alterations. Even when these alterations have been identified and stripped off, we may still not have the letter in the form in which it was dispatched, and in some cases it is possible that a letter may never have been dispatched. These considerations apply to nearly all letter-collections at all times: the only important fact for our present inquiry is that there is no letter in any of the collections made by Peter himself and circulated in his lifetime which can plausibly be regarded as fictitious. Even with all the additional rhetoric and changes of emphasis in later recensions, the reality of

the events described in the letters remains unimpaired. There is no sign anywhere, so far as I have been able to discover, of any invention of persons or events. The reason for this is that the aim of the later accretions was not to invent events, but to interpret or modify their doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, if the Peter of Blois to whom *Epp.* 76 and 77 are addressed is interpreted as simply a mirror-image of the writer himself and an excuse for an introspective view of his own personality, we have not only an otherwise wholly unexampled fantasy, but also much detail on our hands which contradicts all that we know of his family, his career and the development of his interests. These detailed contradictions will emerge as we proceed. In outline it may be said that nothing that we know about his own family bears any relation to the tale of disaster affecting the family of the recipient of these two letters; and nothing that we know about the letter-writer in his later years bears any relation to what he tells us about the continuing studies of his namesake to whom these letters are addressed. Moreover, there is irrefragible evidence for the existence of another Peter of Blois with characteristics similar to those described in the two letters. I shall return to this last point presently. For the moment, the reasons I have given may suffice to establish a provisional basis for the historicity of the person and situation described in the two letters, which now requires further investigation.

We may begin with the earlier of the two letters, *Ep.* 77. Since it appears in the first edition of the letter-collection of 1184, and since the writer describes himself as archdeacon of Bath, a position which he obtained in 1182, the letter can be dated with reasonable certainty between these two years.<sup>4</sup> At this time the writer's position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy as an archdeacon was not very high, but his standing among men at the centre of Angevin affairs, including the king himself, was brilliant. Since joining the household of Richard, archbishop of Canterbury, in 1174, he had written two works of edification for the king, and he was engaged on the composition of a serious panegyric on Henry II's reign. Moreover, he was well known at the papal court. He had been present at the Lateran Council of 1179, and had written in the pope's name – though whether on the pope's initiative or his own we do not

<sup>3</sup> The nearest approach to a fictitious letter is the recension of his treatise *De Hierosolymitana peregrinatione* which is addressed to different dignitaries of the English church in different manuscripts. (For one pair of addressees, see *PL* 207: 1057.) This call for a crusade had originally been part of a larger work, which Peter took to pieces after the death of Henry II on 6 July 1189. But, though it had not originally been written as a letter, it is quite likely that he circulated it to officials in various dioceses in an attempt to stir up enthusiasm for the crusade. For an account of the circumstances in which this work was written and adapted to form a letter, see my essay, 'Peter of Blois and the Third Crusade', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting and R.I. Moore (London, 1985), pp. 208, 213, 217.

<sup>4</sup> Although the title 'archdeacon' is sometimes added unwarrantably in the late MSS, the best manuscripts are punctilious in reproducing the original addresses, and their consensus can confidently be accepted.

know – an instruction in the Christian religion for the sultan of Iconium. He had probably just been offered, and had refused, the minor bishopric of Rochester, which had been vacant between July and October 1182. Life had never looked brighter for him and after a long struggle he was very pleased with himself.<sup>5</sup>

*Ep. 77* fully expresses his self-satisfaction. Its main point was to stake out the writer's claim to have reached an eminence comparable to that of his namesake and 'dearest master'. Since one important purpose of the letter-collection was to teach correct modes of address, the writer did not use such titles carelessly, and we may take it that his namesake had in fact been his master, perhaps in his home town of Blois before he went further afield to study at Tours under Bernard Silvestris. Alternatively, the recipient of the letter may himself have been a master in Tours under Bernard Silvestris. At all events, when the letter-writer wrote *Ep. 77*, he felt that he had reached a plateau from which he could address his former master as an equal:

If [he wrote] a man of inferior life or humbler fame were to share our name, we would have to earn more honour to make up for the deficiency. But the honour which I add to our common name by accumulating revenues and enjoying the familiarity of magnates and by my writings, you too enlarge in similar or even more elegant ways. Our name and writings are diffused throughout the world so that neither flood nor fire can destroy them.

This is the self-satisfied theme of the whole letter. A notable feature of the boasting lies in its assurance that *writing* is the road to fame both for himself and his namesake, and also for those who were immortalised in their writings – particularly in his own. He unashamedly portrays his namesake and himself seeking glory by leaving writings which will last for ever.

From this happy scene we turn to the later of the two letters, *Ep. 76*. The difference of mood and attitude to his namesake is very conspicuous. It reflects the mood of all that he wrote after his return to England from the Third Crusade in 1192: old, ill, without a patron, without any important employment, turning his mind increasingly to a life of religion, especially to the ideals of the Cistercian and Carthusian Orders. In this letter he says that he had already sent his namesake several other letters with a similar message of admonition, but since he did not include them in his letter-collection we may take it that they added nothing to the facts which he wished the reader to know. Nevertheless, his namesake is represented as having answered one of these letters, reiterating his intention of continuing his chosen studies and deriding the letter-writer's addiction to the Bible. It was this reply which had inspired the full-scale denunciation of his former master's chosen studies contained in the later of the two letters to him, *Ep. 76*.

The message of this new letter was that he now looked on himself as having

<sup>5</sup> PL 207: 238A.

diverged from his namesake in almost every respect. While his former tutor – ignoring all the advice given him in intermediate letters – had continued to relate the fables and loves of Hercules and Jove and other pagan deities, to study the philosophers and canon law, and to deride theology, the letter-writer had taken on the task of cultivating the truths of religion and of forming others in virtue. This new stance led to the criticisms of his master with which the second letter was filled:

Quid tibi ad vanitates et insanias falsas? Quid tibi ad deorum gentilium fabulosos amores, qui debueras esse organum veritatis? . . . Et quae insania est de Hercule et Jove canere fabulosa, et a Deo qui est via, veritas et vita, recedere? . . . In fabulis paganorum, in philosophorum studiis, tandem in iure civili dies tuos usque in senium expendisti et, contra omnium te diligentium voluntatem, sacram theologiae paginam damnabiliter horruisti . . . Quid tibi ad Jovem et ad Herculem? . . . Ego quidem nugis et cantibus veneris quandoque operam dedi, sed per gratiam eius qui me segregavit ab utero matris meae reieci haec omnia a primo limine iuventutis . . . Omitte penitus cantus inutiles et aniles fabulas et naenias pueriles! Illud mihi maxime vertitur in stuporem unde tibi materia cantandi possit erumpere quem inter anxietates innumeras video constitutum . . . Hoc unum precor ut, omissis inanibus scribas quae theologicam sapiant gravitatem, quae ad honestatem fructificent et aedificent ad salutem.<sup>6</sup>

These sentences come from all parts of *Ep.* 76 and illustrate the passionate vigour and consistency of the expostulation to his old master. He continued to express all his old admiration for his master's learning and eloquence, but he wholly deprecated the levity which kept him in his former courses and led to his continuing to call the Bible 'insipid and infantile'.

This remonstrance was the main theme of the letter. A secondary theme was the blindness to reality which led his namesake to persist in his old ways despite the manifold disasters which had befallen his family. His elder brother, John, his younger brother, Gerard, and his nephew, Nicholas, had all died; and his other brother, Haimo, was in prison. How (the writer asks) in the midst of such disasters could his namesake continue his inanities?

There is ample evidence that the letter-writer himself had followed the course he recommends. Increasingly his works show evidence of the study of theology, and of giving his mind to serious theological and religious problems. He had turned from his admiration of Henry II, and his acceptance of the aims of secular government, to a close attachment to the ideals of Cistercian and Carthusian monasticism. As for his family, we know that he had only one brother, William, who was a monk, and several sisters, whose sons were rather

<sup>6</sup> PL 207: 232B-C, 233A, 234A-B, 237A-B. For *aniles fabulas*, see I Tim. 4:7; for *naenias pueriles*, Horace, *Ep.* i, 1, 62; for the disasters to his namesake's family, see below and p. 111.

troublesome, and that he himself was the sole heir to his father's property.<sup>7</sup>

It is only by ignoring all that we know of the letter-writer's family and the well-known works of his later life, and by attributing to him writings displaying interests quite different from any for which we have evidence in his known works, that it is possible to argue that – far from having abandoned the kind of conduct and its associated writings which he ascribes to his namesake – the letter-writer had secretly continued to write poetry which circulated without his name, but to which (in the guise of his *alter ego*) he now puts forward a kind of clandestine claim.

Besides, despite Dronke's doubts, there certainly was another contemporary Peter of Blois with interests and personality which fit the account given in the two letters *Epp.* 77 and 76.

### *Characteristics of the 'Other' Peter of Blois*

In establishing the identity of the 'other' Peter of Blois, it is first necessary to take into account an initially confusing fact: they were both canons of Chartres. Yet, on examination, this initial similarity, far from uniting them, emphasises their difference.

To deal first with the letter-writer, it had been one of his earliest ambitions to become a canon of Chartres and he believed that, after his return from Sicily in 1169, he had had a promise of a canonry from the bishop of Chartres, who was also at this time archbishop of Sens.<sup>8</sup> To his chagrin, this promise had not been kept and he had had reluctantly to go to England to make his career. Several years later, however, John of Salisbury, who was bishop of Chartres from 1176 to 1179, gave him a canonry at Chartres and the letter-writer wrote to thank him for it in effusive terms.<sup>9</sup> In a later letter, he wrote again to defend himself against the accusation of using his influence with various lay

<sup>7</sup> For the changes of the letter-writer's attitudes to the royal court and to the religious life I must provisionally refer the reader to what I have written on this subject in *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*, pp. 107-24, and in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting and R.I. Moore (London, 1985), pp. 207-219. For the letter-writer's brother William, see *Ep.* 90; for one of his nephews, *Ep.* 12; and for a brief account of his family the following extract from an unpublished letter (which, with many other unpublished letters, will soon appear in E. Revell, *The Later Letters of Peter of Blois, in Auctores Britannici medii aevi*): 'Pater meus in territorio Blesensi nihil patrimoniale habuit, sed acquisivit industria sua unde omnes filias suas honorifice maritavit, singulique in earum maritaggio assignans de possessionibus suis quantum potuit et velle debuit et prout ipsum decuit. Me omnium bonorum suorum quae superant publice et solemniter heredem constituit'. Erfurt, Amplonian MS F.70, fo. 190, for which (pending the appearance of E. Revell's edition of these letters) see R.W. Southern, 'Some New Letters of Peter of Blois', *English Historical Review* (London, 1938), pp. 412-24.

<sup>8</sup> In *Ep.* 128, to William, archbishop of Sens (1168-76), who also continued to act as bishop of Chartres (1166-76), Peter writes of his great desire for a prebend at Chartres which the archbishop had promised, but failed to give him. *Ep.* 72 has more on the same subject.

<sup>9</sup> See *Ep.* 70, to John of Salisbury, who was then bishop of Chartres, in which Peter calls himself *canonicus tuus* and expresses his sense of obligation in effusive terms.

magnates in an attempt to get the deanery of Chartres.<sup>10</sup> In this attempt he failed; and there is no sign that he ever had a residential position at Chartres or that his canonry carried with it any significant function or emolument. He remained to the end of his life just one non-resident canon of Chartres among the large body of seventy-six canons.

The situation of **the other Peter of Blois** with regard to **Chartres** was quite different. He was not only a canon but also **active in diocesan administration** and, for some time at least, as **archdeacon of Dreux**, one of the four archdeacons of the diocese.<sup>11</sup> And he hated it. We know about his feelings on this subject because **he wrote a *Speculum iuris canonici*** with a preface in which he describes his situation at Chartres and his feelings about it.<sup>12</sup> In this preface, he represents himself as a new Prometheus chained to the Caucasian mountain, keeping his free mind fixed on the stars while an eagle tears at his entrails. And what was the rock to which he was punitively chained? It was the cathedral of Chartres. The stars among which his free mind moves as he attempts to alleviate the burden of his office at Chartres are the pagan myths of antiquity; and, as a further cure for the tedium of his official life at Chartres, he has written the work on canon law, of which this account of his position forms part of the preface.

It is at once obvious that the position, interests and outlook of the writer of this preface bear no relation to those held or expressed by the letter-writer in any of his vastly voluminous works. But they are entirely in keeping with the description of his namesake given in *Ep.* 76, in which the letter-writer deplores

<sup>10</sup> See *Ep.* 130, also to John of Salisbury as bishop of Chartres. Peter defends himself against this charge.

<sup>11</sup> A Peter of Blois witnesses several charters as a member of the chapter of Chartres. On some occasions this may be the letter-writer, but certainly not the one in which he is called archdeacon of Dreux. (See *Collection de cartulaires chartrains*, ed. R. Merlet and M. Jusselin in *Archives d'Eure-et-Loir*, 2 vols. 1906-9, p. 53.) I owe this reference to Prof. Elizabeth Revell.

<sup>12</sup> *Petri Blesensis Speculum iuris canonici*, ed. T.A. Reimarus, (Berlin, 1837), p. 1. On this work, see S. Kuttner, *Repertorium der Kanonistik (1140-1234)*, *Studi e testi*, 71 (Città del Vaticano, 1937), p. 220, where it is dated about 1180, but chiefly on 'biographical grounds', which seem to be non-existent. So far as internal evidence goes, any date between about 1175 and 1190 would be possible. I quote here the words in the preface in which the author describes his position at Chartres:

Prometheus in Caucasi montis cacumine religatus, quamvis iecur eius a vulture perhenniter roderetur, inter haec tamen supplicia ad astrorum circuitus excubabat. Animi enim libertatem carcer corporeus non inclusit. Ut igitur utar simplicitate bucolica qua dicitur, 'urbem quam dicunt Romam, Melibee, putavi stultus ego, huic nostre similem'; et infra, 'sic magnis componere parva solebam', me quidem Prometheo, Carnotum Caucaso, vulturi muneris iniuncti solitudinem audeo comparare. A domestico enim revocatus exilio, a scolasticis semotus deliciis, Carnotensemque detrusus in carcerem, vitam consumpsissem penitus otiosam nisi torporem quibusdam operi(bu)s exercuissem. Assidua igitur lectione, voluminibus legum et canonum revolutis, varias inter canones rebellionum insidias apprehendi, diligentiam scrutabundus adhibui ut inter illam canonum repugnantiam quarundem distinctionum remedio pacis federa reformarem.



his namesake's addiction to pagan myths, philosophical studies and Roman Law, and begs him to turn (as the letter-writer himself had done) to theology and the study of the Bible. The contrast between the witty, brilliant, rebellious canon of Chartres, who sought relief from business in pagan myths, in the study of law and in erotic poetry, on the one hand, and the letter-writer, who in all his known works displays a deep commitment to the conventional ideals of his time – the crusade, orderly government with due recognition of the rights of clerical and secular interests, a thorough immersion in biblical language and imagery and a growing commitment to Cistercian and Carthusian religious ideals – is brilliantly illuminated in the contrast between the whole body of the letter-writer's voluminous works and the preface of the *Speculum iuris canonici* written by his namesake.

So far as I can judge, the contents of the *Speculum* have the same imprint of a mind widely different from that of the letter-writer. It would need a lawyer to judge its qualities accurately, but it does not need a lawyer to see that it is a work stamped with great lucidity and individuality of style, exhibiting at least as much knowledge of Roman as of Canon law, and remarkable for its paucity of quotations from the Bible. In looking through the work, I have noticed only one biblical quotation: 'Sit sermo vester, Est, Est; Non, Non' (Matthew 5:37).<sup>13</sup> No doubt a diligent search would reveal others, but the brevity of this one is characteristic of the writer and provides a strong contrast to the style of the letter-writer. This contrast, combined with the allusions in the preface to pagan myths and his hatred of the ecclesiastical business which chained him to the cathedral of Chartres, confirms the picture of him drawn by the letter-writer in *Ep.* 76.

One further point can be added. The letter-writer's appeal to his former master to change his way of life was partly based on the disasters which had befallen the other Peter of Blois's family: his elder brother, John, his younger brother, Gerard, and his nephew, Nicholas, had all died, and his other brother, Haimo, was in prison. These details, as I have already pointed out, are totally unlike anything we know of the letter-writer's family.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, therefore, to the contrast between the minds, interests and writings of the two Peters of Blois, the details about their respective families provide further evidence for distinguishing between the two men. We could of course have wished for more, but there is enough to establish, first, that there were two contemporary Peters of Blois whose interests and careers, despite some basic similarities, were demonstrably different; and, second, that the two

<sup>13</sup> *Speculum iuris canonici*, p. 66. It may also be noted that, on p. 63, he quotes the Golden Rule in a non-biblical form: 'Scriptum est enim, *Ne facias alii, quod tibi non vis fieri*'.

<sup>14</sup> For details, see above, pp. 6-7 and n. 7.

letters we have been considering can only be understood in the light of these differences.

*The Poetry of the Two Peters of Blois*

It is necessary in the first place to understand the nature of these two letters, and to accept the real existence of the other Peter of Blois, in order to understand the writer of these letters and his aim in collecting them. But there is a further reason for distinguishing the two characters who have the same name: they both wrote poetry, and we must ask whether any, and how much, of their poetry has survived.

The essential evidence that the letter-writer was also a poet is found in several places in the letter-collection itself. Besides the statement in *Ep. 76* quoted above, there is an early letter (*Ep. 12*), in which he asked his nephew to send him 'versus et ludicra quae feci Turonis'. Since it was at Tours that he had his earliest mature education in literature and letter-writing in the 1140s, we may presume that the 'versus et ludicra' belonged to that period of his life. Although he described these pieces as 'trifles', they were sufficiently important for him to wish to copy them and to promise to return them to his nephew when copied. So far as we know, they have not survived.

Then in *Ep. 57*, which first appears in the second edition of his letter-collection of 1189 and was probably written between 1184 and 1189, he provides the main evidence for his poetry. The letter was written in reply to a friend who, having become a monk, had asked him for some titillating reading to relieve his tedium. The essential passage runs thus:

Quod autem amatoria iuventutis et adolescentiae nostrae ludicra postulas ad solatium tedium, consiliosum non arbitror cum talia temptationes excitare soleant et fovere. Omissis ergo lascivioribus cantilenis, pauca quae maturiore stilo cecini tibi mitto si te forte relevent a tedio et edificent ad salutem.<sup>15</sup>

In the letter-collection of 1189, the poems attached to the letter consisted of only nine stanzas. They are always printed as a single poem, but they could equally well, or better, be regarded as a series of poetic *pensées* on the theme of turning from lascivious thoughts to more mature reflections. Entirely appropriate though they are to the theme of the letter, they are very meagre, and in the fourth edition of his letters of about 1198 Peter of Blois added four more

<sup>15</sup> *PL* 207:172C. In the first line, I have corrected the *vestrae* of the printed edition to *nostrae*, which has the support of all good MSS. The texts enclosed in this letter are the verses beginning *Olim militaveram*, *PL* 207: 1127-30.

poems, two on the corruptions of the clergy, one on the capture of Richard I by the duke of Austria, and one on the folly of court life. The poem on King Richard's captivity was certainly written in 1193 and the others are probably of a similar date. We can only suppose that, in making a new edition of his letters, Peter took the opportunity to fill out the meagre display of his poetic talent in the earlier edition by adding these recent examples of his serious poetry.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these verses, which are preserved in recensions of the letter-collection made in the writer's life-time, there are a few other poems which were inserted in collections of the letters made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. On the surface these later additions have very little authority, but it is clear that some late medieval collectors of the letters had access to the writer's literary remains and some of the additional letters which collectors added to the letter-collection are undoubtedly genuine. Whether this is true of any of the additional poems is much more doubtful, and I shall do no more than list them at the end of this essay.

Apart from these poems preserved in the letter-collection, three further poems are known which have the name of Peter of Blois attached to them in medieval manuscripts. Two of these are poems in praise of wine as against beer, found in a late medieval English manuscript. They consist of seventeen lines of rhymed hexameters in praise of wine by Peter of Blois, which are answered at similar length by a canon of Salisbury, Robert de Bellofago, in praise of beer. These are then followed by fifteen elegaic couplets in praise of wine by Peter and a roughly comparable number of verses in praise of beer by his opponent.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, there is a fragment of another poem independently preserved and attributed to the letter-writer in his life-time. It denounces the flatteries and rumours of court life. Only a few lines have survived in a polemical work written in or near Cologne in 1206. Dronke has for the first time made metrical sense of this fragment and rightly associates it in style – and, one can also add, in sentiment – with the poems attached to *Ep. 57* in the edition of 1198. The full text has not come to light, but the attribution of the fragment by the contemporary German writer is very explicit; we may accept it as a unique

<sup>16</sup> The verses added in the later recension of the letter are the four (or five on Dronke's reckoning) poems beginning 'Qui habet aures audiet, In nova fert animus, Quis aquam tuo capiti, Quod amicus suggerit', in *PL* 207: 1127-36; in Dronke's list, nos. 35, 19, 38, 40; for an important text, and analysis of the last, see pp. 206-13 of his article.

<sup>17</sup> For the texts, see E. Braunholz, 'Die Streitgedichte Petrus von Blois und Robert von Beaufeu (de Bellofago) über dem Wert des Wein und Bier', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, 47 (1927), pp. 30-38; with additions in A. Wilmart, 'Une suite au poème de Robert de Beaufeu pour l'éloge de la cervoise', *Rev. Bénédictine*, 50 (1938), pp. 136-40.

illustration of the wide circulation of some of the verses of the letter-writer during his lifetime.<sup>18</sup>

No other poems with medieval ascriptions, either to the letter-writer or to his namesake, have so far come to light. Despite this, a new age of conjectural attributions began in 1929. The initial impetus for this development probably came from Karl Strecker's edition of the poems of the most famous of late twelfth-century poets, Walter of Chatillon, which appeared in 1925. In this edition Strecker gave for the first time a reliable text of a survey of contemporary learning, which Walter of Chatillon had delivered as a sermon to the students of Bologna, probably in about 1174. In this survey Walter mentions no names of authors except in the sub-section of grammar in which he lists four outstanding writers of rhythmical verse: Stephen of Orleans, Peter of Blois, Berterus and Walter himself. No doubt his reason for mentioning names at all at this point was to stake out his own claim to fame as a poet, and of the four whom he mentions, it is only his own poetry that has survived in any quantity.<sup>19</sup>

The work leading up to Strecker's edition had one important consequence in stimulating interest in the poetical remains of Peter of Blois. Unfortunately, no one seems to have considered the possibility that the Peter of Blois to whom Walter of Chatillon was referring may have been the recipient of *Epp.* 76 and 77 rather than the letter-writer. Yet that is surely the first problem raised by this passage. When he wrote *Ep.* 77 in 1182-84, the letter-writer regarded his master and namesake as the better-known of the two Peters of Blois, and he may well have been the poet to whom Walter of Chatillon referred. Be that as it may, all the suggestions that have so far been made have had the letter-writer and not his namesake in mind. I shall now briefly review them with the alternative possibility in mind.

The earliest of the new suggestions came in the first volume of Hilka and Schumann's new edition of the *Carmina Burana*, published in 1930. In this volume the editors pointed out some striking similarities between the language and style of three poems in the *Carmina Burana* and those which Peter of Blois had added to *Ep.* 57. These three poems, beginning respectively with the words: 'In lacu miserie . . .'; 'Dum iuventus floruit . . .'; and 'Vitae perditae me legi subdideram . . .' have the same theme as the verses attached to the

<sup>18</sup> The fragment is quoted in a *Dialogus clerici et laici contra persecutores ecclesiarum* written in the neighbourhood of Cologne in about 1206. In the course of the debate, the *clericus* quotes Peter of Blois: 'Dictator ille egregius magister Petrus Blesensis archidiaconus dixit: Mide regis vicio/ aures gerunt asini /magni rerum domini, /quibus adulatio /palpat late patulas /auriculas /et humani bibulas /favoris, /ausi de se credere /quicquid potest fingere /vox adulatoris.

For the dialogue in which these verses appear see G. Waitz, *Chronica regia Colonensis*, MGH, *SS rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, xciii (1880) p. 321. The only connection between the dialogue and the chronicle is that they were both written in the neighbourhood of Cologne. It may be noted as characteristic of the letter-writer that these lines are an echo of John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, iii, c. 12 (in Webb's edition, i, pp. 213-15). For the verse form, see Dronke, no. 52.

<sup>19</sup> *Moralisch-satirische Gedichte Walters von Chatillon aus Deutschen, Englischen, Französischen und Italienischen HSS*, ed. Karl Strecker (Heidelberg, 1929), p. 41: for the date, see p. 37.

first edition of *Ep. 57*.<sup>20</sup> Despite their anonymity in the *Carmina Burana*, and the absence of any medieval attributions to Peter of Blois, these poems have a similarity of style, phraseology and subject-matter which makes the attribution to the letter-writer very attractive. The only oddity is that the letter-writer should not himself have added them to *Ep. 57*. Despite this, these additions fit so well into the pattern of the letter-writer's habits of thought and expression that they can be accepted without much hesitation.

The same cannot be said of the next suggestion which has been generally accepted. The suggestion was made in 1934 by F.J.E. Raby, with the support of Dom Wilmart and with a hint that there might be more to follow, that a poem long ago printed by H. Hagen from a Berne manuscript might very well also be the work of Peter of Blois. It was addressed to King Henry II and began:

Post dubiam,                    D31  
 post nugatoriam  
 fortunae gloriam,  
 post opes Siculas,  
 convertor anxius . . .<sup>21</sup>

The poem is a plea for patronage from someone who had recently returned from Sicily. Since it was well known that Peter of Blois had returned from an ill-fated venture in Sicily in 1169, Raby ascribed it to him with some confidence. It too has very generally been added to the list of the letter-writer's poems, and it is accepted by Dronke.<sup>22</sup> But there is a fatal snag which has not, so far as I know, been generally noticed. In the course of the poem, the author mentions that Henry II's younger son had been named as king of Ireland, and this did not happen until 1177. But by this date Peter of Blois was firmly established in the household of the archbishop of Canterbury and in high favour with Henry II. So, attractive though the suggestion seems at first sight, the attribution to the letter-writer cannot stand, despite the similarity in style and general situation.<sup>23</sup>

This provides a warning which needs to be heeded in all these attributions. When a fashion of verse has gained favour, whether the rhythmical versification of the twelfth century, the metaphysical fashion of the seventeenth, or the romantic fashion of the early nineteenth, it is remarkable how quickly it can be successfully adopted by several authors. This has been insufficiently

<sup>20</sup> *Carmina Burana*, ed. Alfons Hilka and Otto Schumann (Heidelberg, 1930), 1, nos. 29, 30, 31; for notes and sources, see 2 (1930) pp. 42-49.

<sup>21</sup> For the text, see H. Hagen, *Carmina medii aevi* (Berne, 1877), pp. 183-86. For Raby's suggestion, see F.J.E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1934), ii, pp. 141-42.

<sup>22</sup> No. 31 in Dronke's list.

<sup>23</sup> The reference to the king of Ireland and its consequence for dating the poem was noticed by Dom Laporte in *Revue Mabillon*, 43 (1953), p. 5n., who suggested William of Blois as the author, certainly mistakenly.

taken into account in attributions to the letter-writing Peter of Blois even when the argument of style and content seems fairly strong.

Worse was to follow – this time from a source than which none could be more distinguished. In 1945, in the second volume of his catalogue of the *Reginenses* manuscripts in the Vatican Library, Dom Wilmart initiated a new phase in hypothetical attributions. In describing four *rythmi seu cantilenaee delicatiore forma distinctae* in MS *Reginensis* 344, fo 36/r-v he tentatively attributed them also to Peter of Blois, the letter-writer. It will suffice for present purposes if I simply list the titles and first lines of the poems in question:

1. *De gestis Herculis*

beg. *Olim sudor Herculis / monstra late conferens . . . Carmina Burana*, ed. A. Hilka and O. Schumann (Heidelberg, 1941), vol. 2, no. 63; see also A. Wilmart, 'Le florilège mixte de Thomas Bekynton, *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, i (London, 1940), p. 62. Dronke no. 27.

2. *De amica cuiusdam clerici*

beg. *Sevit aure spiritus / et arborum . . .*  
(*Carmina Burana*, vol. 2, no. 83) Dronke no. 43.

3. *Hic monet contemnere divitias*

beg. *Divitie si affluent / nolite cor apponere . . .*  
(ed. Wattenbach, *Anzeiger f. Kunde der deutscher Vorzeit*, 22 (1875), p. 120, and B. Hauréau, *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, vol. 29, ii, pp. 313-14.) Dronke omits.

4. *De virginis rapta virginitate . . .*

beg. *Dum prius inculta / colerem virgulta*  
(*Carmina Burana*, no. 84.) Dronke omits.

Even these slight indications of subject matter make it clear that three of the four (nos. 1, 2, 4) are erotic poems with a leaning towards pagan fables. All three appear in the section *Liebeslieder* in the Hilka-Schumann edition of the *Carmina Burana*. Dronke claims nos. 1 and 2 for the letter-writer and ignores the other two. Yet, in the light of the description of the 'other' Peter of Blois's interests in his own preface to his work on canon law and in *Ep.* 76, it would be more reasonable to consider attributing nos. 1, 2, and 4 to the recipient of this letter, and only no. 3 to the letter-writer. Nos. 1, 2, and 4 have the wit, the knowledge of classical myths and the lubricity, which the letter-writer attributes to his old master and namesake, and which are partly displayed in the

preface to the *Speculum iuris canonici*. No.3 has the serious purpose, which the letter-writer expresses abundantly in his letters. It is also possible, perhaps more likely, that none are to be attributed to either of the two Peters of Blois.

I have not the learning necessary for pursuing the question of attributions beyond this point. My only purposes in pursuing it thus far are, first, to point out the dangers of any attributions made only on stylistic grounds; second, to emphasise the need, in making any further attributions, to bear in mind the different characteristics of the two Peters of Blois as exhibited in their other writings, and as described in the letter-writer's *Epp.* 76 and 77; and, third, to suggest that Dronke's long list of poems which he claims as being 'probably' by the letter-writer, like Wilmart's short list of nearly sixty years ago, are valueless as indicators of authorship, despite the great contribution that Dronke's article makes to our understanding of these texts in themselves.

If the facts set out in this essay are accepted, no more progress can be made until the distinction between the two Peters of Blois is taken seriously as the basis of any further conjectures. I suggest that the only poems which can at present be fairly confidently attributed to the letter-writer are the following:

1. The poems attached to *Ep.* 57 in both its first and second recensions.
2. The poems in praise of wine, which are attributed to him and have a local context entirely consistent with what we know of his career and correspondents.
3. The fragment of the poem attributed to him in 1206 by the Cologne writer.
4. Probably also the three poems in *Carmina Burana* suggested by Hilka and Schumann in 1930, which are closely related in style and subject-matter to those attached to *Ep.* 57.

This conclusion does not of course diminish the importance or interest of Dronke's list of poems as expressions of a phase in the history of medieval learning and literature. Nor does it diminish the value of his editions, translations and comments on their subject matter. But, beyond the limits which I have indicated, his list cannot be used as evidence of the writings, interests or psychology of the letter-writer, and emphatically not (as Dronke supposes) for the interests and activities of the court of King Henry II.

*Appendix*

I add here references to additional verses found in late medieval manuscripts of Peter of Blois's letter-collection. Although they have no substantial authority, they may have been found among his literary remains:

1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 650, fifteenth-century from Carthusians of Mainz, after *Ep.* 111, a poem beginning *Qui mea scripta leges*. Printed from this MS in Giles's edition of Peter of Blois's letters, but not in *PL*, nor in Dronke's list.
2. London, BL, MS Harley 3672, fifteenth-century, a German MS from the diocese of Passau; after *Ep.* 15, with the rubric, 'Hec epistola continuatur cum praescripta et non habet rubricam nec etiam numerum epistolarum', a poem beginning: '*Non te lusisse doleat, / sed ludum non incidere . . .*'. This poem is found in a thirteenth-century English MS, Bodl. 57. fo. 66 v. with the inscription, *Documenta clericorum Stefani de Lanketon*, and printed in F.M. Powicke, *Stephen Langton*, (Oxford, 1928), pp. 205-6. It is printed without author's name in *Carmina Burana*, no. 33. Dronke, no. 23, describes it as 'possibly Peter of Blois'.