THE CONTEXT

OF THE MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRICS

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ABSTRACT

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Only within the last two decades has Middle English lyric poetry received extensive critical attention from sympathetic readers who attempt to account for the particular aesthetic effects this body of poetry achieves. This study explores the possibility of grounding such a study in a theory of literary context derived from speech-act and linguistic models of language usage.

The study begins with a survey of the critical literature, identifying and documenting six assumptions which inform it. One of these, termed the linguistic suitability hypothesis, holds that the ME language was uniquely suited to the production of just such poetic texts as have come down from the period. This is shown to be an indefensible position.

Chapter Two focusses on the notion of context, both as it has been applied to the ME lyrics specifically and as it has been elaborated in recent critical theory, most notably by Mary Louise Pratt. These discussions are shown to be flawed and an alternative is proposed. The concept of deixis, as elucidated in the work of the linguist Charles Fillmore, supplies an empirical data base for contextualist study of lyric poetry. Deixis refers to those elements of language--certain of the personal pronouns, adverbs and adverbial phrases, and verb tenses--which derive their real-world significance only from the specific context in which they are uttered.

The body of the study surveys the lyric poetry of the ME period

from the point of view first of person deixis, then of time and place deixis, and finally of deictic self-reflexivity. In each case the primary objective is to establish the interest of a contextualist reading, by demonstrating its wide applicability and by raising issues for further study. The bearing of a contextualist perspective on various of the issues raised in the critical literature is also pointed out.

The study concludes with a brief examination of a well-known text which displays no deictic features whatsoever, suggesting nevertheless that it can pertinently be read on the contextualist model developed in the body of the study.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Happily for the student of Middle English literature there is no longer a need to begin a study of the lyric poetry in English of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries with a justification. Skillful and sympathetic critical attention over the last two decades together with wide availability of the texts themselves (at least several hundred of the best of them) in a dozen or more recent anthologies have combined to dispel the generally skeptical opinion of an older generation of scholarship, of which George Kane's disparaging remark that "The religious subject as a whole had a restrictive effect upon [the lyrics'] poets" is a fair sample and one often cited of late.[1] Where the older generation of critics found dogma, tedium, and doggerel in these lyrics the critics of the past two decades have found devotion, variety, and technical skill; and a group of poets once felt to have little claim on our aesthetic sensibilities are now said to be "outsung [in their own sphere] by only a small chorus of the best lyric poets in the language."[2]

As a matter of fact the most recent work on the Middle English lyrics has not concerned itself much with this sort of revisionist appreciation. Beginning, perhaps, with Raymond Oliver's Poems Without Names: The English Lyric, 1200-1500[3] the tendency has been to assume a broadly sympathetic audience and to present instead of a defense an analysis of the material from the point of view of an area of

technical expertise, or to provide close readings of a number of the texts, or both. The present study belongs to the last of these types. It is an attempt to demonstrate the relevance of a particular class of linguistic phenomena known as deictics to a contextually motivated understanding of this body of poetry. I will defer a full explanation of these phenomena until Chapter Two, and their bearing on the Middle English lyrics forms the subject of the following three chapters. Briefly, deictics are linguistic elements whose meanings are wholly defined by the circumstances of the situation in which they are uttered. They have no fixed meanings, but derive them in a given instance from the context of the utterance. The first and second person pronouns and adverbials of time (now) and place (here) are notable examples.

Such a demonstration as I am undertaking here would have little interest unless it could be shown to have some particular relevance to these lyrics by virtue of the wide occurrence of the phenomena in question in them; hence I will cite examples widely from the standard anthologies. They lie at hand everywhere, and it seems to me that this fact in itself must be taken into account as we strive for a fuller appreciation of the lyrics. Secondly, the notable presence of the deictic phenomena in the lyrics raises a number of interesting questions about the poetics--the presumptive, underlying rules of poetic composition--of the Middle English period, and although a full treatment of that subject lies outside the scope of the present study I will devote some space to a discussion of some of the major issues involved, since the orientation of much of this work is unfamiliar, I believe, to most readers of Middle English literature. We will find, for example, that

just as it is unprofitable and perhaps even dangerous to insist on a strict division of the Middle English lyrics into secular and religious provenances, it is unprofitable, dangerous, and in any case untenable to insist upon a strict separation of natural and poetic forms of language, so that such a view, which some critics have brought to bear explicitly (and many hold implicitly), rather hinders than furthers our understanding of this poetry. Finally, it is one of the purposes of this study to point out systematic interrelationships among various motifs of the current criticism of the lyrics--the nature and identity of the speakers in them, their public quality, their ambivalent attitude toward the natural surroundings, their conventionality of language, their pragmatic or functional aesthetic, their fusion of the secular and religious domains--and to ground this systematicity in the linguistic phenomenon of deixis.

The most recent critical work on the Middle English lyrics, as I have said, offers a close reading of the lyrics, a discussion of their relationship to some other area of learning, or some combination of the two. In order to place the present study within the context of these broadening circles of critical study I want to survey several of these works before passing on to an examination of some preliminary issues in the remainder of this chapter.

Edmund Reiss's The Art of the Middle English Lyric: Essays In Criticism itself briefly surveys the field of lyric scholarship through the publication of Sarah Appleton Weber's Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric: A Study of Sacred History and Aesthetic Form in 1969.[4] Raymond Oliver's Poems Without Names, mentioned above, was in press simultaneously with Reiss's work, so it receives only a

few lines of attention there in a note. I will comment more extensively on it below. The bulk of Reiss's work is taken up with close textual analyses of twenty-five individual lyrics, most of them well known but a few that have received little or no attention. Reiss's technique is to make use of "as many critical and scholarly tools as I could justifiably employ" in order to see "how the poems do what they do and how all their parts contribute to the whole" (p. xii). This kind of close attention, which I must agree is "rarely applied to medieval verse," produces readings which are sometimes insightful, sometimes quixotic; but as Somerset Maugham remarked apropos of reading the theatre critics, it is diverting to agree and diverting to disagree. In any event, for the lyrics he discusses Reiss's comments are apt to be the most extensive textually centered analyses in the critical literature; and he performs the further service of collecting in one place information on the MS source(s), printed editions, and previous critical commentary.

Nevertheless, Reiss's work remains the only one to devote itself wholly to approaching each lyric "according to its own demands." The three book-length studies which have appeared since his work all attempt to ground Middle English lyric practice in one aspect or another of medieval Christianity.[5] These are Douglas Gray's Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric[6], Sister Mary Arthur Knowlton's The Influence of Richard Rolle and of Julian of Norwich on the Middle English Lyrics[7], and David L. Jeffrey's The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality.[8] These works extend the discussions of sources and influences and thematic classifications begun by Woolf and Weber in the previous decade. Gray's viewpoint is the most eclectic

of the three. He discerns in the "inherited [Latin] tradition" an "imaginary museum" wherein is conserved "the fruit of twelve centuries of Christian tradition--hymns, religious poetry, commentaries, sermons, . . . the Scriptures, the Psalter, and the Western liturgy." This supplies collectively "an elaborate and developed theology and various sophisticated symbolic or allegorical modes of thought" as well as "ideas and themes, words and phrases, . . . also a rich array of visual images," which in turn forms the material of which the lyrics are constructed.[9] Sister M. A. Knowlton confines herself to a study of the influence of the two best known English mystics of the period on contemporary poetry and finds that "Richard Rolle's influence on the lyric literature of the one hundred and fifty years after his death was very great, [while] that of Julian [was] very slight." She accounts for the difference by referring it to their contrasting styles, characterizing Rolle's as "effusive" with an "immediate popular appeal," whereas Julian's is "reserved" and "intellectual."[10] David Jeffrey's study of the contribution of the Friars Minor to the English lyric tradition is both scholarly and highly accessible, although many will find that his conclusion that "the Middle English lyric is, essentially, a Franciscan song"[11] somewhat exaggerates the case. The chapters on "Spiritual Revolution and Popular Poetry" and "Franciscan Spirituality", in any case, afford a useful--and fascinating--glimpse of an era of corrupt ecclesiastical practice and deteriorating spiritual morale, as it were, throughout a very large area of Western Christendom. It was within this distressing atmosphere that the Middle English lyrics suddenly began to appear in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, and Jeffrey's analysis goes far toward establishing

a causal connection by reading the lyrics as expressions of the reformist, popularized spirituality of the Franciscans.

As I mentioned earlier, although these works differ in assigning the greatest measure of influence on the development and thematic stock of the lyrics to one or another source within the Christian tradition, there is substantial concurrence among the critics upon a set of interpretational assumptions (although they are often set forward as objective qualities of the lyrics themselves). These assumptions effectively govern modern readings of this poetry, so pervasive are they; most of them are shared by this study. But the possibility that they can be grounded in an understanding of the function of deixis in Middle English poetic practice has not been explored. In the remainder of this chapter I would like to document these assumptions, deferring my own rationale for holding those of them which I do until the appropriate time. In the case of three, however, which I do not hold, I will offer refutations and alternatives.

Although the practice of the lyrics' editors has nearly always been to separate the religious from the secular ones, recent criticism has consistently argued that they form a single tradition. Thus Edmund Reiss, for example, maintains that "the distinction between secular and religious, at least insofar as the medieval lyric is concerned, seems to be both artificial and inadequate, and ofter something that gets in the way of understanding the various poems." The distinction, he believes, arises from consideration only of the surface of the text, its littera in contemporary terminology, and ignores the fact that "most frequently, even when the surface of the poem appears to be secular, there exists beneath it a moral or religious sentence

that represents the poem's essential significance."[12] His position and the rationale for it were substantially anticipated by John Speirs. David Jeffrey argues that "to separate mechanically the two 'kingdoms' [i.e. the secular and religious] in a medieval poem may obscure one of the most important premises of such a poem, which can be that there is no sharp discontinuity between secular and religious experience, or between the realm of God's created nature, including his highest creation, and God himself."[13] For David Manning, "the analogy which medieval poets saw between the natural and supernatural worlds is reflected in [a number of] poems" in which "the two traditions--religious and secular--blend harmoniously."[14] This assumption is shared by the present study, which often cites works from the two "kingdoms" side by side to illustrate a point. The basic linguistic material which establishes a poem's deixis is unaffected by its subject, theme, point of view, function, imagery, style, or diction.

A second assumption of modern lyric criticism, shared by this study, is that although these lyrics <u>are</u> lyrics, "modern definitions of lyric which emphasize the expression of an individual's emotion will clearly not be applicable to most of them," as Douglas Gray expresses it.[15] Rosemary Woolf begins her compendious study by making exactly this point. She warns that the Middle English 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 on its way." In a note she traces the history of the usage of the term, labelling the post-nineteenth century expressionist associations a la Ruskin ("Lyric Poetry is the expression by the poet of his own feelings") as "even more

insidiously misleading when applied to the Middle English religious lyric than is the [earlier] emphasis on musical qualities." Nor do the lyricists fit our modern conception of the poet, she argues, "for they 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," a trait she refers to as the medieval poets' "abnegation of individuality."[16] For Raymond Oliver such a "modern definition" is wholly out of the question, for "in medieval literature, at least, we have nothing but the embodiment of an intention; there is no temptation to discuss the text apropos of the private experience and mental workings of its author, a dubious enterprise even where modern poetry is concerned."[17] Robert D. Stevick takes A. K. Moore and George Kane, in particular (and Steven Manning, as well, though the critique in his case is mitigated) to task for their failures to observe the fact that "inferences about the poet's imagination, or creative faculty, or consciousness, seem to be about as untrustworthy as grounds for evaluation as they are deficient in providing a satisfactory accounting of the poem."[18] Reiss recognizes, with Ananda Coomaraswamy, an analogy between the medieval artist and the modern mathematician in that "neither possesses artistic self-consciousness, at least not in the modern sense of the term; feeling, as such--that which is the basis of the term 'aesthetic'--is necessarily irrelevant to their works."[19] As long ago as 1946 Leo Spitzer discounted an allegation of medieval plagarism by positing a distinction between what he called the "empirical I" and the "poetic I," and he advanced the theory that "in the Middle Ages, the 'poetic I' had more freedom and breadth than it has today: at that time the concept of intellectual

property did not exist because literature dealt not with the individual but with mankind; the 'ut in pluribus' was an accepted standard."[20] Similar positions may be found in Manning (p. 50) and Weber (p. 204). The contrary assumption--that the lyrics do express the thought, feeling, sensibility, world view, anxiety, or other recognizably individual perception of individual poets--suggests itself particularly strongly to the uninitiated reader of these lyrics, not merely because of his necessarily modern perspective on lyric poetry in general but because of the remarkably marked tendency of the lyrics to use the first person pronoun and to address the reader directly. The phenomenon of dexis bears directly on this matter, and the application of it to this assumption, with attendant problems of interpretation not generally recognized in the criticism, forms the subject of Chapter Three.

A third interpretational assumption often put forward as a characteristic of the lyrics themselves is that they are in the main functional and public works rather than objects of private aesthetic contemplation. The point is similar to the preceding one, but recognizably distinct from it. Gray, for example, notes that "The lyrics are sometimes put to what we might recognize as 'literary' uses (e.g. in plays), but more often than not the impulse behind them is quite functional and practical." He adds that "Utility is normally put before beauty," contending that "The lyrics were meant to be, and were, used, sometimes in private devotion and prayer, sometimes for public devotional display, sometimes to emphasize and drive home points in sermons."[21] In a chapter entitled "Public, Practical, Anonymous" Oliver asserts that "most short poems from the English Middle Ages derive their meaning from large cultural values or institutions. They are

social artifacts, public and useful, whose purpose can be gauged only with respect to a larger purpose." Their points of view are "general and public" and derive from "a handful of general sources" including "social role or position, Scripture or religious doctrine, nonreligious doctrine or theory, and broadly religious or existential positions."[22] While it is difficult to tell what is excluded by this list of "sources" the emphasis on what is publicly accessible is apparent. In a most interesting recent study, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," Anne Middleton characterizes this quality very sharply. Although the works she has primarily in mind are "those two 'baggy monsters,'" Confessio Amantis and Piers Plowman, and although she tends to conceive of this quality as a feature which distinguishes the poetry of the later fourteenth century from what precedes it, much of her characterization applies to the lyrics as well. She finds that certain attitudes, "which constitute the foundations of a secular and civic piety, are attended in the poetry by explicit and coherent notions about the nature of poetry, about poetry's worldly place and purpose." Hence "poetry was to be a 'common voice' to serve the 'common good'" and "The realized presence of the poetic speaker in this literature became a stylistic means of expressing that purpose." Furthermore, "The public poetry of the Ricardian period is best understood not as poetry 'about' contemporary events and abuses, whether viewed concretely or at a distance, from the vantage point of a universal scheme of ideal order--it is rarely occasional or topical, and it is indifferent on the whole to comprehensive rationale systems of thought or of poetic structure. Rather it is poetry defined by a constant relation of speaker to audience within an ideally conceived

worldly community, a relation which has become the poetic subject. In describing their mode of address, the poets most often refer to the general or common voice, and the ideal of human nature that sustains this voice assigns new importance to secular life, the civic virtues, and communal service."[23] Here again, the contribution of an understanding of the lyrics' deictic elements to a fuller specification of the "constant relation of speaker to audience" has not been recognized. The point is taken up in Chapter Three.

A fourth assumption which forms a constant theme in the recent criticism of the lyrics is nicely summarized by Speirs's remark that "There is a great deal that is of the nature of drama in English medieval poetry." He particularly has the alliterative poetry and Chaucer in mind but clearly means to include the lyrics as well: "This whole body of English medieval verse, in which we hear not only the poets themselves but characters talking, is much more dramatic in nature than most nineteenth-century verse is--and most twentieth-century verse also."[24] Gray's remark about "The stress on 'being there' in meditating on the scenes from the life of Christ" picks up the same idea.[25] The point is developed more extensively by Woolf (1968), Dronke (1977), and Zumthor (1972), whose discussions are analyzed in Chapter Four, in which we examine the relevance of the deictic phenomena to these observations.[26]

The fifth and sixth widespread critical assumptions have to do with language and the lyrics. Critics have often noted that the lyrics' diction tends to be conventional, unoriginal, cliched, even formulaic. What is new is that, since Stevick's influential article in 1966, they have attempted to recognize this conventionality as a

formal feature of this poetry which contributes to, rather than detracting from, its characteristic appeal. Thus Stevick, who focusses his attention upon the correspondence of metrical, syntactic, and ideational "structures," finds that a single, well-defined pattern "constitutes a structure of metrical, linguistic, and quantitative features in conformity to which the linguistic 'message' was normally expressed. It is in light of this structure that the poetic structuring of the message--that is, the poetic utterance--can be best understood."[27] Because the present study attempts to further this discussion substantially, two presentations of this argument, by Stevick and by John F. Plummer, require attention here.

Stevick begins with a given: "from the beginnings of the English lyric into the sixteenth century, the four-stress line in rhymed stanzas was the norm." Because the line was relatively short, seven to ten syllables, and "essentially iambic," these conventions, operating in concert, "restricted the variability of the line." The coincidence of rhyme, which gives prominence to the rhyme word and, hence, establishes "a valence for the highest linguistic stress," with metrical stress at the end of the line tended to place linguistic terminal juncture there, further restricting variability. The result is that "the line and major syntactic constructions thus were generally coextensive."[28] But the limited scope of these syntactic constructions in turn tended to dictate that "the verse norm of traditional Middle English lyrics was conducive to assertions and questions." These "small, fixed, and relatively uniform" units had moreover to be presented in "a linear arrangement of simple sequence."[29]

Now Stevick addresses the question of how such an arrangement can

be "poetic." For an answer, he appeals to a variation of the Romantic organic structure theory and introduces a new distinction, between explicit and implicit structuring:

> A "poetic" structure, in being single, must unify these "blocks" of overt-expression patterns. Such obvious devices of organization as enumeration . . ., interview . . ., or catalog . . . achieve unity only of an external kind: the relation between one unit of development and the next need only be conventional and not a consequence of the form of expression at given points in the poem. Formulaic development such as that of penitential prayers may develop an internal structure while conforming to the inherited religious formulas; it so happens that most poems of this type do not. The one type of structuring of expression which is shared by poems that have been regarded as best, whether secular or religious in subject, depends on juxtaposition of metrical-expression units with implicit structuring.[30]

Unfortunately Stevick does not define the term "implicit structuring," or the variant "implicit organization," but he finds an example of it in the much discussed "Sunset on Calvary":

> Nou goth sonne vnder wod, --
> me reweth, marie, þi faire Rode.
> Nou goþ sonne vnder tre, --
> me reweþ, marie, þi sone and þe.

He contends that "In neither couplet is one line subordinated explicitly to the other, nor are the lines explicitly coordinated"; rather "Within each couplet the statements are connected only by the rhyme and metrical patterning that tend to establish phonological linking of the two statements. It is just this implicit structuring of the expression, keeping in this instance the maximum correlation between line and unit of complete utterance, that elicits the pyschological, temporal, doctrinal, and other connections the reader can supply and sets the mode within which those connections are to be made."[31]

The argument, I am afraid, is circular. Stevick sets out to demonstrate why this poem's form is poetic. He holds that it will be

found to "unify" its "blocks" of "overt-expression patterns." But that unity is not signalled explicitly in syntactic subordination or coordination. It must therefore, he believes, be signalled implicitly instead. Such implicit structuring, he concludes, is definitively characteristic of poetry and gives rise to the connections we notice when we read it.

Following Stevick's lead in a recent article entitled "The Poetic Function of Conventional Language in the Middle English Lyric," John F. Plummer attempts to "determine some of the stylistic implications of the high frequency of conventional phrases in the lyrics."[32] His suspicion, he says, is that "the conventional phrase plays a determining role in the style of the Middle English lyrics, perhaps even the central role in shaping what the lyric is and is not."[33]

Plummer contends that one of the "facts of the literary history surrounding the lyrics" is that Dante's stipulations in "De Vulgari Eloquentia" "have the effect of restricting the admissible vocabulary [for poetry in the vernacular] on phonological and semantic grounds."[34] That such restriction was observed by the poets seems to be borne out by empirical studies of the lexical stock of the troubadour and trouvere poets. Hence, Plummer argues, "As Dante's discussion of the song tradition makes clear, the vocabulary, the nature of the language of the song, is an essential ingredient in determining its character," and he sets out to test Dante's remark against the Middle English lyrics.

Unlike Stevick, who focussed on the conventional metrical structure of the lyrics, Plummer focusses on the conventional lexical item--the cliche. He regards the stock of such conventional material as the

poets' "technical vocabulary" and declares that its value lies not in some special meaning it might thus acquire but, on the contrary, in its meaninglessness:

> The most important effect of an extensive use of cliches in the lyrics, I would suggest, is an alteration of the way in which the language of the lyrics carries meaning, or signifies. The method of signification most prominent in such a lyric is that in which the words signify in relationship to themselves (identifying themselves as items drawn from a specific restricted lexicon) and to the structure of the particular lyric in which they are contained.[35]

I am not certain of the meaning of this last sentence; but insofar as it clearly specifies a quantitative measure for an idea of crucial importance to the argument which is untestable, the "prominence" of the "method of signification" Plummer claims operates here remains in question. To proceed to firmer ground, however:

> Expressions of the poet's suffering, the lady's beauty, and the onset of love in the springtime, for example, were couched in stereotyped terms in order to divest, to a large degree, the words in such expressions of their normal signifying relationship to the real world, to objective reality. It is difficult, if not impossible, to "believe" a poet who says of his love that "Hire rode is as rose þat red is on rys; wiþ lilye-white leres lossum he is," because we have seen the rose-red and lily-white complexion so often before. The expression is opaque; we cannot see through the words to the lady herself, but see instead the conventional expression of feminine beauty. The signifying relationship between the expression and the real world is short-circuited, and the expression as a whole becomes more important than its words, whose normal semantic values are minimized.[36]

Here again, key terms--"normal signifying relationship," "normal semantic values"--go undefined, but the putative absence of these qualities is crucial: "The reader is forced by the conventional nature of the expression, its <u>lack of information</u>, to pay attention chiefly to the form of the expression."[37] Nor does it help to learn that Plummer is using the word information "in the specific sense, defined by Shands, of 'a "dimensionless quantity" which is defined as the inverse of

probability. This means that the information carried by any message is measured in terms of its unlikeliness.'"[38] Information may be so measured--though this assertion depends again on an absent quantitive assessment of a lexical item's likelihood of occurrence (presumably)[39] --but it certainly cannot be so defined. This is no definition.

But I am quarreling. The cat is out of the bag when Plummer observes broadly that:

> This impulse to minimize novelty and information, to short-circuit the signifying relationship between the message and the real world, strikes me as being a particularly interesting instance of the poetic function of language, which Jakobson defined as that "set (Einstellung) toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake," which promotes the "palpability of signs." This emptying of the semantic value from words promotes the palpability of words, and consequently promotes our awareness of poetic structure. The process liberates the sign tokens of language from their communicative (referential) function, so that in themselves, like musical tones, they mean nothing and their structuring within the particular lyric means everything.[40]

Much the same claim is being made here as Stevick makes: if the linguistic elements in question do not have some explicit connection with the inherent poeticality of the text in which they are found, they must have some implicit one--because the text is certainly poetical. Plummer conjures up, in fact, a new language (as Stevick posits a new sense of structure), parallel to the "normal linguistic code which supplies the meanings for words in everyday discourse," but which is instead "a specific specialized code, the complex of traditional associations established by the repeated use of certain words in certain situations in the lyric tradition." It is to this latter code that "Recourse would be had first" in order to determine "the possible meanings that a word might have."[41] The practical application of these ideas to a lyric ("Bytuene Mersh ant Aueril") produces a rather

pedestrian New Critical style discussion of patterns of poise and balance among the stereotyped-language units in the poem.

Enough has been said here, I think, to cast doubt on the explanatory power of Plummer's theory of conventionalized language in the lyrics. It reduces language to lexicon and seeks its examples selectively even there. It rests on intuitive, undefined concepts and uncorroborated and perhaps untestable generalizations. Ultimately Plummer's argument, and Stevick's as well, founder on an implied distinction (rather explicit, actually, in the case of Plummer) between natural and poetic language. Like many others, they posit a ghost in the machine of poetry, a peculiar undefinable quality which inheres in that kind of language and in no other. Yet it is not the claim that the language of the lyrics is largely conventional with which I disagree, but the attempt to ground an explanation for this fact in this false dichotomy. Because this position is antithetical to the one I have taken in this study, I devote considerable further attention to it in the following chapter.[42]

Meanwhile a second attitude current among some critics toward the special relationship between language and Middle English lyric literature needs to be examined. In this case it is not the diction of the lyrics but their linguistic medium--the Middle English language itself--which is alleged to be the source of their peculiar fitness of expression. These literary variations of the Whorf hypothesis seem to appeal especially to comparativists, who are accustomed to discerning national and regional literary characters and are prone to assign the distinctive traits they sense to the linguistic substratum, much as distinctive qualities of the various European vintages are largely

assigned to the mineral substrata. Thus John Speirs is led to ponder, rather inconclusively, the balance between the well known levelling effects of the pan-European medieval culture and the distinctiveness of the various "national" strains:

> But the differences between the lyrics in the different languages are just as striking as the resemblances; and are at least as fundamental since they arise from the differences between the languages themselves, each language having its individual genius and characteristics and having been shaped in expressing a particular people's sensibility and experience. . . .Every single English song and lyric that has come down to us from before the fifteenth century has done so in a dialect [as though the rest had not--it is simply more easy to detect the differences in the non-standard orthography of Middle English practice] and has therefore, as an essential characteristic, the speech flavour of the folk of some particular locality in England. Yet these so English lyrics have, at the same time, such resemblances to the lyrics of the rest of medieval Europe as to suggest that all medieval lyrics are, in greater or less degree, akin.[43]

The notion that each language has "its individual genius" and is "shaped in expressing a particular people's sensibility and experience," and that this lends "an essential characteristic" to the poetry written in it is not carried very far here. Rosemary Woolf makes much of it, however. In her work this premise becomes the foundation upon which she builds an argument which aspires to explanatory adequacy, which I term the linguistic suitability hypothesis, and which I would like to discuss at some length here.[44]

In its most general form, the linguistic suitability hypothesis attempts to account for the characteristic themes, forms, stylistic effects (in general, any widely recognized category of literary phenomena held to have aesthetic implications) of a literary corpus in a given language during a given epoch by referring such phenomena to properties alleged to inhere in the linguistic medium--the language--itself. It thus amounts to a theory of aesthetic determinism, or more

properly perhaps, is both shaped and limited by the properties of the medium the creative artist employs.

It is in discussions of the flourishing in Middle English of lyrics on the subjects of Death and Christ's Passion that Woolf presents the clearest statements of the linguistic suitability hypothesis. Why this should be so is a point to which we will return later; in the meantime the hypothesis itself requires examination. It will be necessary to quote extensively. Here is the first explicit statement of the hypothesis:

> The more important point for the beginnings of the meditative lyric, however, is the relationship between the Bernardine emphasis on natural feeling and the qualities of English in the thirteenth century, for here there was a unique and fortunate coincidence between religious theory and literary potentialities. The recognition and praise of ordinary human emotion meant in literary terms that the language used to express it had no need to be different from that of everyday life. . . . [O]nly the vocabulary and rhythms of common speech were available to writers of the thirteenth century. The lowly status of English ensured that expressions of love should recall neither theological analyses nor the magnificant passions of romantic lovers, but only the ordinary affection and tenderness of everyday experience. English was obviously at this time very limited as a medium for writing: subjects which require nobility or complexity of expression were ordinarily beyond its range. But, by a fortunate coincidence, what the language was admirably suited to express was exactly what the writers of the meditative lyrics required of it.[45]

Woolf is suggesting here that, by "fortunate coincidence," a three-level congruence obtained in the thirteenth century among "the Bernardine emphasis on natural feeling," the flourishing of Middle English lyrics on the Passion, and some particular qualities of thirteenth century Middle English which are evidently to be regarded as crucially constitutive of the language at that time. That these congruencies are offered as an explanatory hypothesis is clear from the fact that the Passion lyric tradition is in reality the third term in a kind of

literary algebra:

Bernardine emphasis on natural feeling	+	Peculiar nature of 13th c. M.E.	=	Flourishing Passion lyric tradition

Similarly, in her account of the origin and development of the lyrics on Death in Middle English, Woolf sees a peculiar fitness to the subject in the artistic medium: "The medieval death themes . . . like the meditation on the Passion, did not require nobility of language, but, on the contrary, their reference to ordinary, unheightened experience was best expressed by quick, exact, colloquial language: therefore the unique diminution of the vernacular in England made it a perfect medium for this kind of poetry. The immediate, uncomplex effect of the poetry was not in danger of being modified by an unintended learned or courtly air, for the vacabulary, since it was rarely used for literary or learned work or for courtly conversation, could have no overtones except those of everyday communication."[46] Here again the attempt to achieve explanatory adequacy is clear, in that certain qualities of thirteenth century Middle English are offered as the principled, internal motivation for the observable fact of a flourishing tradition of lyrics on death at that time.

Any reader who has even a casual acquaintance with descriptive linguistics will have noted several problematical issues in Woolf's presentation of the hypothesis, but in the interest of giving full weight to her employment of the hypothesis within the broader argumentative structure of her book as a whole I will defer a close inspection of these issues for the moment and pass on to an examination of the use to which she puts the hypothesis.

We have already seen, in the cases of lyrics on the Passion and

death of Christ, that the linguistic suitability hypothesis provided Woolf with a principled way of accounting for their abundance and their stylistic force--the notion being that the thirteenth century lyricists were following a linguistic line of least resistance. But any literary abundance is a relative one; specifically, in this case, it is relative to the Marian lyrics (which will flourish in their turn in the fifteenth century) that the Passion and death lyrics are abundant in the thirteenth century. But Woolf's application of the linguistic suitability hypothesis to this group of lyrics leads her into contradiction and unresolved paradox. Whereas the hypothesis can be said to account for both the quality and the quantity of Passion and death lyrics, Woolf divides the two functions and restricts its explanatory scope to a quantitative claim only in the case of the Marian lyrics. Nothing inherent in the hypothesis itself suggests that it will have different explanatory capabilities in the cases of different thematic groups of poems; Woolf is forced into this inconsistency because she judges the Marian lyrics to be of lower quality than those on the Passion and death, an opinion which stems from the fact that these lyrics do not appear to derive from a well-defined Latin tradition. The Marian lyrics are a problem for her.

I mean by a quantitative claim a statement of the following sort, taken from the chapter on "Lyrics on the Virgin and her Joys," from which many like statements could be adduced: "In England in the thirteenth century, there was, as we have repeatedly observed, a perfect coincidence between the traditions of meditative piety and the potentialities of literary expression. But to this felicitous coincidence the devotion to the blessed Virgin was an important exception. By the

thirteenth century England had had quite a long history of Marian piety. . . . But for its expression in vernacular literature there was lacking an adequate language and secular models. Therefore, whilst the large bulk of religious poetry in France chiefly consists of poems to the Virgin, England before the revival of secular love literature at the end of the fourteenth century has comparatively few.[47] The argument proceeds ex silencio through a recitation of all the various strains of lyrical Marian piety well attested from the continent but sparsely so from England: prayers of penitence to Mary the interventrix in general, at the hour of the sinner's death, at the Last Judgement; hymns of praise to the Virgin's beauty, and to her nobility. When, however, Woolf takes up a discussion of the paucity of English lyrics praising Mary by celebrating and exploring her scriptural types, together with the allied group of lyrics which revel in the paradoxes growing out of her title of Mater Dei, she appears to be losing the courage of her former conviction. Searching for an explanation for this relative paucity in the psychology of a growing familiarity among audiences with what was once not merely fresh but arrestingly and startlingly so, she suggests that only "well-turned variation . . . or perfect poise in expression [can] make the familiar startling." but that "since poise, as we have already said, was beyond the range of English in the earlier Middle Ages, the unwillingness to use paradoxes might be explained as the inspiration of literary good sense."[48] Put simply, Woolf suggests that the earlier Middle English lyricists had the sense not to try to write lyrics they knew their language was unequal to. Such an explanation, though it asks us to credit an untold number of poets with extremely nice stylistic judgement they do not

as a group generally display in this period, does accord perfectly with the version of the linguistic suitability hypothesis she posits and invokes here and in the passage cited just above. But it is clear that, though it affords her a witty throwaway line, Woolf is unwilling to rest her entire case for the paucity of these lyrics on this single hypothesis. She therefore adduces another, in this case the theological hypothesis that "the celebration of the Virgin's unique position does not accord well with meditation upon Christ in His humanity.[49]

Such inconsistent and partial reliance on the linguistic suitability hypothesis prepares us, in a sense, for an even more startling deviation from it, indeed a reversal of it, which follows in twelve pages. Discussing the (also scarce) lyrics devoted to meditation on the Nativity, one of the five joys of Mary, Woolf remarks that "It would have seemed a most reasonable guess that if the authors of Latin poetry chose, despite the difficulties of their linguistic medium, to suggest the poverty, helplessness, and sweetness of the Christ-Child and the loving-kindness of His mother, that the vernacular poets of the thirteenth century, writing in homely English, would also have provided meditations on the Nativity, deliberately exploiting its emotional potentialities. . . . Yet, not only did writers ignore the subject, but also in the poems on the five joys where the Nativity had to be described the treatment is exceptionally formal and dogmatic."[50] Such poems deal a double blow to the linguistic suitability hypothesis: they are abundant in Latin, despite the "difficulties" of that linguistic medium, and rare in "homely English," despite the perfect suitability of that one. That Woolf is sensitive to the tendentious nature of the argument ex silencio is beyond question; why then pursue it so

far? I think the answer lies in the fact that she is committed to the linguistic suitability hypothesis on other grounds, which we will take up shortly, and has in any case a ready explanation for the un-English behavior of the Marian lyrics in the claim that they were never really part of the English tradition until much later: "The lyrics to the Virgin form a much less homogeneous group than do those on the Passion and death. Whereas the latter are direct offshoots of one central tradition, the Marian lyrics spring from a number of miscellaneous influences. Unlike the other lyrics, for which there are scarcely any parallels in other languages, the lyrics to the Virgin are an offshoot of a western European tradition which, though it was part of English spirituality from an early date, did not become firmly rooted in English literature until the fifteenth century."[51] But the response to this sort of observation is obviously that, though a group of lyrics may appear to be heterogeneous from one point of view, or when one set of analytical criteria is applied, that heterogeneity disappears when another set is applied. "Miscellaneous" influences, in short, are so only by virtue of one's cataloguing system and not by virtue of innately "miscellaneous" properties. Indeed, the "one central tradition" to which Woolf refers here as though it were a given is in fact a point at issue: its existence is one of the primary arguments of her book.

To ask, then, whether the heterogeneity is real or apparent is to ask whether the analytical criteria are well motivated, a question which bears directly on the problem of explanatory adequacy. We observed earlier that Woolf's adoption of the linguistic suitability hypothesis seems to have been motivated in the first place by precisely the desire to achieve this level of adequacy; and indeed the linguistic

suitability hypothesis does provide a principled analysis. In abandoning it and reverting to external justifications Woolf weakens not so much her case for the hypothesis, which she never presents explicitly anyway, as the reader's conviction that it can be made to account for quantitative literary phenomena at all, or indeed whether it is wise to assign any causal explanation to felt quantitative deficiencies where literature is concerned. Yet the chapter on Marian lyrics closes on exactly this point, by vaguely asserting that the fact that thirteenth century English lyricists did not produce more of these lyrics is itself problematical: "there was here no simple literary-devotional situation, as for the Passion and death lyrics, and whilst the problems do not show themselves in lack of quality, they do in lack of quantity."[52]

Hence by dividing its qualitative from its quantitative scope Woolf brings the linguistic suitability hypothesis into unresolved self-conflict. What then is the reason for bringing such a powerful explanatory device into play in the first place? I believe the answer lies in Woolf's adherence in principle to the same distinction between natural and poetic language as we observed in Stevick and Plummer, but with this important difference, that in her case the distinction collapses by a "fortunate coincidence" of early Middle English with contemporary poetic themes, so that the poetic language <u>is</u> the natural language at that epoch.

The clearest indication of Woolf's adherence to the poetic language thesis, apart from its general implication in such passages as I have cited above, is to be seen in her discussion towards the end of the book of the aureate sixteenth century style which supplants the

medieval style. Here she traces the latter's literary legacy into the sub-literary horae form: "Though the pressures of contemporary style made continuity with the medieval tradition impossible in any poetry of literary pretensions in the sixteenth century, in sub-literary forms there did remain some direct influence from it [in verses in the horae where] though it has no literary merit it does show the continuity of a low, unadorned style in contexts where the verse was unobtrusive because subordinated to a picture."[53] Even a casual glance at a facsimile of Blake's Jerusalem will show what a deal of difficulty there can be in separating, let alone subordinating, verse from picture, but it is the notion of the relegation of the medieval "low, unadorned" style to sub-literary genres in the sixteenth century which is troublesome. Style here is clearly identified with the concept of a literary language; literature cannot be written in any other form of language; what is written in another form of language is sub-literary at best. Though it may yet possess a "colloquial and ironic vitality" which allies it with the common speech implied by the term natural language, verse written in this style must give way in the sixteenth century before a changed concept of literary language. Hence Woolf cites the new sixteenth century style as one of four causes of the end of the lyric.

My purpose here is not to represent Rosemary Woolf's work as primarily a defense of the poetic language thesis, which it certainly is not, but to show how she uses this thesis, and in particular the linguistic suitability hypothesis, in support of her general thesis of the rise, flourishing, and sudden decline of the lyric in Middle English. It is significant that the thesis is allied with such

teleological criticism, for it agrees with and is tacitly supported by the widely held doctrine of linguistic decline. Although there is no direct evidence in her book that Woolf supports such a notion, it is consistent with both her general thesis of decline and her specific application of the linguistic suitability hypothesis. We have already seen the internal inconsistency in her use of the hypothesis; it remains to examine the hypothesis itself, in order to determine precisely the nature of the claim it represents and the evidence to support it.

A close inspection of Woolf's presentation of the linguistic suitability hypothesis shows a rather narrow conception of its linguistic base, as is the case with Stevick and Plummer. If we conceive of language as a complex system which integrates a syntax, a lexicon, and a phonology, we will notice that Woolf, like Plummer, seems clearly to confine her attention to the lexical component only. When she states that "The recognition and praise of ordinary human emotion meant in literary terms that the language used to express it has no need to be different from that of everyday life" she seems to mean by language "the vocabulary and rhythms of common speech," which she asserts were the only form of language available to writers of the thirteenth century. Indeed, "the more successful would be the poem," for it would be devoid of "associations of learning or grandeur" which "would impair and perhaps destroy the meditation."[54] Again, the death themes were best expressed in "quick, exact, colloquial language," a language "not in danger of being modified by an unintended learned or courtly air, for the vocabulary . . . could have no overtones except those of everyday conversation."[55] I have already pointed out how closely

allied with the poetic language thesis this emphasis on the colloquial, the everyday, the unlearned is, but it is clear from these passages that these terms have no more than a morphological significance for Woolf. Yet it is the lexical stock of the thirteenth century lyrics that makes their language colloquial, and not their colloquial lexicon that defines thirteenth century Middle English. The lexicon is not the language. It is, in fact, according to contemporary medieval as well as current linguistic theory, a superficial element of it. The Modistic theorists of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries regarded the various syntactic phenomena of accidence, concord, and agreement as the fundamental linguistic reflection of the relationships among things in the realm of existences; they accorded, as does modern linguistic theory, only an attenuated significance to words as lexical elements, and still less to their phonological shape.[56] Hence, the "vocabulary and rhythms" of "Quick, exact, colloquial" thirteenth century Middle English, even could these terms be defined precisely enough to test the proposition, cannot have been any more constitutive of that language than they would be of modern English. The colloquial lexicon, then, becomes the final term in a series of reductions in Woolf's argument: poetic language is identified with natural language; natural language is identified with colloquial language; colloquial language is identified with colloquial lexicon. The linguistic suitability hypothesis, then, as Woolf presents it, simply collapses and encapsulates this reductive series by asserting the aptness of the last term in the series for the practice of the first.

As I mentioned above, the poetic language thesis is taken up in greater detail in the following chapter. It is important, I believe,

to dispose of it entirely in order to appreciate the possibility inherent in its logical opposite, so to speak, a "natural language" theory of literature. Such a theory, which I term Contextualism, can be founded upon a thorough study of the phenomenon of literary deixis, and it forms the balance of Chapter Two.

Notes

[1]George Kane, Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics, Piers Plowman (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 179.

[2]Stephen Manning, Wisdom and Number: Toward a Critical Appraisal of the Middle English Religious Lyric (Lincoln, Nebraska: The University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 32. See also p. xi, n. 1, wherein views similar to Kane's held by Brook, Speirs, Kar , Moore, and Robbins are documented. Sarah Appleton Weber, Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric: A Study of Sacred History and Aesthetic Form (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1969), p. 227-28, n. 4, traces the attitude as far back as a work published in 1911 by Frank A. Patterson (The Middle English Penitential Lyric [New York: Columbia University Press]), citing the Kane passage as well. Edmund Reiss, in The Art of the Middle English Lyric (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. x, limits himself to the comment that the works of Kane and Moore "did not act as any sort of vanguard to further critical or scholarly activity." Perhaps he is not thinking of the possibility of corrective critical activity. On the other hand, he rates W. T. H. Jackson, The Literature of the Middle Ages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), for his evaluation that the Middle English lyric has "a pleasing naivete and simple charm, but also a monotony of theme and lack of technical skill" (p. 275), adding "such comments as this confuse surface sophistication with literary merit and reveal a prejudice linking good medieval poetry with courtly tradition" (p. ix).

[3]Poems Without Names: The English Lyric 1200-1500 (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1970).

[4]Reiss, p. ix-xi.

[5]A fourth book, V. J. Scattergood's Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century (London: Blandford Press, 1971) would appear from its title to have a different orientation. It was unavailable for examination for this study. Charles Muscatine's Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer (Notre Dame and London: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1972) examines the work of the Pearl poet, Langland, and Chaucer against the background of fourteenth-century political history, but is silent on the lyrics.

[6]Themes and Images in the Medieval Religious Lyric (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[7]The Influence of Richard Rolle and of Julian of Norwich on the Middle English Lyrics (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).

[8]The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

[9]Gray, p. 3.

[10]Knowlton, p. 183. Since the 150-year period of Rolle's (c. 1300-1349) influence does not begin until mid-fourteenth century, about a century and a quarter of the earliest work of the period cannot be accounted for by this means.

[11]Jeffrey, p. 261.

[12]Reiss, p. xiii.

[13]Jeffrey, p. 14.

[14]Manning, p. 105.

[15]Gray, p. 59. See also his comments pp. 10 and 60.

[16]The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1968).

[17]Oliver, p. 6. See also p. 8. The reference to "the embodiment of an intention" derives from J. V. Cunningham's Tradition and Poetic Structure (Denver: A. Swallow, 1960). Oliver quotes the following passage from p. 263: "A work of art is the embodiment of an intention. To realize an intention in language is the function of the writer. To realize from language the intention of the author is the function of the reader or the critic, and his method is historical or philological interpretation."

[18]"The Criticism of Middle English Lyrics," Modern Philology, 64 (1966), 103-17.

[19]Reiss, p. xiv.

[20]"Note on the Poetic and Empirical 'I' in Medieval Authors," Traditio, 4(1946), 414-22.

[21]Gray, p. 37.

[22]Oliver, pp. 11, 32.

[23]Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," Speculum, 53, 94-114.

[24]Speirs, p. 33.

[25]Gray, p. 33.

[26]Peter Dronke, The Medieval Lyric (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Paul Zumthor, Essai de poétique médiévale (Paris: Seuil, 1972). Stephen Manning's many remarks about the "dramatic lyric" (pp. ix, x, 3, 9-11, 22, 32, 33-55 passim, 138, 173n.) often seem to contradict this assumption, viz. "At their most dramatic, the religious lyrics merely straddle the boundary between the two types [i.e. dramatic lyric and song]" (p. 9). In fact, the distinction in Manning's mind seems

to correspond with the distinction between modern, "intensely personal," and medieval conceptions of lyric: the former are dramatic lyrics and the latter songs. The distinction between the two lies in the differing "attention they pay to their sound, and in the degree to which they utilize their lyric situation." The song "exhibits a regular meter and accents its rime" while the dramatic lyric "exhibits frequent metrical irregularities and favors enjambement" (p. 3). These qualities have no bearing on the sense of drama being discussed here and in Chapter Four. As for the criterion of the lyric situation, "In the song, the speaker is not sharply characterized; he tends to be anonymous, or Everyman" while "In the dramatic lyric, the speaker is sharply characterized because . . . he unconsciously (or consciously . . .) betrays a considerable part of his personality" (p. 35). This aspect of Manning's distinction collapses with the second general critical assumption discussed above.

[27]Stevick, p. 114.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Stevick, p. 115.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]John F. Plummer III, "The Poetic Function of Conventional Language in the Middle English Lyric," Studies in Philology, 72(1975), 367-85.

[33]Plummer, p. 367-68.

[34]Plummer, p. 370.

[35]Plummer, p. 371.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Plummer, p. 372.

[38]The reference is to Harley Shands, "Outline of a General Theory of Human Communication," in Essays in Semiotics, ed. Julia Kristeva et al. (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 359.

[39]And note that the question is not whether "we cannot see through the words to the lady herself" but whether the poet's contemporary audience could or could not. No use to speak of a conventional language which does not demonstrably become regarded as such until five centuries after it is spoken.

[40]Plummer, p. 372-73. Roman Jakobson's essay, of which more in Chapter Two, is entitled "Linguistics and Poetics," in Style in Language, ed. T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960). The quotation is from p. 356.

[41]Plummer, p. 374.

[42]Like Stevick and Plummer Raymond Oliver finds that what he calls "the generalness of the poems--their commonplaces and proverbs, their relative lack of modifiers, the self-explaining metaphors, the universally clear and accepted ways of organizing sounds, rhythms, and structures" is the source of their "peculiar excellence" (p. 135). Unlike them, however, he accounts for this simply by making a virtue of these qualities, calling the best of the lyrics "graphic, definitive epigrams" and claiming that "the essence of good 'anonymous short poems' is shortness, as opposed to verbosity, and a spare, generalized anonymity, as opposed to a detailed subjectivism" (p. 136). The "argument" is tautological (though in fact it is meant as a summary and not as a substantive argument).

[43]Speirs, p. 51.

[44]The term explanatory adequacy was put forward by Noam Chomsky to describe a grammar which goes beyond mere saving of the appearances (this is termed descriptive adequacy) to provide a principled account of the facts of the language, "in that the linguistic theory with which it is associated selects this grammar over others, given primary linguistic data with which all are compatible," because it takes into account "some empicical assumption about the form of language," that is, about language itself or language in general. See Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1965), p. 24-27.

[45]Woolf, p. 23-24.

[46]Woolf, p. 77.

[47]Woolf, p. 114-15.

[48]Woolf, p. 133-34.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Woolf, p. 146-47.

[51]Woolf, p. 157.

[52]Woolf, p. 158.

[53]Woolf, p. 366-67. See note 2 above for Reiss's comment, in another context, that the confusion of surface sophistication with literary merit reveals a prejudice which links good medieval poetry with the courtly tradition.

[54]Woolf, p. 23.

[55]Woolf, p. 77.

[56]By far the best introduction to Modistic thought is G. L. Bursill-Hall, ed. and tr., Grammatica Speculativa of Thomas of Erfurt,

The Classics of Linguistics (London:Longman, 1972). In addition to a Latin text and translation of this important work Bursill-Hall provides a 126-page introduction and a selective bibliography.

Chapter II: A Theory of Literary Contextualism

The question of the relationship between natural or ordinary language and literary or poetic language has exercised the criticism of this century perhaps more than any other. While the New Critics simply have assumed an absolute distinction between the two, the Structuralist poeticians and their Russian forebears have recognized the problematical nature of the relationship and have sought to ground the distinction in some linguistic (that is to say ostensibly objective) features of the two. As Mary Louise Pratt has shown, their attempts to do so have been, from the beginning, unsuccessful; but the failure is an instructive one. I will summarize her critique of the Structuralist natural versus poetic language argument by way of introduction to a contextualist perspective which I believe avoids the difficulties encountered by the Structuralists but at the same time provides a principled and well-motivated way of examining literary texts as discrete entities of discourse which are distinct from conversations, telephone directories, transcripts of trial proceedings, and any other imaginable form of discourse whose provenance is the quotidian affairs of men. By grounding this perspective in the notion of context I mean to locate the discussion of the Middle English lyrics which follows exactly at the interface between the palpable linguistic forms they are and the aesthetic and intellectual interests they induce. It appears that a little discussed feature, known

as deixis, shared by all natural languages, occupies exactly this pivotal position and it can be shown to function crucially both in the determination of syntactic structure at the sub-discourse level and in semantic interpretation at the discourse level. Charles J. Fillmore has devoted the most extensive attention to this phenomenon, and it will be necessary to summarize his work in some detail. This done, I will attempt to extend a few of the most obvious implications of deictic theory into literary criticism, suggesting especially a new approach to genre classification, and focussing specifically on its implications for the study of lyric poetry.

In a careful, cogent, and I think seminal study entitled Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse Mary Louise Pratt mounts a powerful critique of the structuralist distinction between natural and poetic language in order to move "toward integrating literary discourse into the general description of all our communicative activities."[1] If this impulse seems to err on the other side of an excess than the one she opposes, it can be understood as characteristic of the mood of a good many contemporary analysts who are impatient to demonstrate the value of broadly discourse-centered study for the study of literary discourse. Like St. Augustine, they often find themselves cast in the role of apologists for humble "natural" language texts which, when careful attention is devoted to them turn out to be highly ordered and skillfully composed linguistic phenomena in their own right. From this perspective "literary" texts fare none the worse for being associated with "natural" ones. But, to return to the specific question at issue, that very distinction is suspect, at least in the terms in which it has most recently and aggressively been cast by the Structuralist

poeticians (the term is Pratt's). Pratt's critique of their position is twofold: first, the distinction itself rests on a faulty analogy between the subject studied by structural linguistics and that studied by literary criticism; and second, the features of usage claimed to be characteristic of literary discourse can be shown to be integral to non-literary discourse as well.

The first phase of Pratt's critique rests on a careful analysis of Russian formalist and structuralist metatheory.[2] Fortunately for her project there is a good deal of such analysis (these thinkers were nothing if not metatheoreticians) and it is strikingly consistent. For Ejxenbaum, Sklovskij, Jakobson, Tynjanov, Tomasevskij, and Brik, as well as more recent thinkers like Todorov, Levin, and Barthes, there exist two distinct domains of language whose scope is defined, as in this citation from the Prague School Theses of 1929, by reference to extra-linguistic reality: "In its social role, language [le langage] must be specified [distinguer] according to its relation to extralinguistic reality. It has either a communicative function, that is, it is directed toward the signified, or a poetic function, that is, it is directed toward the sign itself" (tr. Pratt).[3] Pratt sees this bold excursion into the linguistic no-man's-land of real-world information as the initiating step in a four-step procedure intended to establish the "principle of specificity" by (1) defining literature as a linguistic category; (2) postulating an opposing linguistic category containing all and only nonliterature; (3) redefining grammar in such a way that its domain is all and only nonliterature; and (4) ascribing to nonliterature all and only those properties described by structuralist grammar.

Although nothing in this bare outline of a procedure seems in itself problematical,[4] when one recalls that the subject matter of structuralist linguistics was, in fact, taken to be only la langue and not la parole, it is apparent that any analogy postulated between the linguistic structures discovered by structuralist linguistics (which are confined to the level of la langue) and the observable structures of poetic texts (phenomena observable on the level of la parole only) is necessarily an apples-and-oranges proposition. Yet exactly such an analogy was proposed by the structuralist poeticians, and proposed often. Pratt cites many examples, among which is the following: "A folklore work is extraindividual and exists only potentially . . . it is a skeleton of actual traditions which the implementers embellish with the tracery of individual creation, in much the same was as the producers of a verbal message (la parole in the Saussurian sense) act with respect to the verbal code (la langue)" (Jakobson and Bogatyrev, tr. Pratt).[5] A similar relationship between the individual work and the tradition was posited for all literature, and not merely folklore. The crucial point here is that in separating poetic from ordinary language the structuralist poeticians assumed, rather than demonstrated, the existence of a set of specifically poetic structures and norms for their distribution parallel to those linguistics was discovering in the realm of ordinary language. But, as Pratt points out,

> the structural linguist's grammar is not a description of any set of utterances at all, and it is even more emphatically not a description of how language is used in a given utterance and context. A structuralist grammar--an inventory of phonemes, morphemes, and rules for combining them--bears no substantive resemblance at all to the inventory of devices, conventions, and norms which makes up the langue the poeticians were postulating for literature. Nor are there grounds for equating the two. The so-called grammar of communicative language can exist apart from the so-called grammar of poetry, but the

> reverse is not so; the latter exists only by contrast to the former.[6]

The force of Pratt's argument derives from the underlying assumption that the differences that do exist between literature and nonliterature can be specified only with reference to "how language is used in a given utterance and context," which leads her ultimately to explore the relevance of speech-act theory to literary criticism, or at least to the criticism of prose narratives. We will turn later to the set of problems her perspective raises about the relationship between a text and its context.

Not only does the assumed distinction between the two language realms lead to the faulty analogy between linguistics and poetics we have just examined, but it also leads to the unfortunate and insupportable conclusion that ordinary language, like the grammar which describes it, is "utilitarian, prosaic, mechanical, practical, and automatized." These qualities, of course, were exactly what structuralist linguistics claimed for its discovery procedures and its formal models, and they constitute the grounds for its claim to avoid the mentalism which had flawed the work of earlier centuries. But, as Pratt shows by reference to the work of William Labov, they cannot accurately be attributed to ordinary language but rather to the grammatical model of it which "only undertakes to describe those aspects of language that can be accounted for in terms of dummy constructions, grammaticality, rôles de service and the action of a mechanism."[7]

Labov's work, Pratt argues, provides not merely insight into but eloquent evidence of both the creativity and craftsmanship of a great many practitioners of what are called natural narratives. A natural narrative is produced any time anyone recounts an incident; it is thus

among the most common and widespread of speech events, virtually an everyday occurrence with nearly everyone. Labov collected a number of such narratives in the process of studying Black English Vernacular, his term for the speech of young urban blacks. His interview technique, designed to elicit speech as nearly unmonitored as possible, included asking the informant whether he had ever been in a situation in which he was in danger of being killed. Labov became fascinated by the exceptional verbal virtuosity displayed by many of the informants in these narratives and by the high value the vernacular speech communities placed on such virtuosity. In a volume of essays entitled Language in the Inner City he published a number of these narratives together with an analysis of their structure and content.[8] It is not necessary to repeat Pratt's summary of Labov's work, for it is her own application of it to literary studies that interests us here.

Ranging widely through the narrative fiction of the western literary tradition for her examples, Pratt shows that all six of the elements of the prototypical narrative Labov identifies may be found in works of literature as well. To cite a brief (and foreshortened) example from among many: narratives ordinarily include, near the beginning, what Labov calls an orientation, which serves to "identify in some way the time, place, persons, and their activity or situation." It precedes the first narrative clause, defined by Pratt as a clause "with a simple preterite verb, or in some styles, a verb in the simple present," which introduces the complicating action with which the narrative proper begins, and follows the abstract, "a short . . . summary" which "encapsulates the point of the story."[9] Pratt contends that, just as Labov's model predicts, these three elements occur in

their proper order in the first twenty pages of George Eliot's Silas Marner. The title itself constitutes the abstract, for that is its customary function in literary works. The twenty-page description of Raveloe, its inhabitants, and Marner constitutes the orientation (a particularly leisurely one, even by eighteenth-century novelistic standards). And the sentence "About this time an incident happened which seemed to open a possibility of some fellowship with his neighbours" constitutes the first narrative clause and marks the beginning of the complicating action and the narrative proper. Clearly then, despite the fact that Labov's analysis of narrative structure is quite abstract and entails some ambiguous and problematical concepts (such as the notion of "encapsulating the point of the story," or the crucial term "narrative clause" itself), the organizational plan of a literary narrative can be shown to duplicate that of a nonliterary one. Pratt argues that this fact directly contradicts the poeticians' claim that literary language has a distinctly different structure from that of ordinary language.

This is the first part of Pratt's argument. She shows that the structuralist poeticians' claim to have grounded poetics in the study of a form of language (called literary) as well motivated and defined as the form of language (called ordinary) upon which linguistics is grounded, is untenable, since it rests upon a faulty analogy where its theory is concerned and a myopic view of language where its practice is concerned. Labov's work on natural narratives supplies the crucial evidence for her demonstration of the latter point.

But more than this, Pratt argues, Labov's context-dependent approach allows us to specify in a much more interesting way the nature

of the relationship between literature and nonliterature and signals the need for criticism to shift its attention to new questions. "Labov in effect translates the rather opaque question 'Has the poetic function dominated the verbal organization of this message?' into the broader and more meaningful questions 'What is the speaker trying to do in forming this discourse?' and 'What does the hearer do when he receives it?' It is the answers to these questions which motivate Labov's statements about the formal properties of his data. His analysis, in other words, is context-dependent, anchored in the circumstances surrounding the utterance."[10] Although no one would deny the opacity of the question whether the poetic function dominates the verbal organization of a message, the analysis Pratt offers as a substitute is equally problematical. Surely it is naive to suggest that questions about authors' intentions or readers' responses are "broader and more meaningful" than the poeticians' questions, especially in the aggressively pragmatic shape Pratt gives them. The very fact that proponents of these two approaches (they are, after all, not new questions) have tended to regard themselves as holding sole title to the interpretation of a work should have suggested to her that author and reader will make uneasy bedfellows in any theory that purports to mediate their claims upon the work. But I wish to examine in some detail Pratt's concept of context-dependency in order to clarify its relevance to the theory of contextualism I am developing here.

First it is necessary to try to specify exactly what Pratt means by context. Its locus classicus for her appears to be Jakobson's touchstone essay "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," but context-dependency is a quality she attributes rather to the critical

work of Labov than to Jakobson:

> Labov's data make it impossible to attribute the aesthetic organization of prose fiction to "literariness," but his methodology shows us what we can attribute it to: the nature of the speech situation in which the utterance occurs, in which the speaker and his audience are engaged. The formal and functional similarities between literary and natural narrative can be specified in terms of similarities in the speech situation and their differences identified in terms of differences in that situation. . . . Thus the point of departure gets shifted from the message (to use Jakobson's terms) to the addresser, the addressee, and the context.[11]

The notion of the engagement of author and audience plays a particularly central role in Pratt's own analysis, since the norms and conventions governing their reciprocal expectations and responsibilities in a given circumstance can be at least provisionally specified and departures from them can be claimed to induce certain aesthetic effects. For example, as we have seen, the normal case is for a narrative to preface the complicating action with an orientation; this is in recent linguistic usage the unmarked case.[12] But it is possible for a narrative to open without an orientation, or with an incomplete one; this constitutes the marked or deviant case and as such it is not surprising, Pratt suggests, that we have a special term for it, the opening _in medias res_, though there is no such term for openings with full orientations. This kind of norm, and the possibility of significant deviation from it, derives from the ostensible structure of narrative itself. Others Pratt explores derive from the set of conditions held to be necessary for a particular type of speech act to be correctly or appropriately performed (termed appropriateness or felicity conditions) and from the norms governing the exchange of speeches in a conversation (termed the cooperative principle). All such norms involve interactions between speakers and hearers in specific contexts,

and are thus held to be themselves context-dependent. Pratt holds that the incorporation of this notion of context-dependency into her view of literature allows her to circumvent the structuralists' problem of circular definitions of literature and poeticality. But her analysis is seriously weakened by her varying and unrestricted construence of the term context.

We have seen that Pratt specifically claims the quality of context-dependency for Labov's work on natural narrative. But it is curious to claim that Labov's analysis of "the formal properties of his data" is context-dependent, "anchored in the circumstances surrounding the utterance," when, at the beginning of the chapter in which that claim is made, Pratt quotes from a passage in which Labov himself is at pains to <u>minimize</u> the element of context-dependency in the danger of death narratives: "' they are not free [Labov is speaking of the narratives elicited by his field workers] of the interactive effect of the outside observer,'" having in fact a form "'typical of discourse directed to someone outside of the immediate peer group of the speaker'"; nevertheless, "'because the experience and emotions involved here form an important part of the speaker's biography, he seems to undergo a partial reliving of that experience, and <u>he is no longer free to monitor his own speech</u> as he normally does in face-to-face interviews.'"[13] Labov knows his data to have been elicited in face-to-face interviews, but he must claim as strongly as possible, even to the point of portraying his informants as automata in the throes of a trance, the irrelevance of the fact to his analysis of its "formal properties" if that analysis is to have any truly broad explanatory power concerning the structure of natural narrative in general. And

it is precisely the formal properties of the data--the abstract six-part scheme he identifies in it--which is free of any influence from "the circumstances of utterance"; hence the broad applicability of it to narrative fiction which Pratt demonstrates. Thus it is difficult to see in what sense Labov's work can be called context-dependent; in any case, the aspect of his work Pratt makes use of is formal, abstract, and unconcerned with any circumstance of utterance.

But there is an even more serious problem for Pratt in connection with the reference to Jakobson's "context" in the passage cited above. Jakobson does not offer a definition of the term in the essay "Linguistics and Poetics," but in his usage it seems to have little to do with "the circumstances of utterance" or "the nature of the speech situation in which the utterance occurs." Rather, it is associated with the real-world bearing of the utterance, its subject or "'referent' in another, somewhat ambiguous nomenclature," as Jakobson phrases it.[14] What Pratt has in mind, a quasi-contractual engagement between speaker and hearer, seems closer to Jakobson's "contact," defined by him as "a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling them both to enter and stay in communication." Indeed, the illustrative examples of discourse dominated by the contact function which Jakobson cites clearly show the sort of violation of quasi-contractual norms Pratt is so interested in, whereas his illustrative examples of context-dominated discourse show that this function has nothing to do with the nature of the relationship presumed to hold between the addresser and the addressee.

Yet again, it is anything but helpful to an understanding of the term context for Pratt to assert, by way of summarizing her critique

of Ohmann's position on the essential fictivity of literature, that "the real lesson speech act theory has to offer is that literature is a context, too, not the absence of one."[15] It is unlikely that Pratt means this assertion in anything like the sense most readers of literary criticism will associate with it, familiar as it is from Eliot's essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; rather she is claiming that a reader of literature assents to a particular set of expectations which will mediate his relations with the author and which are specific to a class of utterances which includes literary discourse. The sense in which "literature is a context, too" can only be understood here as a kind of interaction between a reader and a text. But in fact the interaction is one-sided: only the reader acts in Pratt's analysis, the author having finished acting before the work gets into the reader's hands. Moreover, the identities of the author and the message disappear in her scheme into an amalgam called a text. This notion is especially clear in the section on "Definitiveness, pre-paration, and pre-selection," where it is not the author but a small army of publishers, editors, critics, reviewers, librarians, professors, and others who set the work before the reader.

This new sense of the disappearance of the subject follows from the consequences of turn-taking rules, as described in the work of Paul Grice, which Pratt ingeniously extrapolates from conversation into performances in general and the reading of literature in particular. The author's turn is over when the text is complete; from there on it is all the reader's turn, and his compensation for being so long excluded from active turn-taking comes in exercising his right to judge. This, ultimately, is the sense of context which emerges in her work,

as is clear from the following passage:

> Even these rudimentary similarities between literature and other speaker/Audience [the capital denotes a voluntary audience] situations are enough to tell us that speaker and Audience are present in the literary speech situation, that their existence is presupposed by literary works, that they have commitments to one another as they do everywhere else, and that those commitments are presupposed by both the creator and the receivers of the work. Far from being autonomous, self-contained, self-motivating, context-free objects which exist independently from the "pragmatic" concerns of "everyday" discourse, literary works take place in a context, and like any other utterance they cannot be described apart from that context.[16]

Beyond question Pratt's work performs invaluable service in sensitizing critics to the pragmatic sociological milieu in which literary discourse is produced and consumed. On the other hand, I suspect many will be uncomfortable with the notion of even so audience-canny a work as The Tempest as a commodity of exchange, definitive, pre-pared, and pre-selected for audience consumption. My own point of departure from Pratt's analysis, however, is the treatment of context itself, which, as I have tried to show, is uncomfortably ambiguous in her work. If a truly context-sensitive (or indeed context-dependent) analysis is to be put forward surely it must rest on a firmer and less ambivalent conception of its primitive term.

In fact, the speech-act theory which is so useful to Pratt in establishing the pragmatics of literary discourse cannot help but lead her into this ambivalence. By distinguishing the various members of a class of speech acts--for example commanding, pleading, and requesting, all directives in Searle's terminology--on the basis of differing appropriateness conditions (the first requires the addresser to be in authority, the second the addressee, and the third either one or neither if they are peers), Searle reduces the notion of context-dependency to

veritable context-determinacy. The appropriateness conditions incorporate a sociological hierarchy which is assumed to be static for any speech situation, known to all interlocutors involved, and crucial to the selection of speech acts from among the entire inventory. Violations of these conditions are not held to be unknown, but to be socially marked: pleading with an inferior, such as a waiter, to use Pratt's example, is interpreted as sarcasm. But this analysis is satisfactory only when the social hierarchy it depends upon is guaranteed to be static and well-defined, as in the case of the relationship between a diner and a waiter. It fails to account for a great many very ordinary speech situations in which hierarchy as such is unimportant (or unproductive). What parent has not tried both commanding, pleading, and requesting to get his child to perform some onerous task like cleaning his room? If a hierarch obtains here, surely it is the parent who is in authority; yet we would not wish to claim that parents who plead with their children are being sarcastic, or that parents who make requests of their children are treating them as peers (much less as superiors), or indeed that parents' only appropriate form of directive toward their children is the command. Searle's analysis works only at the expense of a double reduction. He reduces context-dependency to context-determinacy, as we have seen. And he reduces context itself to a hierarchically defined social relationship. This, as I have demonstrated above, appears to be substantially the sense of the term in Pratt's work.

On the other hand, the participants in any speech situation know that factors other than their putative hierarchical status bear directly upon the correct interpretation of the discourse. Why should we

make the counter-intuitive claim that only information about the personages who are party to a discourse (still less information about the abstractions to which they are reduced in Searle's analysis) is of interest to the theoreticians when it is clear that the speakers themselves make use of much more information? Consider a remark such as "Nice day today, isn't it?" Every competent adult speaker of the language knows that this has several interpretations which vary with the circumstances in which it is uttered and have nothing much to do with the nature of the relationship between the speaker and his audience. The unmarked case, which will be chosen whenever the weather is reasonably pleasant for the time of year and the place, is to interpret this as a conventional greeting. If the weather is decidedly disagreeable, the hearer will assign the message the marked interpretation known as irony. The message is still a greeting, of course; but ironical greetings imply a camaraderie borne of common discomfort. This one might be paraphrased as "We're all suffering through this howling blizzard together." The speaker could have chosen a neutral greeting (Hello) but instead made crucial use of his and his hearer's knowledge of weather conditions at the time and place of the utterance to achieve a different effect. Notice, too, that a hearer may reject the marked interpretation, even in circumstances of foul weather, if that sort of weather suits the conversants' purposes. For duck hunters meeting in a cold, drizzly November pre-dawn, such a greeting implies not the camaraderie of common misery but the pleasure of a promising day's sport. Even such a trivial example as this makes clear the fact that speakers and hearers make use of a good deal more knowledge about the circumstances of utterance than simply their putative sociological

rank--specifically, the circumstances of place and time.

The linguistic elements which refer to these circumstances of person, time, and place have been termed an utterance's deictics. They have been shown, by Charles J. Fillmore in particular, to be crucially relevant to the linguistic description and explanation of sentences in which they occur. What stands at present as the definitive description of the phenomenon of deixis is a series of six lectures delivered by Fillmore at the University of California at Santa Cruz in the summer of 1971.[17] Since this phenomenon has a central relevance to the discussion of literary contextualism it is appropriate at this point to summarize the salient points of Fillmore's presentation.

Fillmore begins by proposing the thought experiment that his audience assume only the single fact that somebody used the sentence "May we come in?" He declares that "Our task is to make explicit everything that we know about the sentence as a linguistic object, and everything that we can know, as speakers of English, about the situation, or class of possible situations, in which it was uttered. We will be interested, in short, in the grammatical form of the sentence, the meanings and grammatical properties of its words, and in the assumptions we find ourselves making about the speaker of the sentence and about the setting in which it was uttered."[18] He surmises the following will be the case for all speakers of English:

> [W]e will probably find ourselves imagining a situation involving some kind of enclosure, call it E, and at least three beings, call them A, B, and C. One of these, A, is a speaker of English and is the utterer of our sentence; one of them, B, is believed by A to be a speaker of English and is the addressee of our sentence; the third, C, is a companion of A. . . .
>
> We further assume, in picturing the situation in which our sentence could have served as a permission requesting utterance, that A believes that he and C are outside the enclosure E;

> that A believes B, the addressee, to be inside E; that A is interested in the possibility of his gaining admission to E, in C's company; and that A believes that B has the authority--or represents somebody who has the authority--to decide whether or not A and C may enter E. We further understand that the uttering of this sentence is an act which socially requires B to do something--in particular, to say something--it being understood that what B says as a response to the question will count as authorizing or forbidding to move into E on the part of A and his companion C. We know, too, what would count as an authorizing or forbidding act on the part of B. For example, we would know what to make of it if B, on hearing our sentence, were to say "Okay."[19]

Most of these claims rest specifically on our ability to correctly interpret the sentence's deictic signals. In particular, all of the claims of the first paragraph quoted above depend upon the correct interpretation of the sentence's person deixis. The pronoun "we" identifies the utterer of the sentence as one of the two participants of any speech situation, the speaker, and further implies the existence of a hearer (Fillmore's "B") to whom the sentence is addressed, and a companion, "C", not a participant as such but implied by the plural form of the pronoun. (As this example clearly shows, the term first person plural is a misnomer: what "we" signifies is not generally a choir of speakers but a single speaker and one or more companions, possibly including the hearer as well. We will resolve this ambiguity in a moment.)

Time-and-place deixis, as Fillmore had shown in a paper published before this lecture was given figure importantly in the interpretation of the verb "come," and account for many of the claims of the second paragraph.[20] In general, the appropriateness paradigm for this verb, in expressions of the form "X came to Y at T", where X is the moving entity, Y is the destination, and T is the reference time (as distinct from coding time, the time at which the utterance is spoken) is as follows:[21]

1) The speaker is at Y at coding time
2) The addressee is at Y at coding time
3) The speaker is at Y at reference time (T)
4) The addressee is at Y at reference time (T)

In the case of "May we come in?", the pronoun "we" is X, the moving entity; whatever enclosure we imagine as being in construction with "in" is Y, the destination; and T, the reference time, is lacking. Because T is lacking, appropriateness conditions 3 and 4 can be ruled out; it must then be the case either that the speaker is at Y at coding time or that the addressee is at Y at coding time. As I mentioned just above, the English pronoun "we" is ambiguous with respect to its clusivity value: it certainly includes the speaker but it may or may not include the addressee as well. Thus two answers are possible to the question "Did we make a mistake?": "Yes we did" treats "we" as inclusive of the addressee, and "Yes you did" treats "we" as exclusive of the addressee. But since X, the moving entity ("we" in our sentence) by definition is not at Y, the destination, we can rule out appropriateness condition 1 above, leaving only the condition that the addressee be at Y at coding time for the sentence to be appropriate. Hence the addressee cannot be a member of the group seeking to move to Y; "we" must have its exclusive value.

Fillmore's analysis of this seemingly simple utterance greatly expands the scope of the linguist's task. Important consequences follow from the very fact of deictic anchorage: constructions with "come," for example, are potentially four ways ambiguous, those with "we" are potentially two ways so, and these ambiguities can be accounted for in general and resolved in particular instances only by making reference to our knowledge of the properties of the three deictic coordinates of

person, place, and time. This knowledge is a part of the linguistic competence of every speaker, which the linguist is obliged to describe and explain. Fillmore's own agenda for the linguist is lengthy but worth repeating for the scope of its vision:

> (1) The linguistic description of a language must characterize for each lexical item in the language
> (a) the grammatical constructions in which it can occur
> (b) the grammatical processes to which it is subject in each relevant context
> (c) the grammatical processes which its presence in a construction determines, and
> (d) information about speech act conditions, conversation rules, and semantic interpretation which must be associated in an idiosyncratic way with the lexical item in question;
> (2) it must provide the apparatus which characterizes
> (a) the grammatical structures of sentences on the "deep" or most abstract level, and
> (b) the grammatical processes by which abstract linguistic structures are processed and become surface sentences;
> (3) it must contain a component for calculating the complete semantic and pragmatic description of a sentence given its grammatical structure and information associated with these lexical items;
> (4) it must be able to draw on a theory of illocutionary acts, in terms of which the calculations of (3) are empowered to provide a full account of the illocutionary act potential of each sentence;
> (5) it must be able to draw on a theory of discourse which relates the use of sentences in social and conversational situations, and
> (6) it must be able to draw on a theory of "natural logic" by means of which such judgments as the success of an argument or the appropriateness of elements in conversations can be deduced.[22]

What is striking about this list is the extent to which it exceeds the traditional conception of the linguist's business, confined largely to the first three items, and implicates pragmatic, social, and real-world considerations in the determinations he must make. But, as critics, we can leave the linguist to his chores and return to our own, which, I think, also will need revision and expansion.

If we now ask how the conception of context aids an understanding

of literature, we will arrive at an answer that is at once broader in scope and more refined in application than Pratt was able to provide. Recall that her notion of literature as a context rested on the conception of a conversation between writer and reader, each of whom takes a single turn. The writer, for his part, claims the floor by means of a conventional assertion of tellability, orients his reader as to the particulars of character and setting, proceeds through his story by narrating complicating details, concludes, summarizes, and signals the end of his turn. The reader is compensated for his patient attention by the inherent interest of the story, if the writer has done his job well, and by the right to form judgments in any case. But it should be apparent that as a model of the "literary speech situation" this is appropriate only for narrative literature. The drama, by contrast, involves the audience so completely in the exchanges of the dramatis personae--in the latters' conversational turn-taking, if you will--that it seems absurd to conceive of a play as an utterance, a turn. If the playwright has done his job well, it is not his speech we seem to hear but his characters'.

This is perhaps the place to mention a remark of Fillmore's to the effect that playwrights and theorists of conversational interaction take as their model an ideal conversation, quite distinct from normal conversation, as he illustrates by means of an analogy to a game of catch.[23] The players are each equipped with a supply of balls, representing topics, and the only rule is one ball in the air at a time. In the ideal version of the game, a single ball, selected by one of the players, is tossed back and forth until it is either deliberately allowed to fall or retired by its original owner; in the normal

version, though, each player who catches a ball thrown by another of the participants tends to replace it with one of his own, which is in turn replaced by whoever catches it by one of his own, and so on. Pratt's model corresponds to a version of the game with a single ball (very large, I suppose), a single throw (very high), and a single catch (very skillful). It strains the ordinary conception of conversational turn-taking to the limit by reducing it to the limit.

What is missing, then, from this view of context is a sensitivity to the interaction between the presumptive, internal situation of utterance the work displays and the actual, pragmatic, external one in which it is audited, a sensitivity that is grounded in a full recognition of the crucial role played, in both cases, by the deictic phenomena mentioned above in interpreting and evaluating the discourse. Put another way, Pratt's analysis of literary texts enters and remains at levels 4 and 5 of Fillmore's agenda. It is not that she is obliged to begin at the head of the list, but that in centering her analysis here she sacrifices the interpretive and explanatory values that derive from a study of deictic phenomena, linking as they do levels 1 through 3 with level 6, and limiting herself instead only to the explanatory values derivable from the study of usage conventions and their violations. This gives her study of this interaction, which she calls "Literary Cooperation and Implicature," a distinctly low-mimetic bias, I suppose because what studies of the conventions at issue exist have been made on this level, although I won't try to substantiate the point. Rather, what concerns me here is the inadequacy of conceiving of the literary work as a nesting of turn-taking conventions within the one great turn-taking, as an examination of lyric poetry in particular will

reveal.

For in the lyric we feel ourselves to be at the farthest remove from the "natural speech situation," from the conventions of conversational turn-taking, whether normal or in some way idealized, indeed, from ordinary conceptions of speech at all. Prosody itself calls attention to this fact, and the prodigality of sense we call polysemy further underscores it. Even Wordsworth's sober theoretical protestations to the contrary, so at variance with his own best practice, succeed in the end at persuading us this is so. Yet, having insisted on the point, I want to recant a bit in the remaining pages of this chapter and recover a balanced view of the lyric as an utterance with a context.

In seeking to treat disccurse systematically, sociolinguists such as Labov, speech-act theoreticians such as Searle, critics such as Pratt, and linguists such as Fillmore all take conversational speech as the fundamental stratum of analysis; all forms of discourse--grocery lists, letters, newspaper reports, literary texts--are held to be derivable, ultimately, from the primitives of ordinary, natural-language, face-to-face exchanges. A given discourse may or may not display deictic anchorage, and when it is present it may or may not be extensive. The relevance, or topicality, of a contribution to the discourse (or of the entire discourse, if it is perceived as a unit contribution by a single participant--a natural narrative, for example) is always at issue: for non-deictically anchored discourse relevance must reside in its real-world bearing (as in the case of a doctor's prescription, a key to the genera of the order Coleoptera, The Anatomy of Criticism, etc.) or in the psychological criterion of tellability,

which seems to involve some mysterious human penchant for story-telling (as in the case of narratives in general), or a perhaps even more mysterious human penchant for the sounds of our own language which we might call listenability (as in the case of lyric poetry). On the other hand, to the extent that a given segment of discourse (or unit discourse) is deictically anchored, its relevance is guaranteed by that very anchorage in the speech situation itself: it has an empirical relevance to that discourse of which its deixis asserts it is a part.

Now it seems to me that it is very often the case with lyric poetry, and especially with the Middle English lyrics, that it constantly asserts its deictic anchorage in this way: a strikingly large number of these lyrics reproduce the deictic elements of a conversation by their use, especially, of the speaker- and hearer-marking pronouns (I, you/thou), by their characteristic pattern of alternating speakers, by the present tense, and by other means to be taken up in detail in the body of this study. Ironically, though, the more a discourse asserts its deictic anchorage and eschews a real-world relevance, the more ambiguously we perceive its context. Imagine finding the message "Meet me here tomorrow at noon" in a bottle adrift on the high seas (the example is Fillmore's, and it nicely points up the irony of the term "deictic anchorage" as well as the irony of relevance). But this, too, is very much a part of the way we respond to lyrics, as though they were pregnant messages found floating adrift; Mill's remark that poetry is not heard but overheard makes a similar point. In terms of the vocabulary of deixis, we could say that the lyric is deictically underdetermined: the signals designating the personages, the place, and the time of discourse tend often to be present, but they have no

unambiguous or unmistakable, tangible real-world reflexes as they do in natural conversation. The process by which a reader supplies a set of real-world reflexes for the imaginative constructs of literature has been termed recuperation by the structuralists, and an excellent summary of their observations can be found in Jonathon Culler's Structuralist Poetics.[24] Deictic recuperation, however, seems to have been overlooked, though it now appears to be crucial to an understanding of the lyric's aesthetics.

Hence the lyric, by comparison with narrative and drama, makes an imperious claim to relevance. By contrast, a narrative, as Labov has shown, begins with a ritual assertion of its tellability (hence evidently our fascination with the various guises of the teller in fiction); or a drama begins with a ritual darkening of the theatre and opening of the stage to the audience's view, thus asserting that its relevance lies in its "watchability." But the beginning of a lyric is marked only by the incantatory quality of its sound, the pulse of prosody sensed from the opening syllable, asserting that this discourse is listenable. Its wellsprings are deep in sound itself. A narrative cannot choose but attempt a schedule of events; its audience knows the pattern as well as its narrator does, and holds him responsible for it. But a lyric makes its own pattern in sound; its audience does not so much hold its creator responsible as hold its peace, hold its breath. Its judgment upon the finished work is not so much determined by evaluating how worthwhile it may have been to suspend a turn in conversation while it took place as by how its conception of the possibilities of discourse itself may have quickened in its embrace. Relevance, in a sense, is beside the point; the lyric masters discursive relevance with sonic

irrelevance.

Any conception of the literary context of the lyric, then, must include both this sense of relevance in listenability that derives from the notion of the lyric as a speech, a unit of discourse, and the sense of deictic involvement in a speaking, a virtual, if not an actual, realization of a face-to-face encounter. The model of the conversation is not merely a heuristic device where the lyric is concerned--the lyric, and especially the Middle English lyric, is conversation, as its deictic anchorage asserts. But because its real-world context is indeterminate, it cannot subordinate those signals to the place-holding function they have in natural conversation; thus it is that deictic anchorage carries more weight in the lyric than in natural conversation and implies a context which, merely functional there, acquires a new significance.

What follows is a study of the particular contribution an understanding of deictic context makes to our reading of the Middle English lyrics. On the topic of the relevance of listenability I will have a little to say in the chapter on discourse deixis. There is general agreement among critics that the order of skill and degree of variety of versification of these lyrics as a body is relatively low; perhaps that estimation would be revised upward if we better understood the criterion of listenability as it was conceived by the people by and for whom the lyrics were composed. But that is a project I will only glance at in passing. My central purpose is rather to assess the extent and effect of deictic contextualism in the lyrics by studying the roles played by person deixis, place and time deixis, discourse deixis, and the deictically embedded verbs "come" and "go", after which I will

have something to say about non-deictically anchored lyrics. Perhaps, in addition to making a contribution to the study of Middle English lyrics, such a project will expand the conception of literary context as well.

Notes

[1]Mary Louise Pratt, Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1977).

[2]Though she appears not to distinguish between the two, I do not believe it makes any difference to the critique itself, which rests on the centrality to each of a shared, ultimately Saussurian conception of language.

[3]Pratt, p. 8.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Pratt, p. 9.

[6]Pratt, p. 14.

[7]Pratt, p. 15.

[8]William Labov, Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular, University of Pennsylvania Series in Conduct and Communication, No. 3 (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972).

[9]Pratt, pp. 369; 44; 45.

[10]Pratt, p. 73.

[11]Pratt, pp. 73-74.

[12]"It is frequently the case that of two units in contrast . . . one will be positive or marked the other being neutral or unmarked. . . . When this situation holds, it is usually the case that the unmarked form is more general in sense or has a wider distribution than the marked form." John Lyons, Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 79.

[13]Pratt, pp. 40-41.

[14]Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., Language and Style (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1960), p. 353.

[15]Pratt, p. 99.

[16]Pratt, p. 115.

[17]The six lectures delivered by Charles J. Fillmore at the University of California at Santa Clara are entitled "May We Come In?," "Space," "Time," "Deixis I," "Coming and Going," and "Deixis II." They have been reproduced in mimeograph form.

[18]Fillmore, "May We Come In?," p. 3.

[19]Fillmore, "May We Come In?," p. 4

[20]Charles J. Fillmore, "Deictic Categories in the Semantics of 'Come'," Foundations of Language, 2 (1966), 219-27.

[21]Fillmore, "May We Come In?," p. 11.

[22]Fillmore, "May We Come In?," p. 16.

[23]Fillmore, "Deixis II," p. 4.

[24]Jonathon Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

Chapter III: Individuality and the Context of Utterance

Certainly one of the most striking features of Middle English lyrics is the frequent recurrence of the first person singular pronoun, as though a great many of those mainly anonymous lyricists wanted to speak to us directly, despite their anonymity. But it is important not to beg the question of the identity of the speaking voice: we know that the authors of dramas, narratives, and poems have from the beginning been adept at creating voices to speak. The metaphor of the persona is one way of describing the relationship between an author's own veridical speaking voice and the one that speaks in his poems (most particularly, of course, what the voice has to say), and though the term is an old one, the concept appears to be relatively new: in the sense of a public role or character it does not appear in the New English Dictionary. Still, if we have learned to distinguish carefully between poet and persona, so as not to commit the kind of biographical relativism labelled intentional fallacy by Wimsatt and Beardsley, yet we can never quite get the poet out of our minds altogether. He must have existed, after all; and once we have conceived of him as a flesh-and-blood individual we inevitably assume the germaneness of the details of his life to the interpretation of his activities. That way lies historical criticism.

The study of deictic phenomena offers another approach to the problem of locating the work within a context. In this chapter I will

survey the issues raised by an examination of person-deixis in the lyrics, in particular the problem of identification of the speech-act participants. This would seem to be the more significant when one remembers the extent to which Middle English lyrics exploit one or another of a number of stock, quasi-dramatic speech situations: a sinner addresses Christ; Christ addresses man; Christ and Mary at the Annunciation; the sinner addresses Mary; the sinner addresses other sinners; a secular lover addresses his beloved; or the voice in the poem simply addresses the reader. Some of these settings, to be sure, are historical, in the sense that they are attested in the Bible, while others are invented; still others are a kind of historical invention, as when an Old Testament text is conflated with a New Testament situation in the O vos Omnes group. What they have in common, though, is their exploitation of a nuclear speaker-hearer speech situation.

By way of introduction to the questions I want to raise here, consider the following short lyric from the thirteenth century MS Digby 86 (Brown XIII no. 50).[1]

> Swete ihesu, king of blisse,
> Min herte loue, min herte lisse,
> þou art swete mid I-wisse--
> Wo is him þat þe shal misse.
>
> Swete ihesu, min herte liȝt
> þou art dai wiþ-outen niȝt
> þou ȝeve me strengþe and eke miȝt
> For-to louien þ al riȝt.
>
> Swete ihesu, mi soule bote,
> In min herte þou sette a rote
> Of þi loue þat is so swote,
> And wite hit þat hit springe mote.

What is particularly striking here is the iteration of person-deixis, which establishes the identities of the two participants of a

speech event, the speaker and the hearer. The vocative "Swete ihesu," with which each stanza begins, and the second person pronoun thou/þi, which occurs six times in the poem's twelve lines, repeatedly designate the hearer in a speech event, while the first person pronoun mi/min/me, which also occurs six times, designates the speaker. In this way the poem actualizes the three critical elements by which we recognize a speech-event: speaker, hearer, and message (the speaker's words).

It happens, in this case, that we know something about the identity of one of the participants in this speech event, the hearer: we know his name, ihesu. Because the speaker three times addresses him with the epithet "swete," and with the honorific "king of blisse," and because of the nature of the speaker's message (to which we will turn in a moment), we are undoubtedly justified in associating this ihesu with the personage of the same name who figures so extensively in the New Testament, in other well-known texts, in the folk tradition, in daily liturgical practice of the Christian church, and in other ways historically attested from the period. In short, there is a real-world ihesu whom speakers unquestionably addressed and still address times without number, and this lyric represents such an addressing. The point may seem simple-minded, but it is important to remember that names, the so-called proper nouns, do not necessarily have unique real-world referents. To assume, as we do in this case, a unique referent for the name ihesu is in effect to restrict the scope of a variable, hence to restrict the field of contextual associations permissible with it. To see that this is so, compare the effect of the poem substituting any disyllabic name for ihesu--William, for example, or

Sally.

The message the text represents is remarkable for its internal focus. With the exception of the allusion in line 4 to "him þat þe shal misse" (a faceless "him" consigned to anonymity and, perhaps, to spiritual oblivion as well by his very exclusion from the I-Thou context that the poem invokes), every detail of the message points toward one of the participants in a pattern fundamentally of simple alternation. In the first stanza, for example, the hearer, ihesu, is addressed twice, first by his name (itself ornamented by the epithet "swete," which can also function as a name) and then by the title "king of blisse." In the second line, he is addressed twice more by means of the quasi-appositives in the possessive constructions "min herte loue" and "min herte lisse." The only strictly deictic element of the first two lines is the pronoun "min," designating the speaker. The name, the title and the appositives associated with the hearer are nondeictic ways of referring to him, and they convey the speaker's sense of deference in addressing this hearer. Not until the third line does the poet employ the hearer-deictic pronoun "þou." I functions as the subject of the poem's first clause, a simple assertion of the validity of the epithet "swete" which begins each stanza. The last line of the stanza contains a reference to a third party who is a non-participant in this speech event as indicated by the pronoun "him," a point reinforced lexically, as I have suggested, by the proposition it contains, that 'he shall miss thee.' The pronouns of the second stanza are all deictics and refer to speaker, hearer, hearer, speaker, and hearer in that order; and in the last stanza, the pattern is simply speaker, speaker, hearer, hearer. I do not suppose anything in particular of

significance is to be derived from these patterns, except their possible relationship to the phenomenon of shifting, which I will take up in detail later on.

Let us turn now from the form of the message to its content. We have already noticed, in the first stanza, that the speaker adopts an extremely deferential mode of address toward this particular hearer; in fact, not until the fourth line of the stanza does he venture a proposition not associated with his perception of their own relationship: "Wo is him þat þe shal misse." If the formulaic expression "Woe is X" may be paraphrased by some such expression as 'May X suffer woe,' or 'Let X suffer woe,'--in short by an optative or subjunctive sense--then it will be apparent that the speaker's first concern, after identifying himself and his hearer, is to exclude from the context of what he has to say everyone who, unlike himself, is not "in touch with" the hearer he is addressing. This exclusivity, of course, gives the poem an intensely personal character; but more than this, it serves as the preamble to an assertion of the participants' self-sufficiency--at least of the hearer's, whose "strengþe and eke mi t" the speaker hopes to tap. But the speaker is far from being motivated only by a crass desire for self-sufficiency; rather, he asks for strength and might "for-to louien [Jesus] al riȝt." The third stanza repeats the request in the poem's only consequential metaphor: "In min herte þou sette a rote Of þi loue þat is so swote, And wite hit þat hit springe mote." The metaphor underscores thematically the self-sufficiency and inner-determinedness of the message reflected in its deictics. The figure of the tender root that springs from the ground by its own power, with proper nourishment, aptly represents the speaker's desire to husband

the relationship of love that grows between him and the hearer--which, indeed, binds him to his hearer in a relationship which by itself endows him with special significance--and at the same time asserts its independence from any outside agency or circumstance. The fact that it echoes as well a number of Biblical vegetative images associated with Christ--the root of Jesse, the tree of life, the green wood of Luke 26:33--is further evidence of the connection.

So far we have examined the message and the hearer, and made some observations about the latter's identity. What can we say about the identity of the speaker? Unlike the hearer he is unnamed; he is devoid as well of any nondeictic indication of his identity, such as the honorific title or appositive phrase associated with the hearer. In fact, although he is the speaker, he never once refers to himself by the nominative pronoun "I"--only the oblique mi/min/me forms occur here, and those without exception in construction with the various nouns and pronouns referring to the hearer: "min herte lisse," "þou ȝeue me strengþe," "mi soule bote," etc. It is as though the speaker cannot conceive of his identity separate from that of his hearer, yet the poem's use of the person deictic pronouns points to a speech event which in itself confers upon its participants at least the separate and independent statuses of speaker and hearer, and upon what is said at least the status of a message. Hence, although the poem offers enough information so that we can confidently associate a real-world reflex with the hearer represented in it, it specifically withholds any information whatsoever which might make it possible to associate a real-world reflex with the speaker. Who is speaking is not merely a moot question; it is one the poem prevents our answering by its

choice of the contextual details it includes.

These considerations raise several points having to do with the nature of historical criticism. One version of the historical thesis holds that, in principle, the more we know about the author of a poem, the more we know about the poem. The notion of the persona, as has been mentioned above, mediates between the author and the voice speaking in the poem, and if they are distanced, yet there is a method to the distance; hence the more we know about the voice the more we know about the poem. This line of reasoning depends upon the following three assumptions: 1) This is a poem; 2) Someone produced it; 3) That someone bears some relationship to the "I" in the poem. My objection to the first assumption is that, although it is a moot point, it has the effect of pre-validating the whole argument, begging the question by assuming at the outset that a particular relation of intentionality holds between the work and the real world. The second assumption shifts attention away from the text and onto the author, comprehends the relationship between them as purely causal (the poet is conceived as the efficient cause of the poem), and betrays a predisposition to account for any and all details of the text cataphorically. The third assumption is necessary, of course, in order to provide a textual locus for the arguments derived from the second. Such a process of reasoning eventually and inevitably reduces each text to the status of a psycho- or socio-historical document, interesting rather for the light it sheds on its author and his times than for the intrinsic value of the speech event it represents.

In the previous chapter I referred to a discussion of Fillmore's about the various game models which would be appropriate analogues for

the various derivatives of conversational speech acts. He rightly points out that actual conversation differs from the idealized conversation of the theorists and playwrights and mentions several other specialized versions of the game ("The Platonic Dialogue," "Meet the Press").[2] In order to discuss the lyrics, we need to become familiar with two variations of conversational speech acts, one discussed by Fillmore and one not. The first is the familiar idealized conversation model; the second is a foreshortened variation of it which I will call the logomorphic model.

The idealized conversation model comprehends two categories of participant, speaker and hearer. The former is always a single individual and is associated with the various forms of the first person pronoun; the latter may be a single individual or a group of them, referred to by the forms of the second person pronoun.[3] One participant begins by making a speech; its topic is considered to be binding upon the group, and all subsequent contributions must, in some way obvious to the participants, be felt to be connected with the topic in hand. The phenomenon is known as relevance by topicality. A phenomenon known as shifting occurs whenever a speaker abandons the floor and another speaker takes it up: the new speaker, of course, refers to himself by means of the first-person deictic pronoun forms, and to the others by means of the second-person forms. Thus "I" can designate any of an indefinite number of individuals as they, by turns, become speakers. Put another way, it can have any number of real-world reflexes all of whom have in common the role of speaker. Only reference to the particular occasion of utterance can determine which of the various participants of a conversation is meant by a deictic pronoun;

his real-world identity is hidden by the phenomenon of shifting and is recuperable (if at all) only by inference from the details of the messages. Eventually in the course of an idealized conversation the group comes to regard the topic as sufficiently dealt with, at which point the topic may be changed or the conversation ended. The only requirement seems to be that more than one contribution be made--a single contribution violates our notion of a conversation, idealized or otherwise.

In the conversational speech act I refer to as logomorphic, on the other hand, the concept of holding the floor does not appear to be relevant, for none of the participants designated by the first contribution as hearers makes, in his turn, a contribution of his own. Rather, the concept of speaking itself becomes paramount. The original speaker remains the only speaker, and his hearer(s) only hearer(s). Yet there can be no question that both participants' existences are recognized: the person-deictic pronouns have exactly the same function in this model as in all the others. Only reference to the occasion of utterance will supply incontrovertible evidence for the assignment of real-world reflexes for the pronouns. Hence the alternation of individuals who are in turn designated by the deictic pronouns (shifting) does not occur. In its place, something akin to it tends often to occur: the speaker's alternate reference to himself and to his hearer. Similarly, the criterion of relevance by topicality cannot be applied to contributions subsequent to the first one, since there are none. In its place the single contribution displays an internal development--the topic is explored not through the varying points of view of the various participants, but through the progress

of thought of a single participant.

Two variations on each of these models are possible, according to whether speaker, hearer, both, or neither is actualized in the text by means of person-deictic pronouns. Thus the four possibilities are

1) +speaker +hearer
2) -speaker -hearer
3) +speaker -hearer
4) -speaker +hearer

The first of these, the most common one, corresponds to the situation in which a text actualizes both speaker and hearer (either in an idealized conversation or in a logomorphic one). The second corresponds to the case in which neither speaker nor hearer is actualized and is characteristic of third person narratives (which are not comprehended under any conversational model). The third case, in which a speaker designates himself as such but does not designate a hearer, corresponds to the soliloquy, especially useful in drama where the actual context of utterance (i.e. the presentation of a play before an audience) supplies appropriate hearers although the implied context of utterance does not. The last case, in which only the hearer is designated deictically, seems very rare if not non-existent. Short passages of this form could be cited, of course, but it seems to be axiomatic that if there is an audience, then there must be a speaker who will eventually identify himself as such. The values for -speaker and -hearer in this paradigm correspond to our intuitive interpretations of them, so that we can safely say that by convention "-speaker" is interpreted as 'the author' and "-hearer" is interpreted as 'the audience' (reader or listener). An interesting ambiguity arises in the case of lyrics marked +hearer, for this, too, can be interpreted conventionally to include the

reading or listening audience; thus the second-person deictic pronoun forms may designate a hearer or hearers both in the actual context of utterance (as a poem) and in the implied context of utterance (within the poem). I will deal with the phenomenon of hearer ambiguity in more detail later on.

Lyrics which employ the model of the idealized conversation, with at least two speakers, lend themselves to the discussion of a number of disputational subjects; typically the speakers articulate separate points of view which may be represented as being more or less in opposition. A stock variant of the form, much employed by the secular Middle English lyricists, casts the speakers as would-be lovers and produces the love debat: the twenty-fourth lyric in MS Harley 2253, "De clerico et puella," is a fine example of the type (Brook 1956:62).[4] The clerk, first to speak, announces the topic in the arresting if conventional oxymoron "my deþ y loue, my lyf ich hate, for a leuedy shene," and concludes his first speech by posing the lady a direct question: "Whet helpeþ þe, my suete lemmon, ly lyf þus forte gaste?" She responds, charmingly, with an attack ad hominem and an ironic refusal to debate the issue: "Do wey, þou clerc, þou art a fol, wiþ þe bydde y noht chyde." But of course she does dispute his suit, pointing out the danger in his being surprised in her "boure" and citing him the proverbial wisdom that it is "bettere on fote gon þen wycked hors to ryde." This provides the clerk both his next contribution and a means to draw another contribution from her--he asks her another question, "Weylawei! Whi seist þou so?" and follows it up with the command "þou lete me lyue ant be þi luef ant þou my suete lemman." She responds by referring again to the risk of a liaison, reminding the clerk

that he is being watched night and day by her kinfolk, who wouldn't hesitate to kill him. The next series of transitions, which brings the little drama to a conclusion, is skillful indeed. Her last remarks, the clerk declares, have made him suddenly sorrowful; yet he recalls the time when they kissed fifty times at a window, and such "feir bihests makeþ mony mon al is serewes mythe." But, for her part, she replies, "Mi serewe þou makest newe," for she had "louede a clerk al par amours," something she apparently just now remembers. He seizes this opening to summarize his case:

> 'Whil y wes a clerc in scole, wel muchel y couþe of lore;
> ych haue þoled for þy loue woundes fele sore,
> fer from hom ant eke from men vnder þe wode-gore.
> Suete ledy, þou rewe of me; nou may y no more!'

Swayed by his gentle importunings, she concedes: "þou semest wel to ben a clerc, for þou spekest so stille; shalt þou neuer for mi loue woundes þole grylle." Unlike the other lyrics on the stock De clerico et puella theme, this one makes the clerk's identity as a clerk crucially significant to the outcome, and even goes some distance toward giving him the "stille" speech she finds attractive in a clerk. This kind of verisimilitude in the representation of speech is characteristic of the general level of compositional skill evident in the Harley lyrics. Yet the idealized conversation provides not merely the form of this lyric, but its theme as well, for it is ultimately an argument for the power of deft conversation to win friends and influence people.

While this lyric develops a secular version of this thesis, another in the series develops a religious analogue of it, and represents as well an important variation on the idealized conversation form. The latter is an English setting of the Latin sequence Stabat iuxta Christi

crucem in which Christ and Mary converse at the cross (Brook 56-57). Actually, neither speaker is identified by name (only Adam and Simeon are mentioned by name in the text). The textual details, however, point unmistakeably to these real-world identifications. What is significant is that each speaker addresses the other by the term denoting their relationship, mother and son, and as mother and son they are engaged in a debate over the propriety of the mother's grief at her son's impending death. Their perspectives, of course, differ:

> 'Moder, nou y may þe seye,
> betere is þat ich one deye
> þen al monkunde to helle go.'
> 'Sone, y se þi bodi byswngen,
> fet ant honden þourhout stongen;
> no wonder þah me be wo!'

The mother sees only her dying son, while his vision embraces the entire salvation history of mankind. This difference in point of view is reflected in the speech-act dynamics of the lyric, for Mary's comments return again and again to the details of the situation of utterance, if we may call it that--the wounds she sees on her son's body, the "harde tre" itself, the pain of her grief--while he leads her toward the discovery of a significance they have which encompasses all time and all human circumstance. This he does by noting that she now feels the sorrow of all women who bear children--'nou þou wost of moder fare', an illusion to the tradition that her childbearing had been without pain--to which she responds by claiming a special right to intercede with him on behalf of all women 'þat to me grede.' Now, for the first time, her vision turns outward from the conversational mise en scene to encompass persons not present and a time not the immediate present. Having accomplished his purpose, both in the narrow sense of

the education of his mother and in the wider sense connected with salvation history, the son says his farewell, the mother says hers, and their dialogue ceases. At this point, a new voice enters and addresses first the mother--"Leuedy, for þat ilke blisse, bysech þi sone of sunnes lisse"--and then the son--"Louers, for þat ilke blod þat þou sheddest on þe rod, þou bryng vs into heuene lyht." This speaker is deictically identified only as "vs," which we can interpret as an anaphoric reference to the "monkynde" of lines 8, 15, and 27. This "monkynde," as a collective personage in the poem, can participate in the salvific promise the poem makes only by participating as well in the dialogue it represents. Thus the three parties come into contact through the medium of speech: son and mother converse with each other directly while mankind, for his part, addresses each of them in turn and has the poem's promise that the mother will speak for him to the son as well.

The poem offers parallel metaphors: the dynamic interrelationship of son, mother, and mankind in the text--that is as it is strictly defined by the deictic elements of the text, a relationship which comprehends both the son's comforting of his mother by giving significance to his (and her) suffering and her parallel desire to comfort mankind--has its counterpart in the larger world comprehended by the message of the text, which the believer reads as the promise of salvation--that which gives significance to his suffering. The son's promise to his mother of happiness to come, unfulfillable within the present-bound speech event reported in the first 54 lines, receives its fulfillment only in the speech event which follows it and which links it deictically to "vs" in the last two stanzas. This commentary, provided by an

anonymous spokesman for us mankind, points up the significance of the preceding exchange between mother and son by asserting that the son's promise to his mother is to his intentions toward mankind as his fulfillment of the promise is to his fulfillment of his intentions. Mary, who takes upon herself the role of mediatrix in the course of their exchange, is the middle term in this logical predication as well.

Carleton Brown asserts confidently that "the ultimate source for this dialogue between the Blessed Virgin and her Son is without doubt a Latin prose narrative of the Passion represented as spoken by the Virgin to St. Anselm . . . or to St. Bernard," and indeed, in the case of the former possibility at least, the textual details agree fairly well.[5] In Chapter XII of Dialogus Beatae Mariae et Anselmi de Passione Domini the Virgin reports that, for the third time, "Tunc iterum gladius Simeonis animam pertransit" upon hearing the crowd's insults and Christ's mild reply; St. Anselm asks her what she did then, and she answers "Stabam juxta crucem tam plena moerore, quod consolationem ferre non poteram, et mecom stabant sorores meae, et maria Magdalena. Et cum filius meus videsset me et Joannem discipulum suum quem diligebat dixit: Mulier, ecce filius tuus (Joan. XIX, 25,26). O quam miserablis licentia! Deinde dixit discipulo Ecce mater tua (ibid., 27)."[6] Here at least are the details of the sword prophesied by Simeon, Mary's inconsolable weeping, the emphasis on their relationship as mother and son, and the "stabam juxta crucem" clause paraphrased in the opening line of the English lyric. More than this, however, the fact that these details occur in the context of a dialogue between the Blessed Virgin and her son has its parallel in the lyric; and even the fact that it is a framed dialogue, one that is reported in the context of

another (that between the Blessed Virgin and St. Anselm), has its counterpart in the lyric's structure in the new voice that enters in the tenth stanza.

On the other hand, G. L. Brook declares the lyric to be an "English version of the Sequence Stabat iuxta Christi crucem."[7] This Latin poem, which occurs only in the York Missal, is attributed to Jacapone da Todi and runs as follows.[8]

Stabat iuxta Christi crucem,
videns pati veram lucem,
mater regis omnium.
Vidit caput coronatum
spinis, latus perforatum,
vidit mori filium.

Vidit corpus flagellari,
manus, pedes perforari,
vinctum a crudelibus.
Vidit caput inclinatum,
totum corpus cruentatum
pastoris pro ovibus.

Vidit potum felle mixtum,
natum suum crucifixum,
gubernantem omnia,
Christum pati haec flagella
vidit mater et puella
vidit et opprobria.

Vidit virgo haec dicentum,
natum suum innocentum,
'ecce mater filius.'
Pati vidit virgo natum
dicentum 'est consummatum',
et sic transit gladius.

In dolore tunc fuisti,
virgo pia, cum vidisti
mori tuum filium.
Dolor ingens, dolor ille,
dicunt sancti plusquam mille,
excellit martyrium.

Virgo clemens, virgo pia,
spes reorum, vitae via,
virgo plena gratia:
Iube natum ac implora,

servis tuis sine mora
nobis dare gaudia.

This text, too, contains the reference to Simeon's sword, Mary's excessive dolor ("dicunt sancti plusquam mille"), emphasis on the mother-son relationship, and the opening "stabat" clause. It differs from the St. Anselm text in that it does not reproduce as much Calvary-scene dialogue (only two lines) and does not itself appear to be cast as a dialogue. There is evidence, however, that the sequences were performed antiphonally, by two half-choirs; hence they must have created quite a distinct impression of a dialogue in music. If the first three lines of each stanza were performed by male voices and the latter three by female voices, the voices would be mirrored in the alternation of Christ's and Mary's speeches in the English lyric; in any case, it exactly reproduces the sequence's metrical and stanzaic form.

There is little to be gained by choosing one of these two works as "the source" of the English lyric; what seems important to me to recognize is the fact that each of the three of them, whatever their relationship of influence upon one another may be, makes crucial use of the model of an idealized conversation for its form, and, in the case of the lyric, for thematic material as well. Its central thesis--the efficacy of the word's intercession--works itself out in the course of the dialogue it represents. That it is able to do this is owing largely to the lyricist's most truly creative stroke: his transposition of the Latin imperfects into English present tenses. Certainly much of the lyric's sense of immediacy derives from its representation of the events as taking place at coding time, rather than before it (as the Latin pieces do); but more than this, the present-tense

setting makes possible the depth of thematic impact the lyric has. What it says is true not merely at the time of the events it documents but on every occasion of its utterance.

A number of other lyrics are constructed on the model of the idealized conversation, notably the 13th-century debate between the Nightingale and the Thrush and the ballad-like "Bargain of Judas" (Brown XIII:52, 25); these will be discussed in the following chapter on time-and-place deixis, for their emphasis is upon the context of action rather than upon the context of personality we are discussing here. On the other hand, a great many lyrics constructed on the logomorphic model of conversation exploit the context of personality, and I will turn now to a discussion of some of these.

The logomorphic model of conversation, as I stated earlier, provides for both participants but allows only one of them to speak. It is a model of conversation in which one of the conversants is silent; nevertheless, his influence is felt, as will be noticed, in the ways the speaker tailors his contribution and monitors its tellability specifically for the benefit of his silent interlocutor. Because the hearer is silent, his real-world identity is an open variable. This allows the lyricists to incorporate subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) "identity riddles"--sometimes the contribution's tellability rests on an appropriate answer to the question of who is speaking, sometimes to the question of who is listening, and sometimes to both questions. I will refer to these groups as speaker-derivative, hearer-derivative, and participant-derivative lyrics, and discuss them in that order.

In many cases of speaker-derivative lyrics, it is Christ who speaks. Occasionally he is identified by name, as in this lyric from

MS Advocates Lib. 18.7.21 (Brown XIV:63):

> I am iesu, þat cum to fith
> With-outen seld & spere,
> Elles wer þi det i-dith
> ȝif mi fiþting ne were.
> Siþen i am comen & haue þe broth
> A blisful bote of bale,
> Vndo þin herte, tel me þi þouth,
> þi sennes grete an smale.

The speaker here is Christ the Knight, a Christological motif familiar from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. The poem does not dwell upon the irony of the fact that he has come to fight "with-outen seld & spere" but subtly transmutes this commonplace to work a different purpose: his healing word is his weapon. For the hearer to fight on his own behalf were his death, but Christ fights in his stead. Since he has come and brought with him such a "blisful bote" out of bale, Christ argues, the hearer's appropriate response would be to undo his heart and tell his thought and his sins. The reason, then, that he needs neither shield nor spear is that the power of his word is sufficient to release his hearer from sin and death. But the invitation to "tel me þi þouth" is open-ended--the hearer will respond or not, as he chooses in the silence at poem's end.

More often with these lyrics, the speaker is not identified by name but can nevertheless be associated with a real-world reflex through the circumstantial details of the text. This short lyric from Advocates MS. 19.1.11 is a fine example (Brown XV: 111):

> I haue laborede sore and suffered dey th,
> and now I Rest and draw my breyght;
> but I schall come and call Ryght sone
> heuene and erght and hell to dome;
> and thane schall know both devyll and mane,
> What I was and what I ame.

Here speaker deixis merges with--becomes--the very theme of the work.

Spare though it is, the imagery moves from the banal, animal experience of work and death through the humane arts of speech and judgement to come to rest in the question of the significance of existence itself. This ascending triplet is echoed, in the fourth line, by the parallel descending triplet "heuene and erght and hell," which provides the key to the epistemological riddle of the last two lines--for "what I was and what I ame," the unknown to be solved, is the third term of the poem's third triplet, again and finally ascending.

Occasionally it is not Christ but Mary whom we take to be speaking. Carleton Brown titles one of the lyrics from the Grimestone Commonplace Book "The Blessed Virgin's Appeal to the Jews" (IV: 60):

> Wy haue ȝe no reuthe on my child?
> Haue reuthe on me ful of murning,
> Taket doun on rode my derworþi child,
> Or prek me on rode with my derling.
>
> More pine ne may me ben don
> þan laten me liuen in sorwe & schame;
> Als loue me bindet to my sone,
> so lat vs dey en boþen i-same.

Texts such as this and the one just considered clearly depend upon the reader's (or hearer's) association of a few key details with a particularly strong and familiar context--the Biblical narrative--as soon as he recognizes them. These details amount to a set of indexical commonplaces: the ruthlessness of the hearers the speaker is addressing ("Wy haue ȝe no reuthe on my child?")--marking them in turn as the Jews assembled at Calvary--the rood on which the son is suspended, the mourning and pain the speaker expresses, all of these point to a single, unambiguous identification of the speaker. After all, the sentiments expressed here could be those of any mother who has had the misfortune to see her son put to death; nor was this manner of execution

practised only in a single case. Yet no 14th-century reader would have mistaken this speaker for Everywoman. It must have been only too common to witness the death of a child of one's own, but in only one other case that I am aware of, the magnificent "Pearl," does this experience become the center of a poetic expression. It is as though Mary's loss, still felt with startling immediacy, so overshadows human losses as to pre-empt all expressions of this kind.

A very large body of logomorphic-model lyrics derives its interest not from the question of who is speaking but from the question of who is being spoken to. These are the hearer-derivative lyrics. They may be divided into two groups: those in which the hearer is identifiable with a particular real-world reflex--Christ--by a process similar to the one just outlined, and those in which no such identification is possible.

As a compact example of a lyric which addresses Christ, Brown prints this piece from the 14th century (XIV: 5):

> Louerd, þu clepedest me
> an ich nagt ne ansuared þe
> Bute wordes scloe and sclepie:
> 'þole yet! þole a litel!'
> Bute 'yiet' and 'yiet' was endelis,
> and 'þole a litel' a long wey is.

Here, as in the case of "Stand well, Mother, under rode," there is no unambiguous signal in the text by which we assign the referant "Christ" to the deictic pronoun þu. The title "louerd" with which the poem begins might apply to anyone in a position of authority; the OED cites numerous secular examples from the period (s.v. lord), including instances of vocative constructions quite similar to this one. Nor can we assume that a distinction between thou and you such as obtains in

early modern English, and the current English of a few speakers, operates here--second person pronoun usage in Middle English seems to have been in a state of transition between the ordinary employment of þu, þin, etc. in Old English and the restricted employment of thou in Modern English. "You" as a form competing with "thou" seems to have been the form which was at first limited (applied only to persons of superior station) and only gradually superceded thou in ordinary usage. That all such evidence is inconclusive will scarely surprise anyone accustomed to reading poetry of whatever period. What is striking about the piece, on the other hand, is the nearness with which it approximates an immediate speech event. The deictics þu and me establish hearer and speaker immediately; the verb, "clepedest," 'called,' reinforces this lexically. Notice, though, that there are two speech events here: the lord's call and the speaker's response, reported in the text, and the text itself as the poetic representation of a present instance of one. The first of these stands prior to the present one, signalled by the past tense "clepedest" and its complement "ansuared." The temporal separation of the two instances of discourse raises the interpretive question what significance is to be attached to the difference between the messages of the past and present discourse.

The speaker admits that in the previous instance he all but entirely refused to participate in the lord's offer of discourse: "ich nagt ne ansuared þe / Bute wordes scloe and sclepie." The placement of the negatives, the enjambment, the deprecatory "bute," and the lazy indifference conveyed by the adjectives "scloe" and "sclepie" all contribute to the impression of the barest minimum of a response--scarcely more than no response at all. Hence the speaker's ironic

disassociation from his message of the past is accomplished in the message of the present. The speaker's message at that time, 'Wait a little,' was a promise of future performance, but now, with an irony reflected in the tension created by the juxtapostion of contraries, he evaluates his performance at the same barest minimum: "'þole a litel' a long wey is." The present tense of the poem's last word brings back the present discourse, and with it the contrast of the past--or rather, the non-present, which contrasts deictically with the present, and comprehends future time as well. The message of the present speech event, in fact, suggests a nexus with an eternally unfolding non-present in the terms "a long wey" and "endelis." In terms of speech-act dynamics the speaker's first response to the lord's call employed the strategy of minimizing his commitment to his hearer; the promissory "þole a litel" suggests future performance, but in fact betrays a present-centeredness that refuses to comprehend a future, let alone an eternity. The message of present discourse, on the other hand, does comprehend such things, as can be seen in the last two lines. But deictic utterances of any sort are validated only by present circumstances; as Fillmore puts it, "it is not the sentence in isolation--the proposition--which is necessarily true, but every utterance of it."[10] Hence the message of the present speech event, which entails the notion that the speaker is now ready to contemplate an eternal non-present, can only be validated by present performance. Now two signals in the poem indicate that this occasion of utterance will be different from the previous one: first, the irony we have discussed, which distances the speaker from his earlier self; and second, the very empirical fact of his now spontaneously addressing the lord, in a sincere if belated

answer to his call, unlike his earlier slow and sleepy response.

I began the discussion of this piece with the contention that its interest lies in processing the message simultaneously for its interpretive content and for clues within it about the identity of its ostensible hearer. While it is evident that there is no absolutely unambiguous way to determine the hearer's identity, it is reasonable to assume that the identity of speaker and hearer, as well as the referant of the message, must be given the richest interpretation possible consistent with the data. Jonathon Culler, in discussing the interpretive convention by which we read a poem as a unity, has pointed out that "the intent at totality of the interpretive process may be seen as the literary version of the Gestaltist law of Prägnanz: that the richest organization compatible with the data is to be preferred."[11] He goes on to suggest that a reader must possess "at least rudimentary notions of what would count as unity," mentioning such arrangements as "the binary opposition, the dialectical resolution of a binary opposition, the displacement of an unresolved opposition by a third term, the four-term homology, the series united by a common denominator, and the series with a transcendent or summarizing final term." I think it is at least equally plausible to suggest that besides these quasi-mathematical conceptions a reader--or listener--posseses a conception of unity grounded in the fundamental speaker-hearer-message triad of ordinary speech, familiar to him from his earliest years; and if that is indeed the case, then the Law of Prägnanz provides a principled way of accounting for our interpretation of the hearer's identity in the lyric we have been discussing.

But the hearer's identity as Christ is seldom at issue in the

Middle English lyrics. It is far more often the case that the speaker addresses Him by name, unambiguously and forthrightly, as in the following lyric attributed to Friar William Herebert (Brown XIV:22).

þou kyng of woele and blisse,
louerd iesu crist,
þou uaderes sone of heuene,
þat neuer ende bist,

þou, uor to sauue monkunne
þat þou haddest whrout,
A Moeke maydes wombe
þou ne shonedest nouht;

þou þat ouercome
þe bitter dethes stunchg,
þou openedest hoeuene-ryche
to ryth byleues þrunchg;

þou sist in godes ryth hond
in þy uaderes blisse;
þou shalt comen to demen ous,
woe leueth al to wysse;

þe þoenne woe byddeth help ous
wham þou hauest y-wrouth,
Whom wyþ þy doerewourþe blod
on rode hauest y-bouth.

þe þoenne woe bysecheth,
help ous þyn oune hyne,
Whom wyth þy derewourþe blod
hast bouth vrom helle pyne. Amen.

Loosely anaphoric in structure, the poem divides into groups of four stanzas and two stanzas. The first group of stanzas, each of which begins with a nominative or appositive þou, repeated in the third line (in one case the fourth), identifies the hearer both by name--"louerd iesu crist"--and by some aspect of his relationship to the speaker, different with each stanza. The first stanza asserts that, like any man, he is a "uaderes sone"; and the second complements the first by a reference to his mother. In the third stanza, the speaker notes what has already been the consequence of this hearer's activities

among men, at least for the 'throng of true believers': by overcoming death he has opened the kingdom of heaven for them. The fourth stanza expresses the further consequences of the speaker's relationship to this hearer, for he will 'come to judge us' all. The last two stanzas retain the stanza-initial pronominal structure of the first four but shift from the nominal to the objective form þe by inverting the normal subject-verb-object word order: "þe þoenne woe byddeth help ous" and "þe þoenne woe bysecheth." The effect is to reinforce syntactically the sense of the message itself, which conveys the speaker's sense of complete subordination to his hearer, whom he may rightly, then, beg for help. (It is worth noting in passing that poems of vocative address are characteristic of Friar Herebert's compositional style. Of the fourteen lyrics attributed to him in Brown XIV, eleven are addressed directly to a hearer in this way.)

Of course, many hearers besides Christ may be addressed in the lyrics of the period. Friar Herebert, for example, has a lyric addressed to Herod, one addressed to the Holy Ghost, and four addressed to Mary. On one view, propounded by Rosemary Woolf, the large number of Marian hymns in Middle English, particularly prevalent from the 15th century, is to be attributed to historical causes, notably the rise of the cult of the Virgin in England. Another possible explanation lies in the facility with which writers were able to adopt the Marian personality to a conversationally derived poetic practice. Mary's unique position as mankind's special interventrix has already been pointed out in the discussion of "Stond well, Modor, vnder rode." The strikingly dramatic scene of the meeting of mother and son at Calvary begs for dialogue, a Biblical vacuum both Patristic writers such

as St. Anselm and medieval poets sought to fill. But the Gospels contain another striking sequence involving Mary and an immortal interlocutor for which St. Luke preserves the dialogue; and this exchange between Mary and the Archangel Gabriel became not merely the model for but the substance of many Middle English lyrics.

Although the Biblical text in Luke's Gospel preserves the Annunciation scene as a dialogue, the lyrics which derive from it are logomorphic, representing either the "Salve, Maria" of Gabriel or the "Ecce ancilla domini" of Mary. As an elaborate but typical example of the former motif, written in the emerging aureate style of the 15th century, here is a stanza from a lyric of seven stanzas printed in Brown XV (69):

> Haile! Precellent lady, bothe quene & empresse,
> The chosen spowse of god his promyse to fulfyll,
> Pray for vs, pore wretches þat lyve here in distres,
> O flowre of virginite, whiche neuer thoghtist yll;
> Thy son will performe what so euer is thy will.
> Loke! for whome thow prayest, releassed is his trespace--
> Wherfore, haile! glorious lady, mary full of grace.

Here the motif of Mary's power of intervention for the benefit of mankind is first construed as liberally as possible--"Thy son will performe what so euer is thy will"--then forthrightly (some might say crassly) invoked, as though the speaker were stabbing his finger at a document: "Loke! for whome thow prayest, releassed is his trespace." The attitude this conveys is mechanical, if not in fact spiritually debased, in comparison with the humble devotion born of "ryth beleue" that characterizes earlier expressions of this same motif; but it is significant that the speech event context itself, with its ability to allow the speaker to place himself in immediate contact with his hearer, continues to provide the model for poetic form.

The stanza quoted, the poem's fourth, begins like the others with

a variation of Gabriel's salutation "Ave gratia plena," which begins the first stanza. His greeting was undoubtedly the inspiration for a number of Latin hymns of praise beginning with a variation of that formula, and many of these, too, have their English paraphrases and expansions. Here, for example, is the first stanza of another elaborate 15th century lyric addressed to Mary (Brown XV:26):

Salue	Hayl! oure patron & lady of erthe,
Regina	qwhene of heuen & emprys of helle,
Mater	Modor of al blis þu art, þe ferth,
Misericordie	Of mercy & grace þe seconde welle.
Vita	lyfe come of þe, as þe sownde of a bell
Dulcedo	Swetnes, þu art both moder & mayde,
Et spes nre	Oure hope with þe þat we may dwelle
Salue	Hayl! ful of grace as gabriel sayd.

Quite apart from whatever appeal any such prayer might have for the faithful, this lyric presents a graphic illustration of the art of embellishment. The first element in each of the English lines succinctly translates the Latin; to it is then added some rhetorical figure, such as the apostrophe of the first line, the antithetical isocolon of the second, the simile of the fifth, the paradox of the sixth, or some amplifying detail from the wealth of Marian devotional material, which seems to have suggested the titles of fourth well of bliss and second of mercy conferred in the third and fourth lines. Increasingly with the lyrics of the 15th century, ornamentation itself becomes topical and poetry becomes verbal display.

In addition to such hymns in praise of divine personages there are of course many in praise of very earthly ones. Occasionally, as in this enticingly incomplete 14th century piece, printed by Robbins, they preserve the beloved's name to great effect.[12]

> With right all my herte now I you grete,
> With hondert syes, my dere!

> Swete God, give us grace sone to mete,
> And sone to speken ifere.
> Annes, Annes, Annes, Annes, Annes!
> Annes, be now stedfaste on allewys,
> And thinke on me, my swete Annes.
> My faire Annes, my sothe Annes,
> I love youre . . .

This logomorphic message is in lieu of a true exchange in which the speaker and his hearer can "speken ifere"; in the meantime the incantatory repetition of the beloved's name suggests by onomatopoeia the very sighs it induces in the speaker, just as the poem itself bears a sonic resemblance only to the conversation he would be having with her, even to suggesting its interminability.

Another subcategory of lyrics composed on this model addresses not a human or divine interlocutor but an inanimate or abstract one personified. Chaucer's witty complaint to his purse is expertly cast in this form.[13]

> To yow, my purse, and to noon other wight
> Complayne I, for ye be my lady dere!
> I am so sory, now that ye been lyght;
> For certes, but ye make me hevy chere,
> Me were as leef be layd upon my bere;
> For which unto your mercy thus I crye:
> Beth hevy ageyn, or elles mot I dye!

The deftly manipulated topicality of the speaker's message contributes greatly to the fun here. On one level, very carefully specified by the person-deictic pronouns "I" and "yow," Chaucer is addressing his silent and comfortless purse. The relevance of the message lies in their metaphorically inverted relationship: now that the purse is "lyght" Chaucer's cheer is but "hevy." On another level, of course, this speech is not directed at one of the author's personal effects at all, but at the reader, who will understand the topicality of the message in more universal terms as a playfully ironic commentary on the

straightness of poverty. All of this is sustained through two more stanzas to the same effect. To these Chaucer then appends this envoy:

> O conquerour of Brutes Albyon,
> Which that by lyne and free eleccion
> Been verray kyng, this song to yow I sende;
> And ye, that mowen alle oure harmes amende,
> Have mynde upon my supplicacion!

With the change in hearer from the inanimate purse cum overhearing reader to the very animate and potentially provident Henry IV comes a subtle shift in topicality indeed: if he "that mowen alle oure harmes amende" has ears to hear and smiles upon the speaker's suit the relevance of this message will be measured in its perlocutionary force.

In respect of this ulteriorization of relevance Chaucer's lyric is strikingly like the Marian supplication discussed a moment ago (Brown XV:69) with its confident assertion that "for whome thow prayest, releassed is his trespace." It is no accident that the purse is addressed as the speaker's "lady dere," for by attributing to it a feminine personality Chaucer manages to parody not merely the courtly tradition of the lover's complaint to his sovereign and sustaining lady but the Christian tradition of the plaint of the sinner to his benign and assuaging lady as well. The point, I think, is reinforced by the punning image in the line "For I am shave as nye as any frere," a line which manages to suggest both the destitution and the devotion of the speaker, each equally undercut with ironic playfulness.

By no means all of the lyrics addressed to an artificial hearer are as entertaining or as skillfully composed as this one, but they share with it the interest of a dual relevance arising from the dual conception of the hearer to whom they are addressed. Conjuring formulas offer particularly striking illustrations of the phenomenon, as in

the following example (Robbins:65):

> Medicina pro morbo caduco et le fevre
> In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.
> What manere of evil thou be,
> In Goddes name I coungere thee.
> I coungere thee with the holy crosse
> That Jesus was done on with fors.
> I conure thee with nailes three
> That Jesus was nailed upon the tree.
> I coungere thee with the precious blode
> That Jesus shewed upon the rode.
> I coungere thee with woundes five
> That Jesus suffred be his live.
> I coungere thee with that holy spere
> That Longeus to Jesus hert can bere.
> I coungere thee nevertheless
> With all the vertues of the Masse,
> And all the holy prayers of Seint Dorathy.
> In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.

The Latin inscription informs the reader in what context he will find the poem useful; until and unless he finds himself in such a context, the poem's force for him is limited to whatever devotional force the pious images call up. But of course the poem is not addressed to a reader--or even a human hearer--but to "what manere of evil" the speaker finds himself confronted with in a patient suffering from epilepsy or fever. Its topicality within this context must lie in the presumptive relevance of the message to that mysterious and malignant hearer; hence the attempt to nullify evil with good by reciting a list of the cruel sufferings Jesus turned into the supreme benefit.[14] On the other hand, its relevance within the context of a speech event overheard or read by a human auditor lies entirely in the possibility of his having to employ it himself on a similar occasion; it is the perlocutionary force of the piece that interests him primarily, and he will judge its efficacy by whether or not it "works" in each single instance of its use.

Perlocutionary force of a somewhat different sort is at issue in the following brief lyric printed by Robbins (1955:155):

> Go, hert, hurt with adversitee,
> And let my lady thy wondes see;
> And sey hir this, as I say thee:
> Farwell my joy, and welcom peine,
> Till I see my lady againe.

The personification of the heart as the hearer in the first line is matched by the further hearer-personifications of "joy" and "peine" in the fourth, which the "hert" is to address as surrogate hearers under its commission as surrogate speaker in delivering a message to the "lady," who in fact is the hearer the original speaker (he who speaks the poem) would like to "see againe" in the first place. With this embedding of abstracted participants and abstracted speech events it is hardly surprising that the topicality of the message rests upon an abstraction as well: "Farwell my joy, and welcom peine" is to be the speaker's lot. If, however, a particular individual--the lady herself--happens to be among the incidental hearers of this message (for the "hert" is the specific hearer to whom it is addressed), then it may have the desirable perlocutionary force of bringing speaker and lady together again. It seems to be one of the conventions of courtship that the fiction of a speech event is as pertinent as the fact of one.

It is not always the case that lyrics constructed on the logomorphic model of conversation require this dual analysis of the topicality of the message. Far more often than not, in fact, the topicality of the message as far as the reader is concerned is baldly (and some readers think excessively) apparent. These are lyrics on explicitly moral themes addressed to the reader himself rather than to a hearer we conceive of as internal to the speech event represented by the lyric. Put

another way, the deictic signals in these lyrics mark them as speech events in themselves, not as derived representations of speech events; the reader himself becomes part of the immediate speech event, for he is the hearer whom the speaker addresses. Person deixis in the lyrics of this group always marks the presence of either a speaker or a hearer, but we will need to specify the conditions under which the latter signals are to be interpreted as referring to the reader.

One of the most marked features of this group of lyrics is the frequent occurrence of the quasi-deictic lexical item "mon" or "man" used vocatively, or its compound "mankind" used as an antecedent for the first person plural pronoun: "Wrecche mon, wy artou proud, þat art of herth I-maked?" (Brown XIV:133); "Do bi salomones rede, Man, and so þu selth wel do" (Brown XIV:10); "for quike and for deade and al mankinde, and þat ws here god don, in heuene mot þal it finde" (Brown XIII:67); many examples could be given. These lexical items seem invariably to be associated with the moral themes characteristic of this group, as will become clear from a closer examination of the three lyrics from which these examples are taken.

The first of the three has at least the merit of brevity.

> Wrecche mon, wy artou proud,
> þat art of herth I-maked?
> hydyr 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.

The thesis of this piece is as bluntly pointed as the means used to convey it, the simple shock value of the last two lines, which derives from the incongruity between the final state of man's body and the

pride he exhibits in it before his death. The implication is that the departure of the soul shows the body for what it really is, corrupt and repulsive; hence, by extension, more attention should be paid to the needs of the soul and less to those of the body before they go their separate ways. This, of course, is a commonplace of Christian morality, and commonplaces are by definition always relevant even if, as in this case, they make the hearer uncomfortable.

Discomfiture in the reader (or hearer) seems often to be an effect aimed at in these lyrics; this is certainly the case with Brown XIII:10. Here is the first stanza:

> Man mei longe him liues wene,
> ac ofte him liyet þe wreinch;
> fair weder ofte him went to rene,
> an ferliche maket is blench.
> þar-vore, man, þu þe biþench,--
> al sel valui þe grene.
> wela-wey! nis king ne Quene
> þat ne sel drinke of deth-is drench.
> Man, er þu falle of þi bench,
> þu sinne aquench.

Without precisely contradicting man's expactation of long life the poem nevertheless casts considerable doubt on his chances for it by flatly contradicting his other pleasant expectations: the fair weather that turns to rain, the sunshine that suddenly disappears, the youthful green that fallows. None will be spared eventual death, not king nor queen.

The second stanza advances the argument by asserting that neither bodily strength "ne iweping ne bene, mede, liste, ne leches dreinch" will prevail against death's "wiþer-clench." All his props are knocked away; man stands naked and alone, prepared for the advice of the third stanza to "Do bi salomones rede, Man, and so þu selth wel do."

The poem might effectively (from our point of view) have ended here, but its speaker seems to sense the particular vulnerability of his hearer at this point and presses his advantage with unanswerable questions and uncomfortable images in the third stanza:

> Man fwi neltu þe bi-þenchen?
> Man fwi neltu þe bisen?
> of felthe þu ert isowe,
> weirmes mete þu selt ben.
> her nauest tu blisse days þre,
> al þi lif þu drist in wowe;
> wela-wey! deth þe sal dun þrowen
> þar þu wenest heye ste,
> In wo sal þi wele enden,
> in wop þi gle.

The speaker has now thoroughly prepared his hearer for the message of the fourth stanza. The world and fortune are, he asserts, "buth þine iuo"; they beguile the hearer "for to do þe wo." "þar-fore," he says, "let lust ouer-gon, man, and eft it sal þe liken." Thus he turns the very shortness of man's earthly life to his advantage, for it alone stands between the hearer and a better one.

It could scarcely be maintained, then, that this lyric is a reflection on the commonplace thesis of the shortness of man's life; rather it is an invitation to--even an imposition on--a hearer not merely to engage in such a reflection but to act upon it. This lyric, like others we have examined, is carefully calculated to obtain a perlocutionary force. But whereas in the case of Chaucer's complaint to his purse, for example, that hoped-for turn of events (if it were to take place) would be a by-product, so to speak, of the lyric, induced by the wit it aims at in the first place, in this case the hoped-for turn of events is aimed at directly and stated forthrightly. It is the difference between proceeding by indirection and proceeding directly. The

shock value of the controverted expectations and the grisly images is necessary in order to offset the hearer-reader's sovereign capability, in any direct confrontation, of ending the discourse at any point simply by walking away or closing the book. Hence, though such images have generally been regarded as owing to a gratuitous stylistic predilection for the gruesome, borne of a gratuitously gruesome age, we can see that in fact they are strategically employed elements of the speech events these lyrics represent.

The third example shows that such moralizing speakers do not always hold themselves aloof from those to whom they are speaking; they are quite capable of recognizing their own need for support as well, as is shown by the inclusive we of Brown XIII:67:

> Bidde huue with milde steuene,
> til vre fader þe king of heuene
> In þe mununge of cristis pine,
> For þe lauerd of þis hus an al lele hine,
> for alle cristinfolk that is in gode lif,
> that god schilde ham to-dai fro sinne and fro sithe,
> for alle tho men that are in sinne bunden
> that ihesu crist ham leyse for is hali wndes,
> for quike and for deade and al mankinde,
> and þat ws here god don, in heuene mot þai it finde,
> and for alle þat on herþe vs fedin and fostre,
> saie we nu alle þe hali pater noster.
>
> Ure fadir þat hart in heuene
> halged be þi name, with giftis seuene
> Samin cume þi kingdom,
> þi wille in herþe als in heuene be don,
> vre bred þat lastes ai
> gyue it hus þis hilke dai,
> and vre mis-dedis þu orgyue hus,
> als we forgyue þaim þat misdon hus,
> and leod us in-tol na fandinge,
> bot frels us fra alle iuele þinge. amen

Inclusiveness, in fact, is the keynote of this little piece, from the first person plural pronoun of the opening and closing lines to the very spirit of the Paternoster the speaker recites. One can't help but

notice, too, the gracious references to the earthly lord upon whom, evidently, the speaker depends for a measure of generosity: the "lauerd of þis hus," among whose "lele hine" the speaker hopes the lord will count yours truly, a lord who no doubt is intended to recognize himself again in the reference to "alle þat on herþe vs fedin and fostre." Carleton Brown notes this point, and suggests that the poem "was designed for members of a mendicant order on a soliciting expedition."[15] Whether this is so or not, the immediacy of the speech event context is unmistakable. As in the case of the lyrics just discussed, the function of the first twelve lines here is to prepare the hearer to perform some pious or morally desirable action. That perlocutionary thrust, in this case, would produce a choral recitation of the Paternoster as a minimal reward for the speaker's efforts on the hearers' behalf; and food, shelter, perhaps a monetary donation if the hearers truly have ears to hear.

As these examples show clearly, when a speaker employs the term "man" vocatively he intends his hearer to hear directly, not to overhear. The relevance of his message when addressed to this most generalized of hearers derives from what he conceives as the most generally pertinent of all topics, Christian morality. But these are not the only cases, nor the only topics, in which a speaker may address a hearer-reader directly. The difficulty lies in determining which is intended: the hearer-reader himself, for whom the poem is an immediate speech event, or a hearer conceived of as internal to the fictionalized speech event the poem represents. A comparative example should make the problem clear.

Here is the first stanza from Chaucer's epistolary poem addressed

to Sir Philip de la Vache, with the hearer-deictic pronouns underlined.[16]

> Flee fro the prees, and dwelle with sothfastnesse,
> Suffyce unto thy good, though it be smal;
> For hord hath hate, and climbing tikelnesse,
> Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal;
> Savour no more than thee bihove shal;
> Reule wel thyself, that other folk canst rede;
> And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

The interpretation of the second-person deictics here is withheld (through two more stanzas) until the Envoy, which begins "Therfore, thou Vache," thus unmistakably and unambiguously supplying a real-world referant--Vache--for the pronouns in question, by cataphoric co-reference. A much simpler instance of the same phenomenon is the opening line of a lyric printed by Robbins (1952:6): "Is tell yw my mynd, anes tayliur, dame." In these cases the hearer in the first instance is a character internal to the fiction of the lyric; the lyric represents a speech event as taking place between the speaker and that hearer.

On the other hand, there is no internal referant for the deictic "thou" in these lines from Robbins (1952:33):

> Summe men sayon þat y am blac.
> yt ys a colour for my prow;
> þer y loue þer ys no lac,
> y may not be so wyte as þou.

This is the single instance of the second person pronoun in the entire poem, which runs to 24 lines, yet its force seems more than merely rhetorical: it has the effect of creating an immediate flush of self-consciousness in the hearer-reader, so that he concedes the speaker's point without argument--a clever polemical strategy totally in harmony with the off-hand tone of the piece.

Or again, how do we interpret the person-deictics of this gnomic

piece (Robbins 1952:15)?

> Ich am of Irlaunde,
> ant of the holy londe
> of irlande.
> Gode sire, pray ich þe,
> for of saynte charite,
> come ant daunce wyt me
> In irlaunde.

If we are to understand this as an invitation to ourselves, the hearer-readers, we need a metaphorical interpretation for the speaker's request, for we cannot literally comply with it; on the other hand, if we give the request more literal force, we can see no one within the fiction of the speech event represented here whom the speaker may be addressing. Either interpretation involves ambiguity, and in both cases the ambiguity results directly from the ambiguity of reference of hearer deictics.

Paradoxically enough, the resolution of the ambiguity of hearer deixis, by analyzing the poem as an immediate speech event addressed to the hearer-reader, ambiguates in turn the poem's speaker deixis; if the hearer-reader is satisfied that he is being addressed directly, he is naturally less interested in the question "Why am I being addressed?" than in the question "Why is this speaker addressing me?" So, in a sense, with these hearer-determinate lyrics addressed to the hearer-reader we come full circle and find ourselves once again searching for the topicality of the message vis-a-vis the speaker. Professor Robbins has done just this, no doubt unconsciously, in titling the two pieces just cited "In Praise of Brunettes" and "The Irish Dancer." In each case he has worked backward from topicality to a nonce identification of the speaker, and has thereby provided an object lesson in the desirability for an editor not to project himself upon his texts by

extending them in a direction he thinks they should have taken. As Mary Louise Pratt has convincingly shown, we read titles as part of the works they head up.

My purpose in this chapter has been to display something of the scope with which the Middle English lyricists explored the possibilities they found inherent in the speech event models they incorporated in their poems. In particular, I have tried to show that the central interest, for a very large body of these lyrics, lies in our analysis of the identities of the speech act participants, speaker and hearer, and the topicality or relevance of the message within that context--the context of utterance. But the identities of the speaker and hearer are not the only deictic dimensions of these lyrics: utterances are anchored with respect to time and place as well as person. In the next chapter we will examine some lyrics whose central interest arises from an exploitation of topicality in the context of time and place--the context of action.

Notes

[1]Carleton Brown, ed., English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932); Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939); and G. V. Smithers, eds., Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century, 2nd ed., corrected (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957). These are hereinafter cited as Brown XII, Brown XV, and Brown XIV respectively.

[2]Fillmore, "Deixis II," p. 4.

[3]The designation first person plural for "we" and "us" and "our" is a misnomer since it refers ordinarily not to a chorus of speakers but to a single speaker and his companion or companions. Any case of true choral speaking must have been prearranged among the speakers (it would be highly unlikely that two or more people spontaneously produced the same utterance, one with reference to themselves as a group), hence is hardly comparable to the spontaneous contributions characteristic of conversation in any form.

[4]G. L. Brook, ed., The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of M.S. Harley 2253 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956).

[5]Brown XII, p. 204.

[6]Jacques Paul Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina. (Paris, 1852), Tomus 159, col. 284.

[7]Brook, p. 84.

[8]The text is from G. Wackernagel, Das Deutsche Kirchenlied: Von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), rpt. of Leipzig ed. of 1864, vol. 1, p. 162.

[9]Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series XXXVI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 150.

[10]Fillmore, "Deictic Categories in the Semantics of 'Come'," p. 225.

[11]Culler, p. 174.

[12]Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., Secular Lyrics of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 146.

[13]F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1961), p. 539.

[14]There may be a kind of homeopathic relevance to epileptic seizures or virulent fever in the particular sufferings described

here as well, such as the forcible spreading of Jesus's limbs on the cross. On the other hand, the imagery of binding and constriction, particularly notable in the first eight lines, may suggest the nature of the treatment of the patient, which presumably would accompany the conjuration. If this be the case, the following lines vividly suggest the procedure of bloodletting, familiar in medical practice down virtually to the present century. The reference to "Seint Dorathy" may be to Dorothea of Marienwerden (1347-1394) who, according to Abbe Engelbert, was "favoured with ecstasies and visions" and lived confined in a six by nine foot cell where she died "racked with sufferings and austerities." The Lives of the Saints, trans. Christopher and Anne Fremantle (New York: Collier Books, 1964), p. 456.

[15]Brown XIII, p. 218.

[16]Robinson, p. 536.

Chapter IV: Here and Now: Time and Place and the Context of Conflict

The presentation of dramatic conflict in literature is always rooted in time and place. This is as true of a modern stage play as it is of the earliest Greek dramas. So embedded in the practice of playwrighting is this deictic anchorage that a printed indication of the time and place of the action (the "setting") is as regular and universal a feature of the printed material accompanying the dialogue itself as the list of the _dramatis personae_. Even dramatic action never meant for the stage--the Homeric epics, Chaucer's _Troilus and Criseyde_, Milton's _Samson Agonistes_--invariably locates itself in time and space.

Conceptions of time and place and the linguistic means by which we distinguish among and identify them divide sharply into two groups: those which derive immediately and directly from the act of speaking and those which do not. The former group constitute the deictic signals of time and place and include all the ways by which we indicate the relationship between a message and the moment and location in which it is uttered. Time deixis comprises adverbials such as _now_, _then_, and _soon_, the verb tenses, and various pariphrastic constructions such as _this morning_; place deixis comprises such adverbials as _here_ and _there_ and pariphrastic constructions such as _to my right_. These phenomena have been catalogued and described exhaustively by Charles J. Fillmore[1] and we need not be concerned with their details here. What will concern us in this chapter is their relationship to Middle

English lyric practice, and in particular their relationship there to the fundamentally dramatic presentation of conflict which grows invariably out of a particular sense of time and place.

The incipiently dramatic qualities of much medieval poetry have been pointed out by several perceptive writers recently. In his Essai de poétique médiévale Paul Zumthor makes the point quite explicitly. For him, "Le caractère général le plus pertinent peut-être de la poésie médiévale est son aspect dramatique. Tout au long du moyen âge les textes semblent avoir été, sauf exceptions, destinés à fonctionner dans des conditions théâtrales: à titre de communication entre un chanteur ou récitant ou lecteur, et un auditoire. Le texte a, littéralement, un 'rôle à jouer' sur une scène."[2] While it is true that these remarks reflect predominantly upon the relationship between the speaker of the text and his audience in an oral cultural setting ("type de culture à dominante orale"), that is to say that they are directed towards the kinds of considerations raised in the previous chapter on person deixis, Zumthor goes on to point out the dramatic relevance of a sense of time and place as well: "Un texte se fait dans le temps," he says, and the various medieval poetic codes incorporate procedures which "permettant de produire des equivalents de la sensation spatiale" as well. The examples he cites do so in a very literal way. The liturgical trope ("jeu liturgique"), the chanson de geste, the romance and the drama proper ("jeu dramatique") all very likely were performed in just the kinds of places in which their internal action takes place, yielding a fruitful spatial mimesis: "Espace externe, auquel correspond un espace interne, engendre par le rayon visuel ou sonore qui, se deplacant dans l'oeuvre, ne cesse de la reveler sous des angles

differents, successifs et rarement mis en perspective."[3]

Alongside Zumthor's rather metaphysical speculations on the esthetics of performance in an oral culture we may place Peter Dronke's careful and concrete remarks on the same head in The Medieval Lyric. Devoting his entire introductory chapter to the topic of "Performers and Performance," Dronke repeatedly shows an interest in interpreting the entire range of early medieval European lyric poetry within the context of face-to-face performance. Attuned as he is to the dramatic qualities that mark the encounter between performer and audience, it is hardly surprising that Dronke's response to much of the best material from the period evinces the stir and excitement of the best theatrical experience. Speaking of the 13th century "Bargain of Judas," for example, he says that "seldom in medieval poetry has such dramatic compression been achieved in lyrical form. . . . It is one of the most 'modern' of medieval poems: with its swiftly changing tableaux, its terse, explosive use of dialogue, its sharp moments of tension and climax, one could well call it the first masterpiece of expressionism."[4] If the phrasing here smacks a bit of a review of a broadway opening, it unmistakeably points up the inherently dramatic quality of a lyric which tersely limns a sequence of events against the backdrop of a few sharply etched scenes. Nor is "The Bargain of Judas" especially unusual in this respect, except perhaps in its excellence; a considerable number of Middle English lyrics make use of fundamentally the same strategy of time and place deixis to exploit a dramatic topic.

Yet another sense of the near connection of time- and place-anchored lyrics to patently dramatic literature is conveyed by Rosemary Woolf. References to a connection between a lyric and one of the

mystery or morality plays may be found throughout her book; but whether or not such a connection exists for any particular lyric it is in general true, she says, that "most of them are very immediate, and give the effect of being a key speech detached from a whole dramatic scene in which the reader actually takes part." In fact, the reason that quite a number of the lyrics were eventually incorporated into the mystery plays, she maintains, is "not because the plays were lyrical, but because the lyrics were dramatic."[5]

Dramatic they were--and are--indeed, and that in the fundamental sense of embodying conflict. But it is specifically the relationship between the conflict or tension expressed or implied in the poem, which constitutes the topicality of the message, and the time- and place-deictic anchorage of the message which interests us here. From this point of view, a small number of deictically defined themes emerges, around which we can organize a large body of poems from the entire period: a group centered on the conception of "this world"; another on the transitoriness of time; a third on conditional or hypothetical conceptions of time; and a fourth involving complex inter-mixtures of these themes. A fifth group, with which we will begin, makes use for the most part of non-deictic conceptions of time and place in providing a setting for the dramatic material in the message. Because their anchorage is non-deictically specified they more clearly satisfy our conception of dramatic setting, and for that reason make a convenient introduction to the discussion.

The non-deictically anchored lyrics themselves may be subdivided into two groups: those in which a narrator identifies the time and place of a sequence of events, which he then narrates; and those which

are best described as occasional pieces, if we may extend that conception to include not merely dedicatory and commemorative verses, but also charms, epitaphs, book plates, "stations of the cross," and other lyrics whose primary significance derives from their connection with a particular time or place.

Peter Dronke, as noted above, has praised "The Bargain of Judas" (Brown XIII:25) for its achievement of "dramatic compression" in lyric form; his subtle explication of the various characters' motivations, particularly Judas's, shows insight into the poet's power of invention beyond the bare details of the Gospel narratives. But it may be possible to add to these insights by calling attention to the interplay between non-deictic and deictic anchorage within the poem. It begins, as Labov contends all narratives do, by swiftly identifying the time, place, and protagonists of the narrative:

> Hit wes up-on a scereþorsday þat vre louerd aros,
> ful milde were þe wordes he spec to iudas:
> 'Iudas þou most to iurselem oure mete for-to bugge'

The place name Jerusalem unambiguously identifies a geographical location without reference to the location of the speaker who is, at the time it is uttered, quoting the words of one of the characters in the narrative he is relating; hence, like all place names, it is a non-deictic way of referring to a location. Similarly, the time at which these events are said to take place, upon a Sheer Thursday (a term replaced in modern usage by Holy or Maundy Thursday) non-deictically identifies the time of the narrative by placing it at a particular point within the cycle of the liturgical calendar. Of course, the poet's anachronistic naivete constitutes part of the immediacy of dramatic impact Dronke speaks of: the events the poet relates took place

not merely on a Holy Thursday but on The Holy Thursday. This was the Holy Thursday that, after the event, defined the term "Holy Thursday." To be more accurate, though, the poet calls it scereþorsday, which the OED derives from a Norse root meaning 'bright, clean, or pure,' hence 'cleansed or free from sin or guilt' (s.v. skere). The application to this particular day in the liturgical calendar apparently dervies from practices arising in later Church history, either the tradition of confessing on this day or the custom of cleaning the altars on this day; however, Dronke's insights into Judas's guilt-born motivation--reflected in precisely those details the poet superimposes upon the Gospel account--suggest a particularly appropriate connection between the poem's central theme and its setting at this time.

Dronke has also called attention to the lyric's "swiftly changing tableaux," a term that is felicitously exact from the point of view of deictic interpretation. For once the general setting is established all changes of locale are managed by references that are deictic to the characters themselves, and this internal deixis creates the effect of immediately significant configurations--tableaux. Judas's meeting with his sister "fer i þe brode strete" is the first of these. Ragnar Rommetveit (1968) points out that this kind of ellipsis--the particular street intended, known to both speaker and hearer, need not be specified--is characteristic of deictically anchored utterances.[6] The rock upon which Judas sleeps with his sister is another instance. The next tableaux is invoked with the line "fforet hym [Judas] com þe riche ieu þat heiste pilatus."

Fillmore has devoted considerable attention to the deictic implications inherent in the verb 'come,' of which much more later; for

the present it will be enough to note that the verb implies the simultaneous presence in the same place of the two substantives in construction with it, i.e. Judas and Pilate. The sense of place the verb invokes is thus entirely deictic: ground zero of the narrative, for the moment, is wherever Judas is, no more. Six lines further in the narrative another 'come' invokes another tableaux: "In him com ur lord gon as is postles setten at mete." No transition between the two is necessary, for the verb itself implies a new focal point for the action. Within this tableaux the climactic exchange takes place:

> 'Wou sitte ye, postles, ant wi nule ye ete?
> ic am aboust ant isold to-day for oure mete.'
> Vp stod him iudas, 'lord am i þat frec?
> i nas neuer o þe stude þer me þe euel spec.'

For Dronke, this last line is "the very thing that Christ knows to be false," hence it gives away Judas's guilty conscience in a non sequitur; but the non sequitur has a specifically deictic coloring. "I was never in a place where evil was spoken of you" is neither precisely a lie nor precisely irrelevant in the context of Christ's words; but it is an equivocation about the places Judas has been in today.

Whether or not the text as it stands is complete is a moot question, but Dronke's remark about its "subdued close" underscores its completeness as an esthetic experience. Once again, though, we notice that this effect can be attributed to elements of the lyric's deictic anchorage. For just as it begins by noting the time of the events it chronicles, the poem closes with a time-specific prediction about the significance of those events: 'Stille þou be, peter, Wel i þe icnowe; þou wolt fur-sake me þrien ar þe coc him crowe.' The cock-crow Jesus refers to is more than a mere figure for a certain time of day--he

means the very moment when next a cock crows. Hence the expression is as deictically anchored as its paraphrase 'tomorrow morning' would have been in the same context. Dronke is correct in reading a significance in the silence that follows the lyric's last line--"The two deserters are left standing, with no more to say"--an interpretive insight we can credit to the fact of the lyric's grounding in the time deixis governing immediate speech events. Only with the illusion of spontaneous speech fresh upon us does the silence seem related to the words that just precede it.

The next three poems I would like to discuss have in common the motif of the springtime opening, but I would like to call attention to yet another trait of theirs, and a more interesting one. The texts are "The Thrush and the Nightingale" (Brown XIII:52), "Now Springs the Spray" (Brown XIII:62), and "Spring" (Brook:11). These, of course, do not exhaust the Middle English lyrics with springtime openings--rather, they are three of the best and clearest examples of a generalization about such lyrics which would not be too difficult to extend to the others as well. And that is that these springtime openings always introduce, curiously enough, a message in which conflict or tension or contention predominates.

All is, at first, the birdsong and the blossoms of the locus amoenus. "The Thrush and the Nightingale begins:

> Somer is comen wiþ loue to toune,
> Wiþ blostme, and wiþ brides roune
> þe note of hasel springeþ,
> þe dewes darkneþ in þe dale.
> For longing of þe niȝttegale,
> þis foweles murie singeþ.

The Harley lyric "Spring" shows the virtuoso's touch with a commonplace:

Lenten ys come wiþ loue to toune,
wiþ blosmen ant wiþ briddes roune,
þat al þis blisse bryngeþ.
Dayese es in þis dales,
notes suete of nyhtegales,
vch foul song singeþ.
þe þrestelcoc him þreteþ oo;
away is huere wynter wo
when woderoue springeþ.
þis foules singeþ ferly fele,
ant wlyteþ on huere wynne wele,
þat al þe wode ryngeþ.

But much briefer--only a single line--is the note of bliss in "Now Springs the Spray," before the undertow of tension asserts itself:

Nou sprinkes the sprai,
al for loue icche am so seeke
that slepen i ne mai.

The tension comes, though, to the others as well; it is only a question of time. It begins in the second stanza of "The Thrush and the Nightingale," keynoted by the strife which opens and closes the stanza:

Hic herde a strif bitweies two--
þat on of wele, þat oþer of wo.
Bitwene two I-fere,
þat on hereþ wimmen þat hoe beþ hende,
þat oþer hem wole wiþ mi te shende.
þat strif ȝe mowen I-here.

There follows a debate between the two birds in idealized conversation form. The thrush maintains that women are "fikele and fals to fonde," that they "wercheþ wo in euchan londe," while the nightingale is "on bi nome þat wol shilden [women] from shome." At length the nightingale carries the day by citing the instance of Mary, who "ne weste of sunne ne of shame," as refutation of the thrush's claim that among a hundred women there aren't five who can remain chaste or refrain from working general woe or bringing shame upon men. Mary's superior virtue defeats the thrush's cynical misogyny; he departs not merely the field

but the country, saying "icham ouercome þoru hire þat bar þat holi sone."

Not quite so neatly does the tension of the Harley lyric resolve itself. The Arnoldian note of sadness makes itself heard suddenly at the end of the second stanza:

> Mody meneþ, so doþ mo;
> ichot ycham on of þo,
> for loue þat likes ille.

Unlike the speaker of "The Thrush and the Nightingale" this speaker does not merely report a strife he overhears--the turmoil here is within his own soul, reflected in the contrast between his dark ruminations and the general gaity of the season. Even worms, he reflects, use the darkness of their surroundings to woo, but as for him,

> ȝef me shal wonte wille of on
> þis wunne weole y wole forgon
> ant wyht in wode be fleme.

Flight, evidently, is in his future, too; but it is the flight of escapism, not of honest defeat.

"Now Springs the Spray" belongs to a popular sub-group of these non-deictically anchored lyrics in which a narrator encounters another speaker or speakers, either in a dream or while out riding for recreation. If he encounters a pair of speakers, it is their dialogue, which he recounts, which embodies the conflict or tension ("The Thrush and the Nightingale" has such a form); if he encounters a single speaker, as in the case of "Now Springs the Spray," their conversation expresses the conflict. The three line burden establishes the time of the events by a deictic circumlocution for springtime, "Nou sprinkes the sprai," and manages to suggest the theme of conflict too in the oxymoronic love-agony topos "al for loue icche am so seeke/ that slepen i ne mai."

These lines precede the first stanza, and then follow it and each of the other two, so that they frame the whole and underscore the note of tension.

Just as tension arises from incongruity in the refrain, it is further developed by incongruity in the first stanza. The narrator, out for a ride "o mi pleyinge," encounters a little maid who suddenly sings "'the clot him clingge! wai es him i louue-longinge sal libben ai'". In the second stanza the narrator's response to these words generates a new kind of incongruity in his ironic characterizations of the maid and her song.

> Son icche herde that mirie note,
> þider i drogh;
> i fonde hire in an herber swot
> under a bogh
> with ioie inogh.
> son i asked, 'thou mirie mai
> hwi sinkes-tou ai
> Nou sprinkes the sprai,' &c. (emphasis added)

Her answer, given in the third stanza, raises incongruity to a thematic level--it is, she says, the very source of her present state of disconsolation, for "'mi lemman me haues bi-hot of louue trewe; he chaunges a newe.'"

In the case of each of these three poems, the motif of conflict or tension is directly linked to the poem's setting in time. They are all springtime lyrics which contrast a message of unresolved conflict with the spirit of the time; hence the incongruity of the setting with the theme serves further to underscore the theme itself. This is not always the case with these quasi-narrative lyrics, of course, but dramatic conflict is central to them all.

The 14th century Vernon MS., the texts of which are reprinted in

Brown XIV, includes four lyrics which employ the motif of a chance encounter to motivate the narration of a dramatic theme (nos. 95, 96, 105, and 107). It is characteristic of these lyrics, however, to bring the conflict to a resolution. In "Mercy Passes All Things," for example, the theme is presented through a kind of beast-parable. Here (as in the other lyrics in the Vernon series) it is place deixis, rather than time deixis, which provides the significant frame for the events of the narrative:

> Bi west, vnder a wylde wode-syde,
> In a launde þer I was lente,
> Wlanke deor on grounde gunne glyde,
> And lyouns Raumping uppon bente,
> Beores, wolues wiþ Mouþes wyde,
> þe smale Beestes þei al to-rente.

The west may signify specifically the uncivilized Welsh hinterland (as a 14th-century Englishman might have conceived it), hence, by extension, any region where the rule of morality or law is subordinate to the rule of force, or the kind of permanent spiritual coordinate illustrated in the stage plan for The Castle of Perserverance, where it represents "Mundus' scaffold," as opposed to the east, "Deus' scaffold"; in any case the event the narrator witnesses there provides him an occasion to reflect upon his parlous times, and at length bears out his theme. What he witnesses is the capture of a small bird by a merlin, which bears the victim off into a tree, evidently to devour it. But the small bird, though it cannot talk, seems to the narrator to express the thesis that "merci passeþ alle þinge." So strongly does the scene cause him to reflect on this thesis that the narrator imagines that "Rihtwyse god"--God himself--presents the argument, in the course of which a number of contemporary social issues are alluded to: simony,

in particular, is mentioned among the generally vicious practices of the day (ll. 133-42), and the nobility and clergy are especially criticized for their ignoble behavior (ll. 157-66). The night passes (suggesting the affiliation of this lyric with more explicit dream visions), and in the morning the merlin releases the small bird; whether urged to do so by "gentrie" or not the narrator cannot say. He concludes with the pious prayer that at our ending we might be able to repeat the refrain, saying then by our own experience, "'Now Merci passeþ alle þinge.'"

"Merci God and graunt Merci" (no. 107) is quite similar in theme and penitential tone to the lyric just discussed, and begins with the same detail of a western setting: "As I wandrede her bi weste Faste vnder a Forest syde," In this case the narrator encounters a penitent man grieving for his offenses and begging for mercy in the refrain. The sight of this man, both hands held on high as he "goes to rest" under a bough, inspires the narrator to an examination of conscience and quasi-confession loosely structured on the commonplaces of the five wits, the ten commandments, and the seven deadly sins. Resolution of the conflict in this case is reflected in the narrator's certainty of absolution: his experience, he believes, has been a salutary one,

> For [God] woldest not þat I weore lost.
> þe Fader haþ ȝiuen me a miht,
> þe sone a science and a siht,
> And wit wo welde me worschupely,
> þe Holigost vr grace haþ diht.

Several lyrics of this form are squarely within the dream-vision tradition, particularly those arising in the fifteenth century in which the narrator encounters a "maide" and her infant child--clearly Mary and Jesus, and sometimes identified as such in the lyric.[7] As is

the case with all the lyrics we have been examining in this section, the narrator establishes the time or place of the incident he narrates within the first few lines; but in these lyrics the anchorage is deictic, not non-deictic. Brown XV:2, "Here I Sit Alone, Alas! Alone," for example, begins with the refrain "Alone, alone, alone, alone, alone;/ Here I sitt alone, alas! alone." and continues in the first stanza

> As I walked me this endurs day
> to þe grene wode for to play
> & all heuyness to put away
> my-self alone.

The adverbials "here" of the refrain and "the other day" of the first stanza are true deictics: they derive their particular significance from the circumstances of the situation in which they are uttered. The "green wood" is an instance of the kind of elliptical place reference possible within a deictically anchored utterance, comparable to the detail of the "brode street" discussed above in connection with "The Bargain of Judas." Of course, the "green wood" has imagistic value as well: it can be interpreted either as shorthand for the <u>locus amoenus</u> or as the index of what Frye calls the "green world," a place where protagonists profit from instructive experience. In any case, the narrator tells us indirectly what is most important about these details. His estrangement from society, caused by the "heuyness" he feels, contrasts with the heavy cheer of the little society he chances upon, so much more significant than his own. Though the maiden-mother tries to console him, the child weeps: "'Moder, me thynkith it is ryȝt ill that men me sekyth for to spill.'" Her response closes the piece on an inconclusive though generally positive note:

> 'Sone,' she sayd, 'let it be In þi thought,
> for mannys gilt is not with-sought;

þu art he þat hath all wrought,
& I þi moder alone.'

A clearer instance of the dream-vision affiliation of these maiden and son encounter lyrics is afforded by Brown XV:4, which begins:

þis endres nyght A-bout mydnyght
As I me lay for to sclepe,
I hard a may syng lullay
for powaret so sco wepe.

Similarly, the refrain of Brown XV:5, "She Sang, Dear Son, Lullay," places it in the dream-vision tradition:

Thys yonder nyȝth y sawe A syȝte,
A sterre As bry th As ony daye
& euer A-monge A maydene songe,
'by by, lully, lullaye.'

And again, Brown XV:72 opens with a vision at night:

As I lay vp-on a nyth
My þowth was on a berd so brith
That men clepyn marye ful of myth
Redemptoris mater.

All of these speak of the vision they relate as having taken place just prior to the poetic speech event itself, in true deictic fashion, a formal device which goes far toward accounting for the immediacy of these lyrics often spoken of in the literature on them. But they are exceptional in this regard among the lyrics whose general form is the narration of an incident or an exchange of dialogue which develops an inherently dramatic situation. Most of these, as we have seen, locate the dramatic situation in non-deictic time or space in order to gain a setting, in the conventional sense in which that term is applied to drama; the incident of Christ's coming, evidently, is felt to have a significance which transcends the particularities of time and place--it is relevant to every time and place--hence it deserves the unconventional, deictic setting of the last four examples discussed.

Very good evidence that these encounter lyrics were perceived as a sub-genre with its own distinctive formal features survives in a secular burlesque of the form from Porkington MS 10, printing in Robbins (no. 119) as "The Hunted Hare." It begins:

> Bi a forrest as I gan fare,
> Walkyng al myselven a-lone,
> I hard a mornyng of an haare,
> Rouffully schew mad here mone.

The details of the forest setting, the solitary narrator, and the overhearing of a complaint have been faithfully reproduced, but the substitution of the hare for a human speaker (or for the non-game birds that figure human sentiments) gives the spirit of the piece away. The hare's complaint is full of the highest drama:

> Dere-worth god, how shal I leve
> And leyd my lyve is lond?
> ffrov dale to doune I am I-dreve;
> I not where I may syte or stond!

Evidently the extent of the mourner's protestations had come to be felt as a sore point: the redundancy of "how shal I leve and leyd my lyfe in lond," as well perhaps as its excessive alliteration, seem to echo the ornate diction of:

> I met a mayde at þe citeys ende,
> snobbynge & syȝnge sche wes ny schente,
> . . .
> Sche tuggyd & tere with gret turment;
> sche brake hure skynne boþe body & brest,
> etc. (Brown XV:6)

This continues in the same ponderous fashion through ten more 12-line stanzas; the author of "The Hunted Hare," for his part, produced 19 quatrains.

A large body of lyrics has survived whose unique relevance to a particular time and place entitles their editors to classify them as

occasional pieces; if we add to these those lyrics which have a particular connection with a general kind of time or place, or class of times or places, we have a very large group indeed. But since the nature of the connection between the deictic material and the topicality of the message is easy to see in each case, a few examples will be sufficient to illustrate what is interesting about this group.

Most of these lyrics, by their very nature, are secular, but a small number (Brown XIV prints three) were evidently intended to be linked with the observation of the Hours of the Cross. Brown XIV:30, for example, is divided into eight groups of from two to four stanzas, each group linked to one of the canonical hours by means of a reference to the events of the corresponding hour on the day of the crucifixion (though that notion is anachronistic).

The section labeled "Mid-day" (sext), for example, begins "At middai, idesu, wit mild mode, þou spred þi bodi on þe rode." It was evidently part of the point of the observation of the Hours of the Cross to mentally re-enact, as it were, the sequence of events at Calvary. This practice seems to have died out, supplanted perhaps by the observation of the Way of the Cross, also called the Stations of the Cross, in which "the soul of the onlooker is moved to sorrowful contemplation" at each of "14 chosen representations of the sufferings of Christ on His way to Calvary."[8] The deictic orientation of this practice is clearly spatial rather than temporal, for the penitent moves from station to station, contemplating at each stop the event represented there. Moreover, the practice seems to have originated as a "pious imitation of the pilgrims who traveled to the Holy Land to visit the places hallowed by Christ's sufferings" so that in point of historical

fact the Way of the Cross is an imitation of a pilgrimage, itself an imitation of the Via Dolorosa.

The canonical hours, to return to the lyric in hand, like any cyclically recurring demarcation of time, are non-deictic temporal references, since they are defined, at least approximately, by reference to a naturally occurring sequence of events and have nothing to do with the moment of utterance of a speech event. The poem can be seen, then, as a way of making sacred the moments of the day by linking the stages of its routine cycle to the events of salvation history in successive meditative moments, as though the immediacy of the meditative speech event confers its deixis upon the routine of the quotidian cycle and restores every moment to the moment of grace.

More typical of the occasional lyrics are the Boar's Head Carols, of which Robbins:55 is a good example:

> Caput apri Refero
> Resonens laudes domino.
>
> The boris hed In hondes I brynge,
> with garlondes gay & byrdes syngynge!
> I pray you all helpe me to synge,
> Qui estis in conviuio.
>
> The boris hede, I vnderstond,
> ys cheff seruyce in all this londe,
> wher-so-ever it may be fonde,
> seriutur cum sinapio.
>
> The boris hede, I dare well say,
> anon after the XIIth day,
> he taketh his leve & goth a-way--
> Exiuit tunc de patria.

It is not difficult to imagine this song's being sung to accompany the actual bearing in of the <u>pièce de résistance</u> on festive occasions in the great manors, the learned among the company eagerly anticipating the humor of the Latin tag at the end of each stanza. No doubt the

twelve day Christmas celebration was most often the occasion of its singing, but it may equally well have accompanied other extended celebrations.

Another verse appropriate to a particular kind of occasion is the following traveller's charm, Robbins:64:

> Here I ame and fourthe I mouste,
> & in Iesus Criste is all my trust.
> no wicked thing do me no dare,
> nother here nor Elles whare.
> the father with me; the sonne with me;
> the holly gosste, & the trienete,
> be by-twyxte my gostely Enime & me.
> In the name of the father, & the sonne,
> And the holly goste, Amen.
> Amen.

Solitary travel was by all accounts hazardous in the Middle Ages, and remained so for centuries afterward (my own grandfather felt it necessary to carry a handgun when traveling by horse on business in the remoter parts of Alabama around 1900). The tremulous determination of "Here I ame and fourthe I mouste" is particularly appealing; anchorage, as it were, is what the speaker most craves but must forego.

Though versified weather prognostications have little poetic value, their expression of a body of belief in the predictive value of events occurring on particular days of the year gives them a peculiar interest in the context of a discussion of time and place deixis. If a man knows this St. Paul's day prognostication, for example, he knows much about what lies before him (Robbins:71):

> Giff sanct Paullis day be fair and cleir,
> Than sal be-tyd ane happie yeir.
> Gif it chances to snaw or rane,
> Than sal be deir all kynde of grayne.
> and giff þe wind be hie on loft,
> Than weir sall vex þe kingdome oft.
> and gif þe cloudis mak darke þe skye,
> Boith nowte and foull that yeir sall dye.

Saint Paul's day is not a deictically defined point in time, but one that is fixed by the Church's calendar as June 29. The prognostication "works," however, by projecting elements of the weather which can only be determined by immediate experience onto the future by simple homeopathy. It seeks to give greater than immediate significance to transitory but immediately experienced events, hence to orient (and thus control) weather in the same way that deixis orients and controls time and space.

That, too, is the lesson of this tombstone inscription, Robbins: 126:

> All ye that passe be thys holy place,
> Both spirituall & temporall of euery degre,
> Remembyr your-selfe well duryng tyme & space:
> I was as ye are nowe; and as I, ye shalbe.
> . . .

The entire significance of this verse lies in its exploitation of deictic anchorage: through the medium of written language the speaker's here and now is conjoined with the hearer's here and now. The difference in their states, the poem asserts, is as easily effaced as the difference in their deictic anchorages. Nevertheless, the poem is appropriate only for particular kinds of places--grave-sites. Hence its fundamental affiliation with place is non-deictic.

Four great time and place-deictic themes do run through the Middle English lyrics, however, and with this discussion of non-deictically anchored lyrics as a background we can turn now to a discussion of the "This World," "Ubi Sunt,' "When . . . Then," and Complex groups of deictically anchored lyrics.

The deictic motif of "this world" is always invoked as an index of the fleeting attractions of man's earthly existence, in contrast to

the existence he will enjoy--or endure--forever in the hereafter. Thus it is associated exclusively with religious or moral themes from the earliest times. The well-known thirteenth century lyric "Worldes blis ne last no throwe" (Brown XIII:46) is an early, and evidently widely circulated (for it survives in at least three manuscripts), expression of the theme. The first stanza encapsulates the point, which is rather repeated than developed in the subsequent five (or six, depending upon the MS).

> Worldes blis ne last no þrowe,
> hit wit ant wend a-wey a-non;
> þe lengur þat hich hit i-knowe
> þe lasse hic finde pris þer-on,
> for al hit is imeynd wyd kare,
> mid sorewe ant wid uuel fare,
> ant at þe laste pouere ant bare
> hit let mon, wen hit ginnet gon.
> al þe blisse þis here ant þere
> bi-louketh at hende wop ant Mon.

Many specifically deictic elements link this lyric with the here and now of an immediate speech event: "al shal gon þat her mon howet" (l. 11); "þe mon þat her no god ne sowet" (l. 13); "al þe blisse of þisse liue" (l. 21); "þu shalt al bileuen here" (l. 25). These, in combination with the direct address to the listener cannot fail to create the illusion of an immediate speech event, one whose topicality lies in the very contrast between two different perceptions of the same surrounding circumstances. "You are licking honey from a thorn," the poet admonishes his hearer, "if you see your love in the bliss of this world, for it full of bitterness" (ll. 35-37); "therefore," he advises, "bethink yourself well, and cleanse yourself of your misdeeds" (ll. 65-66). The moral is a commonplace familiar to every reader of Middle English literature, but the use of the deictic elements in its

expression lends it an immediacy of impact it otherwise would not have.

A compact form and a reference to proverbial lore add interest to this employment of the theme from the MS. Harley 2253 group (Brooke: 11).

> Wynter wakeneþ al my care,
> nou þis leues waxeþ bare;
> ofte y sike ant mourne sare
> when hit comeþ in my þoht
> of þis worldes ioie hou hit geþ al to noht.
>
> Nou hit is ant nou hit nys,
> also hit ner nere ywys.
> þat moni mon seiþ soþ hit ys:
> al goþ bote Godes wille,
> alle we shule deye þah vs like ylle.
>
> Al þat grein me graueþ grene,
> nou hit faleweþ al bydene;
> Iesu, help þat hit be sene,
> ant shild vs from helle,
> for y not whider y shal ne hou longe her duelle.

The composer of this lyric knows he is exploiting a commonplace; in fact, he believes it adds authority to his own observations to point out their relationship to proverbial wisdom: "þat moni mon seiþ soþ hit ys: al goþ bote Godes wille," etc.

For Zumthor, such citation of proverbial wisdom is part of the mechanism by which the poet asserts the historicity of his work, that is its place within the collective cultural whole, which in turn guarantees it its veracity: "Par ces perpétuels retours [i.e. l'introduction de dictons ou d'expressions proverbiales aux articulations du texte], par cette littérature dans la littérature, sera plus manifestement comblée, sanctionnée, justifiée, l'attente d'une collectivité pour laquelle le poème, en vertu d'une opposition radicale avec ce qui n'est pas lui, est toujours vrai."[9] But we need not invoke a cultural collectivity, with mysterious collective yearnings needing to be

accounted for, to understand the basis for this practice. Its origin in the deictic dynamics of immediate speech events is clear: what is proverbial, what is spoken by many men, is ipso facto not to be held strictly to the present speaker's account. He need not demonstrate its veracity since it is not original with him. Like any proposition, this one will be true if every instance of it is true, hence the very frequency of its repetition argues that, were it unsound, that would previously have been discovered.

The winter setting of the poem is, of course, non-deictic. As the season of death for the vegetative world when, the poet asserts (somewhat anti-naturalistically) all grain is buried unripe, winter becomes a metaphor for human life suddenly cut off; it is not so much a fixed date as a relative terminus ad quem, aptly figuring the poet's state of mind as he muses on the questions of whither he shall go and how long remain here.

Another of the Harley lyrics, Brook:10, cites authority of a very different kind in support of essentially the same thesis. The first four stanzas closely paraphrase the parable of the laborers in the vineyard from the twentieth chapter of Matthew's Gospel; then in the fifth stanza the poet applies the lesson to his own time and place:

> þis world me wurcheþ wo;
> rooles ase þe roo,
> y sike for vnsete,
> ant mourne ase men doþ mo
> for doute of foule fo,
> hou y my sunne may bete.

Brook notes the change here from the narrative of the first four stanzas to the "style of the penitential lyric" but does not feel that argues corruption of the text. "The poet remembers," he says, "that

he, as well as the labourers in the vineyard, is in danger of losing God's love."[10] Evidently he has in mind the poem's last six lines, which run:

> þis mon þat Matheu ȝef
> a peny þat was so bref,
> þis frely folk vnfete,
> ȝet he ȝyrnden more,
> ant saide he come wel ȝore,
> ant gonne is loue forlete.

But clearly this lesson is not something the poet suddenly "remembers," for he has already told us that he is restless as a roe deer and sighs after what he knows is evil: this world is too much with him. He yearns for more, like the man in the parable, and must learn to reconcile himself to the terms of the "agreement" God has made with man. However, his formulation of that agreement, paraphrasing verse 16 of Matthew's chapter, departs more radically from the language of the source than anything else in the poem. In the Vulgate Matthew's text runs "Sic erunt novissimi primi, et primi novissimi. Multi enim sunt vocati, pauci vero electi," but in the lyric this becomes:

> ȝef y may betere beode
> to mi latere leode,
> to leue nam y nout lees;
> to alle þat eyer hider eode
> to do to-day my neode
> ichulle be wraþþelees.

What is particularly striking here is the transposition of the gnomic and timeless epigrams of the original into an utterance rooted deictically in time and place: "To all that come here to do my bidding today, I will be wrathless." This poem expresses a sense of the tention between the state of sin and the immediacy of the moral imperative better than any, perhaps, until the age of Donne.

Later treatments of the theme, particularly in the fifteenth

century, tend to exhibit the self-consciousness that results from over-ingenious attempts to freshen what is no longer felt freshly. "This lyfe, I see, is but a cheyre feyre," observes one of the fifteenth century practitioners of the theme (Brown XV:149), reflecting further that "All thyngis passene and so most I algate," Mixing his metaphors he adds:

> To-day I sat full ryall in a cheyere,
> Tyll sotell deth knokyd at my gate,
> And on-avysed he seyd to me, chek-mate!

The poem is evidently intended to be understood as a valedictory of the departing soul to the body, now laid out "wormys to fede," but not only has the freshness of the poet's conception faded, but the certainty of his technique as well--the lines "Whan I haue ended all myn aduersite, Graunte me in paradise to haue a mancyon" hardly accord with the notion that time is already up and the game over. Nevertheless, we still see the outlines of a dramatic conception deictically anchored in the conception of "this world."

If the strategy of the "This World" group of lyrics is to emphasize the transitory nature of man's existence by deprecating the passing attractions of this middle earth, another group of lyrics exploits essentially the same moralistic resource by commenting directly on the passing of time itself. This group, which I will call the "Ubi Sunt" group after the best-known formulation of a group of inter-related ideas, exploits the moral implications of change brought about by the passage of time, as the "This World" group exploits similar implications brought about by change of place.

Not that the temporal and spatial dimensions of change are wholly distinguishable, except for the sake of discussion. The deictic

overlapping which in fact often occurs is well illustrated by what is perhaps the best known expression of the ubi sunt topos in Middle English, Brown XIII:48. Its opening line exactly translates the Latin "Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?", to which it then adds the vivid details which insure its interest as poetry:

> Uuere beþ þey biforen vs were,
> Houndes ladden and hauekes beren
> And haddeb feld and wode?
> þe riche leuedies in hoere bour,
> þat wereden gold in hoere tressour
> Wiþ hoere briȝtte rode;
>
> Eten and drounken and maden hem glad;
> Hoere lif was al wiþ gamen I-lad,
> Men keneleden hem biforen,
> þey beren hem wel swiþe heye--
> And in a twincling of on eye
> Hoere soules weren forloren.

The rhetorical question has some existential force for its point when its deictic anchorage is considered. If there were people before us, the speaker asks, where are they now? Their absence from the physical space of the speech event argues, in effect, their nonexistence, yet the vivid detail with which the speaker describes them--the men afield with their hounds and hawks, the ladies with gold in their tresses--confers on them an undeniable reality. Their existence is present only in the then-ness of the past tenses of the verbs of this passage, relentlessly consigning their moments in the sun to a time anterior to the present speaker's. His primal place and time are his own here and now, to which they belong only by virtue of his memory's power to summon them up.

The poet's interest in these men and women lies in the fact that he can exploit the difference between their former and present states to drive home a moral: "Hoere paradis hy nomen here, And nou þey lien

in helle I-fere, þe fuir hit brennes heuere." The shift in verb tense between the clauses telling what they took while here and where they now lie signals a permanent shift for the duration of the poem; the six stanzas which follow this shift contain present tense verbs only, as the speaker addresses his listener directly in the kind of immediate speech event discussed in the previous chapter: "Dreȝy here, man, þenne if þou wilt a litel pine þat me þe bit." Having served their purpose, the bygone men and women are forgotten. The poet has answered his own rhetorical question with finality and it ceases to interest him any further. The task in hand commands his entire attention.

Similar instances of the close linking of place and time deixis can be found in the productive motif of "three sorrowful things" (Brown XIII:11A and B, 12A and B). These closely related lyrics express their point with a succinct and epigrammatic force, merely stating, not solving, a problem for the reader.

> þru tidigge us sumet iche dei--
> ful wel leue me his may:
> On, We sulle honne;
> þath oþer, we nite wanne;
> þe þridde his of muchel kare,--
> we nite fwider we sulle fare.

The fact of our going hence is a problem in the meaning of place deixis; the fact that we cannot know when our going will take place is a problem in the meaning of time deixis; and the fact that our destination is unknown argues that we are in for a general and sweeping reorientation, whatever the event.

Sometimes, as in the case of the following lyric, the poet finds a metaphor in a non-deictic conception of time for the disquieted state of his speaker's mind--or soul.

Mirie it is while sumer ilast
ȝif fugheles song,
oc nu neche ȝindes blast
and þeder strong.
Ej! ej! þhat þis nicht is long,
and ich ȝid ȝel michel wrong
soregh and murne and fast.

The fast-approaching season of storms brings with it the same lesson for this reflective speaker as the speakers of the preceding poems in this group have conveyed: the sovereign factuality of this time and place, than which nothing seems more real, more fixed, is delusory. Change is at the heart of man's existence, a simple fact the moral dimensions of which the lyricists constantly exploited.

Even such a seemingly irremediable wrong as the first, the prototypical sin, acquires a positive value in the light of the events of salvation history, giving rise to the topos of the felix culpa, the fortunate fall that leads ultimately to Christ's rising. This simple fifteenth century lyric celebrates this paradox (Brown XV:83).

Adam lay I-bowndyn, bowndyn in a bond,
fowre þowsand wynter þowt he not to long;
And al was for an appil, an appil þat he tok,
As clerkis fyndyn writyn in here book.

Ne hadde þe appil take ben, þe appil taken ben,
ne hadde neuer our lady a ben heuene qwen;
Blyssid be þe tyme þat appil take was,
þer-fore we mown syngyn 'deo gracias!'

Two dispensations are contrasted here: the Adam-dispensation of a time gone by, marked by the past tenses of "lay," "thought," and "was," and the speaker's dispensation, which includes us as reader-hearers as well in the "we" of the last line, marked by the present tense of the poem's last line. The shift from past tense to present corresponds to the Christian's conception of the shift from the Old Law to the New, under which salvation is possible: "Therefore we may

sing 'deo gracias!'"

Another group of lyrics explores time as a continuum along which events have a significance owing to their relative relationship to each other, especially the relationship of implied simultaneity conveyed by the grammatical relative construction When . . . Then. One such lyric uses this deictic motif as a framework upon which to hang a simple series of anaphoric clauses, intended evidently to accumulate a certain shock value by their repetition of the grislier details of human death (Brown XIII:71):

> Wanne mine eyhnen misten,
> and mine heren sissen,
> and mi nose koldet,
> and mi tunge ffoldet,
> and mi rude slaket,
> And mine lippes blaken,
> and mi muþ grennet,
> and mi spotel rennet,
> and min her riset,
> and mine herte griset,
> and mine honden biuien,
> and mine ffet stiuien,
> al to late, al to late,
> wanne þe bere ys ate gate.

Form and thesis both are encapsulated by the two-line proverbial tag "When the bier is at the gate then it's much too late to worry." The second stanza tells us what to expect when these things come to pass.

> þenne y schel fflutte
> ffrom bedde te fflore,
> ffrom fflore to here,
> ffrom here to bere,
> ffrom bere to putte,
> and te putt ffor-dut.
> þanne lyd min hus vppe min nose,
> off al þis world ne gyffe ihic a pese.

Another group of closely related lyrics uses this same When . . . Then frame, with notably pointed details describing suffering in the when-portion, as an invitation to pious meditation rather than a

justification for the contemptus mundi attitude of the lyric just discussed. These include Brown XII:35A and B, 36, and 37. Perhaps the best of these is 35B, which runs:

> Quanne hic se on rode
> ihesu mi lemman,
> An be-siden him stonden
> marie an Iohan,
> And his rig i-suongen,
> and his side i-stungen,
> for þe luue of man,
> Wel ou hic to wepen
> and sinnes for-leten,
> yif hic of luue kan,
> yif hic of luue kan,
> yif hic of luue kan.

Here again the tendency toward anaphoric structure is marked in the lines describing the scene the speaker envisions (though he is probably speaking of viewing an actual iconographic representation of the Calvary scene) and the thrice-spoken last line. It seems quite characteristic of this When . . . Then frame to employ anaphoric structure: one of the best-known instances of the phenomenon is found in the first 18 lines of the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

As the reference to Chaucer might suggest, by no means all the occurrences of this When . . . Then frame in Middle English poetic practice are in conjunction with a religious theme. An amusingly vituperative misogynist lyric has been printed by Robbins (114), beginning:

> Whan netilles in wynter bere Rosis rede,
> & thornys bere figges naturally,
> & bromes bere appylles in euery mede,
> & lorelles bere cheris in þe croppis so hie,
> & okys bere dates so plentvosly,
> and lekes geve hony in þer superfluens--
> Than put in a woman your trust & confidens.

Three similar stanzas follow specifying impossible feats by fish, birds, and animals, the last concluding "Whan shrewd wyffes to þer husbondes

do non offens--Than put in a woman your trust & confidence." Here again, anaphora is very much a part of the point, for while any of the specified events is sufficiently impossible (just as any of the death details of Brown XIII:71 is sufficiently distasteful) the accumulation of a number of them gives the impression of a certain thoroughness and a depth of conviction of the author's part.

Although the poems we have been discussing exploit only a single deictic motif each, there is no reason why we should expect every poem to be limited to a single motif, and in fact a number of them are not so limited. Deictic conceptions of time and space are, as we have already noted, felt to be closely related; hence the motifs of This World, Ubi Sunt, and When . . . Then, as well as other time and place-deictic conceptions, can be incorporated in varying combinations to produce poems of much greater deictic complexity than those we have been considering.

One of these is the celebrated Love Rune of Friar Thomas de Hales (Brown XIII:43). Although the historical circumstances of its composition are not well known, scarcely exceeding the information conveyed in the MS that it was composed by "frater Thomas de hales de ordine fratrum Minorum, ad instanciam cuiusdam puelle deo dicate," it is difficult to imagine what further information could add to our appreciation of the work. It is immediate speech in poetic form--which is to say that although on the one hand it is clearly rooted in unique and particular personalities and events, on the other its significance rather begins than ends there.

Our concern here is with time-deixis and place-deixis, but a word or two about the poem's person-deixis would be appropriate as well.

The poem begins by addressing the reader--the unnamed reader, not the young woman mentioned in the Latin preface, as is clear from the third-person references in the opening lines: "A mayde cristes me bit yorne þat ich hire wurche a luue-ron." The first stanza maintains this third-person reference to her, for its purpose is to account explicitly for the occasion of the poem's composition, its topicality or relevance. With the second stanza, the speaker turns to face the young woman herself; the reader now becomes the third party, for it is clear that he is not included among the speaker's immediate hearers when he says "Mayde, her þu myht biholde þis worldes luue nys bute o res." This is the voice posture of the remainder of the poem, another 24 stanzas. Hence the poem has the extremely intimate quality of a face-to-face discussion of a private matter; but because the matter is universally relevant, and because the form in which it is composed allows it a public audience, it gains immeasurably in interest.

The speaker's strategy is to persuade the young woman that she faces a choice between two alternatives: she may dedicate herself to Christ, as he urges her to do, or she may choose an earthly lover. Near the end to the poem, the speaker faces her clearly with this choice and its consequences:

> Ne doþ he, mayde, on vuele dede,
> þat may cheose of two þat on,
> & he wile wiþ-ute neode
> take þet wurse, þe betere let gon?

Nor is the choice one that can be made once for all, the speaker knows. He recognizes that there will be times when she will regret her decision. On those occasions, he urges her, she should re-read his advice:

> Hwenne þu sittest in longynge,
> drauh þe forþ þis ilke wryt;

Mid swete stephne þu hit singe,
& do al so hit þe byt.

This kind of recursion of immediate speech upon itself forms the main topic of the next chapter, so I will not elaborate upon it here. But note that it is part of a When . . . Then motif, linked to the occasion of the poem's composition as well:

Hwen þu me dost in þine rede
for þe to cheose a leofmon,
Ich wile don as þu me bede,
þe beste þat ich fynde con.

The primary deictic motifs derive directly from the speaker's strategy of presenting a choice. As we have seen, the This World and Ubi Sunt formulaes are generally employed to invoke the contemptus mundi attitude, an attitude which has the effect of lessening the attractions of earthly life and preparing the penitent's mind to accept more readily the promised attractions of the hereafter. We find both of these deictic motifs developed very fully in the poem.

This World is the first of them to be developed, appearing as soon as the speaker addresses the young woman directly:

Mayde, her þu myht biholde
þis worldes luue nys bute o res
And is by-set so fele volde,
vikel & frakel & wok and les.

And to this he immediately appends the ubi sunt formula:

þeos þeines þat her weren bolde
beoþ aglyden so wyndes bles,
Vnder molde hi liggeþ colde
& faleweþ so doþ medewe gres.

Time and again in the first eleven stanzas the speaker returns to these motifs: "þus is þes world, as þu mayht seo, Al so þe schadewe þat glyt away;" "he doþ as þe blynde þat in þis world his luue doþ;" "Hwer is paris & heleyne þat weren so bryht & feyre on bleo;" etc.

Other deictic motifs are intertwined with these. The speaker suggests that in this morally topsy-turvy world deictic coordinates themselves are untrustworthy:

> þis world fareþ hwilynde--
> hwenne on cumeþ an-oþer goþ;
> þat was bi-fore nv is bihynde,
> þat er was leof nv hit is loþ.

And again:

> Monnes luue nys buten o stunde:
> nv he luueþ nv he is sad,
> Nu he cumeþ, nv wile he funde,
> nv he is wroþ, nv he is gled.
> His luue is her & ek a-lunde,
> nv he luueþ sum þat he er bed;
> Nis ne neuer treowe i-funde--
> þat him tristeþ he is amed.

John Edwin Wells has called attention to the fact that a poem in the Vernon series, Brown XIV:111, bears a close resemblance to the Love Rune on several points, notably the general sequence of ideas, some verbal parallels, and some identical rime words.[11] But much the same can be said, and perhaps more forcefully so, of another of the Vernon series poems, which Brown entitles "Think on Yesterday" (Brown XIV:101).

For example, the third stanza of this poem contains not only the deictic motifs we have been examining but also verbal and notional echoes surrounding the idea of human fickleness and untrustworthiness in general:

> Whose wolde þenke vppon þis
> Mihte fynde a good enchesun whi
> To preue þis world, al-wei I-wis
> Hit nis but fantum and feiri.
> þis erþly Ioye, þis worldly blis
> Is but a fikel fantasy,
> For nou hit is and nou hit nis,
> þer may no mon þer-inne affy;
> Hit chaungeþ so ofte & so sodeynly,
> To-day is her, to-morwe a-way--
> A siker groun ho wol him gy,

I rede he þenke on ȝuster-day.

Thomas of Itales likens this world to "þe schadewe þat glyt away"; in the Vernon series poem the speaker devotes an entire stanza to a description of children chasing their shadows cast on a wall by candle-light, from which he derives the moral that

> þe schadewe cacchen þei ne miht,
> For no lynes þat þei couþe lay.
> þis schadewe I may likne a-riht
> To þis world and uster-day.

Thomas disparages worldly riches, pointing out that they make the rich man's heart "smerte & ake:' and

> If he dret þat me him stele
> þenne doþ him pyne nyhtes wake;
> Him wexeþ þouhtes monye & fele,
> hw he hit may witen wiþ-vten sake.

The author of the Vernon series poem argues that " if þi nei ebor þe Manas," then "þou wolt drede þi nei ebores þrete, And neuer a day þi dore to pas Wiþ-oute siker defense and grete." The neighborly menace, he suggests, is actually death, the best defense against which is "clene lyf, parfyt and trye;" seen in this light, death is not a thief, as some men say, but "studefast, trewe, and lele, And warneþ vche mon of his greef, þat he wol o day wiþ him dele."

As for the matter of rime-words in common to the two poems, these are not lacking either. Within the same stanza in each of the two poems can be found lyhte, mihte, nyht(e); stele, hele; bour, flour; I-seo, beo. Seven other words are rimes common to both poems.

Several other poems in the Vernon series exploit a complex of deictic motifs, notably Brown XIV:106 and 108; the former has the refrain "þis world fareþ as a Fantasy" and the latter opens with a reference to "þis wrecched world" (it has the refrain "þat treuþe is best"). These

works are certainly connected in spirit at least with many others in the Vernon series, including "Think on Yesterday"; hence some degree of influence from the Love Rune might be imputed to these as well. Carleton Brown has commented that "'The Love Ron' is one of the few English poems of the thirteenth century which was still remembered and imitated as late as the end of the fourteenth century," and these echoes of it in the Vernon series may be exactly what he had in mind.[12]

To summarize the discussion to this point, I have been claiming first that a handful of deictically defined motifs, sometimes alone and sometimes in combination, form the conceptual centers of a large number of Middle English lyrics, so that we are justified in regarding these motifs collectively as a productive convention of the poetic practice of the era. The simple recurrence of these motifs in poems from each of the three centuries of the period constitutes primary evidence for this claim; and the fact that the motifs can be shown to have been imitated in the fourteenth and parodied in the fifteenth centuries suggests strongly that the lyricists themselves were conscious of these motifs as fundamental elements of their poetics.

I have also claimed that these deictic conventions account in large part for the dramatic qualities many critics have attributed to the lyrics, though with the exception of Peter Dronke such critics have been content to make that characterization generally, rather than to associate it with specific lyrics. Rosemary Woolfe, to be sure, makes an extremely valuable contribution to our understanding of the literary history of the period by identifying those lyrics or passages from them which later were incorporated into the mystery plays; but the sense in which a lyric can be called dramatic by virtue of its being a

self-contained presentation of conflict through dialogue is missing from her work.

Anchorage in time and place is requisite for drama, and that requirement may be satisfied non-deictically as well as deictically. What can we say now about the differences between the two approaches? With the non-deictically anchored group the evocation of a particular time and place is exactly analogous to the notion of the setting of a drama proper. It constitutes the backdrop against which the conflict is represented. Generally, as we have seen, this backdrop has a positive or negative iconic value: it either reinforces or contrasts with the dramatic thesis. Hence the April opening _in loco amoeno_ of the thrush-nightingale debate contrasts in its portrait of harmonious serenity with the thesis of disputation and prefigures the return to harmony of the poem's resolution; on the other hand, the wild western woodland setting of the Vernon series lyrics with the refrain "Mercy passes all things" is entirely appropriate to the initiating action of the drama, the seizure of a small bird by a raptor, to be released at length in confirmation of the piece's eleemosynary thesis.

As for the deictically anchored lyrics, it is apparent that time and place for them are an integral part of the drama itself--the speakers of these lyrics continually warn us against the false and transitory values of the here and now. This conception is possible only by contrast with a radically different conception of time and place, one supplied by Christian cosmology. This middle earth, for the men of the middle ages, is a temporal as well as spatial way station. Hence these lyrics are suffused with the theme of _contemptus mundi_ and recur again and again to the question of trust.

But it is the contrast between two world conceptions that makes drama possible, and anchorage in time and place provides the stasis against which such contrast can be developed. Deictic anchorage, as opposed to non-deictic, provides a set of locative, temporal, and personal coordinates which are wholly relative, thus elevating the individual and his circumstances immediately into dramatic relevance. Discourse itself provides the centering moment, but the doctrine of the Church teaches that its values are false--thus the tension reflected in these deictically anchored lyrics.

Although this strain of profound skepticism is often taken to be an index of medieval thought, we can find alongside it a more optimistic strain, keyed to a different kind of deictic motif from those we have examined thus far. Lyrics exploiting this group of deictic themes, associated with the verbs 'come' and 'go,' form the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Charles Fillmore has devoted two papers to a description of the deictic properties of 'come' and 'go,' properties which he believes must be understood if "The ways in which speakers of English understand expressions containing the verb COME [are to] be made intelligible."[13] This is on the face of it a sweeping claim, one that implicates deixis directly in the semantic processing of a verb whose incidence of occurrence must be quite high. The claim is particularly interesting in the context of the present discussion when one realizes how frequently the verb 'come' and its companion 'go' appear in the Middle English lyrics.

In fact, the verb 'come' appears in what is generally taken to be the oldest surviving Middle English song (at least the oldest for which musical notation survives), the famous Cuckoo Song (Brown XIII:6):

Svmer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med
and springþ þe wde nu.
Sing cuccu!

Awe bleteþ after lomb,
lhouþ after calue cu,
Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ.
Murie sing cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu,
Wel singes þu cuccu.
ne swik þu nauer nu!

Sing cuccu nu, Sing cuccu!
Sing cuccu, Sing cuccu nu!

What can Fillmore's analysis of the verb 'come' tell us of interest about this lyric? First he notes that all three deictic categories, person, place, and time, are implicated in its semantic processing. Specifically, when a speaker or addressee figures directly in the discourse, which is the case here, "'come' . . . indicate[s] motion toward the location of either the speaker or the addressee at either coding time or reference time."[14] The distinction between coding time and reference time is a function of the tense center of the discourse: coding time refers to the functionally coeval moment during which the message is produced and processed, while reference time refers to any other time which may be specified (by an adverbial phrase or clause). In this case, the tense center of the discourse is coding time--the motion indicated by the verb is taking place at the moment of the speech event itself. The location in question is evidently that of both speaker and addressee, for there is no indication that the two are separate, as would be the case if the first two lines read "Summer is a-comin' in to your abode, cuckoo." Hence we can point to two affiliations conveyed by the verb: the speaker and his addressee, a cuckoo, are affiliated

in the same speech event; and a third entity, "summer," is affiliated with the two of them by virtue of its approach. The speaker and addressee are, in fact, in Fillmore's terminology the goal of summer's movement, since the verb "come" in general indicates motion toward a goal, in contradistinction to "go," which indicates motion away from a source. No teleological motivation on the part of summer is necessarily implied by this, but it is worth recognizing that the speaker's choice of verbs construes himself and his addressee as the particular and specific endpoint of summer's motion; hence they are more than mere bystanders at summer's near approach. For the moment, at least, the cyclicality of the seasons has been converted into a directionality, a vector.

Now we can bring to bear another observation of Fillmore's, that "we can think of a communication act as metaphorically an instance of motion--the travelling of a message from one person to another."[15] It has for its source the speaker and for its goal the addressee, and we can speak of the moment of the speaker's formulation of the message as its encoding time and the moment of the addressee's reception of it as decoding time. With these analogies in mind we can understand the pragmatic dimensions of the poem.

The speaker's message to his addressee the cuckoo is the command to sing; what the cuckoo sings is its own name, so that in a sense it announces merely its own existence, it sings itself into existence. Like the bleating ewe, the lowing cow, the leaping bull, and the farting buck, the cuckoo's behavior is a spontaneous response to the approach of summer; but unlike the others', the cuckoo's pseudo-linguistic behavior approximates human linguistic behavior with its capacity

to create and control. His song, perfect in its simplicity, asserts nothing but his own immediate existence, hence the speaker exhorts him never to cease singing it, never to cease putting it in motion, just as he would have the approach of summer be unceasing: "Wel singes þu cuccu. ne swik þu nauer nu!"

The speaker cannot sing himself into existence onomatopoetically, as the cuckoo does, but he can imitate this recursiveness by repetition of his song itself; and this is the meaning of the two-part burden, with its syncopation of three syllables on four, intertwining the controlling command to sing with the self-creative message of the song ad infinitum:

> Sing cuccu nu, Sing cuccu!
> Sing cuccu, Sing cuccu nu!

The text indicates that these lines are to be sung simultaneously, by two voices, as long as the song is to last ("quociens opus est"), the first voice resting at the end of the line ("faciens pausacionem in fine") and the second resting in the middle (after the first phrase), not at the end, and immediately beginning again after the second phrase ("pausans in medio & non in fine. Set immediate repetens principium").

This song is full of movement--it is in the imagery of the cavorting animals, in the syncopated rhythm of its performance, in the very sense of the verb 'come' that controls it from the opening line, and as I have suggested in the pragmatic gesture that motivates it. I think that sense of movement, spontaneous yet under control, accounts for the differently felt dramatic qualities of this lyric as compared with the others we have been considering in this chapter. I suggested earlier that drama proceeds from the stasis of anchorage, whether

deictic or nondeictic; but clearly the peculiar quality of these verbs of motion is to convey not a steady state but a Gestalt of states, a bridging of states, the controlled spanning of an interval. Hence it is not the tension of drama but its release that is the hallmark of these lyrics.

In the following lyric, the repetition of 'come' is striking, and the movement it implies balances the austerely anaphoric structure of the piece, one of the most remarkable in the entire corpus of Middle English lyrics (Brown XIV:3c).

I sayh hym wiþ ffles al bi-sprad He cam vram Est.
I sayh hym wiþ blod al by-ssad He cam vram West.
I sayh þet manye he wiþ hym brouȝte He cam vram souȝ.
I sayh þet þe world of hym ne rou te He cam vram north.

I come vram þe wedlok as a svete spouse, þet habbe my wif wiþ me in-nome.
I come vram viȝt a staleworþe knyȝt, þet myne vo habbe ouercome.
I come vram þe chepyng as a Riche chapman, þet mankynde habbe ibouȝt.
I Come vram an vncouþe londe as a sely pylegrym, þet ferr habbe i-souȝt.

What iconographic value the four compass points may have here is difficult to say, but we can identify a line by line linkage of the imagery between the two stanzas. Thus the imagery of the flesh in the first line is echoed in the imagery of wedlock of the fifth; that of blood in the second in the warfare of the sixth; that of the company of followers in the third in the redeemed race of mankind of the seventh; and that of estrangement in the fourth in the foreign journeying of the eighth. It is of course the imagery here which allows Carleton Brown to entitle the piece "How Christ shall Come", a matter of person-deictic interpretation of the kind discussed in the previous chapter. The parallels do in any case strengthen the presumption that the I of

the second stanza is the same individual referred to as he in the first; hence, though the poem has two speakers, their messages are structurally and imagistically congruent.

This congruence extends as well to the massage of the coming: paradoxically, what look like four openings are one and the same. That, I think, is what is implied in the tense shift from the first stanza to the second. From the human perspective, in the first stanza, the many aspects of Christ's coming strike us as so many separate comings, as from the four points of the compass (collectively symbolic of an infinite diversity of direction). The past tense marks these events as anterior to the present discourse; that is, we can say that they are events--plural--because the past tense allows any number of events anterior to the present moment. But from the divine perspective of the second stanza, it is one coming, to be spoken of only in an eternal present tense.

We meet with this idea of unity in repetition in conjunction with the verb 'come' in another lyric, one of the most celebrated and highly praised from the entire period (Brown XV:81):

> I syng of a myden þat is makeles,
> kyng of all kynges to here sone che ches.
>
> he cam also stylle þer his moder was
> as dew in aprylle, þat fallyt on þe gras.
>
> he cam also stylle to his moderes bowr
> as dew in aprille, þat fallyt on þe flour.
>
> he cam also stylle þer his moder lay
> as dew in aprille, þat fallyt on þe spray.
>
> moder & mayden was neuer non but che--
> wel may swych a lady godes moder be.

The thrice-repeated coming figures the triune God whose earthly

appearance the poem celebrates; once again, what is mysterious to the human mind is expressed in the past tense, so that by accumulation what is (in doctrinal fact) a unity can be approximately comprehended. The speaker's choice of his subject--"I syng of a maiden that is matchless"--is as sublime as the choice she makes in choosing the king of all kings as her son; but the subject is shrouded in paradox and is literally inexpressible. Hence the succession of metaphors by which he tries to make the movement of speech suggest the ineffable entry of divinity into the realm of human experience. In the end, he can only offer up the paradox whole, as a thing which speaks for itself.

The other deictic verb of motion, 'go,' figures prominently in the following brief lyric from the fourteenth century, Brown XIV:71, which makes strategic use of it in the midst of numerous deictic themes:

> Gold & al þis werdis wyn
> Is nouth but cristis rode;
> I wolde ben clad in cristis skyn,
> þat ran so longe on blode,
> & gon t'is herte & taken myn In--
> þer is a fulsum fode.
> þan ȝef i litel of kith or kyn,
> For þer is alle gode. Amen.

Here the speaker not only expresses his <u>contemptus mundi</u>, his disparagement of the values of "this world," but proposes in a bold metaphor how he would retreat from it. His conception is that escape lies not in the other world of the hereafter but in a profound penetration into the heart of the sacred, where all the sustenance, all the society, he needs will be found. The movement he envisions <u>into</u> the sacred heart inverts the perverted values of this life, which flow outward from the heart, as Jesus explains in Matt. 15:18-20: "Quae autem procedunt de ore, de corde exeunt, et ea coinquinant hominem: de corde enim exeunt

cogitationes malae, homicidia, adulteria, fornicationes, furta, falsa testimonia, blasphemiae: haec sunt quae coninquinant hominen." The conjunction in the lyric of the images of the bloody skin and the fulsome feast further argue this chapter of Matthew as its imagistic and thematic source, for the verse just cited continues "Non lotis autem manibus manducare, non coinquinant hominem" and the remainder of the chapter relates the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and the fishes.

The perversion of values is not always a religious theme, nor is it always treated earnestly, as the following secular lyric from Robbins (174) shows. Here the source and goal-deictic values of the two verbs of motion have been deliberately reversed, at least insofar as their conventional cultural association with the speech events of greetings and farewells are concerned.

> Welcome be ȝe when ȝe goo,
> And fare-wel when ȝe come!
> So faire as ȝe þer be noo mo,
> As brith as bery brovne.
> I love ȝow verryly at my too,
> Nonne so moch in al þis toune.
> I am right glad when ȝe wil goo,
> and sory when ȝe wil come!

The movement here is from nonsense in the first two lines through ambivalent sense in the middle four to the clear sense of the last two. The sense of the last two, of course, is prepared for by the others. The speaker is inverting the love lyric convention, on a very low level, to produce a lyric of denunciation (but with festive, not calamitous, import to him). 'Welcome' and 'farewell' have virtually no semantic content; their functions are simply to mark arrivals and departures. Hence the associations of 'welcome' with a departure and 'farewell'

with an arrival are nonsensical. The comparative constructions of the middle of the stanza have a meaning, but it is ambivalent. This progression, if it can be called such, from nonsense to ambivalent sense prepares the way for the clear if unconventional sense of the last two lines.

The sense of the entire second stanza is equally explicit as that of the last two lines of the first.

> And whan e be ovth fare,
> I pray for yow sertayn,
> þat neuer man, horsse, ne mare,
> brynge yow to town a-geyn,
> To prayse youre bewte I ne dare,
> ffor drede that men wille seyn.
> ffare-welle! no more for you I care,
> but pray yow of my songe have no desdayn!

This last 'farewell' has its conventional value again and prefaces the final jibe, an extra measure of spite delivered extra-metrically. Interestingly as long as the two verbs of motion function, to borrow Derrida's phrase, under the erasure of the first two lines, all the inherently dramatic qualities of tension and conflict associated with the lyric's deictic anchorage come into play; but when normal values reassert themselves, the conflict is banished in the movement of resolving action.

Notes

[1]See especially "Space" and "Time," lectures delivered at the University of California at Santa Clara, 1971.

[2]Essai de poétique médiévale (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 37.

[3]Zumthor, p. 38.

[4]The Medieval Lyric (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 69.

[5]Woolf, p. 19.

[6]Ragnar Rommetveit, Words, Meanings, and Messages: Theory and Experiments in Psycholinguistics (New York: Academic Press, 1968).

[7]There is also one instance from the fourteenth century, Brown XIV:56.

[8]B[onaventure Anthony] Brown, "Way of the Cross," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967. What was in earlier practice a considerable variation in the number and nature of the stations coalesced around the end of the middle ages into these fourteen: (1) Christ is condemned to death by Pilate; (2) Jesus is made to carry the cross; (3) Jesus falls the first time; (4) Jesus meets his blessed Mother; (5) the cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene; (6) Veronica wipes the face of Jesus; (7) Jesus falls the second time; (8) Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem; (9) Jesus falls the third time; (10) Jesus is stripped of His garments and receives gall to drink; (11) Jesus is nailed to the cross; (12) Jesus dies on the cross; (13) Jesus is taken down from the cross; (14) Jesus is laid in the sepulcher.

[9]Zumthor, p. 35.

[10]Brook, p. 80.

[11]John Edwin Wells, "'A Luue Ron' and 'Of Clene Maydenhod'," Modern Language Review, 9 (1914), p. 236-37. The "Clene Maydenhod" is not printed by Brown. It may be found in F. J. Furnivall, ed., The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS, Part II, EETS No. 117 (London: 1901), p. 464-68.

[12]Brown XIII, p. 198.

[13]Fillmore, "Deictic Categories in the Semantics of 'Come'," p. 219. The other paper alluded to is the Santa Clara lecture "Coming and Going."

[14]Fillmore, "Coming and Going," p. 12.

[15]Fillmore, "Coming and Going," p. 4.

Chapter V: The Context of Performance

In the last chapter I had occasion to refer to the particular attention Peter Dronke pays to the performative aspects not merely of medieval English lyric poetry but of the lyric practice of the entire western European cultural continuum in the middle ages. This focus of his on performers and performance, and the consequent sensitivity to the functional dimensions of verbal art to which it leads, give his work a particular relevance to the topic of discussion in the present chapter: the mechanisms by which the Middle English lyricists show their interest in, concern for, and relationship to the linguistic medium in which they are working.

We have seen already that the linguistic phenomena referred to collectively as deictics specify the primary coordinates of person, place, and time that are unique to and constitutive of an individual speech event. Beyond its capacity to refer to these three primary coordinates, however, the resources of language include the means to refer to the discourse itself, the present instance of it, and thus to foreground its function, just as person deixis particularizes an individual conversant and identifies him as, for example, the speaker.

This phenomenon of discourse deixis is much less well defined than person, place, or time deixis. On the one hand, as Fillmore points out, it concerns itself with such relatively uninteresting lexical items as 'the former' and 'the latter'.[1] These devices merely

allow a speaker to sort and identify items in a list according to the order in which he first mentioned them. On the other hand, in the context of a discussion of literary discourse, discourse deixis merges with the phenomenon of self-referentiality to include all of the means by which language is present to itself as language. And it is within a specifically functional perspective, such as Dronke's, that the subject comes into contextual focus.

The pragmatic bias of The Medieval Lyric is evident from the outset. For Dronke the term "song" is fully interchangeable with the term "lyric," an identification he anchors in the historical practice of western Europe from the first century of the Christian era onward. He points out that alongside the lute- and flute-accompanied songs of the upper classes stands "a rich tradition of popular songs associated with many aspects of the everyday life of the people," a tradition which "lived on in the early Middle Ages."[2] Songs are performed poetry; a performer has a repertoire; and the repertoire of the medieval scop, gleomon, spilman, jongleur, or ménestral, Dronke finds, was purely functional: "Medieval song has three main functions: formal commemoration, entertainment, and cult."[3] These functions obtain whether the audience is clerical or laic, courtly or common, so that "the songs performed for a clerical and a noble audience shade off almost imperceptibly into the songs performed for a popular one, and popular songs themselves continually absorb the influence of more sophisticated art-songs."[4]

This complex interpenetration of what the critic would prefer were neatly distinct traditions is well known to students of Middle English. Certainly it is characteristic of the lyrics. Nevertheless

Dronke's simple yet comprehensive division of the lyrics into the three functional categories of entertainment, commemoration, and cult does provide a way of classifying the lyrics for analytical purposes without artificially distancing one strain of the poetic practice from another. At the same time, it will help us focus on the deictic dimensions of this discourse by revealing the varying stances of the performer to his material: now thoughful, now flip; now vain, now self-effacing; now transparent, now opaque.

This is not to say that it is always easy to assign a given lyric exclusively to one or another or the functional categories. But this should hardly be surprising, or troublesome either. Attempts to analyze discourse functionally have always recognized the capacity of language to serve two or more purposes simultaneously: Jakobson's seminal essay on "Linguistics and Poetics" is a classic case in point. What is important, rather, is that functionality itself be recognized, for from this follows the significance of self-referential discourse. Hence the separation of the discourse-deictic lyrics into lyrics of entertainment, lyrics of commemoration, and lyrics of cult is pragmatic and provisional. My intent is doing so is to identify the primary thrust of each piece, not to exhaust its functional potentialities nor to specify their exact admixture.

Since entertainment as such is not aimed for in the discourse of religion, lyrics which aim frankly to entertain are to be found almost exclusively among the secular collections, most of which have been printed by Robbins. The first lyric printed in his collection of "Popular Songs" (Robbins:1) is a marvelous example of the type, a perfect minstrel's curtain-raiser, adaptable to almost any company. It begins

by reminding the company of their obligation of hospitality toward the unknown newcomer, challenging them slyly at the same time to match him at his own game:

> Is þer any good man here
> þat will make me any chere?
> & if þer were, I wold cum nere
> to wit what he wold say.
> A, will ye be wild?
> by mary myld
> . . .
> I trow ye will syng gay.

One would think the question was rather whether he could make them "any chere," for that is the minstrel's profession, but the speaker persists in his challenge in the second stanza, linking it now with the protocol of the tourney:

> Be gladly, masters, euerychon!
> I am cum myself alone
> to appose you on by on.
> let se who dare say nay--

No doubt, by this point, a good minstrel will have sized up his audience carefully, in order to be sure of his man for the next move, for it is at this point that his clever design begins to become clear. Turning to one of the company, he asks:

> Sir, what say ye?
> Syng on, lett vs see.
> Now will it be
> Thys or another day?

Naturally the challenged man, surprised at suddenly being called upon to become performer just when he thought most to be audience, will have no response; and the little joke at his expense--the minstrel vamping on his lute, perhaps, while the victim splutters helplessly--doubtless brings a hearty laugh from his companions, who don't know yet their turns are coming. One of them, perhaps, is roaring more

lustily than the others--he is the minstrel's next mark: "Loo, this is he þat will do þe dede!" Suddenly conscious that he has been singled out, the man attempts to curb his laughter, but the minstrel knows how to turn this to advantage too:

> he tempereth his mowth, þerfore take hede.
> Syng softe, I say, lests yowr nase blede,
> ffor hurt yowrself ye may!
> But by god þat me bowght,
> your brest is so towght,
> tyll ye haue will cowght
> ye may not þer-with away.

For the rest, all the minstrel needs are three easily recognized types, likely to be found in any group--a thin man, a fat man, and a shy type, standing in the rear. Each of these, in turn becomes the butt of the minstrel's jokes. Challenging the thin man, who perhaps manages some feeble response, the minstrel declares he sings "noþer good tenowre, treble, ne mene"; but as though his very thinness bespoke a certain lack of vitality, the minstrel dismisses him with:

> I hold you excused
> ye shall be refused,
> ffor ye haue not be vsed
> to no good sport nor play.

The joke works will whether it happens to be true of the individual or not, for if true the audience will credit the minstrel with a perspicacity he doesn't have and laugh <u>at</u> their companion; if false, and the man is in fact lively, the jibe will be taken as ironic recognition of the fact and the company will laugh <u>with</u> their companion.

The jest at the expense of the fat man is much broader:

> Sir, what say ye with your ffat face?
> Me thynkith ye shuld bere a very good bace
> To a pot of good ale or Ipocras,
> truly as I you say!
> hold vp your hede,
> ye loke lyke lede;

ye wast myche bred
euermore from day to day.

And now, seemingly by chance, the minstrel's gaze lights on some self-conscious fellow who has drifted to the rear in hopes of avoiding just the attention he now receives:

Now will ye see wher he stondith behynde?
Iwis, broþer, ye be vnkynd.
stond forth, & wast with me som wynd,
for ye haue ben called a synger ay.
Nay, be not ashamed;
ye shall not be blamed,
ffor ye haue ben ffamed
the worst in the Contrey!

So, everyone in the company has now had a laugh--a reasonably harmless one--at his own friends' expense; and the minstrel has accomplished two things at least. For the first, he has entertained the company. This, after all, is what he is paid to do--but it is the way he has done it that marks him as the professional. The professional knows he can't make a living by extemporizing, and only a professional can pull an item from the repertoire and make it work everywhere, every time. For the second, by "apposing" the group members one by one, he for the moment sets each of them, not himself, apart from the group, so that by the end of his song he addresses a group member familiarly as "brother," speaks of his activity among them as a trifling matter, a wasting of wind, and insinuates that he as well as they is familiar with the esteem in which a man is held in the country about. In short, the entertainer has ingratiated himself with his audience; whatever material he chooses to perform afterward can hardly fail to be well received.

As for the specifically discourse-deictic elements of this lyric, we need only notice how often the subject of this song reverts to the singing of songs: all five of the minstrel's victims are faced down

on the point of their skill in singing. To use a linguistic metaphor, the minstrel's skill lies in fitting a discourse token onto a real world context of utterance in such a way that it appears to be a discourse type. When this is well done, the audience of any repertory discourse--any discourse known to have been composed for repeated performance before various audiences--has the sense that the speech act of which it is a part is unique and spontaneous. This tends to freight the context with real-world significance, producing in the audience genuine mirth or Aristotelian catharsis via what Coleridge felicitously termed the willing suspension of its disbelief.

But even this quality of "live and unrehearsed" spontaneity can be carefully written into the performer's material, as this next lyric demonstrates.

It isn't always the case that the minstrel makes the company the butt of his jokes. The following lyric (Robbins:4) shows that he can turn his art upon itself and satirize his own ability to sing. Here again, the performative aspects of the song must be imaginatively recreated in the reading, for they are unrecorded in print.

If i synge ȝe wyl me lakke,
& wenyn I wer out of myn wyt;
þer-for smale notes wil I crake;
so wolde god I wer qwyt.

Syn me muste take þis mery toyn
to glade with-al þis cumpany;
I rede or ony swych be don,
for godes loue, tey vp our ky!

ffor-soþe I may not synge, I say--
my voys & I arn at discord;
but we xul fonde to take a day
To takyn myn avys & myn acord.

A singer must sing and be judged for it, though circumstances may to a

greater or lesser extent impair his ability to do it well: this is the token reading of this text. On a type reading, the lyric becomes a comment on the social obligations of minstrels--and poets--to fulfill exacting expectations on the part of their audiences whether willing or no. Moreover, it asserts the mutuality of obligation, of function. The audience must "take up its key" in order for the lyric to succeed, whether this means to supply a pitch or musical burden or to bring to the song the necessary interpretive apparatus. Hence the lyric is a reminder that the nexus between a poet and his art--his "voys"--is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the success of his discourse. The further connection between speaker and audience is vital.

Much the same point is made by a spurious defense of women, which depends for the sense of its type-reading on the two-line refrain, repeated after each stanza, "of all Creatures women be best: Cuius contrarium verum est." The piece (Robbins:38) is a compendium of misogynist canards each of which has been cast in the form of its logical contrary; the Latin tag in the refrain denies these, in turn, and thereby restores the conventionally intended sense. A sampling: "women be trewe as tirtyll on tree, Not lyberall in langage, but euer in secree"; "tell a woman all your Cownsayle, & she can kepe it wonderly well"; "by women was neuer man begiled"; "To þe tavern they will not goo . . . To sspende ther husbondes money soo." I suppose that the performative humor of the piece lay in the differentiation of the audience into comprehenders and non-comprehenders of the Latin line. The former would have enjoyed sharing an in-joke with the performer, while the latter no doubt thought the Latin represented the voice of <u>auctoritas</u> in support of the song's ostensible thesis.

The second great functional category consists of lyrics whose intent is commemoration. Dronke suggests that these are linked ultimately to the authoritarian nature of the social system: "Seignurial authority presupposes retainers. A ruler maintains around him a body of courtiers and officials; they try to win praise and glory in his eyes, and he in theirs. For praise and glory to be truly won, however, they must be celebrated in some lasting mode. Hence the very nature of a court implies the need for the arts, and in particular for the art of celebration by poetry and song, which has the greatest potentiality of diffusion."[5] Curiously, only a few such "commissioned" formal commemoratives survive from the Middle English period; these tend to be late, aureate in style, and the work of known authors such as Lydgate, Hoccleve, and Dunbar. Subtlety, evidently, was not a quality their authors strove to give them (an observation which probably reflects more on the predilictions of their intended audiences than upon the authors'), as can be seen from this opening stanza of an eleven-stanza piece composed by Lydgate to accompany a New Year's gift of an eagle to Henry VI and his mother, Queen Katherine (Robbins:96):

> þis hardy foole, þis bridde victoryous,
> þis staately foole moste Imperyal,
> Of his nature fiers and corageous,
> Called in scripture þe foole celestyal--
> þis yeeris day to youre estate ryal
> Lowly presenteþe t'encresce of your glorye,
> Honnour and knighthoode, conquest and victorye.

But it was evidently not only nobility who desired commemoration in some form likely to be diffused. To judge from the following "Verses on a Chained Horae" a successful member of the burgeoning middle class at the close of the period could aspire to no less.

> This present book legeble in scripture,

Here in this place thus tacched with a cheyn,
Purposed of entent for to endure,
And here perpetuelli stylle to remeyne,
Fro eyre to eyre; wherfore appone peyn
Of cryst-is curs, of faders and of moderes,
Non of hem hens attempt it to dereyne,
While ani leef may goodeli hange with oder.

Now this stanza seems no more than a conventional though neatly turned imprecation of the kind popular on book plates throughout the period. But the second stanza shows the man of affair's familiarity with the waywardness of material things (perhaps already foreshadowed in the image of the last line of the first stanza).

But for-as-moche that noo thyng may endure
That urthely ys, alwey, y trowe, certeyn;
When-so-euer thys book here-aftyr in scripture
Eyder in koueryng begynneth fause ayeyn,
All tho therto that diligence doth or peyn
Hit to reforme, be they on or other,
Haue they the pardon that criste yafe magdaleyn,
With daili blessyng of fader and of moder.

Having thus made his chained book of hours an objective correlative, as it were, for the transitoriness of all things, the speaker now seizes his chance to make it as well the memorial of him who cause it to be written.

Gret reson wolde that euery creatur,
Meued of corage on hit to rede or seyn,
Shuld hym remembre in prayer that so sure
Bothe preest and place and bokes lust ordeyn
At his gret cost, John Harpur, noght to leyn;
Wherfor in speciall his eires wyth all oder
Ar hyly bondon to pray the souereyn
Lord of all lordes present hym to hys moder.

The bathos in these lines speaks volumes of a man whose values Church doctrine officially condemns but Church practice daily depends upon; and yet John Harpur's request is without a trace of insincerity or excess of sentiment.

The same cannot be said for the thirteenth-century "Regret de

Maximian," (Brown XIII:51) an English paraphrase of the Latin "First Elegy of Maximian." Excess is reflected in its very length, some 273 lines, giving the speaker more than ample scope to bewail the passing of his many fine attributes in his old age. In fact, like Gertrude, he protests too much--it is the attributes themselves, and not their passing, that really interest him:

> þo ich wes ȝoung and wis,
> And werede grei and gris,
> Ich heuede frendes þo.
> Foul soþ I-seid hit Iis,
> þe mon þat is of pris,
> He haueþ frendes þe mo.

And again:

> Riche I wes and riȝt
> Borlich I-wis and liȝt,
> As ich am ounderstonde.
> Of herte ich wes wel liȝt,
> Soþliche wiis and briȝt,
> And franc mon of honde.
> þer nis clerk ne kniȝt,
> Ne mon of more miȝt,
> þat meuere was in londe.

To be sure, the speaker does admit that these attributes (and many more, all fair) have passed, that things have changed with him, that death approaches. In that sense the lyric is allied with the This World group discussed in the previous chapter. But whereas impending death typically engenders the spirit of <u>contemptus mundi</u>, and a concommitant spirit of <u>contemptus ipsius</u>, as it might be termed, this speaker is full at the end of bitter resentment of his loss, a resentment he expresses in shamelessly scurrilous fashion:

> Iich may seien alas,
> þat ich I-boren was;
> I-liued ich have to longe,
> Were ich mon so ich was,
> Min heien so grei so glas,
> Min her so feir bihonge,

And ich hire heuede bi þe trasce
In a derne place,
To meken and to monge:
Ne sholde hoe neuere at-witen
Min helde ne me bifliten,
Wel heye I shulde hire honge.

The overall effect, and in particular this final stanza, makes the work less a "regret" than a self-commemoration, such as it is.

Comparatively few lyrics whose primary function was entertainment seem to have survived from the Middle English period, though many must have been written; few lyrics whose primary function was formal commemoration, in the sense intended by Dronke, seem to have been written at all; but when we come to examine the lyrics whose primary function is the expression of cult, the saving hand of the clergy has passed numbers of them down to us. Among these are quite a few in which language is present to itself in discourse deixis. If language can entertain through its power to surprise, and commemorate through its power to publish, it can also give expression to faith through its power to praise and to ponder. These two impulses, the open declaration of belief and the close confrontation of unbelief, are at the heart of any cult. Both find vivid expression in the Middle English lyrics.

Late in the period an anonymous lyricist brought both strains together in a single brief work (Brown XV:120):

A God and yet a man?
A mayde and yet a mother?
Witt wonders what witt Can
Conceave this or the other.

A god, and Can he die?
A dead man, can he live?
What witt can well replie?
What reason reason give?

God, truth itselfe doth teach it;
Mans witt senckis too farr vnder

By reasons power to reach it.
Beleeve and leave to wonder!

The poised paradox and fascination with wit and reason anticipate the metaphysical school of the Renaissance, but its quiet submission--not to dogma but to faith itself--marks this word as medieval in spirit.

From the beginning of the period the more usual tendency is to give clear expression to one strain or the other, to declare belief or to confront doubt. The thirteenth-century "Hymn to the Heavenly Father," Brown XIII:59, belongs to the former category. According to Brown, it is a "free rendering" of a Latin Paraphrasis Orationis Dominicae, which immediately precedes it in the MS.[6] Thus it has two apparent sources, the Latin paraphrase and its source in the Gospel of Matthew; yet the concern of the Middle English lyric for the role of language in the expression of cult is unique to it. It begins:

Hit bilimpeþ forte speke, to reden & to singe
Of him þe no mon mai at-reke, king of alle kinge.
He mai binde & to-breke, he mai blisse bringe,
He mai luke & unsteke, michte of all þinge.

The speaker's confident assertion of his faith in the rightness of his function is missing from the Latin piece, which begins "Pater rerum omnium pius et fidelis"; rather it reflects the spirit of the context in which the Lord's Prayer arises in Matthew 6:9. In the verses which precede it in the sixth chapter, Jesus rebukes religious ostentation, saying in particular "when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men"; and again, "when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the pagans do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." But the present speaker, confident that what he prays is blameless (for it is modeled

on the Lord's Prayer itself), can shape the way he prays unselfconsciously.

There is evidence in the rimes of the third stanza that this lyric was composed to be read, as they first line suggests, as well as to be heard. The four-line stanza contains the following four end-rimes: éorþe; feorþe; éorþe; néor þe. The last of these, "near thee," is a perfect eye-rime in the original, but in ordinary pronunciation the phrase could scarcely have suggested a rime with the others. þe, as the head nominal of the phrase, would receive a degree of stress far greater than that given to the last syllable (if the final -e be not elided) of eorþe and feorþe, and with this stress the vowel undoubtedly would have had the quality /e/ rather than /ə/. Evidently the accent marks were supplied with this in mind--while the eye-rime would suffice the silent reader, the reader aloud needs a clue to negotiate a tricky bit of scansion.

The following lyric (Brown XIII:64) gives expression to the other strain in the expression of cult, the confrontation of unbelief. The penitential spirit of the work is evident from its opening lines:

> Hi sike, al wan hi singe,
> for sorue þat hi se
> wan hic wit wepinge
> bi-holde a-pon þe tre.

What the speaker beholds, in his mind's eye, is the Crucifixion scene, which he sketches in a series of brief, vivid images:

> 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.
> (his frendis werin al of-ferde,
> þei clungin so þe cley)
> þe rod stonit in ston.

mari hir-selfe al-hon,
hir songe was way-le-way.

When I see with eye and heart both his cold body, hanging between two thieves, "hu soldi singe mor?" the speaker asks; yet he goes on to detail the wounds, the spear at the heart and another at the side, the nails "too long," the cross "too high," the stones growing wet at his feet, the meager companionship of John and Mary. All these defy comprehension; they can only be sorrowfully accepted. But the speaker expresses true astonishment at those who, seeing what he sees, can choose to ignore it to pursue the attractions of this world:

Wel ofte wan hi slepe
wit soru hic ham soit,
wan hi wake and wende
hi þenke in my þoit,
allas! þat men beit wode,
bi-holdit an þe rode
and silit--hic li noyt--
her wouelis in-to sin
for any worlde-his win,
þat was so der hi-boyt.

Cult itself is sometimes a difficult phenomenon to isolate in the literature of the Middle Ages, in particular where it concerns the treatment of women. The relationship between the secular cult of courtly love, on the one hand, and the Christian veneration of the Blessed Virgin, on the other, is difficult to establish with precision, a task which anyway is outside the scope of this study; but unquestionably each influences the other so pervasively that strains of both belief systems often run through the same poem. This is the case with several of the Harley lyrics, one of the more difficult of which directly addresses the problem of the expression of belief in verse. Entitled by Brook "The Poet's Repentance" (Brook:6) the lyric expresses the speaker's desire to atone now for the wicked and witless songs he

formerly had composed on the subject of women:

> Weping haueþ myn wonges wet
> for wikked werk ant wone of wyt;
> vnbliþe y be til y ha bet
> bruches broken, ase bok byt,
> of leuedis loue, þat y ha let,
> þat lemeþ al wiþ luefly lyt;
> ofte in song y haue hem set,
> þat is vnsemly þer hit syt.
> Hit syt ant semeþ noht
> þer hit ys seid in song;
> þat y haue of hem wroht,
> ywis hit is al wrong.

The poet explains that his accustomed misogyny was to be blamed on Eve, who "rafte vs alle richesse ryf." Now, however, since the birth of Mary's baby, "wommon nes wicked non." The poet will no longer vouch for the tales told in town "of brudes bryht wiþ browes broune." Rather he will serve women with feet and hand "for on þat vs warp from wo." More than this--he will retract all his objectionable earlier work:

> Euer wymmen ich herie ay,
> ant euer at neode y nyckenay
> þat y ner nemnede þat heo nolde.
> Y nolde ant nullyt noht,
> for noþyng nou a nede
> soþ is þat y of hem ha wroht,
> as Richard erst con rede.

These are curious lines, and not merely because retractions in general are curious phenomena in the literary world--one thinks of the lengths to which critics have gone in order to account for Chaucer's famous retraction at the close of fragment X of the Canterbury Tales. It is curious, for example, that the poet of the Harley MS qualifies his retraction twice, specifying that it is "at neode," 'of necessity.' If it is heartfelt, why qualify it? If it is not heartfelt, why make it? And what is the meaning of the reference to Richard? Whoever he is, it is clear from the final stanza that he is allied with just the

kind of courtly attitude toward women that the poet has renounced:

> Richard, rote of resoun ryht,
> rykening of rym ant ron,
> of maidnes meke þou hast myht;
> on molde y holde þe murgest mon.
> Cunde comely ase a knyht,
> clerk ycud þat craftes con,
> in vch an hyrd þyn aþel ys hyht,
> ant vch an aþel þin hap is on.
> Hap þat haþel haþ hent
> wiþ hendelec in halle;
> selþe be him sent
> in londe of leuedis alle!

Brown notes that Böddeker characterizes this poem as "Eine Ironie," but maintains that a medieval poet would scarcely introduce the Virgin "as the climax of his argument" if his intention were to satirize women ironically.[7] Yet it is tempting to allow an ironic reading alongside the penitential public one--when pressed, perhaps by a humorless or straight-laced retainer, the poet disowns his former work publicly; but privately, for Richard's benefit say, "soþ is þat y of hem ha wroht, as Richard erst con rede."

Truth itself, and the capacity of language to convey or obscure it, is a theme rarely encountered in the Middle English lyrics, but it occurs in several of the poems in the Vernon series, Brown XIV:95-120. In fact, it could be said of the entire series, with its characteristic refrain in the closing line of each stanza, that the necessity to incorporate a fixed linguistic unit, such as Deo gracias, into a varying syntactic and semantic context demonstrates more than the ordinary degree of sensitivity to language itself, language as a subject of the poetry. Not that this sensitivity produces uniformity in the treatment of language in the Vernon series, as two examples may show.

On the other hand, many of the poems are openly and simply

didactic, using the refrain to state a general moral precept, examples of which are developed in the stanzas. The overall effect is to suggest the homily of a parish priest. Brown XIV:115 is such a work. Here is the first stanza.

> The grete god so ful of grace
> of whom al godnes growe ganne--
> And alle þat listeneth me a space,
> God childe hem from þe fende satanne!
> A litil word in my hert ranne,
> I wole hit synge, ȝif hit ȝou lest,
> To gete þe loue of god & man--
> And al-wey fonde to say þe best.

The speaker then proceeds straightforwardly to elaborate on his theme, instancing the kinds of situations his dictum will encompass. The fifth stanza suggests how widespread may have been the concern about such tales as the speaker of the Harley lyric claims he now disowns, though not precisely for the same reason that this speaker condemns them:

> In company ȝif þat þou be
> þer men speketh vilany,
> ȝyve þou be tempted ȝet turne þe,
> And þan dost þou a gret gentri.
> A bad tale is ribaudi,
> Hit gete no worship, est ne west,
> For godis loue do cortesi,
> And euer fond to say þe best.

Such tales as "sownen into synne" are neither to be listened to nor repeated--it is not sufficient simply to ignore them. Thus the Church's moral counterthrust aims not at undoing damage already done, by contrary claims or virtuous counterexamples, but at stifling linguistic production itself. In the uncomplicated moral universe of this poem, such virtuous linguistic behavior can only produce the rewards of the virtuous:

> For good word may gete heuen blisse,

And do þe lyue in ese & rest;
For cristis loue, tak a-tent to þis,
And euer fond to say þe best.

But alongside this bright optimism the Vernon series also displays a profound skeptical mistrust of the word, as can be seen in Brown XIV: 103. The speaker begins with a general condemnation of This World, such as we have already become acquainted with, but his contemptus mundi is soon discovered to be more specifically a contemptus orationi.

þe mon þat luste to liuen in ese,
Or eny worschupe her to ateyne,
His purpos I counte not worþ a pese,
Witterli, but he ordeyne
þis wikked world hou he schal plese
Wiþ al his pouwer and his peyne:
ȝif he schal kepe him from disese,
He mot lerne to flatere and feyne;
Herte & mouþ loke þei ben tweyne,
þei mowe not ben of on assent;
And ȝit his tonge he mot restreyne,
For hos seiþ þe soþe, he schal be schent.

The speaker casts this opposition between truth and falsehood in the technical terms of the day which were used to distinguish not between truth and untruth but between differing kinds of truth, simple literal truth and the truth of interpretation, text and gloss:

þus is þe soþe I-kept in close,
And vche mon makeþ touh and queynte;
To leue þe tixt and take þe glose,
Eueri word þei coloure and peynte.

What is reflected here is doubtless the irritation of a Friar of one of the preaching orders at the freedom with which anyone who had attained some learning could apply the simple text-and-gloss analytical formula to derive his own interpretation of scripture. But it is possible as will that the speaker raises the point to rationalize (to himself?) the notoriously poor treatment these mendicants received customarily at the hands of the people whose welfare they ostensibly had in mind:

For let a frere in Godes seruise
þe pereles to þe peple preche,
Of vre misdede & vre queyntise,
þe trewe tixt to telle and teche;
þau he beo riht witti and wyse,
ȝit luytel þonk he schal him reche.

The speaker's condemnation of the times in which he finds himself is profound, even apocalyptic. What he sees as a universal sin against language can only be cleansed by a horrible new vision of the Paracletic tongues of flame announcing not the birth of wisdom but the death of deceit:

Seþþe þe tyme þat god was boren,
þis world was neuer so vntrewe;
Men recchen neuer to ben for-sworen,
To reuen þat is hem ful duwe;
þe peynted word þat fel bi-forne,
Be-hynde, hit is anoþer hewe.
Whon Gabriel schal blowe his horn,
His feble fables shul hym rewe:
þe tonges þat such bargeyn gon brewe,
Hit weore non harm þouȝ þei were brent.
þus þis gyle is founde vp of newe,
For hos seiþ soþ, he schal be schent.

In the latter part of the Middle English period there is evidence that the interpretational strategy alluded to here as "text and gloss" itself becomes a kind of cult, capable of being exploited in a discourse-deictic lyric. In order to understand the impulse that produced such an apparently monotonous and banal moralizing as Brown XV:189, we need to recognize in it the self-referential strain in which not merely language but the whole analytical scheme from which language was felt to derive its significance is present to itself. The "Song of 'Goods'," as Brown entitles it, is far less a song about the nature of the good than about the nature of song--and of language.

Each of the poem's four stanzas focusses on an aspect of goodness, and it is in the arrangement and organization of these four distinct

aspects of goodness that the poem's self-referential interest lies. The first stanza will illustrate the point:

> While þou hast gode & getest gode,
> for gode þou miȝt be holde;
> Who haþ no gode, he can no gode--
> a gode man so me tolde.
> Hit is noȝt gode for no gode
> of gode forto be bolde;
> But þi gode to god be gode
> þi gode wil fail & folde.
> Wiþ an .v. & an .I. gode wil come & goo,
> but þi godes grounde be gode, þi gode wil worche þe woo.

The stanza concerns itself with goods, in the sense of material possessions; as the refrain lines suggest, they will come and go, and they have no innate moral value. This level of analysis corresponds to the literal level of scriptural interpretation in exegetical practice, in accordance with the well-known mnemonic couplet "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,/ Moralia quod agas, quo tendas anagogia." Each of the following three stanzas in turn interprets the idea of the good on the allegorical, moral (or tropological), and anagogical levels. In the second stanza, the allegorical or belief-centered interpretation of "good," the summarizing refrain says that "gode is gode to wisse, for with gode þou miȝt be gode, & bygge hevene blisse." The third, the moral or tropological stanza, concerns itself with right action, and ends with the refrain "gode is þat gode doth, oþer gode was neuer gode for certeyn & forsoth." And the final stanza, appropriately enough, places the good within a cosmic perspective: "in gode is gode ende, for al is gode which endeis gode & þerto Crist vs sende."

The use of such a formal device announces, in a sense, the demise of the original signification of the system upon which it is based. If four-level exegetical interpretation were, for this speaker, a living analytical strategy, he could not have used it to provide mere

exterior form for his work, however learned or clever the device may have seemed to be. In order for the strategy to direct and control the impulse toward polysemous reading, it must not itself be present in the text to which it is to be applied. A system cannot be analyzed in its own terms. Hence the fact that in this lyric it has become a scarcely concealed organizational device argues that its living functionality has passed into the fossilization of form. It is cult that lacks the continual renewal of fresh revelation, and so is on the way to becoming not cult but occult.

Notes

[1]Fillmore, "Deixis II," p. 1-3.

[2]Dronke, pp. 14-15.

[3]Dronke, p. 24.

[4]Dronke, p. 30.

[5]Dronke, pp. 24-25.

[6]Brown XIII, p. 213.

[7]Brown XIII, pp. 228-29.

Chapter VI: Poems Without Contexts

Maiden in the mor lay,
In the mor lay,
Sevenight fulle ant a--
Sevenight fulle ant a--
Maiden in the mor lay,
In the mor lay,
Sevenightes fulle ant a day.

Well was hire mete,
What was hire mete?
The primerole ant the--
The primerole ant the--
Well was hire mete,
What was hire mete?
The primerole ant the violet.

Well was hire dring,
What was hire dring?
The chelde water of the--
The chelde water of the--
Well was hire dring,
What was hire dring?
The chelde water of the welle spring.

Well was hire bour,
What was hire bour?
The rede rose an te--
The rede rose an te--
Well was hire bour,
What was hire bour?
The rede rose an te lilie flour.

By now it should be quite apparent what this poem is not: it is not a deictic poem. It contains not a single present tense verb, nor a first or second person pronoun, nor a place-designating adverbial. Its "situation of utterance" seems timeless, universal.

Yet, for all that, I do not think it is hard to see the shadowy outlines of at least two speakers engaged in a conversation here. In

the first stanza a speaker announces a topic for conversation and asserts its tellability by repeating two quite remarkable statements: that a maiden lay in the moor, and that she did so for seven full nights and a day. The topic's tellability lies, in a word, in its inconceivability. How should a maiden--a particularly vulnerable and inexperienced human being--be lying in a moor--a particularly sterile, inhospitable environment? And that for seven nights and a day, enough time for her to need sustenance and shelter?

In the following three stanzas the suggestion of a new voice can be heard raising just such questions in the second and sixth lines. (If we assume, on the contrary, that the same speaker asks the questions and answers them, their rhetorical effect is undercut by the fact that the first line of each of these stanzas anticipates the answer: "Well was hire mete," "Well was hire dring," "Well was hire bour." On this reading a certain mechanical quality creeps into the poem, one that hardly accords with the enchanting, even trancelike quality critics of every interpretational persuasion have noticed in it.[1]) The interpretive assumption of a new speaker to ask the questions, hence of a conversational dialogue, will give us a clue to a satisfactory reading. Let us first examine some formal subtleties that procede from this assumption and then ask what they might mean.

If we designate the fact that the maiden lay in the moor as Topic A_1 and the fact that she did so for a certain length of time as Topic A_2 the seven lines of the first stanza have the form $A_1A_1A_2A_2A_1A_1A_2$. This form is retained, in fact, even when the new speaker enters with his questions in stanzas two, three, and four. They are simply WH-questions derived by transformation from the statements in the first

lines. These questions in effect ask the first speaker to elaborate on Topic A_1. The first speaker does so, but only partially, in lines three and four, which constitute Topic A_2. The incompletion of his responses (marked both by their syntax, which demands a missing noun phrase, and by their truncation of the four-beat metrical scheme) is satisfied in the last line of each stanza, more accurately designated as representing Topic A_{2-3}. Hence the seven-line formal pattern $A_1A_1A_2A_2A_1A_1A_{2-3}$ corresponds to a form of the rhetorical device known as enumeratio, the division of subjects into adjuncts, which is further reflected in the relationship between the second, third, and fourth stanzas and the first.[2]

Within each stanza the seven-line pattern of sub-topics corresponds to a speech-situation pattern in which an initial speaker announces the topic (or sub-topic) with an assertion (line one), a second speaker queries the assertion for specifics (line two), the first speaker gives a partial answer (lines three and four) and repeats his initial assertion (line five), the second speaker repeats his query (line six), and the first speaker repeats his partial answer, adding a second, seemingly final, detail (line seven).

The question in line six in each stanza, though it is identical with the one in line two, seems to beg for the last piece of information from a speaker who, thoroughly in control of the speech situation, teasingly withholds it until the end. Why should he do this? I will suggest two answers.

The first is a pragmatic one derived from the dynamics of the conversation. It is desirable, as we have seen, to get and hold the floor during a conversation. A participant competes for this privilege

and will claim it from someone else before the latter is entirely finished if that speaker cannot hold interest until the end. Thus the withholding of a fascinating bit of information until the last, together with a bit of artful advertising of its coming, tends to guarantee the continued interest of one's auditors.

But more than this, to read the poem is to sense the presence of real mastery of frugal resources. The presumptive speaker, on my reading, certainly retains masterly control of the conversation, as I have just suggested, and this with a very small stock of information. But in this he resembles the poet himself, whoever that may have been, who marshalls the sparest of verbal resources, sound or sense, to create a lyric whose fascination continues to draw the attention of its readers, beginning students and seasoned critics alike.

And finally, the maiden in the poem. Is she not amazingly the mistress of her situation? She seems not merely to survive but to flourish in an inhospitable environment. People lost in the wilderness are supposed to grub for roots to eat and cower by fallen logs at night, but the sources of her nourishment and shelter are pure, sweet, and wholesome. The very ordinariness of primroses and violets, chill spring water, roses and lilies suggests that what is alien for most of us is perfectly familiar for her. In this effect lies true mastery.

What the poem conveys, then, is a sense of control. The first speaker, the poet, and the maiden all manage to channel the unruly, to master the intractable, for a certain space. Not that this implies complete dominion for any of the three, for the accomplishment of each is bounded: speakers cannot hold the floor forever, poets cannot compose poems of infinite length, maidens are not immortal. "This World"

is a place of transition, after all. But to confront that which would defeat one--another speaker, a silence or a blank scrap of parchment, a hostile environment--and to master it without subjugating it, is art.

The poetry of deixis lies very close to the origin of all literature in ordinary conversation, in men speaking to one another. To engage in a conversation is to relinquish exclusive claim to the title of Self; it is to engage in a confrontation with another--with the other, in fact--in a way that is inherently present within the texts of poetry written in this economy. But the example of "Maiden in the mor lay" shows us that even without the overt signals of a conversation in progress Middle English poems draw upon the dynamics of the nuclear speech situation and derive from it power, economy, and timeless interest.

Notes

[1]I have borrowed the title for this chapter, together with this edition of the poem, from a masterly and instructive article by Professor J. A. Burrow, "Poems Without Context," Essays in Criticism, 29: pp. 6-32. A summary of the various interpretations of "Maiden in the mor lay" alluded to will be found on p. 21. The article discusses what is known and what may be surmised about each of the twelve items contained on a leaf from MS Rawlinson D. 913, including the present poem, which is item 8. Interestingly, only one other item of the twelve, number 2, is also lacking a specifically deictic context. It reads in full "The godemon on his weye" and seems almost beyond speculation. But Burrow means something different, of course, by "context" than I do. He means, on the one hand, knowledge of "the title of the text, who wrote it, when, for what occasion, for what audience, etc.," and on the other, knowledge of its genre (p. 27).

[2]Reiss thinks "the method may be related to the rhetorical device of merismus (distributio)" but this is certainly wrong. Merismus implies a division of the whole into parts. In fact, the assumption leads Reiss to speak of the poem's "fragmented thought," the different parts of which the audience is led to "focus on" and "savor" one by one, as though it were not one poem but several (p. 103). See Richard A. Lanham, A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) s.v.v. Distributio, Enumeratio.

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