## Contents

**List of Figures**
- page ix

**Acknowledgments**
- x

**List of Abbreviations**
- xii

**Evolution of the Alliterative B-Verse, 650–1550**
- xiv

1 **Introduction: The Durable Alliterative Tradition**
   - 1

2 **Beowulf and Verse History**
   - 23
   - The Evolution of Alliterative Meter, 950–1100
   - 24
   - Verse History and Language History
   - 32
   - Beowulf and the Unknown Shape of Old English
     - Literary History
   - 44

3 **Prologues to Old English Poetry**
   - 53
   - Old English Prologues and Old English Poetic Styles
   - 53
   - The Beowulf Prologue and the History of Style
   - 66

4 **Lawman, the Last Old English Poet and the First Middle English Poet**
   - 71
   - Lawman and the Evolution of Alliterative Meter
   - 72
   - Lawman at a Crossroads in Literary History
   - 79

5 **Prologues to Middle English Alliterative Poetry**
   - 93
   - The Continuity of the Alliterative Tradition, 1250–1340
   - 94
   - Excursus: Middle English Alliterating Stanzaic Poetry
   - 103
   - Middle English Prologues, *romance*, and Middle English Poetic Styles
   - 106

6 **The Erkenwald Poet’s Sense of History**
   - 127
   - A Meditation on Histories
   - 128
   - *St. Erkenwald* and the Idea of Alliterative Verse in Late Medieval England
   - 136
   - Authors, Styles, and the Search for a Middle English Canon
   - 145
## Contents

6   The Alliterative Tradition in the Sixteenth Century  148  
   The Alliterative Tradition in its Tenth Century  148  
   Unmodernity: The Idea of Alliterative Verse in the Sixteenth Century  157  
   Conclusion: Whose Tradition?  168  

Note to the Appendices  174  
Appendix A. Fifteen Late Old English Poems Omitted from ASPR  175  
Appendix B. Six Early Middle English Alliterative Poems  180  
Appendix C. An Early Middle English Alliterative Poem in Latin  183  
Glossary of Technical Terms  187  
Notes  190  
Bibliography  210  
Index  228