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# DEVOTION AND DEATH:

# ANALYZING THE THEMES AND GENRES OF MIDDLE ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LYRICS

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# **DEVOTION AND DEATH:**
# ANALYZING THE THEMES AND GENRES OF MIDDLE ENGLISH RELIGIOUS LYRICS

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## ABSTRACT

This project intends to explore some of the most recurring themes observed in Middle English religious lyrics, as well as the influence of the institution of the Roman Catholic church and its views on such lyrics. Devotional lyrics and death and morality lyrics are the focus of analysis in this paper, centering on the works of authors St Godric of Finchale Priory, William Herebert, John Audelay, and William Dunbar.



**Keywords:** Middle English; Christianism; Lyrics.



## RESUMO

Esse projeto tem como objetivo explorar alguns dos temas mais recorrentes observados em letras de músicas religiosas escritas em inglês médio, assim como, a influência da instituição da Igreja Católica Romana e suas opiniões nessas letras. O foco da análise neste trabalho são as letras de devoção e as letras que tratam de morte e moralidade, centrando-se nas obras dos autores St Godric of Finchale Priory, William Herebert, John Audelay e William Dunbar.



**Palavras-chave:** inglês médio; cristianismo; letras de música

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# INTRODUCTION

The role religion takes in literary works has been in countless occasions throughout the history of literature one of great influence. In the case of Middle English literature, due to its historical context and the Roman Catholic church's influence and power, it is one of the greatests examples of such. At that time, clerics influenced the faithful with poetry, especially in song form, which was very popular, and even stylistically influenced contemporary authors and ones who came after.

This monograph aims to analyze a few Middle English religious lyrics and determine whether they reflect the church's point of view and interests of the time. The authors whose works will be analyzed are St Godric of Finchale Priory, William Herebert, John Audelay, and William Dunbar. The genres in which they wrote will be discussed, as well as the themes approached in their lyrics. Further technical analysis will not be made, such as scansion, as this is not the objective of this paper.

The historical context and the involvement of the Roman Catholic church in politics, showing their power at the time, will be discussed in Chapter 1, as well as the church's views during the period of Middle English. In this chapter, an introduction to Middle English literature will also be made.

An introduction to the authors will be presented in Chapter 2, which discusses when and where they lived, what they wrote and what influenced their writing.

In Chapter 3, the genres in which religious lyrics authors wrote in will be presented, while in Chapter 4 a more detailed analysis of the recurring themes of the time will be made, with examples of such lyrics written by the authors chosen for this monograph.

# CHAPTER 1: Historical Context

The development of Middle English began with the coming of the Normans to England. In 1066, the Duke of Normandy - William, the Conqueror (1028-1087) - managed to take the English territory, after his victory in the Battle of Hastings(1066). Upon conquering this new land, he decided to take inventory of each part of the country, and to divide its parts to the nobles, thus developing what we now call feudalism. The language of the Nobility was, therefore, French, while English speaking was left to the peasants.

At first, the French and the English could not communicate, however, as time progressed both languages were learned by the opposing people. And so, the French vocabulary started to be gradually incorporated into the English language, giving birth to Middle English.

The development of middle English as a language went through a few phases, as the period which we consider it as the vernacular language of England is rather large, spanning from 1066 since the Norman conquest until the end of the Middle Ages, in 1500. Therefore, the works of the authors here presented will at times be in different phases of Middle English, as language is always evolving.

## 1.1) Church's involvement in England's Medieval History and Politics

The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages was an extremely powerful institution, which not only influenced societies' religious doctrines, but was decisive in political decisions as well. Before the aforementioned invasion planned by the Duke of Normandy, he pleaded with Pope Alexander II (1010-1073) for his blessing. Although the debate on whether the blessing was given or not still continues, the Duke's claim to the throne was endorsed in some people's eyes nonetheless, which helped him in his conquest. "While this failed in the long term to persuade most impartial observers of the justice of his claim, it facilitated recruitment of the invading army". (GARNETT, 2009, p. 41)

In similar manner, during the thirteenth century, King John (1166-1216)'s policies and sour relationship with Pope Innocent III (1161-1216) - which resulted on his temporary excommunication - and the barons resulted in the baronial revolts and

the resolution of the Magna Carta, a document which conceded rights to common men, securing justice to them, as well as, for the first time, submitting the nobility and the king himself to the law. The pope himself was not happy by the document, which affected clerics' lives as well, however, it might be argued that its confection might have come as a result of the English's view of King John as tyrannus after refusing to accept the nominee to Canterbury.

Not only did the higher positions among the clerics exert great power over politics and, consequently, over peasants, but the lower clergy was also very present in people's lives and held positions of influence over their parishes. They were essentially community leaders and the opinion and advice of the Church was valued, something that will be seen in greater detail in the following subsection.

### 1.2) Church's medieval views

In order to understand how the authors that will be talked about in this paper approached the subjects of their works, it is important to first understand, in a wider vision, the Church's views of the time.

A few years after the Norman Conquest, in 1098, Pope Urban II (1035-1099) implemented a series of policies which were written by his predecessor Pope Gregory VII (1020-1085), being thus called the Gregorian Reform. Said reform established, among other things, the purifying of the Church by celibacy.

> "In pre-Conquest England the king, [...] could be depicted as a Christ-like figure, the Good Shepherd of his people. In the Gregorian world view there was no place for such theocratic notions, on the contrary kings were little better than robbers whose only hope of salvation lay in submission to the protection and demands of the Church". (LEYSER, 1997, p. 188)

The communal sense of the Catholic Church began to grow, due to one of the establishments of the Gregorian Reform being the reaffirmation of "the bishop's role in administering pastoral care" and mandating that "each Christian go to confession and receive communion at least once a year." (FRENCH, 2009, p. 330) This allowed for the sense of community to grow among Christians, and with it the principle of charity, which "required social integration and fraternity".

Prayer was also done in community, as singular prayer was distrusted by clerics, for fear that the laity would fall into heresy and error. Some people of

elevated status could be allowed to have chapels at their houses with the license given by bishops, however they were only allowed to pray under the supervision of chaplains.

In the twelfth century, Pope Innocent III, a notorious (and controversial) figure for starting the Crusades, asserted that humans were leading miserable lives, and the only hope of escaping eternal damnation was in God's grace. This affirmation generated "a new drive for penitential self-awareness" (GILLESPIE, 2005, p.70), and would come to influence people's lives and the Church's doctrines.

The notion of Purgatory, a place where people would stay in penitence for their sins in wait for heaven, was first introduced in the Second Council of Lyons, in 1274, "presided over by Pope Gregory X"(1210-1276) according to historian R. N. Swanson in his chapter of the book *Medieval Christianity* (2009). "Until around 1100, the general assumption was that most humans were, quite simply, without hope of salvation - they were just too sinful to be saved," the author states.

After the notion of purgation was developed, the relationship between the souls of the living and the souls of the ones in Purgatory became an important one. A XV Century English manuscript described the ascension of the souls from Purgatory to Heaven as an engineering mechanism where the souls are cleansed, being pushed by two different forces: the Mass, and the souls' good deeds. As the laity began seeking provisions for leaving Purgatory after their deaths, a third alternative was presented to them as a way to bypass Purgatory or shorten their time there: acquiring indulgences.

As a result of the novelty of the concept of Purgatory, the late Middle Ages saw an explosion of concern about death, a topic which affected everyday life as well as art. How one would come to pass away was decisive for their soul, to die a "good death" - whether they would go to Hell or go to Purgatory. Their last moments were "tests of faith", with some illustrations and printed texts showing how around death beds, loved ones and priests circled in prayer and would encourage the dying, maintaining faith. At the moment of death they would pray for liberation from Purgatory.

For the great mass of Christians, it was a visual and oral religion, since the reading of the scripture was reserved to monks and clergy. It was accessible only to a social and intellectual elite, and in the fourteenth century Dominican friar Jacobo

Passavanti declared “there was no need for either laity or the lower clergy [...] to know more than the bare minimum of religious formulae” (WEBB, 2009, p 305)

Going against the idea of reserving the scripture to the intellectual elite, John Wycliffe (1328-1384), a scholar and preacher, translated the Bible into Middle English and began distributing it among local groups. Wycliffe was already known for his controversial beliefs: speaking against transubstantiation and claiming ‘dominion’ was nullified unless exercised by the virtuous. He and the ones who followed his ideas became known as “lollards” and were seen as heretics by the Church. “Lollard theology was based on a belief in the supreme value of scripture - *sola scriptura* - and on the right of all Christians to read and understand it.” (LEYSER, 1997, p. 198) These ideas point to them anticipating the Protestant Reform of the sixteenth century.

### 1.3) British literature in the Middle Ages

In this section, the subject of discussion is the general scenario of Britain’s literature and lyrics, as well as how the reading and writing of those lyrics worked. This will not be a detailed analysis, as this is not the aim of the paper.

Before approaching the aforementioned subjects, one must once again speak about the language status in Britain at the time. As the French language was spoken by the nobility, English was spoken by peasants and Latin was the language of the church, this situation influenced the English language’s lexicon and phonetics. Moreover, it also created an auspicious environment for macaronic writing - texts written in more than one language - in fact, this will be also seen later on in this paper.

The overall themes of British literature were various throughout the thousand year span of the Middle Ages, however, adventure narratives were incredibly popular and survive in collective imagination to date. The oral tradition which used to be really strong in Britain before the Norman conquest was always filled with stories of great warriors and epic journeys. The idea of the unbreakable hero that could be seen then was carried onto later trends such as Greek mythology characters in *History of the Britons* (1140) and, perhaps much more strongly, in the character of King Arthur, a character who belongs to Welsh mythology. A character who also rose

around that time was Robin Hood, however, contrasting with other heroes who had high morals, this one was arguably an anti-hero.

Many authors of the middle ages wrote in lyric form, which was very popular at the time, although the majority of Middle English lyrics are anonymous. The most famous of those authors might be Geoffrey Chaucer (approx. 1340 - 1400), author of The Canterbury Tales, known for writing in English and creating words and expressions. A few notorious lyrics of the time were also William Langland's (1332 - 1386) *The Vision of Piers Plowman* and *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* (XIV century) of unknown authorship.

Some characteristics of Middle English lyrics should also be mentioned. Not many sheets of music still survive of the time, so little is known of how the lyrics are supposed to sound like:

> [...] What survives tends to be in early manuscripts of monastic provenance, in collections made by musically literate clerics for their own use, or in later song repertories associated with particular households or ecclesiastical establishments. The melodies for many lyrics were probably carried in people's heads. (BOFFEY, 2005, p. 2)

The lyrics were most probably supposed to be read aloud, "by informed readers at least, with a sense of the movement of the verse" (DUNCAN, 2005, p. 19). Coming from the tradition of alliteration, the English verse started to be influenced by the French form, as well as other poetry forms which came from translations. Thus, the stress count in Middle English lyrics displayed some flexibility.

## CHAPTER 2: Authors

In order to better understand the lyrics which will be discussed in the further chapters it is important for this study to discourse on the lives of the four authors whose lyrics will be looked into. A further understanding of the authors' backgrounds and intentions is decisive as this paper intends to examine their work in later chapters.

### 2.1) Saint Godric of Finchale

Godric of Finchale (1065-1170) was a saint who lived his last years as a hermit. Never being officially canonized, he was a popular local saint in the county of Durham, whose hymns are generally regarded as some of the oldest songs of the English language and “as standing in the beginning of Middle English poetry”. (RANKIN, 1923, p. 699) Although much was speculated about his life, thanks to the records written by Reginald of Finchale, a good deal of his story is known.

Born in Norfolk into a simple and poor family, Godric became a peddler and then a merchant and developed a business in which he worked on until his decision to dedicate his life to the service of God. He made two pilgrimages to Rome and two to Jerusalem, becoming a hermit after that and resigning himself in the last 40 to 60 years of his life to an ascetic life.

His life as a hermit was marked by asceticism, reportedly praying while immersed in cold water, sleeping using a stone as a pillow, and perhaps most famously he beheld many visions.

> “Then he became a hermit, lived for more than a year in a hut near Whitby and then in a hole in the ground near Durham. Here he built a little hut of wood, which he called St. Mary's Chapel; here he lived an incredibly ascetic life; here he beheld many visions, now of the devil appearing in divers forms to tempt him, now of the Virgin, of Mary Magdalene, of John the Baptist, of St. Nicholas, of St. Peter, and even of Christ; and here he died on May 20, 1170”. (RANKIN, 1923, p. 699)

According to Reginald of Finchale, St. Godric could also speak French when “inspired”, despite there being no evidence that he could speak the language fluently.

This is an interesting fact owing to his inclusion of French words throughout some of his lyrics (RANKIN, 1923, p. 706).

### 2.2) William Herebert

William Herebert was a Franciscan friar and theologist. His exact date and place of birth is unknown, however scholars speculate that it was “probably in Wales no earlier than 1270” (LOEWEN; WAUGH, 2022, p. 237). Herebert joined the Franciscans in Hereford and moved to study at the University of Paris in 1290, later on getting his doctor degree at Oxford, where he would become a lector. He made his return to Hereford where he would spend his final years.

Herebert’s best known work is his commonplace book, MS Additional 46919, where most of his writing can be found. In it he included a lot of preaching material, recipes, devotional verses of another friar, Nicholas Bozon, as well as a number of translations of Latin hymns and poetry. In Professor Ingrid Nelson’s book *Lyric Tactics: Poetry, Genre, and Practice in Later Medieval England* (2017), she analyzes Herebert’s translations as “tactical practices”, drawing a correlation between that and the fact that friars seeked to teach doctrine to lay audiences.

> “The friar uses tactical practices in his translations in order to integrate scholastic textual theories of translation and authority with the affective and popular appeals of performance. Herebert’s English hymns unite his scholastic influences with popular preaching and liturgical practices to stabilize song’s morality by separating its affective performance from its doctrine.” (NELSON, 2017, p. 61)

### 2.3) John Audelay

Much like the other authors, the exact date of birth of John Audelay - or Awdley, as his name is spelt in many ways in the same manuscript - is uncertain, it is known, however, that he lived during the end of the fourteenth century and beginning of the fifteenth.

During his younger years, Audelay was the chaplain of Richard, Lord Lestrange of Knockin, a man who due to the orchestration of an ambush was found guilty of inciting assault. At such an episode, Audelay was also convicted of aiding and abetting the violence.

The following years of his life were spent at Haughmond, after losing his sight, where he wrote his book of poems. In many of his poems he introduces himself as “the blind Awdley”, as he closes one, for example, with the words:

I pray youe al pur charyte *for the sake of*
Redis this carol reverently, *read*
Fore I hit mad with wepyng ye; *weeping eye*
Mi name hit is the blynd Awdlay. (REICHL, 2005, p. 150)

Audelay wrote a plethora of poems and lyrics - most notably, carols. His writing offered an accentuated variety of themes when it came to their subject. One central idea is understood by John Wheatley: “Audelay describes the world that he inhabits as full of sin and desperately in need of Christian redemption.” (WHEATLEY, 2010, p. 212) He seemed to believe his own blindness and deafness was a punishment for his past sins.

In his work, Audelay denounces blasphemous attitudes, sometimes shifting his focus to the Lollards, (WHEATLEY, 2010, p. 214), with criticism of their heresies. His tone is strident and at times morbid, as he on many occasions tells the reader, at times listener, about his physical state.

### 2.4) William Dunbar

A scottish poet, courtier and ecclesiastic, William Dunbar lived during the final decades of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. His background and date of birth are uncertain, however, he constantly “takes an aristocratic point of view in his poems, asserting on one occasion that he is “*of nobill strynd*” [strain, descend]” (ROSS, 1981, p. 4).

The first records of his life are those of his St Andrews University days, where he received his bachelor’s and master’s degree. Some of his poems also indicate that, during this time of his youth, Dunbar embarked on foreign traveling. Later records of his life are on the royal court of King James IV of Scotland (1473-1513), where he gained notoriety. It is speculated that he might have died in the Battle of Flodden (1513).

With substantial diversity and variability in their styles and genres, writing religious and secular alike, the poems of William Dunbar are exceptional, having countless collections throughout the years. A great part of his work was devotional and doctrinal, such as hymns and moral poems, although some of his most famous work are his satire poems, written in a dark and cynical tone.

As Dunbar was standing in the end of the fifteenth century, much of his literature style was at the same time of transition and of epitome. He paid homage to Chaucer as well as other writers who came before him, and wrote a few pieces towards the end of his life which seemed to be invoked by the upcoming Renaissance.

# CHAPTER 3: Genres

As this chapter of the paper introduces the main subject of the paper with more depth, it must be considered that the main source material for this study was *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric* (2005) a survey made by several authors, edited by Thomas G. Duncan. In the material, the lyrics are separated into chapters by genre or theme, having each author talking about that specific type of lyric. Religious lyrics, carols, sermon lyrics and moral and penitential lyrics are all approached in chapters of their own.

In this study, carols and sermon lyrics will be approached as genres, while religious lyrics will be first introduced as a whole. However, as moral and penitential lyrics discuss a theme of the lyrics, they will be further seen in chapter four. Additionally, in this chapter lyric translations will also be talked about.

## 3.1) Religious Lyrics

Middle English religious lyrics, which in general had the Catholic faith as their central theme, were various in their compositions and purposes. Devotion, doctrine exposition and penitention are some of the purposes for which the authors might feel inclined to write, or even translate about. The forms these lyrics might be written in were also diverse, “with differently ordered stanzas, or with differing numbers of stanzas, in varying manuscript contexts.” The speaker of religious lyrics is sometimes attributed a “particular kind of voice– personal, sincere, involved, immediate.” (WHITEHEAD, 2005, p. 96)

While there were already a few religious songs in Britain in the early Middle English days, a decisive factor to increase and develop vernacular religious lyrics was the desire of the Franciscan Friar Order to produce songs which would serve as evangelical tools. According to Whitehead (2005, p. 97), early Middle English religious lyrics followed, then, “two textual traditions”: some appropriating metre and idioms of popular songs, while others created, or “improvised” as the author points out, based on liturgy and scriptural lessons. Some lyrics were also incorporated into sermons, as will be further discussed later on in this chapter.

### 3.2) Translations of Religious Lyrics

For this study, the translations made by William Herebert will be the focus of discussion. His purpose and skills will be commented on, with the objective of aiding the analysis of the lyrics which are credited to his name.

The translations of lyrics at the time might have been at first attributed to the lack of material in the vernacular. As the Church held the power over scripture and the sacred texts were written in latin, there were many hymns which were written in latin as well, therefore, the translation process to Middle English occurred.

As it was previously stated, many medieval friars wrote religious lyrics, preaching materials, and other texts which might appeal to the laity. Herebert's translations serve as an example of such tactical moves. After considering the age-old translation debate that has been around since ancient Greek – the conflict of rhetoric and meaning, in his translations Herebert he decides to put "*sensus* over *verbum"*, that is, to focus on the meaning.

One example, as Nelson (2017) points out, is his translation of the Latin poem *Ave maris stella* (Hail, star of the sea, in Nelson's translation). An excerpt taken from the Latin poem reads as follows:

> Sumens illud Ave
> Gabrielis ore,
> Funda nos in pace,
> Mutans nomen Evae (NELSON, 2017, p. 80)

In Herebert's translation, he follows the contemporary preaching style, changing the syntax and turning the lines from sexsyllabic lines to tetrameter lines. With this, by adding information to his translation, he transforms the text into a "text of performance", choosing to shift its focus on the "strategies of an orthodox preacher"(NELSON, 2017):

> Thylk "Aue" that thou vonge in spel
> Of the aungeles mouhth kald Gabriel;
> In gryht ous sette and shyld vrom shome,
> That turnst abakward Eues nome. (NELSON, 2017, p. 81)

### 3.3) Carols

The Middle English Carol was a popular genre of music within Middle Age years, in which the lyrics, intended for singing, were made up of uniform stanzas with burdens (refrains) beginning the lyrics and being repeated after every stanza. Author John Audelay wrote a great deal of carols, having carols about Christmas, Mary, saints, death, among other subjects.

There were carols of many themes, some being religious and some being secular. Among religious themes, the most common ones were carols of Christmas, or nativity carols, and the ones of Passion, which talked about Christ on the cross and sometimes death. One example, written by John Audelay, is titled *Welcum be thou Heven Kyng (*In die Natalis Domini) in which the first two stanzas read as follows:

Welcum, yole, in good aray *Christmas*
In worship of ye holeday

Welcum be thou Heven Kyng,
Welcum, ibore in hon mornyng *give birth*
Welcum, to ye now wil we syng
Welcum, yole, for euer and ay *ever and always*

Welcum be thou Mare myld
Welcum be thou and thy Child
Welcum, fro the fynd thou us schilde, *defend*
Welcum, yole, for euer and ay (WHITING, 1931, p. 186)

With time, carols started losing their appeal to the masses, being considered less fashionable by the end of the sixteenth century. However, they survive in a slightly different form in current years with Christmas carols.

### 3.4) Sermon Lyrics

Lyrics in the sermon started being added as a means of making ecclesiastical education more accessible and more dynamic to the laity. As records show, congregations were susceptible to many distractions and were growing more and more tedious with the same sermons, therefore priests, friars and other members of the clergy started to add poetry and lyrics to their services.

Author Alan J. Fletcher (2005, p. 195) separates these lyrics into two categories: structural, lyrics which “originally had no existence independent of the structure of the sermon in which it participated” and non-structural, lyrics with Christian moral frame which the priest knows and might choose to include in his sermon.

## CHAPTER 4: Themes

Although there were various themes which religious lyrics authors wrote about, for the purpose of this paper, two themes will be the focus, as they were the most important subjects of religious lyrics at the time. This chapter will be separated into two main themes: lyrics of devotion; and lyrics of morality, penitence and death. These two themes, however, in many ways influenced each other, and were influenced by contemporary theological views, as will be explained further on.

To exemplify these themes and go into deeper detail, lyrics of the authors already mentioned in chapter 2 will be used as examples, and the influence the Church might have had in those authors particularly, will be discussed as well.

### 4.1) Devotional lyrics

The first lyrics to be analyzed, *A cry to Mary,* were written by St Godric in early Middle English, as it reads:

Sainte Marye Virginie,
Moder Jesu Christes Nazarene,
Onfo, schild, help thin Godric, *receive, defend*
Onfang, bring heylich with thee in Godes Riche *on high*

Sainte Marye, Christes bur, *chamber*
Maidenes clenhad, moderes flur, *virgin among maidens, flower*
Dilie min sinne, rix in min mod, *reign, heart*
Bring me to winne with the self God *bliss* (DAVIES, 1963, p. 51)

Saint Godric in this poem delivers a personal cry to Mary, mother of Jesus, in perhaps a moment when he is having one of his visions, addressing her in reality as well. Preaching does not seem to be the main intent for these lyrics, as Godric himself is the speaker. His secluded life also points to the assumption that his priority in the service of God was to worship.

In the late fifteenth century, towards the end of the Middle Ages, William Dunbar wrote *A Hymn to Mary* - lyrics with the same theme and addressee, which read as follows:

Haile! sterne superne. Haile! in eterne, *star*
In Godis sicht to shine.
Lucerne in derne for to discerne *lamp, darkness*
Be glory and grace divine.
Hodiern, modern, sempitern, *of today, everlasting*
Angelicall regine, *queen*
Our tern inferne for to dispern, *vicissitude, below, drive away*
Helpe! rialest rosine. *most royal rose*
Ave! Maria, gracia plena,
Haile! freshe Houre feminine,
Yerne us, guberne, virgin matern, *desire, govern*
Of reuth baith rute and rine. *pity both root and rind*
…
Emprice of pris, imperatrice, Bricht, polist, precious stane,
Victrice of vice, hie genetrice *conqueror, mother* (DAVIES ,1963, p. 247)

As nearly five hundred years separate them, a few changes which happened over the course of those years in the religious songwriting might be observed when such lyrics are contrasted. At first glance it is noticeable already that these lyrics are composed of more than one language, with verses like *"Ave! Maria, gracia plena"*, showing how much the influence of Latin and French contributed to Middle English's macaronic texts, something that gained increasing popularity after Godric's years.

Dunbar's devotional poem is a more impersonal one, in a sense that the author is not speaking in first person, and his name is not seen in text, therefore the reader might identify and insert themselves into the place of the one who is addressing Mary. His devotional writing is comparable to Godric's, complimenting Mary as many ways as he can, a usual practice for devotional lyrics. Dunbar, who was not a clergyman, might not have had the purpose of preaching for his readers and listeners, however, he was influenced by the songwriters and poets who came before him.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the notion of affective piety centered on the Passion of Christ grew popular and influenced devotional and penitential lyrics alike. “Devotion to the suffering Christ went hand in hand with a growing personal awareness of sin and guilt” (GILLESPIE, 2005, p. 74) Therefore, affection and emotion in acts of devotion to Christ was encouraged. A special attention was given to the power of empathy, and how being able to understand Christ’s pain in the cross would give better understanding of his love for humanity.

As songwriters were more interested in showcasing emotions and making the listener feel those emotions as well, lyrics like hymns and carols would start to appear more and more. These lyrics could be used as teaching tools by friars and priests, sometimes as mnemonic devices as well, as a remembering Christian was considered more virtuous. One example, which is a hymn of devotion to Christ, is *A Palm-Sunday hymn* by William Herebert:

Wele, herying and worshipe be to Christ *glory, praise and honor*
that dere ous boughte,
To wham gradden "Osanna!" children clene *cried aloud*
of thoughte.

Thou art King of Israel and of Davides kunne, *kin*
Blessed King that comest till ous withoute wem of sunne. *stain of sin*

All that is in Hevene thee herieth under on, *praises with one voice*
And all thine owne hondewerk and euch dedlich mon. *creation, mortal man*

The folk of Giwes with bowes comen aycinest thee, *Jews, boughs (of palm), witness*
And we with bedes and with song meketh ous to thee. *prayers, humble*

He kepten thee with worshiping, ayeinst thou shuldest deye, *watched, expecting*
And we singeth to thy worshipe, in trone that sittest heye.

Here wil and here mekinge thou nome tho to thonk; *homage, gracefully accepted*

Queme thee chenne, milsful King, oure offringe of this song. *please you*

(DAVIES, 1963, p. 98)

In this hymn, Herebert delivers a worship hymn in which the speaker is praising Christ and teaching about scripture. His intention is to preach and to make his congregation sing and learn with this hymn, which explains the lack of first person, as well as common allusion to scripture such as *"To wham gradden 'Osanna!' children"* which means, in Davies' translation roughly "the children cried aloud 'Osanna!'". According to the gospels, when Jesus enters Jerusalem, he is met with a crowd that greets him with palm tree branches singing "Hosana! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!"

Nativity lyrics, songs which praised and depicted Christs's birth and sometimes a focus on Mary, were also popular during Middle English years. Christmas carols, which are still popular nowadays, were perhaps a little different back then, with themes ranging from a Mary lulling her child to sleep to a juxtaposition of Jesus's birth and imminent death. An example of a nativity lyric is John Audelay's poem number 42, which reads as follows:

Nowel! nowel! nowel!

Ther is a Babe born of a may
In salvacion of us;
That He be heryd in this day, *praised*
Vene Creatore Spiritus . *Come Creator Spirit*

In Bedlem, in that fayre plas,
This blessid Barne borne he was; *boy*
Him to serve, God grawnt us *grace,*
Tu trinetatis unitas. *You, unity of Trinity*

The angelis to shepardis and sayd,
'Pes in erth be mon unto.'

Ther-with thai were ful sore afrayd,
Glorea in ex[c]elsis Deo. *Glory to God in the highest*

The shepardis hard that angel song; *heard*
Thai heredon God in Trenete; *praised*
Moche merth was ham among, *mirth*
Iam lucis ortus sidere. *now that the light of the sun has risen* (WHITEHEAD, 2005, p. 153)

The word nowel, which comes from French (noël), is a cry from joy at the birth of Christ. Again, the languages are mixed in this poem as Audelay also inserts *"Glorea in excelsis Deo!"* a common latin sentence of religious lyrics. Words of gratitude and love for Christ's coming to the word are spoken.

As the crucifixion and to the resurrection influenced the Roman Catholic Church and its believers faith, especially after the twelfth century, it is also interesting to see how devotional songs were written about the resurrection. Here follows the first two stanzas of *A hymn of the Resurrection* by William Dunbar:

Done is a battell on the dragon blak!
Our campioun, Christ, confoundit hes his force; *champion*
The yettis of hell ar brokin with a crak; *gates*
The signe triumphall rasit is of the Croce;
The divillis trimmillis with hiddous voce;
The saulis ar borrowit and to the blis can go: *souls, ransomed*
Christ with his blud our ransonis dois indoce. *endorse*
Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. *The Lord has risen from the tomb*

Dungin is the deidly dragon, Lucifer, *overcome*
The crewall serpent with the mortall stang, *sting*
The auld, kene tegir with his teith on char, *old, tiger, open*
Whilk in a wait hes line for us so lang, *which*
Thinking to grip us in his clows strang:
The mercifull Lord wald nocht that it wer so-
He maid him for to felye of that fang. *made him fail in that capture*

Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro. (DAVIES, 1963, p. 253)

In this poem Dunbar speaks of Christ as a victor who defeated death and evil. It is possible to see the influence of authors who came before him, as he was a late medieval songwriter, for example in the repetition of the sentence *"Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro*" as a burden to his stanzas, something he might have gotten from authors like Audelay and Herebert. His vocabulary is complex and remenices folklore, comparing Lucifer to a dragon to be slain in battle, which gives the lyrics the feeling of an epic poem.

Dunbar was a man of high social status with enough influence and education to afford to read previous authors. The other authors presented in this paper were members of the clergy in some way, which appoints how education was inaccessible to the common folk in medieval Britain.

In an overall sense, the devotional lyrics could be presented in many ways, leading the listener to an experience of devotion which taught, made them reflect, made them feel exhilarated with the power of Christ and the Saints. This could be amplified by the music accompanying the lyrics, which would enhance emotions with the creation of polyphony.

### 4.2) Lyrics of morality, penitence and death

As previously stated, the morality lyrics were greatly affected by the notion of empathizing with Christ in the cross in his pain, so that people could understand his love for humanity and this would cause moral reformation. This was at a time of Pope Innocent III's policies and affirmations that humans only hope was in God's will. These affirmations caused a general feeling of existential anxiety, as well as a feeling of inadequacy, which would come to be showcased in lyrics.

A visual appeal was starting to be used by priests and friars as a moral reformations tool, to cause this feeling of empathy to the pain of Christ. Descriptions of the crucifixion, of Christ's wounds and blood, were a way of making the congregation actually see what was happening and enable them to feel:

> [...] It is also the case that, from the twelfth century onwards, the imagination began to be accorded a distinct and systematic role in spiritual formation within a monastic and canonical milieu, and that, by the fourteenth century,

> images and sights were also held to have unprecedented power to arouse the emotions, effectively enabling the viewer to 'feel', and by 'feeling' to resolve upon a programme of personal moral reform. (WHITEHEAD, 2005, p. 108)

By the fifteenth century, believers even used "supplementary tools", such as a statue or a crucifix, which served as encouragement to their mental image.

An example of how visual image was used in description can be observed in the lyrics of the first four stanzas *A knight stained from battle* credited to William Herebert, which read:

What is he, this lordling, that cometh from the fight? *young lord*
With blod-rede wede so grisliche idight, *blood-red raiment to terribly arrayed*
So faire icoyntised, so semlich in sight, *clothed, godly*
So stifliche yongeth, so doughty a knight. *sturdily, valiant*

'Ich it am, ich it am, that ne speke bote right, *speak the truth*
Chaunpioun to helen monkunde in fight.' *champion to heal mankind*

Why, thenne, is thy shroud red with blod all imeind *clothes, mixed*
Ase troddares in wringe with most all bespreind? *wine-press, grape-pulp*

'The wringe ich habbe itrodded all mysulf on, *on my own*
And of all monkunde ne was non other won. *there was no other hope for mankind* (DAVIES, 1963, 94)

Here, a blood stained Christ who just came from battle talks to the speaker, who, at first sees Him and gives a description of a heroic Jesus, godly and a knight, with fair clothes, who just won a battle. He explains He is the champion who will heal mankind and the speaker asks about his clothes, which are stained with blood, to which He replies that there was no other hope for mankind, in other words, He is talking about His sacrifice. With these lyrics, painting visual picture and creating a storytelling scenario, Herebert touches his reader, in an attempt to cause moral reformation and affection.

The feelings of inadequacy also drove authors to write lyrics, questioning their value after their sin. Discussions on the inevitability of death, the uncertainty of its time and where people would leave to after death were also happening a lot at the time. Author John Audelay, who was blind and deaf felt his physical condition was a punishment for his past deeds, and, as a result, some of his lyrics have death and penitence as central themes. In the lyrics *Dred of deth, sorrow of syn,* he pleads for comfort as he fears death. He speaks of his physical situation and says that the Passion of Christ of what comforts him, of perhaps it is what he wishes it to do. It reads as follows:

Passio Christi conforta me *Passion of Christ comfort me*
Lade, helpe! Ihesu, merce!
Timor mortis conturbat me. *The fear of death confounds me*

Dred of deth, sorow of syn,
Trobils my hert ful grevysly;
My soule hit nyth with my lust then; *is harmed*
Passio Christi conforta me.

For blyndnes is a heve thyng,
And to be def ther- with only,
To lese my lyght and my heryng;
Passio Christi conforta me [...]

As I lay seke in my langure, *sick*
With sorow of hert and teere of ye, *eye*
This caral I made with gret doloure; *pain*
Passio Christi conforta me [...]

Lerne this lesson of blynd Awdlay:
When bale is hyest then bot may be; *remedy*
Yif thou be nyd nyght or day, *troubled*
Say passio Christi conforta me. (GILLESPIE, 2005, p. 155)

The sentence *“Timor mortis combat me”* is also used in another poem, by William Dunbar, perhaps referencing Audelay’s lyrics, in which he talks about the fragility of the things in life, and how death is unavoidable. The first three stanzas read:

I that in heill wes, and gladnes, *health*
Am trublit now with gret seiknes, *sickness*
And feblit with infermite.
Timor mortis conturbat me

Our plesance heir is all vaneglory; *pleasure*
This fals warld is bot transitory;
The flesh is brukle the Fend is sle. *frail, wily*
Timor mortis conturbat me.

The stait of man dois change and vary,
Now sound, now seik, now blith, now sary,
Now dansand mery, now like to dee. *die*
Timor mortis conturbat me. (DAVIES, 1963, p. 250)

The speaker of this poem was once healthy and now is sick, as he contemplates his imminent death he reflects on how the pleasures of life are transitory.

In summary, as the lyrics here showcase, in the moral reformation implemented by the Church, the fear of death and pain were used as tools to make people empathize with the pain of Christ. This not only influenced the lyrics of cleric authors like Herebert and Audeley, but also other catholic songwriters like Dunbar.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, contextual and theological aspects of the medieval period influenced the act of songwriting at the time. The development of Middle English as a language can be observed in the macaronic texts, in which the English and Latin verses appear following one another. The concern with death and dying a "good death", which was so present in the Middle Ages with the new found penitential awareness and the notion of Purgatory, is evident in lyrics such as "*Timor mortis combat me"*. This awareness walked hand-in-hand with a notion of inadequacy, which was felt not only by the laity, but can be observed in Audelay's self-consciousness over his own physical state and feeling that he deserved punishment for his past deeds.

As the church exerted power over all other social classes at the time and, by order of the Pope, both the lay and the clerics had to grow a communal sense. This surely served as inspiration for many songs which were destined to teach the laity, as, to them, religion was mainly visual and oral and the reading of scripture was reserved to monks and clerks. Some songs with the purpose of teaching bible passages such as *A Palm-Sunday Hymn* by Herebert, are an example of that.

Also seen in *A Palm-Sunday Hymn* is the attention to more expressive and emotional lyrics which would generate a feeling in the listener. Songs became not only a tool of teaching but a way of making the congregation feel empathy and love for the sacrifice of Christ, be that with jolly nativity carols such as Audelay's poem 42 or with visual descriptions of the Passion of Christ, of his blood and triumph, as it is able to observe in Herebert's and Dunbar's poems of resurrection.

The author's different backgrounds were defining factors to sort the focus of their writing. Herebert and Audelay were writing to preach and make their readers or listeners repent, as they were clerics with a good communal sense, who were born well after the Gregorian Reform was implemented and was already established. St Godric, one might imagine, was writing as a way of worship, sometimes detailing his visions with his lyrics. Lastly, Dunbar, the only author who was not a monk or religious figure, was a man of high status and education, and therefore, he was probably well read and found inspiration on previous authors, as he did with Audelay.

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