Techniques of Aural Poetry in the Middle English Lyric.

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TECHNIQUES OF AURAL POETRY IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRIC

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in

The Department of English

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I express my deepest gratitude to Professor Thomas A. Kirby, whose guidance and encouragement enabled me to carry this project to completion. I must also acknowledge the valuable assistance of Mrs. Martha Irby and Mrs. Frances Coleman of the Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University. Finally, to Mrs. Ann Chenney, who typed the final draft, my sincerest thanks.
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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, medievalists have expressed dissatisfaction with contemporary criticism of Middle English lyrics, a dissatisfaction stemming from the failure of modern scholarship to keep ever in mind the features of medieval lyric which distinguish it from modern lyric. Although acknowledging the public and didactic nature of most medieval literature, scholars have not given adequate attention to the characteristics of religious and secular lyric resulting from its having been designed for a listening audience.

The variety of extant medieval literature precludes characterizing the age as pre-literate, but accounts of public readings and entertainment in the form of recitation and reading aloud support the idea of the age as one of transition between the period of oral composition and that of visual presentation made possible by printing. The aural features of medieval verse narrative already noted by scholars -- direct address; appeals for attention; references to hearing, telling and singing; opening and closing prayers; episodic, linear progression of narration; frequent use of formulaic expressions -- indicate that medieval poets were conscious of the demands of oral presentation. The appearance of these elements also in the lyrics places them within this same tradition.

The salient feature of aural poetry is repetition in sound and imagery. Middle English poets often employ rhyme and alliteration not only for aesthetic
purposes but also as an aid to memory and as formulae reinforcing theme. Doublets function to fill out a line, expand an idea, complete a rhyme; and they were additionally employed thematically. Houndes and haukekes and fau and griss, for example, suggesting the shortlived pleasures of wealth in this world, occur regularly in the treatment of the ubi sunt motif; and phrases such as moder and meide and flesh and blood appear exclusively in religious lyrics on the Virgin and the Crucifixion, respectively. Although the needs of the listening audience restricted the poet to familiar imagery, he was free to develop an extended image or to catalog a series of images, occasionally venturing a striking figure based on the audience's familiarity with the conventional. Puns, a device immediately apprehended by the ear, are characteristic of these lyrics.

Middle English lyric exhibits a limited number of themes and forms. The religious lyrics, for example, reveal only three significant themes: the implications of the Nativity and Crucifixion; glorification of the supplication to Christ and the Virgin; and the contemplation of mortality and the vanity of earthly pursuits. In treating theme, the poet assumes one or three roles as speaker. He either describes a scene or presents it dramatically in monologue or dialogue, most conspicuously in the Nativity and Crucifixion lyrics. Secondly, in the prayers and hymns to Christ and Mary, he speaks for or with his audience; and, finally, in the homiletic verse he addresses the audience as preacher. Verse forms are the popular and familiar -- couplets,
cross rhyme and tail rhyme stanzas utilizing a simple and colloquial style.

A courtly tradition combining the complex verse forms of ballade and rhyme royal with aureate diction emerges with the rise of the vernacular after 1350, heralding the transition to written presentation. Characteristic of fifteenth-century lyrics are references to reading and writing, the convention of the courtly love letter, a concern with language and literary style, and the development of devices demanding visual apprehension, such as anagrams and acrostics. Aural poetry survived in didactic devotional poetry and in song-lyric, but visual poetry predominated after the sixteenth century as a result of the opportunities presented by the printed page for greater freedom and complexity through the union of visual and aural perceptions.
CHAPTER I

SOME PROBLEMS IN THE STUDY OF MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRIC

The past few years have seen among medieval scholars a growing dissatisfaction with the treatment of Middle English lyrics. In separate articles appearing in 1966, Robert D. Stevick and Edmund Reiss complained that modern literary criticism has ignored the lyrics.¹ Stevick attributed this neglect to "the attractions of Chaucer, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Piers Plowman, the Wakefield pageants, etc.," adding that even those who have surveyed "critically the verses and their traditions . . . have not supplied the extent and rigor of critical study we may wish for and expect" (p. 103). Reiss pointed to "a prejudice linking good medieval lyric poetry with courtly tradition" as part of the reason "Middle English lyric has been overshadowed by its Latin and continental vernacular counterparts" (pp. 373-374). Both Stevick and Reiss advocated as a remedy the rigorous application of the tools and methods of contemporary literary criticism.

In the years which have followed the publication of these two articles, the lyrics have been accorded considerable attention. Many scholarly arti-

¹See Stevick, "The Criticism of Middle English Lyrics," MP, 64, 103-117; and Reiss, "A Critical Approach to the Middle English Lyric," CE, 27 (1966), 373-379; hereafter cited as "Criticism" and "Critical Approach" respectively.
cles have appeared, doctoral dissertations have been written, several new editions of the lyrics have made these poems readily available in paperback, and at least four substantial studies of them have been published. Peter Dronke's *The Medieval Lyric* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), a survey of the medieval lyric of western Europe, devotes only two chapters to the Middle English lyric, however. Raymond Oliver has offered a brief, broad survey of the anonymous lyric from 1200 to 1500 in *Poems Without Names* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970). The other two studies have limited themselves entirely to the religious poems: Rosemary Woolf's *English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) focuses on the place of these poems within a tradition of meditative verse; and Sarah Appleton Weber, in *Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969) has examined the impact of medieval theology on lyric form.

Despite these efforts, however, we find George Kane, in the April 1972 volume of *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* complaining once again about the treatment of the secular lyrics in particular. They are, according to Kane, "among the worst served by medievalists of the writings from the

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2"A Short Essay on the Middle English Secular Lyric," 73, 110-121; hereafter cited as "Short Essay."
Middle English period" (p. 110). "The criticism of these poems," he claims, "is largely affective and subjective, their scholarship mainly occasional and unrelated" (p. 110). Kane's indictment of the results of modern criticism of the secular lyrics can be extended to the criticism of medieval lyrics in general.

Much of this dissatisfaction is traceable to two problems, one presented by the lyrics themselves, the other by medieval literature in general. The first is the scope of the material traditionally characterized as "lyric" and the concomitant difficulty this presents the critic of finding a way into his subject. The solutions often employed to overcome this problem have been less than satisfactory for several reasons. The second problem is that some of the commonplaces about medieval literature so frequently acknowledged by medievalists have nonetheless been only partially considered in the criticism of the lyrics.

The critics of medieval lyric have been frustrated in their attempts to define the term "lyric" partly because of the custom of calling "lyric" any poem which cannot otherwise be classified as epic or dramatic and partly because of the diversity represented in the standard editions of the Middle English lyrics. Arthur K. Moore, in attempting to characterize Middle

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3 The standard editions, those by Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, are listed here with the abbreviations used hereafter in the text
English poems lyric poetry in The Secular Lyric in Middle English acknowledges the difficulty in defining its limits:

Partly as a consequence of fragmentation, medieval lyric runs an eccentric course, never one thing or two, but always a rapidly shifting concept. No definition, therefore, comprehends the diversity of its parts. The lyric in Middle English ranges from naked ejaculation to extensive analyses of feeling, from predominantly narrative song to wholly subjective statement. It is religious and secular, sung and unsung. To describe it in terms of length, content, point of view, form, origin, or manner of presentation is to invite a number of vitiating exceptions (pp. 4-5).

Once the critic has recognized the diversity of Middle English lyric, however, how is he to approach the poems in a fashion which will be meaningful and rewarding? Biographical criticism is an avenue closed to the medievalist since most of these poems are anonymous; but even if they were to identify the lyrics. All of the poems quoted in the text are from these editions unless otherwise noted and will be cited as numbered in the edition in which they appear.


4(Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1951); hereafter cited as Secular Lyric.
not, such an approach would scarcely be useful because, as most critics agree, the authors were generally "declaiming or arguing the commonplaces of [their] times within the limits of conventional form." The historical survey presents certain other problems. The date of a given manuscript, of course, bears no necessary relationship to the date of a poem's composition. Trinity College Cambridge MS. 599, which preserves the text of a brief lament beginning "My lefe ys faren in a lond," dates from about 1500, but it is generally agreed that the poem itself is the same one sung by Chaunticleer in Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale, written more than a century earlier. And the date of the manuscript of "Sumer Is Icumen In" is a matter of some dispute; despite evidence dating it from the middle of the thirteenth century, Manfred Bukofzer contends that the musical accompaniment precludes such an early date for the poem. Stevick has noted with relief that

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5Arthur K. Moore, "Lyric Personae and Prying Critics," Southern Humanities Review, 1 (1967), 44. See also Oliver, pp. 13-14; and Woolf, pp. 6, 8.


7Bukofzer, in "Sumer is Icumen in: A Revision," University of California Publications in Music, vol. 11, no. 2 (1944), treats the problem of date at some length (see pp. 79-114) and concludes that the rota could not have been earlier than 1310 (p. 92); but B. Schofield, in "The Provenance and Date of 'Sumer is Icumen in,'" The Music Review, 9 (May, 1948), 81-86, insists that paleographical evidence indicates a date no later than 1260 (p. 86).
"the exegetes of myth, syndrome, and the conflict of social classes" have apparently "found the lyrics too thin to supply the stuff of their doctrines." 8

The most popular solution to the problem of diversity has been the division of the lyrics into secular and religious categories. Although helpful in reducing the scope of the material to be treated, this approach frequently can be misleading. For one thing, it tends to overlook or minimize the contributions of one category to the other. Literary historians who have studied the development of medieval lyric in Latin and the vernacular have concluded that the secular and the religious lyric developed simultaneously, each influencing the other. Peter Dronke states conclusions shared by F. J. E. Raby and Philip Schuyler Allen. 9 Comparing the songs of the Cambridge MS. to those in other large collections of Latin and vernacular poetry from the twelfth century to the end of the Renaissance, Dronke notes that

the similarity in the whole range of lyrical modes and genres is so striking that we can conclude that already around the year 1000 practically all the basic types of medieval and Renaissance lyrics had evolved. Nor is there any need to suppose that these developments had occurred only in an exclusive clerical milieu; on the contrary, in secular lyrics at

8"Criticism," p. 103.

least the clerks must have been quite as much indebted to vernacular poets as the other way round. . . .
The lyrical repertoire that was largely shared by all medieval Europe . . . is . . . the product of ancient and scarcely separable traditions of courtly, clerical, and popular song (p. 30).

Further along, in a chapter on the rise of the religious lyric, Dronke acknowledges that "the first heights of achievement in our extant repertoire of medieval European lyric occur in the religious mode . . . more than two and a half centuries before vernacular and secular lyrics survive in any abundance"; but he is quick to add: "That there were achievements of comparable stature at still earlier times and in profane and vernacular as well as in sacred Latin song, I have little doubt; but through the accidents of preservation, in a world where the lettered were predominantly the clergy, these have not survived" (p. 32).

As a consequence of the exchange of influence, the dividing line between secular and religious lyric in Middle English verse is often blurred, if not wholly indistinct, and the classification of some of these lyrics is a matter of the critic's personal whims or his individual critical stance. The brief thirteenth-century lyric beginning "Foweles in be frith" is a good example of the sort of ambiguity which virtually defies this either-or classification:

\begin{verbatim}
Foweles in be frith.
be fisses in be flod,
and i mon waxe wod.
Mulch sorw I walke with
for beste of bon and blod.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{XIII} \textsuperscript{8}
Despite the apparent simplicity of this short poem, it has been the subject of a good deal of critical commentary. Its classification as secular or religious depends to a considerable extent on what the reader sees as the implications of the word _beste_ in the last line. E. K. Chambers characterizes the poem as a lament, "probably amorous," and several later critics have concurred. Theo. Stemmler includes it in his anthology _Medieval English Love Lyrics_ (1970); and Moore, also assuming it to be secular, dismisses it with the single comment that "the nature setting . . . is insufficiently articulated with the poet's love-longing" (_Secular Lyric_, p. 29). Dronke gives a rather full paragraph to a characterization of the poem as an excellent, though rather conventional love complaint (pp. 144-45). It is probable that a number of these writers are led to their conclusions by the fact that most editions of the poem gloss the word _beste_ in line 5 to mean only _best_; thus the final line of the poem translates "the best (person)" (Robert Stevick, _100_, p. 25), or "the best creature living" (R. T. Davies, _Medieval English Lyrics_, p. 52). Even Carleton Brown, in his edition of thirteenth-century lyrics, glosses the word as _best_ and gives a reference to this poem and line (_XIII_, p. 243). Dronke, who translates the line as "the best of bone and blood," goes on to

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characterize it as "a phrase which was probably even then an alliterative cliché" (p. 145) in the conventional idealization of the lady common to the complaint.

Other writers, however, see the poem as more than simply a lover's complaint. Beste translates more properly to mean beast or creature, a noun rather than the superlative of the adjective. Such a meaning removes all of the connotations of idealization which Dronke and others see in the final line. The editors of the Middle English Dictionary cite this poem and line as the earliest appearance of the word in this form in the language.\(^{11}\) At least three critics, as a consequence, have analyzed the poem as essentially religious in nature. According to an item in Explicator by David Luisi, the poem reflects "the tension between what is as it should be (the natural order of the universe [reflected by the 'foweles in be frith' and the 'fisses in be flod']) and what is as it ought not to be (the human capacity to oppose that order)."\(^{12}\) Ruta Sikora\(^{13}\) and Edmund Reiss\(^{14}\) carry the poem's

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\(^{12}\)"Fowels in the Frith," 25 (1967), no. 47.

\(^{13}\)"The Structural Simplicity of the Early Middle English Lyric: Three Examples," Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny, 11 (1964), 236.

religious implications even further, citing scriptural passages which they see echoed in the poem. Miss Sikora cites Genesis i, 21: "And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the water brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind; and God saw that it was good." With this reference in mind, she sees the poem as a kind of commentary on the whole action of Genesis, man's violation of the natural order through original sin; and she concludes that the speaker's sadness comes from his recognition of his separation from God and the cause of that separation. Reiss arrives at a similar conclusion, citing, however, Matthew viii, 20, and Luke ix, 58: "Foxes have their holes, the birds their roosts, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." Certainly no more far-fetched than any of the foregoing interpretations is the possibility that this poem makes indirect reference to the Crucifixion, the speaker's "sorw" emanating from his awareness of Christ's agony on the cross, a frequent theme in the religious lyrics. Such a reading would permit a double meaning for beste, not only creature, but best of creatures. Both of these designations would be appropriate for God incarnate, subsuming at the same time the speaker's identity with Christ ("Take up thy cross and follow me").

The difficulty, illustrated by the preceding discussion, of ascertaining the motives behind many of the lyrics suggests the hazards of what Stevick ("Criticism," p. 103) calls "the all-or-none" doctrine of patristic exegesis. Many scholars have voiced serious doubts about the validity of this approach.
in the interpretation of medieval literature when it is applied as universally
as its advocates recommend. Morton W. Bloomfield, in an article on "Sym-
bolism in Medieval Literature,"\textsuperscript{15} voices six objections which seem well
taken: (1) it assumes the method to be unique to the period and does not
distinguish between literature and theology; (2) it emphasizes a symbolic
rather than a literal approach to scripture which is uncharacteristic of the
late Middle Ages; (3) the four-fold method of interpreting scripture which it
presupposes was never systematically applied; (4) it does not distinguish
between scripture "dictated by God in the form of the Holy Ghost and literary
works written purely by erring and sinful man"; (5) it permits no way, other
than tradition, for correcting or proving interpretations ("with sixteen mean-
ings for the peacock, who is to decide between them?"); (6) it is "essentially
simplistic [and] imposes a non-historical order and system on what was in
fact disordered and unsystematic."

The patristic exegetes proceed from the dubious assumption that
literature, even pagan literature, in the Middle Ages was, as D. W. Robert-
son explains it, "not to be enjoyed in itself, but was to be used for the pur-
pose of furthering charity; [consequently] it was necessary to interpret [lit-

\textsuperscript{15} MP, 56 (1958), 73-81.
erature] in the same way that it was necessary to interpret the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, according to Robertson, "Medieval Christian poetry, and by Christian poetry [is meant] all serious poetry written by Christian authors, even that usually called 'secular,' is always allegorical when the message of charity or some corollary of it is not evident on the surface" (p. 14).

There are a number of difficulties which arise from the application of these suppositions to Middle English literature, particularly the lyrics. First, the problems of dating and authorship make it difficult to ascertain the motives behind the poems unless such motives are actually stated or otherwise indicated in the poems themselves. Moreover, considerable evidence exists to show that churchmen themselves, to whom the tools of allegorical interpretation would surely have been readily available, were frequently unable to utilize secular lyrics to promote Christian charity. A good example of one such lyric is "Maiden in the mor lay," which Robertson uses to support his argument for the validity of the patristic method:

Maiden in the mor lay--
in the mor lay--
seuenyst fulle, seuenist fulle.
Maiden in the mor lay--
in the mor lay--
seuenistes fulle ant a day.

This poem, according to Robertson, "cannot be said to make much sense" unless "we take note of the figures and signs in it," whereupon it "makes perfectly good sense" (p. 27). That she lay seven nights and a day signifies, according to Robertson's interpretation of the elements in the poem, the wilderness of the world (the moor) under the Old Law before the Light of the World (Christ: "I am the Day.") dawned. The maiden ate primroses (a sign of fleshly beauty) and violets (for humility) and drank "the cool water of God's grace." Her bower was made of the red rose (of martyrdom or charity) and the lily of purity. "Indeed," concludes Robertson, "the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . is the maiden in the moor" (p. 27).
Apparently, however, to the detriment of Robertson's method, which E. Talbot Donaldson has termed in this instance "so unrevealing that it can be considered only disappointing if not entirely irrelevant," not all medieval churchmen were able to see the maiden as the Virgin Mary. Richard L. Greene has shown in an article written for Speculum in 1952, the year following Robertson's essay, that "Maiden in the mor lay" was one of the \textit{cantilenae teatrales, turpes, et seculares} found objectionable by Bishop Richard de Ledrede, a Franciscan friar who held the See of Ossory from 1317 until 1360. The Red Book of Ossory, a volume of official documents maintained by the diocese for six centuries, contains a number of Latin lyrics composed, according to the note which accompanies them, to replace the secular lyrics in use by the clergy. The ninth of the sixty Latin poems is a Nativity hymn written to be sung instead of "Maiden in the mor lay," the first line of which prefaces the Latin lyrics to indicate the melody to which the Latin was to be sung.

Greene's article casts serious doubts on the validity in this instance of the sort of interpretation advocated by Robertson; and there are bits of

\footnotesize


evidence elsewhere which reinforce these doubts. The Gemma Ecclesiastica of Giraldus Cambrensis records that Bishop Northall pronounced anathema upon anyone who should ever again sing the lyric "Swete lamman dhin are" within the limits of his diocese after a priest, kept awake all night by singing in the churchyard, began the early morning mass by intoning the lyric instead of the Dominus vobiscum.19 Robert Mannyng of Brunne tells the story of the cursed dancers of Colbek as a warning against the singing of secular songs in the churchyard,20 and Rossell Hope Robbins credits the composition of many religious songs to the efforts of the Franciscans to replace secular carols with hymns.21 Finally, the haphazard preservation of many secular lyrics, on fly-leaves, as marginalia, on the back of official documents, and as graffiti, suggests the small worth accorded them by clerics and scribes.

Some of the arguments which Robertson offers in support of patristic exegesis are open to question as well. For example, he justifies the obscurity of the four-fold allegorical approach by asserting that "if the great truths of the faith were expressed too openly, the result might be to cast

19Quoted by Brown, XIII, p. xi.


pearls before swine, or to enable the foolish to repeat without understanding," adding that "this reasoning explains why Christ spoke to the multitudes in parables" (pp. 11-12). It is clear, however, that in their context in the New Testament, parables were employed to clarify Christian doctrine, not to obscure it. Finally, most literary historians agree that an important motive behind the rise of vernacular religious literature in the Middle Ages was the desire of the Church to spread Christian truth among the ignorant, who unlike the clergy would scarcely have possessed the depth of knowledge necessary to comprehend the "obscure and puzzling combinations . . . frequently involving tantalizing surface inconsistencies" which Robertson insists were a part of "the normal office of the poet" (p. 12).

In all fairness, it must be admitted that the application of Robertson's method to religious literature can often be illuminating; however, the difficulty in ascertaining the motive behind many of the lyrics, as well as the probability that "lewed" men composed a large segment of the audience for whom these poems were intended, makes the wholesale application of patristic exegesis unprofitable at best and frequently misleading. And as another skeptic has put it, "Even the saints, one suspects, were not always sanctimonious." 22

22William Matthews, "Inherited Impediments in Medieval Literary History," in Medieval Secular Literature: Four Essays, ed. William
If we have dwelled over-long on the hazards of the patristic method, it is because they present an obvious example of the danger inherent in any attempt to impose upon one kind of literature a critical method developed in the study of another kind of literature. The difficulty modern criticism has had in avoiding this very thing brings us to the second factor figuring prominently in the current dissatisfaction with the results of the criticism of the lyrics -- failure to maintain the proper frame of reference in analyzing the poems despite agreement among medievalists as to the characteristics of medieval literature in general and the lyrics in particular. Three features of Middle English lyric -- its objective, impersonal point of view, its didactic intention, and its aural nature -- require brief mention.

It has become commonplace in studies of the lyrics for medievalists to proclaim the difference between these poems and modern notions of what lyric poetry is or ought to be. In *Wisdom and Number: Toward a Critical Appraisal of the Middle English Religious Lyric* (1962), Stephen Manning prefaces his discussion with the assertion that "these poems were not written in anticipation of modern preconceptions about the lyrics. They are *songs* [his italics]. And they must be judged as such."23 Although Rosemary Matthews, Contributions of the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, I (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965), 12. Hereafter cited as "Inherited Impediments."

23(Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press), p. 1.
Woolf is in disagreement with Manning's characterization of the religious lyrics as songs, she nevertheless echoes his contention that these poems differ from modern lyrics; discussing the dangers inherent in "classifying . . . medieval poetry according to classical genres," she adds that

the religious lyrics possess very few of the qualities that the term "lyric" may lead the reader to expect. In English criticism the word "lyric" has descended from the sixteenth century, gathering associations along the way. It now suggests a poem short, delightful, and melodious, and with a sweetness and light-heartedness that distinguishes it from more serious and reflective poems. The description does not fit the medieval religious lyrics. Many of these are long, few were set to music, and all of them are devotionally and didactically serious.24

In the footnote appended to this passage and in her introduction, she further clarifies her objection to the modern definition: its insistence on musical qualities and "the even more insidiously misleading" (p. 1) emphasis on the subjective motive which the term "lyric" acquired in the nineteenth century. Medieval poets, she insists, "are not concerned with the question of how they feel individually, but only with what kind of response their subject should properly arouse in Everyman" (p. 6).

It is this subjective element in contemporary definitions to which Raymond Oliver also objects; in identifying the intentions of Middle English

lyric as celebration, persuasion, and definition, he notes that these "motives are practical and dynamic; they are concerned with affecting people's lives, either directly or by a kind of intellectual conversion. The poems are not meant to be 'things of beauty [and] joys forever,' valuable in themselves" (p. 13). In developing this point Oliver reiterates: "medieval poetic intentions, always practical, are mediated by publicly accessible points of view, not by private personae, in order to affect behavior" (p. 14). These poems, he insists, are "meant to affect the lives of large classes of people, not to express the delights and agonies of unique, post-Romantic souls" (p. 8). While Oliver, Woolf, and Manning utilize these distinctions between Middle English and modern lyric as points of departure for their studies, their failure to keep these differences in mind in conjunction with the other important features of medieval literature -- its predominantly didactic function and its aural nature -- often prevents their recognition of the full significance of some of their conclusions.

The didactic motive of most medieval literature requires little commentary: the efficacy of literature in teaching is universally acknowledged. How this function is accomplished and to what extent it takes precedence over other considerations are variables. But as a consequence of the dominant role of the Church in the daily life of the Middle Ages, a moral or didactic purpose justified the existence of much medieval literature. The second feature requires considerably more attention than it has been accorded.
Medievalists acknowledge the oral performance for which many medieval poems were designed and point to the possibility of oral transmission in attempting to account for some of the variant readings in multiple manuscripts of the same poem. Such an acknowledgment implies an assumption whose importance has heretofore been overlooked: between the time of orally-composed poetry for recitation and the period of written or printed literature designed for an audience of readers, there was a transitional period in which literate poets composed for largely illiterate audiences and perhaps recorded in written form the compositions of oral poets who were themselves unable to write. Such literature, written down but designed for oral presentation before an audience of listeners, has throughout this study been termed "aural" poetry to distinguish it from the orally-composed, orally presented literature of an earlier age. Evidence to be presented in Chapter II indicates that aural literature flourished in England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries before the introduction of printing from the Continent.

Despite the commonly acknowledged features of medieval literature, its critics have not fully explored their implications in analyzing the characteristics of Middle English lyrics. The difficulty in maintaining the frame of reference necessitated by these features inheres in the fact that the tools and methods of modern literary criticism have developed largely from and for investigating printed literature written for an audience of readers. Over and above the contributions of contemporary scholarship to the editing and
glossing of the lyrics (by no means an inconsiderable task), medievalists have largely confined themselves to a seemingly endless preoccupation with the subtleties of those poems which appeal to modern tastes. Hence the reasons for the vague dissatisfaction of Stevick, Reiss, and Kane. In a paper read in 1964 at UCLA before a colloquium on medieval secular literature, William Matthews warned against dwelling on the best and ignoring the rest:

the literary historian . . . still proportions his space and frames his commentary according to present-day aesthetic judgments. And in so doing he quite often has to ignore the medieval popularity or importance of the works that he is discussing . . . no one should quarrel on aesthetic grounds with this emphasis [on the best literature of the Middle Ages]; as ordinary readers, we are always going to value or neglect older literature as it happens to appeal to our own tastes. But history is not the same thing as aesthetics, even though aesthetics is a proper subject for history . . . . The literary historian [charged with aesthetic discrimination as well as history] is predisposed to be the historian of successes that we still approve. The result is that he is not only uncommunicative about former successes that we now count as failures; he is also most reluctant to talk much about that important and fascinating subject, the qualities and characteristics of literary mediocrity and badness.25

Matthews points out that underlying this procedure is "a belief in universals, a belief that what we admire in Chaucer or Walther or Juan Ruiz is always admirable" (p. 2), but the converse of this premise -- that what in Middle
English literature is boring to us was also boring to the medieval audience -- is not valid.

Analyzing the lyrics from the point of view that oral presentation largely determined their form and structure, as well as their treatment of theme and image, accomplishes two things: it confirms our judgments about the best of these poems and enables us to better understand the appeal of others to the medieval listener. Before turning to the lyrics themselves, however, it is necessary to present the evidence indicative of their predominantly aural nature and to suggest some of the effects of oral performance on the developing written tradition.
CHAPTER II

EVIDENCE OF ORAL PRESENTATION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

The origins of Middle English vernacular poetry are uncertain. It is obvious, however, that the desire of the Church to spread its doctrine among the unlettered masses figured importantly in the rise of vernacular religious literature in England, especially in the fourteenth century. In his study of English penitential lyric, Frank Allen Patterson has suggested that early fourteenth-century mysticism gave impetus to the development of the English religious lyric;¹ noting that the English mystics, like St. Godric and Richard Rolle, for example, felt compelled "to create for the ignorant laity a deep religious life," Patterson suggests that "the vernacular came into use for the more practical purpose" of religious teaching: "The missionary spirit, the practical side of mysticism, was the leading motive in the development of the vernacular religious lyric" (pp. 18-19). Patterson then demonstrates that many of the religious lyrics are metrical renditions of Latin liturgical prayers, hymns, and psalms into English. The origin of secular lyric is even less certain. The theory has been advanced that secular lyric arose from dance-songs associated with pagan festivals in

¹The Middle English Penitential Lyric (1911; rpt. New York: AMS Reprint, 1966),
Beatrice H. N. Geary has shown that the verse forms and metrical patterns of fifteenth-century lyric suggest a relationship to popular song, and an investigation of the stanza patterns of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lyrics bears out her conclusions. For the moment, however, it will perhaps suffice to say that the available evidence suggests that much of the vernacular lyric, whether religious or secular, originated for or with the masses. Because the Middle English audience, especially prior to 1350, was largely unlettered and because the production of reading matter was a laborious and expensive task, the poet designed his poetry to be presented orally -- by singing, chanting, reciting or reading aloud -- whether his purpose was spiritual inspiration or solace, moral edification, or simply entertainment. With the growing prosperity of the middle classes, the development of literary patronage, and the invention of printing, English

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4Exact figures based on my own examination of the poems in XIII, RL XIV, RL XV, SL, and HP are discussed in Chapter IV and appear in charted form in Appendix.
literature of the late fourteenth century moved toward written presentation. The transition is even more clearly revealed in fifteenth-century literature. Even so, the techniques and many of the devices demanded by oral presentation continued to influence the form, structure, and imagery of English poetry right up to the Renaissance.

Three types of evidence attest to the aural nature of early Middle English literature. Circumstantial evidence indicates that even the lettered man of the Middle Ages relied upon his ear as much as his eye to fix the written word in his mind. Moreover, the eyewitness testimony of writers of the period provides references to and descriptions of public readings and oral performances of literary works. The most reliable evidence, however, is provided by the poetry itself -- internal evidence in the form of the devices utilized by the poets and the structure which oral delivery demanded. All of this evidence can be utilized to establish the place of the Middle English lyric within the framework of an aural tradition, a tradition which began to disappear with the rise of a literate public.

Circumstantial evidence is always weak since it is open to more than one interpretation. In From Script to Print: An Introduction to Medieval Vernacular Literature, however, H. J. Chaytor records several pieces of
such evidence which are suggestive of the aural nature of medieval literature. He contends that "the medieval reader, with few exceptions, did not read as we do; he was in the stage of our muttering childhood learner; each word was for him a separate entity and at times a problem which he whispered to himself when he had found the solution" (p. 10). According to Chaytor, when a scribe or copyist was "confronted . . . by a manuscript often crabbed in script and full of contractions," he relied not upon "whether he had seen, but whether he had heard this or that word before; he brought not a visual but an auditory memory to his task," having learned "to rely on the memory of spoken sounds, not upon the interpretation of written signs. And when he had deciphered a word, he pronounced it audibly" (p. 14). Chaytor supports his conclusions by citing the testimony of an eighth-century copyist who appended to his completed chore a description of his labor: "Tres digiti scribunt, duo oculi vident, una lingua loquitur, totum corpus laborat."6

The arrangement of certain monastic libraries testifies to the accuracy of the scribe's description. Libraries in the cloisters at the Abbeys of Durham and Gloucester contain enclosed carrels placed next to the windows. Chaytor

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6Ibid., p. 14, n. 1. "Three fingers write, two eyes behold, the tongue pronounces, the whole body labors."
quotes the description of their function from the Rites of Durham and suggests that the reason for these enclosures was that "the buzz of whispering and muttering" as the monks went about their reading and copying would have otherwise been intolerable.

Although Chaytor's efforts are directed ultimately toward encouraging modern scholarship to reevaluate its approach to the emendation of medieval texts, the evidence underlying his conclusions points up the extent to which the medieval writer or copyist relied upon auditory rather than visual impressions. It is highly probable that the audience for whom medieval literature was intended also depended largely upon the ear rather than the eye.

Circumstantial evidence of the currency of oral presentation for entertainment during the later Middle Ages is provided by the variety of terms used to designate those who performed before live audiences. Although the distinctions among conteur, jongleur, troubadour, trouvère, and minstrel have been obscured by time, these terms probably once distinguished various

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7[There were] in every wyndowe iii pewes or Carrells where every one of the old monkes had his Carrell severall by himself, that when they had dynd they dyd resorte to that place of Cloister, and there studied upon there bookes, everyone in his Carrell all the after none into evensong tyme. . . . All there pewes or Carrells was all fynely wainscotted, and verye close all but the forepart which had carved worke that gave light in at there Carrell doures of wainscott; and in every Carrell was a deske to lye there bookes on; and the Carrells was no greater than from one stanchell of the wyndowe to another" (Chaytor, pp. 18-19).
kinds of public performers of literary works. Roger Sherman Loomis attributes the dissemination of the Arthurian legend to "the wide-ranging activity of professional Breton storytellers, conteurs, who, speaking French, were welcomed as entertainers where ever that language was understood." In the same tradition as the conteurs were troubadours, trouvères, jongleurs, and minstrels who were largely responsible for the widespread influence of medieval French poetry in western Europe. Troubadours, if not of the nobility themselves, as was the "first troubadour," William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, were usually attached to the court of some nobleman, as in the case of Bernart de Ventadorn, for example, among whose patrons were Eleanor of Aquitaine and Raymond IV of Toulouse. The troubadour, perhaps both composer and performer, though probably more often the latter, was distinguished from the trouvère, who seems only to have composed for public performance. Wandering performers, those without patrons, were frequently termed jongleurs. They performed not only by singing and reciting but also by tumbling, juggling, and doing tricks before any sort of audience they could muster. The term minstrel seems to have been interchangeable with troubadour, designating those who sang and played for the court; however,

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its use in the late Middle Ages indicates that it became almost a generic term applicable to any singer, story-teller, or entertainer.\footnote{Gaston Paris, in \textit{Histoire poétique de Charlemagne} (Paris, 1865), has suggested that early minstrels both composed and recited, and later minstrels recited the works written by the trouvères (see p. 11, 74). Léon Gautier notes that "le plus grand nombre des jongleurs se sont bornés à chanter les œuvres des trouvères; mais que parmi ces chanteurs, il en fut plus d'un, au midi comme au nord, qui voulut et qui sut composer lui-même" \textit{Les Épopées Françaises} (Paris, 1892), II, 42. Edmond Faral, however, in what is generally conceded to be the definitive work on the subject of minstrelsy in France, \textit{Les Jongleurs en France au Moyen Âge} (Paris, 1910), comes to the following conclusions with regard to the various terms:}

Medieval literature abounds with references to these performers and their performances, most of which indicate that their activities were inseparable from music. Records of the expenditures at the court of

\footnote{Le nom de trouvère ne s'applique pas à une catégorie spéciale d'individus qu'on pourrait opposer aux jongleurs: c'est un nom nouveau du jongleur. Le trouvère, c'est simplement le jongleur considéré comme auteur. Aussi ne faut-il pas s'étonner que les deux titres aient bientôt pu s'employer indifféremment l'un pour l'autre. Tout trouvère qui faisait métier de poésie était jongleur, et tout jongleur qui composait était trouvère. C'est pourquoi il est factice et purement théorique de vouloir distinguer entre les jongleurs et les trouvères et d'en faire deux classes séparées par les aptitudes et les fonctions (p. 79).}

See also E. K. Chambers, \textit{The Mediaeval Stage} (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1903), I, 1-88, for an excellent survey of the development of minstrelsy and his distinctions among the various terms designating public entertainers in the Middle Ages.
Edward III of England reveal that between 1344 and 1347, the king had in his employ no fewer than nineteen minstrels, including "five trumpeters, one citoler, five pipers, one tabouretter, two clarions, one nakerer, and one fiddler," not to mention three other minstrels termed waits. The variety of the minstrel's repertoire is suggested by a passage from Chrétien de Troyes' Erec et Enide quoted by Urban Tigner Holmes in a paper on the medieval minstrel:

When the Court was assembled there was not a minstrel in the countryside who knew any form of entertainment who did not come there. There was much joy in the great hall. Each one performed as well as he could. Some leaped, some danced, some did magic tricks, some narrated, others sang, some whistled, some played upon instruments, one upon the gigue, another on a viele, another on a harp, still another on a rote. One played the flute, another a shawm. They had tambourines, drums, bag-pipes, whistles, and horns.

The presence of minstrels at weddings and other feasts was apparently a matter of course. The poet Rutebeuf commented near the end of the thirteenth century that it "is common everywhere, as all men know, that when

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11 Quoted in Chambers, Mediaeval Stage, I, 49-50.

some one puts on a wedding or a feast the minstrels hear of it and see nothing better. They come from everywhere, some on foot and others on horseback." The truth of his observation is borne out by records, cited in E. K. Chambers' *The Mediaeval Stage*, which note that there were 426 minstrels present at the wedding of Margaret of England to John of Brabant in 1290. The secular nature of their performances is implied by the number of times denunciations of their profession appear in the religious literature of the period.

More substantial than such circumstantial evidence, however, is the eyewitness testimony of medieval writers who have left references to and descriptions of the practice of oral reading and reciting as a means of publication, education, and entertainment. Lynn Thorndike and George Wilson have pointed to a number of instances in which medieval scholars read their works aloud before university audiences to secure official approval of their

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13 Quoted by Holmes, in "Medieval Minstrel," p. 163.


15 Chambers (Mediaeval Stage, I, 35-41) records innumerable instances of the prohibitions against minstrelsy in Church rules, but he also points out the inconsistencies between the "formal anathemas of the church" and the actual practices of monks and bishops (pp. 56-57).

16 "Publication of New Works in Medieval Universities," *Speculum* I (1926), 101-03.

treatises prior to turning them over to scribes and copyists to be preserved in manuscript, and Wilson asserts that such readings were the means whereby "large universities like Oxford and Paris secured books for their students" (p. 290). Robert K. Root has shown that this practice continued as late as the fifteenth century -- in Italy, at least -- as a means of proofreading before allowing scribes to make copies for preservation and circulation. An illustration from a manuscript of the period shows a university teacher dictating to his students who have no books of their own.

Frequent references to and accounts of oral presentations are to be found in English literature from the earliest times throughout the Middle Ages. In Beowulf, the scop recounts to Hrothgar's court the tale of Sigemund's defeat of the dragon; Bede records the visit of "John, the chanter of the Apostolic See who came to Britain [and] taught by word of mouth the singers of [Wearmouth] the order and manner of singing and reading," and he gives an account of his own two-day reading of the Life of St. Cuthbert before the


19Reproduced in Maurice Hussey, comp., Chaucer's World: A Pictorial Companion (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1968), p. 76. The illustration is indicated as being from a MS. in the British Museum, but it is not otherwise identified. Discussing it in connection with Chaucer's Clerk, Hussey comments that it "shows us that a lecture was originally a reading during the course of which the student might copy down the basic text and hear commentaries upon it at the same time" (p. 77).
elders of the Lindisfarne community, an account paralleled by Giraldus Cambrensis' description of his three-day reading of the *Topographia Hiberniae* ca. 1185. In the *Life of Alfred*, Asser records a number of oral readings before the king and states that much of Alfred's early education was accomplished through his listening to others recite Saxon poems, "his retentive mind enabling him to remember them." "Romanz-reding" is listed as one of the forms of entertainment at the coronation of Havelok, and the lover in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* records that his lady would often command him to read to her from the story of Troilus. Several such instances of reading aloud appear in Chaucer's works. The *Wife of Bath* describes how Jankin read to her from his book of wicked wives, and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, when Pandarus comes to intercede with his niece on Troilus' behalf, he finds


21 De Rebus a se Gestis, Libre III, ed. J. S. Brewer, Rolls Series, Opera I (1861), 72-73.


Chaucer himself is shown reading *Troilus and Criseyde* before the court in an illustration in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS. 61, fol. lv. 24

Perhaps the most reliable evidence of oral performance is the internal evidence which can be gleaned from the poetry itself. The frequency of oral delivery suggested by the foregoing testimony is borne out when we observe in the poetry recurring elements which indicate a speaker-audience relationship. The characteristic features of verse romances provide the best point of departure for examining these elements for two reasons. First, the testimony of medieval writers themselves suggests that these poems were one of the most popular forms of public entertainment in the Middle Ages. Moreover, in attempting to extend to Middle English poetry the findings of J. Milman Parry and A. B. Lord that highly formulaic poetry is the product of oral composition, medievalists have confined themselves almost entirely to examining the romances. 25 Although their investigations have not proven
oral composition in these poems, their findings strongly suggest that Middle English verse romances reflect an intermediate stage between a period of oral composition and the modern written literary tradition. Jerome E. Coffey, for example, in his dissertation, "The Evolution of an Oral Formulaic Tradition in Old and Middle English Alliterative Verse" (State University of New York at Buffalo, 1969), analyzes the romances of the alliterative revival and finds that "the Germanic-alliterative verse form in English is intimately linked to an oral tradition not only in Old English but in Middle English as well" (p. 33). He goes on to suggest that what occurs in Middle English poetry is "not a revival at all but a continuing tradition" (p. 34). A comparison of the lyrics to these poems reveals a high frequency of recurrence of


See Michael Curschmann, "Oral Poetry in Mediaeval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research," Speculum, 42 (1967), 36-52. Curschmann suggests (pp. 36-37) that efforts to prove oral composition in medieval literature have been "isolated and inclusive" because scholars have so far failed to relate their investigations to "comparable problems in other fields of mediaeval literature and to other aspects of oral composition." He insists that the "use of oral devices such as formulas" does not itself constitute proof of "oral composition in the sense in which the term is used by Parry and Lord and their followers" (p. 50).
these same elements which in turn indicates that the lyrics too are a part of what we may term an aural tradition.

Foremost among the elements in the romances which imply oral performance are references to hearing, telling, and singing, frequently accompanied by a direct address to the audience. The poet of King Horn, for example, begins by addressing the audience and describing the upcoming performance as a song:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Alle beon hi blithe} \\
\text{That to my song lithe!} \\
\text{A song ich shall you sing} \\
\text{Of Murry the Kinge.}\]
\]

There can be little doubt that Havelok the Dane was performed orally. The lengthy opening address indicates a large audience and a festive occasion for the performance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Herkneth to me, gode men,} \\
\text{Wives, maides, and alle men,} \\
\text{Of a tale that ich you will tell,} \\
\text{Who-so it will here and ther-to dwelle.} \\
\text{The tale of Havelok y-maked;} \\
\text{While he was litel, he yede ful naked.} \\
\text{Havelok was full gode gone:} \\
\text{He was full gode in every trome;}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\text{King Horn, in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. Donald B. Sands (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 15-54. For the sake of convenience and since, as the discussion makes clear, the devices cited throughout the remainder of this chapter are common to Middle English narrative verse, I have limited the illustrative quotations to the poems in this anthology, hereafter cited in the text as MEVR.}\]
He was the wighteste man at nede
That thurte riden on any stede.
That ye mowen nou y-here,
And the tale you mowen y-tere,
At the beginning of ure tale,
Fill me a cuppe of full good ale;
And while I drinken, her I spelle.

11. 1-15, MEVR

Another good example of this sort of beginning is to be found in the second
stanza of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, in which the poet indicates not
only the oral nature of his tale, but suggests that he obtained the elements
of his story by word of mouth, though he assures his audience in the conclud­ing
lines of the passage that his facts are verifiable in written form:

Bot of all bat here bult of Bretaygne kynges,
Ay watz Arthur be hendest, as I haf herde telle;
Forbi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,
Bat a selly in si3t summe men hit holden,
And an outtrage awenture of Arthurez wonderez;
If 3e wyl lysten £is laye bot on little quile,
I schal telle hit astit, as I in toun herde,
    with tonge
    As hit is stad and stoken
    In stori stif and stronge,
    With lel letteres loken
    In londe so hatz ben longe.

11. 25-36

The frequency with which these opening devices recur reflects the poet's need for some means of securing the attention of his listeners and 

The following examples reveal the formulaic quality of the openings of the romances:

Lystnes, lordingis that been hende,
Of falsnesse, hou it will ende
    A man that ledes him therin.
Of foure wedded bretherin I wole you tell
That wolde in Ingelond go dwelle,
    That sibbe were nought of kinde.

_Athelston_, 11. 7-12, MEVR

Liteth and lestneth and herkneth aright,
And ye shull heere a talking of a doughty knight.

_Gamelyn_, 11. 1-2, MEVR

Now of this aventours that weren y-falle
I can tel sum, ac nought all.
Ac herkneth, lordinges, soth to sain,
Ichil you telle Lay le Frayn.

_Lay le Freine_, 11. 19-22, MEVR

Lithe and listeneth the lif of a lord riche,
The while that he livid was none him liche
Nether in boure ne in halle . . .

_Nowe wille ye list a while to my talking,
I shalle you telle of Arthoure the King
How ones him befelle._

_The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell_, 11. 1-3, 13-15, MEVR

Lystonnyth, lordyngis, a lyttyll stonde
Of on that was sekor and sounde
    And doughty in his dede.

_Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle_, 11. 1-3, MEVR
announcing the subject of his story or song. Their similarity is no accident; they were part of the common pool of stock devices which evolved from the earlier oral tradition.30

Similar openings are to be found in the lyrics; they are particularly characteristic of narrative lyrics, both secular and religious. Two early examples appear in Brown’s edition of thirteenth-century lyrics; the first introduces a moral poem which Brown entitles "Le Regret de Maximian," while the second is the opening stanza of an Epiphany song:

Herkne to mi ron,
As hic ou tellen con
Of helde al hou hit ges:
Of a modi mon,
Pat muchel of murpe won
In prude and al in pes.
His nome wes maximian;
Swech nes neuere nan
Iwis wip-houten les.
Clerc he wes foul goed,
As moni mon hounder-stod;
Therep al hou hit wes.
XIII 51, 1-12

Of aventures that han befalla
Y can sum telle, but nought all:
Herken, lordynges that ben trewe,
And Y wol you telle of Syr Orphewe.
Sir Orfeo, 11. 21-24, MEVR

30Coffey’s work (see p. 35, above) is relevant here, since his thesis is that these phrases reflect the evolution of Old English formulaic usage. A. C. Spearing, in Criticism and Medieval Poetry (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1964), p. 24, also sees the effect of an earlier oral tradition in the use of these elements in Middle English poetry.
Wolle ye iheren of twelte day, 
Wou þe present was ibroust 
In-to betlem þer iesus lay? 
Per þre kinges him habbet isoust,  
a sterre wiset hem þe wey,  
suc nas neuer non iwroust,  
ne werede he nouþer fou ne grey,  
þe louerd þat us alle hauet iwroust.

XIII 26, 1-8

The frequent references to singing and the survival of a surprising number of lyrics accompanied by musical notation\(^{31}\) indicate the degree to which lyric poems were performed as songs. Brown's notes point to fourteen of the 91 poems in XIII as surviving with musical accompaniment, for example, and many more are described as songs by the speaker, most often in the first or last stanza. "A Spring Song of Love to Jesus" (XIII 63) opens with a description of the "fuheles song" in spring which creates in the speaker a "luue newe" that "gladiet al my song" (11. 1-6); the second stanza opens "Of iesu crist hi synge" and the poet concludes his song with a stanza beginning "Iesu, lefman swete, ih sende þe þis songe" (11. 51-52). In the fourteenth-century lyrics, two songs to the Blessed Virgin provide additional

\(^{31}\)John Stevens, Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 33-34, discusses a number of reasons that relatively few musical MSS. survive from the Middle Ages and the Tudor period: "the greater difficulty of writing music," a greater demand for the verses than for the melody, the expense of producing musical manuscripts, and the tendency of copyists to note down the words of a familiar song or to compose new verses and indicate the melody simply by mentioning the name of a popular or traditional tune.
evidence that Middle English lyric was designed for singing. In the hymn beginning "Mary, mayde mylde and fre," the poet opens with the prayer that Mary will "one wyle lest to me,/Ase ich þe grete wþp songe," and concludes with a similar prayer:

\[
\text{Haue, leuedy, þys lytel songe} \\
\text{Pat out of senfol herte spronge;} \\
\text{Aþens þe feend þou make me stronge,} \\
\text{And 3yf me þy wyssynge;} \\
\text{And þa3 ich habbe y-do þe wrange} \\
\text{Þou graunte me amendyng!} \\
\text{RL XIV 32}
\]

The speaker in "A Song of the Five Joys" concludes also with a prayer to the Virgin that she lead aright all "pat singes pis sang" (RL XIV 31).

Benedictions and occasionally invocations are another indication of oral performance in that they frequently make reference to the audience. Immediately following the call to attention at the beginning of Havelok (see pp. 36-37, above) comes an invocation:

\[
\text{And while I drinken, her I spelle} \\
\text{That Christ us shilde a ll fro helle!} \\
\text{Christ late us evere so for to do} \\
\text{That we moten comen him to;} \\
\text{Benedicamus Domino!}
\]

Benedictions are more frequently employed than invocations, both in the romances and the lyrics. In Havelok, the poet concludes by addressing the audience with a request that they pray for his soul's salvation; at the same time, however, he reminds them of the labor that has gone into his tale, no doubt in hopes of securing a generous payment for his entertainment:
Forthy ich wolde biseken you
That haven herd the rime nu,
That ilke of you, with gode wille,
Saye a paternoster stille
For him that haveth the rime maked
And therefore fele nyghtes waked
That Jesu Christe his soule bringe
Biforn his fader at his endinge.

11. 2994-3001

_Athelston_ begins with a prayer of blessing on the audience, and _King Horn_, _Gamelyn_, _Sir Orfeo_, and _Sir Launfal_ conclude with benedictions.

Because such a high percentage of the religious lyrics are themselves versified prayers, we might expect difficulty in isolating invocations and benedictions. Such is not the case, however; these devices are frequently employed in the poems of praise and celebration and are characteristic of narrative poems treating the Nativity and Crucifixion. "A Song of the Five Joys" and "Marye, mayde mylde and fre" ([RL XIV](#) 31 and 32, quoted on p. 41, above) celebrating the five joys of the Virgin, open and close with prayers. "A Song of Love to Jesus" ([XIII](#) 63) concludes with a prayer. "Jesus Appeals to Man by the Wounds" ([RL XIV](#) 127) is a monologue spoken by Christ on the cross, but the final stanza is a prayer appended by the poet:

_ihesu, for bi woundis fyue,
þou kepe hem weel in al her lyue
þat þese lessouns ouer wole rede,
And þerwiþ her soulis fede._

11. 29-32

The absence of such prayers in poems with religious or moral themes would be more remarkable than their regular occurrence; however, similar
prayers are to be found in secular poetry as well. "The Siege of Calais" (HP 28) and the "Agincourt Carol" (HP 32) are marked by closing prayers. A number of the popular songs in Robbins' edition of the secular lyrics exhibit the same feature. A song in praise of Ivy (SL 52) concludes with a two-line prayer: "God graunt vs all his blysse, /ffor there shall we nothyng lack" (11. 14-15), and some medical verses on bloodletting end with the sort of formulaic prayer found in secular and religious verses alike:

So |bat be lord be helpyng,
 That all thyng hath in gouernynge.
So mote hit be, sey nowe we,
Amen, Amen, for charite!

SL 81, 11. 87-90

A popular song narrating the adventures of "Sir Penny" ends with this benediction:

God graunte vs grace with hert & will,
|he gudes |bat he has gifen vs till
         well and wisely to spend;
and so our liues here forto lede,
|bat we may haue his blis to mede,
ever with-owten end.

SL 58

These devices, regardless of whether they originated in oral composition or not, served the performer of aural poetry in providing him with a means of approaching and withdrawing from his audience. In an unpublished dissertation on "The Beginnings and Endings of the Middle English Metrical Romances" (Stanford, 1927), Parley A. Christensen concludes that opening and closing prayers served several needs in silencing the audience, securing
ecclesiastical approval of the performance, and revealing the poet's piety in
the hope of receiving satisfactory payment at the end of a performance (pp.
46-61, passim).

Ruth Crosby, in demonstrating the oral delivery of Chaucer's poetry,
isolates in the romances two categories of evidence which she believes to
indicate oral presentation: the first includes the devices discussed above which
suggest a speaker-audience relationship; the second consists primarily of
different types of repetition designed "to appeal . . . to that fondness of the
popular audience . . . for hearing things said in a familiar way."32 Included
in the latter category are repetitions of word, phrase, formula, and sound.
But it becomes clear upon examining the poetry that these elements functioned
for more than simply delight. As Spearing, in Criticism and Medieval
Poetry, 33 has noted, such repetitions were an intrinsic element in aural
poetry:

If an audience of listeners is to be able to respond
to a poem on a single reading of it, not only must
its expressive devices be largely simple, they

This article is a discussion of evidence of oral delivery in more than sixty
French and English verse romances. Miss Crosby's article on "Chaucer
and the Custom of Oral Delivery" appeared also in Speculum, 13 (1938),
413-432.

33Pp. 20-21.
must also contain a high proportion of the familiar. In such circumstances a poet cannot afford to be too novel, too original, too individual in style; he must keep largely within a stylistic convention which his audience will understand and accept without consideration. Within the staple conventional idiom there will of course still be wide scope for the gifted poet to express his individual vision by gradual shadings, cumulative effects; but not by a persistent use of sharply individual turns of phrase. If he is to keep his audience with him, he must usually describe swords as being bright as silver, and an unhorsed knight as rolling like a ball (pp. 20-21).

Heavy reliance on repetition is thus a characteristic feature of Middle English lyrics; because of the varied uses to which repetition was put, it will be more helpful to take up separately and at length the individual categories of repetition, not only to demonstrate their effectiveness in aural poetry but to show their continued influence in poetic composition despite the decline of oral presentation at the close of the Middle Ages.

Only scant attention need be given at this point to two other interrelated characteristics of Middle English poetry -- its episodic structure and what Spearing describes as its "thin texture" (p. 18). These features are attributable to essentially the same considerations accounting for repetition. Both of these elements are characteristic of narrative poetry and as such figure prominently in the historical lyrics, but the employment of episodic structure in the religious lyrics is limited by the fact that narrative elements in these poems focus on the major festivals of the Church calendar, Christmas and Easter, events which were so familiar to the people that they required
little actual narration. Since Christian doctrine derives largely from the
meaning of the Nativity and the Crucifixion, the religious poets directed their
efforts toward conveying the significance of these events. However, in those
poems whose method is narrative, episodic structure is characteristic.

With the movement to a written literature designed to appeal to an
audience of readers, many of the features characteristic of aural poetry
began to disappear. It is to be expected that the most obvious devices of the
aural poet, such as direct address to an audience of listeners, would be among
the first to go, and such is the case. References to reading and writing make
their appearance alongside those to hearing, singing and telling. Less quick
to fade were the more subtle devices inherent in the tradition of oral presenta­
tion -- the repetition of sound, words, phrases, imagery, and the larger
elements of form and structure. Many of these elements, however, such
as rhyme and alliteration, which formerly functioned at least partially as an
aid to memory, became more and more ornamental. Verse forms became
more varied and complex; the love song gave way to the love letter and
acrostics and anagrams began to appear. Style too underwent a transforma­
tion, as poets attempted to elevate the vernacular to a level that would appeal
to courtly patrons whom they had once addressed in French. If the thirteenth-
and early fourteenth-century lyrics are marked by sameness and convention,
those of the fifteenth century may be said to be varied and experimental. An
examination of the prominent features of aural poetry will enable us to see
the fifteenth century as an age of transition between the aural and the written literary tradition.
CHAPTER III
THE USES OF REPETITION

Peter Dronke's conclusion that the medieval lyric of western Europe is "the product of ancient and scarcely separable traditions of courtly, clerical and popular song"\(^1\) is equally applicable to Middle English lyric. Taken as a whole, both secular and religious lyric in England from 1200 to 1500 share a common diction and imagery and employ similar forms and structure. The distinctions between the two are matters of subject matter and motive, and even in these areas there is frequently overlapping.\(^2\) The religious lyrics of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries share with the secular lyrics those features of language and style which distinguish them from the earlier poetry, so that in examining the evolution of these poems from aural to written we can treat secular and religious lyrics as a single

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\(^1\) Medieval Lyric, p. 30.

\(^2\) In Chapter I, pp. 7-10, we have already observed the difficulty of classifying "Foweles in þe frith" as either secular or religious. Many of the ubi sunt lyrics -- for example, "Mirie it is while sumer ilast" (XIII 7), and "Wen þe turuf is þi tuur" (XIII 30) -- can be termed religious only if we reserve to the medieval Christian writer a concern with the transience of earthly life. The same sort of problem is presented by a number of fifteenth-century courtly love lyrics which Brown, RL XV, p. xxi, points out must be read "carefully to be certain that the devotion expressed is directed toward the Virgin" rather than to the poet's mistress.
tradition. If our conclusions about the characteristics of this poetry are based largely on an examination of the religious lyrics, it is only because their survival over the secular in a proportion of three or four to one and the preservation of many of them in more than one manuscript enables us to generalize with a greater degree of certainty. In short, there seems to be no reason to accept George Kane's description of the religious lyrics as "relatively isolated survivals." Nor need we consider except as very remote Kane's suggestion of "the possibility that more or greater religious verse was composed in [Middle English] than has been left to us" (p. 105). It seems far more likely, in fact, that the poems which have survived are truly representative of the Middle English lyric tradition.

3See Robbins' comments in the first paragraph of the introduction to SL, p. xvii.

4"The Middle English Religious Lyrics," in Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics, "Piers Plowman" (1951; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 105. Although R. M. Wilson, in The Lost Literature of Medieval England (New York: Philological Library, 1952), p. 244, concludes that the "perfection and technical excellence" of thirteenth-century lyrics "suggest that they are far from the beginnings of such literature" and insists that "the lyric was well established in England at least as early as the first half of the 12th century," nevertheless, in his chapter on lyric poetry (pp. 171-191), the fragments which he quotes as examples of an early lyric tradition do not differ markedly in form and style from the lyrics in the editions by Brown and Robbins. Chance being the greatest factor operable in the survival of the lyrics, it seems highly probable that extant lyric, while by no means complete, is at least representative.
The most salient feature of Middle English poetry is the use of repetition of almost every sort, from the smaller elements of sound, word, and phrase to the larger elements of stanza pattern and structure. Several factors working together are responsible for the Middle English poet's reliance on repetition. As we have already noted, the didactic function of poetry was of primary importance, especially in the religious poetry. Conveying information, doctrine, or idea took precedence over imaginative power, emotive force, or aesthetics; these elements assumed importance only insofar as they enabled the poet to achieve his primary motive. Since his poetry was destined for an audience largely unlettered, the poet, regardless of his own degree of literacy, had to rely on the ear as the medium through which his ideas were perceived by and fixed in the mind of his audience. Repetition was the device most useful to him in this endeavor. Within the limits placed on him as a consequence of these factors, the medieval poet made use of repetition in a variety of ways.

The musical quality intimately associated with lyric poetry derives largely from the repetition of like sounds, either with or without the accompaniment of recurring patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. The most obvious contributions which these elements make to poetry is the pleasure and delight afforded the audience. Children enjoy nursery rhymes and tongue-twisters long before phrases such as "silver bells and cockle shells" or a "peck of pickled peppers" have any real meaning for them.
For poets who compose for an audience of readers who, for the most part, do their reading silently, devices of sound are less important than they were to the Middle English poet in evoking an aesthetic response or conveying ideas. For the medieval poet, who had only his audience's ear to work upon, devices of sound were important in reinforcing the ideas which the words conveyed and in helping fix these ideas in the minds of his audience. Rhyme and alliteration made ideas and information easier to recall, and the Middle English poet employed these devices both to reinforce meaning and for ornamentation.

The relative ease with which information in rhymed form can be memorized accounts for the wide variety of material anthologized by Brown and Robbins in their editions of the religious and secular literature. Under the heading "Practical Verse" (SL, pp. 58-84), Robbins includes such items as charms against thieves (62, 63), fevers, and night-goblins (65, 66) and prognostications on the weather and lucky and unlucky days (71, 72, 73). Number rhymes which aided both lettered and unlettered in remembering such tidbits of information as the number of months in the year and the number of days in each month provide more useful information (68, 69, 75). Some medieval scientific information is also included in the practical verse: "Directions for Bloodletting" and some verses "On the Medicinal Properties of Leeks" (81, 80) suggest that medicine was not necessarily practiced by learned men. The evidence of widespread popularity of these
rhymes suggested by their survival in so many manuscripts indicates the usefulness of mnemonic verse in the Middle Ages. Robbins points out (SL, p. 51) that Lydgate's "Dietary" (SL 78) survives in 46 manuscripts, a number surpassed only by The Pricke of Conscience, The Canterbury Tales, Piers Plowman, and Confessio Amantis. While most of these verses are relatively short -- two to ten lines -- the "Dietary," the instructions on bloodletting and a poem on "The Philosophers' Stone" (SL 88) contain 80, 90, and 76 lines, respectively. Robbins notes that the survival of the "Dietary" in small manuscripts of the kind used by school children indicates that this kind of practical information was taught by rote at an early age.\(^5\)

The effectiveness of this technique was recognized by the Church and is responsible for the number of rhymed Ave Marias, paternosters and decalogues which we find among the shorter lyrics. Brown, in his edition of the thirteenth-century lyrics, prints five versions of the decalogue from manuscripts dating from the early thirteenth century to the fifteenth century.\(^6\) The significant differences among these five versions can be

\(^5\)See Robbins' notes, SL, p. 251.

\(^6\)XIII 23; 70 a, b. Two others are printed in the notes on these poems, pp. 181-182, 219-220.
attributed to the different Biblical texts on which they are based, but other
differences suggest the operation of some degree of oral transmission, in
the preservation of rhyme words and patterns.

The effectiveness of rhyme as an aid to the memory can be verified
by examining its role in the dissemination and preservation of Middle English
poetry. Modern scholarship, rooted as it is in a written literary tradition,
has too often assumed that the variations in a poem preserved in more than
one manuscript are the consequence of scribal error. However, an examina-
tion of several of these variations reveals that, despite frequent radical
changes in other parts of the line, the end rhymes remain virtually identical
throughout. A case in point is provided by "Of One that is so Fair and Bright"
(XIII 17), a hymn to the Virgin preserved in two thirteenth-century manu-
scripts -- Trinity College, Cambridge 323 (dating no later than 1253) and
B. M. MS. Egerton 613 from the second half of the century. A comparison
of the variations suggests that some of the differences result from oral
transmission. The most notable difference is that stanza two of the Trinity
MS. appears as stanza four in the Egerton MS. In non-narrative poems
where there is little continuity from stanza to stanza, this sort of change is
exactly the kind that oral transmission would be most likely to effect. 7

7 Brown suggests, for example, in the introduction to XIII, p. xxvi,
that the shifting of stanzas and retention of rhyme words are "exactly what
we should look for if the verses were taken down from recitation."
Moreover, despite at least eight lines containing significant variations, the rhymes remain identical except for the slight change of the be/me rhyme (11. 5-6) of the Trinity MS. to me/me in the Egerton MS. At least two other changes are worth noticing because of the way in which they affect the reading of the poem. In the Trinity MS., lines 23-27, which are addressed to the Virgin, ask her to behold her Son who shed His blood for man and "bidde we moten come to him." The corresponding lines in the Egerton MS. (11. 14-17) begin with the more intensive "Bi-sek him wit milde mod" that "we moten komen til him," a more effective statement of the idea. Again more effectively, lines 28-29 of the Egerton MS. address the Blessed Virgin as "Leuedi, flour of all hing/ rosa sina spine," suiting the English to the Latin phrase, while the corresponding lines in the Trinity MS. read "Leuedi, best of all hing," no more formuliac than the epithet of the Egerton MS. but certainly less sensitive.

The same kinds of differences can be noted in the three versions of another hymn to the Virgin. "A Prayer of Penitence to Our Lady" (XIII 32 a, b, c). Version a is from the Trinity MS., while b is from Cotton Caligula a. ix, and c is a flyleaf poem from Royal MS. 2. F. viii. The chief differences once again involve stanza rearrangement: the stanzas appearing as two and three in the Cotton MS. are reversed in the Royal MS., and stanzas appearing as two, three, and four in the Cotton MS. appear in the order three, four, and two in the Trinity MS. The first stanzas in all three
versions are virtually identical, except that in rhyming singen/bringen/childinke/hendinke, the Trinity scribe reveals a very poor ear for rhyme,\(^8\) a characteristic of all the other stanzas in this version. The most significant differences occur between the Cotton MS. and the Royal MS. Lines 25 and 28 of the Cotton MS. are reversed in the corresponding stanza of the Royal MS. (stanza two, 11. 15 and 18), as are lines 44 and 47. Moreover, the prayer addressed to God at the conclusion of the stanza beginning "All this world" is addressed to the Virgin in the Royal MS. Additionally, the bi-seo/freo rhyme in lines 38 and 40 of the Cotton MS., while identical to that in the Trinity MS., becomes a fre/be rhyme in the Royal MS. Finally, the parallel structure of stanza three in the Royal MS. is more repetitive (bor, and once he, plus verb plus complement) in contrast to the same passage in the other versions. The differences between the Royal poem and the others, coupled with the fact that the Royal version is preserved on a flyleaf, indicate a scribe working either from memory or from a recitation. Brown attributes the differences between the Cotton and the Trinity MSS. not only to the Trinity scribe's poor ear for rhyme but also to the dialect differences between the scribe's own and that in which the poem was originally composed.\(^9\) Brown points a number of times to the omission and

\(^8\text{XIII}, \text{p. 193.}\)

\(^9\text{Ibid.}\)
rearrangement of stanzas as almost certain evidence of oral transmission. Even in very long poems surviving in as many as fifteen or more manuscripts, the significant differences in the texts seldom involve rhyme. For example, in his notes to "The Sweetness of Jesus" (RL X IV 48, pp. 61-65, 262-263), Brown prints the most important differences occurring among thirteen of the fifteen manuscripts in which the poem is preserved. In this poem of 120 lines, Brown catalogs significant variations affecting thirty-four lines (or 28.3%). Only one involves rhyme words. Such faithfulness to rhyme patterns is not in itself proof of oral transmission; oral transmission operating exclusively between composition and manuscript preservation would result in a far greater number of far more significant variations. But it does suggest that frequently more than just "lost originals" and careless scribes operated in accounting for variant readings. It also verifies the strong appeal which rhyme has for the ear.

Another feature of rhyme in the Middle English lyric is the almost formulaic use to which certain rhyme words were put. Ruth Crosby, in analyzing evidence of oral presentation in medieval romance, points to the frequent recurrence of pairs of rhyme words (lif/wif; bro/eber/ober) as a device designed to appeal to the listener's delight in the familiar. An

10"Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages," Speculum, 11 (January 1936), 105.
examination of such recurrences in the lyrics indicates that they served a far more important function for the aural poet. Since, as the discussion above shows, the rhyme words remained fixed more firmly in the mind than other parts of the poetic line, the Middle English lyric poet often selected rhyme words which conveyed the most important part of his message. Richard L. Greene, in discussing the relationship between burden and stanza in the carol, has suggested that one could derive a good understanding of the subject matter of the carols simply by examining the burdens.\textsuperscript{11} Much the same thing can be said about the rhyme words in the lyrics. Three examples serve to prove this point.

An examination of the lyrics reveals that of the ninety-five times the word \textit{born} is employed as one rhyme word, it is paired with \textit{lorn} or \textit{forlorn} thirty-six times, with \textit{bifern} eighteen times, and with fifteen other words forty-one times. Of the thirty-six times it is paired with \textit{lorn} or \textit{forlorn}, twenty-seven times the two words form a couplet expressing the significance of the Nativity. Examples can be cited from all three of the volumes containing religious lyrics:\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{12}In passages quoted from verses in other than couplet form, lines intervening between rhyming lines have been omitted in order to demonstrate better the similarity of idea among the passages.
Of a meide he was iborin
y-brout he hautit bat wæs for-loren.
XIII 24, 11. 11 & 13

be king bat wæs of be ibore,
To bare blisse bat wæs for-lore.
XIII 41, 11. 33 & 35

Blessed be bou bat hauest y-bore
be wordles raunsoun bat was uor-lore.
RL XIV 13, 11. 17-18

Nou god, bat wæs in bethleem boren,
let vs neuer ben for-loren.
RL XIV 117, 11. 89 & 91

'Son,' she sayd, 'I have be borne
to saue mankynd bat was forlorne.'
RL XV 2, 11. 9-10

A newe 3er, A newe 3er a chyld was I-born,
vs for to sauyn bat al was for-lorn.
RL XV 84, 11. 1-2

In the same fashion, the blod/rod rhyme pair was employed to convey
the meaning of the Crucifixion. In terms of frequency, this rhyme pair occurs
forty-six times in contexts similar to the following examples:

he honge al of blode
Se hey a-pon be rode.
XIII 64, 11. 25-26

God, bat de3edest on be rod
for ous bou sheddest hi swete blod.
XIII 88, 11. 17 & 19

And hys armes ystreith hey up-hon be rode;
On fif studes on his body he stremes ran o blod.
RL XIV 1, 11. 3-4
And now I loke opon thy face,
And se the hyng there on the rode,
Spoylyd and sprynkelyd all with blode.

RL XV 97, 11. 35-57

In addition to the **blod/rod** pair, we find also **blod/god** (forty-three occurrences); **blod/fod** (twenty-two); **blod/mod** and **blod/wod** (eighteen and thirteen occurrences, respectively). In monorhymed quatrains and in longer stanzas employing cross rhyme (abababab) as well as in the six-line tail-rhymed stanza (aabaab), three or four of these rhyme words were employed to convey or reinforce the meaning of the lines:

\[\text{He milde Lomb isprad o rode,}\]
\[\text{heng bihornen al oblode,}\]
\[\text{for hure gelte, for hure gode.}\]

XIII 45, 11. 1-3

\[\text{Suete ihesu, my soule fode,}\]
\[\text{bin werkes bueb bo suete & gode;}\]
\[\text{bou bohtest me upon be rode,}\]
\[\text{for me bou sheddest bi blode.}\]

RL XIV 7, 11. 29-32

\[\text{Suete sone, bi faire face droppet al on blode,}\]
\[\text{& bi bodi dounward is bounden to be rode;}\]
\[\text{Hou may bi modris herte bole}n so suete a fode,\]
\[\text{Pat blissed was of alle born & best of alle gode!}\]

RL XIV 64, 11. 5-8

\[\text{Ihesu, for loue bou stei3 on roode,}\]
\[\text{For loue bou 3af bi herte blode;}\]
\[\text{Loue bee made my soules foode,}\]
\[\text{Pi loue vs bough}te til al goode.\]

RL XIV 89, 11. 21-24

\[\text{Gold & al biis werdis wyn}\]
\[\text{Is nouth but cristis rode:}\]
\[\text{I wolde ben clad in cristes skyn,}\]
\[\text{Pat ran so longe on blode,}\]
& gon t'is herte & taken myn In---
Per is a fulsum fode.
Pan ȝef i litel of kith or kyn,
For Per is alle gode. Amen.

The rhyme words rod/blod/god/fod employed in these examples carry the kernel of doctrine which the stanza itself simply elaborates.

Another rhyme pattern of the same sort can be found in the Marian lyrics and those on the Nativity. "An Orison to the Blessed Virgin" (RL XIV 33) is a brief prayer in tail rhyme:

Mayde and moder mylde,
Uor loue of þine childe
Bet is god an man,
Me bet am zuo wylde
Uram zenne þou me ssylde
As ich þe bydde can. Amen.

In "An Orison to the Trinity" (RL XIV 93), we find a similar rhyme pattern in the stanza addressed to the Virgin:

I preye þe, lady, meke and mylde,
Þat þou preye for my mysdede,
For loue of þi swete childe
As þou hym sauȝ on rode blede.
Euer þete haue I beon wylde,
My synful soule ys euer in drede,
Mercy leuedy, þou me schilde
And helpe me euer at al my nede.

That original sin made man "wilde," and that the "milde" maiden could intercede with her "childe" and thus "schilde" man from the consequences of that sin is an idea appearing again and again in the religious lyrics. "A Song of the Love of Jesus" (RL XIV 84), a lyric frequently attributed to Richard
Rolle, employs this same rhyme pattern to convey a similar idea:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In myrth he lyfes nyght & day \& bat lufes \& bat} \\
\text{swete chylde--} \\
\text{It es ihesu, forsoth I say, of all mekest &} \\
\text{mylde;} \\
\text{Wreth fra hym wald al a-way \&of he wer neuer} \\
\text{sa wylde,} \\
\text{He pat in hert lufed hym, \& bat day fra euel he} \\
\text{will hym schylde.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

11. 73-76

"Mater Salutaris" (XIII 16) utilizes three of these four rhyme words to convey the same theme in the opening stanza, as does "A Prayer of the Five Joys" (XIII 18):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Seinte mari, moder milde,} \\
\text{mater salutaris} \\
\text{feirest flour of eni felde,} \\
\text{uere nuncuparis,} \\
\text{b\textcolor{red}{o}} \text{rou ihesu crist b\textcolor{red}{o}} \text{u were wid childe;} \\
\text{b\textcolor{red}{o}} \text{u bring me of my b\textcolor{red}{o}} \text{ustes wilde} \\
\text{potente} \\
\text{b\textcolor{red}{a}} \text{t maket me} \\
\text{to de\textcolor{red}{b}e tee} \\
\text{repente.}
\end{align*}
\]

XIII 16, 11. 1-10

In "A Prayer of the Five Joys," however, it is the "stronge fend" that is "so wilde" rather than sinful man (XIII 18, 11. 13-14, 16).

Formulaic rhyme can also be found in the secular poetry. The pairing of hert/smert recurs regularly in the love songs of complaint in which the lover bemoans the cruelty of his lady:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thus ame I sett in stable wyse} \\
\text{To lefe and dure in yowre seruyce} \\
\text{Wyt-oute faynyng of my hert} \\
\text{Thow I fele neuer soo grete smert.}
\end{align*}
\]

SL 167, 11. 21-24
ffor defence though y wold make,
your lokyng wold me peressh to the hert;
thus prisoner shuld y be take,
& suffre mo peynes stronge & smert.

SL 205, 11. 45-48

ffarest of fare, this lettre lite,
that chefe is of my paynes smerte--
all can y not well endite;
let þese wordes synke in your herte
ffor all my wele & wo y-wys.

SL 199, 50-54

But such devices were more compatible with the didactic function of
the religious lyrics and are more easily discerned in these poems because
of the large number of poems treating only a small number of themes.

The Middle English poet employed alliteration in much the same
fashion. Utilized in conjunction with stressed syllables, it reinforced the
rhythm of the line; and since primary stress fell most often on the nouns,
verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, the message was driven home with hammer-
like blows. A lyric from the Vernon MS. provides an excellent example of
the way in which the didactic poet employed alliteration to emphasize his
point. The poem, an elaboration of the Ten Commandments, consists of
thirteen eight-line stanzas and employs a refrain admonishing the audience
to "kepe wel cristes comaundement." The stanza on swearing makes
particularly effective use of alliteration:

In Idel Godes nome tak þou nouȝt,
But cese and saue þe from þat synne;
Swere bi no þing þat God haþ wrouht;
Be war his wrapþe lest þou hit wynne,
But bisy þe her bale to blynne,
Fortunately, however, this heavy-handed use of alliteration is offset by the number of poems in which alliteration, employed much more freely, is played against rhythm and rhyme: "A Dialogue between the Blessed Virgin and her Child" (RL XIV 56), a Nativity carol, combines these elements to achieve great tenderness. The poem is perhaps too long (148 lines) to print in its entirety, but stanzas two through nine are sufficient to suggest the skill with which the poet has employed sound:

pe maiden wolde with-outen song  
Hire child o slepe bringge;  
pe child houthte sche de[de] him wrong,  
& bad his moder sengge.

'Sing nov, moder,' seide þat child,  
'Wat me sal be-falle  
Here after wan i cum to eld--  
So don modres alle.

Ich a moder treuly  
Þat kan hire credel kepe  
Is wone to lullen louely  
& singgen hire child o slepe.

Suete moder, fair & fre,  
Siben þat it is so,  
I preye þe þat þu lulle me  
& sing sum-wat þer-to.'

'Suete sone,' seyde sche,  
'Wer-offe suld i singge?  
Wist i neuere ȝet more of þe  
But gabriëles gretingge.
He grette me godli on is kne
& seide, "heil! marie.
Ful of grace, god is with þe;
Beren þu salt Messye."

I wondrede michil in my þouth,
for man wold i rith none.
"Marie," he seide, "drede þe nouth;
Lat god of heuene alone.

þe holi gost sal don al þis."
He seyde with-outen wone
þat i sulde beren mannis blis,
þe my suete sone.

What is unusual about the use of sound in this poem is that so many devices have been blended so skillfully, yet none so obviously as to overwhelm. In addition to consonantal alliteration involving a high percentage of m, s, and l sounds, vocalic alliteration is employed to link lines 11-12: "Here _after 
wan i cum to _eld_ _/So don modres _alle._" In line 15, both assonance, in the repetition of the back vowels in "wone," "lullen," "lovely," and consonance, in the medial l's of the last two words, combine to reinforce the sense of the lines. In line 19, medial rhyme is introduced: "I preye þe þat þu lulle me"; and the line is linked to that following through the repetition of þe, þat, þu, and þer-to. The poet, moreover, utilizes alliteration to link stanzas as well as lines. The repetition of s in line 9 links the stanza to the preceding one, which ends with sengge; m sounds link stanzas three and four; s's tie stanzas four, five, six; g links six with seven and eight with nine; and m ties seven with eight. The result of these devices is not unlike a descant or a countermelody playing against a fairly regular rhythm of four-
and three-stress lines employing cross rhymes. The effect of this subtle use of sound can be fully appreciated only when the poem is read aloud.

There are two other Nativity songs in the Advocates Library MS., from which Brown prints this one, employing similar devices in the same cross-rhyme quatrain stanza form (RL XIV, 57, 58). Of these, "A Song of the Blessed Virgin and Joseph" (RL XIV 58) is the more interesting. It employs a chanson d'aventure opening very similar to the one in 56:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Als i lay vp-on a nith} \\
\text{I lokede vp-on a stronde,} \\
\text{I be-held a mayden brith,} \\
\text{a child sche hadde in honde.} \\
\end{align*}
\]
58

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Als i lay vp-on a nith} \\
\text{Alone in my longging,} \\
\text{Me þouthe i sau a wonder sith,} \\
\text{A maiden child rokking.} \\
\end{align*}
\]
56

All three of these songs make their earliest appearance in the Advocates MS. (ca. 1372); and while "A Song of the Nativity" (57) is unique to this manuscript, the "Dialogue between the Blessed Virgin and her Child" (56) appears in much corrupted texts in three later manuscripts. "A Song of the Blessed Virgin and Joseph" (58) appears in a mid-fifteenth-century manuscript (MS. Selden B. 26) accompanied by musical notation, one of only two of the fourteenth-century lyrics among those in RL XIV to come down to us with proof that it was sung. It is interesting to speculate that 56 and 57 might have been designed for the same musical accompaniment. Neither of these, however, achieves the same effective use of sound which the poet of 56 accomplishes.
A. C. Spearing, in discussing the use of alliteration in several passages in Chaucer's works and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, adumbrates the employment of alliteration on more than one occasion in a formulaic fashion to achieve onomatopoeic effects. He cites as examples the *sch-* repetition employed to describe the beheading of the knight, the butchering of the deer, boar, and fox, and the blows the Green Knight takes at Sir Gawain, as well as the repetition of *b* sounds in the Nun's Priest's Tale: "Of bras they broghten bemes and of box, / Of horn, of boon, in which they blewe and powped" (11. 3398-3399). The lyric poets were capable of achieving the same effects. In "The Christ Child Shivering with Cold" (RL XIV 75), the poet employs *k* sounds to reinforce the sense of the lines:

```
Ler to louen as i loue þe;  
On al my limes þu mith i-se  
Hou sore þei quaken for colde.
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11. 1-3

The Gawain poet uses the same device in describing the "cold borne" which came "claterande fro þe crest," the "nakked rokkez," and the "hard iisse-ikkles" which Gawain encountered in his search for the Green Chapel. Somewhat less effective is the repetition of *t, k, b, d* sounds which the poet of the "Proprietates Mortis" (XIII 71) employs in cataloging rather grimly the signs

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13 *Criticism and Medieval Poetry*, pp. 19-20.
of death. Occurring at the end of short, two-stress lines, these sounds contribute to an effect both stark and chilling. Brown (XIII, pp. 220-222) prints four other English texts of these signs from different manuscripts, including one from the Worcester Fragments of the "Address of the Soul to the Body" (ca. 1180), all of which utilize these same sounds in greater or lesser degrees.

The most important legacy of the alliterative tradition insofar as the lyric is concerned is the wealth of stock phrases and formulaic expressions it provided the Middle English poet. A number of recent studies have supported the idea that the lyric was in fact an important element in the survival of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line and in the fourteenth century alliterative revival. Stuart H. L. Degginger, in examining early English lyrics (1150-1325), concludes (p. 142) that the use of alliteration in these poems is the consequence of their nearness in time to Old English poetry.14 Degginger's conclusion is reinforced by the statistical evidence provided by Merle J. Fifield,15 who has evaluated the relationship of early English lyrics to the alliterative tradition:

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15 "Alliteration in Middle English Lyrics," Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1953. Fifield tabulates 276 alliterative phrases in thirteenth-century lyrics, only sixteen of which contain foreign elements. All others are native (p. 40).
The thirteenth-century lyrics were written in a century which saw the end of the vigorous old tradition and the beginning of a new alliterative language, which was to include some of the ancient phrases. About 47 per cent of the alliterative phrases in thirteenth-century lyrics were in the old tradition and are employed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. New phrases, which appear in later works, were also created. The common alliterative language is used by both secular and religious poets in succeeding centuries, but more of the thirteenth-century lyricists' innovations are found in later religious lyrics than in other alliterative literature. Thirteenth-century lyrics can be proved neither the direct antecedents of late alliteration nor direct descendants of the old tradition, but they have been proved preservers of Old English alliterative phrases and contributors to the continuing expansion of alliteration. 16

The common stock of phrases to which the alliterative tradition contributed so heavily provided the poet with resources useful in a variety of ways. These phrases were employed to fill out a line, to complete a rhyme or an alliterative pattern, and to contribute to an image either descriptively or metaphorically. These functions were not mutually exclusive, of course, and regardless of their primary function, they no doubt appealed to the audience's delight in the familiar. The primary function of these phrases can be suggested by examining their position in the lines in which they occur.

The most frequently recurring type of phrase is the doublet; composed of a pair of terms, frequently, though not necessarily alliterative, usually synonymous, though sometimes contrasting, these phrases were made largely of nouns, adjectives and adverbs, and very infrequently, verbs. Doublets were primarily employed to complete a line and provide a rhyme; they appear preponderantly in the second half of the line with the second element of the doublet occurring as the rhyme word. Their usefulness in this connection was enhanced by the fact that the paired words were almost always monosyllabic. Although within the pair the terms could be reversed to make the rhyme, reversal is less likely to occur in pairs composed of one dissyllabic term and a monosyllabic term (the monosyllabic term is nearly always the second element) and in alliterative phrases. The most frequently recurring phrase is day and night; it occurs ninety-one times in the three volumes of religious verse, with more than 50% of these occurrences in the second half of the line. The elements are reversed thirty-seven times, which fact indicates one reason for its popularity -- either element could be rhymed easily. Similar phrases, used adverbially like day and night and contributing little other than rhyme or line expansion, are

17 My own examination of the lyrics shows that only cri and calle and grunt and grone recur with any frequency. The absence of alliterative verb phrases in the lyrics may well stem from the fact that these poems are less concerned with actions than are the romances and other narrative poetry.
to/fro, here/bere, erly/late, and far/wide.

The alliterative phrases are far more likely than the non-alliterative to appear elsewhere in the line, although they, too, appear overwhelmingly in the second half-line. The phrase fair and fre, for example, occurs six times in the lyrics of the thirteenth century. In three of these occurrences, it is utilized for alliterative purposes; "bat feir ant freoly ys to fyke" (XIII 82, 1.26); "ah, feyre hinges, freoly bore" (XIII 82, 1.40); "feir ant fre to fonde" (XIII 83, 1.8). In two occurrences it contributes to the rhyme: "bat is so fayr and fre" (XIII 63, 1.12); "bou art feyr & fre" (XIII 87, 1.9). In one occurrence, it fulfills both alliterative and rhyming functions: "Fair ich wes and fre" (XIII 51, 1.133). Some phrases seem to have been employed almost wholly in only one position. The phrase gamen and gle, for example, occurs nine times in the lyrics, every time in the second half of the line; and it is never reversed. Flesh and blod, which occurs nineteen times, however, appears nine times in the first half of the line and ten in the second, while its alliterative counterpart bon and blod occurs eleven times, only once out of final position.

Some of these phrases obviously evolved from the repetition of subject matter and theme. Hence the alliterative phrase moder and meide, which embodied the paradox of the Virgin birth, was exclusively the property of the religious lyrics. Flesh and blod, associated as it is with the sacrament of Holy Communion, appears only once outside the religious lyrics,
in "When Rome is Removed" (HP 45), a political prophecy, and even then
the reference is to "Godes fleyshe and his blode" (1. 10). On the other
hand, wisdom and womanhed or womanly and wysse occurs four times,
every time in secular lyrics of courtly love in the fifteenth century, all of
which suggests the evolutionary nature of these phrases. A number of
phrases seem not to have survived in the lyrics beyond the fourteenth
century. Curteis and hende occurs four times but only in thirteenth- and
fourteenth-century lyrics. Purple and pall and its variation scarlet and pall
also do not survive the fourteenth century. Lond and leode, which Fifield
points to as a survival from Old English, \(^{18}\) barely survives the tradition.
Appearing twice in the thirteenth century, its appearance in the fourteenth
century is limited to two of the Harley lyrics and one lyric in the Vernon
MS. The useful phrase more and less makes its first appearance in the
fourteenth century but enjoys widespread use in both religious and secular
lyrics well into the fifteenth century, appearing a total of twenty times.

Unlike the narrative poet of the romances who drew upon these
phrases to aid him in establishing character or situation without departing
from the rapid progress of the narrative, the lyric poet often employed
these terms in an expansive fashion. Since idea, theme, or emotion was

more important than action in the lyric poems, the poet had to elaborate
the theme or retard the progress from idea to idea in order that these ele-
ments be more fully grasped by the audience. These phrases furnished
him with an easy way to provide the necessary elaboration or retardation.
The fourth stanza of the "Love-Ron" of Thomas de Hales exemplifies the
technique:

Nis non so riche ne non so freo
bat he ne schal heonne son away,
Ne may hit neuer his waraunt beo,
gold ne seoluer, vouh,ne gray.
Ne beo he no be swift, ne may he fleo
ne weren his lif emne day.
hus is hes world, as bu mayht seo,
Al so be schadewe bat glyt away.

XIII 43, 11. 25-32

The idea in the first four lines, of course, is that even the rich man is
subject to the mutability and decay of this transitory world, but that idea
is expressed in the first two lines. The second two serve merely as elabo-
ration with the pair phrases expanding the idea into the full four lines. In
similar fashion, a thirteenth-century poem entitled "Doomsday" (XIII 28a)
contains the following series of doublets employed expansively:

From bat adam was i-wrout bat comet domesday
Monie of be riche men bat weren fou & gray,
Riden uppe steden & uppe palefray,
Ha sculen atte dome singen wellaway.

Ne sculen heo ber nout fisten wid sceldes
ne wid sperre,
Wid helme ne wid brunie ne wid none gerren.

11. 13-18
A lyric from the Vernon MS. provides a third example in which the phrases are both expansive and ornamental; three and one-half of the four doublets alliterate with w:

\begin{quote}
God, hat I haue I-greuet be
In wille & werk, in word and dede,
Almihti lord, haue Merci of me
Hat for my sunnes bi blod gon schede!
Of wit & worschupe, weole & wede
I honke be, lord, ful Inwardly;
Al in his world, hou-euere I spede,
Ay Merci, god, And graunt Merci!
\end{quote}

\textit{RL XIV 107, 11. 9-16}

Finally, doublets as well as other stock phrases constitute most of the imagery employed by the lyric poets. Much of the imagery in the lyrics is merely decorative, adding little if any dimension to the theme. Two of the secular poems in Robbins' edition, for example, "A Farewell to His Mistress, III" (SL 204) and "A Lover's Farewell to His Mistress" (SL 205), consist almost entirely of stock images cataloged simply for purposes of ornamentation. Highly repetitive, they become mere exercises in alliteration. A single stanza will surely suffice for illustration:

\begin{quote}
ffarewell perle, pris preisable,
ffarewell cristall, coriouse in kynde,
ffarewell amytest, all amyable,
ffarewell emeraude, most of mynde.
\end{quote}

\textit{SL 205, 11. 93-96}

The poet continues in this manner for twelve stanzas. This use of imagery was widely current throughout Middle English poetry. It can be found extensively in the Harley lyrics, for example:
While jewels had symbolic meanings,19 nevertheless in both of these illustrations it seems far more likely that the choices were based primarily on alliterative needs and that meaning was secondary. Such cataloging is not limited to secular poetry. It is frequently employed in the religious poetry, especially in salutations to and hymns in praise of the Blessed Virgin, where it is perhaps more justified as an exercise in religious devotion.

For example, the "Ave Regina Celorum" from Trinity College Dublin MS. 516 (RL XV 23) is headed with a note describing it as "a deuowte salutation."20 Each stanza, and there are six of eight lines each, consists of alliterative phrases descriptive of the Blessed Virgin:


20See RL XIV, p. 41.
Haile be þu, fairest þat euyr god fand!
Haile be þu rechest of al tresoure!
Haile! lampe euyr ligh tand,
To hie & lowe, riche and poure,
Haile! spices swettest of al sauoure,
Haile! of whom oure ioye gan coum,
Haile! of alle wemen frute & floure,
Velut Rosa vel lilium.
11. 25-32

In turning from a discussion of stock imagery as ornament to its function as image, several observations can be made. First, a great many Middle English lyrics are almost totally devoid of simile, metaphor, and symbol, elements which modern readers have come to expect as an inherent part of poetry.\textsuperscript{21} To the degree that imagery is employed, it is utilized to evoke or establish the mood or emotion appropriate to the subject, to set situation or character, to describe behavior or physical appearance, and in the religious lyrics to convey doctrine. Finally, the imagery employed by Middle English poets is largely visual and is conventional to the point of cliche. The reasons are obvious. If the aural poet is to keep his audience with him, he cannot afford the unique, the original, or the complex; he must confine himself to familiar and simple images which can be immediately apprehended. We need here give only brief attention to the types of images and their manner of employment.

\textsuperscript{21}Douglas Gray's Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyrics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) was not received in time to be given consideration in this study; his focus seems to be on the influence of liturgy and theology on theme and imagery.
The natural association of mood with weather, season, or time of day made images based on these elements useful in evoking emotion. Hence the poet in "Sunset on Calvary" (XIII 1) need only mention the setting sun to establish a mood of sorrow and pity. Similarly the joy of the Resurrection is evoked in the opening line of "Aurora lucis rutilat" (RL XIV 37): "An Ernemorwe be day-list spryngel." In like manner, a reference to spring and summer, birds and flowers, sets the stage for a discussion of love either sacred or profane, while fall and winter inductions lead to contemplations of death, decay, the ubi sunt motif.

In describing character or behavior, the poet employed similes and metaphors drawn from the language of the metrical romances. Complexions were "lylie-whyt" (XIII 78, 1. 31) or "ase rose bat red is on rys" (XIII 76, 1. 11) whether the poet's subject was his mistress, the Blessed Virgin, or the Christ Child. Both the Virgin Mary and the speaker's mistress were "bryht ase burde in bour" (XIII 76, 1. 1; RL XIV 72, 1. 2). The comparison of Christ to the lover-knight was implicit in the descriptive phrase "hardi and bolde" (XIII 24, 1. 26) owing to the association of the phrase with the heroes of the romances; and when the Virgin Mary describes Christ's death on the cross (RL XV 10, 1. 61), it is in the manner of the romances: "fful stille he stode as eny ston." Many of the doublets employed descriptively operated as metonymy as well. For example, in the passage quoted above from "Doomsday" (XIII 28a; see above, p. 72), the phrase "fou & gray"
represents the "riche men" who, like everyone else, are subject to death. Thomas de Hales' "Love Ron" (XIII 43) employs the same phrase (1. 28) in connection with the same idea, and a similar phrase, "grei and gris," is employed twice in "Le Regret de Maximian" (XIII 51, 11. 110, 122), also in reference to riches that have passed away. "Houndes and hauekes" is used with the same connotations in "Ubi Sount Qui Ante Nos Fuerount?" (XIII 48):

\begin{verbatim}
Uuere b e f c > £ey biforen vs weren,
Houndes ladden and hauekes beren
And hadden feld and wode?
11. 1-3
\end{verbatim}

Similarly, such combinations as "bure and halle" and "castel and tour" were sufficient to introduce a courtly motif.

The poet who wished to employ image as image generally did so by developing a single image as the basis for his entire poem or by employing a series of images conveying the same idea. "The Maiden Makeles:" (RL XV 81) is a well-known example of the former; examples of the latter are also provided by religious poems in honor of the Blessed Virgin. Associated with the role of the Blessed Virgin as the Mother of Christ was a tradition of images involving chambers, vessels, and other containers: the poet of "Honour to Him Who Descended from Heaven" (RL XV 74) has constructed a hymn from a series of three such metaphors:

\begin{verbatim}
That was Ihfi, our saueour,
The onely sone of god myghty,
That beldyt in that bygly bowre,
Whiché is the wombe of mylde mary.
\end{verbatim}
Mylde that maydene may be eald,
ffor with fylthe was she neuer fylde;
fful wele was hyr that had in wolde,
In hyr chief chawmbre, suche a chylde.

She is the chief of chastyte,
the conclaue and the clostre clene,
Of hym that hyr humylite
Commendyth, amonge his sayntys bedene.

Even so, the poet is careful to indicate in his first stanza what the terms of his comparison are, and reinforces their relationship to one another by linking the stanzas together alliteratively.

Working within the limits which the comprehension of the audience placed upon him, the poet could vary the terms of his image and create a striking figure that, nevertheless, because of its similarity to the conventional, was capable of being immediately apprehended. Thus in the tradition of the chamber and vessel metaphors, the poet in "Marye, mayde mylde and fre" (RL XIV 32) develops a series of images in honor of the Virgin, beginning with "Chambre of the tryntyte," introducing along the way Old Testament types (she is the "rytte sarray"), then presenting the audience with "þou ert þe slinge, þy sone þe ston, / þat dauy slange golye op-on" (11. 25-26).

One final figure employed by the Middle English poets needs brief consideration here -- the pun or **double entendre**. It is a figure which lends itself particularly well to aural poetry, for if we accept Chaytor's characterization of the unlettered man as one who has no fixed orthographic images in his mind, if, indeed, he depends on auditory rather than visual im-
pulses, the pun is an effective device immediately apprehended by him. Such double meanings made possible by homonyms occur frequently in Middle English verse. We have already commented (see Chapter I, pp. 8-9) on the possibility of a double meaning in best/beste in "Foweles in the frith," and Edmund Reiss has suggested that wod in that poem also operates with both wood and mad as its meaning. The brief poem "Nou goth sonne vnder wod" (XIII 1) employs a number of such elements. Wod, sonne, and tre all operate in this poem with more than a single meaning. The sun/son pair appears frequently in the religious poetry. The conventional image portraying the Blessed Virgin as "clerare than Cristall" (see RL XV 13, 1. 8, for example) led to the use of son as the sun shining through this spotless glass:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{[P]e tober ioy i wate it was} \\
\text{Als sun schines thoru he glas} \\
\text{Sua ert bu, leued[i], wemles} \\
\text{and ai sal be.}
\end{align*}
\]

RL XIV 31, 11. 21-24

In "Marye, mayde mylde and fre" (RL XIV 32), a similar image is made possible by the sun/son substitution:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ase he sonne takeb hyre pas} \\
\text{Wyb-out breche bor3-out bat glas,} \\
\text{By maydenhod on wemmed hyt was} \\
\text{For bere of byne chylde,}
\end{align*}
\]

11. 73-76

\[\text{From Script to Print, p. 14.}\]
Another pun was made possible by the double meaning of kynd. A number of the lyrics in which Christ appeals to man from the cross employ this word so that both of its meanings are possible, thus adding an extra dimension to these poems. A fifteenth-century religious lyric (RL XIV 104) begins "Vnkinde man, take hede of mee!" and another (RL XIV 108) opens with a similar phrase: "O man vnkinde/ haue in mynde/ my paynes smert." In both cases unkinde may be read to mean both unfeeling and unnatural. Man is unfeeling, perhaps, because he is un-natural in that he fails to respond to Christ's suffering because his sin has separated him from his original natural state.

In "I would be Clad in Christis Skin" (RL XIV 71), Edmund Reiss sees a double meaning in rode in the opening lines: "Gold & al þis werdis wyn/ Is nouth but Christis rode," rode here meaning both countenance and cross.23 The meaning is thus both "that which is truly valuable . . . in this world is to be found only in Christ's countenance" and "worldly wealth and joy must pale beside -- and because of -- the crucifixion" (p. 103). The apprehension of such word play is not as instantaneous for the reader as it is for the listener, since the reader tends to recall a visual image of sun or son rather

than the auditory image. Insofar as this device survives in modern literature, therefore, it is most at home in the theatre.

Before turning to look at the larger structures of form, structure and style, it is worth noting that those few lyrics which modern criticism praises as the best employ these same devices of repetition to one degree or another. "The Maiden Makeles," which George Kane terms "an instance of the ideal religious lyric, that farthest removed from the expression of homily or doctrine or devotion with tags and tricks of poetry attached to it,"\textsuperscript{24} utilizes repetition of sound in rhyme and alliteration, conventional imagery, and stock phrase: the spring setting, which Kane notes is "not . . . the conventionally set springtime of well-worn poetic usage . . . but in the very April when spring does break" (p. 163) is certainly no more precise than that established in the Harley lyric as "Bytuene mersh & averil" (XIII 77) or Chaucer's "Aprille with his shoures sote." The "beautiful" simile of the "mysteriously appearing dew" has analogues not only in the four lines from Jacques de Cambrai,\textsuperscript{25} but in a lyric from the thirteenth-century German

\begin{quote}
Ensi com sor la verdure
Descent rosee des ciels,
Vint en vos cors, Virge pure,
De paradis vos dous Fiels.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24}P. 163.

\textsuperscript{25}Chambers and Sidgwick, p. 349. The passage referred to is quoted as follows:
poet, Mechthild of Magdeburg: "I come to my loved one/ like a dew upon the flowers," as well as in liturgical tradition. In fact, in her examination of this poem, Sarah Appleton Weber has traced everyone of the images as they are employed in the poem to the liturgy. That the poet is able to fuse successfully these elements into "a poem of the purest poetic conception," to use Kane's phrase, may be due not only to the poet's artistry. It is worth considering that the familiarity of these conventions to the medieval audience enabled the poet of "The Maiden Makeles" to employ them in such a way as now appears subtle and suggestive to an audience of readers unfamiliar with the techniques of aural poetry.

The foregoing discussion is not by way of detracting from the poem or its poet. It is merely for the purpose of suggesting that, while what is a "good" poem (whatever that may be) to modern readers was equally appealing to medieval audiences, it may have been so for very different reasons. For these very same reasons, other poems, which we do not find "good," might very well have been such to the listening audience for whom they were intended.

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26Dronke, Medieval Lyric, p. 83, quotes these lines in English, attributing them to Mechthild, but he does not further identify them.

27See Theology and Poetry, pp. 57-60.
CHAPTER IV

THEME, STYLE, AND FORM IN THE EARLY AURAL LYRIC

In turning to an examination of theme and subject, style, and form in the early lyrics, we find as high a degree of repetition as that encountered in the study of sound and image. These poets confined themselves to the reiteration of a small number of themes and subjects -- the implications of the Nativity and the Crucifixion; glorification of and supplication to the Blessed Virgin and Christ; and the contemplation of death and the vanity of earthly pursuits. Within this limited range, the poet usually approached his theme in one of three ways which can be distinguished in terms of the role which the poet assumed in relationship to his audience. First, as an observer with the audience, the poet either described what all might see or silently looked on a scene dramatically presented in the form of a dialogue or a monologue. This approach is most frequently found in the Nativity and Crucifixion lyrics. Second, in the hymns and prayers to the Blessed Virgin and Christ, the poet spoke either for or with his audience. Finally, he spoke to his audience directly as preacher or teacher, most often in the moral and homiletic verses. Regardless of the approach, however, there is an acute awareness of a speaker in most of these poems, which is a sure sign of aural influence.

Lyrics on the Passion outnumber those on the Nativity by about four
to one. Brown, for example, in his edition of thirteenth-century lyrics, prints only three poems which are even remotely related to the Nativity, an Epiphany song and two lyrics on the Annunciation. But in this same volume, he prints more than twenty poems on the Crucifixion. The explanation for these figures lies in the motives from which early vernacular lyric sprang -- the desire of the Church to create in the ignorant laity an understanding of Christian doctrine. Central to this doctrine, of course, is Christ's redemption of mankind through His suffering and death on the cross. According to Rosemary Woolf, this emphasis on Christ's suffering as a means of awakening man to the love of God can be traced to the influence of Cistercian meditation, especially as established by St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. William of Thierry, who propounded the notion that "those who cannot yet bear the full blaze of Christ's divinity, . . . those beginners in prayer," can nevertheless be moved by the stories of Christ's life, and experience a deep compassion for his sufferings."¹ Rossell Hope Robbins has shown that the authors of early Middle English religious lyrics were largely the Dominican and Franciscan friars² who sought to create in the people the


love of Christ which Cistercian spirituality emphasized. The abundance of Crucifixion lyrics produced as a consequence of this emphasis provides numerous examples of the three approaches to theme. An examination of these lyrics will form the basis for most of the discussion which follows, although some attention will be given to aural elements in the hymns and prayers and the homiletic verse.

Of the twenty or so lyrics focusing on the Crucifixion which Brown prints in XIII, in all but one ("In Sign of Love to Man," XIII 69) the poet describes the scene which the audience is to imagine or he presents a dramatic scene. Six of these lyrics are based on writings attributed to St. Bernard. "Aspice Mitissime Conditor" (XIII 33) is preceded in the manuscript by a passage of Latin prose beginning Bernardus: Aspice mitissime conditor (XIII, p. 193). Among the fourteenth-century lyrics Brown prints two, both titled "Candet Nudatum Pectus" (RL XIV 1a, b), also based on this passage, but from manuscripts attributing the words to St. Augustine (p. 241). The other five lyrics from the thirteenth century, as well as "Respice in Faciem Christi" (RL XIV 2a, b) and "Look to Me on the Cross" (RL XIV 4) are taken from another passage of Latin prose also by St. Bernard. The Latin prose immediately precedes "Man's Leman on the Rood" (XIII 34) in the manuscripts; "In Sign of Love to Man" (XIII 69) is preceded in its manuscript by both Latin and French renditions of these same lines. In all of these poems, the presentation of detail is largely determined by the Latin original. Two
of the lyrics based on the Respite passage are almost identical; both are single quatrains in couplet rhyme with the same rhyme words:

Wyth was hys nakede brest and red of blod hys syde,
Bleyc was his fair handled, his wnde dop ant wide,
And hys armes ystreith hey up-hon he rode;
On fif studes on his body he stremes ran o blode.

RL XIV la

Wit was his nakede brest and red of blod his side,
Blod was his faire neb, his wnde depe and uide,
starke weren his armes hi-sprend op-on he rode;
In fif steden an his bodi stremes hurne of blode.

RL XIV lb

The poets' efforts in both of these versions were aimed at creating a stark, vivid visual image of Christ on the cross. No attempt other than the presentation of details is made to evoke emotion. The poets depended on the details of Christ's suffering, presented in each version in syntactically parallel inverted structures to emphasize the adjectives, to move the audience.

Woolf, in commenting on these verses as early examples of meditative poetry, points to their "mnemonic brevity" and their "complete explicitness" as characteristic of an art intended to serve as verbal instruction and which could be easily memorized (pp. 27, 28).

"Aspice Mitissime Conditor" (XIII 33), based on the same Latin original as these two fourteenth-century lyrics, presents the same details in a dramatic fashion. The speaker is Christ on the cross addressing God the Father:

Hu þad madist alle þinc,
mi suete fadir, hewene kinc,
Bi-sue to me þad am þi sone,  
þad for monkine habe fles ynomin.

Mi wite brest, suene & brit,  
bloði is min side rist  
& min licam on rode i-stist.

Mine lonke armes, stiue & sterke,  
Min heyin arrin dim & derke,  
Min ðeyis honket so marbre-ston in werke;

Þo flod of min rede blod  
Al owir-weint min þurlit fod.  
Fadir, þau monkine ab idon folie,  
Mid mine wondis for hem mercy ic þe crie.

The details here are presented in essentially the same order as those in the shorter poems: the white breast, the red blood, the body stretched on the cross, the blood flowing from the five wounds. But in this poem the descriptive details are placed between stanzas which relate them to the meaning of the scene which the previous poems only describe; Christ on the cross suffers for the sake of man. Moreover, the dramatic monologue makes the scene more immediate to the audience, who stand, as it were, in the presence of Christ as He pleads for them with the Heavenly Father.

The same two approaches are to be seen in the poems based on the second passage from the writings of St. Bernard, the Respice in faciem Christi, along with the third approach in which the poet addresses man.

Brown prints five versions of the Respice passages, poems which he entitles "Man's Leman on the Rood," in which the poet observes with the audience, describing what all can see:
As in the Aspice mitissime conditor poems, the Crucifixion scene itself is sketched without embellishment; the details are starkly presented, yet the scene is easily visualized. Two elements are included in this poem which are not found in the Aspice poems: Mary and John are witnesses to the scene; and the poet emphasizes the proper response for those looking on: "Hiþe hi mai wepen/ and selte teres leten." Although the inclusion of Mary and John in the scene has the effect of causing man to stand somewhat farther back from it, at the same time he is brought psychologically closer, in that he becomes a participant with Mary and John. The close-up provided by the Aspice poems which emphasize the details of Christ's suffering -- the white and red contrast of the body and blood, the strained limbs -- becomes in the Respice lyrics a tableau. According to Woolf, the tears, "from the time of St. Bernard onwards, were considered the outward sign of the fitting inward response to the Passion" (p. 31). Brown prints two versions of a poem, "The Mind of the Passion" (XIII 56a, b), which simply prescribe this response:
Loverd þi passion,
Who þe þenchet arist þaron,
teres hit tolet,
and eyen hit bollet,
nebbes hit wetet,
ant hertes hit swetet.

A much longer poem, "A Song of Sorrow for the Passion" (XIII 64),
is an expansion of the Respice in faciem Christi meditation. Each of the six
ten-line stanzas develops a part of the scene which the shorter poems sketch
out. Stanza one echoes the lines of "My Leman on the Rood" (XIII 35) in
describing the setting and the speaker's sorrow:

Hi sike, al wan hi singe,
for sorue þat hi se
wan hic wit weepinge
bi-holde a-pon þe tre.
hi se ihesu, mi suete,
his herte blode for-lete
for þe luue of me.
his wondis waxin wete --
marie, milde and seete,
þu haf merci of me!

The stanza typifies the poet's approach, which is highly emotional; at several
other points in the presentation of the scene, he interjects an emotional
address to Mary, as in the stanza above, or to the audience or to Christ
Himself. In stanza two, he elaborates the scene in a way which vivifies it
and brings it closer to home:

Hey a-pon a dune
as al folke hit se may,
a mile wyt-hute þe tune
a-bute þe mid-day,
þe rode was op a-reride.
In a parenthetical aside, the speaker notes: "his frendis werin al of-ferde, / bei clungin so be cley," his tone almost scornful. Further along, he contrasts the faithless disciples with the sorrowing Mother of God "hir-selfe al-hon, / her songe was way-le-[way]." The colloquial language of this passage creates a feeling of intimacy between audience and poet which enables the audience to better comprehend the poet's grief when, following the completion of the description of the scene in stanza three, he cries out to them, "hu soldi singen mor?" Stanzas four and five are essentially repetitions of the first three, even to the point of describing the "feu frendis" who remain until the end; in the fifth stanza, Mary is joined in her mourning by St. John and the scene of the shorter poems is thus made complete. The final stanza, as the final lines of the shorter versions, suggests man's response to what he beholds. This expansiveness focuses the attention of the audience on each detail of the scene rather than on the scene as a whole.

Three of the Respice poems present the speaker as a preacher, addressing his audience and urging them to "Loke to bi louerd . . . þar hanget he a rode" (RL XIV 2b). In these lyrics, the poet emphasizes the reason for Christ's suffering. "Respice in Faciem Christi" (RL XIV 2b) begins by exhorting man to "loke," then urges him to "wep hyf þo mist terres al of blode." After presenting the details as do the other versions of this passage, he concludes with another exhortation: "Begin at his molde and loke to his to, / ne saltu no wit vinde bute anguisse and wo." The other
version of this poem which Brown prints (RL XIV 2a) is less effective; the
details are less well organized, portraying less successfully the suffering
of Christ and failing to emphasize man's response. "In Sign of Love to Man"
(XIII 69), however, is a far better hortatory treatment of the same material:

Man, folwe seintt Bernardes trace
And loke in ihesu cristes face,
How hee lut hys heued to be
Swetlike for to kessen be,
And sprat his armes on be tre,
Senful man, to kippen be.
In sygne of loue ys open his syde;
His feet y-nayled wid be fabyde.
Al his bodi is don on rode,
Senful man, for hyne goode.

The poet here accomplishes several things briefly and effectively. He has in
orderly fashion presented the picture of Christ on the cross, proceeding from
head to toe, then calling up the entire scene in the final couplet. At the same
time, through his appeals to man, he brings the audience into the picture.
His exhortation in the opening couplet to "loke in ihesu cristes face" brings
man in close to the scene. Finally, his choice of words emphasizes the
meaning of Christ's suffering in awakening man to God's love: the sagging
head of Christ bent to kiss man; the arms outstretched to embrace him;
and the feet nailed fast that He might longer abide with man. All this, con-
cludes the poet, is "Senful man, for hyne goode." The effect of the poem is
intensely personal, stressing through the repetition of "senful man" man-
kind's unworthiness of such love and conveying more successfully than "Man's
Leman on the Rood" (XIII 34) the theme of Christ as the lover of man.
"Look to Me on The Cross" (RL X IV 4), the last of the Respice poems requiring mention, can be considered briefly. It is a dramatized version of St. Bernard's words employing one of the most popular approaches to the Passion -- a dramatic monologue in which Christ appeals to man from the cross, pointing to His five wounds and the crown of thorns which He has suffered for man's sake and exhorting man to turn his heart to Him. The details presented so skillfully and the theme delineated so subtly by the preceding poem here are overdone. The gory aspects are stressed, as Christ, following several lines detailing the blood flowing from the five wounds and His thorn-inflicted brow, urges man to "turn mi bodi abuten, oueral þu findest blod" (1. 8).

As the foregoing discussion indicates, there is a similarity in the structure of all of these poems. The details of Christ's suffering are identical, and for the most part the order of their presentation is the same in every lyric. In those poems where a mediator intrudes between scene and audience, his presence is clearly indicated by the use of direct address and his purpose is to direct the audience's attention to the significance of the scene and to recommend the proper response. In all but one of the poems (RL X IV 2b), the visual image is presented first, the delineation of detail proceeding from head to toe, and then the emotion is evoked or recommended. In the dramatic presentations of scene, Christ speaks from the cross; the details of His suffering, though presented in the same order as in other
lyrics, are framed both at the beginning and the end by passages stating the significance of His sacrifice. In "Aspice Mitissime Conditor" (XIII 33), Christ reiterates that He is on the cross "for monkine" (ll. 4, 13); in "Look to Me on The Cross" (RL XIV 4) "ich tholede for be" is twice repeated (11. 2, 10), as Christ addresses sinful man.

Of all the approaches to the treatment of the Passion, the one most frequently employed by the Middle English religious lyricists was the dramatic approach in which the poet became one with the audience, either addressed by an easily identified speaker, as in the numerous appeals to man from Christ on the cross, or observing a monologue or dialogue. These poets recognized the possibilities which drama presented of direct communication and a sense of immediacy and involvement on the part of the audience, and they endeavored to make the most of them. In addition to the two monologues spoken by Christ on the cross which have already been discussed, Brown prints thirteen other monologues and three dialogues on the Passion in his editions of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lyrics. Ten of the monologues are appeals addressed by Christ to man; two are appeals by the Blessed Virgin, to Christ and to the Jews who crucified Him; and one is a prayer to God by Christ in Gethsemane. All three of the dialogues are between Christ and the Virgin.

The ten monologues spoken by Christ have a common element in that all of them remind man of what Christ has suffered and most of them extend
an offer of mercy to man. Four of these are appeals to man from the cross. "Abide, Ye who Pass By" (RL XIV 46) and "O vos omnes qui transitis per viam" (RL XIV 74) are addressed to passers-by. Both open with appeals for attention: "Abyde, gud men, & hald yhour pays," (46); "3e bat pasen be he wey3e, / Abidet a litel stounde!" (74). The first is more typical in its inclusion of the offer of grace in the closing lines:

And of bi syns ask aleggance,  
And in my mercy haue affyance  
And bou sall gett my grace.  

11. 16-18

Both poems resemble the Aspice and Respice lyrics in urging man to "Loke vp" and "behald my body" (46, 11. 5, 7), and in pointing to the wounds which Christ has suffered, as, for example, in the last four lines of the "O vos omnes" lyric:

To be tre with nailes þre  
Wol fast i hange bounde,  
With a spere al þoru mi side  
To min herte is mad a wounde.  

RL XIV 74, 11. 4-8

The other appeals from the cross are similar. "Homo vide quid pro Te Patior" (RL XIV 77), like "Abide, Ye who Pass By" and "O vos omnes qui transitis per viam," addresses man and bids him behold Christ's suffering:

Vnkynde man, gif kepe til me  
and loke what payne I suffer for þe.  

Behalde, þe blode fra me downe rennes,  
noght for my gylt bot for bi synnes.  

11. 1-2, 5-6
Following a passage pointing to the five wounds and appealing for man's love, the poem concludes with an offer to man: "In erth mi grace, in heuen my blysse" (1. 30). "How Crist Spekes tyll Synfull Man of His Gret Mercy" (RL XIV 47) differs slightly in that it emphasizes Christ's mercy in five stanzas, employing only the first stanza to set the scene:

Man, þus on rode I hyng for þe,  
For-sake þi syn for luf of me,  
Sen I swilk luf þe neðe;  
Man, I luf þe ouer all thing,  
And for þi luf þus wald I hyng,  
My blyssed blode to blede.  
11. 1-6

Each of the five remaining stanzas offers man mercy, citing Mary Magdalene and Peter as examples of sinners to whom Christ showed His mercy.

Four of the monologues are not appeals from the cross. They refer to Christ's Passion in the past tense and are hortatory, urging man to remember Christ's suffering on the cross and to forgo sin. References to Christ's wounds and His agony are followed by exhortations to man to "þenc" or to "Lere":

vnder mi gore  
ben wndes selcow3e sore.  
Ler, man, mi lore;  
for mi loue sinne no more.  
"Christ's Appeal to Man,"  
RL XIV 51, 11. 18-21.

Mine peines weren harde and stronge,  
Mi moder þouth es swipe longe:  
Þenc, man, er þu do þi sinne,
Wath i bolede for man-kinne;
Min harde deth he shal don blinne.

"Think, Man, of My Hard Stundes," RL XIV 3, 11. 11-15

"Christ's Three Songs to Man" (RL XIV 76) is a series of three songs. The first and second conclude with stanzas expressing ideas similar to these:

I suffre iewes on me to spete,  
& al nith with hem i wake,  
To loken wan þu woldest lete  
þi senne for loue of þi make.  
11. 5-8

Min herte is for-smite a-to,  
al, mankinde, for loue of þe,  
To loken wan þu woldest go  
Fro þi senne for loue of me.  
11. 13-16

Similar correspondences are also to be found in the opening lines of these four poems.

"Jesus Pleases with the Worldling" (RL XIV 126) and "Jesus Appeals to Man by the Wounds" (RL XIV 127) are also monologues addressed to man, but they differ from the foregoing poems in that their structure is determined by the special nature of their appeals. In "Jesus Pleases with the Worldling," Christ's words are addressed specifically to the worldly man who takes particular delight in the vanities of this life. The first four stanzas establish vivid contrasts — between man's "garland of grene/ of floures Many on" and Christ's crown of thorns; between man's impeccably white-gloved hands and Christ's own "wip nailes þorled"; between man's arms spread wide when he "dauncest narewe" and Christ's, cruelly stretched on the cross; and
between man’s coat fashionably slit up the sides and Christ’s side opened
"wiþ spere sharpe/ y-stongen to þe herte." The poem concludes with Christ’s
reminder of the pain He has suffered and His offer of Heaven’s bliss to those
who "let þi synne & loue þou me." Nevertheless, in the presentation of the
details of Christ’s physical agony and His offer of mercy, the poem does
not differ essentially from the pattern of the other monologues.

Closely related to this lyric is a single stanza of "Lovely Tear from
Lovely Eye" (RL XIV 69), a lyrical address to Christ on the cross by peni-
tent man, which employs the same kind of contrast:

I prud & kene,
þu meke an clene,
Withouten wo or wile;
þu art ded for me,
& I liue þoru þe
So blissed be þat wile.

11. 7-12

In this poem, Christ weeps for man who responds with great compassion in
the burden to this carol:

Lu[u]eli ter of loueli ey3e, qui dostu me so wo?
Sorful ter of sorful ey3e, þu brekst myn herte a-to.

"Jesus Appeals to Man by the Wounds" (RL XIV 127) follows the same
pattern of the other monologues in delineating Christ’s suffering from head
to toe, but each stanza appeals to man by one of the wounds to forsake one by
one the Seven Deadly Sins, urging its opposite virtue. Stanza one, for
example, appeals by the wounds from the crown of thorns to the proud man,
exhorting him to be "meke," and so on, down to the appeal by the nailed feet
to the slothful urging him to rise up "out of þi bed" and "þanke me þerfore."
The final stanza is a prayer to Christ by the five wounds. Two features
distinguish this poem from the others which follow the pattern of the Aspice
and Respice poems in their presentation of detail; it is more a sermon on the
Seven Deadly Sins than an emotional appeal to man, and the last stanza
suggests that perhaps this lyric was intended for an audience of readers
rather than listeners:

Ihesu, for þi woundis fyue,
Pou kepe hem well in al her lyue
But þese lessouns ouer wole rede,
And perwif her soulis fede.

Brown includes the poem in the final section of RL XIV entitled "Miscellaneous
Lyrics of the End of the Century," which includes several other poems,
notably "An Acrostic of The Angelic Salutation" (131), which also were
probably intended for readers rather than listeners. Evidence of this move­
ment toward the written rather than the aural presentation of literature will
be discussed more fully in Chapter V.

The similarity of content and its arrangement in a number of these
poems can be traced to their sources of inspiration. The appeal to man
from the cross originates in a passage from Lamentations i, 12: O vos
omnès, qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut dolor
meus (RL XIV, p. 261). This verse of scripture, along with similar pas­
sages from Micah vi, 3 and Isaiah v, 4, formed a part of the Easter liturgy
sung on Good Friday, according to Rosemary Woolf (p. 36); but these appeals
have clearly been combined with the details of Christ's suffering as reflected in the two passages attributed to St. Bernard. The reproach by Christ to "man unkynde" stems also from a Latin original, a verse beginning Homo, vide, quae pro te patior by Philippe de Grève (RL XIV, pp. 267, 269), a poem which was frequently attributed to St. Bernard (Woolf, p. 37). "Jesus Pleads With the Worldling" (RL XIV 126) has as its source yet another passage attributed to St. Bernard -- Tu es homo, et habes sertum de floribus -- frequently quoted in the sermon books, among them the Fasciculus morum, Legenda aurea, and the Summa praedicantium (Woolf, p. 41).

All of these lyrics require visualization on the part of the audience, which must imagine itself at the foot of the cross. The aim of these appeals, either loving or reproachful in tone, is to move man to compassion and repentance by means of straightforward, unelaborated descriptions of Christ's suffering, concluding with an appeal to man for his love. The dramatic monologue, which removes the poet as mediator and puts the audience, as it were, in the presence of Christ, could more effectively achieve these ends through its directness.

A small group of early Passion lyrics make the appeal to man through the Blessed Virgin and her sorrows. Two of these poems are monologues: "The Blessed Virgin's Appeal to the Jews" (RL XIV 60) and "Lamentatio dolorosa" (RL XIV 64). Three are dialogues: "Dialogue between Our Lady and Jesus on the Cross" (XIII 49), "Dialogue between Jesus and the Blessed
Virgin at the Cross" (RL XIV 67), and "The Blessed Virgin to her Son on the Cross" (RL XIV 128). Both monologues, although ostensibly addressed to different audiences, have similar features. The speaker in each is identified in the opening line of the poem, which contains a plea for compassion.

In "The Blessed Virgin's Appeal to the Jews" (RL XIV 60), Mary seeks mercy for her Son: "Why have ye no reuthe on my child?" In the "Lamentatio dolorosa" (RL XIV 64), the plea is addressed to Christ on her own behalf: "Sute sone, reu on me & brest out of bi bondis." The evocation of emotional response to the Crucifixion is made easier in these poems because the audience can identify readily with a mother's sorrow over the suffering of her child.

That the purpose of these two lyrics is to move man to an emotional response becomes clear when we realize that neither poem attempts to deal with the greater significance of the Crucifixion; both are narrowed to the single focus of Mary's human suffering. Through the intensity of her grief, the audience comes to experience similar emotions. In the content of the Blessed Virgin's pleas, both poems are very much alike. Her appeal to the Jews pleads for pity for herself and her child:

Wy haue ye no reuthe on my child?
Haue reuthe on me ful of murnih[n]g,
Taket doun on rode my derworbi child,
Or prek me on rode with my derling.

The first two lines constitute the plea for pity -- in line one for Christ, in line two for Mary herself. Lines three and four suggest the alternatives -- to remove Christ from the cross or to sacrifice Mary with her Son. Stanza
two elaborates:

More pine ne may me ben don
Pan laten me liuen in sorwe & schame;
Als loue me bindet to my sone,
so lat vs deyen hopen i-same.

As Mary is bound to her Son by a mother's love for her child, so His suffering is her suffering; and insofar as man is able to identify with the bond between mother and child, so far does Mary's agony become his own.

"Lamentacio dolorosa" (RL XIV 64) seeks to evoke compassion in much the same fashion, as Mary pleads with Christ on the cross. As in the appeal to the Jews, she seeks alleviation of her suffering, either through Christ's release -- "Brest out of þi bondis" -- or through her own death -- "bring me out of þis liue" (1. 9). This lyric, however, brings in an element of the meaning of the Crucifixion. Mary's plea that Christ break His bonds implies her recognition of His supra-human capabilities; her description of His suffering in stanza two focuses on this element:

Suete sone, þi faire face dropped al on blode,
& þi body dounward is bounden to þe rode;
Hou may þi modris herte þolen so suete a fode,
Þat blisse was of alle born & best of alle gode!

The juxtaposition of the details of Christ's suffering with Mary's own agony intensifies and heightens the audience's perception of Mary's sorrow, and the blode/ rode/ fode/ gode rhyme pattern helps to convey the significance of the scene which the audience witnesses.

The structure of the poem is particularly suited to aural presentation.
Each stanza opens with direct address by Mary to Christ; the "suete sone" which begins each stanza identifies both the speaker and the individual addressed and at the same time emphasizes the human nature of their relationship. Stanzas one and three are virtually identical. The direct address is followed by a plea: "reu on me." In each case Mary seeks release from her own suffering; in stanza one, she seeks Christ's release from the cross, in stanza three, her own death. The progression comes through stanza two, in which she recognizes the reason for Christ's suffering; thus having realized the necessity for Christ's suffering, she seeks release by another means -- her own death. This stanza also suggests that Christ is at this point in the little drama much closer to death: whereas in stanza one Mary has said, "nou me ūarket ṣat i se . . . / Nailes dreuen in-to ṣe tre, so reufuliche ūu honge[s]" (ll. 2-3), in stanza three she says, "me ūarket ṣat i se ṣi det3" (1. 10). Both of these monologues stress Mary's desire to escape her own suffering through death. In the former, she does not wish to live, she tells the Jews, "in sorwe and schame." In the latter, she expresses the desire to "fle & lete alle ḧese londes" (1. 4), and in the final stanza she declares "nou may I no more ēriue,/ For al ḧis werd with-outen ē ne sal me maken blīpe."

Closely related to these two poems is a slightly different sort of monologue in which the poet as a witness to the Crucifixion addresses his response to the Blessed Virgin in simple and economical fashion:
In four very brief lines, the poet creates a clear visual image of sunset on Calvary and the sorrowful vigil of the Blessed Virgin. In a tone of quiet compassion, the poet here responds to the pleas of Mary in the monologues for "reu" and "reuthe."

Sarah Appleton Weber, in discussing the effects of sacred history and theology on the Marian laments, indicates that for the medieval audience the intensity of the emotion in Mary's words was heightened because Mary spoke not just as any mother:

It is not the typical, but the individual and particular associations that Mary and Christ have, as it is in all human relationships, that are seen to cause and to convey intensity of suffering. Further, the fact that Mary is not any mother, her Son not any child, but that she is the Mother of God and that she shared the uniquely profound experiences of His life and death is what reveals their suffering to be far greater than any other human being's suffering . . . in the same way as Mary was closest to Christ throughout His life, so she was foremost in grief at His suffering and death.3

3 Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 117.
Moreover, according to Weber, in the second of these two monologues, "Lamentacio dolorosa" (RL XIV 64), the agony of Mary's pleas is increased by the audience's recognition of this unique relationship:

When the reader recognizes that the conception of the poem depends fundamentally on the idea that Mary's dying son is God, he sees the essential question expressed by her appeal and, also, God's unspoken answer. If this man is God, the all powerful, He can burst His bonds. Why, then, doesn't he? Mary, who loves Him most and knows Him most fully, because she is most fully aware of the significance of the situation can ask this question most forcibly. Christ's silent death, through [sic] wounding the one closest to Him, is thus recognized to be Christ's willing choice because of His love for man (p. 118).

However, the Marian dialogues, both those at the scene of the Crucifixion and those at the Nativity, suggest that the medieval poet found it necessary to explain this relationship and its meaning more fully to his audience. The most familiar of the dialogues is "Stonde wel, moder, under rode" (XIII 49a, b) based on the Latin hymn Stabat iuxta. The tail-rhyme stanza form (aabccbb) is perfectly adapted to the dialogue. In each of the stanzas, Christ speaks in the first three lines and the Blessed Virgin replies in the

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4Brown prints a verse translation of the Latin hymn Stabat iuxta Christi Crucem (XIII 4); it is not, however, a dialogue. "Dialogue between Our Lady and Jesus on the Cross" (XIII 49a, b) is in the same verse form as the Stabat iuxta and the Latin original. The discussion of the dialogue is based on the b version as Brown prints it, which is the more complete poem.
second three. There is a real progression in the poem from Mary's concern at the beginning of the poem with her Son's suffering and her own to her final understanding of the meaning of Christ's sacrifice, a progression of understanding which the audience shares. Despite her understanding, however, her very human agony is not mitigated.

Rosemary Woolf (p. 246) dismisses the lyric with only the briefest of comments, finding it lacking in tenderness and suggesting that "whilst the Virgin laments with unrestrained human distress, Christ speaks dogmatically with an impassivity befitting His divinity." What the poet endeavors to accomplish, however, is the revelation of Christ's dual nature, both human and divine; he achieves this revelation through the presentation of Christ's double suffering — His physical torment and death which is necessary for man's salvation, and His very human agony as He witnesses the sorrow of His mother. Unlike the monologues, in which only one aspect of the Passion is presented, the dialogues can convey the scene even more dramatically, presenting the image of both human and divine suffering. The compassion between Mother and Son is matched by the compassion for them both which the poet is thus able to evoke in his audience. At the same time, he accomplishes a didactic purpose in establishing and explaining the meaning of this suffering.

As in the Blessed Virgin's monologues, the opening lines establish for the audience both the setting and the identity of the characters: "Stonde
wel, moder, vnder rode." The remainder of Christ's address to Mary in this stanza identifies the paradox which the poem is to explore: the Christian's response to the Crucifixion involving both sorrow and joy -- sorrow in the presence of Christ's suffering and the joy of redemption which that suffering makes possible. Mary's reply to Christ's exhortation in stanza one that she behold His agony "wyth glade mode" poses the question which the poem will endeavor to answer:

"Svne, quu may bliþe stonden?
hi se þin feet, hi se þin honden,
nayled to þe harde tre."

In turn, Christ's response in stanza two looks toward the ultimate implications of His Passion, the salvation of man: "hi þole þis ded for mannes thinge--/ for owen gilte þoli non" (11. 8-9). The recognition of His innocence serves only to intensify Mary's sorrow. "Svne," she responds, "hi fele þe dede stunde" (1. 10). Contrary to Woolf's evaluation of Christ's attitude as dogmatic and impassive, the third stanza of the lyric portrays His human nature. His words indicate that His mother's grief makes His own suffering harder to bear:

"Moder, reu vpon þi bern!
Þu wasse awey þo blodi teren,
it don me wers þan mi ded."

11. 13-15

Mary's questions and Christ's answers in the following two stanzas reveal her inability in her sorrow to accept the explanation of His sacrifice which Christ offers her: "Bettere is þat ic one deye/ þan al man-kyn to helle go"
(11. 20-21). Mary's reply emphasizes the nature of her grief:

"Sune, þu best me so minde,
with me nout; it is mi kinde
þat y for þe sorye make."

11. 28-30

This reminder of her human relationship to Christ heightens the awareness of the audience to the human aspect of Christ's nature, and in stanza six, as in stanza three, the poet plays upon Christ's capacity to suffer as a man in His words to Mary: "Moder, merci! let me deyen" (1. 31). Mary's reply voices the same plea for her own release in death that was a part of her monologues. From this point on, the poet develops what is to be the source of Mary's consolation. In stanzas eight and nine, Christ indicates that Mary's sorrow will enable her to identify with all mothers. The Virgin Birth made her unique; in her sorrow for her child she becomes as other mothers:

"Moder, reu of moder kare!
nu þu wost of moder fare,
þou þu be cleene mayden m[an]."

11. 43-45

Although she is not reconciled and her grief remains, Mary understands:

"Sune, help alle at nede,
alle þo þat to me greden--
M[ay]den, wyf and fol wyman."

11. 46-48

Weber views these words as Mary's first prayer of intercession, saying that in so speaking the Blessed Virgin consents to become the mother of all mankind and that it is as man's intercessor that she will find comfort for
her grief. The final stanza of the lyric offers the promise whereby not only
Mary's but all mankind's joy will be restored:

"Moder, y may no [lenger] duellen,
be time is cumen y fare to helle,
be [bridde day] y rise upon."
11. 49-51

Mary's last words in the dialogue express her desire to die with her Son; the
poet thus emphasizes her human grief which cannot be consoled by a joy
which is yet to come.

In the Digby MS. the ninth stanza is the final one, but in MS. Royal 12
E. i (XIII 49b), there are two stanzas appended in which the poet appears as
the speaker to provide summary exposition. These stanzas fit nicely with
the foregoing dialogue in that they narrate the carrying through of Christ's
promise to rise from death. The poet's words are addressed to Mary as
intercessor and appeal to her to lead man out of sin and into the bliss of
Heaven which Christ's sacrifice has opened to him. In these stanzas, Mary
is seen to fulfill the role for which her suffering has prepared her.

"The Dialogue between Jesus and the Blessed Virgin at the Cross"
(RL XIV 67) is a much briefer poem than "Stonde wel, moder." As we have
seen in the other dramatic poems, this one, too, opens with a designation

5Theology and Poetry, pp. 132-133.
of character and setting: "maiden & moder, cum & se, / bi child is nailed to a tre." The speaker here is designated as Jesus by the manuscript, but Brown insists that since Christ is here spoken of in the third person and later speaks in the first person, the speaker must be John, who is later addressed by Christ (see RL XIV, pp. 266-267). The details of the dialogue are essentially the same as those presented in "Stonde wel, moder" (XIII 49). The first eight lines of the poem describe the wounds of Christ as a means of indicating His suffering and are addressed to Mary. Her reply is brief, only seven lines, expressing her sorrow and inability to comprehend her Son's agony. The questions which she poses in her lament evokes the final section of the dialogue, spoken by Christ from the cross. His tone is didactic and homiletic as He addresses both John and Mary in setting out the plan for salvation which can only be fulfilled by His death. After commending His soul to God, He addresses man, exhorting him to pray to Mary. As drama, this poem is less successful than the former. There is no sense of the struggle in Christ between His human attributes and His divinity, and the suffering of Mary plays only a minor role in evoking the sermon from Christ on the cross.

Three other poems, all spoken by the poet as an observer, focus on the sorrow of the Blessed Virgin. They follow both the form and structure of the foregoing dialogues. All are in the tail-rhyme stanzas of the Stabat Moder. "Jesus Sorrows for His Mother" (XIII 45) is in eight-line stanzas,
however, while the others — "Stabat iuxta Christi Crucem" (XIII 4) and "Our Lady Sorrows for her Son" (XIII 47) — are in six-line stanzas. Both of the latter are based on the Latin hymn Stabat Mater; and both, like "Stonde wel, moder," suggest Mary's kinship with all mothers through her suffering and her role as the Mother of Mankind and intercessor as a consequence of this identification. All three of these lyrics conclude with prayers to her. "Jesus Sorrows for His Mother" (XIII 45) differs slightly from the other two in containing an address to Mary by Christ, which Brown says (XIII, pp. 200-201) was adapted from a passage by St. Bernard. A Latin passage immediately preceding this poem in the manuscript employs an eight-line stanza identical to that of the English lyric, but there are no verbal parallels between the two. There are, however, as Brown has pointed out, a number of verbal parallels between this lyric and "Stonde wel, moder," which can be attributed to the Bernardian lament influencing both.

A small group of Crucifixion lyrics fits into none of these three classifications according to approach. "The Matins of the Cross" (RL XIV 30), "An Orison to the Blessed Virgin from the Azenbite of Inwyt" (RL XIV 34), and "The Hours of the Cross" (RL XIV 55) are, as the titles perhaps suggest, versified Hours of the Cross. Both the choice of details and their arrangement are determined largely by liturgical tradition. The latter two are very similar: in couplet stanzas of varying lengths, with opening and closing prayers. Both seem to be fragmentary in that the "Orison to the
Blessed Virgin . . ." omits sections for matins and lauds, and the "Hours of
the Cross" omits lauds. "The Matins of the Cross" differs from both of
these in its organization and development. The sections for each Hour are
symmetrically arranged. The poet endeavors to include in each Hour not
only the appropriate meditation, but a second meditation on a joyful event as
well; moreover, the prayer concluding each section is carefully suited to the
meditation. The passage for midday provides a good example of his efforts:

At middai, ihesu, wit mild mode,
Pou spred þi bodi on þe rode,
To drau us all to heuen;
Þat ilk time, lauerd, þou wild
Take flexs o þat maiden mild,
Thoru an angel steuen.

Receiue, lauerd, me and ma
In-to þi suet armes tua,
Þat er bright and scene.
Lauerd, þou hele wondes mine
Wit þi suet medicine.
Grant þat it sua bene!

Make vr bodijs fair and chast,
For to receiue þe haligast,
Wit hert god and clene;
Þat we mai clene all cum to þe,
Þar þou sittes in trinite,
And iei es euer sene.

The structure here is typical of that of the other sections. In the first six-
line stanza we can discern a two-part division; the first three lines introduce
the image of Christ being placed on the cross. The sorrow of this scene is
contrasted with the joy of the Annunciation, which is the subject of the second
half of the stanza. In the two-stanza prayer which follows, the first stanza
implores Christ to fulfill the meaning of His Crucifixion by receiving man and healing his sinful wounds with "pi suet medicine," i.e. His blood shed on the cross. The second stanza of the prayer, with its references to making "vr bodijs fair and chast," is tied to the second half of the meditation stanza as the poet prays for the cleansing of body and soul, paralleling the implications of purity in the references to the Blessed Virgin. In this particular lyric, we can see how the poet, working well within a firmly established tradition which to a large extent predetermined both his choice and arrangement of material, could nevertheless express his individuality.

In addition to these three versions of the Hours of the Cross, there is a handful of narrative lyrics which simply depict and explain or celebrate events associated with the Crucifixion. Two thirteenth-century lyrics, "A Light is Come into the World" and A Springtide Song of the Redemption" (XIII 24, 54), are songs relating and explaining the events of Passiontide. They exhibit several similarities. Both make specific reference to Adam's sin as the root cause of Christ's sacrifice; both describe Christ's agony and the sorrow of Mary, and each ends with a prayer -- the former to Mary and the latter to Christ. Although the poet speaks to his audience in both poems, he identifies with them in the prayers, seeking intercession for "vs." The other thirteenth-century lyric in this group is "The Bargain of Judas" (XIII 24, 54), the well-known ballad focusing on the events of Holy Thursday and Judas' betrayal. The structure is narrative and episodic, and the poet employs a
great deal of dialogue, between Judas and his sister, Judas and Pilate, and Judas and Christ. No definite source has been discovered for the events of the poem, although popular song and Coptic legend provide interesting parallels. Brown suggests that the poem, which ends rather abruptly, is incomplete (XIII, p. 183), noting at the same time that it is in the same hand as another narrative poem, "The Journey of the Three Kings" (XIII 26), a song of Epiphany.

The two fourteenth-century songs in this group are descriptive narratives couched in the language of the popular verse romances. "Vexilla Regis prodeunt" (RL XIV 13) is based directly on the Latin hymn as the title implies. In this lyric, Christ becomes the king going forth to battle with His enemies, His cross both banner and throne, and His blood His royal shroud. The first four stanzas are descriptive and narrative. They are followed by a four-stanza address to the cross ending with a prayer. The poet of "A Lament over the Passion" (RL XIV 79) speaks as the lady whose lover-knight has been captured and put to death. The epithets which open each of the seven highly alliterative stanzas quickly make it clear that Christ

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is the knight; He is addressed as "My hope of my hele," "My well of my wele," and so forth. This is one of a number of poems in which such imagery is employed, but not all of these can be associated directly with the events of Passiontide.\footnote{Almost all of the monologues addressed to man by Christ make direct or indirect reference to the Crucifixion, but I have chosen to discuss only those in which we can clearly ascertain a Passiontide setting. In "i am iesu, þat cum to fith" (RL XIV 63), for example, Christ speaks as the lover-knight, but the implications of the poem suggest a post-Passion address to man, especially in the last four lines:}

The same limited number of approaches to theme and structure characteristic of the Crucifixion lyrics is also found in the Nativity poems. As we have noted already in this chapter (see p. 84, above), there are not nearly so many poems on the events of Christmas as on those of Easter, and many of these allude to or make direct reference the Crucifixion and its meaning. Brown, in his edition of the thirteenth-century lyrics, prints only one Epiphany song and two lyrics of the Annunciation, and both of the Annunciation poems allude to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The aural nature of these poems is clear. The Epiphany song, "The Journey of the Three Kings" (XIII 26), exhibits several of the characteristics of medieval verse narrative.

\begin{verbatim}
Siðen i am comen & haue þe broth
A blisful bote of bale,
Vndo þin herte, tel me þi þouth,
þi sennes grete an smale.
\end{verbatim}

11. 5-8
The opening lines indicate that it was intended for oral presentation:

Wolle ye iheren of twelte day,
Wou be present was ibroust
In-to betlem þer iesus lay?

Like the openings of verse romances, the poet both addresses his audience and announces his subject. Although he speaks to a group, his approach is essentially one of identification with his listeners; the story which he is about to relate has significance for him as well as for them and he includes himself among those whom "þe louerd ... hauet iwroust" (1. 8). The development of the narrative follows the pattern of romances: it is direct, straightforward, and reiterative; two of the eight-line stanzas in which the poem is written are required to establish the significance of the star and the nature of the three kings who will follow it to the Christ child's cradle. The first of these stanzas employs several of the alliterative phrases and the expansive devices used by the narrators of verse romances:

þre kinges seten in here þede,
boþen yohge men & hore,
ho iseien one sterre scinan,
ne seien ho neuer none more.
wel ho wisten wou hit hede,
wise men & witti of lore,
þat iesus was icomen for nede
so hit was iquidded yore.

The second, sixth and eighth lines of this stanza are expansive, i.e., they contribute little or nothing to the progress of the story but serve to permit the details to be absorbed by the audience before the narrator proceeds to
other matters. These are also the lines employing the language of the romances. Note the doublets "younge and hore" and "wise and witti" in lines two and six respectively, and the attribution of the facts to legend and tradition in line eight. Elsewhere in the poem, the alliterative phrases sotel & sene, some & saiste, and doublets such as wite & rede, quike & dede, and sonne & mone are utilized by the poet, always in the second half of the line and largely to fill out the line and provide a rhyme.

The episodic nature of the narrative is characteristic of medieval narrative in general. The poet requires three stanzas to introduce his subject and the three wise men. Stanzas three and four are substantially identical in that the kings and their gifts are identified in passages of dialogue. Stanza four would have required careful use of vocal inflection in order for the audience to recognize three different speakers. The punctuation of Brown's text indicates that all three kings speak in this passage:

pe on sait, "gold we sculen hem beden so me seal to riche kinge."
"pe stor is god to prestes nede."
pe bridda, "mirre we sculen him bringe."

11. 27-30

The journey itself is telescoped into two lines in order to move quickly from the preliminaries to the dramatic scene of the wise men's encounter with Herod, whose intentions are delineated in short lines that operate in the manner of stage directions in drama: "ful ney is herte wolde to-breken/ & ban he madam glade chere" (11. 35-36). The effectiveness of the presentation
is obvious: the poet enables the audience to visualize the scene and at the same time prepares for Herod's attempt to deceive the Magi through the change of expression which his words imply.

Twice in the poem the poet addresses the audience in the form of asides. Once he elaborates on the significance of Christ's birth for mankind: "lowe he liste ut of is trone/ to sauen us alle quike & dede" (11. 55-56). The second time he reminds the audience of the angel's warning which he had earlier recounted: "he bitbat heroudes lond fur-saket--/ an angel us saide he nas nout trewe" (11. 63-64). Finally, in the concluding lines of the poem he addresses the audience directly with an admonition: "Pennc hou, mon, bat tou ne bee lorn/ for alle dedis bat tou doest" (11. 79-80).

Like the Epiphany song, "I Sing of One that is Matchless" (XIII 31) opens with a statement of subject: "Of one ic wille singen bat is makeles" (1. 3). The aural nature of the poem is obvious from the reference to singing; Weber has suggested that the spring opening contained in the first two lines identified the melody for the audience. Both this lyric and "Gabriel's Greeting to Our Lady" (XIII 44) focus on the meaning of the Annunciation,

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8P. 49; "The opening stanza of the poem might be said to be merely a friar's adaptation of a conventional beginning of a secular love song, used perhaps to capture the audience's attention, or perhaps to identify a secular melody to which the poem might be set." Her suggestions are in line with the practices of scribes and clerics in the matter of preserving musical settings which Stevens has described (see above, Chapter II, p. 40).
tying it directly to the scheme for salvation. Both poems employ the dramatic element inherent in the scene of Mary’s confrontation by the Angel Gabriel, playing it out in dialogue with the poet in the role of interpreter. The manuscript of "I Sing of One that is Matchless" indicates that it may have been employed in a sermon: the headnote identifies it as an Exemplum de beata virgine & gaudiis eius (XIII, p. 55). "Gabriel’s Greeting to Our Lady" was sung; it survives with musical notation, and Weber has pointed out the manner in which the musical phrases reinforce the meaning of the words. Moreover, in comparing these two lyrics, Weber reveals the similarity in the choice and arrangement of details: the words of Gabriel, followed by a statement of the paradox of the Virgin Birth; Mary’s acquiescence to God’s will; a brief description of the Nativity; and a final statement relating these events to the salvation of man. According to Weber, the inclusion of these elements in both lyrics is the result of the influence of sacred history and theology, and we may expect to find the same events in similar arrangement in all the lyrics on this theme, just as we found the repetition of theme and structure in the Passion lyrics.

The Nativity lyrics of the fourteenth century, like those of the thirteenth century, are numerically few in comparison to the Crucifixion lyrics surviv-

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9 Theology and Poetry, pp. 40-46.
ing from the same period. Only seven such lyrics are printed in Brown's collection. Of these, five are dramatic, either monologues or dialogues; one is celebratory, in carol form; and one is narrative. Three of the dramatic lyrics are monologues in the form of lullabies addressed to Christ in the cradle, two spoken by penitent man and one by the Blessed Virgin. All three are from the same source, John Grimestone's Commonplace Book (MS. Advocates Library 18. 7. 21.), and all are similar in wording and detail. "Christ weeps in the Cradle for Man's Sin" (RL XIV 59) and "A Lullaby to Christ in the Cradle" (RL XIV 65), both sung by the penitent, exhibit lullay burdens and open with "lullay, lullay, litel child," a phrase identifying both subject and theme. The tone of both is sorrowful in contrast to what we have come to expect in Christmas carols. The theme is the Christ child's birth to a life of suffering and sorrow culminating in the Crucifixion. In both, the speaker voices his awareness of man's sin and guilt and sees this condition as the cause of the Crucifixion. "The Christ Child shivering with Cold" (RL XIV 75) is sung to Christ by the Blessed Virgin, who voices her regret at His "porful bed" and the "Ox & Asse [that] ben ñi fer" (11. 8, 11), presaging the suffering that He is to endure on the cross. As in the appeals of Mary to Christ on the cross discussed above, Mary concludes her song with the wish that she "nouth dwellen her to long" after her Son's death.

In similar fashion, the "Dialogue between the Blessed Virgin and
her Child" (RL XIV 56) emphasizes the sorrow inherent in Christ's birth. The first half of the poem, through line sixty, narrates the Annunciation, the Nativity and the visitation by the shepherds, as Mary responds to questions from her Son. Following this passage, the Christ child Himself foretells the events of His life, stopping just short of the Crucifixion. At His comment that "most partiz of he puple/ Sal wiln maken me king" (11. 103-104), Mary interrupts to express her joy. Her mood quickly changes to one of sorrow by the child's admission that He has been sent to pay "mannis ransoun" (1. 123). To ease her mind, Christ describes His Resurrection and tells Mary that in due time she will join Him in Heaven. This lyric is a framed dialogue beginning with a typical chanson d'aventure opening, "als i lay v-pon a nith," and closing with a reference once more to the frame:

Serteynly, bis sithe i say,  
This song i herde singge,  
Als i lay bis 3olis-day  
Alone in my longingge.

The lullay burden which this poem, like the monologues, employs is here addressed to the Virgin.

"A Song of the Blessed Virgin and Joseph" (RL XIV 58) is framed in the same way, but is a monologue spoken by Joseph, who explains the miracle of the Virgin Birth. The lyric concludes with a passage similar to that quoted immediately above:

I þankid him of his lore  
With al myn herte mith,  
Pat þis sithe i sau þore  
Als i lay on a nyth.
To this is appended a single stanza in which the poet exhorts his audience
the worship Christ both day and night.

"A Song of the Nativity" (RL XIV 57) is largely narrative. In the
same verse form as the preceding lyrics, it bears close resemblance in
its choice of details to the dialogue between Christ and the Blessed Virgin
(RL XIV 56), except that this poem focuses more narrowly on the events of
the Nativity, beginning with the Annunciation, and including the visitation by
the shepherds, Epiphany, and the flight into Egypt. Only three stanzas are
devoted to the Crucifixion and none to the Resurrection. It concludes with
an admonition to the audience to pray to Christ and Mary. Finally, "Hand by
Hand We Shall us Take" (RL XIV 88), a celebration carol, utilizes the ele­
ments we associate with Christmas carols. Addressed to "senful man,"
it urges him to "make . . . ioye & blisse/ for be deuel of elle man haʒt
for-sake,/ and godes sole ys maked oure make" (11. 2-4). The opening
stanza, beginning "A child is boren a-mo[n]ges man" echoes verbally "A
Song of the Nativity" (RL XIV 57), but the tone of this poem is more joyful
than any of the other Nativity poems in this group.

In their treatment of the two most significant events in the Christian
calendar, early Middle English poets were confined by scripture and theology
to a limited choice and arrangement of detail. The poet working directly
from Latin verses apparently felt more or less compelled to imitate the
structure and verse form of his source. In contrast, the lyrics based on
passages from the liturgy or inspired by selections from Latin meditations and the sermons exhibit a greater variety of structure and treatment of theme. The purpose of these poems was to instruct the audience in the significance of these events for their lives and to evoke from them the proper response. The most effective means of accomplishing these ends was to portray the event so that the audience witnessed or imagined itself participating in it. The earlier lyrics employed description to present a scene which the audience could visualize in the mind’s eye; since this visual image was conveyed to the mind by way of the ear, the pictures are sketched with broad strokes omitting embellishment and distracting detail. The later lyrics, especially those of the fourteenth century, involved the audience more directly, as participants in the monologues addressed to man by Christ on the cross and as silent onlookers in the dialogues between Christ and the Blessed Virgin. As we noted earlier in this chapter (see p. 84 above), Rosemary Woolf sees this technique as derivative, having been influenced by Cistercian meditation, but in these early lyrics in the vernacular it seems to have developed at least partly because direct communication without a mediator was more immediate and hence more effective in eliciting an appropriate response from the listeners. The preservation of these lyrics in the friar miscellanies and in commonplace books, in sermon manuscripts and sermon notebooks, suggests that their manner of presentation was through recitation before an audience or congregation.
Whereas the lyrics on the Passion were based largely on patristic writings, the hymns and prayers to Christ and the Blessed Virgin have their origins almost entirely in the liturgy and Latin hymnody. They were designed to be recited or sung by the audience. Hence, in these poems, the poet most often speaks as one of the audience, praying or singing with or for them.

Sarah Appleton Weber, in discussing the effect of liturgy and theology on the Marian lyrics, emphasizes the Virgin's special role, not only as the mother of Christ, but also as the mother of mankind, by virtue of her suffering at the Crucifixion. Her position as the Queen of Heaven upon the Assumption made her man's intercessor with her Son. Most of the hymns and prayers addressed to Mary, translated from or based on passages from the liturgy of the Feast of the Assumption, honor her in that role. The largest group of these poems is made up of celebrations of the Five Joys. Weber (p. 151) has suggested that man could see in Mary's joys his own ultimate joy in Heaven if she would shield him from sin and intercede with Christ on his behalf.

The arrangement of the Five Joys is always chronological from the Annunciation to the Assumption, sometimes including Epiphany and omitting the Ascension or treating it together with the Resurrection. Almost all of

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10Ibid., p. 150.
these lyrics, whether celebratory or penitential, begin and end with prayers addressed to the Virgin for mercy and grace. In only a few is there clear-cut evidence of oral presentation since the poet was most often speaking with or for rather than to his audience, but the structure of several of them would have encouraged memorization and facilitated recall.

"A Prayer of the Five Joys" (XIII 18) is carefully structured. It consists of five ten-line stanzas, each one devoted to a single one of the Five Joys. Except for the final stanza, the treatment of each Joy is identical. Each stanza opens with a salutation appropriate to the Joy it discusses. As the Virgin hailed by Gabriel in the first stanza, Mary is addressed as "leuedi brist." Stanza two, which celebrates the Nativity, addresses her as "moder milde," and so on throughout the poem. Each stanza concludes with an appropriate petition, for mercy, for grace, for freedom from sin, for Heaven's bliss, for eternal life.

Much like this lyric in structure is the "Oracio de Sancta Maria" (RL XIV 92). It opens with a salutation to the Blessed Virgin and concludes with a prayer. The first stanza elaborates on the Annunciation and is followed by four additional stanzas, each of which is devoted to one of the Joys. These stanzas open in identical fashion: Mary is saluted with a "Hail" followed by an epithet such as "flower of alle þynges" and "gladdyst of alle wyue." The final stanza contains a prayer seeking for all men the bliss of Heaven. This lyric, however, appears to treat six rather than Five Joys;
although the Assumption is not fully developed in the sixth stanza but included
only in the epithet addressed to Mary, the structure of the stanza is identical
to that of the first verse in which only half the stanza is devoted to the Annun-
ciation while the second three lines contain a prayer.

"A Song of the Five Joys" (RL XIV 11) is unusual among these lyrics,
for both its language and structure make obvious its instructional purpose.

It employs direct address coupled with a chanson d'aventure opening:

Ase I me rod his ender day
by grene wode to seche play,
mid herte y bohte al on a may,
Suetest of alle binge.
Lybe & ich ou telle may
al of hat suete binge.

11. 1-6

The four stanzas which immediately follow consist of a hymn of praise which
concludes with another direct address clearly indicating the didactic nature
of what is to follow: "Nou y may 3ef y wole/ be fif ioyes mynge" (11. 23-24).

A separate stanza is then given over to each of the Joys (including the Epiphany
and omitting the Ascension). The stanzas open in identical enumerative
fashion -- the first joy is, the second joy is, etc. The final stanza is a

prayer in which the poet, who has heretofore addressed his listeners from

the first person singular point of view, now becomes one with them:

preye we alle to our leuedy,
ant to be sontes hat wonep hire by,
bat heo of vs hauen merci,
ant bat we ne misse
In his world to ben holy
ant wynne heuene blyss. amen.

11. 55-60

The address to the audience, the enumeration of the Five Joys one by one, and the concluding prayer are highly suggestive of the aural and didactic nature of this particular Marian poem.

Similar in structure to this lyric is another "Song of the Five Joys" (RL XIV 31). It opens with a prayer of penitence following the salutation to Mary which echoes the words of Gabriel according to the scriptures. Each of the prayer stanzas is structured identically: the Joy with which the stanza is concerned is identified and elaborated in the first four of the five lines in each stanza, and the fifth line is a one-line prayer, always addressed to "Leuedi." A longer prayer of four stanzas seeking deliverance from the pains of Hell and access to the joys of Heaven concludes the poem. Like the "Song of the Five Joys" (RL XIV 11), this treatment of the Joys of Mary includes Epiphany and omits the Ascension.

In all of these hymns and prayers, the structural devices employed by the poet would have made the content easy to recall. For the most part the poems are brief and exhibit a high degree of parallelism in syntax and stanza development. The relationship between opening and closing prayers and stanza content, the deliberate enumeration and explanation of the Joys, as well as the devices of address to the audience and references to hearing or telling suggest the poet's attempt to prepare a prayer or meditation in
which the audience might join and which they might retain for private devotional use.

Several of the lyrics in this group are simply translations from Latin hymns employed in the services of the Church. Among the earliest of these is *Gaude virgo mater Christi* (XIII 22). Brown also prints three versions of the *Ave maris stella* and several lyrics with stanzas based on the *Alma redemptoris mater* (see RL XIV 17, 41, 45, 19 for examples). As in the Crucifixion lyrics based on Latin hymns, the poets are generally content to follow the structure and verse forms of their Latin originals.

Like most of the Marian lyrics, the prayers of praise and penitence to Christ and the Trinity were also derived from the liturgy. Frank Allen Patterson, in his study of Middle English penitential lyric, points to the "words of the services of the Church -- words that were read, sung and prayed, not daily only, but often several times daily"\(^{11}\) as the source for most of these lyrics, adding that "the clerks, in their anxiety to make the ways of salvation clear and open to the ignorant, and at the same time attractive and easily remembered, often rendered the most important portions of the services into rhymed verse" (p. 21). "A General Confession"
(RL XIV 87) is a metrical paraphrase of the General Prayer of Confession in rhymed couplets, for example; and a number of other lyrics in Brown's collections show the influence of similar liturgical prayers. Brown prints four rhymed prayers of contrition addressed to the Trinity, all of which begin with virtually identical opening lines:

Fader and sun and haligast,
To be i cri and call mast,
Pat treuest es in tron.
"An Orison to the Trinity," RL XIV 29,
11. 1-3.

Fadur & sone & holygost,
Lord, to be I cri and calle,
Studfast god of migthes most.
"An Orison to the Trinity," RL XIV 93,
11. 1-3.

Fadur and sone & holy gost,
bat i clepe & calle most
On god in trinite.
"A Prayer for Three Boons," RL XIV 124,
11. 1-2.

Fadur & sone & holi gost, o god in tr[i]nite,
To be y make my mone, bou3 y unworbi be.
"The Knight of Christ," RL XIV 125,
11. 1-2.

Of these four prayers, "A Prayer for Three Boons" shows greatest evidence of the possibility of oral presentation in its structure. It consists of fifteen six-line stanzas divided into three groups of five stanzas each. The opening stanza -- the first three lines of which are printed above -- concludes in a manner which suggests public use:
There follow three prayers for forgiveness of past sin, protection from future temptation, and assurance of eternal life. The transition from one prayer to the next is obvious and pointed. The first prayer is announced: "The firste bone þus i by-ginne" (1. 7), and the prayer itself is one of confession; it concludes in the same pointed fashion as it opens: "Mercy, ihesu, i crie ay--/his is my ferste bone" (11. 29-30). The second prayer, which begins with the sixth stanza, opens "þat other bone . . ." and concludes at the end of stanza ten with "þis is my oþer bone" (1. 60). Stanza eleven opens the third prayer: "þe þridde bone to þe, ihesu, i praie" and the poem concludes with a stanza much like stanza one in its obvious public intention:

\[
\begin{align*}
\textit{P}at \textit{iole} & \textit{b}lyss\textit{se} \ 3\textit{e} \ graunte \ to \ me \\
\textit{Now} & \ \textit{þou woldys} \ þi \ \textit{woundes} \ \textit{schede}, \\
\textit{For} & \ \textit{senfol} \ \textit{man} \ \& \ \textit{for me}; \\
\textit{þou} & \ \textit{graunte} \ \textit{me} \ þis \ \textit{bones} \ þre, \\
\textit{And alle} & \ \textit{þo} \ \textit{þat} \ \textit{cristen} \ \textit{bee}, \\
\ \textit{Amen, pur charite}. \\
\end{align*}
\]

This prayer, as most of the other penitential prayers, follows the pattern of petition demanded by the Sacrament of Penance as it was formally defined by the Council of Trent in 1551. Patterson (p. 7) quotes the following passages from the \textit{Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent} (trans. J. Waterworth, London, 1848):

\[\text{The acts of the penitent, himself, to wit contrition, confession, and satisfaction,}\]
are, as it were, the matter of this sacrament, which acts, inasmuch as they are, by God's institution, required in the penitent for the integrity of the sacrament and for the full and perfect remission of sins, are for this reason called the parts of penance.

Session XIV, Chapter II

The Council further defined contrition as "a sorrow of mind, and a detestation for sin committed, with the purpose of not sinning for the future. . . . Wherefore the holy Synod declares that this contrition contains not only a cessation from sin, and the purpose and beginning of a new life, but also a hatred of the old" (Session XIV, Chapter IV). "A Prayer for Three Boons" (RL XIV 124) follows the orthodox pattern of contrition and confession in its first section. In the enumeration of the sins confessed, it adheres closely to the pattern of the extended confession which Patterson prints as the third lyric in his edition. In his notes to this lyric, Patterson quotes from a number of prose confessions found in Prymers and religious treatises, indicating that these became "conventionalized in the thirteenth century or before" (p. 160). The poet of "A Prayer for Three Boons" follows the prescribed formula of confession of sin, sorrow for it, and a desire for amendment. The structure of the poem parallels exactly his three-fold prayer, and the opening and closing stanzas suggest the possibility that this prayer was intended for public rather than for private use.

All of the penitential prayers adhere more or less to a similar organization of contrition, confession, and desire for amendment, although some
emphasize one more than another. "A Prayer to be delivered from the Deadly Sins" (RL XIV 123), for example, a prayer by the blood of Christ, is a poem of seven stanzas, each of which according to the instructions in the manuscript is to be followed by the recitation of the Paternoster and the Ave. The prayer stanzas are arranged chronologically according to the shedding of Christ's blood, beginning with the circumcision and concluding with Christ's wounded side. The stanzas follow a parallel structure; each begins with an address to Christ and a reference to the particular wound in the first three lines. The second three lines contain a prayer, a petition for protection from one of the sins. Stanzas one is illustrative of the structure of the others:

Ihesu, for thi precious blod,  
bat thou bleddest for oure good  
in circumcisioon,  
Of he, crist, ich aske mercy  
to chaste my lecherous bodi  
fro damnacioun.

11. 1-6

The same sort of structure is to be found in "A Prayer to Jesus" (RL XIV 94), which is also a prayer of contrition and amendment addressed to Christ in four-line stanzas. Each verse begins with direct address followed by one or more dependent clauses such as "for thi wurthy wounde/ That went to thi hert-rote" (11. 1-2), or "bat art heuene Kyng,/ Sothfast god & man also" (11. 13-14). The salutation and modifying clauses fill the first two lines of each stanza and the last two lines contain the prayer of petition.
A paraphrase of a Latin hymn, "Ihesu dulcis memoria" (RL XIV 89), and a hymn by William Herebert based on the Latin Tu rex glorie Christi (RL XIV 22) are similarly structured. Just as we have suggested in the case of the Marian lyrics, the structural parallelism of the stanzas and the repetition found in initial stanza lines within a poem constitute a pattern of development which would make such poems easily memorized and recalled by an audience of listeners.

Characteristic of these hymns and prayers to the Blessed Virgin and Christ is the first person point of view from which they are presented. Very few of these lyrics were addressed to the audience; they were instead designed to be spoken by a mediator speaking on behalf of the audience as well as himself or by the audience. In contrast to these lyrics, there exists a large body of homiletic verse and moral poetry in which the poet almost always speaks directly to the audience. Even in those lyrics in this group in which, as in some of the Crucifixion and Nativity lyrics, a dramatic situation is established, we can still isolate the voice of a speaker as preacher or moralist addressing a readily identifiable audience.

Since many of the longer homiletic verses are for the most part versified sermons, we should not be surprised to find that many of them reflect the general structure recommended by medieval treatises on the art of preaching. In Preaching in Medieval England (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), G. W. Owst has outlined the four parts into which medieval
sermons usually fall as a result of the recommendations of these treatises. The first two sections were usually brief, consisting of a statement of theme, taken ordinarily from the scripture read from the lesson, the epistle or the gospel, followed by the ante-theme, which was either a prayer of supplication or, more often, of invocation. As preliminaries, these were expected to be short; indeed, Owst notes that such introductions could in fact be omitted "when the preacher [was] pressed for time" (p. 321). The main part of the sermon was the processus thematis which involved the division and dilation of the theme. There were prescribed methods of developing the theme, including the three-fold division of the text, the elaboration of figures and the development of analogies, and the propounding of questions and conclusions. The final part of the sermon ordinarily involved an emotional appeal to the audience, stressing either the horrors of death and Hell or the love and mercy of Christ.

The opening stanzas of the homiletic lyrics characteristically indicate both audience and theme. Verbal repetition is employed in many of these poems, usually in the form of a refrain, as a means of emphasizing the theme. The central idea of the sermon poems most frequently is the

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notion that all earthly pursuits are vain and that human life is brief and transient. "But thou say Sooth thou shalt be Shent" (RL XIV 120) is typical of these poems in its use of direct address, statement of theme, and the employment of refrain to point up the appropriate response of man in the face of mutability and decay:

Who-so loueth endless rest,  
His false world he mot he fle,  
And dele ber-wip bot as a gest,  
And leue hit not in no degre.  
Hit is but trouble & tempest,  
Fals fantasye, & vanite;  
In hat praldom who-so is I-prest,  
Him mot eschewe al charite.  
Hat day hat eueri mon schal se  
His dedes schewed & his entent;  
What maner mon so hat he be,  
But he say soth, he schal be schent.  
11. 1-12

Many of the poems in the Vernon MS. follow exactly the same pattern as this lyric. "Truth is Best" (RL XIV 108), for example, begins with a similar form of address:

Hose wolde him wel a-vyse  
Of his wrecched world I weene,  
I hope ful wel he schulde dispise  
Pe foule falsheide hat ber-in bene.  
11. 1-4

The concluding line of each stanza of this lyric employs a variation of the refrain that "Truth is best." Similarly, "Charity is no Longer Chere" (RL XIV 109), also from the Vernon MS., moralizes on the decline of virtue. It is addressed to "hose wolde be-benke him weel/ On his world is went,
Each of the stanzas develops by example the idea of the refrain that "charite is no lengor cheere." "Keep well Christ's Commandments" (RL XIV 102) is a sermon based on the Decalogue addressed to "vche leod þat liueþ in londe." One by one, each of the commandments is amplified, with the refrain of each stanza admonishing the audience to "kepe wel Cristes Comaundement."

Several of the moralizing lyrics on the transience of human life open with rhetorical questions, a device which immediately establishes a relationship between speaker and audience; one of the best known of these is "Vbi Sount Qui Ante Nos Fuerount" (XIII 48):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Uuere beþ þey biforen vs weren,} \\
\text{Houndes laden and hauekes beren} \\
\text{And hadden feld and wode?} \\
\end{align*}
\]

11. 1-3

The amplification of the theme in the longer poems on this subject follows the recommendation of the sermon writers in posing a series of such questions and then suggesting the inevitable answer. Stanza three of this version reiterates the question of the opening lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Were is þat lawing and þat song,} \\
\text{ þat trayling and þat proude song,} \\
\text{þo hauekes and þo houndes?} \\
\end{align*}
\]

11. 13-15

"Cur Mundus Militat" (RL XIV 134) employs the same method of amplification. It opens with the question "Whi is þe world biloued, þat fals is & vein?" The succeeding questions echo those of the "Love-Ron" of Friar
Thomas de Hales (XIII 43):13

Telle me where is salamon, sumetyme kinge riche?
or sampson in his strenke, to whom was no man
liche?

Or he fair man absolon, merueilous in chere,
or he duke ionatas, a weel biloued fere?

Where is bcome cesar, hat lord was of al?
or he riche man cloibd in purpur and in pal?

The answer to these questions is always the same:

All heese grete princis, with her power so he3e,
ben wanischid a-way in twinkeling of an ige.

The advice to man which these lyrics offer is always the same, too, either
explicitly or implicitly: set not your heart on earthly things but on the joys
of Heaven:

13Friar Thomas' lines appear in stanza nine:

Hwer is paris & heleyne
bat weren so bryht and feyre on bleo,
Amadas & dideyne,
tristram, yseude and alle beo,
Ector, with his scharpe meyne,
& cesar, riche of wordes feo.
Heo beo i-glyden vt of be reyne
so be schef is of be cleo.

Further along, in stanza eleven, reference is made to the "veyr . . . absalon
(1. 83), as well as to "henry vre kyng" (1. 82).
In their conclusions, the homiletic lyrics also adhere to the prescriptions of sermon treatises in emphasizing the decay of the body and the fate of the soul after death or in pointing to God's tender mercy for those who abide by His will. The poet of "Cur Mundus Militat," above, reminds man that he is but "wormes mete, poudir, & dust" (1. 33); and a macaronic poem, "Esto Memor Mortis" (RL XIV 135), warns man of the sinner's fate:

Caro vermis ferculum, Penk on be pynes of helle;
Mors habet spiculum Pat smyteþ man full felle;
Te ponet ad tumilum Tyl domes day to dwelle.
Hic relinquis seculum; Pere nys not ellis to telle.
11. 31-34

Most of the poems, however, conclude with a promise of God's mercy and love to those who follow the homilist's advice. "Always try to Say the Best" (RL XIV 115) ends with the following benediction:

For godis loue, þenke on þis songe,
Man & woman faire of face,
And take þis in ȝoure hertis amonge,
Whare-euer ȝe go, or in what place.
Ihesu ȝou kepe in eueri cas,
And in heuene ȝou make a feste;
For godis loue so ful of grace,
Al-way fond to say þe best.
11. 73-80

The shorter poems on these subjects are chilling and graphic in
their presentation of the details of physical decay. Some may well have been employed as the conclusions of prose sermons. "Wretched Man, why art thou Proud" (RL XIV 133) circulated widely in manuscripts of the Fasciculus morum, a treatise of popular instruction in morals (RL XIV, p. 287). In the same manner as some of the longer lyrics on earthly transience, it, too, opens with a rhetorical question:

Wrecche mon, wy artou proud,  
Pat art of herth I-maked?  
hydry ne browtestou no schroud,  
bot pore þou come & naked.  
Wen þi soule is faren out  
þi body with erthe y-raked,  
þat body þat was so ronk and loud,  
Of alle men is i-hated.

A number of very early poems of this type appear in Trinity College Cambridge MS. 323, described by Brown (XIII, p. xx) as a miscellany "compiled in a religious house" and containing "many pieces plainly designed for the instruction of laymen." Several of these lyrics seem to have been based on the "Address of the Soul to the Body" preserved in the Worcester Fragments. One of the most effective is "When the Turf is Thy Tower" (XIII 30). It reverses the usual procedure in posing its question at the end rather than at the beginning:

Wen þe turuf is þi tuur,  
& þi put is þi bour,  
þi wel & þi wite þrote  
ssulen wormes to note.  
Wat helpit þe þenne  
al þe worilde wnne?
"Over the Bier of the Worldling" (XIII 38), in the same vein, employs a dramatic setting. The soul addresses the body on its bier:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nu } & \text{ buoy vnseli bodi up-on bier list} \\
\text{Were bet } & \text{ byne robin of fau & of gris?} \\
\text{Suic day } & \text{ haut i-comin } \text{ buoy changedest hem pris,} \\
\text{Pad } & \text{ makiit } \text{ he Heuin herbe } \text{ had } \text{ buoy on list,} \\
\text{Pad rothihin sal so dot } & \text{ he lef } \text{ had honkit on } \text{ be ris.} \\
\text{Pu ete } & \text{ byne mete } y-\text{makit in cousis,} \\
\text{Pu lettis } & \text{ he pore stondin } \text{ brute in forist & in is,} \\
\text{Pu noldist not } & \text{ he bi-} \text{penchen forte ben wis,} \\
\text{For-} & \text{ hi haulistou for-} \text{lorin } \text{ he loye of parais.}
\end{align*}
\]

The word choice employed in both of the preceding lyrics echoes the scriptural passage that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter Heaven. The tuur and bour and white throat in the first lyric indicate that the individual addressed is a courtly lady, and the effect of the entire poem is similar to the lines addressed to Marvell's "Coy Mistress." The robes of "fau & of gris" (1. 2) in the second lyric suggest the aristocratic standing of the individual to whom the words are spoken, as does the contrast between his cauldrons of meat and the poor whom he has ignored in the cold.

A handful of homiletic verses which Brown dates from the end of the fourteenth century are monologues with chanson d'aventure openings. In all of these the speaker describes an encounter (as in "As I wandrede her bi weste/ Faste vnnder a Forest syde" [RL XIV 107] or "In a Chirche, her I con knel" [RL XIV 96]); the individual whom the narrator meets addresses a sermon to him. "The Bird with Four Feathers" (RL XIV 121) is interesting
for the use it makes of sermon techniques. In this particular lyric, the poet encounters a featherless bird who employs the four lost feathers of youth, beauty, strength, and riches to preach against the vanities of the world. The feathers are considered one by one as their loss is accounted for in terms of the false values of this world. Each feather is paralleled with scriptural texts recounting the fate of Solomon, of Nebuchadnezzar, and of Job. The lesson is summarized by the bird in this fashion:

My Ioye, my merth, is al agoon;
3owthe, Strengthe, and my bewte,
My fethers faire, be falle me froo.
Wher-to is a man more liche
Panne to a flower bat springis In may?
Alle that lyueth, bothe powre and ryche,
Shal deye vnknowyng of her day.

Throughout the poem, the message is reiterated by means of the refrain "Parce michi domine."

The chanson d'aventure homiletic lyrics may be described as framed monologues, for the message in the poem is addressed both to the speaker who introduces the monologue as well as the larger audience for whom the poem is a whole is intended. As dramatic presentations, the potentialities of these lyrics are not as fully realized as in the dramatic Crucifixion lyrics, because the poet remains as an intermediary between the monologist and the audience; his interpretation and application of the message at the beginning and end of these lyrics detract from the immediacy of the direct appeals such as those from Christ on the cross. With the exception of the addresses of
the soul to the body, most of the homiletic verses cast the poet in the role of preacher or teacher moralizing to the audience.

Perhaps most suggestive of the aural nature of the early lyrics is the high degree of dramatic elements which they employ. In each of the foregoing groups of poems, there appear a large number of monologues and dialogues in which the audience is called upon to visualize itself as an integral part of the scene. In the prayer and hymn lyrics, the audience participates with the speaker; and in the moral lyrics, the audience becomes the congregation addressed by a preacher. The sources of many of the hymns and prayers, in Latin hymns and Church liturgy, and the preservation of many lyrics in sermon manuscripts and sermon outlines is also indicative of their aural intention. Their style, too, suggests that these lyrics were intended for presentation by recitation, reading aloud, or singing for or by an audience for the most part unlettered.

In attempting to characterize the style of these early lyrics, we encounter a problem of terminology. Classical rhetoric recognized three levels of style. As defined by the Rhetorica Ad Herennium, a popular treatise attributed to Cicero, they are the Grand, the Middle, and the Simple:

There are, then, three kinds of style, called types, to which discourse, if faultless, confines itself: the first we call the Grand; the second, the Middle; the third, the Simple. The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial class of words.
The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech.\textsuperscript{14}

Geoffroi de Vinsauf, in the \textit{Arte Versificandi}, acknowledged the same three levels of style, but defined them according to their subject matter: "When we talk about persons or things of general importance, then the style is grand; about low subjects, it is low; about middling subjects, it is middle."\textsuperscript{15}

Raymond Oliver, in insisting that neither of these discussions of style provides a descriptive term appropriate to the Middle English lyric, proposes instead to employ terminology that reflects the medieval poet's approach to style in terms of what Oliver calls "social considerations":

The classical definition is wholly verbal; it deals with the choice and arrangement of words. The medieval definition is social, in a rather simpleminded way: we use fine language on fine subjects... When the English poets were conscious of style at all, they must have fit it into some such framework of social decorum. The grandest poems were for God and His Mother -- or the poet's mistress -- and the lowest were for man the sinner, born and dead in corruption.\textsuperscript{16}


\textsuperscript{15}Documentum de Arte Versificandi, quoted in Edmond Faral, \textit{Les Arts Poétiques du XII\textsuperscript{e} et du X\textsuperscript{II\textsuperscript{e}} Siècle} (Paris: E. Champion, 1924), p. 312: \textit{Sunt igitur tres styli, humilis, mediocris, grandiloquus ... Quando enim de generalibus personis vel rebus tractatur, tunc est stylus grandiloquus; quando de humilibus, humilis; quando de mediocris, mediocris.}

\textsuperscript{16}Poems without Names, p. 75.
The dichotomy which Oliver sees between low and grand styles, however, is simply invalid when applied to Middle English lyric written before 1350, although it is perhaps appropriate for fifteenth-century lyrics, both religious and secular. One need only to compare, for example, "Three Sorrowful Things" (XIII 12a), a lyric on the transience and uncertainty of human life which according to Oliver's distinctions ought to be in the low style, with "My Leman on the Rood" (XIII 35a), a lyric focusing on the Crucifixion which ought to be in the grand style:

> Wanne ich þenche þinges þre
> ne mai neuere bliþe be:
> þat on is ich sal awe,
> þat ober is ich ne wot wilk day.
> þat þridde is mi meste kare,
> i ne woth nevre wuder i sal fare.

**XIII 12a**

> Wenne hie soe on rode idon
> ihesus mi leman,
> and bi him stonde
> maria and iohan,
> his herte duepe i-stunge,
> his bodi þis scurge i-ssuenge,
> for þe sunne of man,
> Hiþe hi mai wepen
> and selte teres leten,
> ief hic of luue chan.

**XIII 35a**

Neither of the lyrics employs ornate or impressive language or figures of speech. Both use relatively simple syntactical patterns, opening with a _when/then_ relationship between two ideas to express cause and effect. In the first lyric, the relationship is stated in the opening lines; in the second,
the effect is withheld until the last line, but in both poems the details of the
cause are recounted one by one in similar enumerative fashion, with one
line devoted to each detail and the statement of detail arranged in units which
are syntactically parallel. What little inversion occurs -- as in *binges bre*
and *blipe be* (12a, 11. 1-2), *selte teres leten* (35a, 1. 9) -- serves primarily
for rhyme and emphasis. It seems equally tenuous to classify "Wen þe turuf
is þi tuur" (XIII 30) as a courtly lyric in the grand style, as Oliver does (p.
79) on the basis of the poet's use of courtly terms such as *turuf* and *bour.*
As we have suggested in Chapter III (see above, p. 77), the connotative
power of such words had become commonplace as a consequence of their
frequent appearance in the popular romances, and they were by no means
the property of the aureate poets.

Perhaps, then, the best term to describe early Middle English lyrics
is *plain,* as opposed to the aureate or ornate, decorated verse that developed
among the upper classes in the fifteenth century in both secular and religious
poetry. As we have noted elsewhere in this chapter, as well as in Chapter
III, the early lyrics are devoid of elaborate imagery, decorative alliteration,
and complex syntactical structures. Rosemary Woolf attributes the absence
of these elements in the early lyrics to the condition of the English language
in the thirteenth century as a "depressed vernacular," stressing that "only
the vocabulary and rhythms of common speech were available" to the poets
of this period, adding that "English was obviously at this time very limited
as a medium for writing: subjects which required nobility or complexity of expression were ordinarily beyond its range." The ornateness of many of the lyrics of Harley MS. 2253 would seem to cast doubt on this interpretation. It seems far more likely that the plain style of the early lyrics was the consequence of their popular destination and their didactic intention. The poet had to avoid complexity of imagery, language, and syntax and to rely on a vocabulary familiar to most of his audience as well as on sentence patterns which were simple and close to those of common speech if he were to convey clearly an idea which could be grasped upon a single hearing.

We can see most clearly in the shorter lyrics the features of syntax and diction characteristic of the plain, almost colloquial style of these early lyrics. In each of the two poems quoted above (XIII 12a and 35a) the poet confines each line or syntactical unit to a single detail or impression. In "Three Sorrowful Things," alliteration and inversion are employed functionally to emphasize the main idea of the first two lines; the cause/effect relationship is re-emphasized by the couplet rhyme. The device of enumeration which the poet employs to identify the "binges þre" is typical of the didactic purpose of many of the lyrics. The statement of the three things is accomplished in parallel structures involving noun clauses as complements in each case.

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except the third; the third thing is cast as an appositive, and the noun clause complement is replaced by the noun phrase "mi meste kare." The variation at this point reinforces the meaning in that the poet is stressing as the most significant cause of his sorrow the fact that "i ne woth nevre wuder i sal fare."

The same sort of progression is followed by the poet of "My Leman on the Rood" in painting the scene of Christ's crucifixion. The cross and Christ upon it, with Mary and John standing alongside, provide the focus for the entire scene. By enumerating the details of Christ's suffering, the poet brings the audience close-up. The transition from contemplation or meditation to response is provided by line seven: "for þe sunne of man" permits the shift from scene to response in the last three lines of the poem. The progress is from detail to detail, phrase by phrase, and the movement from dependent to independent clause is clearly marked.

The syntactical inversion noted earlier (see above, p. 144) in these two poems was rather frequently employed throughout the early poetry as a means of calling attention to detail. The poems on the Crucifixion based on the passages from the writings of St. Bernard reverse the normal order of subject-verb-complement in order to emphasize Christ's suffering:

Wit was his nakede brest and red of blod his side,
Blod was his faire neb, hi wden depe and uide,
starke weren his armes hi-spred op-on þe rode;
In fif steden an his bodi stremes hurne of blode.

RL XIV 1b
The same device is employed in the opening lines of the first of "Christ's Three Songs to Man" (RL XIV 76) in which Christ addresses man from the cross: "Water & blod for þe i suete/ & as a þef i am i-take."

The diction of the lyrics is seldom complex and infrequently polysyllabic, yet it is only occasionally truly colloquial. "Wretched Man, why art thou Proud" (RL XIV 133), which utilizes direct address, is typical of the use of colloquialisms. These are restricted mostly to contracted or syncopated forms:

Wrecche mon, wy artou proud,
Pat art of herth I-maked?
hydyr browtestou no schroud,
bot pore þou come & naked.

11. 1-4

Forms such as artou and browtestou (11. 1 and 3) are most often to be found in the lyrics employing direct address and in the monologues and dialogues. "Over the Bier of the Worldling" (XIII 38), for example, in which the soul addresses the body of the worldly man on its bier, concludes: "þu noldist not bi-þenchen forte ben wis,/ For-þi hauistou for-lorin þe Ioye of parais" (11. 8-9). "Weal is a Cursed Thing" (XIII 40) begins "Weole, þu art a waried þing,/ vn-euene constu dele." In "Jesus pleads with the Worldling" (RL XIV 126), a monologue spoken by Christ on the cross, Christ's pleas exhibit the same colloquial elements. In stanza two, He contrasts His outstretched arms on the cross with the worldly man's arms outstretched in dancing:

A-cros þou berest þyn armes,
whan þou dauncest narewe;
To me hastou non awe,
but to worlde's glorie.

11. 11-14

It is not until the end of the fourteenth century that the lyrics, addressed for the most part to the Blessed Virgin or the poet's mistress, begin to appear employing flowery diction, decorative alliteration, and a high percentage of polysyllabic French loan words and Latinized or aureate English. In fact, Brown prints not one lyric in his editions of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century poems couched in the elaborate language of many of the fifteenth-century lyrics.¹⁸

For the same reasons that these lyrics employ a plain style, they are also characteristically brief. Of the 753 poems anthologized in the standard editions by Brown and Robbins, 542, or 71.9% are shorter than fifty lines; if the historical poems are excluded, their narrative structure making them somewhat longer, this figure rises to 76.9% (only 50% of the historical poems are shorter than fifty lines). The longest poem of the 753 lyrics in these collections, "The Battle of Otterburn" (HP 26) is 280 lines in length. Only 65 lyrics, or 8.5%, are longer than 100 lines. When we break

¹⁸The lyric which comes closest in diction to the aureate poems of the fifteenth century is "Quia Amore Langueo" (RL XIV 132), a chanson d'aventure type of poem in which the poet encounters the Blessed Virgin "In a tabernacle of a toure," but, even so, the style is far closer to that of the lyrics in the Vernon manuscript.
these poems down into religious and secular groupings, we find that on the whole the secular lyrics tend toward greater brevity than the religious: 86.7% of them consist of fewer than fifty lines, while only 3% are longer than 100. The longest lyric in Robbins' edition of the secular poems is a courtly love lyric (SL 205) of 136 lines. Comparing the 335 lyrics in RL XIV and RL XV with the secular poems, we find that 239 or 71.3% are shorter than fifty lines, while nearly 9% are longer than 100 lines.

We can only suggest the role of oral presentation in determining the length of the lyrics by examining those lyrics which survive as songs and consequently whose aural nature is certain. We have already commented on the surprising number of thirteenth-century lyrics which survive with musical notation. Of these fourteen poems, eight are shorter than fifty lines, while the longest of the other six contains only sixty-five lines. Of the eight shorter poems, three are probably secular, and the longest of these, "Sumer Is Icumen In," is only nine lines in length. In the collection of fourteenth-century lyrics, Brown includes only two which survive with musical scores, "A Song of the Blessed Virgin and Joseph" (RL XIV 58) with sixty-four lines and "I Have Set my Heart So High" (RL XIV 129), only nine lines long. In noting the infrequent appearance of music with the fourteenth-century lyrics,  

19See above, Chapter II, p. 24, and note 31, p. 40.
Brown characterizes the period as the "age of the literary lyric" (XIII, p. xliii). However, his statement is somewhat misleading, for a careful examination of his notes on these poems reveals that at least a third of them occur under circumstances which strongly suggest that they were sung. Many of them, as the foregoing discussion has indicated, are translations or paraphrases of Latin hymns that were used liturgically, as, for example, the versions of *Ave maris stella* (RL XIV 17 and 45) and *Alma redemptoris mater* (RL XIV 19). Brown also prints two versions of *Populi meus quid feci tibi* (RL XIV 15 and 72) which was sung in the Good Friday services. "Quis est iste qui uenit de Edom?" (RL XIV 25), a paraphrase of Isaiah 63, 1-7, by William Herebert, appears in his service book. 20 Of the forty or so lyrics in RL XIV which show strong evidence of oral presentation, only six are longer than fifty lines and only two are longer than 100.

Even more convincing is the evidence provided by the secular lyrics. Eighteen of those in Robbins' edition have come down to us with musical settings. All are shorter than fifty lines; moreover, of the sixty poems which Robbins classifies as popular song, reprinted largely from minstrel collections and song books, only one is longer than fifty lines. Finally, despite the tendency of narrative lyric toward greater length, it is nonetheless

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20 See RL XIV, p. 254.
suggestive of the effect of oral presentation to note that the five historical poems which survive with music are all shorter than fifty lines. Admittedly, the small number of poems surviving with their musical settings makes generalization hazardous at best; when we recall, however, Stevens' remarks about the survival of medieval music manuscripts (see above, Chapter II, note 31, p. 40), we can infer that oral presentation had a role in restricting the length of medieval lyrics.

Another characteristic feature of these lyrics as a group is the small number of verse forms which their poets employed. The popular forms -- couplets, tail-rhyme and cross-rhyme stanzas -- dominate throughout the three centuries from 1200 to 1500. The lyrics of the thirteenth century show the highest degree of irregularity and uncertainty in their stanza forms. Although two-thirds of these lyrics exhibit couplet, monorhyme, cross-rhyme and tail-rhyme stanzas, the other third reveal a variety of miscellaneous verse forms. Several of these reflect the poet's attempt to maintain the stanza form of his Latin or continental original in his own translation. A comparison of an English stanza of "A Prayer to the Redeemer" (XIII 15), which appears in both English and French in Trinity College Cambridge MS. 323, with the French original reveals the poet's difficulty in maintaining the rhythm of the French:

\begin{verbatim}
Sire deu uus eistes tel
pere de tere e de cel
plus douz ke mel
kaunt il est chaud
\end{verbatim}
None of the thirteenth-century lyrics exhibits any of the courtly verse forms.

The stanza forms of the fourteenth-century lyrics indicate two things: the continuing tradition of the popular forms and the gradual introduction of new forms at the close of the century. While the number of miscellaneous forms decreases, the ballade stanza and rhyme royal make their first appearance. Fifteen of the fourteenth-century lyrics are in the ballade stanza (ababbcbc); only one, however, is in rhyme royal. Throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the carol stanza appears only sporadically, twice in the thirteenth century and eight times in fourteenth-century lyrics. Its rapid rise in the latter half of the fourteenth-century reflects the growing efforts of the Church to adapt popular forms to religious uses. 21

The rapid development of a courtly tradition in the lyrics after 1350 becomes obvious when we examine the verse forms employed by fifteenth-

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21 Greene, Early English Carols, pp. cxi-cxii.
century poets. Although the number of poems in the popular stanza forms remains constant, there is a considerable increase in the number of rhyme royal and ballade stanzas. Whereas we find only one rhyme royal poem in the fourteenth-century lyrics, in the fifteenth-century religious lyrics alone, we find twenty-nine such poems. In comparison to the fifteen examples of ballade stanza in the fourteenth-century lyrics, there are thirty-four fifteenth-century lyrics in RL XV which exhibit this form. In turning to the secular lyrics, we find too few such poems in the thirteenth century to permit a meaningful compilation of figures; but the secular lyrics in Robbins' edition show a proportion of courtly and popular forms similar to that of the religious lyrics. Of the 212 poems which Robbins includes as representative of secular poetry during this period, 116 are cast in the form of couplets, cross-rhyme, carol, tail-rhyme, and ballad stanzas, while sixty-nine exhibit the courtly forms of ballade and rhyme royal stanzas, with a sprinkling of roundels (mostly by Charles d'Orleans) and virelais.

The dominance of popular forms in the early lyrics reflects the destination of most of these poems. They were intended for "lewd" men who, if they read at all, read the vernacular. The popular forms were the most familiar and appealing to them and the simplicity of these forms, involving only two or three rhyme sounds in a regularly recurring pattern, made such poems not only easier to compose but easier to remember; hence we find the practical verse in Robbins' edition of the secular lyrics most
frequently written in couplets, and the various rhymed versions of the deca-
logue are also in this form. The decline of French as the language of the
aristocracy and the concurrent rise of English after 1350 resulted in the
development of a vernacular courtly tradition in the lyrics, as poets who had
formerly written in French for patrons who spoke French began to adapt
their native tongue to courtly tastes. Although the popular forms continued
to serve the practical needs of religious instruction and moral didacticism
for a large portion of the population, the courtly forms, consisting largely
of ballade and rhyme royal, employing what Robbins terms aureate diction,
developed to serve the needs of the upper classes. It is in the fifteenth
century, then, that a dual tradition can be distinguished in terms of the
audience for whom the lyrics were intended. Both secular and religious poets
composing for the masses continued to employ the techniques and devices,
as well as the form and style, of aural poetry. Those lyrics destined for
courtly audiences, written both for their entertainment and their devotions,
provide most of the evidence of a rapidly developing written literary tradi-
tion.
CHAPTER V

EVIDENCE OF THE TRANSITION TO WRITTEN LITERATURE IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY LYRICS

The transition toward a written tradition was well underway by the end of the fourteenth century. Some of the most telling evidence of the decline of aural literature is seen in the vastly increased production of manuscripts. George C. Coulton has estimated that for every page of English written in the thirteenth century, three were written in the fourteenth and ten in the fifteenth.¹ The accuracy of his estimate is supported by the figures which H. S. Bennett compiled in studying fifteenth-century manuscripts of the romances:

[W]e have some 84 romances extant which were written between 1100 and 1500, and of these no less than 65 exist only in fifteenth-century manuscripts. When every allowance has been made for the loss and destruction of medieval manuscripts, the overwhelmingly increased number of fifteenth-century copies cannot be gainsaid, and forms an important item of the evidence which makes it right to speak of the fifteenth century as an age interested in literature.

These facts are even more impressive when we look at them more closely, and see that many

¹Robbins, SL, p. xxii, cites Coulton's estimate in a manner which suggests that it was made as a personal comment to him.
of these manuscripts are unique, and that, but for some fifteenth-century interested party, we should be without them. For example, it is to the manuscripts of this century that we must turn for our only text of such works as Octovian, Athelston, Emare, Ipomadon, Joseph of Arimathea, Le Morte Arthur, or The Song of Roland. No less than 40 percent of all these romances written between 1100 and 1500 exist solely in single copies written down in the fifteenth century.2

That the preservation of religious literature prevailed over that of secular literature is indicated by the case of the lyrics themselves. Rossell Hope Robbins has pointed out in the introduction to his edition of the secular lyrics that "for every secular lyric there are three or four religious," adding that "this ratio holds for all Middle English poetry, . . . [O]f the 123 texts [listed in the Index of Middle English Verse], each of which appears in more than 8 manuscripts, only 33 are non-religious" (p. xvii).

The wealth of fifteenth-century manuscripts indicated by the remarks of Professors Coulton and Bennett is the consequence of a combination of factors which worked together to create a new and larger clientele for written literature. The most important of these factors was, of course, the spread of literacy downward and outward from court and Church. The Church

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2"The Production and Dissemination of Vernacular Manuscripts in the Fifteenth Century," The Library, 5th series, 1 (1947), 172. Hereafter cited as "Vernacular MSS."
had never encouraged the preservation of literature which was not doctrinal or practical in nature, and court patronage had been limited largely to the support of minstrels and poets who entertained at festivals and celebrations.\(^3\) However, with the emergence of English as the official language in the latter half of the fourteenth century and the development of trade and commerce, there grew up in England an increasing number of people who could read if not write the vernacular,\(^4\) and who, though they could not afford to commission the writing of new works, were able to purchase copies of those already in circulation. John Shirley is known to have attempted to

\(^3\)Karl J. Holzknecht, in *Literary Patronage in the Middle Ages* (1923; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1966), pp. 118-119, cites the "Go, little book" envoy as evidence that a particular work was written at the behest of a patron, and notes that although it is as "old as the Romans" it appears rarely in early medieval literature and is not used with any frequency until the fifteenth century, suggesting that prior to that time there was no huge demand for written literature even within the court circles. His conclusions are supported insofar as Middle English literature is concerned by other evidence as well. The aureate collections, whose Latinized and heavily French vocabulary indicate that they were composed for the aristocracy, date from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, during which time clear-cut distinctions between popular and courtly poetry can first be discerned. (see Robbins, *SL*, pp. xxvii-xxix).

\(^4\)J. W. Adamson notes, in "The Extent of Literacy in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The Library*, 10, no. 2 (1969), 164, that "in former times the number of readers greatly preponderated over the number of writers." Further along in the same article, he cites figures which indicate that perhaps as much as 35 to 40 percent of the population was able to read by the end of the fifteenth century, although he counts as excessive Sir Thomas More's estimate in the early sixteenth century that well over half the people could read (p. 167).
satisfy the demand for the poetry of established authors such as Chaucer and Lydgate through the production of multiple copies of their works in what Bennett has described as his "publishing company" set up in four shops rented from St. Bartholomew's Hospital.\(^5\) Such copies, many of which were on paper -- a medium becoming more readily available, and cheaper than parchment\(^6\) -- survive side by side with the more expensive and ornate presentation copies belonging to wealthy patrons. In this same period, for the first time, there appear bequests of books in the wills of laymen; and inventories of personal libraries occur in the records of the landed gentry.\(^7\)

Aural poetry, of course, did not disappear in the fifteenth century. It is particularly evident in the moral and religious lyrics and the secular songs destined for that large segment of the population that continued to be

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\(^6\)Ritchie Girvan, in "The Medieval Poet and his Public," English Studies Today, ed. C. L. Wrenn and G. Bullough (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), says that "paper . . . was in abundant supply all over western Europe" (p. 87) and points as evidence to an Italian merchant who died in 1410, leaving over 100,000 paper documents -- mostly correspondence (p. 88). He is also of the opinion that the romances listed in the inventories of the Duke of Gloucester in this same period, valued from a sixpence to a shilling, may also have been on paper. Adamson, however, in the article cited in note 4 above, insists to the contrary that "paper was dear in the fifteenth century" (p. 164).

\(^7\)Bennett, "Author and Public," pp. 22-23.
unlettered. These poems reveal, as Brown puts it in his introduction to the fifteenth-century religious lyrics, that "no real line of cleavage exists between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries" (p. xxxi). Even a cursory glance at these lyrics shows that poets continued to employ many of the devices of earlier aural poetry.

Many of the minstrel songs which Robbins prints in his edition of the secular lyrics were obviously intended for oral presentation before the same kind of audience also entertained by verse romances. The second stanza of "A Minstrel's Greeting" (SL 1) addresses "masters everychon," and successive stanzas make it clear that the singer moved among the audience singling out individuals to whom the stanza was then addressed. Stanza four addresses "ye with your face so lene," and five is directed at "ye with your fflat face" (11. 25, 53). Robbins also prints two "Invitation[s] to Festivity" (SL 2, 3), which, along with "An Unwilling Minstrel" (SL 4), are also addressed to an assembled company. The invitations were obviously employed at Christmas entertainments. Some of the practical verse was evidently taught to a group through recitation. A series of verses entitled "Christmas Day Prognostications" (SL 72) served as a part of the Yuletide entertainment. There are references to listeners throughout and the opening stanza indicates the audience:

Now hathe ye harde, bothe olde & yonge,
Discrivede many a dyuers thyng—
Off dremyng, off chaffaryng, of childres byrthe,
Off lettyng blode, off weddyng, & of other myrthe,
And off other thyngges þat ben to done
By the Rule of the moone,
And by oure forme-fadres witnes.
But I warne you, bothe more & les,
þat ye be never the more bolde
For no thyng that I haue tolde
þat to done moorrow or eve,
But who so shall any thyng leve,
As I haue you made of mynde,
Bettir profyt may no man fynde
þat þis ping ys trewe Anowȝe
þat I haue of spokyne to you.

These lines suggest that the prognostications were part of a series of items regularly recited during the Christmas festivities.

Those fifteenth-century religious lyrics intended for moral and didactic purposes rather than for private devotions also show evidence of oral presentation. One of the most interesting is "Our Lady's Imprecation" (RL XV 10), a monologue addressed by the Virgin to Judas and the Jews involved in the Crucifixion. Somewhat incongruously, Mary begins her lament after the fashion of a minstrel about to entertain with a verse romance:

Listyns, lordyngus, to my tale
And 3e shall here of on story,
Is bettur then ouþer wyne or ale
þat euer was made in this cuntry,
How iewys demyd my son to dye.

11. 1-5

The poem also ends in the manner of a romance -- with a prayer appended by the poet to the story Mary tells of the events of Passiontide:

Now pray we to hym with hert & thoghþt,
That prince þat soke oure lady brest,
Owt of this worde when we are broȝt
With hym and hir in heuyn to rest.

11. 109-112
This poem employs descriptive alliterative phrases in a manner similar to that of earlier poets. Mary, describing Christ's suffering on the cross, uses a phrase found frequently in verse narratives: "fful stille he stode as eny ston/ And lete yow bete hym as a beest" (11. 61-62). Further along, after describing the harrowing of hell, the poet pictures Satan bound in hell "as stille as ston" (1. 103). In the same manuscript (Cambridge University Ff. 5. 48) in which this poem appears, there is preserved another Marian lament, also a monologue, employing the same devices. Mary addresses all mothers who have their sons "full holl and sounde" (1. 57). The phrase "hap and hele" appears in stanza nine solely to provide a rhyme, and other doublets occur regularly as filler: "town & strete" (1. 49), "nayle and speyre" (11. 38, 54) are examples. "Ave Regina Celorum" (RL XV 24) also employs doublets for rhyme. The phrase "alle & some" appears three times in seven stanzas, every time in the second half-line and always to provide a rhyme for the -um ending of the Latin refrain. "One and alle," "fare and nere," and "moste and leste" occur elsewhere in the poem for the same purpose.

Formulaic rhyme continues to be employed in the fifteenth century, especially in the carols whose stanza forms demand three or four monorhymes. "A Maid Hath Borne the King of Kings" (RL XV 77), a macaronic Nativity carol, utilizes the borne/forlorne rhyme in the opening stanza:

Regem regem A mayde hath borne,  
To Sawe mankynde that was forlorne;  
And 3yt ys sche as sche was be-forne,  
Res miranda.
"A New-Year Song of the Nativity" (RL XV 84), preserved in one of the minstrel collections, Sloane MS. 2593, uses this rhyme pattern twice:

A New ger, A newe 3er a chyld was I-born,  
vs for to sauyn Jaat al was for-lorn.  
11. 1-2

al of a clene maydyn our lord was I-born,  
vs for to sauyn ßat al was for-lorn.  
11. 10-11

The same formula appears in "Angels, Star, and Magi" (RL XV 86, 11. 5, 7), and twice in "Balthazer, Melchior and Jasper" (RL XV 88, 11. 2-3, 46-47), an Epiphany carol also from the Sloane MS.

These devices carried over into lyrics written for the eye rather than for the ear. Formulaic rhyme, for example, appears in "An Acrostic of the Angelic Salutation" (RL XIV 131), which is built around a rhymed version of the ave maria; stanza two combines the born/forlorn rhyme with the milde/childe pattern:

Marie, mayde and moder milde,  
Milce and merci was of ße boren,  
To sauuen and fram helle schilde  
Alle ßo ßat weren forloren;  
For giltes of oure eldren wilde,  
Adam and Eue her biforen,  
Praie for vs to ßine childe,  
ßat we to his blisse be coren.  
11. 9-16

The thirteenth stanza is especially interesting. It is an elaboration of the phrase from the Hail Mary which describes Christ as the fruit of Mary’s womb; fittingly it employs the blode/rode/gode/fode rhyme:
And be fruit, bat to alle gode
Frouerling is, and ek hem strongeb,
And soules helpe and liues fode
Bat worpschipeliche hit vnderfongeb,
Ripede in bin herte blode,
Ase appel bat on be tre hongeb.
So dede upon rode
He to wham folk cristene longeb.

The poem, in itself an elaborate exercise in devotion, nevertheless succeeds particularly well in this stanza in fusing the image of Christ, the fruit of Mary's womb, hanging on the rode (tree) and ripening in His own blood to become the "gode fode" through which man might be saved, with the image of Adam's tree whose fruit condemned man to death.

"A Salutation to the Virgin" (RL XV 15) is an expansion of the Hail Mary, a type of poem frequently found in manuscripts of private devotions belonging to the upper classes. It too employs formulaic rhyme: the milde/childe/wilde pattern appears in the first stanza and milde/childe/schilde in the ninth. Stanza ten exhibits the blode/fode/gode formula, and the born/forlorn pair appears in stanza eleven.

Alliteration in fifteenth-century secular and religious lyrics is employed functionally in the moral and didactic poetry and decoratively in the courtly lyrics both religious and secular. The fifteenth-century lyrics which Brown labels "Songs against Vices" and "Proverbs and Moral Sentences" frequently employ alliteration in the refrain lines which embody the moral even when this device is not characteristic of the remainder of the stanza.

One example is "See Much, Say Little, and Learn to Suffer in Time" (RL XV
whose refrain gives the poem its title. "Medicines to Cure the Deadly Sins" (RL XV 178) utilizes alliteration throughout the stanza, each of which concludes "yeve vs lycence to lyve yn ese." An example of decorative alliteration in poetry designed for private reading is "Counsels of Prudence and Patience" (RL XV 183), preserved in Cotton MS. Caligula A. ii, identified by Robbins as a collection of aureate verses prepared for a patron:8

I See A Rybane Ryche and newe,  
Wyth stones and perles Ryally pyght,  
Regalles, Rubies, Saffyres blewe;  
The grownde was alle of brent gold bryght,  
Wyth dyamandes full derely dyght;  
Ryche Saladyne sette on euery syde,  
Wher-on was wrytyn A Resoun full Ryght,  
And all was for the better A-byde.

Such decoration is a hallmark of the fifteenth-century courtly love lyric.

"The Beauty of His Mistress" (SL 130) exhibits both the aureate diction and the decorative alliteration typical of these poems:

O Excelent suffereigne, most semely to see,  
bothe prudent & pure, lyke a perle of prise,  
also fair of fygure & oreant of bewtye,  
bothe cumlye & gentyll, & goodly to aduertyse;  
your brethe ys swettur then balme, suger, or lycresse.
I am bolde on yow, thoughe I be nott able,  
To wrytte to your goodly person whyche ys so ameable.

8See SL, pp. xxiii-xxvi, particularly note 3, p. xxvi.
by reason.
   for ye be bothe fair & free,
   thereto wysse & womanly,
   trew as turtyll on a tree
   with-owt any treason.

11. 1-12

In the closing lines of this stanza, the alliterative doublets are employed both decoratively and to provide the rhyme. The reference to writing in line six of the stanza indicates that the poem was probably intended for a reader.

Similar references to writing and to reading appear in the lyrics with increasing frequency after 1350 and constitute some of the surest evidence of the growth of a written literary tradition. Prior to this time, such references were utilized by the poet in contexts giving his work the authority of some written source. Ruth Crosby, in enumerating the various kinds of evidence of oral presentation, cites this device as a type of asseveration which the poet hoped would lend greater credence to his words. In the early religious lyrics we find, for example, such phrases as "ase we hit finde hir wriiten in þe godspelle" (XIII 29b, 1. 8), "ase teche holy bok" (RL XIV 16, 1. 54), "as we in bok rede" (RL XIV 26, 1. 11), and "þus is wriiten in þe gospelle" (XIII 19, 1. 13). Among the earliest references to both reading and writing are those which appear in the "Love-Ron" of Thomas de Hales. The opening lines of the poem indicate that the lyric was written at the behest of a young lady: "A Mayde cristes me bit yorne/ þat ich hire wirche a luue-ron." At the conclusion of his lyric, Friar Thomas addresses
the maiden, advising her "Hwenne þu sittest in longynge, / drauh þe forþ þis ilke wryt" (11. 201-202), but it is clear that the substance of the lyric was intended for reading aloud or singing, for he then adds "Mid swete stephne þu hit singe" (1. 203) and ends with a prayer that God "yeve him gode endynge, / þat haueth i-wryten þis ilke wryt" (11. 209-210). After 1350, however, such references appear in contexts suggestive of a written literary tradition.

The widespread popularity of the courtly love-letter in the fifteenth century is indicative of the extent to which reading and writing had become commonplace in court circles. Robbins prints seventeen such poems among the courtly lyrics included in his edition of the secular lyrics. Almost all of them mention writing and many of them employ imagery involving paper and ink. The lovelorn poet of "From a Departing Lover" (SL 197) bids farewell to his lady in a stanza rife with such references:

y may wryte no more a dele,
for of no leyser sykerly;
but ofte-tymes y grete þou wel
as sterris sitten on þe skye;
& more often by a þousand part
þen ony clerke may wryte with inke,
or eny man can pryve by art,
or mouþe speke, or herte þenke.

11. 41-48

Similar phrases appear in "The Beauty of His Mistress" (SL 129). Following the lengthy catalog of the lady's virtues and the poet's protestations of undying devotion, the concluding stanzas indicate the written presentation of
the poet's sentiments and attest to the conventional nature of the comparisons of the above lyric as well:

wherfore as many tymes I grete yow
as clarkes can wrytte with papur & ynke,
& as monye moo as gressys grewe,
or tonge can tell, or harte can thynke.

noo more I wryte to yow at thy tym,  
but wher-euer ye be on lande or watter,
crystes dere blessyng & myne
I sende yow yn grettyng of thy letter. 
11. 49-56

In "In Praise of Margaret the Queen" (SL 188), the Duke of Suffolk invokes the spirits of Chaucer and Lydgate, beseeching them to "enlumyne . . . my penne" and "of these lettyrs let thy colours shyne,/ This byll to forthir after myn entent" (11.. 29-32). Finally, "Scorn of Women" (SL 211), an anti-feminist tirade, contains one stanza built entirely around a writing image:

In sothe to say, thowgh all the erthe
so wanne
Were parchemyne smothe, whyte and scryb-
abyll,
And the gret see that callyd ys the occianne
Were tornyd into ynke, blakkyr than sablyr,
Euery styk a penne, yche man a scryuener abyll,

Nat cowde [they] then wryte womans trechery.
11. 36-41

A number of different types of verse which first make their appearance in the late fourteenth century verify the growth of a reading audience. One of the earliest poems probably designed for reading from a manuscript is a late fourteenth-century acrostic built on the _ave maria_ (RL XIV 131). The
opening phrase of each stanza is taken from a rhymed version of this prayer which serves as the poem's preface:

Heil! Marie, ful of grace,
God is wip þe in euerich place;
Blesced be pou ouer alle wymmen,
And þe fruit of þin wombe, amen.

In his introduction to the religious lyrics of the fourteenth-century, Brown classifies this lyric as "representative of a large class of verse, Latin, French, and English" appearing near the close of the period (p. xxi). A number of similar devotional lyrics appear also in the fifteenth century. In "The Five Joys of Our Lady, with Acrostic" (RL XV 31), the initial letter of each of the five stanzas combines to spell out MARIA. Another example of this type of verse is "An Alphabetical Devotion to the Cross" (RL XV 101). Each line of the poem begins with successive letters of the alphabet; moreover, the first and last lines of this lyric employ a pictorial representation of the cross rather than spell out the word itself. The opening line implores "† of ihū criste be euer oure sped;" and the lyric concludes, "As to thy + reverence we may haue." The pictorial carried to the extreme can be seen in "A Political Prophecy by the Dice" (HP 46), a late fourteenth-century poem in which all of the numbers in the prophecy are represented by the printed faces of the dice.

Another popular device which could only have been appreciated by a reader was the punctuation poem. Three of these are printed by Robbins in his edition of the secular lyrics (see SL 110, 111, 112). Such lyrics were
punctuated in a manner which permitted two different, usually contradictory meanings. "Punctuation Poem, II" (SL 111) is a good example:

Nowe the lawe is ledde by clere conscience.
fful seld. Couetise hath dominacioun.
In Euery place. Right hath residence.
Neyther in towne ne feld. Similacion.
Ther is truly in euery cas. Consolacioun.
The pore peple no tyme hase. but right.
Men may fynd day ne nyght. Adulacioun.
Nowe reigneth treuth in euery mannys sight.

Read with only the end punctuation observed, the poem is a paean on order and goodness. However, when the medial punctuation is observed, the meaning is reversed; the poem then can be read as a commentary on the decline of virtue.

The kind of experimentation which these types of poems represent suggests the relative newness of the medium of the written or the printed page as a means of communicating to an audience heretofore dependent on the ear rather than the eye. Obviously, such poems as these require for their success visual rather than aural apprehension and hence demand an audience of readers rather than listeners. Their occurrence in the poetry of the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries indicates that such an audience must surely have developed by this time.

The growth of a written literary tradition after 1350 led to an increasing concern among the poets of the time with the fitness of the vernacular as a language suitable for literature. The most obvious manifestation of this concern is to be seen in the development of aureate verse in which poets
composing for the nobility attempted through Latinized English to suit their language to the tastes of the court. As we have noted earlier, this consciousness of style is almost entirely absent from the poetry of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. But the courtly love lyrics and the religious poetry designed for the private devotions of the upper classes are both explicit and implicit in the concern for language which they manifest.

It became conventional for the poet of the courtly lyrics to apologize for his inability to find the right words to express his love for his lady or to describe her as she deserved. The poet of "From a Caitiff Bound and Thrall" (SL 196), for example, apologizes for addressing himself to his lady in "termes rud" (1. 5), but excuses himself on the grounds that "this bill I wret with hart Interiall, / Exhorting hir excuss my ignoraunc" (11. 6-7). The same sort of apology appears in "A Letter Protesting His Devotion" (SL 192):

How ye be my souerayne lady, I-wyss I can-not wryte, ne ffynd I perto papyr nor yng; Wel I wote a hole 3ere it ys to lyte to make yow to know so mych on how I thynke.

11. 8-11

The apology is reiterated in the closing stanza:

9See Chapter IV, pp. 143-148.
And to yow also worchyp and reuerense,  
Prayng yow the effectt of my sentense  
Ye take in gre, how pat my wrytyng be rude,  
To trowth yt sownyth; and so y conclude.  
11. 18-21

"To Her Lover" (SL 207) is unusual among these poems for the woman's point of view it represents. The lady's reference to her letter as a "symple byll" (1. 11) and her use of the envoy "goo lyttle queare" (1. 15) indicate that the love letter was intended for a reader.  

The conventional apology appears in stanza five:

& as towchyng his letter of translatyon  
owt of frenche, how-so euer he englyshe be,  
all pis ys said vnder correctyon,  
with the supportatyon of your benyngnyte.  
11. 19-22

The poet of "The Lover’s Mocking Reply" (SL 209), in response to "A Mocking Letter to Her Lover" (SL 208), claims that the lady's letter of "derusion" permits him to answer "boldly withoute ony offence" and he begins with a scathing criticism of her literary style:

The ynglysch of Chaucere was nat in youre mynd,  
Ne tullyus termys wyth so gret eloquence,  
But ye, as vncurtes and Crabbed of kynde,  
Rolled hem on a hepe, it semyth by the sentence.  
11. 8-11

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10 The development of this sort of envoy concomitant with the written literary tradition has already been noted. See above, note 3, p. 157.
Experimentation carried over into verse forms as well as language. As was indicated earlier (see above, Chapter IV, p. 153), while the popular verse forms of couplet, cross-rhyme, and tail-rhyme stanzas dominate the poetry of the fifteenth century, the more complicated forms of ballade, rhyme royal, roundel and virelai make their initial appearance after 1350. Except for ballade and rhyme royal stanza forms, however, these newer verse patterns did not prove very popular. The reason is perhaps provided by Lydgate, who in the conventional apology for language in the *Troy Book* (II, 168), complains that "In ryme Ynglish hath skarsete."¹¹

The sort of experimentation which the foregoing discussion suggests is typical of an age of transition. The lyrics of the fifteenth century provide clear evidence of the transition in literature from aural to visual presentation; and the best evidence of that transition is to be found in the courtly rather than the popular lyrics. The double tradition of courtly and popular lyric continues, however, throughout the sixteenth century, although Douglas Peterson, in *The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), insists that it is the courtly style which dominates. He attempts to explain why in the

concluding chapter of his study. He characterizes the plain style as "the 'popular' or 'vulgar' style . . . reflect[ing] a didactic concern," adding that since its purpose is to encourage a "parochial audience to embrace and act upon the ethical and theological truths of Christianity, it assumes the idiom of the common man" (p. 349). The courtly style becomes then the "literary" style. In the sixteenth century, particularly, according to Peterson, the eloquent or courtly tradition becomes both a "literary and a courtly ideal: to write well is to write as the courtier writes" (p. 353).

The career of the plain style in the sixteenth century is a matter of some debate. Peterson suggests that when the courtly tradition had run its course, the plain style re-emerged in the devotional poetry of the early seventeenth century, continuing a tradition of anticourtly verse which had "its roots in the simple didactic poetry of the Middle Ages" (p. 356). C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, employing the term "Drab poetry" to designate that written in the plain style, agrees that it became subordinate to the eloquent or "Golden" poetry in the late sixteenth century; but he insists that while "plain statement . . . carry[ing] the illusion of the speaking voice" indeed emerged as a characteristic of metaphysical style, the didactic function inherent in medieval poetry was ceded to prose.\(^ {12} \)

he suggests (p. 558), metaphysical poetry, though characteristically colloquial and plain, is "too subtle" to convey its ideas to the mind by way of recitation.

Aural poetry, insofar as it survived into the sixteenth century, survived largely as song-lyric. Its features as characterized by those who have traced its history have much in common with the aural poetry of the Middle Ages, and it is marked by the same limitations. Catherine Ing, in *Elizabethan Lyric* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), notes that Elizabethan song-lyric was not a vehicle for "deep and original thought, subtle psychology, strange imagery, social or philosophical implications. In fact, these lyrics are notorious for their repetitive subject-matter (usually faithful -- often despised -- love, with celebrations of ladies' beauty), their well-worn imagery and their light intellectual weight" (p. 20). R. W. Ingram, in an essay appearing in *Elizabethan Poetry* (Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, no. 2, 1960), concurs: Elizabethan lyric, he contends, provides no opportunity "for discussion, close argument, or intricate thought. Emotional content must be plain and straightforward, it must be strongly enough expressed for the hearer to seize it and identify himself with it, but without the intrusion of the deeper and special feelings of the poet himself."¹³ These descriptions

could apply to the secular and religious lyric of the Middle Ages.

Printing freed the poet from these limitations. The effect of the transition from aural to visual presentation was, first, the exploitation of the printed medium in the form of devices such as anagrams and acrostics which are to be found in much of the poetry of the fifteenth century. This sort of experimentation produced in the seventeenth century the "hieroglyphick" or shaped verse whose typographical image reflects the poem's central metaphor. Accompanying these developments, however, was a growing awareness of the way in which auditory and visual image could work together to achieve greater complexity and variety. George Herbert's "Easter-wings" and E. E. Cummings' "in Just-" provide examples of the way in which poets have employed the printed page, combining both visual and aural imagery.

One stanza of Herbert's poem is sufficient to illustrate his method:

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.\textsuperscript{14}

F. E. Hutchinson in his edition of Herbert's poems, notes that "all early editions print [the lines of this poem] vertically" (p. 43), which would reinforce the image of wings which provides the poem's central metaphor. Moreover, it must be noted that the idea of man's spiritual diminishing as a consequence of sin is paralleled by the diminishing line lengths until man becomes "Mostpoore." His renewal, made possible by Christ's victory over the grave at Easter, is reinforced visually by the increasing length of each successive line. Such a device is possible only through the printed medium; the effect cannot be achieved in aural poetry. Herbert does not ignore the reader's inner ear, however; the effect of the alliteration in the last line is to suggest the sound of fluttering wings.

E. E. Cummings' "in Just-" employs similar devices:

in Just-
spring  when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles  far  and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring
when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far  and  wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and
it's
spring
and
the
goat-footed

balloonMan    whistles
far
and
wee15

The typography of Cummings' poem has both visual and auditory functions. The spacing, employing many short, broken lines, enables the reader to see the broken gait of the "lame," "goat-footed" balloonman. This visual image is reinforced by the large number of hyphenated compound words which Cummings uses. The shrillness of the balloonman's whistle as he approaches in the distance is made audible to the reader's inner ear not only by the choice of the word "wee," but also by the wide spacing. The placement of the phrase "far and wee" at the end of the poem enables the reader both to see and to hear the balloonman's departure at the conclusion of the lyric. The close spacing of "eddieandbill" and "bettyandisbel" serves a double function. It suggests the inseparableness of close childhood friendships. Moreover, in combination with the breathless quality achieved in the poem by the omission

of all punctuation, it contributes to the reader's perception of children's speech patterns.

These two lyrics, reflecting a combination of effects made possible by printing, testify to the accuracy of Chaytor's observation that "[h]earing and sight, once disconnected, have become inseparable. . . . [w]hen we read to ourselves, the visual impression is accompanied by an auditory perception; we hear, or can hear, the sentences that we read, and when we compose, we write to the dictation of an inner voice." This fusion of eye and ear altered the nature of lyric poetry. The printed page provided the reader with a source to which he could return, to reread, to consider, and to ponder. He could exercise his critical faculties to contemplate connotations, to examine the relationships of words in phrases and sentences, and to discern implications not readily apprehendable upon a first and perhaps single impression. The poet, freed from heavy reliance on the familiar -- in rhyme patterns, rhythmical sequences, imagery, word choice, and syntax -- could emerge as an individual stylist. As we noted in Chapter I, it is the personal note, the subjective element, which distinguishes the modern lyric from the medieval. The end of the Middle Ages, insofar as

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16 From Script to Print, p. 7.
literary style is concerned, coincides with the invention of printing, which
effected a transition from an aural to a visual presentation of literature.


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APPENDIX

A SYNOPSIS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRIC STANZA FORMS

The chart below includes all of the lyrics in the editions by Brown and Robbins. Different versions of the same lyric have been counted separately. The number in parenthesis below the designated edition indicates the total number of lyrics in that edition.

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<th>RL XV (198)</th>
<th>SL (212)</th>
<th>HP (100)</th>
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VITA

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Title of Thesis: Techniques of Aural Poetry in the Middle English Lyric

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Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination: December 6, 1972