

## TWO THIRTEENTH-CENTURY RELIGIOUS LYRICS

BY PETER DRONKE

In two songs, one Latin and one English, composed around 1250, we can observe poets working towards a new mode of organizing lyrical poetry. While this development implies a gain in imaginative freedom, the freedom is achieved in each instance through a particularly demanding virtuoso form. It is the form itself, shaped by echo and association, that seems to summon a content shaped by echo and association. The links of rhyme suggest new links of imagery; from echoes in the words further echoes in thought are generated. To study and compare this process in detail in the Latin and the English song, and to evaluate what each achieves, is the purpose of this essay.

5-x Both the Latin song, *Furibundi*, and the English, *Somer is comen and winter gon*, survive in unique manuscripts. Both present textual problems which, unless another manuscript were to be found, may never be fully soluble. The Latin text, with neums, is one of the later additions in the Codex Buranus, squeezed in at the foot of a page (f. 100v) by a mid-thirteenth century copyist.<sup>1</sup> It has never, to my knowledge, received any critical attention.<sup>2</sup> The lines themselves are scarcely legible in the manuscript, and in Schmeller's edition three lacunae remained. Two of these have now been filled in Schumann and Bischoff's text of the song. Only the opening phrase remains baffling: the legible letters, *O g . . . . . ai*, with neums indicating an elaborate melisma over them, suggest that the song opened with a passionate apostrophe, two or three words at most, which must have been set off formally and melodically against the three strophes that follow.<sup>3</sup> These are clearly articulated in the manuscript, each beginning with a capital. They are freely constructed, nonetheless they have certain formal symmetries of their own. This is most immediately apparent in the way that the opening words of the three strophes echo one another.<sup>4</sup>

*Estas in exilium* (69) of the second. Both significantly use a *descort* form. The dangers, when the regular parallelisms of strophic or sequence form are discarded, lie in loose or aimless organization, and in verbosity. These too can be found among *descorts* in the Codex Buranus.<sup>7</sup>

The first impression of *Furibundi* is one of breathless verve: the echoing rhymes follow one another so swiftly, there seems to be a headlong motion from start to finish. At the same time there is a complementary impression of complexity: the intelligence is caught back by the difficult syntax. Each strophe has its own demanding and refined syntactic pattern: the first, a sentence enclosing an involved parenthesis; the second juxtaposing two quite elaborate units; the third as if open-ended, one thought calling forth the next; at the close this sentence remains as if suspended at a great height.

I believe the poet has aimed at both kinds of effect, at arousing disparate but complementary responses in his listeners. On the one hand he achieves the momentum of the piece—perceptible both in the cascade of rhyme and in a motion of thought that can pass with such relentless speed from Christ's executioners at the opening to the celestial bride at the close. On the other he achieves an intellectually fascinating series of links in the sounds and in the images, which summon reflection long after the song itself is over. In considering these links more closely, it may be helpful to bear the two divergent but united kinds of poetic effect in mind.

The opening is dramatic and stark. Whatever words of outcry preceded, they could scarcely have diminished the shock of that word *Furibundi*, or the suddenness of *te*. We begin with the executioners at the cross, and then, without explanation, Christ is being addressed. Who is the speaker? A Christian meditating on the crucifixion? It might seem so, yet the next words (*quodquod lacte, melle . . .*) bring a second shock: those executioners are all, however many, who have been nurtured on the milk and honey of Christ's love. None is free from guilt; each becomes, at least for a time, one of the *furibundi*. The speaker is both accused and accuser; he is executioner and Everyman.

The words are chosen with deep care for their later reverberations in the song. This is most readily apparent with the first word. Indeed the three opening words—*Furibundi*, *Letabundi*, *Sitibundi*—could be seen as epitomizing the movement of thought in the poem: from the rage (leading to Christ's death) to the joy (of redemption) to the thirst (of the redeemed soul for the celestial love-union). The three-fold movement is the dialectic of redemption in the macrocosm, the dialectic of conversion within the individual soul.

In the phrase about gall and vinegar the poet plays on and conflates several biblical associations. The wording itself is closer to Psalm

this gesture itself a traditional figura for the healing water and blood which were struck by a lance from the side of the crucified Christ. The Good Friday liturgy contains a further variation on the theme: there in the *Improperium* Christ says to his people:

*Ego te potavi aqua salutis de petra: et tu me potasti felle et aceto.*<sup>11</sup>

I gave you the water of salvation to drink from the rock; you gave me gall and vinegar to drink.

Thus we can perceive not only the far-reaching connotations of the imagery at the opening of this strophe but also the structural relevance. Again the images link with what precedes and with what follows. The drinking of Christ's blood, *munda unda*, is a sweet potion, the reversal of the bitter drink, the gall and vinegar, of stanza 1. At the same time, this blood is drunk by Christians in the wine of the eucharist: that is why, in the second half of stanza 2, the vivifying effect of the blood-wine is conjoined with that of the "living divine bread," and in rhythm, rhyme and syntax *tuus sanguis | munda | unda | et potavit* is precisely counterbalanced by *recreavit | vivus | divus | panis iste*. This time it is at the close of the stanza—*o benigne, | digne | odis, | modis*—that the grace-notes, words which have no role in the pattern of imagery, come. The intellectual strenuousness resolves itself in a pure play of sound, expressing fervour and delight.

Once more the opening of the third stanza introduces a moment of dramatic unexpectedness. The first word, *Sitibundi*, seems to hark back to all the liquid images, bitter and sweet, that had gone before, the *pax* would seem to be the "kiss of peace" that precedes the moment of communion.<sup>12</sup> But suddenly a new dimension is introduced: the thirst is for a kiss of love, the peace is the consummation of love. Instead of continuing the communion imagery suggested by the previous stanza, the poet makes a brilliant transition to the erotic imagery of the Song of Songs.<sup>13</sup> The communion itself could indeed be seen as a foretaste of the complete love-union of the bride, the soul, to the divine Lover,<sup>14</sup> but poetically the effect is more splendid than this. The startling transition to direct speech transforms the *pax* from liturgical ceremony to an intimation of the bride's heavenly state of fulfilment. Her guilt in this life is not forgotten—she is still one of the thirsting—but the last lines open the heavenly vistas. She is both dark and beautiful (Cant. i. 5): again the poet's use of apposition is striking (*nigra fui | sponsa pulchra*), showing her beauty as it were emerging from her darkness. After the luxuriant play of rhymes, there is the beautiful withdrawn effect of the unrhymed last line. The preceding rhymes (*dilecta | perfecta | recta*) had created an intensification, and at the last, as no rhyme concludes the song, the effect seems

tions in the manuscript text fairly straightforward. Yet other passages raise a delicate question: how far did the poet's will to express certain things in a particular way override his will to formal flawlessness? How far does the flexibility so characteristic of his style also imply looseness of construction? It seems to me unlikely that we can attribute every "looseness" here to the negligence of a series of copyists, or to the faulty memory of a first recorder. Middle English lyric seldom aimed at, or achieved, the sheer effortless elegance of language and rhyme of the most polished contemporary Latin songs. So too the Middle English religious lyric often contains strong didactic elements, which do not always coalesce perfectly with the imaginative, however vivid these may be in themselves. This can entail artistic "looseness" of another kind. At all events decisions about possible flaws in particular lines of this song remain difficult. Let us first have the text before us.<sup>18</sup>

- |                                               |     |                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. Somer is comen ond winter gon,             | a 4 | Summer has come and winter gone,        |
| þis day biginniz to longe,                    | b 3 | the day begins to grow long,            |
| ond þis foules euerichon                      | a 4 | and the birds, one and all,             |
| ioye hem wit songe.                           | b 3 | take their joy in singing.              |
| So stronge                                    | b 1 | So fiercely                             |
| kare me bint,                                 | c 2 | sorrow binds me—                        |
| al wit ioye þat me fint                       | c 4 | despite the joy that is found           |
| in londe,                                     | b 1 | all around—                             |
| al for a child                                | d 2 | all for a young knight                  |
| þat is so milde                               | d 2 | who is so gentle                        |
| of honde.                                     | b 1 | of gesture.                             |
| 2. Þat child þat is so milde ond wlong,       |     | That young knight, so gentle and noble, |
| ond eke of grete munde,                       |     | and of great power too,                 |
| boþe in boskes ond in bonk                    |     | in the thickets and the hills           |
| isout me hauet astunde.                       |     | has sought for me a while.              |
| Ifunde                                        |     | He had found                            |
| he heuede me                                  |     | me bound                                |
| for an appel of a tre                         |     | because of an apple                     |
| ibunde;                                       |     | from a tree;                            |
| he brac þe bond                               |     | he broke the bond                       |
| þat was so strong,                            |     | that was so strong,                     |
| wit wunde.                                    |     | through his wounds.                     |
| 3. Þat child þat was so wilde ond <i>bold</i> |     | That knight, who had been so defiant    |
| to me alute lowe.                             |     | and daring,                             |
| Fram me to Giwes he was sold—                 |     | bowed down low to me.                   |
| ne cupen hey him nout cnowe.                  |     | By me he was sold to Jews—              |
|                                               |     | they could not tell him for what he     |
|                                               |     | was.                                    |
| "Do we," <sup>19</sup>                        |     | "Let us,"                               |
| sayden he,                                    |     | they said,                              |
| "naile we him opon a tre                      |     | "Let us nail him on a tree              |

8. He ros him ene þe þridde day  
 ond sette him on is trone;  
 he wule come a domes day  
 to dem us cuerich one.

Grone  
 he may ond wepen ay,  
 þe mon þat deiæt witoute lay  
 alone.

Grante ous, Crist,  
 wit þin uprist  
 to gone.

Amen.

By his own might he rose the third day  
 and seated himself on his throne.  
 He will come on judgement-day  
 to judge us, everyone.

Groan  
 he may and weep forever,  
 the man who dies without faith,  
 alone.

Grant us, Christ,  
 in your rising  
 to rise with you.

Amen.

1,7 is funde MS 2,3 bank MS 3,1 wlong MS 3,10 scumi him MS  
 (*scumi* inserted from margin) 4,2 allonde MS 4,4 simten MS 4,8 mi  
 MS 5,3 MS erasure illegible; 14th cent. hand in margin *ne mylle hit* 5,4  
 walle MS 5,9 ne mitte us saui MS; another possible correction: *ne mitte us*  
*sauī / castel-wawe / ne halle* 6,3 thus 14th cent. hand in margin; MS erasure  
 illegible. Brown reconstructs, *An<d of here eyen heo> let blod*; but today, even with  
 ultra-violet lamp, only the final *d* is legible with certainty. 6,7 changedere  
 MS 7,1 nam, man MS 7,7 brace MS 8,4 cuerichic one MS 8,7  
 man MS 8,11 gene MS For rhyme it would also be possible to regularize  
 at 4,5: *fonde*; 4,8 *honde*; 5,5 *walle*.

The nature-opening is of a kind characteristic of love-lyric: the speaker, filled with longing, contrasts the joy of spring or summer, the joy of the birds and of the whole outer world, with his or her own inner grief, languishing for the beloved, unable to respond to the world's call to joy. Such an opening had often, a decade or two before this song was composed, been adapted to songs of divine love by the Flemish poetess Hadewijch: it is her most frequent and distinctive mode of opening a religious lyric:<sup>20</sup>

Men mach den nuwen tijt  
 Wel bekinnen overal:  
 Die voghele hebben delijt;  
 Die bloemen ontspringhen in berch in  
 dal.

Waer so si staen,  
 Si sijn ontgaen  
 Den wreden winter diese qual.  
 Ic ben ontdaen,  
 Mij en troeste saen  
 Die minne jeghen mijn ongheval.

The new season  
 can be felt everywhere:  
 the birds have their delight,  
 flowers spring up over hill, over dale.

Wherever they are,  
 they have escaped  
 the torment of cruel winter.  
 I alone am lost,  
 if solace does not come  
 from Love to me in my wretchedness.

Hadewijch in her state of longing for divine love, which many times in her songs is evoked in chivalric terms, comes close in spirit to the opening of the English song. As Miss Woolf has pointed out, "child" is here used for "knight"—as so often in ballads and romances.<sup>21</sup> But I would venture to disagree with her on a point of emphasis. The

undergo; the bitter drink is a *sonde*, both senses of the word—gift and feast—being present, recalling the world of gracious behaviour by a grim irony. For the rest, the fourth and fifth stanzas are more directly didactic, alluding to moments of Christ's passion and reflecting on their meaning for mankind, for the process of redemption. The later part of the fifth stanza—"ond wallen / in helle dep / nere neuere so swet"—has again something of the sardonic tone first heard at the entry of the executioners. With its final words (difficult to reconstruct with certainty) the romance world, the world of *castel, tur* and *halle*, is decisively rejected—in its literal sense.

The sixth stanza is perhaps the most thrilling in the song, as well as the most problematic (so much so that a recent edition has omitted it altogether). Here the virtuoso form breaks down, as the poet appears both to rhyme *blod* (in the same meaning) with itself three times, and to confuse the "a" and "c" rhymes which in every other stanza he keeps distinct. A further difficulty is that in the illegible third line we must rely either on a fourteenth-century completion in the margin of the manuscript,<sup>27</sup> or else complete the line in our own way. With lines 5-7 the problems are different again. The first two, "þe trace / ran of here blod," seem to me moving and poetically flawless, even though the form should preclude an "a" rhyme here. We must reckon with the possibility that the break in form was the poet's deliberate decision, because of what he wished to say. Only in 7 "fles ond blod," a cliché that adds little to "changed here . . . face," seems suspect for reasons of sense as well as rhyme. Yet I do not know a way of correcting the line which would not be an arbitrary rewriting.

The stanza begins with the sufferings of Mary at the cross, and concludes with an astonishing image of the suffering of Christ. Already in the words used of Mary—"þe trace / ran of here blod"—the image of the chase may be implicit, her flowing tears of blood leaving a track or trail, like that of a wounded animal. The pitiful image of Mary disfigured by weeping is completed by that of Christ as the deer, slain and dismembered. The image of Christ as *cervus* is as old as Christian symbolism itself,<sup>28</sup> but for the concreteness and succinct savageness of its use here (a use that clearly has no literal counterpart in the passion) I know no parallel. The chase brings back the connotations of the chivalric world, whose sport is hunting, but in order to reverse them, as the knight's heroic gesture had been reversed before ("wit wunde"). The knight himself, the hunter, is the slain quarry. This is a paradox commonly developed in love-allegories of the chase, of which the earliest instances appear to be contemporary with this English song. The knight is a lover, hunting his lady's love, but doomed, because of her hardness, to be her quarry

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Carmina Burana* 1, 3 (eds O. Schumann and B. Bischoff, 1970), no. 5\*, pp. 117-18; *Carmina Burana* (ed. J. A. Schmeller, Stuttgart, 1847), no. CC, pp. 78-9. It should perhaps be recalled that the main body of the manuscript contains no religious lyrics, though there is a group of plays with sacred themes.
- <sup>2</sup> The three references under "Literatur" (*CB* 1, 3, 118) are to brief incidental allusions only; there is no mention of the song in surveys such as F. J. E. Raby's *Christian Latin Poetry* or J. Szövérfy's *Die Annalen der lateinischen Hymnendichtung*.
- <sup>3</sup> Bernhard Bischoff has kindly informed me that even with the help of a powerful new ultra-violet lamp in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek no further letters are decipherable. To the device of opening with a passionate apostrophe, formally set off from the rest of the lyric, I would see a certain parallel in *CB* 100, the beautiful lament of Dido, in which the rhythmic sequence form is preceded by an invocation in classical hexameters:
- O decus, o Libye regnum, Carthaginiis urbem!*  
*O lacerandas fratris opes, o Punica regna!*
- Here, however, the invocation extends over into the first two lyrical lines, giving an effect of continuity as well as contrast.
- <sup>4</sup> I give a plain prose translation facing the Latin and the Middle English texts, in case this should be helpful to readers of lyric coming from other languages and disciplines; it is also the most succinct means of indicating how I would construe the more problematic lines in each song.
- <sup>5</sup> Adopting Schumann and Bischoff's suggestion (ad loc.), I take *quodquod* to be the manuscript spelling for *quotquot*.
- <sup>6</sup> And of course melody (though in the case of *Furibundi* no attempt to conjecture this from the neums has yet been made).
- <sup>7</sup> E.g. in *Bruma, veris emula* (57); *O Antioche* (97).
- <sup>8</sup> Matt. xxvii, 34, 48; Mark xv, 23; Luke xxiii, 36; John xix, 28-30.
- <sup>9</sup> Already in John iii, 14-15; more fully in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (130-140 AD), xii, 5ff.
- <sup>10</sup> Schmeller printed *mundâ undâ*, construing the phrase ablativally; the new edition gives no indication. In view of the poet's fondness for apposition and asyndeton (cf. *lacte, melle; puella maris stella; odis, modis*), I prefer to construe *munda unda* in apposition to *sanguis*.
- <sup>11</sup> *Liber Usualis Missae et Officii* (Paris-Tournai-Rome: Desclée, 1937), pp. 707-8.
- <sup>12</sup> Already from the time of Gregory the Great the kiss of peace was seen as belonging to the preparation for communion—see J. A. Jungmann, *El Sacrificio de la Misa* (Spanish edn, Madrid: B.A.C., 1963), pp. 887ff.
- <sup>13</sup> *Cant. i, 1: Osculetur me osculo oris sui*; for other echoes of the Song of Songs, see Schumann and Bischoff, ad loc.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. F. Ohly, *Hohelied-Studien* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1958), pp. 41, 274.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. P. Dronke, "Hildegard of Bingen as Poetess and Dramatist," *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 150-79.
- <sup>16</sup> K. Strecker (ed.), *Die Lieder Walters von Châtillon in der Hs. 351 von St.-Omer* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925), p. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Isaiah lxiii, 1-4: the winepress and vintner in this passage were interpreted figurally as the cross and the crucified Christ. For a recent account of this tradition (and of the related typology of Num. xiii), see R. Woolf, *English*

<sup>27</sup> As I have done; for the expression, cf. *King Horn*, 1405-6:

Rymenhild was ful of mode,  
He wep teres of blode.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., for instance, St Ambrose, *De Interpellatione Job et David II*, 1 (PL XIV, 811).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Thiébaux, "An Unpublished Allegory of the Hunt of Love: *Li dis dou cerf amorceus*," *SP*, 62 (1965), pp. 531-45; I. Glier, *Artes Amandi* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1971), esp. pp. 156-78, and in the *Register s.v. Jagdallegorie, Jagdmotiv*.

<sup>30</sup> The sense "to move downwards (e.g. from heaven to earth)" for Middle English "hute" is not well documented in *OED*, but emerges clearly in OE (cf. King Alfred's *Boethius*, XXV, edited by Sedgefield, p. 57). The weak preterite is attested elsewhere in ME (e.g. *Ormulum* 8961). At 7,6 the Sisams (op. cit.) emend to *lighte*, but this would spoil the significant echo of 3,2.

<sup>31</sup> It would be an absorbing and worthwhile task to trace more fully the development of virtuoso "echo" forms in medieval European lyric, from the first major experiments of this kind in the late twelfth century (Arnaut Daniel, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras' *Kalenda maia*, Morungen's *Ich hört uf der heide*) to those summits of thirteenth-century lyric where meaning and sound-play enhance each other (Cavalcanti's *Donna me prega*, King Alfonso's *Non me posso pagar tanto*), to the fourteenth-century decline into technical feats more playful than meaningful (the collection of Old French *estampies*, Heinrich Frauenlob).