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What's in a Name? Pinning Down the Middle English Lyric

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I. Perspectives

Approaching the question of genre: why and how

The term *lyric* as applied to Middle English is decidedly problematic.[1] Scholars publishing collections of Middle English 'lyrics' or writing about them tend to avoid the problem of definition by treating the word as synonymous with 'short poem'. The trouble is that *lyric* is not part of the medieval vocabulary and may not have been part of the medieval consciousness,

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[1]   Middle English poems will be identified by their number in Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London: British Library, 2005); see also Carleton Brown, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943) and *Supplement to The Index of Middle English Verse*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins (University of Kentucky Press, 1965). Citations will refer principally, by poem number, to the following editions: *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932); *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown, 2nd edn rev. by G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957); *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939); *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955); *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Carols will be cited from *The Early English Carols*, ed. by R. L. Greene, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). References to the Brown and Robbins editions will be abbreviated: Brown *XIII*, *XIV*, *XV*; Robbins *SL*, *HP*. In addition to these standard editions, general collections of Middle English lyrics include: *Early English Lyrics: Amorous, Divine, Moral and Trivial*, ed. by E. K. Chambers and F. Sidgwick (London: Bullen, 1907); *Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by R. T. Davies (London: Faber, 1963); *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics*, ed. by Robert D. Stevick, 2nd rev. edn by Robert D. Stevick and Eric C. Dahl (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Theodore Silverstein, *Medieval English Lyrics*, York Medieval Texts (London: Arnold, 1971); *Middle English Lyrics*, ed. by Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman, Norton Critical Editions (New York: Norton, 1974); Thomas G. Duncan, *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400* (London: Penguin, 1995); Thomas G. Duncan, *Late Medieval English Lyrics and Carols 1400–1530* (London: Penguin, 2000); and *Medieval Lyric: Middle English Lyrics, Ballads, and Carols*, ed. by John C. Hirsch (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). A collection of European lyrics (languages other than Middle English translated) is offered by James J. Wilhelm, *Lyrics of the Middle Ages: An Anthology* (New York: Garland, 1990). Butterfield's replacement for the Norton Critical Edition by Luria and Hoffman is forthcoming. Recent scholarly surveys include *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. by Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005); Douglas Gray includes a chapter on lyrics in his *Later Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 355–80; while Ardis Butterfield, 'Lyric', *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100–1500*, ed. by Larry Scanlon (Cambridge: Cambridge Unversity Press, 2009), pp. 95–109, emphasises the manuscript context. Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou surveys and quotes a wide variety of poems in her 'Popular Song and the Middle English Lyric', in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. by Karl Reichl (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 555–80. See in addition her *'I have a yong suster': Popular Song and the Middle English Lyric* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2002).

although there was certainly awareness of more specialised genres that modern scholars would consider varieties of it. My own interest in lyrical poems in various languages, ancient and medieval, attracts me to this problem, and inclines me to take up the challenge by suggesting some parameters for Middle English poetry. I believe that designating as lyric certain kinds of Middle English short poem — not all kinds — invokes in a useful way both ancient and modern concepts as well as the thought-ways of medieval poets themselves. All the same, I am somewhat daunted by the array of medievalists — notably Rossell Hope Robbins, John Stevens, R. T. Davies, J. A. Burrow, Rosemary Greentree, Julia Boffey, and more implicitly Ardis Butterfield — who have decided that the better part of valour is discretion, and have settled for the catch-all 'short poem' as the meaning of *lyric*.[2]

With lyric we are dealing with what linguists would call a 'fuzzy concept',[3] this latter being a necessary phenomenon in human thought, a point made by Wittgenstein to which I shall return. Being a fuzzy concept, lyric overlaps with other categories, rather than being sharply divided from them, and its constituents can be defined only loosely. But why does it matter whether particular Middle English poems can legitimately be called lyrics or not, since the people who composed them and listened to them wouldn't have cared? I would argue that although it couldn't have mattered in the Middle Ages, it matters to us. We approach the past from the perspective of the present, and can hardly do otherwise. So my emphasis here will not be on how a poetic genre was perceived by medieval poets, but on how *we* can contextualise it. What does medieval poetry gain by the anachronistic application to it of the term *lyric*? The poetry gains nothing, but our appreciation of it does. The classification of poetry tends to be retrospective. Indeed, the word *lyric* was first applied to poetry several hundred years after the Archaic lyric poets of Greece were composing, and thus has always been anachronistic — as we shall see. What we call poems affects our response to them. *Lyric* is a pregnant word with a host of associations. When editors or critics collect and discuss poems under this title they invoke those associations, whatever their disclaimers. Calling poems lyrics implies a generic affinity, and, as Tztevan Todorov said in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), genre is the means by which a work is situated (by its author or its listeners/readers) in relation to the universe of literature.[4] Precisely because 'lyric' is loaded with historical baggage, as a literary term it is far more useful to us than 'short poem'. However, the baggage needs to be unpacked carefully, and that is what I want to do.

The definition of poetic genres has tended to be pursued in aesthetic rather than sociological terms, and so was popular between the 1950's and 1970's, when literary studies were still dominated by New Criticism. This kind of genre theory has not been a major preoccupation in recent decades, when scholarship has leaned increasingly towards materialist

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[2] Robbins, *SL*, p. v; John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 9, 203; Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics*, p. 46; J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 64; Rosemary Greentree, *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), p. 37; Julia Boffey, 'Middle English Lyrics and Manuscripts', in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. by Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 1–18 (p. 1 n. 1); and Butterfield, 'Lyric', pp. 95–96. Robbins says that he is accepting Carleton Brown's definition of lyric as any short poem, but I have been unable to locate the place where Brown actually says this. No such statement is to be found in Brown's three standard editions (itemised in n. 1, above).

[3] See William O'Grady and John Archibald, *Contemporary Linguistic Analysis*, 5th edn (Toronto: Pearson Longman, 2004), p. 232.

[4] '…se met en rapport avec l'univers de la littérature': *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 12.

approaches, and aesthetic criticism has often been castigated. In an article arising from discussion of lyric at the 2006 MLA convention, Rei Terada notes with approval how presenters took it for granted that lyric bore on social issues. At the same time, Terada questions the necessity for 'lyric' as an ontological category, and advocates 'lett[ing] "lyric' dissolve into literature and "literature" into culture'. Bucking the trend, Simon Jarvis, in his response to Terada, insists on the formal properties of verse, and protests, 'let's not let everything dissolve into everything else'.[5]

The fact is that the subject of lyric genre doesn't lend itself very well to sociological and materialist criticism. Sociological approaches indebted to both Romantic and Marxist thought have been applied to genre analysis for a long time, but when one is talking about lyric poetry it is hard to take them very far. Significantly, Terada's article is short, theoretical, and without detailed examples. The pronouncements of the Romantic poets on the social function of poetry can be thought-provoking, and even profound, but they are virtually impossible to apply in detail to particular cases. Wordsworth and Shelley on poetry and society are inspiring, and anything but specific. For them the poet *par excellence* is the lyric poet. Wordsworth proclaims in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* — the title of his collection is significant — 'the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society'.[6] Shelley's 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world' is the ringing final sentence of the *Defence of Poetry*.[7] Less inspirational and more cerebral, Theodor Adorno, in the 1950s, saw lyric as the assertion of an individual subjective being against the collective and the realm of objectivity; but he balked at demonstrating how this might work with the 'unfathomable beauty' ('abgründige Schönheit') of a Goethe lyric.[8] In a medieval context, two eminent Romanists, Erich Köhler and Hans Robert Jauss, in the seventies, emphasised the relationship between the genres of poetry and their real-life context. For example, Köhler offers a rather rigid explanation of the troubadour *canso* as a form which celebrates the harmonising of the interests of the rising lower knightly class and the old-established nobility.[9] More persuasive is Jauss's view of genres in the light of a constantly evolving 'horizon of expectation', a fairly flexible and less narrowly sociological theory.[10] The materialist analyses of our early twenty-first century, emphasising the economic and political determinants of literary production, are not frequently directed to lyric poetry.[11] And, as we see in Terada, current scholarship often seeks to trace relationships

[5]   See Rei Terada, 'After the Critique of Lyric', *PMLA*, 123 (2008), 195–200; Simon Jarvis, 'For a Poetics of Verse', *PMLA*, 125 (2010), 931–35 (p. 934).

[6]   *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), I, 141.

[7]   Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Critical Prose*, ed. by Bruce R. McElderry, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), p. 36.

[8]   The poem is *Wanderers Nachtlied II*. See Theodor Adorno, 'Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft', in *Noten zur Literatur*, 3 vols (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1958–65), I, 73–104 (pp. 81, 91) (repr. from *Akzente*, 1 (1957), 8–26; trans. by Bruce Mayo in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, ed. by S. E. Bronner and D. M. Kellner (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 155–71).

[9]   'welche die Harmoniesierung der Interessen von aufsteigendem niederum Rittertum und altem Hochadel … besang'; Erich Köhler, 'Gattungssystem und Gesellschaftssystem', *Romanische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, 1 (1977), 7–22 (p. 10).

[10] Hans Robert Jauss, 'Theorie der Gattungen und Literatur des Mittelalters', in *Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, ed. by H. R. Jauss and E. Köhler (Heidelberg: Winter, 1972), pp. 107–38, translated as 'Genres and Medieval Literature', in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 76–109.

[11] The point is made by Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 4.

across conventional boundaries, and tends to be sceptical about establishing genre categories. Poet and critic Susan Stewart's attempt to bring the two enterprises, border crossing and genre definition, together, in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, is heroically sweeping: she claims that lyric 'has as its task the crossing of thresholds among persons, positions, and social groups', and that it may be 'considered as a genre of cultural transformation'.[12] As all these examples indicate, attempts to relate poetry — lyric poetry in particular — to social concerns tend to be either theoretical or procrustean. Depending as it does on aesthetic and formal considerations, analysis of lyric genre is resistant to sociological and materialist approaches. Nevertheless, its importance remains, as a tool for exploring human creativity and a way of understanding the relationship of the present to the past.

Contemporary modern usage understands by *lyric* a short, emotive poem expressive of personal feeling and experience, a sense established in the Romantic period. The adjective *lyrical*, often carrying a touch of irony, is not usually applied to dark or painful subjects and tends to suggest a certain effusiveness.[13] Obviously, these modern uses will not accommodate all the short medieval poems that we call lyrics. But I do believe it is possible to define lyric in a way that respects both modern concepts and medieval phenomena. If lyric is a genre, it is a large, trans-historical, cross-cultural one, overlapping with and including other genres. It might be called a mode, but such a categorisation is rather abstract, and ignores poetic form.[14] On the relationship between genres and particular texts, I find the insights of a couple of theorists helpful. Todorov, in his study of the fantastic, emphasises that a work's genre identification can be neither complete nor exclusive, observing that one should not speak of a particular genre existing in a work, but of the work's manifesting that genre, and adding that a work can manifest more than one.[15] Basing his position on Wittgenstein's family resemblance theory, Alastair Fowler, in *Kinds of Literature*, makes the case that 'representatives of a genre may … be regarded as making up a family whose septs and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all'.[16] Wittgenstein makes his observation about family resemblances (*Familienähnlichkeiten*) with reference to the concept 'game', which he describes as necessarily blurred (*unscharf*).[17] Todorov's and Fowler's approaches relieve us of the obligation to list required features, or to specify a hierarchy of categories, by proposing more fluid ways of dealing with the protean shapes of genres and their interrelationships.

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[12]   Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 41, 42.

[13]   See sense 3 in the *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com>, at the time of writing under 'Draft Additions 1997': 'Excitedly effusive; highly enthusiastic, fervent'. Both Butterfield, 'Lyric', p. 96 and Nicolette Zeeman, 'The Theory of Passionate Song', in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. by Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), pp. 231–51 (p. 233) distance themselves from the word 'lyrical' by placing it in quotation marks.

[14]   The major exponent of literary modes, Northrop Frye, does not include lyric among them, but speaks of it as a genre; see *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 270–81. On the distinction between genres and modes, see also Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

[15]   'On devrait dire qu'une oeuvre manifeste tel genre, non qu'il existe dans cette oeuvre . . . une oeuvre peut . . . manifester plus d'une catégorie, plus d'un genre', *Littérature fantastique*, p. 26. For Todorov's theories, see also Tzvetan Todorov, *Les genres du discours* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).

[16]   p. 41.

[17]   Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, ed. and trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, 3rd edn (New York: Macmillan, 1968), sections 66–71.

It is tempting to speak of lyric as a universal genre; however, the resulting generalisations can only be based on one's own frame of reference. Far-flung comparisons may be illuminating, but they may also be hazardous, as Pauline Yu makes us aware when she criticises the unconscious application of Western assumptions about lyric to Chinese *shi*.[18] John Burrow, in a discussion of Middle English poetry, incidentally makes the same point in reverse. He is talking about the Rawlinson lyrics, which we will encounter again below. Burrow notes that these 'poems without contexts' contain symbols readily comprehensible to someone familiar with western European conventions, and offers as an example the blossoming hawthorn standing in for the speaker's sweetheart: 'only a reader from Mars, or perhaps China, could misunderstand'.[19] The symbol is culture-specific. For reasons such as this, objectively describing the manifestations of lyric world-wide, throughout human history, as the entry in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* — thirteen dense two-column pages — bravely strives to do, is an impossible undertaking that, however informative, inevitably ends up being superficial, error-prone, and bewilderingly diverse.[20] Rather than assuming universality, then, I propose to draw on a broad but not global context, tracing the major steps in the evolution of *lyric* as a word and lyric as a concept from ancient to modern times. I will focus on ancient Greece, on Renaissance England, on post-Romantic writers, and on the scholars of the last fifty years, in order to show how our understanding of medieval lyrics fits into this larger pattern.

A preliminary definition of lyric

As a starting point, I am taking a fairly conventional approach, and defining the essential properties of lyric in general as brevity, intensity, focus on the moment, and shaped form,[21] usually involving certain repetitive features. I would understand *lyrical* accordingly, while accepting that the adjective carries with it an additional nuance that isn't appropriate to all lyrics. These terms are necessarily imprecise. Brevity is a relative thing, and one can hardly specify that a lyric poem must be less than a given number of lines. Intensity is similarly vague; I would find it not only in passionate feeling or vivid imagery, but also in exuberance, in the pleasure of play, and in the heightened sensibility that lifts poetry above the humdrum and the everyday. Focus on the moment distinguishes lyric from narrative, but there are poems that manage to be lyric and narrative at the same time. And, of course, there are lyrical passages in long narrative poems — like Milton's passionate apostrophe to light at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, Book Three (lines 1–26), or Wordsworth's visionary moment in *The Prelude* on realising that he has crossed the Alps (6.525–48), to take two famous examples.[22]

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[18] Pauline Yu, 'Alienation Effects: Comparative Literature and the Chinese Tradition', in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. by Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 162–75 (pp. 174–75).

[19] J. A. Burrow, 'Poems without Contexts: The Rawlinson Lyrics', *Essays in Criticism*, 29 (1979), 6–32 (p. 6) (repr. in his *Essays on Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), pp. 1–26). Burrow is referring to the poem *Of euerykune tre* (*Index*, no. 2622; Robbins, *SL*, no. 16).

[20] *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 713–26. This book was first published in 1965, and has not, as far as I know, been re-edited since it appeared as the *New Princeton Encyclopedia* in 1993.

[21] Cf. Silverstein, in the 'Introduction' to his 1971 edition: 'Modern critics … have variously talked of its relation to song, its brevity, its intensity, its selection of significant moment' (*Medieval English Lyrics*, p. 4).

[22] *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. by Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); William Wordsworth, *The Prelude (Text of 1805)*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

My last criterion raises the question of lyric metre and the relationship between lyric and song.[23] Historically, lyric poetry, and indeed perhaps all poetry, is rooted in song, but in the course of time and with the spread of literacy, text and music moved apart. In western Europe lyric poetry is usually composed in stanzas, with rhyme and often refrain, and a distinction is felt between this kind of more highly-patterned verse and the simpler forms used for narrative or drama. This contrast is observable in ancient Greek, with its stichic (non-stanzaic) metres — hexameters for epic, iambic trimeters for the speeches of the characters in plays, and more elaborate (though not rhyming) sung strophes of various kinds for lyric. To turn to the medieval period, somewhat similar contrasts are observable in Old Norse and Old French. Norse verse is nearly always stanzaic, but the simpler *fornyrðislag* ('old metre') is found in the mythical and heroic verse of the Poetic Edda, as distinct from the four-line-stanza *ljóðaháttr* ('song metre'), and the formally very complex scaldic court poetry. In Old French the epic *chansons de geste* use assonance rather than rhyme, and are composed in *laisses* (irregular verse paragraphs) rather than stanzas. Generally, however, much medieval narrative and dramatic verse was composed in rhyming stanzas, and sometimes sung — as ballads are to this day. This complication, which I will return to later, gives one pause but doesn't make 'lyric form' meaningless, particularly when it involves conspicuous repetition and refrain, and when it is linked to musical delivery. In ancient and medieval as well as later poetry, particular genres, including lyric genres, are often attached to a distinctive verse form.

Lyric can also be defined by what it's not. Versified proverbs, admonitions, curses, mnemonics, and other genres that might be called practical spring to mind. Most of such items can only be admitted as lyric if we allow *anything* short that rhymes.[24] It is possible, though, that occasionally verse of this kind may convey an intensity that transcends its merely practical function. Satire is also unlyrical, at least in its harsher aspects. So is verse where a doctrinaire or didactic function dominates and little aesthetic or emotional satisfaction is offered. As I suggested above, lyric implies a heightened sensibility, a certain 'lift'. Thus, I would exclude from the category of lyric much political, eulogistic, invective, and instructional material. This is precisely the material, often very pedestrian, that Rossell Hope Robbins assembles in his *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, the volume with which he completed the series of standard editions of Middle English lyrics. His decision to dispense with the term *lyric* seems to arise from his sense — very justifiable, I think — that the majority of the poems in this book are not lyrics at all.

The archetypal triad: a misunderstanding of Plato and Aristotle

Lyric is often thought to be one of three overarching genres, the others being narrative (or epic) and dramatic. The classic epic-dramatic-lyric triad, which has venerable origins, has been carefully taken apart by the theorist Gérard Genette, in the seventies, and the Hellenist Claude

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[23] A detailed consideration of the musical form of lyrics lies outside the scope of this paper. Significant contributions are *Early Bodleian Music*, vols 1 and 2 [facsimile edition] ed. by John Stainer, vol. 3 [introduction] by E. W. B. Nicholson, 3 vols (London: Novello, 1901; repr. Farnborough: Gregg, 1967); *Medieval English Songs*, ed. by E. J. Dobson and F. Ll. Harrison (London: Faber, 1979); John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and, now, the Medieval Song Network founded by Butterfield and Deeming in 2009: <http://www.medievalsongnetwork.org>, Institute of Musical Research, University of London.

[24] As Butterfield does in her 'Lyric' chapter.

Calame, in 1998.[25] Both Plato and Aristotle comment on the different kinds of expression chosen for three different kinds of poetry: epic, dithyrambic, and dramatic (Plato) or iambic (Aristotle), in the *Republic* and the *Poetics*, Plato considering whether the poet speaks directly, through characters, or in both ways, and Aristotle commenting on poetic words.[26] *Dithyramb*, mentioned by both and probably referring to an energetic song and dance, came to be understood as standing in for *lyric* here, but there is no evidence that this was what they meant. *Lyric* is a Hellenistic term, recorded only since the first century BCE and denoting poems composed 'for the lyre' — or some other stringed instrument. In fact, it was not until the late fourth century CE that the term *lyrikoi*, originally referring to poets, became a term for the genre in which they composed.[27] In classical Greek such poems were called 'melic' because they were designed for a melody. As Genette shows, neither Plato nor Aristotle is really talking about *genres*, but about modes of utterance, that is, the manner in which something is said.[28] It seems to have been only from late antiquity on that their remarks were interpreted in a generic sense, when the fourth-century Roman Diomedes Grammaticus took up Plato's modes of discourse and turned them into *poematos genera* ('kinds of poem'). He specifies that the kinds are three, goes on to enumerate them — the dramatic, the narrative, and the mixed,[29] and then itemises some of their particular 'species' (a *species* being a division of a *genus*). In Diomedes' scheme, epic and lyric are 'species' of the mixed kind. Plato does very briefly allude to the possibility of composing in epic, melic, or tragic verse, and *melic* would have been his word for *lyric*, but he does not elaborate.[30] In the *Poetics* more generally Aristotle is, of course, concerned especially with epic and tragedy, and actually says very little about lyric. At the beginning of the treatise he enumerates various genres, including that for the lyre (*kitharistikē*),[31] but he does not get into the nature of lyric poetry at all. Our triad receives little attention in the Middle Ages, although it does appear briefly, in Diomedes' formulation, in John of Garland's *Parisiana Poetria*, a mid-thirteenth-century handbook addressed to material in Latin and with no direct application to vernacular literatures.[32] In his overview of post-Greek attitudes to lyric, Michael Silk skips right over the medieval period to the Renaissance.

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[25] Gérard Genette, 'Genres, «types», modes', *Poétique*, 8 (1977), 389–421, expanded in *Introduction à l'architexte* (Paris: Seuil, 1979); Claude Calame, 'La poésie lyrique greque, un genre inexistant?', *Littérature*, 111 (1998), 87–110.

[26] *The Republic of Plato*, ed. by James Adam, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902–7), 394c; Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. by D. W. Lucas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1459a 5–10.

[27] See Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), pp. 182–83; Bruno Gentili, *Poetry and Its Public in Ancient Greece*, trans. by A. Thomas Cole (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 243 n. 1 (trans. from *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica* (Rome: Laterza, 1985)); Calame, 'Lyrique grecque', p. 95.

[28] 'Nous n'en sommes pas encore à un système de genres; le terme le plus juste … est … *mode*: il ne s'agit pas à proprement parler de «forme » … comme dans l'opposition entre vers et prose, ou entre les différents types de vers, il s'agit de *situation d'énonciation*' ('Genres, «types», modes', pp. 393–94; Genette's italics). See also Calame, 'Lyrique grecque', p. 96.

[29] 'Aut enim activum est vel imitativum, quod Graeci dramaticon vel mimeticon, aut ennarrativum vel enuntiativum, quod Graeci exegeticon vel apangelticon dicunt, aut commune vel mixtum, quod Graeci *koinon* vel *mikton* appellant'; Diomedes Grammaticus, 'De poematibus', in *Artis grammaticae libri III. Grammatici latini*, ed. by Heinrich Keil, 8 vols (Leipzig: Teubner, 1857; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), I, 297–529 (p. 482). See also Calame, 'Lyrique grecque', pp. 95–99.

[30] *Republic*, 379a.

[31] *Poetics*, 1447a 15 and 24.

[32] See *The Parisiana Poetria of John of Garland*, ed. and trans. by Traugott Lawler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 98–100; also Genette, 'Genres, «types», modes', p. 400.

And A. C. Spearing observes that for most modern scholars 'post-classical lyric poetry seems to begin with Petrarch'.[33] Silk notes that the Italian Antonio Minturno in 1559 mentions Plato's 'epic, scenic, and melic' poets. Thereafter, quite a few Renaissance writers theorise the subject.[34] The modern conception of the triad is essentially a Romantic construct, indebted to Goethe, among others, and the idea of three universal *Naturformen* outlined in his 1819 *Divan*, the lyric being characterised as *enthusiastisch aufgeregte* (excited by ecstatic feeling).[35] This threefold division of literature has been enormously influential, is often taken as a given, and is certainly useful, but it remains a construct rather than an independently existing system, and need not be regarded as a kind of holy Trinity of archgenres, presiding over a multiplicity of genres, subgenres, sub-subgenres, etc.

Middle English conceptions of lyric genres

When we turn to Middle English literature we find little interest in formal classification. Middle English, like Old English, is rather vague about words for poetic genres. Old English *lēoð*, related to modern German *lied* and denoting a specifically metrical utterance, fell into disuse, leaving *song* and *yedding*, the latter derived from Old English *giedd*, and defined very capaciously by the *Middle English Dictionary* as 'a poem or song; a saying; also, a recitation (spoken or sung) of a verse narrative'.[36] So it is likely that in earlier Middle English no term more precise than these would be used.[37] The French-derived *carol*, denoting a ring dance and subsequently the song accompanying it, is attested from around 1300.[38] Some modern scholars regard the carol as a genre separate from lyric, but there is no compelling reason why the narrower cannot be accommodated within the wider genre. In England the carol, religious and secular, is a stanzaic song, beginning with a burden which is repeated at the end of each stanza. Most of the Middle English examples are in manuscripts dating from around the fifteenth century.[39] The term *complaint* for a poem of courtly love-longing is found sporadically in the late period. And from the time of Chaucer onwards the *formes fixes* of French lyric are applied to Middle English verse in special metres, i.e., the *ballade*, *rondeau*, and *virelai*.

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[33] *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 175.

[34] Michael Silk, 'Lyric and Lyrics: Perspectives, Ancient and Modern', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric*, ed. by Felix Budelmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 373–85 (pp. 378–79); this essay forms the Epilogue to the volume. Calame regards the Spanish Francisco Cascales, in a letter dating from 1613, as initiating Renaissance discussion of the triad, discussion in which Milton took part (*Of Education*, published 1644); see 'Lyrique grecque', pp. 92–93.

[35] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, under 'Naturformen der Dichtung' in the *Noten*, *Berliner Ausgabe 3: Gedichte und Singspiele 3.1*, ed. by Siegfried Seidel (Berlin: Aufbau, 1973), 234.

[36] *The Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Hans Kurath, 59 vols (Chicago: University of Michigan Press, 1952–2001), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>.

[37] See Karl Reichl, 'Old English *giedd*, Middle English *yedding* as Genre Terms', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 349–70. On *giedd*, see also John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 16–19; 209 n. 26; 211–12 n. 42. Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, p. 279, believes Middle English *song* could refer to instrumental music.

[38] See *OED* and *MED*, *carol/carole*, sense 1.

[39] Stevens notes that the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were the heyday of the carol (*Music and Poetry*, p. 8).

Even in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, though, it is clear, because of the conventional formulas and motifs used, that poets were aware of smaller genres that we would see as embraced by the larger genre of lyric. *Reverdie* and *spring song* may be modern designations,[40] but the charming natural setting, usually placed right at the beginning, the key words 'lenten,' 'April,' or 'May,' the birds, the blossoms, and the springing of love in youthful hearts, all point to a well-marked genre. Witness the delightful *Natureingang* of *Lenten ys come wiþ loue to toune*,[41] one of the most famous of the Harley lyrics, and the brilliant paean to spring at the beginning of the *Canterbury Tales*, here forming an introduction to a narrative work, but reminiscent of many independent lyrics.[42] Similarly conventional, but somewhat more particularised, the *chanson d'aventure*, in which a male narrator happens upon a maiden, often begins with something like 'als i me rode this endre dai' ('as I rode the other day'), to quote the opening stanza of the early carol better known by its burden, *nou sprinkes the sprai* ('now springs the [budding] spray').[43] The (modern) French genre names reflect the French origins of these particular conventions. Other genres feature woman's voice lyrics of a deliberately uncourtly kind, for instance the *chanson de délaissée*[44] and *chanson de malmariée*, the latter very well documented in France. In late Middle English we find a mini-genre of poems, ranging from the humorous to the pathetic, spoken by girls who have been taken advantage of by a priest or clerk called John, Jankyn, or Jack. Although there is no contemporary term recorded for these seduction lyrics, the recurrence of the name (John and its familiar equivalents), the motifs (the overtures take place on feast days and holidays), and the poetic form (carol) suggests a distinct awareness of a particular type of poem, in this case very likely attributable to clerics.[45]

Throughout the Middle English period, key phrases also distinguish the genres of religious lyric with its Latin origins. Thus, the reproach of Christ to those who pass by the Cross echoes Lamentations 1.12: *O vos omnes qui transitis per viam…* The eloquent eight-line poem *ʒe þat pasen be þe weyʒe*[46] is preceded in the manuscript by an explicit reference to this biblical passage. Lyrics on the fear of death may utilise the refrain from the Office for the Dead *Timor mortis conturbat me*, like John Audelay's touching poem on his blindness and bodily decay,[47] and William Dunbar's powerful 'Lament for the Makaris' — and for himself.[48] Again, a standard scene may be evoked: Mary lulling the infant Jesus in numerous lyrics beginning 'Lullay',[49] or standing at the foot of the Cross — poems in the tradition of the *Stabat mater*,[50]

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[40] Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiéval* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 158, mentions that the term *reverdie* appears in Old French in the thirteenth century, and that it is not clear exactly what it meant at the time.

[41] *Index*, no. 1861; Brown, *XIII*, no. 81.

[42] *General Prologue*, lines 1–18: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 23.

[43] *Index*, no. 360; Brown, *XIII*, no. 62.

[44] The term is Pierre Bec's; see *La lyrique française au Moyen Âge*, 2 vols (Paris: Picard, 1977–78), I, 65–66.

[45] See Robbins, *SL*, nos 25–28; in 24 the seducer is an unnamed clerk, in 29 called Jack but not identified as a clerk.

[46] *Index*, no. 4263; Brown, *XIV*, no. 74.

[47] *Index*, no. 693; Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 369. The burden of this devotional carol is 'Lade, helpe! Jhesu, merce! | Timor mortis conturbat me'.

[48] *I that in heill wes and gladnes*. *Index*, no. 1370.5; no 23 in William Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958).

[49] For example, Brown, *XIV*, nos 25, 26; Greene, *Early English Carols*, nos 142–55.

[50] See Brown, *XIII*, nos 4, 47, 49; Greene, *Early English Carols*, nos 157–64. The thirteenth-century Latin hymn of uncertain authorship begins *Stabat mater dolorosa | iuxta crucem lacrimosa* ('The sad mother was standing | weeping beside the Cross'). For the text see *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, ed. by Guido Maria Dreves, Clemens Blume, and Henry Marriott Bannister, 55 vols (Leipzig: Fues/Reisland, 1886–1922), LIV, 312–18 (no. 201).

Christ pointing to his bleeding heart or his wounds.[51] Even if there is no technical terminology, all these, and many others, are unmistakable topoi, distinct and developed enough to create particular genres.

The status of lyric poetry in Middle English

The absence of formal names does suggest, though, that the authors involved did not think analytically about poetic genres in English.[52] As Nicolette Zeeman notes, there are no *artes poeticae* concerned with lyrics in Middle English.[53] Until the late fourteenth century the English lyric genres, especially in secular verse, seem not to have been taken seriously. Early manuscripts are never devoted to Middle English lyrics alone, and lyric pieces, often fragments, are frequently written on odd spaces: margins, blank areas, fly leaves, and scraps. The Rawlinson lyrics — twelve poems and fragments, two in French and ten in English including the enigmatic *Maiden in the mor lay* — are written, as prose, on an isolated strip of parchment pasted in at the beginning of a manuscript that they have nothing to do with.[54] Early Middle English lyric lacked prestige, since English was definitely not the language of learning, nor yet regarded as the language of the aristocracy, although it was increasingly used by them. Normans were becoming native speakers of English by the mid-twelfth century, but, in Ian Short's words, only with Chaucer did English regain 'the status of an innovative literary medium with a national dimension'.[55] The low status of secular lyric also helps to account for the very small number preserved in Middle English relative to the Continent.[56]

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[51] On this *imago pietatis*, common in the fifteenth century, see Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), pp. 184–86 and Plate 1: Woolf prints a facsimile of BL Add. 37049, fol. 20r, where a picture of Christ pointing to his bleeding heart accompanies the lines 'O man unkynde | Have thow in mynde | My passion smerte. | And thow schalt me ffynde | To the ryght kynde, | Lo here myn hert'.

[52] A point made by George Kane, 'A Short Essay on the Middle English Secular Lyric', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 73 (1972), 110–21 (p. 120). Alfred Hiatt fairly recently argues for a 'non-system of genre' in Middle English, meaning not that there were no genres, but 'that what existed was more organic, decentred, and unpredictable, than the idea of a system demands': 'Genre without System', in *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First-Century Approaches to Literature, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 277–94 (p. 291).

[53] 'Passionate Song', p. 239 n. 38.

[54] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson D 913, f. 1rv. It is common enough for lyrics to be written in prose, but does suggest they are not regarded as particularly important. The low position of English in the language hierarchy, coming third after Latin and then French, can be detected in trilingual manuscripts. See John Scahill, 'Trilingualism in Early Middle English Miscellanies: Languages and Literature', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 18–32 (pp. 19–20), who infers that Latin was the preferred language for writing, English for oral delivery; also Thomas C. Moser, Jr., *A Cosmos of Desire: The Medieval Latin Erotic Lyric in English Manuscripts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 119, who remarks that in English manuscripts 1100–1400 Anglo-Norman and Latin erotic lyrics 'appear in very nearly equal numbers, with ME a distant … third'.

[55] See Ian Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2007), p. 12. Similarly Mark N. Taylor, 'Aultre manier de language: English Usage as a Political Act in Thirteenth-Century England', in *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and Its Neighbours*, ed. by Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 107–26 (p. 109). On English-French bilingualism 'well into the late medieval period,' see *The Anglo-Norman Language and its Contexts*, ed. by Richard Ingham (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2010) (p. 1). On writers in England in the mid-fifteenth century choosing French for 'snob appeal' or for very specific writing contexts, see Douglas A. Kibbee, 'Institutions and Multilingualism in the Middle Ages', in *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and Its Neighbours*, ed. by Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 63–81 (p. 78).

[56] Cf. Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, 3rd edn (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1996), p. 65: 'in medieval vernacular lyric England alone shows a striking preponderance of sacred lyrics over profane'. However, Dronke attributes this to

Another factor applying to popular poetry, especially of an amorous kind, is the Church's long history of condemning it as lewd and pagan. The songs performed by young women as they danced are the favourite target.[57] Take, for example, the well-known anecdote, told by Giraldus Cambrensis shortly before 1200, of the English priest who, corrupted by hearing erotic dance songs being performed all night outside the church, very disgracefully said 'swete lamman dhin are' ('[give me] your favour, sweetheart!') instead of 'Dominus vobiscum'.[58] Another instance in the same vein, preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript, is provided by the ditty, perhaps the burden of a carol, 'atte wrastlinge mi lemman i ches | and atte ston-kasting i him for-les' ('at wrestling I picked my love, and at stone-casting I dropped him'). This little verse appears in variant forms in two sermons.[59] In the version I have just quoted it is introduced with the words 'wild women and men in my region, when they go in the ring, among many other songs they sing that are of little worth, they say thus'.[60] The sermon writers clean up with allegorical Christian interpretations this naughty song, whose remarks, recorded in the other variant, about the young man's failing to stand, are an obvious double-entendre.[61]

For linguistic and cultural reasons, then, early Middle English secular lyrics were not high-status poetry, as they were, for example, in Occitan, where lyric was cultivated by well-known poets and a whole set of genre names subsequently created by theorists.[62] In contrast to

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the particularly strong influence of the Franciscans in England. It may be significant that the quantity of Anglo-Norman secular lyric preserved is also very small. See Karl Reichl, *Die Anfänge der mittelenglischen weltlichen Lyrik: Text, Musik, Kontext*, Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften Vorträge, G404 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), p. 16.

[57] Thus the Council of Auxerre, 561–605 CE, forbids the performance of 'secular music or girls' songs' (*saecularium vel puellarum cantica*) in church. The Council of Chalons, 647–53, condemns the singing of 'obscene and shameful songs' (*obscina et turpea cantica*) with choruses of women, at religious festivals: *Concilia Galliae, A.511–A695*, ed. by Charles de Clerq (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964). And the Council of Rome, in 853, complains that there are many people, especially women, who desecrate feast days by dancing and singing 'dirty words' (*verba turpia*) and 'having choruses in the manner of the pagans' (*choros tenendo … similitudinem paganorum peragendo*): *Die Konzilien der karolingischen Teilreich 843–59*, ed. by Wilfried Hartmann, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Concilia, 3 (Hanover: Hahn, 1984), p. 328. See also the following note.

[58] *Gemma ecclesiastica*, in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, Rolls Series, 21, 8 vols (London: Longman, 1861–91), I (pp. 119–20; book 1, chapter 43) (trans. by John J. Hagen, *The Jewel of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), p. 92). This chapter begins with a reference to the strictures of the Third Council of Toledo (589 CE) against singing and dancing in churches and cemeteries. See *Decretum Gratiani*, Pars 3, Distinctio 3, C. 2, ed. by E. L. Richter in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols (Paris, Imprimerie Catholique, 1855), CLXXXVII (col. 1782).

[59] In Trinity College, Cambridge, B.1.45, ff. 41v–12r at 41v (thirteenth-century), and Cambridge University Library, Ii.3.8, ff. 85r–88v at 86r (fourteenth-century). *Index*, no. 445.

[60] 'Wilde wimmen and golme i mi contreie, wan he gon o þe ring, among manie oþere songis þat litil ben wort þat tei singin, so sein þei þus'. Text of this sermon (from TCC B.1.45) as in Max Förster, 'Kleinere mittelenglische Texte', *Anglia*, 42 (1918), 145–224 (pp. 152–54).

[61] The other version reverses the order of the athletic contests, and adds 'allas, þat he so sone fel; | wy nadde he stonde better, vile gorel?' Both versions are printed in the Introduction to Robbins, *SL*, p. xxxix, but are not included among his Texts.

[62] See William D. Paden, 'The System of Genres in Troubadour Lyric', in *Medieval Lyric: Genres in Historical Context*, ed. by William D. Paden (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 21–67 (esp. pp. 30, 32, 44); also, in the same volume, Rupert T. Pickens, 'The Old Occitan Arts of Poetry and the Early Troubadour Lyric', pp. 209–41. On medieval Occitan and Northern French genres more generally, see Zumthor, *Essai*, pp. 157–85, and Bec, *Lyrique française*. On the late-thirteenth-century collection of French lyrics in Bodleian Douce 308 arranged by genre (*grans chans, estampies, jeus partis, pastorelles, balettes, sottes chansons*, and *motès*), see Lawrence Earp, 'Lyrics for Reading and Lyrics for Singing in Late Medieval France: The Development of the Dance Lyric from Adam de la Halle to Guillaume de Machaut', in *The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry*, ed. by Rebecca A. Baltzer, Thomas Cable, and James I. Wimsatt (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), pp. 101–31 (p. 118

troubadour and trouvère song, in England, as Butterfield says, 'there is no broad recognizable tradition of high art but a much more diverse, messy and undefined … range of material'.[63] English mingled with French and Latin in the manuscripts, but still for a long time remained a poor relation. To be sure, the three languages interpenetrated each other, producing 'not three cultures but one culture in three voices,' to quote Thorlac Turville-Petre,[64] but these voices were distinct and unequal. The humble status of English as late as Chaucer's time, vis-a-vis the dominant *lingua franca*, is underlined by Butterfield in *The Familiar Enemy*, even as she stresses that the two languages were inseparable, and, with a post-colonial angst reflected in other recent scholarship, rejects a unilingual view of Englishness.[65] Still, in the course of the Middle English period the status of English does rise. This change is reflected in the copying of English lyrics: poems that earlier on would have been treated in a more casual way are given greater prominence and more careful organisation. In Harley 2253, probably dating from the 1340s, the English lyrics are mixed in with other material, including French and Latin, but do 'occur in a rough sequence'; forty or fifty years later, the lyrics in the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts are much more systematically grouped together, most of the Vernon lyrics being refrain poems, in similar stanzas.[66] By the late fourteenth century, although English still came third in the language hierarchy, the composition of English verse could command respect, and be seriously cultivated by major authors, who carefully recreated in English the French-derived *formes fixes*. Only near the close of the medieval period does English lyric receive the stamp of high approval implied by its use in a prestigious single-author manuscript, Harley 682, produced at the end of the long imprisonment of Charles d'Orléans and containing the English version of his poem cycle.

Renaissance use of the term *lyric* in English

I now turn to the Renaissance, which brings explicit recognition of vernacular lyric as a genre with ancient precedents. This recognition occurs earlier on the Continent than in Britain, as we have already seen in Renaissance comments on the lyric-dramatic-epic triad. The actual word 'lyric' is first recorded in English in the late sixteenth century — it appears in French

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n. 8).

[63] Butterfield, 'Lyric', p. 96. Although England had connections with the troubadours and trouvères through Angevin kings, their production — even that of Richard I — had nothing to do with England and is absent from manuscripts connected with England. See Reichl, *Anfänge*, p. 18; also Peter Erlebach, *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der englischen Liebeslyrik des Mittelalters*, Forum Anglistik, N. F., 2 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1989), pp. 149–61.

[64] *England the Nation*, p. 181.

[65] Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 273–74. With Turville-Petre's view that from the late thirteenth century on Englishness as a cultural construct was defined by language (*England the Nation*, pp. 10, 19, 97, 181), contrast the following: Butterfield, who asserts that French includes English and English includes French (*The Familiar Enemy*, pp. 172, 316); Robert Stein, 'Multilingualism', in *Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First-Century Approaches to Literature, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 23–37 (p. 30), who regards as a later fiction the identification of English writing with writing in English; the beginning of Thomas Hahn, 'Earlier Middle English', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 61–91; and Ad Putter and Keith Busby's explicitly post-colonial 'Introduction' to *Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and its Neighbours*, ed. by Chrisopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 1–13 (p. 12). Gray, *Later Medieval English Literature*, p. 126, adopts a somewhat more traditional stance.

[66] See Boffey, 'Middle English Lyrics and Manuscripts', pp. 9–11 (p. 9); also Butterfield, 'Lyric', pp. 103–4.

in 1495.[67] Three *Oxford English Dictionary* citations of the word, as adjective and noun, date from the 1580s. The earliest is in Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, where *lyric* and *lyrical* are used with reference to the classification of poetic kinds in antiquity, but also to the songs and sonnets of Sidney's contemporaries.[68] George Puttenham, in *The Arte of English Poesie*, describes 'Lirique Poets' as men who 'delighted to write songs or ballads of pleasure, to be song with the voice, and to the harpe, lute, or citheron', this with specific reference to the lyric poets of Greece and Rome.[69] 'Ballad' here means much the same as 'lyric': a song or song-like short poem.[70] William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetry* is similarly oriented towards ancient usage. Webbe divides poems into four categories — heroic, elegiac, iambic, and lyric,[71] following the Greek classification of genres by form, different kinds of content being associated with particular metres, and those mentioned here using, respectively, hexameters, elegiac couplets, iambics — for satirical and scurrilous verse, and various sorts of strophe. Actually, the system Webbe is following is retrospective: when Greek poetry in lyric metres flourished in the pre-classical period, the subjects were very various, encompassing not only monody on wine, women (or boys) and song, as well as politics, but also choral odes for celebration and ritual, eulogy and moralising. The Elizabethan theorists looked not to earlier England but to ancient Greece and Rome for their categories, but Tudor lyric was not completely cut off from medieval poetry, as Stevens shows in his investigation of early Tudor music, with particular reference to three songbooks produced in the period 1470–1520, pre-Reformation manuscripts that he finds essentially medieval.[72]

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century views of lyric

Post-Romantic writers on lyric have tended to emphasise its personal aspect, and, similarly, the idea of lyric as an essentially private genre. John Stuart Mill characterised (lyric) poetry as a kind of soliloquy and an inborn skill, as opposed to trained rhetoric; he was drawing on the Latin proverb *oratur fit, nascitur poeta* ('an orator is made, a poet born'). I am putting together two passages here, in two originally separate essays, later published as one: 'What is Poetry?' (January, 1833), where Mill distinguishes between eloquence, which is heard, and poetry, which is overheard, and 'The Two Kinds of Poetry' (October, 1833), where he contrasts Shelley, the natural poet, with Wordsworth, the man of ideas, whose poetry is essentially unlyrical, although the lyric kind is 'more eminently and peculiarly poetry than any other'.[73]

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[67] See Ardis Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France: From Jean Renart to Guillaume de Machaut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 224.

[68] Written about 1580. See *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 371. Sidney also applies 'lyric' and 'lyrical' to some eulogistic and narrative poetry: see pp. 218, 230–31, 236, 242, 246. On the possibility that such kinds of poetry may be lyric, see my remarks on the Agincourt Carol, below.

[69] Published 1589: George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Field, 1589; repr. Amsterdam: Da Capo, 1971), p. 20.

[70] Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, p. 120, suggests that in the earlier sixteenth century *balet* meant 'a courtly song of popular character'.

[71] Published 1586. William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, ed. by Edward Arber (London: n. pub., 1870), p. 86.

[72] Fayrfax (BL Add 5465), Henry VIII's (BL Add 31922), and Ritson's (BL Add 5665). Stevens argues that only in the folk tradition were lyric and music composed together in the late medieval and early Tudor periods: *Music and Poetry*, pp. 98–115, 329.

[73] The two early versions are included in *Essays on Poetry by John Stuart Mill*, ed. by F. Parvin Sharpless (Columbia,

Northrop Frye took up Mill's insight approvingly, and spoke of lyric as 'pre-eminently the utterance that is overheard'.[74] Similarly, T. S. Eliot defined lyric as 'the voice of the poet talking to himself — or to nobody',[75] the first of his three poetic voices (one soliloquising, one addressing an audience, and one speaking through a persona — Plato's three modes and the subsequent lyric-epic-dramatic triad probably lie behind this). But actually Eliot is unhappy about calling the kind of poetry that uses the first voice 'lyric,' and prefers 'meditative verse,' so, as we shall see, he is really thinking of a very particular kind of lyric poetry.

Modern medievalists on the nature and function of Middle English lyric

Modern scholars have felt the need somehow to balance medieval attitudes to Middle English poetry with the very different perspective of their own time. There is a general consensus that whatever 'lyric' means in a medieval context, it means something different from its usual meaning now. Unless one has decided that the word is to be treated as essentially devoid of meaning — which makes it useless — approaches to the problem tend to limit its meaning to a particular facet. Thus, lyric may be understood as basically song, or as an especially intimate kind of poetry, or as poetry voiced in the first person. Alternatively, one may concentrate on a particular kind of medieval lyric and thus avoid the difficulty of accommodating other kinds that in their different ways correspond to some aspect of what *we* would regard as lyric. Before presenting my own suggestions, let me summarise some influential views.

Peter Dronke, whose two major books on medieval lyric appeared in the sixties, emphasises especially lyric's sung or song-like aspect. In the Preface to the first edition of his magisterial *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, Dronke runs off a list of the vernacular songs that, he believes, must have existed before they were first recorded in the twelfth century: 'dance songs, love-dialogues, aubades, ballads, reverdies, lovers' greetings and meditations'.[76] And in the first chapter of his shorter *Medieval Lyric* (first published in 1968), he seeks to demonstrate the rootedness of medieval lyric in the unrecorded oral songs of late antiquity by quoting in translation from a sermon by St John Chrysostom (347–407 CE), a long and highly evocative passage on the many kinds of song pervasive in the lives of ordinary people.[77] In a later article, making the rather difficult case for a continuity of love lyric from Old to Middle English, Dronke incidentally defines lyrics as 'brief poems of keen emotional intensity, using refrains and other incantatory elements', this with reference to a few Old English pieces.[78] As well as drawing on the typical Romantic view of lyric, Dronke's formulation raises the question of lyrical form which I mentioned earlier, and will return to.

South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 3–22 and 28–43. The later combined version (1867) is edited in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, vol. 1, Autobiography and Literary Essays*, ed. by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 341–65. Mill invokes the Latin proverb in the second essay, and one guesses it was also in his mind in the first.

[74] *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 249.

[75] 'The Three Voices of Poetry,' in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 89–102 (pp. 96–97).

[76] Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), I, p. xvi.

[77] p. 15; from St John Chrysostom, 'Expositio in Psalmum 41', in *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca*, ed. by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1859), LV, 155–58 (pp. 156–57).

[78] Peter Dronke, 'On the Continuity of Medieval English Love-Lyric', in *Latin and Vernacular Poets of the Middle Ages* (Hampshire and Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1991), no. XII, pp. 7–21 (p. 7) (repr. from *England and the Continental Renaissance: Essays in Honour of J. B. Trapp*, ed. by Edward Chaney and Peter Mack (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990), pp. 7–21). The Old English poems are *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*. Citations from Old English poetry taken from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by G. P.

In her classic study *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (1968), Rosemary Woolf turns away from poetry as song, and also rejects the assumption that lyric must reflect the author's feelings.[79] Instead, she insists on its private nature. She sees herself as writing 'a history of medieval meditative poetry', and distinguishes between the lyric proper, private and intimate, and the carol, which is sung, public, and celebratory.[80] Speaking of the carol, she says, 'its purpose — and probably its ancestry — is dramatic rather than meditative'.[81] Effectively, she has appropriated the genre name for a much narrower genre of devotional verse. She acknowledges a fundamental similarity between this and the meditative English poetry of the seventeenth century, exemplified especially by Donne and Herbert, although, as she points out, the medieval poems avoid the individualism that so sharply distinguishes the later writers.[82] Woolf is talking about religious poetry specifically, but in contrasting the lyric with the carol, as private and public respectively, she is adopting a position that is often applied more widely. She does not define the lyric as personal, but comes close to doing so when speaking of it as private and intimate.

Other scholars do find the lyric a personal genre, in that it uses a first-person voice. Thus, Judson Boyce Allen asserts that the medieval lyric invites its audience to occupy the 'I' of the poem.[83] Somewhat similarly, Douglas Gray in his book on Middle English religious poetry, published a few years after Woolf's, explains that medieval devotional poems in the first person are 'intended for other people to *use*'.[84] This 'generic I' is carefully distinguished from the 'I' as *dramatis persona* by John Burrow in his well known introduction to Middle English literature, *Medieval Writers and their Work*, first published in 1982. Interestingly, Burrow, who, as I noted above, says he accepts the equation of lyric with short poem, at the same time admits that it is impossible to make general observations about lyrics so defined, and then promptly limits his discussion to poems uttered in the first person.[85] A particular kind of first-person voice is also felt to be a defining feature by Rosemary Greentree, who, in the Introduction to her bibliography *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem* (2001), favours a distinction between the lyric 'I,' addressing one person, and the epic or romance 'I,' addressing a plurality.[86] Actually, this reminds me more of the difference between the monodic and the choral 'I' in Greek lyric. Greentree also provides some all-purpose definitions of lyric in terms of criteria that will by now sound familiar: intense emotion, repetitive and evocative sound, music, and commemoration of an event.[87] She is drawing on critics writing in the fifties,

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Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–53). The poems mentioned are all in volume 3, *The Exeter Book*.

[79] p. 1

[80] pp. 308, 383–84.

[81] p. 385.

[82] As Woolf admits, pp. 4–7, Audelay's poem, with the refrain 'Passio Christi conforta me', about his blindness and physical decay (*Index*, no. 693; Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 369) is a notable exception.

[83] 'Grammar, Poetic Form, and the Lyric Ego: A Medieval *A Priori*', in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Lois Ebin, Studies in Medieval Culture, 16 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1984), pp. 199–226 (pp. 208, 211). Allen sees Raymond Oliver's view of the Middle English lyric — 'spoken by types' — as also implicating the ego of the audience (p. 214), referring to Raymond Oliver, *Poems without Names: The English Lyric, 1200–1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 11–40.

[84] Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 60; Gray's italics.

[85] I refer to the second edition (2008). The section on lyric remains virtually unchanged.

[86] p. 12.

[87] p. 5.

specifically, Kenneth Burke and Susanne Langer.[88] And she does ultimately decide that to be on the safe side, *lyric* should be taken to mean no more than 'short poem' in Middle English.

Richard Greene's massive edition of the Middle English carols (first published in 1935, and re-edited in 1977) doesn't investigate the definition of lyric, but does go to great lengths to define the carol, with its burden at the beginning and following every stanza. He carefully distinguishes the carol from the ballad, the latter defined by narrativity and objectivity, features which are possible but unusual in carols.[89] Somewhat similarly, the *Medieval Lyric* collection by John Hirsh treats ballads and carols as two genres, with lyric a third. Greene is especially interested in the origins of the carol, which he explains as a development of dance-song performed by young women, with a varying stanza sung by the leader and an unvarying burden sung by the chorus.[90]

Both Greentree and Hirsh, though writing comparatively recently, hark back to the work of an earlier generation. By and large, interest in defining genres has waned in the past thirty years, and scholars have come to stress more material subjects, like manuscript presentation, rather than generic affinities. However, the former has been carefully brought to bear on the latter by Julia Boffey and Ardis Butterfield. In 'What to Call a Lyric?', Boffey demonstrates that the choice of titles for short poems in late Middle English manuscripts has implications for the understanding of genre.[91] She shows that terms for varieties of lyric were used pretty loosely at the time: Latin and French words for 'song,' along with 'tretys' and 'dite,' and in courtly verse 'complaint'. But her findings don't lead to any pronouncements on what *we* should call a medieval lyric. Butterfield also emphasises manuscript presentation and manuscript context. Her chapter on lyric for the 2009 *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature* arranges its material by the kinds of manuscript involved, showing how closely implicated the English material is with Latin and French. Butterfield doesn't actually define lyric, but does say that in Middle English it includes poetry that would be regarded as lyric by modern critics ('intense, private, and literary') and also poetry that would not.[92]

Three faces of lyric: song, celebration, personal poetry

Taking account of all these views, I'd like now to supplement my preliminary definition of lyric with some further criteria, by focussing on three overlapping aspects in which lyric manifests itself: poems that are songs or song-like, poems that celebrate group festivity, and poems that purport to express personal emotion. I believe that these three aspects, which I call 'faces', help to relate medieval practice to a broader context of poetry and scholarly criticism. The

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[88] Kenneth Burke, 'Three Definitions', *Kenyon Review*, 13 (1951), 173–92 (p. 174), defines lyric in a nutshell as 'an ordered summation of emotional experience'. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner, 1953), p. 258, explains the lyric genre as 'the literary form that depends most directly on pure verbal resources'.

[89] *The Early English Lyric*, pp. lxv–lxxii.

[90] *The Early English Lyric*, p. xlviii. He supposes a wide diffusion and ancient origin for dances of this type (pp. xlvii–xlix). As he acknowledges, he is indebted to the theories of Alfred Jeanroy and Gaston Paris (first voiced around 1890), who traced the whole of European lyric back to these girlish songs. See Alfred Jeanroy, *Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France au Moyen Age*, 3rd edn (Paris: Champion, 1925), p. 445, and Gaston Paris' review of the first edition: 'Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France', in *Mélanges de littérature française au Moyen Age*, ed. by Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1912), pp. 539–615 (p. 611) (repr. from *Journal des savants* (1891), 674–88, 729–42; (1892), 155–64, 407–30.

[91] Julia Boffey, 'What to Call a Lyric? Middle English Lyrics and their Manuscript Titles', *Revue belge de Philosophie et d'Histoire*, 83 (2005), 671–83.

[92] 'Lyric', pp. 95–96.

first, song, the only one of the three that corresponds directly to a medieval term, resembles the ancient view of lyric and also Dronke's view of its origins. The distinction between the second and third faces resembles, but is not identical with, that detected by Woolf and others between the carol and the lyric. And the third face draws on a widespread post-Romantic view of lyric, without assuming autobiographical authenticity.

Although song is an extremely important element of lyric, non-lyrical kinds of poetry could be sung — as the Old French *chansons de geste* were, famously the *Song of Roland* at the Battle of Hastings.[93] It is possible, though, as Stevens suggests, that narrative verse was performed with a recitative rather than a fully sung delivery.[94] In Occitan, the verse forms of the courtly *canso* were used for the satirical or moralising *sirventes* — which, like the *canso*, was sung.[95] Song, then, does not preclude non-lyrical genres. Again, it is often unclear whether particular pieces unaccompanied by musical notation were actually intended to be sung.[96] When presented as songs in longer works, like romances, they obviously were. The presence of refrain might also be an indicator.[97] And the snippets included in early Middle English (or Latin) sermons — like *Atte wrastlinge* and its ilk — doubtless came from real songs.[98] Many verse forms originally sung, notably the *formes fixes* mentioned above, came to be literary forms quite independent of music, a development reflected in the differentiation between sung and unsung lyric found in *L'art de dictier et de fere chançons, balades, virelais et rondeaulx* by Chaucer's contemporary and friend Eustache Deschamps.[99] In late Middle English the word *song* often designated texts with no particular musical application.[100] Still, the association of lyric with song is powerful, and has been stressed in some of the most important scholarship on the subject.

Festive or celebratory lyric runs the gamut from reverence to jollity and sometimes combines the two, as in many Christmas hymns and carols — like *Go day Syre Cristemas our kyng*, *Nowell nowell nowell nowell*, and *Welcum be thou Heuen Kyng*.[101] For this reason, and also to define a kind of lyric that is public and collective, my category includes the playful as well as the earnest. The two are usually separated, but I think they can usefully be seen as

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[93] See William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, 454; Wace, *Le Roman de Rou de Wace*, ed. by A. J. Holden, 3 vols (Paris: Picard, 1970–73), II, 183. The words *cantilena* in William, and *chantout/chantant* in Wace indicate sung delivery, but possibly aren't in that literal sense.

[94] Stevens, *Words and Music*, p. 200 n. 3, comments that the alliterative formula *singen und sagen* 'was [sometimes] made to express a distinction between a lyrical and an epic style of performance'. He also distinguishes between the types of melody used for the two sorts of verse, the musical accompaniment for lyric (as exemplified by the *grande chant courtois*) possessing 'full and substantial meaning of its own', that for narrative (epic, ballad, and romance) only 'subdued and subordinate' musical interest: *Words and Music*, p. 130; cf. p. 259.

[95] See n. 62, above.

[96] See Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics*, p. 27. He adds that 'in very round figures, only some two hundred [Middle English poems] survive with musical settings, and, of these, a good half are polyphonic carols'.

[97] As suggested by Brown, *XIII*, no. 35: for *Quanne hic se on rode* ('When I See on the Cross'); see the notes on p. 195. On this poem, see also Karl Reichl, *Religiöse Dichtung im englischen Hochmittelalter* (Munich: Fink, 1973), pp. 92–93, 113–14, 488–92.

[98] Alan J. Fletcher suggests that parts of lyrics, and even possibly whole lyrics, were sometimes actually sung during preaching: 'The Lyric in the Sermon', in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. by Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), pp. 189–209 (pp. 206–8).

[99] *Oeuvres complètes d'Eustache Deschamps*, ed. by Auguste Henry Édouard, Marquis de Queux de Saint-Hilaire, and Gaston Raynaud, 11 vols (Paris: Firmin Didiot, 1878–1903), VII, 266–92 (pp. 270–71).

[100] As shown by Boffey, 'What to Call a Lyric?'

[101] Greene, *Early English Carols*, nos 5, 6, 7.

on a continuum, the ludic type including poems that imply, without specifically mentioning, a context of group merriment. Gray's view of a particular type of lyric expressing 'delight in "game" and festive entertainment' is relevant here.[102] Banqueting and drinking songs join festive carols at the lighter end of the spectrum, as in the late Middle English Boar's Head Carol,[103] sung as that impressive dish was brought ceremonially into the hall, and *Bring us in good ale*,[104] recorded from the early sixteenth and the fifteenth centuries, respectively. At the opposite end of the spectrum is a kind of ambitious composition practised by sophisticated poets over the ages. 'Ceremonial poems uttered in a public voice on a public occasion' are included under *lyric* in M. H. Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms*.[105] Such poems are seen by modern critics as part of a classical tradition. Admired down the centuries, Pindar's splendid epinicians praising the victors in the Games are perhaps the example *par excellence*. In the hands of Pindar and other Greek choral lyricists, this praise poetry was also moral and didactic, though raised above mere preaching by its imaginative grandeur. W. R. Johnson characterises as 'choral' lyric the kind of poetry that involves 'singing for and to the community about the hopes and passion for order, survival, and continuity that they all share'. He uses both 'choral' and 'singing' figuratively, and traces a tradition 'from Pindar to Horace, from Horace to Jonson, from Jonson to Whitman and other modern choralists'.[106] In the Middle English context, poetry of this kind may be simpler and more 'popular', as with the Agincourt Carol, which I will consider more fully below. And it is worth noting that Greek choral lyric was not always edifying; in the comedy it could be quite frivolous.

Poetry of the choral kind can be personal only in a special, collective, sense. Normally, 'personal' means something different. While it is true that the idea of lyric poetry as intensely personal is a Romantic one, the roots of this concept go far back. Paul Allen Miller has found a new personal awareness in literary Latin as opposed to performance-oriented Greek lyric, a point he makes with specific reference to the adaptation of Sappho 31, describing the devastating physical effect on the poet of the presence of her beloved, in Catullus 51, where the subject is the male poet and his feeling for his 'Lesbia'.[107] Notwithstanding this shift, the Roman poets remain comparatively restrained and convention-bound in their outpourings. Even poems of personal anecdote don't really wear their heart on their sleeve. Catullus 10, for instance, neatly captures the poet's embarrassment at a girl's asking him to lend her the eight litter-bearers he claimed to own when really he had nary a one. His discomfiture strikes us as absolutely true to life. But the witty account of it is light-years away from, say, Wordsworth's detailed account of the development of his own mind in *The Prelude*. Going further back and further afield than Miller, E. K. Chambers, in an observation about origins that now strikes us as quaint and patronising but probably has some truth in it, averred that

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[102] He includes in this category Christmas songs as well as bawdy verses and good-humoured satire (*Later Medieval English Literature*, pp. 366–67). In his analysis of Middle English poems by social function, Oliver defines a 'celebration' category including both the grave and the jovial — but not the lewd or the mocking (*Poems Without Names*, pp. 14–21).

[103] *The boris hede in hond(es) I brynge*. *Index*, nos 3313 and 3314; Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 132.

[104] Title from the burden. The first stanza begins *Bring us in no browne bred for that is made of brane*. *Index*, no. 549; Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 422.

[105] 6th edn (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993), s. v. These words do not in fact appear in the earlier versions of this progressively longer and more complex entry, but are to be found from the sixth edition on.

[106] W. R. Johnson, *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 178.

[107] Paul Allen Miller, *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 1; see also his 'Sappho 31 and Catullus 51: The Dialogue of Lyric', *Arethusa*, 26 (1993), 183–99 (pp. 194–95).

anthropological investigations trace the beginnings of lyric among 'barbarous peoples' to 'the instinct of emotional self-expression'.[108] I would concur with Chambers to the extent that lyric may well originate in oral song, individual or communal, which expresses the feelings of the singer with regard to a specific occasion. This is not the same thing as Ruskin's claim that lyric is 'the expression by the poet of his own feelings'.[109] What is or is not the genuine expression of somebody's own feelings is virtually impossible to determine. Indeed, the question is really a red herring. Often the singer adopts a stage persona, a stage 'self' to which the audience is invited to respond. As Judson Allen notes, this is still the case with popular song.[110] All the same, poetry that lays bare a personal situation in individualistic detail is, by virtue of the determined conventionality of medieval topics and motifs, decidedly unmedieval — and uncharacteristic of the reserve and role-playing of classical verse too.

As we have seen, personal poetry is often equated with poetry spoken in the first person. But I think it is also possible for poetry that speaks of the intimate concerns of the individual human being to be regarded as personal whether grammatically the utterance is couched in the first person or not. Sometimes direct address conveys this personal quality; sometimes the intimacy and urgency of the topic does.

II. The primary materials: Middle English verse

Lyric form in Middle English

I want now to focus on the corpus of Middle English poetry, and to consider the ways in which particular poems embody lyric or manifest elements of it. Formally, the roots of lyric in Middle English are Continental, rather than native. Lyric form as defined by structure, essentially strophic, is unrecorded in the English vernacular before the twelfth century, although it was known to the Anglo-Saxons long before that, as a phenomenon of Latin verse, especially hymns.[111] The new metres are 'an importation from the Latin schools or Romance courts,' influenced by 'accentual Latin verse, stemming from the popular poetry of the latter days of the Roman Empire'.[112] The St Godric songs, simple little compositions in the voice of the Anglo-Saxon saint who died in his nineties around 1110, are perhaps the earliest Middle English text preserved with musical notation; the oldest manuscripts date from around 1200. As E. J. Dobson notes, the melodies are based on plain-song and in a general way the (rhyming) stanza forms are modelled on Latin hymns of the Ambrosian type.[113] Another very early lyric, also

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[108] Chambers and Sidgwick, *Early English Lyrics*, p. 259.

[109] John Ruskin, *Fors clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, 4 vols (New York: Wiley, 1886), I, 167 (in Ruskin's arrangement, vol. 3, Letter 34). Published 1886, dated 1873 by the *OED* in its entry under 'lyric'.

[110] 'Grammar, Poetic Form, and the Lyric Ego', pp. 208, 211.

[111] In Old English, only *The Riming Poem* uses rhyme consistently throughout; there are no poems in rhyming stanzas, and only one, *Deor*, with a real refrain. Both poems in *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, III, *The Exeter Book*. On the issue of rhyme, see Michael McKie, 'The Origins and Development of Rhyme in English Verse', *Modern Language Review*, 92 (1997), 817–31.

[112] I quote from Seth Lerer, 'The Genre of the Grave and the Origins of the Middle English Lyric', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 58 (1997), 127–61 (p. 130), and Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics*, p. 39, respectively. Actually, Lerer mentions this opinion in order to qualify it.

[113] *Seinte marie clane uirgine* (*Index*, no. 2988), *Crist and saint marie* (*Index*, no. 598), *Sainte Nicolaes Godes druoð* (*Index*, no. 3031). See *Medieval English Songs*, ed. by Dobson and Harrison, pp. 104–5. Only a few of the 'Ambrosian' hymns of the early Church can be firmly attributed to St Ambrose.

preserved with music, is *Ar ne kuthe ich sorghe non*[114] ('Previously I knew no care'). This poem, a plea to God for release from prison, is written in an English and a French version in the manuscript. Both are contrafacta of a Latin lament by Godefroy of St Victor, *Planctus ante nescia* ('Unaccustomed to weeping before'); that is, they use its tune. It is not uncommon for secular lyrics in the vernacular to share their melodies with sacred songs in Latin. *Sumer is icumen in* and *Maiden in the mor lay* are two well-known examples.[115] These early Middle English poems are all sung, and they all reflect a break with Old English and a turning towards Latin and French models. Even though the alliterative long line persists in some quarters right to the end of the Middle English period, that line is in essence a tool of stichic verse, and lends itself to lyric poetry only when combined with other devices — that is, with rhyme, refrain, and strophe: witness the highly-wrought artistry of *Pearl* and its elaborate stanzas. This poem is too long and too narrative to be a lyric *per se*, but, like the opening to the General Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* — and the passages from *Paradise Lost* and *The Prelude* that I mentioned earlier — it lingers on lyric moments captured in vivid detail.

Love complaint

The new lyricism is conspicuous in the male-voice love complaint, with its antecedents in the Occitan *canso* and northern French *grand chant courtois*.[116] The full effect of the Romance tradition isn't visible in the earliest Middle English lyrics, but a good example is to be found a little later, in the poem, recorded in the fourteenth century, that begins 'Bryd one brere, brid, brid one brere! | kynd is come of loue, loue to craue'.[117] This little piece consists of three four-line stanzas utilising both rhyme and alliteration. Its conceits and language are highly conventional: the bird apostrophised with a repeated formula, the lover's nearness to death, ('greyd þu me my graue') and, rather paradoxically, his delight in contemplating his lady's stereotypical charms ('hende [gracious or attractive] in halle' is another formula), his wish for a happy constancy — expressed with the well-worn rhyme 'trewe" and 'newe,' echoing 'rewe' ('have pity' [on me]) earlier on. *Bryd one brere* is a graceful song, presenting itself as intimately personal (while being extremely conventional), and is on these grounds a lyric. In a limited way, *Bryd* also exemplifies lyric intensity — which it *lays claim to* rather than really generating. In that respect it is like many other love complaints in Middle English. One of the hallmarks of the courtly love-complaint is its claim to represent intense feeling. The genre is nicely parodied

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[114] *Index*, no. 322; Brown*, XIII*, no. 5. Early thirteenth century; text and notes in *Medieval English Songs*, ed. by Dobson and Harrison, pp. 110–20.

[115] *Index*, no. 3223; Brown, *XIII*, no. 6; and *Index*, no. 3037.5; Robbins, *SL*, no. 18, respectively. *Sumer* shares its melody with *Perspice Christicola* ('Take heed, Christian'), *Maiden* with *Peperit virgo* ('A maiden has given birth'). See *Medieval English Songs*, ed. by Dobson and Harrison, pp. 143–45 and 188–96. The melody for *Maiden* is preserved in the Red Book of Ossory, in Ireland, which contains religious verses in Latin composed by Richard de Ledrede, appointed Bishop of Ossory in 1316, to the music of popular English songs.

[116] The former term is medieval, the latter modern. *Canso* comes into use around 1170, replacing the earlier *vers*. See Zumthor, *Essai*, p. 158. *Grand chant courtois* is Roger Dragonetti's term: *La technique poétique des trouvères dans la chanson courtoise* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1960), pp. 15–139. The only two love complaints in Old English are *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, both in the female voice, and given no title or descriptor in the manuscript. Apart from separation and longing, these Old English poems share no motifs with Middle English lyrics of love-longing in the Occitan-French tradition.

[117] *Index*, no. 521; Robbins, *SL*, no. 147. 'Bird on briar, bird, bird on briar, | nature [animal and human] has come out of love to beg for love'.

in the Chaucerian triple roundel or rondeau *Merciles beaute*,[118] where the pining lover ends up delighted that he has escaped so fat from Love's prison and refuses to languish there lean. *Bryd one brere* was found in 1932 on the back of a papal grant of privileges to an abbey whose revenues later came into the hands of King's College, Cambridge.[119] Copying on this strange medium suggests a curious mixture of negligence and care on the part of the copyist, who probably quickly noted it down, perhaps from memory, on a parchment that was at hand, because he liked it and wanted to preserve it.

Both simpler and more remarkable than *Bryd one brere*, the ever-popular *Foweles in þe frith*, which Abrams quotes entire in the lyric entry in his *Glossary*,[120] condenses to five lines the often-sung restless pangs of the lover in springtime, the narrative element here completely pared away, and the sense of creaturely physicality pressed home by the alliteration:

> Foweles in þe frith,
> þe fisses in þe flod,
> and I mon waxe wod.
> Sulch sorw I walke with
> for beste of bon and blood.[121]

Spring song and love-complaint, intimately personal but without individualistic detail, the artistry of *Foweles in the frith* embodies a medieval but also engages a modern sensibility.

Devotional lyric

The three previous poems — *Bryd one brere*, *Merciles beaute*, and *Foweles in þe frith* — speak through a first-person voice that is both intimate and representative. A similar 'I,' which, in Gray's words mentioned earlier on, is intended 'for other people to use', characterises many pieces of religious verse put forward for the instruction of the reader — or more probably the audience. One of the most striking examples, found in a small early fourteenth-century manuscript of preaching materials in Latin, translates Augustine's famous words about his own former procrastination and spiritual sloth. The Middle English version, which appears right after the Latin original, nicely captures this very human weakness:

> Louerd, þu clepedest me
> an ic nagt ne ansuarede þe
> bute wordes scloe and sclepie:
> 'þole yet! þole a litel!'
> Bute 'yiet' and 'yiet' was endelis,

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[118] In Benson's edition, *Merciles Beaute* appears in a section entitled 'Poems Not Ascribed to Chaucer in the Manuscripts', pp. 657–60 (p. 659).

[119] Formerly King's College Muniment Roll 2 W.32; now King's College SJP/50. John Saltmarsh describes his discovery of the poem in 'Two Medieval Love-Songs Set to Music', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 15 (1935), 1–21.

[120] M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th edn (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009). This appears in all its editions to date, though not in its predecessor, Dan S. Norton and Peters Rushton, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Little and Ives, 1941).

[121] Oxford, Bodleian, Douce 139, f. 5r. *Index*, no. 864; Brown, *XIII*, no. 8. 'The birds in the forest | the fishes in the flood, | and I must grow mad. | Such sorrow I walk with | for best of bone and blood'. See *Medieval English Songs*, ed. by Dobson and Harrison, pp. 142–43 (text), 246 (music). Editions usually print 'mulch' in l. 2, but the rather strange letter is an *s*, supported by the alliteration. The error was pointed out by Carter Revard, ' 'Sulch sorw I walke with': Line 4 of 'Foweles in the frith' ', *Notes and Queries*, n.s., 25 (1978), 200.

and 'þole a litel' a long wey is.[122]

We have here a moralising anecdote which through its patterned form and vivid re-creation of a moment of personal experience also becomes a lyric. Whether it faithfully represents an actual incident in the life of St Augustine is irrelevant.[123]

Similar in its concentrated focus is the well known and richly evocative quatrain musing on Mary's sorrowing face as she stands by the Cross, the first poem in Brown's *Thirteenth Century* volume, entitled by him 'Sunset on Cavalry':

> Nou goth sonne under wod —
> me reweth, Marie, þi faire rode.
> Nou goth sonne under treo —
> me reweþ, Marie, þi sone and þe.[124]

These lines are quoted by St Edmund (Rich), Archbishop of Canterbury 1233–40, in his *Merure de Seinte Eglise*, after a passage in Anglo-Norman verse urging the reader (or audience) to think of Mary and her suffering.[125] Edmund simply attributes the piece to 'un Engleis'. Its background is unknown, but it is preserved in many manuscript versions of the *Merure*, some in Latin, some French, and a few in English. Conveying empathy, instead of admonition, *Nou goth sonne under wod*, like many devotional poems composed later on in the Middle English period, expresses an affective rather than a moralistic piety, prompts sympathy and love rather than fear or penitence. Two images are created, the second called up by the first: the sun (or the Son) going down into darkness and death, with *wod* connoting both the trees in a wood and the Cross as tree, and the fair face of Mary, marred by weeping, her *rode* ('(ruddy) complexion') suggesting its near homophone, the rood.[126] Meditative rather than musical, *Louerd þu clepedest me* and *Nou goth sonne under wod* epitomise lyric of the personal and private kind.

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[122] *Index*, no. 1978; Brown, *XIV*, no. 5. 'Lord, thou called me, | and I nothing answered thee, | but words slow and sleepy, | "Be patient yet! Be patient a little!" | But "yet" and "yet" was endless, | and "Be patient a little" a long way is'. In the Latin, 'non erat omnino quid responderem … nisi tantum verba lenta et somnolenta: "modo", "ecce modo", "sine paululum". sed "modo et modo" non habebant modum et "sine paululum" in longum ibat': *The Confessions of Augustine: An Electronic Edition*, ed. by James J. O'Donnell, <http://www.stoa.org/hippo>, book 8, chapter 5, section 12 (repr. from *Augustine: Confessions*, ed. by James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)).

[123] Leo Spitzer, 'Note on the Poetic and the Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors', *Traditio*, 4 (1946), 414–22 (p. 418 n. 8), finds a 'poetic' (i.e. generic) 'I' in Augustine's *Confessions*. Spitzer's distinction between two kinds of 'I' resembles Burrow's, mentioned above. On the *Confessions*, see also Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 203–7.

[124] *Index*, no. 2320; Brown, *XIII*, no. 1. 'Now the sun goes down beneath the trees — | I am sad, Mary, for thy fair face. | Now the sun goes down beneath the Tree — | I am sad, Mary, for thy Son and thee'. Brown prints the text from Bodleian Arch. Selden supra 74.

[125] On *Nou goth sonne* in the context of the *Merure de Seinte Eglise*, see Ardis Butterfield, 'The Construction of Textual Form: Cross-Lingual Citation in the Medieval Insular Lyric', in *Citation, Intertextuality and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Yolanda Plumley, Giuliano Di Bacco, and Stefano Jossa (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2011), pp. 41–57 (pp. 44–48). Expanding her earlier discussion ('Lyric', pp. 99–101), Butterfield here regards the *Merure* as originally composed by Edmund in Latin, and subsequently translated into French by him or another person.

[126] In early Middle English the vowels in *wod* and *rod(e)* are still short (from Old English *wudu* and *rudu*); that in *rod*, 'Cross', would be long (as in Old English).

Contemptus mundi and the *ubi sunt* motif

While many of the typical forms and themes of Middle English poetry represent something new, some of its topics, especially religious and moral ones focussing on the darker aspects of medieval spirituality, continue traditions that flourished in England before the Conquest. *Contemptus mundi*, the product of an asceticism that medieval society embraced and admired — in theory anyway — produces an abundant, if often forbidding, literature in Latin and the vernaculars. It finds expression in horrific evocations of the rotting corpse like those in the Old English addresses of the Soul to the Body[127] and *The Grave*, a transitional text from around 1200.[128] These poems aren't in lyric form, and their content isn't lyrical. But sometimes, when the *contemptus* theme excites nostalgia or intimate concern, it can produce lyric moments. Thus, the early Middle English poem that Carleton Brown picturesquely entitles 'Death's Wither-Clench' ('attacking grip') displays lyric intensity and personal focus, the latter conveyed by empathy and direct address. Lyric also in its formal properties, being constructed in strophes and intended for singing, this piece is accompanied by musical notation in one of its several manuscript versions.[129] It begins with a moralising generalisation, 'Man mei longe him liues wene, | ac ofte him liyet þe wreinch,'[130] here given concrete urgency by terse unadorned wording and a striking rhyme, maintained through two stanzas:

> wela-wey! nis king ne Quene
> þat ne sel drinke of deth-is drench.
> Man, er þu falle of þi bench,
> þu sinne aquench.
>
> Ne mai strong ne starch ne kene
> aȝlye deth-is wiþer-clench.[131] (lines 7–12)

This grim *memento mori* turns into dramatic action in one striking metaphor after another.

Also from the thirteenth century, and equally alarming, *Wen the turuf is þi tuur* translates a Latin original alongside it in the manuscript. I quote the poem in its entirety:

> Wen þe turuf is þi tuur,
> and þi put is þi bour,
> þi wel and þi wite þrote
> ssulen wormes to note.
> Wat helpit þe þenne
> al þe worilde wnne?[132]

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[127] *Soul and Body I* and *II* are found in the *Vercelli* and the *Exeter Book*: *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, I and III, respectively.

[128] For text, brief commentary, and prose translation, see *Middle English Debate Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by John W. Conlee (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1991), pp. 3–6.

[129] Maidstone Museum A 13, f. 93v. *Index*, no. 2070; Brown, *XIII*, no. 10.

[130] 'Man may expect a long life, but often encounters a wrench'.

[131] 'Alas! There is no king nor queen | that shall not drink of death's drink. | Man, ere you fall off your bench, | your sin quench'.

[132] Trinity College, Cambridge, B.14.39, f. 47v. *Index*, no. 4044; Brown, *XIII*, no. 30. 'When the turf is thy tower, | and the pit thy bower, | thy well-being and thy white throat | for the benefit of worms. | What helpeth thee then | all this world's joy?' The thrust of the Latin is the same, but the wording is slightly different: '*Cum sit gleba tibi turris | tuus puteus conclavis, | pellis et guttur album | erit cibus vermium. | Quid habent tunc de proprio | hii monarchie lucro?*' See Brown, *XIII*, pp. 191–92.

Here economy is more emphatic than elaboration: the vivid antitheses, picked out by alliteration, say it all.

Another extremely widespread motif, 'Where are the dead of former days?' animates the famous passage in the Old English *Wanderer* (lines 92–96) beginning 'What has become of the steed, the rider, the treasure-giver?'[133] as well as early Middle English poetry. *Were beþ þey biforen vs weren?*, sometimes known by its Latin title *Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt*, is extant in several manuscripts, with variations in the stanzas and their arrangement; perhaps it shouldn't be regarded as a separate poem, because it tends to be mixed in with the moralistic maxims called *The Sayings of St Bernard*. I describe it here as it appears in the Digby version, where it is set off as discrete.[134] Similarly evocative is a haunting stanza from Thomas of Hales' *Love Rune* ('secret love message'), a 210-line poem that seeks to turn a young woman's desires towards a divine lover.[135] Although the *Love Rune* is too long and too hortatory to be in its totality a lyric, Brown includes it in his *Thirteenth Century* collection.[136] Reflecting on the famous dead, the speaker asks, rhetorically, 'Hwer is Paris and Heleyne … ?' They are all 'iglyden ut of þe reyne | so þe schef is of þe cleo' ('glided out of the rain, like the sheaf from the hill'). The most famous rendition of this theme must be François Villon's fifteenth-century *Ballade des dames du temps jadis*,[137] best known to modern Anglophone readers in Rossetti's version with its familiar refrain 'Where are the snows of yesteryear,' translating *Ou sont les neiges d'antan?*

Ranging from the wistful to the macabre, verse on this theme can produce bursts of concentrated intensity. In Hales' *Love Rune*, the *ubi sunt* stanza climaxes the images of transience in the first half of the poem, the latter part of which consists of somewhat tedious recommendations to preserve chastity. *Were beþ þey biforen vs weren?* is less nostalgic and more severe:

> Hoere paradis hy nomen here,
> and nou þey lien in helle i-fere,
> þe fuir hit brennes hevere.
> Long is ay and long is ho,
> long is wy and long is wo.
> Þennes ne comeþ þey nevere.[138] (lines 19–25)

As in *Wen the turuf is þi tuur*, no punches are pulled in the contrast between the pampered life of the rich, and their miserable fate after death, reduced there to worm-riddled body, here to howling soul in the fire that never stops. Not lyric in its quieter or sweeter aspects and certainly

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[133] 'Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?' (line 92). See *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, III, the *Exeter Book*.

[134] Oxford, Bodleian, Digby 86, ff. 126v–27r. *Index*, no. 3310; Brown, *XIII*, no. 48. In Digby, *Were beth they*, rubricated with its opening line in Latin, follows the *Sayings* and precedes *Stond wel moder ounder rode*. The six extant versions of the *Sayings* are discussed in J. B. Monda, ' 'The Sayings of St. Bernard' from MS Bodleian Add. E.16', *Mediaeval Studies*, 32 (1970), 299–307 (pp. 299–301).

[135] The phrase *luve runes* appears previously in the *Life of St Katherine*, where it translates *amatoria carmina*. See *Moral Love Songs and Laments*, ed. by Susanna Greer Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1998), p. 13.

[136] Jesus College, Oxford, 29. *Index*, no. 66; Brown, *XIII*, no. 43.

[137] François Villon, *Le Testament Villon*, ed. by Jean Rychner and Albert Henry, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1974), ll. 329–56.

[138] 'Their paradise they took here, | and now they lie in hell together, | the fire that burns forever. Long is 'Ai!' and long is 'Oh!' | Long is 'Whee' and long is 'Wo!' | From thence shall they come never'.

not lyrical in the Romantic sense of the word, these poems and passages speak to the deepest fears and anxieties of the individual human being, the message driven home by parallelism, repetition, rhyme, and alliteration.

How lyrical must a lyric be?

The appearance of lyric elements in non-lyric poems raises questions about degrees of lyricism. In the same manuscript as *Foweles in the frith* is preserved another short poem on the subject of love, a trilingual quatrain, in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English:

> Loue is a selkud wodenesse
> Þat þe idel mon ledeth by wildernesse,
> Þat þurstes of wilfulscipe and drinket sorwenesse
> And with lomful sorwes menget his blithnesse.[139]

A cynical definition of love's madness, impersonal and gender-neutral, this quatrain is something like Shakespeare's Sonnet 129, 'The expense of spirit in a waste of shame', but without that poem's passion.[140] Whereas the appearance of *Foweles in the frith*, on a musical stave with a whole page to itself, draws attention to its lyrical qualities, the trilingual quatrain is presented as nothing in particular: jammed up against the entry immediately before it, with which it has absolutely no connection — a description in Latin of the form and weight of the English shilling. The poem is thus treated extremely casually, more so than the Rawlinson lyrics, which at least form a little collection of verse samples, or even *Bryd one brere*, which, though relegated not very tidily to the back of a legal document, is accompanied by music and written on an otherwise empty page. *Loue is a selkud wodenesse* is a clever literary exercise, which can be somewhat doubtfully included as a specimen of lyric because it is a short poem on the subject of love — a favourite lyric subject, but doesn't really satisfy the criteria of intensity and focus on the moment, and lies outside my categories of song, celebration, and personal poetry.

  The contrast between *Foweles in the frith* and *Loue is a selkud wodenesse* raises another issue: the question of whether poetic quality enters into the question of genre, and whether a piece of verse should be disqualified from consideration simply because it is poetically unimpressive. Being too grandiose or too trivial — or simply not very inspiring — need not be incompatible with lyricism, but being dull and prosaic definitely is. Siegfried Wenzel frequently implies as much in his *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric*.[141] Here, taking up his discovery documented slightly earlier in *Speculum*,[142] Wenzel shows that some of the items regarded as lyrics and analysed as such by critics are merely the rhymed divisions of a sermon: a sort of versified Table of Contents, and comments especially on the early fourteenth-century poem called by Brown 'How Christ Shall Come'.[143] In this particular case the metrical

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[139] 'Love is a strange madness | That leads the idle man through the wilderness, | That thirsts for pleasure and drinks unhappiness | and with frequent sorrows mingles cheerfulness', f. 159r. *Index*, no. 2005; Brown, *XIII*, no. 9. On this trilingual poem and its manuscript context, see Reichl, *Anfänge*, pp. 13–15.

[140] William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.639.

[141] Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 171–72, 250, and *passim*.

[142] Siegfried Wenzel, 'Poets, Preachers, and the Plight of Literary Critics', *Speculum*, 60 (1985), 343–63.

[143] *Index*, no. 1353; Brown, *XIV*, no. 36. See 'Poets, Preachers, and the Plight of Literary Critics', p. 345. Wenzel

clumsiness of the poem — if it can be called that — should have been a tip-off. Being a versified TOC doesn't *per se* disqualify a poem from having the qualities that would make a lyric, but this function is an unpromising start.[144] However, *Loue is a selkud wodenesse* is not poetically negligible; its sharp antitheses are pithy and nicely cutting, especially in the Latin. As epigram it is effective.

Many of the small pieces included in manuscript miscellanies can't be regarded as lyric in any meaningful sense. This is surely true of some of the utilitarian specimens edited by Robbins and cited by Butterfield, who describes them as 'domestic fare' rather than 'high art'.[145] For example, Robbins includes under 'Practical Verse' a versified recipe on the uses of leeks, ending 'It is gud for dronkyn men | A raw lek to ete, & comfortyth the brayn'.[146] Consider too this warning curse directed to bookstealers in Robbins' 'Occasional Verse':

> He þat stelys this booke
> shulbe hanged on a crooke;
> He that this booke stelle wolde
> sone be his herte colde:
> That it mow so be.
> seiþ amen, for cherite.
> > Qui scripsit carmen Pookefart est sibi nomen
> > Miller jingatur qui scripsit sic nominatur.[147]

The first six, mildly amusing, lines might at a pinch be classified as lyric, but it's a stretch; they are called a *carmen* ('song,' 'poem') in the doggerel postscript. The Latin can be translated 'the name of the person who wrote this verse is 'Pookefart'. 'Miller' is joined to it [*jingatur* for *jugatur*?]. That's what the person who wrote this is named'.

Less prosaic, but coarser, *Hogyn cam to bowers dore* narrates a little story with the same misplaced-kiss plot as Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, and thus combines lyric with *fabliau*. *Hogyn* is found in the eclectic collection compiled by the London grocer Richard Hill, during the first three decades of the sixteenth century.[148] The poem is a song, featuring lyric repetition and refrain, as it gleefully describes Hogyn's little adventure. When the young woman he fancies has 'torned owt her ars' at the window, he replies,

> Ywys, leman, ye do me wrong —
> ywis, leman, ye do me wrong,
> Or elles your breth ys wonder strong,
> > hum, ha, trill go bell —
> or elles your breth ys wonder strong,
> > hum, ha, trill go bell. (lines 31-36)

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notes that even those who found the poem so interesting recognised that it was 'poor poetry' (p. 350).

[144] Fletcher rejects verses that had no existence independent of the sermon that uses them to mark its divisions; he comments that though the categories for classifying Middle English lyric may be flexible, 'it is doubtful whether structural verses like these warrant inclusion in any of them' ('The Lyric in the Sermon', pp. 95–97). Butterfield simply includes versified TOC's as a particular kind of lyric ('Lyric', p. 99).

[145] 'Lyric', p. 106.

[146] *Index*, no. 1810; Robbins, *SL*, no. 80. This item, included by Robbins under 'Practical Verse', is followed by recipes in prose.

[147] *Index*, no. 1165; Robbins, *SL*, no. 89.

[148] Balliol College, Oxford, 354, f. 249v. *Index*, no. 1222; Robbins, *SL*, no. 36.

I quote the last stanza of six. Neither very edifying nor very subtle, but witty and catchy, *Hogyn* displays the delight in play which produces a particular kind of lyric intensity. Probably sung in chorus in a context of convivial merriment, the poem, although not exactly celebratory, can be placed in relation to light-hearted songs of a festive kind — as it is by Gray, in his remarks mentioned above.

Pushing the boundaries of lyric in a different way, *Swarte smekyd smeþes, smateryd wyth smoke* ('Black-smoked smiths, covered with smoke') is rough but not lewd, and full of sound effects though they aren't euphonious. This fifteenth-century alliterative poem recreates the violent activity of a work crew of blacksmiths, banging and clanging, huffing and cursing, and driving the sleepless narrator to distraction.[149] Intense the poem certainly is, and, though it claims to be prompted by extreme exasperation, full of delight in its own energetic virtuosity and its alliteration gone mad: 'þei spyttyn & spraulyn & spellyn many spelles, | þei gnauen & gnacchen, þei gronys togydere'.[150] I would see this, like *Hogyn*, as the kind of genial mockery that would be performed for group enjoyment. However, the blacksmiths poem lacks lyrical form, and wouldn't have been sung. And the alliterative metre, without rhyme or stazaic structure, is 'when thus full-blooded, a style generally unsuitable for lyric poetry,' to quote Davies, who finds this poem 'unique'.[151]

Lyric versus narrative and satire

While lyric is typically a non-narrative genre, occasionally a narrative poem, a ballad, say, may possess lyric elements. Some ballads may qualify as dramatic lyrics, for example *Edward* and *Lord Randall*, both post-medieval, although they may have unrecorded medieval ancestors.[152] The two poems leave their plots of treachery and love-hate relationships in the background, and focus, in lyric fashion, on a moment of terrible realisation, that Edward has stabbed his father to death, and that Randall's sweetheart has poisoned him. Both poems are in dialogue form, with no narratorial intervention. The late Middle English Agincourt Carol, inspired by Henry V's victory over the French and his instatement as an English folk-hero,[153] is ballad-like in its theme and structure, but its carol form makes it lyric of the celebratory kind, in this case with a nationalistic and eulogistic purpose;[154] Robbins includes it in the 'Politics in Song' section of his *Historical Poems*. The poem is preserved in two manuscripts, the more famous of which, the Trinity Carol Roll, is a collection of carols with music, most of them associated with Christmas. The manuscript, though battered, is still handsome, and evidently intended as a collection of music for group singing. Ballad-like in its vigorous narrative, the Agincourt Carol resembles a national anthem in its burden, 'Deo gracias Anglia | Redde pro victoria' ('Give thanks to God for victory, England'), and its final stanza asking God to preserve the king.

To my mind, it is worth making a distinction between the Agincourt Carol and more vindictive poems like those by the fourteenth-century Laurence Minot, which Turville-Petre

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[149] Arundel 292, f. 71v. *Index*, no. 3227; Robbins, *SL*, no. 118.

[150] 'They spit and sprawl and utter many curses, | they gnaw and gnash and groan together'.

[151] *Medieval English Lyrics*, p. 34.

[152] *The English and Scottish Popular Ballad*, ed. by Francis James Child, 10 vols (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882–98), nos 12 and 13.

[153] *Owre kynge went forth to Normandy*. *Index*, no. 2716; Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 426.

[154] On nationalism in the Middle English period, see Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, and n. 65, above.

calls 'hate lyric'.[155] I quote a stanza from Minot's poem on the English victory over the Scots at Bannockburn, *Skottess out of berwik and of abirdene*:

> Rughfute riueling, now kindels þi care,
> berebag with þi boste, þi biging es bare;
> fals wretche and forsworn, whider wiltou fare?
> busk þe into brig, and abide þare.
> > þare, wretche, saltou won and wery þe while;
> > þi dwelling in donde es done for þi gile.[156] (lines 19–24)

Certainly celebratory, but also satirical and abusive, the mockery heightened by the packed, vivid lines with their insistent alliteration. The poem's intensity might be lyrical, but its vituperative content is not.

A different case is presented by *Hit wes up-on a screþorsday þat vre louerd aros*. This poem, entitled by Brown 'The Bargain of Judas' and probably dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, is the earliest recorded ballad, an isolated example that suggests the existence of other ballads contemporary with it. In its vivid, and biblically very free, rendering of Judas betraying Christ and Peter denying him, the *Judas* has much in common with the later mystery plays. The poem is found in the same Trinity College, Cambridge manuscript as *Wen þe turuf is þi tuur*, a miscellany of materials including numerous bits of vernacular poetry of a proverbial kind.[157] Significantly, the Judas poem is afforded more dignified treatment than these scraps.[158] It has a page to itself, and is nicely set out, in stanzas. Though regularly included in collections of medieval lyrics, presumably on the basis of its shortness, this poem is thoroughly ballad-like in its narrativity, objectivity, and use of ballad metre. Its intensity and compression can certainly be lyric qualities, but they are equally characteristic of ballads. So overall I wouldn't really consider the poem a lyric. A modern, sung, version, of doubtful authenticity, was collected by John Jacob Niles in his *Ballad Book*.[159] It too is more narrative than lyric.

For a final example, let me take another humorous poem from Richard Hill's commonplace book, like the *Judas* regularly included in collections of Middle English lyrics, but in this case satirical rather than typically lyrical: the light-heartedly misogynist fifteenth-century carol *When nettuls in wynter bryng forth rosys red*, a litany of impossibilia with the burden 'Whane thes thynges foloyng be done to owr intent, | Than put women in trust and confydent'.[160] Satire is essentially unlyrical, but, as well as being in carol form, this poem is charmingly absurd rather than hostile, conjuring up some delightfully outrageous pictures. I particularly like whitings walking forests (stanza 3), and mice moving mountains with wagging of their

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[155] 'Political Lyrics', p. 185.

[156] *Index*, no. 3080; Robbins, *HP*, no. 9. 'Rough-footed rawhide boot, now your trouble is starting, | bag-carrier with your boasting, your building (home) is bare; | false wretch and forsworn, whither will you go? | Hurry to Bruges and stay there. | There, wretch, shall you dwell, and curse the while; | your dwelling in Dundee is done with for your guile'.

[157] B.14.39, f. 34r. *Index*, no. 1649; Brown, *XIII*, no. 25. See Reichl's detailed study of this manuscript in *Religiöse Dichtung*, pp. 116–18 and 375–78; also Scahill, pp. 19–23. Brown prints two ballad lines as one, and does not separate the stanzas.

[158] For example, ff. 27v–29v contain 24 little proverbs, in English, French, and Latin, the French and Latin versions on f. 28r apparently squeezed in later among the English entries.

[159] John Jacob Niles, *The Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), pp. 91–93.

[160] Balliol College, Oxford, 354, f. 250v. *Index*, no. 3999; Greene, *Early English Carols*, no. 402. Greene prints the

tails (stanza 6) — mowing corn with waving of their tails in another version. This poem is far from central to the lyric genre, but it is displays lyric elements in its songlike form, its vivid images, and its playful exuberance.

Conclusion

What, then, can the word 'lyric' reasonably be taken to imply in a Middle English context? It will be a metrical composition in rhyming stanzas, usually non-narrative, with an aesthetic, rather than merely practical, appeal and a poetic 'lift,' even if its subject is trivial, coarse, or violent. To a greater or lesser degree it will be characterised by the four properties with which I began: brevity, intensity, focus on the moment, and shaped form. Most examples will present at least one of the three faces I selected: song, group festivity or celebration, and personal poetry. Particular Middle English lyrics are likely to be more narrowly defined by one or more of the characteristic topoi, which sometimes assume generic significance in themselves: among others, the love complaint, *reverdie*, *chanson d'aventure*, *chanson de délaissée*, Marian lyric, Crucifixion lyric, Nativity song or lullaby, the meditation on *timor mortis*, *ubi sunt*, or the grave — the last three topics tending to produce moral *sententiae* although they can be treated lyrically. As well, or instead, the lyric in later Middle English may be defined by a very specific metrical form, notably the carol, ballade, rondeau, and virelai. Lyric passages and lyric elements occur in poems that are not themselves lyrics. Again, lyrics, in Middle English as in other literatures, are by no means always 'lyrical' in the popular modern sense, meaning something approaching 'rhapsodic'. Nevertheless, we should probably not simply throw out 'lyrical'. Its problematic nuance reflects a persistent sense that ugliness, cruelty, and utter despair are inconsistent with lyricism.

In the introduction to his anthology *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics*, Robert Stevick observes that 'the Elizabethan notion of lyrics as poetry composed to be sung and the modern notion of lyrics as expressing intensely personal emotion can be seriously confusing' when used in a medieval context.[161] As we have seen, the Renaissance concept is indebted to the Greeks, the modern one to the Romantics. While Stevick's comment about Elizabethan and modern concepts of lyric causing confusion is perfectly valid — at least for people with more knowledge of Renaissance literature and nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetic theory than of Middle English poetry, these concepts are actually highly relevant; they just need to be appropriately modified and contextualised. Lyric poetry meets similar personal and social needs in different ages with different ways of looking at the world: it expresses love-longing, whether autobiographical or artistic, in Sappho, Catullus, *Foweles in the frith*, and modern popular song; spiritual quest in Augustine and the anonymous Middle English poet who translated his words, as well as in Donne and Herbert; civic celebration and fervour in Pindar, Horace, the Agincourt Carol, and modern national anthems; and, more modest, but not to be passed over, simple *joie de vivre*, in light-hearted songs enjoyed at gatherings for entertainment and pleasure throughout the ages. To appreciate medieval forms of literature and art we do need to take into account the ways in which their contemporaries may have related to them — insofar as that information can be recovered. But we can't replicate the thinking of an

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version in the fifteenth-century Bodleian, Eng. poet. e.1, f. 43v, followed by variants.

[161] p. x.

earlier age. What we can do is take advantage of our broader perspective and our hindsight; a judicious use of the word *lyric* is one way of doing that.

The Middle English Lyric

Anne Marie D'Arcy

Introduction

At the close of Umberto Eco's novel The Name of the Rose, the narrator describes the vestiges of a vast monastic book collection as 'a kind of lesser library, a symbol of the greater vanished one: a library made up of fragments, quotations, unfinished sentences, amputated stumps of books'.1 Reading these lines calls to mind one of the principal prob-lems concerning the study of Middle English lyrics. Even though many lyrics have been preserved, many more have perished, or described in a fifth-century hymn from the Paschale Carmen of Sedulius (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, hereafter CSEL