

english medieval

religious lyrics



Giotto
The Dream of Joachim
c. 1305

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[In the translation, the term NOTE indicates further explanation or discussion of a particular crux. Click on the term for an immediate transfer to that discussion, and then on RETURN to come back to the translation.]

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INTRODUCTION

If there is a single impression that is immediately but indelibly created by medieval English religious lyrics, it is a sense of their pervasive and haunting simplicity. Composed between the early thirteenth and early sixteenth centuries, these often short poems present the unambiguous truths, the concrete scenes and images, of medieval Christian belief. Mary sings lullabies to the infant Jesus, and is worshipped for her purity. Jesus comes to redeem a sinful humanity, and is passionately adored for all his love. Mary stands watching her son slowly dying on the cross, and speaks in grief to him, as he to her. Jesus rebukes humankind for its desertion of him in his time of need. These universal and fundamental themes of love and sin, suffering and redemption, are the bedrock of the medieval devotional lyric. And such themes are expressed in a language that is quiet, restrained, even spare, in its utterance. Fashioned by the simple directness of the speaking or singing voice, the lyrics eschew rhetoric, and grandiloquence, and stylistic complexity. Their anonymous authors evoke their faith with an assured, plain dignity that is all the more persuasive for its understatement.

Given such a context, any translation of these lyrics at once confronts two major problems. It is not simply that the calm acceptance of Christian belief voiced in the poetry may seem increasingly alien to the questioning secularity of the 21st century, but even more, that the plain language in which such belief is expressed is no longer a modern currency. The English of the modern poetic imagination, as T.S. Eliot famously argued in his essay on the metaphysical poets, is both difficult and complex:

...it appears likely that poets in our civilisation, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilisation comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

Against such a background of indirection, allusiveness, dislocation, how is it possible to translate the clarities of these lyrics into a convincing modern English?

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One way, adopted by all the editions listed in the Further Reading and Links section, is to offer translations only when individual words might not be understood, or might otherwise prove problematic. Of the ten editions listed in this section, four present the medieval original by itself on the page, with a glossary of words that would be unfamiliar to a modern reader placed in the end-pages of the edition. Reading the material in this way, though, is scarcely a fluent experience, involving as it does a constant jumping between text (on, say, p. 21) and glossary (on, say, pp. 196–213) to ensure each word of the original has been understood. And the crucial *form* of the original – the fact that it is a poem – is of course left entirely untranslated. Somewhat less unsettling is the approach adopted by the other six editions in the Further Reading section: to retain the medieval original on each page, but to offer glosses of problematic words in the margins or at the bottom of the page in question. The impact of such a presentation can be illustrated by a single stanza from the poem ‘Stond wel, moder, under rode’:

Moder, nutarst thou miht leren	<i>now for the first time; might learn</i>
Wat pine tholen that childe beren	<i>pain (they) suffer who; bear</i>
What sorwe haven that child forgon.	<i>(they) have who lose a child</i>
‘Sune, y wot, y kan the telle –	<i>son, I know; thee</i>
Bute it be the pine of helle	<i>unless; torment</i>
More sorwe ne wot y non.’	<i>greater sorrow know I none</i>

The benefits of this kind of format are clear. ‘Difficult’ words (nutarst, tholen, forgon) are immediately translated. Words that might be misunderstood (‘the’ for ‘thee’, ‘bute’ for ‘unless’) are quickly clarified. Unfamiliar syntax (the omission of the third person pronoun in ‘tholen’ and ‘haven’) is made intelligible. And yet, for all the gains in accessibility, a substantial question remains about the effect of this kind of presentation. What, actually, is the reader reading? It is not purely a medieval poem, because of the accompanying translations; yet even more so, it is demonstrably not a modern one. The marginal glosses may clarify meaning and syntax, but they do not clarify rhyme scheme, or rhythm, or metrical stress. Indeed, the glosses can hover indecisively between accurately reproduced, though artificial, poetic inversion (‘greater sorrow know I none’) and concrete prose (‘now for the first time’). And whereas each line in the original is part of a fluent, connected sequence, the glosses must inevitably isolate the ‘difficult’ details and present them in a disjointed way, separated by semi-colons (‘son, I know; thee’, or ‘unless; torment’).

This collection of some forty devotional lyrics seeks to overcome such difficulties in a new way: by presenting the medieval texts against faithful modern versions that are intended to stand in their own right as poems. It is worth identifying the major issues of translation that emerge from the juxtaposition:

denotation and connotation of words

one of the major pitfalls of translation, as all translators know, is not those words that are unfamiliar, and that obviously need a glossary, dictionary or thesaurus for their ‘meaning’ to become known, but the words which appear familiar and yet which in fact mean something different. ‘Me thinketh’, to take one example from this anthology, does not mean ‘I think’, but rather ‘it seems to me’. The adjective ‘fre’, to take another, does not mean ‘free’, but rather ‘generous, noble, gracious’. Such *faux amis*, however, are soon recognised. What is more problematic are those words that have retain their primary meaning, but whose strength has become attenuated over the centuries. Consider the following separate lines:

Quia amore *languéo*...
 Ich am thi *make*...
 I syng of a *mayden*...
 Jesu Cristes *milde* moder...
 I *sike* al wan I singe...

The literal meaning of the italicised words here is not hard to discern:

because I languish *or* swoon for love...
 I am your mate *or* spouse...
 I sing of a maiden...
 Jesus Christ’s mild *or* gentle mother...
 I sigh when I sing...

Yet to translate the words in this way is to invite effects that range from the artificial to the ludicrous. Modern people do not ‘languish’, still less ‘swoon’, for love. Christ cannot possibly be made to say ‘I am your mate’ with any degree of seriousness (and the alternative ‘I am your spouse’ is only slightly less bathetic). ‘Maiden’ evokes a rustic quaintness by even nineteenth century standards, let alone twenty-first. And both ‘mild’ and ‘sigh’ highlight the deterioration of connotation over six or seven centuries, the sense that ‘milde’ and ‘sike’ were far more resonant terms in the medieval language than the insipid ‘mild’ and ‘sigh’ are in modern

English. Where examples like these have occurred in the translation, I have always tried to choose the strongest and most telling word in the modern language: thus, ‘grieve’ rather than ‘sigh’; ‘young girl’ rather than ‘maiden’; ‘gentle’ rather than ‘mild’. Very occasionally, the demands of a convincing metrical pulse have required the retention of a word like ‘maiden’; but these are rare exceptions to the general rule.

syntax

In addition to the issues raised by particular words, there are also issues of construction. The lyrics in this anthology are notable for the frequent use they make both of repetition and of inversion. In ‘Jesu, swete is the love of thee’ (no. 2), for example, the word ‘swete’ and its cognates appear five times in the first eight lines. In one middle stanza of ‘Crist makith to man a fair present’ (no. 39), the word ‘herte’ is used five times in four lines. Rather than deploying a range of synonyms, the medieval lyric tends to rehearse key words (love, joy, pain, heart, fair, sweet) time and again. It often, too, inverts normal syntactic order for purposes of both rhyme and rhythm. In poem no. 2, the opening lines are not ‘Jesu, the love of thee is swete, / Noon other thing may be so swete’, but ‘Jesu, swete is the love of thee, / Noon other thing so swete may be’, which advances the central notion of ‘sweetness’ to an earlier, and more prominent, rhythmic position in both lines. Where such repetitions and inversions occur, I have often (though not always) chosen to follow them closely. The incremental resonance that repetition provides, and the advancing/retarding impact of inversion, are valuable effects, enhancing the imaginative strength of many lines.

metre and rhythmic pulse

If, though, there is a single quality of the medieval lyric that must be preserved in any translation, it is that ubiquitous sense of a human voice, whether speaking or singing, that underpins the poetry. The pulses and stresses in the lines of the lyrics are often subtly deployed, but every line conveys the direct immediacy of sung or spoken words. In this translation, I have acknowledged the claims of ‘voice’ before all others, even when it has resulted in some slight change to meaning. For example, the line

˘ – ˘ – ˘ – ˘ –
 Min herte love, min herte lisse

would be most accurately translated as

INTRODUCTION

˘ _ _ ˘ _ _
My heart's love, my heart's joy

But the emphatic stresses here destroy the careful iambic patterning of the original, resulting in an incongruous spondaic force. The introduction of a single word restores the syllabic emphasis of the original:

˘ _ ˘ _ ˘ _ ˘ _
My heart's own love, my heart's own joy

Similarly, the line

˘ _ ˘ _ ˘ _ ˘ _ ˘ _ ˘ _
For the I wil and the I sal love withouten ende

could be rendered

˘ ˘ _ ˘ ˘ _ _ ˘ ˘ _ _
For I will and I shall love you without end

But the rhythm, especially the opening anapaestic feet, sounds wrenched and prosaic. A small change in wording, and the fourteen syllables of the original are restored:

˘ _ ˘ _ _ ˘ _ ˘ _ _ ˘ _ ˘ _ _
For I will love you, I shall love you, till the end of time

Examples like these are scattered throughout the anthology. But when a line is found that *could* have been rendered more closely, its formulation here will almost always be because the primacy of 'voice' has been acknowledged.

conclusion

As already indicated, none of the available editions of medieval religious lyrics presents translations that are intended to stand in their own right as poems; and such a leap into the unknown does not come without risk. Where lines, stanzas, whole poems even, do not work, I hope that readers will e-mail me with their criticisms, comments and suggestions. Where the translation works, I hope it will convey something of the astonishing purity and focus of the medieval lyric – a purity that is a matter of words as well as of faith. Nothing, of course, is ever more difficult to translate than simplicity; but when that simplicity is captured, even for non-believers, it almost stops the heart.

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Jesu Cristes milde moder
Stud, beheld hire sone o rode
That he was ipined on.
The sone heng, the moder stud
And beheld hire childes blod,
Wu it of hise wundes ran.

Jesus Christ's gentle mother
Stood, and watched her son upon the cross
That he was tortured on.
The son hung, the mother stood
And watched her child's blood – the way
It ran down from his wounds.

Tim Chilcott
November 2004

CHRONOLOGY

1200 – 1425 although all the lyrics in this collection were composed during the thirteenth, fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries, none can be dated with any precision – an uncertainty compounded by the fact that many are very likely to have existed in spoken currency before they were written down. All are anonymous. Several lyrics, also, exist in more than one version, with sometimes considerable variations, suggesting an evolution over probably decades. Harley MS 2253, the major manuscript source for the lyrics in this anthology, is generally thought to have been transcribed about 1340 by a scribe in Ludlow, Shropshire, though the manuscript has been variously dated between 1310 and 1340. Several poems here will have been promulgated well before, as well as after, these tentative dates.

Click on either the original or the translated first line to be taken to the relevant lyric. Click on [RETURN](#) to come back to this index

Songs of love-longing for Jesus

Swete Jesu, king of bliss
Jesu, swete is the love of thee
Now I se blosme sprynge
Jesu my lefe, Jesu my love, Jesu my
covetyng

Sweet Jesus, king of bliss
Jesus, sweet is the love of you
As I saw the blossom bloom
Jesus my life, Jesus my love, Jesus the
end of my desire

Songs and Prayers to Mary

Haill, queen of hevin, and steren of blis
Levedie, ic thonke the
Edi be thou, hevne queen
I syng of a mayden
Of on that is so fayr and bright
As I me rode this ender day

Queen of heaven, star of bliss
Lady, I thank you
May you be blessed, heaven's own queen
I sing of a young girl
To one who is so fair and bright
As I rode out the other day

Lullabies

I saw a fayr maydyn syttyn and syng
Lullay, lullay, litel child
As I lay upon a night
Lullay, lullay, litel child

I saw a fair girl sitting and singing
Lullay, lullay, my little child
As I lay awake one night
Lullay, lullay, my little child

Lyrics spoken by Jesus

Love me broughte
I am Jesu that com to fight
Allas! Allas! we yvel y sped!
In the vaile of restles mynd

Love brought me
I am Jesus, come to fight
Oh no, oh no! I've met such grief
In this vale of troubled mind

Christ's complaints

My folk, now answe me
Jesus doth him bymene
Lo! Lemman swete, now may thou se
A sory beverech it is
Ye that pasen be the weyye
'What ys he, thys lordling, that cometh
vrom the vght'

My people, answer me
Jesus complains
See, sweet beloved, now you can see
A piteous drink it is
You who pass along the road
'Who is he, this young lord, who comes
back from the fight'

Stabat mater: the crucifixion

Nou goth sonne under wod
Jesu Cristes milde moder
'Ston wel, moder, under rode'
Why have ye no reuthe on my child?
The milde Lamb, y-sprad o rode
Whyt was hys nakede brest
Whyt is thi naked brest

The sun now sinks beyond the wood
Jesus Christ's gentle mother
'Stand there, mother, beneath the cross'
Why no pity from you for my child?
The gentle Lamb, stretched on the cross
His naked chest was white
White is your naked chest

Meditations upon the Passion

Whan Ich se on rode
Steddefast crosse, inmong all other
Worlde blisse, have god day!
I sike al wan I singe
My trewest tresowre sa trayturly was
taken
Lovely ter of lovely eye
Gold and al this werdis wyn
Crist makith to man a fair present

When I see on the cross
Faithful cross, before all others
Worldly bliss – good bye to you
And when I sing, I grieve
My truest treasure so treacherously
taken
Lovely tear from lovely eye
Gold and all this world's great joy
Christ gives mankind a lovely gift

Songs of love-longing for Jesus

1

Swete Jesu, king of blisse,
Min herte love, min herte lisse,
Thou art swete mid iwisse –
Wo is him that the shal misse.

Swete Jesu, min herte light,
Thou art dai withouten night,
Thou yeve me strengthe and eke might
Forto lovien the al right.

Swete Jesu, mi soule bote,
In min herte thou sette a rote
Of thy love that is so swote,
And wite hit that hit springe mote.

RETURN

2

Jesu, swete is the love of thee,
Noon other thing so swete may be;
No thing that men may here and see
Hath no swetnesse ayens thee.

Jesu, no song may be swetter,
No thing in herte blisfullere,
Nought may be feelid delitfullere
Than thou, so sweete a love.

Jesu, thi love was us so fre
That it fro hevne broughte thee;
For love thou dere boughtist me,
For love thou hynge on roode tre.

Jesu, for love thou tholedist wrong,
Woundis sore, and peynes strong;

2

Songs of love-longing for Jesus

1

Sweet Jesus, king of bliss,
My heart's own love, my heart's own joy,
You are the sweetest thing there is,
And cursed the man who loses you.

Sweet Jesus, my heart's own light,
You are the day without the night,
You give me strength and also might
So I may love you, as is right.

Sweet Jesus, saviour of my soul,
Within my heart you plant a root
Of love from you that is so sweet,
And guard it so that it may grow.

RETURN

2

Jesus, sweet is the love of you.
No other thing could be as sweet;
Nothing that men may hear or see
Has any sweetness beside you.

Jesus, no song could be more sweet,
Nothing I feel more full of bliss;
Nothing could feel more full of joy
Than you, so sweet a lover come.

Jesus, so open was your love for us,
It brought you down from heaven.
For love, you dearly paid for me,
For love, you hung upon the cross.

Jesus, you suffered wrong – for love –
Awful wounds and dreadful pain.

3

Thin peynes weren ful long –
No man may hem telle, ne song.

Jesu, for love thou bood so wo
That bloody stremys runne the fro;
Thi white sides woxen blw and blo –
Oure synnes it maden so, wolawo!

Jesu, for love thou steigh on roode,
For love thou yaf thin herte blode;
Love thee made my soules foode,
Thi love us boughte til al goode.

Jesu, my love, thou were so fre,
Al that thou didest for love of me.
What schal I for that yelde thee?
Thou axist nought but love of me.

Jesu my God, Jesu my kyng,
Thou axist me noon other thing
But trewe love and hert yernyng,
And love-teeris with swete morning.

Jesu my love, Jesu my light,
I wole thee love, and that is right;
Do me love thee with al my might,
And for thee moorne bothe day and nyght.

Jesu, do me so yerne thee
That my thought evere upon thee be;
With thin yye loke to me,
And myldely my need se.

Jesu, thi love be al my thought.
Of other thing ne recche me nought
Thanne have I thi wille al wrought,
That havest me ful dere bought.

RETURN

The pain went on and on and on –
No one could tell it, and no words.

Jesus, you bore such misery for love
That streams of blood ran down from you.
Your pale white sides turned black and blue –
Oh, that our sins had made it so.

Jesus, you rose up from the cross for love;
For love you gave your heart's own blood;
Love made you food for my own soul;
Your love has brought us all that's good.

Jesus, my love, you gave so much,
All that you did for love of me.
What should I give you for those things?
Nothing but love you ask of me.

Jesus my God, Jesus my King,
You ask for nothing else from me
Than truest love and yearning heart,
And tears of love with sweet longing.

Jesus my love, Jesus my light,
I *will* love you, and that is right;
May I love with all my might
And long for you both day and night.

Jesus, make me yearn for you
That every thought is fixed on you,
And look upon me with your eyes,
And gently understand my need.

Jesus, may love of you be all I think.
I do not care for other things,
Only to bring about your will
Who have so dearly ransomed me.

RETURN

Now I se blosme sprynge,
 Ich herde a foules song,
 A swete love-longinge
 Min herte thurghout sprong;
 That is of love newe,
 That is so swete and trewe,
 Hit gladeth al my song;
 Ich wot al mid iwisse
 My lyf and eke my blysse
 Is al theron ilong.

Of Jesu Crist I synge
 That is so fayr and fre,
 Swetest of alle thyng
 His owne Ich owe wel be.
 Ful fer he me soughte,
 Mid hard he me boughte
 With woundes two and thre;
 Wel sore he was y-swonge,
 For me mid spere y-stonge,
 Y-nailed to the tree.

Whan Ich myselve stond
 And mid herte y-see,
 Y-thirled fet and honed
 With grete nailes three –
 Blody was his heved,
 Of him nas nought by-leved
 That of pyne was fre –
 Wel oughte myn herte,
 Al for his love smerte,
 Syk and sory be.

A way! That I ne can
 To him turne al my thought,
 And make him my lemman
 That thus me hath y-boght
 With pine and sorwe longe,
 With woundes depe and stronge –
 Of love ne can I noght!
 His blod that fel to grounde

As I saw the blossom bloom,
 I heard a bird in song;
 A sweet love-longing
 Welled up in my heart
 About a new, new love
 That is so sweet and true,
 It gladdens all my song.
 For certain sure, I know
 My life and all my joy
 Depend on it in full.

I sing of Jesus Christ,
 So beautiful and true,
 The sweetest man in all the world;
 I ought to be his own.
 From far away he looked for me,
 With suffering he paid for me,
 With several wounds.
 In great pain, he was scourged
 And pierced through with a sword
 And nailed upon the cross.

When I myself stand here
 And see it with my heart,
 The feet and hands all pierced
 With three enormous nails –
 Bloodied was his head;
 No part was left of him
 That had no pain –
 For sure should my own heart
 Be aching for his love,
 And cry and be contrite.

But no, I cannot turn
 My every thought to him,
 And make him my beloved
 Who has redeemed me so
 With long suffering and pain,
 With wounds so sharp and deep –
 I cannot feel such love!
 His blood that fell to earth

Out of his swete wounde
Of pine us hath y-broght.

Jesu, lemman softe,
Thou yif me strengthe and might,
Longinge sore and ofte
To serve thee aright;
And leve me pine drye,
For thee, swete Marie,
That art so fayr and bright.
Mayde and moder milde,
For love of thine childe,
Ernde us hevene light.

Jesu, lemman swete,
I sende thee this songe,
And wel ofte I thee grete
And bidde thee among.
Yif me sone lete,
And mine sinnes bete,
That I have do thee wrong.
At mine lyves ende,
Whan I shal henne wende,
Jesu, me underfonge. Amen.

RETURN

4

Jesu my lefe, Jesu my love, Jesu my covetynge!
To the me langis nyghte and day, thou ert all my joynge.

Jesu, Jesu, Jesu, when wille thou on me rewe?
Bot if I have the love of the, my care is ever newe.

My delite and my hame, Jesu my blissful knyng!
Swete ert thou, my swete dreury; in the I hope dwelling.

Ay to dwelle with my lovyng, and play me with my dere,
It thirlis fast in my thinking, and dos me chaunge chere.

Jesu my kynge, I think to the – thou ert sa faire and swete –
Na thing I wil but anely the; heven thou has me hete.

8

Out of his dear, sweet wounds
Has brought us out of pain.

Jesus, gentle lover,
Give me strength and might,
Often yearning painfully
To serve you as I should;
And let me suffer torture
For you, sweet Mary, now,
Who are so fair and bright.
Virgin, gentle mother,
For loving so your child,
Regain for us the light of heaven.

Jesus, so sweet lover,
I send this song to you.
I greet you very often
And always pray to you.
Let me soon forsake,
Atone for all my sins
That have so done you wrong.
And at my life's full close,
When I shall go from here,
Jesus, take me in. Amen.

RETURN

4

Jesus my life, Jesus my love, Jesus the end of my desire!
I long for you both night and day, you are my dear delight.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, when will you pity me?
Unless I have your love, my troubles will not cease.

Jesus, my delight, my home, my blissful king,
You are sweet, my dear sweetheart. I trust to stay with you.

Yes, to live with my lover, and play with my dear,
It pierces my thinking, and makes my mood change.

Jesus my king, I think of you – you are so fair and sweet –
Nothing I want, but only you; heaven you've promised me.

9

Take al my love, hald it with the til I hethin wende;
For the I wil and the I sal love withouten ende.

Al the love that I may love I gife him that me boght;
Ful swete ert thou, my swete Jesu – on the sal be my thought.

When wil thou com in conforthing, and cover me of care?
Forgyve me that I may se – I love the ever mare!

Al mi love is in Jesu, that me langyng has sent;
Thi love me byndis – strenth me thou that me swilk grace has lent!

Jesu to synge is mare joyng than any tong may telle;
The myrth to love Jesu above, is na prechour mai spelle.

Jesu kinge that made al thing, of a maiden was born,
Help oure hoping and oure lyvyng sa that we be not lorn.

RETURN

Take all my love, and hold it close until I come to heaven,
For I will love you, I shall love you, till the end of time.

All the love that I can love, I give him who ransomed me,
You are so sweet, my sweet Jesus – my thoughts will be of you.

When will you come and comfort me, and rescue me from care?
Forgive me so that I may see – I love you evermore.

For Jesus now is all my love, and taught me how to yearn;
Your love binds me – you've given me such grace, now make me strong.

To sing of him brings more of joy than any words can tell;
The joy of loving him above, no preacher can describe.

Jesus, the king that made all things, of a young girl born,
Help our hoping and our living, so that we are not condemned.

RETURN

Songs and Prayers to Mary

5

Haill, queen of hevin, and steren of blis;
Sen that thu sone thi fader is,
How suld he ony thing the warn,
And thou his mother, and he thi barne?

Haill, fresche fontane that springis new,
The rute and crope of all vertu;
Thou polist gem without offence,
Thou bair the lambe of innocence.

RETURN

6

Levedie, ic thonke the
Wid herte suithe milde
That god that thou havest idon me
Wid thine suete childe.

Thou ard god and suete and briht,
Of alle otheir icoren;
Of the was that suete wiht
That was Jesus iboren.

Maide milde, biddi the
Wid thine suete childe
That thou erndie me
To habben Godis milce.

Moder, loke one me
Wid thine suete eye.
Reste and blisse gef thou me,
Mi levedi, then ic deye.

RETURN

12

Songs and Prayers to Mary

5

Queen of heaven, star of bliss,
Since your father is your son,
How could he refuse a thing –
You his mother, he your child?

A fresh, clean fountain springs up new,
The root and head of all that's good;
A polished and unblemished gem,
You bear the lamb of innocence.

RETURN

6

Lady, I thank you
With the humblest of hearts
For the good you have done me
With your lovely child.

You are good and sweet and bright,
Chosen above all others;
That lovely man called Jesus
Was brought to birth in you.

Gentle girl, I pray to you
With your lovely child –
If you will intercede for me,
God's mercy will be mine.

Mother, look upon me
With your lovely eyes;
Give me peace of mind and bliss,
My lady, when I die.

RETURN

13

Edi be thou, hevene queen,
 Folkes frovre and engles blis,
 Moder unwemmed and maiden clene,
 Swich in world non other nis.
 On thee hit is wel eth sene
 Of alle wimmen thou havest the pris.
 My swete leverdy, her my bene,
 And rew of me yif thi wille is.

Thou asteye so the day-rew
 That deleth from the derke night;
 Of thee sprang a leme newe
 That al this world haveth y-light.
 Nis non maide of thine hewe,
 So fair, so shene, so rudy, so bright;
 Swete lady of me thou rew
 And have merci of thin knight.

Spronge blosme of one rote,
 The Holy Gost thee reste upon,
 That was for mankinnes bote
 And here soule t'alesen for on.
 Ladi milde, softe and swote,
 Ich crie thee merci, Ich am thy mon,
 Bothe to honde and to fote,
 On alle wise that Ich con.

Thou art erthe to gode sede,
 On thee lighte th'evene-dew;
 Of thee sprang the edi blede,
 The Holy Gost hire on thee sew.
 Thou bring us out of care, of drede
 That Eve bitterliche us brew;
 Thou shalt us into hevene lede –
 Wel swete is the ilke dew.

Moder ful of thewes hende,
 Maide dreye and wel y-taught,
 Ich am in thine love-bende,
 And to thee is al my draught.

May you be blessed, heaven's own queen,
 The comfort of men, and angels' bliss,
 Immaculate mother, young girl so pure,
 No other is like you throughout the whole world.
 With you, it's as clear as can be
 That you are supreme among women.
 Sweetest lady, hear my prayer,
 Take pity on me, if you will.

You arose just like the dawn
 That leaves dark night behind;
 A fresh, new light shone forth from you
 That's lit up all the world.
 There is no girl that has your glow,
 So fair and lovely, rosy, bright.
 Sweet lady, pity me,
 Have mercy on your knight.

Blossom springing from one root,
 The Holy Ghost did rest on you.
 It was to save mankind, to free
 All souls, just in return for one.
 Gentle lady, soft and sweet,
 Your servant begs your mercy.
 I'll serve both hand and foot,
 In every way that I know how.

You are the soil for growing seeds,
 The dew of heaven dropped down on you;
 The blessed fruit sprang up in you;
 The Holy Ghost had sowed it there.
 You bring us out of care and dread
 That Eve so bitterly brewed for us;
 But now you'll lead us into heaven –
 How sweet is that same dew.

Mother full of virtuous grace,
 Patient and well taught young girl,
 Your love-bonds now have captured me,
 You draw me to you every hour.

Thou me shild, ye, from the fende,
As thou art fre and wilt and maught,
Help me to my lives ende,
And make me with thin sone y-saught.

RETURN

8

I syng of a mayden
that is makeles,
Kyng of alle kynges
to here sone che ches.

He cam also styлле
ther his moder was,
As dew in Aprylle
that falleth on the gras.

He cam also styлле
to his moderes bowr,
As dew in Aprille
that falleth on the flour.

He cam also styлле
ther his moder lay,
As dew in Aprille
that falleth on the spray.

Moder and mayden
was never non but che –
Wel may swych a lady
Godes moder be.

RETURN

9

Of on that is so fayr and bright
Velud maris stella,
Brighter than the dayes light,
Parens et puella,

16

The devil, yes, you'll shield me from –
You will and can because you're good.
Help me till my life's own end,
And reconcile me with your son.

RETURN

8

I sing of a young girl
beyond all price,
The king of all kings
she chose as her son.

He came as silently
to where his mother was,
As dew in April
that falls upon the grass.

He came as silently
to his mother's bower,
As dew in April
that falls upon the flower.

He came as silently
to where his mother lay,
As dew in April
that falls upon the leaves.

Mother and a young girl –
there was never one like her.
Well might such a lady
God's mother be.

RETURN

9

To one who is so fair and bright
Like the star upon the sea,
Brighter than the day's own light,
Mother yet a virgin.

17

Ic crie to the, thou se to me!
Levedy, preye thi sone for me,
Tam pia,
That ic mote come to the,
Maria.

Levedi, flour of alle thing,
Rosa sine spina,
Thou bere Jesu, hevne king,
Gratia divina.
Of all thou berst the pris,
Levedi, queen of Paradys
Electa.
Mayde milde moder is
Effecta.

Of kare conseil thou ert best,
Felix fecundata;
Of all wery thou ert rest,
Mater honorata.
Bisek thou him with milde mod
That for us alle shad his blod
In cruce,
That we moten come til him
In luce.

Al this wored war forlore
Eva peccatrice,
Tyl our loverd was ybore
De te genitrice.
With 'Ave' it went away
Thuster nyht, and comth the day
Salutis;
The welle springet ut of the
Virtutis.

Wel he wot he is thi sone
Ventre quem portasti;
He wyl nout werne the thi bone,
Parvum quem lactasti.

I cry to you, you look on me,
Lady, beg your son for me,
Devoted so,
That I may come to you,
O Mary.

Lady, flower of all the world,
A rose without a thorn,
You carried Jesus, heaven's king,
By grace divine.
You bore the prize of all,
Lady, queen of Paradise,
Chosen here.
Humble girl, and mother too,
And proven now.

You give the best support in pain,
Joyful, fruitful lady.
For all who're weary, you give rest,
Mother so respected.
Beg him with your gentle heart
Who shed his blood for all of us
Upon the cross,
That we may come to him
In light.

All this world was thrown away
Through Eve who sinned,
All until our Lord was born
In you, his mother.
With 'Hail', it went away –
That darkest night – and came
Salvation's day,
And springing out of you
The well of good.

He knows full well he is the son
You carried in your womb;
He won't deny you your request,
The little one who took your milk.

So hende and so god he is,
He havet brout ous to blis
Superni,
That havet idut the foule pit
Inferni.

RETURN

10

As I me rode this ender day
By grene wode to seche play,
Mid herte I thoughte al on a may,
 Sweetest of alle thinge.
Lithe, and Ich you telle may
 Al of that swete thinge.

This maide is swete and fre of blod,
Bright and fair, of milde mod,
Alle she mai do us god
 Thurgh hire bisechinge;
Of hire he tok fleish and blod,
 Jesus, hevene kynge.

With al my lif I love that may,
She is my solas night and day,
My joie and eke my beste play,
 And eke my love-longynge;
Al the bet me is that day
 That Ich of hire synge.

Of alle thinge I love hire mest,
My dayes blis, my nightes rest;
She counseilleth and helpeth best,
 Bothen olde and yinge;
Now I may yif that me lest
 The five joies mynge.

The firste joie of that wimman,
When Gabriel from hevene cam
And seide God sholde bicomen man
 And of hire be bore,

20

So gracious and so good is he
He's brought us to the bliss
Of heaven,
And has closed shut the filthy pit
Of hell.

RETURN

10

As I rode out the other day
To please myself beside the woods,
A young girl filled my heart,
 The sweetest girl of all.
Listen, and I'll tell you all about
 That sweet, sweet thing.

This girl is sweet, of noble blood,
Radiant, fair, a gentle kind,
All she does is for our good
 Through her imploring;
From her he took his flesh and blood,
 Jesus, king of heaven.

I love that girl with all my life,
She is my comfort day and night,
My joy, and best of pleasures too,
 The yearning of my love.
All the better is the day
 When I can sing of her.

I love her most of everything,
My day's own bliss, my night's own rest;
She gives advice and helps the best,
 Both young and old.
Now if I want, I can call up
 Her five joys in my mind.

The first joy of that woman was
When Gabriel came from heaven
And said God would become a man
 And born of her.

21

And bringen up of helle pyn
Mankyn that was forlore.

That other joie of that may
Was o Cristes-masse day,
Whan God was bore on thorough lay,
And broughte us lightnesse;
The ster was seyn before day,
This herdes bere wytnesse.

The thridde joie of that levedy,
That men clepe th'Epyphany,
When the kinges come wery
To presente hyre sone
With myrre, gold, and encens hy,
That was man bicome.

The further joie we telle mawen
On Ester-morwe when hit gan dawen.
Hyre sone, that was slawen,
Aros in fleish and bon.
More joie men have ne mawen,
Wyf ne mayden non.

The fifte joie of that wimman,
When hire body to hevene cam,
The soule to the body nam,
As hit was wont to bene.
Crist, leve us all with that wimman
That joie al for to sene.

Preye we alle to oure levedy,
And to the seintes that wone hire by,
That they of us haven merci,
And that we ne misse
In this world to ben holy
And wynne hevene blysse.

RETURN

He'd bring up from the pains of hell
Mankind that had been lost.

The second joy that young girl had
Took place on Christmas Day,
When God was born in perfect light
And brought us light.
The star was seen before the dawn,
As shepherds testify.

The third joy of that lady
We call the Epiphany,
When kings came wearily along
To offer to her son
Some myrrh and gold and frankincense,
Who'd taken human form.

The fourth joy, then, that we can tell
Was Easter morning when it dawned.
Her son, who had been killed,
Rose up in flesh and bone.
More joy than that men cannot have,
Nor women or young girls.

The fifth joy of that woman, when
Her body came to heaven,
The soul went to the body then,
Where once it used to be.
Christ, grant us with that woman now
That we may see that joy.

So let us pray to Mary,
To the saints who live with her,
That they have mercy on us,
And that we do not fail
To be goodly in this world
And gain the bliss of heaven.

RETURN

Lullabies

11

*Lullay, myn lykyng, my dere sone, myn swetyng,
Lullay, my dere herte, myn owyn dere derlyng.*

I saw a fayr maydyn syttyn and synge;
Sche lullyd a lytyl chyld, a swete lordyng.

Lullay, my lykyng...

That eche Lord is that that made alle things;
Of alle lordis he is Lord, of all kynges Kyng.

Lullay, my lykyng...

Ther was mekyl melody at that chyldes berthe;
Alle tho wern in hevене blys, thei made mekyl merthe.

Lullay, my lykyng...

Aungele bright, thei song that nyght and seydyn to that child,
'Blyssid be thou, and so be sche that is bothe mek and myld.'

Lullay, my lykyng...

Prey we now to that chyld, and to his moder dere,
Grawnt hem his blyssyng that now makyn chere.

Lullay, my lykyng...

RETURN

12

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
child reste thee a throwe,
Fro heighe hider art thou sent
with us to wone lowe;

24

Lullabies

11

*Lullay, my loved one, my dear son, my sweet one,
Lullay, my dear heart, my own dearest darling*

I saw a fair girl sitting and singing.
She hushed a small child, a sweet little lord.

Lullay, my loved one...

He is the same Lord who made every thing;
He is Lord of all lords, and King of all kings.

Lullay, my loved one...

At the birth of that child, such music there was!
All those in heaven's bliss laughed so and sang.

Lullay, my loved one...

Bright angels sang that night and said then to the child,
'May you be blessed, and so may she who is so meek and mild.'

Lullay, my loved one...

Let us pray to that child, to his mother so dear,
To grant them his blessing, who now are so glad.

Lullay, my loved one...

RETURN

12

Lullay, lullay, my little child;
child, rest a little while;
From on high you have been sent
to live below with us;

25

Poure and litel art thou mad,
unkut and unknowe,
Pine and wo to suffren her
for thing that was thin owe.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
sorwe might thou make;
Thou art sent into this world,
as thou were forsake.

Lullay, lullay, litel grom,
king of alle thinge,
Whan I thence of thy mischief,
me list wel litel singe;
But caren I may for sorwe,
yif love wer in myn herte,
For swiche peynes as thou shalt drye
were never no so smerte.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
ful wel might thou crie,
For than thi body is bleik and blak
sone after shal ben drie.

Child, it is a weping dale
that thou art comen inne;
Thy poure cloutes it proven wel,
thy bed mad in the binne;
Cold and hunger thou must thole
as thou were get in sinne,
And after deyen on the tre
for love of al mankinne.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
no wonder though thou care,
Thou art come amonges hem
that thi deth shullen yare.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
for sorwe might thou grete,
The anguissh that thou suffren shalt
shal don thee blod to swete;

Poor and tiny you've been made,
strange, unknown to all,
Pain, distress, to suffer here
for creatures all your own.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
indeed, well might you cry.
You've been sent into this world,
as if abandoned quite.

Lullay, lullay, my little lad,
king of all the world,
When I think of your misfortune,
I've little wish to sing.
But grieve I may in sorrow,
if love is in my heart,
For the torture you will suffer
was never so extreme.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
indeed, well might you cry.
For when your body's pale and wan,
it soon will shrivel up.

Child, it is a vale of tears
that you have entered here.
Your wretched rags show it so well,
the manger where your bed was made.
You must suffer hunger, cold,
as if conceived in sin,
And then must die upon the cross
for love of all mankind.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
no wonder that you mourn,
You've come among the men
who will prepare your death.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
in sorrow may you weep;
The anguish that you will endure
will make you sweat with blood.

Naked, bounden shalt thou ben,
and sithen sore bete,
No thing fre upon thy body
of pine shal be lete.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
it is al for thy fo,
The harde bond of love-longing
that thee hath bounden so.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
litel child thin ore!
It is al for our owen gilt
that thou art peyned sore.
But wolde we yet kinde be,
and live after thy lore,
And leten sinne for thy love,
ne keptest thou no more.

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
softe slep and faste,
In sorwe endeth every love
but thin at the laste.

RETURN

13

*Lullay, lullay, lay lay, lullay:
Mi dere moder, sing lullay.*

As I lay upon a night
Alone in my longing,
Me thoughte I saw a wonder sight,
A maiden child rokking.
Lullay, lullay...

The maiden wolde withouten song
Hire child o slepe bringe;
The child thoughte she dide him wrong,
And bad his moder singe.
Lullay, lullay...

28

Naked quite, you will be bound
and beaten then so hard,
No part of your whole body
will not endure the pain.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
your enemy's the cause.
The cruel chains of yearning love
have bound you up so tight.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
have mercy, little child!
Our own guilt is the only cause
why you are tortured so.
But were we now to follow you
and live as you have taught,
Renouncing sin for your love's sake,
You'd ask for nothing more.

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
gently, soundly, sleep.
In sorrow closes every love,
save, at the last, for yours.

RETURN

13

*Lullay, lullay, lay lay, lullay:
My dearest mother, sing lullay.*

As I lay awake one night,
Alone in all my yearning,
I saw, it seemed, a wondrous sight:
A young girl rocked a child.
Lullay, lullay...

The young girl wished, without a song,
To put her child to sleep.
The child thought that she did him wrong
And bade his mother sing.
Lullay, lullay...

29

'Sing now, moder,' seide that child,
'What me shal befalle
Here after whan I come to ild,
So don modres alle.
Lullay, lullay...

'Ech a moder, trewely,
That can hire cradle kepe
Is wone to lullen lovely
And singe hire child o slepe.
Lullay, lullay...

'Swete moder, fair and fre,
Sithen that it is so,
I preye thee that thou lulle me
And sing somewhat therto.'
Lullay, lullay...

'Swete sone,' seyde she,
'Wherof sholde I singe?
Wist I nevere yet more of thee
But Gabriele's gretinge.
Lullay, lullay...

'He grette me godli on his kne
And seyde, "Hail, Marie,
Ful of grace. God is with thee.
Beren thou shalt Messye."
Lullay, lullay...

'I wondred mychel in my thought,
For man wold I right none.
"Marie," he seyde, "drede thee nought:
Let God of hevne alone."
Lullay, lullay...

"The Holi Gost shal don al this,"
He seyde withouten wone,
That I sholde beren mannes blis,
Thee, my swete sone.
Lullay, lullay...

'Sing now, mother,' said the child,
'What will be my fate
Hereafter when I am a man?
All mothers tell these things.'
Lullay, lullay...

'Truly, every mother
Who keeps her cradle safe
Will often lullay lovingly
And sing her child to sleep.'
Lullay, lullay...

'Sweet mother, generous and fair,
Since that is so,
I beg you, lull me quietly
And sing me something too.'
Lullay, lullay...

'Sweet son,' she said,
'Of what then should I sing?
More of you I never knew
Than Gabriel's greeting.'
Lullay, lullay...

'He greets me kindly on his knees
And says, "I greet you, Mary,
Full of grace. God is with you.
Messiah you will bear".'
Lullay, lullay...

'I wondered deeply in my mind.
I did not want a man.
"Mary," he said, "don't be afraid.
Leave it to God in heaven".'
Lullay, lullay...

"The Holy Ghost will do all this,"
He said without delay,
That I would bring man's bliss to birth
In you, my sweetest son.'
Lullay, lullay...

'He seide, "Thou shalt bere a king
In King Davides see";
In al Jacobs wonying,
Ther king sholde he be.
Lullay, lullay...

'He seyde that Elizabeth,
That baraine was before,
"A knave child conceyved hath,
To me leve thou the more."
Lullay, lullay...

'I answered blythely,
For his word me payde,
"Lo, Godes servant, her am I ;
Be it as thou me sayde."
Lullay, lullay...

'Ther, as he seide, I thee bare
On midwinter night,
On maydenhed, withouten care,
Be grace of God almight.
Lullay, lullay...

'The herdes that waked in the wolde
Herde a wonder mirthe
Of aungeles ther as they tolde,
In time of thi birthe.
Lullay, lullay...

'Swete sone, sikerly,
No more can I say;
And if I coude, fayn wold I
To don al at thy pay.'
Lullay, lullay...

.....

Certeynly this sight I say,
This song I herde singe,
As I lay this Yoles day
Alone in my longinge.
Lullay, lullay...

RETURN

'He said, "you'll bear a king
In David's royal realm.
For all of Jacob's house,
He'll be their king."
Lullay, lullay...

'He said, "Elizabeth,
Infertile though she was,
Has now conceived a child – a boy –
So trust me all the more".'
Lullay, lullay...

'I answered joyously,
His words gave me delight,
"See, God's servant, here I am;
So be it as you say".'
Lullay, lullay...

'And as he'd said, I gave you birth
Upon midwinter night,
A virgin still, without a pain,
Through God almighty's grace.'
Lullay, lullay...

'The shepherds watching on the hill
Heard a wondrous joy
From angels as they sang out loud
When you were born.'
Lullay, lullay...

'Indeed, sweet son,
I can't say more; but if
I could, I'd be so glad
To do all as you liked.'
Lullay, lullay...

.....

I saw this sight for sure
And heard this *lullay* sung,
As I lay on Christmas day
Alone in all my yearning.
Lullay, lullay...

RETURN

*Lullay, lullay, litel child,
Qui wepest thou so sore?*

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
Thou that were so sterne and wild
Nou art become meke and mild
To saven that was forlore.
Lullay, lullay...

But for my seene I wot it is
That Godis sone suffret this;
Merci lord, I have do mis;
Iwis, I wile no more.
Lullay, lullay...

Ayenis my fadris wille I ches
An appel with a rueful res;
Werfore myn hertage I les,
And nou thou wepist therfore.
Lullay, lullay...

An appel I tok of a tre;
God it hadde forboden me;
Werfore I sulde dampned be,
Yef thi weping ne wore.
Lullay, lullay...

Lullay, for wo, thou litel thing,
Thou litel barun, thou litel king;
Mankindde is cause of thi murning,
That thou hast loved so yore.
Lullay, lullay...

For man, that thou hast ay loved so,
Yet saltu suffren peines mo,
In heved, in feet, in hondis to,
And yet wepen wel more.
Lullay, lullay...

*Lullay, lullay, my little child,
Why do you cry so bitterly?*

Lullay, lullay, my little child,
You were so stern and wild,
And now become so meek and mild
To save what has been lost.
Lullay, lullay...

And yet I know it's for my sin
That God's own son is suffering this;
Pardon, Lord, I have done wrong,
And surely I will do no more.
Lullay, lullay...

I chose, against my father's wish,
An apple in my piteous haste,
And thereby lost my heritage,
And now you weep because of this.
Lullay, lullay...

I took an apple from a tree
That God had once forbidden me.
I would be damned because of this
If you had not cried out for me.
Lullay, lullay...

Lullay – oh no – you little thing,
You little lord, you little king.
Man is the reason why you mourn,
Whom you have loved so long.
Lullay, lullay...

For man whom you have always loved
You'll suffer yet more pain,
To head, to feet, to both your hands,
And still weep so much more.
Lullay, lullay...

That peine us make of senne fre;
That peine us bringge, Jesu, to the;
That peine us helpe ay to fle
The wikkede fendes lore.
Lullay, lullay...

RETURN

May all that pain free us from sin,
May all that pain bring Jesus close,
May all that pain help us to flee
The wicked devil's ways.
Lullay, lullay...

RETURN

Lyrics spoken by Jesus

15

Love me broughte
And love me wroughte,
Man, to be thi fere;
Love me fedde
And love me ledde,
And love me letted here.

Love me slow
And love me drow,
And love me leyde on bere;
Love is my pes,
For love I ches
Man to byen dere.

Ne dred thee nought,
I have thee sought
Bothen day and night;
To haven thee,
Wel is me,
I have thee wonne in fight.

RETURN

16

I am Jesu that com to fight
Withouten sheld and spere;
Elles were thi deth y-dight,
Yif mi fighting ne were.
Sithe I am come and have thee brought
A blissful bote of bale,
Undo thin herte, tel me thi thought,
Thi sinnes grete and smale.

RETURN

38

Lyrics spoken by Jesus

15

Love brought me,
Love wrought me,
To be, man, your friend;
Love fed me,
Love led me,
And love kept me here.

Love slew me,
Love drew me,
Laid me out on a bier;
Love is my peace,
For love I chose
To save mankind at such cost.

Don't be afraid;
I've searched for you
Both day and night,
To have you now.
And I am well;
I've won you in the fight.

RETURN

16

I am Jesus, come to fight
Without a shield or spear,
Fateful would your death have been
Had I not fought for you.
Since I've come and brought for you
A sweet release from pain,
Loosen your heart, tell me your thoughts,
The sins both great and small.

RETURN

39

I purveyd hyr a paleis precieuse.
She flytt, I folowyd; I luffed her soo
That I suffred these paynes piteouse,
Quia amore languet.

'My faire love, and my spouse bright,
I saved hyr fro betyng, and she hath me bett;
I clothed hyr in grace and heavenly light,
This bloody surcote she hath on me sett.
For langyng love I will not lett –
Swete strokys be thes, loo!
I haf loved ever else I hett,
Quia amore languet.

'I crownyd hyr with blysse, and she me with thorne,
I led hyr to chambre, and she me to dye;
I browght hyr to worship, and she me to skorne,
I dyd hyr reverence, and she me velanye.
To love that loveth is no maystrye,
Hyr hate made never my love hyr foo –
Ask than no moo questions whye,
Quia amore languet.

'Loke unto myn handys, man!
Thes gloves were geven me whan I hyr sowght;
They be nat white, but rede and wan,
Embrodred with blode (my spouse them bowght!);
They wyll not of – I lefe them nowght!
I wowe hyr with them where ever she goo.
Thes handes full frendly for hyr fowght,
Quia amore languet.

'Marvell not, man, thof I sitt styll –
My love hath shod me wondyr strayte.
She boklyd my fete, as was hyr wyll,
With sharp nailes (well thow maist waite!).
In my love was never dissaite,
For all my members I haf opynd hyr to;
My body I made hyr hertys baite,
Quia amore languet.

'In my side I haf made hyr nest –
Loke in me, how wyde a wound is here! –

And made a precious palace for her sake.
She fled, I followed. Loved her so
That now I suffer awful pain.
Because I fall down here for love.

'My fairest love, my brightest spouse,
I saved from beating. She had me whipped.
I clothed her in grace and heavenly light.
She dressed me in this bloodied coat.
In yearning love, I won't give up,
Look how sweet these lashes are!
I've always loved her as I promised to.
Because I fall down here for love.

'I crowned her with joy; she crowned me with thorns.
I led her to loving; she led me to die.
I brought her to honour; she brought me to scorn.
I worshipped her; she put me to shame.
To love one who loves does not take great skill;
Her hate never made my love her foe,
So ask then no more questions why,
Because I fall down here for love.

'Look at my hands, mankind!
These gloves were given when I looked for her;
They are not white, but red and pale,
Embroidered with my blood (my spouse bought them!);
They won't come off – I won't let go of them.
I woo her with them wherever she may go.
These hands, so loving, fought for her,
Because I fall down here for love.

'Don't wonder, man, if I sit still –
My love has shod me wondrous tight.
She's clasped my feet, as was her wish,
With sharpened nails, as you can see.
In my love was no deceit.
I opened all my limbs to her;
I made my flesh enticement for her heart,
Because I fall down here for love.

'In my side, I've made her nest –
Look here inside – how deep a wound!

Allas! Allas! wel yvel y sped!
 For synne Jesu fro me ys fled,
 That lyvely fere.
 At my dore he standes al one,
 And kallys 'Undo!' with rueful mone,
 On this manere:

'Undo, my leef, my dowve dere!
 Undo! Wy stond I stekyn out here?
 Ich am thi make!
 Lo, my lokkes and ek myn heved
 Are al with bloody dropes byweved
 For thine sake.'

RETURN

In the vaile of restles mynd,
 I sought in mounteyn and in mede,
 Trustyng a treulofe for to fynd.
 Upon an hyll than toke I hede,
 A voise I herd (and nere I yede)
 In gret dolour complaynyng tho,
 'See, dere soule, my sides blede,
Quia amore languo.'

Upon thys mownt I fand a tree,
 Undir thys tree a man sitting;
 From hede to fote wowndyd was he,
 Hys hert blode I saw bledyng,
 A seemly man to be a kyng,
 A graciose face to loke unto.
 I askyd hym how he had paynyng.
 He said, '*Quia amore languo.*'

'I am truelove, that fals was never.
 My sister, mannys soule, I loved hyr thus;
 Bycause I wold on no wyse dissevere
 I left my kyngdome gloriouse.

Oh no, oh no! I've met such grief!
 Jesus, that lovely friend, has fled away
 From me for sin.
 At my door he stands alone,
 Calls out 'repent' with piteous moan
 In just this way:

'Repent, my love, my dearest dove!
 Repent! Why am I shut out here?
 I am your love!
 Look, my hair and all my head
 Are covered with these drops of blood,
 And for your sake.'

RETURN

In this vale of troubled mind,
 I searched the mountains and the fields,
 Hoping to find a true, true love.
 Upon a hill, I then took heed
 And heard a voice (closer I went)
 In deepest sorrow moaning so,
 'See, dear soul, my sides that bleed,
Because I fall down here for love.'

Upon the hill I found a tree,
 And a man sitting under the tree,
 Wounded from head to foot;
 I saw his heart's blood bleeding.
 A handsome man – perhaps a king –
 A gracious face to look upon.
 I asked him why he suffered so.
 He said, '*Because I fall down here for love.*'

'I am true love, was never false.
 I loved man's soul, my sister, so.
 Because I'd never part from her,
 I left the glory of my realm,

This is hyr chambre, here shall she rest,
That she and I may sleep in fere.
Here may she wasshe, if any filth were;
Here is socour for all hyr woo.
Cum if she will, she shall haf chere,
Quia amore languet.

'I will abide till she be redy,
I will hir sue if she say nay;
If she be rechelesse, I will be redy,
If she be dawngerouse, I will hyr pray.
If she do wepe, than byd I nay.
My armes ben spred to clypp hyr to.
Crye onys, I cum – now, soule, assaye!
Quia amore languet.

'I sitt on an hille for to se farre;
I loke to the vayle; my spouse I see.
Now rynne she awayward, now cummyth she narre,
Yet fro myn eye-syght she may nat be.
Sum waite ther pray, to make hyr flee –
I rynne tofore to chastise hyr foo.
Recover, my soule, agayne to me,
Quia amore languet.

'My swete spouse, will we goo play?
Apples ben rype in my gardine;
I shall clothe the in new array,
Thy mete shall be mylk, honye, and wyne.
Now, dere soule, latt us go dyne;
Thy sustenance is in my crippe – loo!
Tary not now, fayre spouse myne,
Quia amore languet.

'Yf thow be fowle, I shall make clene,
If thow be seke, I shall the hele;
Yf thow owght morne, I shall bemene.
Spouse, why will thow nowght with me dele?
Thow fowndyst never love so lele.
What wilt thow, sowle, that I shall do?
I may of unkyndnes the appele,
Quia amore languet.

This is her bedroom, here she can rest,
That she and I may sleep as friends.
Here she can wash all filth away;
Here is the balm for all her pain.
If she'll but come, welcomed she'll be.
Because I fall down here for love.

'I'll wait till she is ready;
I'll send for her till she says no.
If she is heedless, I'll stay close by;
If she's disdainful, I'll beseech her;
If she should cry, I'll beg her stop.
My arms are spread to hug her close.
Just cry, "I come". Try it, my soul!
Because I fall down here for love.

'On a hill I sit to see far off;
I scan the vale and see my spouse.
If she runs off or comes close by,
My eyes will always see her there.
Some stalk their prey, then make them run –
I run ahead to beat her enemies,
Return, my soul, again to me.
Because I fall down here for love.

My sweetest spouse, shall we go play?
In my garden, apples are ripe.
I will dress you in fresh, new clothes;
Milk, honey, wine, will be your food.
So now, dear soul, let us go eat;
Look, my bag is full with all you need.
Do not delay, my lovely spouse,
Because I fall down here for love.

'If you're impure, I'll make you clean,
If you are sick, I'll give you health,
If aught you mourn, I'll comfort you –
My spouse, why now reject me in this way?
You've never found such faithful love.
What would you, soul, that I should do?
Ingratitude should be your name,
Because I fall down here for love.

‘What shall I do now with my spouse?
Abyde I will hyr jantilnesse,
Wold she loke onys owt of hyr howse
Of fleshely affeccions and unclennesse.
Hyr bed is made, hyr bolstar is in blysse,
Hyr chambre is chosen – such at no moo!
Loke owt at the windows of kyndnesse,
Quia amore languo.’

‘My spouse is in chambre, hald yowr pease,
Make no noyse, but lat hyr slepe.
My babe shall sofre noo disease.
I may not here my dere childe wepe,
For with my pappe I shall hyr kepe.
No wondyr though I tend hyr to –
Thys hole in my side had never ben so depe
But *quia amore languo.*’

‘Long and love thou never so hygh,
Yit is my love than than thyn may be.
Thow gladdyst, thow wepist, I sitt the bi.
Yit might thow, spouse, loke onys at me!
Spouse, shuld I always fede the
With childys mete? Nay, love, nat so –
I preve thi love with adversite,
Quia amore languo.’

‘Wax not wery, myn owne dere wife!
What mede is aye to lyffe in counfort?
For in tribulacioun I ryn more ryfe
Ofter tymes than in disport –
In welth, in woo, ever I support,
Than dere soule, go never me fro! –
Thy mede is markyd whan thow art mort,
Quia amore languo.’

RETURN

‘What shall I do now for my spouse?
I’ll wait upon her graciousness.
Would she but look outside her house
Of bodily desire and filthiness,
Her bed is made, her pillow soft,
Her bedroom choice – such as no other.
Look out the window of such kindliness,
Because I fall down here for love.’

‘My spouse is in her bedroom, so be still;
Make no noise, but let her sleep.
My child shall suffer no distress.
I shall not hear my dear child cry
But hold her close up to my breasts.
No wonder that I guard her so:
This hole pierced in my side has never been so deep,
Because I fall down here for love.’

‘However much you yearn and love,
My love is more than yours can be.
You’re glad, you weep – I sit beside,
But might you, spouse, once look at me?
So must I always feed you, spouse,
With children’s food? No, love, not so –
I test your love by suffering,
Because I fall down here for love.’

‘Don’t grow tired, my own dear wife.
What the reward to always live in ease?
When things are hard, I often run to help
More readily than when they’re glad –
In good or bad, I always give support.
Don’t ever go away from me, dear soul –
Reward has been assigned when you are dead.
Because I fall down here for love.’

RETURN

Christ's complaints

19

My folk, now answer me,
And sey what is my gilt;
What might I mor ha don for thee,
That I ne have fulfil?

Out of Egipte I broughte thee,
Ther thou wer in thi wo;
And wikkedliche thou nome me,
As I hadde ben thi fo.

Over al I ledde thee
And afor thee I yede;
And no frendschipe fond I in thee
Whan that I hadde nede.

Fourti winter I sente thee
Angeles mete fro hevene;
And thou heng me on rode tre,
And greddest with loud stevene.

Heilsom water I sente thee
Out of the harde ston;
And eisel and galle thou sentest me,
Other yag thou me non.

The see I parted asonder for thee,
And ledde thee thurgh wel wide; **NOTE**
And the herte blod to sen of me,
Thou smottest me thurgh the side.

All thi fon I slow for thee,
And made thee couth of name;
And thou heng me on rode tre,
And didest me mychel shame.

50

Christ's complaints

19

My people, answer me
And say what is my guilt;
What could I more have done for you
That I have not fulfilled?

I brought you out of Egypt
Where you were in such pain;
You seized me then so wickedly
As if I'd been your foe.

I led you everywhere
And always went in front.
I found no friendship in you
When I most needed friends.

For forty years I sent you
Angel's food from heaven;
And then you hung me on a cross
And screamed with all your voice.

I gave you purest water
Out of the rock-hard stone;
You sent me gall and vinegar
And gave me nothing else.

I forced the sea apart for you
And led you through with ease;
And yet to see my heart's own blood,
You pierced me through my side.

All your foes I killed for you,
And made you famed in name;
You hung me on a wooden cross
And did me awful shame.

51

A kinges yerde I betook thee
Til thou wer al befor;
And thou heng me on rode tre,
And crounedest me with thorn.

I made thin enemies and thee
For to ben knowen asunder;
And on an hey hil thou henge me,
Al the world on me to wonder.

RETURN

20

Jesus doth him bymene,
And speketh to sinful mon:
'Thi garland is of grene,
Of floures many on;
Myn of sharpe thornes,
Myn hewe it maketh won.'

'Thyn hondes streite gloved,
White and clene kept;
Myne with nailes thorled
On rode, and eke my feet.'

'Acros thou berest thyn armes,
Whan thou dauncest narewe;
To me hastou non awe,
But to worldes glorie –
Myne for the on rode
With the Jewes wode
With grete ropis todraw.'

NOTE

'Opyne thou hast thi side –
Spaiers longe and wide –
For veyn glorie and pride,
And thi longe knyf astrout –
Thou ert of the gai route:
Myn with spere sharpe
Ystongen to the herte;
My body with scourges smerte
Biswongen al aboute.'

NOTE

52

A royal sceptre I gave you
So you were first in rank;
You hung me on a wooden cross
And croiwned me all with thorns.

I made your enemies and you
So you were known apart;
You hung me on a high, high hill
For all the world to gaze at me.

RETURN

20

Jesus complains
And says to sinful man:
'Your garland is green
With so many flowers;
Mine is sharp thorns
That make my face pale.'

'Your hands wear tight gloves
That are white and kept clean;
Mine, pierced with nails,
With my feet, on the cross.'

'You cross arms together
As you dance there so close;
You do not revere me,
Just the world and its spoils;
My arms on the cross,
Pulled apart with great ropes
By the mad, savage Jews.'

'You have opened your sides
With long, widening slits
And your knife hanging out –
Vain glory and pride,
You're one of the crowd.
My side with sharp spears
Is pierced to the heart;
My body is painfully scourged
And beaten all over.'

53

'Al that y tholed on rode for the,
To me was shame and sorwe;
Wel litel thou lovest me,
And lasse thou thenkest on me,
An evene and eke amorwe.'

'Swete brother, wel might thou se
Thes peynes stronge in rode tre
Have y tholed for love of the;
Thei that have wrought it me
May synge welawo.
Be thou kynde pur charite,
Let thi synne and love thou me,
Hevene bliss y shal yeve the,
That lasteth ay and oo.'

RETURN

21

Lo! Lemman swete, now may thou se
That I have lost my lyf for the.
What might I do the mare?
Forthi I pray the speciali
That thou forsake ill company
That woundes me so sare;

And take myne armes pryvely
And do tham in thi tresory,
In what stede sa thou dwelles;
And, swete lemman, forget thow noight
That I thi lufe sa dere have boght,
And I aske the noight elles.

RETURN

22

A sory beverech it is
and sore it is aboutt,
Nou in this sarpe time
this brewing hat me brouht.

54

'All I endured on the cross for you
Was shame and grief to me;
You love me very little
And think of me still less
At night and in the morning.'

'Sweet brother, surely you can see
This awful pain upon the cross,
Endured for love of you.
Those who have done this thing to me
May say "Oh no, oh no!"
For love's sake, just be kind.
Leave your sins and just love me.
I'll give you heaven's bliss
That lasts for evermore.'

RETURN

21

See, sweet beloved, now you can see
That I have lost my life for you –
What more could I do for you?
And so I beg you specially
That you give up bad company
Which wounds me bitterly.

Take up my armour secretly
And hide it in your treasury,
Wherever you may live.
And, sweet darling, don't forget
I've bought your love at such great cost.
I ask you nothing else.

RETURN

22

A piteous drink it is
and paid for grievously –
Now to this bitter time
the drink has summoned me.

55

Fader, if it mowe ben don
als I have besought,
Do away this beverich,
that I ne drink et nouht.

And if it mowe no betre ben,
for alle mannis gilt,
That it ne muste nede
that my blod be spilt,
Suete fader, I am thi sone,
thi wil be fulfilt,
I am her, thin owen child,
I wil don as thou wilt.

RETURN

23

Ye that pasen be the weyye,
Abidet a litel stounde:
Beholdet, al mi felawes,
Yef ani me lik is founde.
To the tre with nailes thre
Wol fast I hange bounde;
With a spere al thoru mi side
To min herte is made a wounde.

RETURN

24

‘What ys he, thys lordling, that cometh vrom the vght
Wyth blod-rede wede so grysliche ydyht,
So vayre ycoyntised, so semlich in syht,
So styflyche yongeth, so douhti a knyht?’
‘Ich hyt am, ich hyt am, that ne speke bote ryht,
Chaunpyon to helen monkunde in vyht.’

‘Why thoenne ys thy shroud red wyth blod al ymeind,
As troddares in wrynge with most al byspreynd?’

‘The wrynge ich habbe ytrodded al mysulf on,
And of al monkunde ne was non other won.

56

My father, if it may be done
as I have begged of you,
Take this cup away from me
that I don’t drink from it.

But if it can no better be,
because of all man’s guilt,
That needs must now
my blood is spilt,
Sweet father, I’m your son,
your will shall be fulfilled.
I’m here, your one and only child,
I’ll do what you would wish.

RETURN

23

You who pass along the road,
Just pause a little while,
And look now, all my fellow men
If anyone like me is known.
I hang so tightly held
With three nails to the cross;
A spear right through my side
Has wounded all my heart.

RETURN

24

‘Who is he, this young lord, who comes back from the fight
With clothes blood-red so terribly arrayed,
So beautifully dressed, so wonderful to see,
So bold as he walks by, so valiant a knight?’
‘It’s me, it’s me, who always speaks the truth,
The champion to save mankind and fight for him.’

‘Why is your clothing red and mingled so with blood,
Like treaders in the wine-press, spattered all with must?’

‘The wine-press I have trodden in, and by myself alone,
It was for all mankind; there was no other hope.

57

Ich hoem hadde ytrodded in wrethe and in grome,
And al my wede ys byspreynd with hoere blod ysome,
And al my robe yvuled to hoere grete shome.
The day of thylke wreche leveth in my thouht,
The yer of medes yeldyng ne voryet ich nouht.
Ich loked al aboute som helpynge mon,
Ich souhte al the route, bote help nas ther non.
Hyt was myn oune strengthe that thys bote wrouhte,
Myn own douhtynesse that help ther me brouhte.
Ich hadde ytrodded the volk in wrethe and in grome,
Adreynt al wyth shennesse, ydrawe doun wyth shome.'

On Godes mylsfolnesse ich wole bythenche me,
And heryen hym in alle thing that he yeldeth me.

RETURN

I've trodden on them all in anger and in wrath;
My clothes are spattered with their blood all mixed together.
My robes are all defiled to their terrible disgrace.
The day that vengeance comes lives on inside my mind,
The year reward is given, I will not then forget.
I looked all round about for help from someone there;
I searched all through the crowd, but there was no help there.
Only my own strength brought salvation then,
Only my own bravery that brought help to me there.
I've trodden down the people in anger and in wrath,
Drowned them in indignity, dragged them down with shame.'

I'll think now of the mercifulness of God,
And praise him for everything he gives.

RETURN

Stabat mater: the crucifixion

25

Nou goth sonne under wod,
Me reweth, Marie, thi faire rode.
Nou goth sonne under tre,
Me reweth, Marie, thi sone and the.

RETURN

26

Jesu Cristes milde moder
Stud, biheld hire sone o rode
That he was ipined on.
The sone heng, the moder stud
And biheld hire childes blod,
Wu it of hise wundes ran.

Tho he starf that king is of lif,
Drierie nas neuerre no wif
Than thu were, leuedi, tho;
The brithe day went into niht
Tho Jesu Crist, thin herte liht,
Was iqueint with pine and wo.

Thi lif drei ful harde stundes
Tho thu seye hise bludi wundes,
And his bodi of rode don.
Hise wundes sore and smerte
Stungen thureu and thurw thi herte,
As te bihichte Simeon.

Nu his heued with blud bi-sprunken,
Nu his side with spere istungen,
Thu bihelde, leuedi fre.
Nu his hondes sprad o rode,
Un hise fet washen wit blode
And i-naillet to the tre.

60

Stabat mater: the crucifixion

25

The sun sinks now beyond the wood,
Mary, I mourn your lovely face.
The sun sinks now beyond the trees,
Mary, I mourn your son and you.

RETURN

26

Jesus Christ's gentle mother
Stood, and watched her son upon the cross
That he was tortured on.
The son hung, the mother stood
And watched her child's blood – the way
It ran down from his wounds.

And when he died, the king of life,
No woman ever grieved as much
As you did, lady, then.
The brightest day turned into night
When Jesus Christ, your heart's own light,
Was killed in hurt and pain.

You suffered such enormous pain
When you saw his wounds of blood,
His body hung upon the cross.
His painful, awful wounds
Pierced deep inside your heart,
As Simeon had foretold.

At his head all damp with blood,
At his side pierced with a spear,
You look now, lady full of grace,
At his hands spread on the cross,
At his feet all bathed in blood,
And nailed upon the cross.

61

Nu his bodi with scourges beten,
And his blud so wide hut-leten
Maden the thin herte sor.
War-so thu castest thin eyen,
Pine strong thu soie im dreien –
Ne mithte noman tholie more.

Nu is time that thu yelde
Kende that thu im withelde
Tho th child was of the born.
Nu he hoschet wit goulinge
That thu im in thi chiltinge
Al withelde thar biforn.

No thu fondest, moder milde,
Wat wyman drith with hire childe,
Thei thu clene maiden be;
Nu the's yolden arde and dere
The pine werof thu were
Ine ti chiltuing quite and fre.

Sone after the nith of sorwen
Sprong the lith of edi morwen;
Ine thin herte, suete may,
Thi sorwen wende al to blisse,
Tho thi sone al mid-iwisse
Aros hup-on the tridde day.

Welle wat thu were blithe,
Tho aros fram deth to lieu,
Thur the hole ston he glod;
Al so he was of the boren,
Bothen after and biforen,
Hol bilof thi maidenhod.

Neue blisse he us broute,
That mankin so dere boue
And for us yaf is dere lif.
Glade and blithe thu us make
For thi suete son's sake,
Edi maiden, blissful wif.

Then his body – beaten, scourged,
With his blood all over spread,
Made the heart within you ache.
No matter where you cast your eyes,
You saw him suffering such pain –
No man could suffer more.

Now is the time that you pay back
To Nature what you kept from it
When your child was born.
It asks you for those anguished cries
That, in the bearing of your child,
Were all withheld before.

Now you're feeling, gentle mother,
What a woman suffers for her child,
Though you're a pure young girl.
Now you're given, hard and dreadful,
The pain that, in your child-birth,
You were so freely spared.

Soon after sorrow's night,
The light of blessed morning sprang
Within your heart, sweet girl.
Your sorrows turned to such great bliss
When your son – for certain sure –
Arose upon the third day.

And then, what joy you felt
When he arose from death to life
And glided through the intact stone,
Just as he was born of you.
Before and afterwards, the same,
Your purity remained complete.

He brought us all new blissfulness,
Redeemed mankind at such a price
And gave his precious life for us.
You make us glad and full of joy
For the sake of your sweet son,
Blessèd girl, and joyous woman.

Queen of euene, for thi blisse,
Lithe al hure sorinesse,
 And went hur yuel al in-to gud.
Bring hus, moder, to thi sone,
Mak hus eure with im wone,
 That hus bouté wi his blud.

RETURN

27

‘Stond wel, moder, under rode,
Biheld thi child wyth glade mode;
 Blythe moder mictu be.’
‘Sune, hu may I blithe stonden?
I se thin feet, I se thin honden
 Nayled to the harde tre.’

‘Moder, do wey thi wepinge;
I thole this ded for mannes thinge –
 For owen gilte tholi non.’
‘Sune, I fele the dede-stunde;
The swerd is at min herte-grunde
 That me byhycte Symeon.’

‘Moder, reu upon thi beren!
Thou wasse away tho blodi teren;
 It doth me werse than mi ded.’
‘Sune, hu micti teres wernen?
I se tho blodi flodes ermen
 Ut of thin herte to min fet.’

‘Moder, nu y may the seye,
Bettere is that ic one deye
 Than al mankyn to helle go.’
‘Sune, y se thi bodi swngen,
Thi brest, thin hond, thi fot thurstungen
 No selli nis thou me be wo.’

‘Moder, if y dar the telle,
Yif y ne deye thou gost to helle;
 I thole this ded for thine sake.’

64

Queen of heaven, for your bliss,
Lighten all our sorrowing
 And turn our evil into good.
Bring us, mother, to your son;
Make us stay for ever with the man
 Who bought us with his blood.

RETURN

27

‘Stand there, mother, beneath the cross;
Look at your child with joyous mind,
 Happy, mother, you must be.’
‘My son, how can I stand here joyously?
I see your feet, I see your hands,
 Nailed to the hard, hard cross.’

‘Mother, cease your weeping now;
I bear this death for mankind’s sake;
 I do not bear it for my guilt.’
‘My son, I feel the pains of death;
The sword that Simeon promised me
 Is at my heart’s deep core.’

‘Have pity, mother, on your child.
Wipe those tears of blood away;
 They do worse things than my own death.’
‘My son, how can I hold my tears away?
I see these streams of blood run down
 Out of your heart upon my feet.’

‘Mother, I can tell you now,
Better it is that I alone should die
 Than all mankind should go to hell.’
‘My son, I see your body whipped,
Your chest, your hands, your feet pierced through;
 No wonder that I feel such grief.’

‘Mother, I dare to tell you this:
If I don’t die, you go to hell;
 It’s for your sake I’m suffering this death.’

65

'Sune, thou best me so minde,
Ne wit me nout – it is mi kinde
That y for the this sorwe make.'

'Moder, merci! Let me deyen
For Adam ut of helle beyen,
And al mankin that is forloren.'
'Sune, wat sal me to rede?
Thi pine pineth me to ded;
Let me deyn the biforen.'

'Moder, nutarst thou miht leren
Wat pine tholen that childre beren,
What sorwe haven that child forgon.'
'Sune, y wot, y kan the telle –
Bute it be the pine of helle
More sorwe ne wot y non.'

'Moder, reu of moder kare!
Nu thou wost of moder fare,
Thou thou be clene mayden-man.'
'Sune, help at alle nede,
Alle tho that to me grede,
Mayden, wyf, and fol wymman.'

'Moder, y may no lengore duelle,
The time is cumen y fare to helle,
The thridde day y rise upon.'
'Sune, y wyle with the funde,
y deye, ywis, of thine wnde,
So rueful ded was nevere non.'

When he rose than fel thi sorwe,
The blisse sprong the thridde morwe –
Blithe moder wer thou tho.
Moder for that ilke blisse
Bisech ure god ure sinnes lisse,
Thou be ure cheld ayen ure fo.

Bliscd be thou, quen of hevене,
Bring us ut of helle levēne
Thurh thi dere sunes miht

'My son, you always think of me.
Don't blame me now; it's deep in me
That I should sorrow for your sake.'

'Mother, please now... let me die,
Redeeming Adam out of hell,
And all mankind that is so lost.'
'Son, what am I to do?
Your suffering tortures me to death,
So let me die before you die.'

'For the first time, mother, you now know
The pain of those who bear a child,
The grief of those who lose a child.'
'I know, my son; and I can say,
Unless it be the pains of hell,
I know no greater sorrow.'

'Have pity, mother, on a mother's grief.
Now you know about a mother's fate
Though you're a pure young girl.'
'My son, please help in every need
All those who cry to me –
Young girl, wife, and foolish woman.'

'Mother, I can no longer stay,
The time has come to go to hell,
And rise again the third day.'
'My son, I'll go with you;
I die, truly, of your wounds,
A death so piteous has never been.'

When he rose, your sorrow passed;
The third morning, and your joy sprang forth
A joyous mother you were then.
Mother, for that very bliss,
Entreat God to forgive our sins,
And be our shield against our foes.

Queen of heaven, you are blessed.
Lead us from the flames of hell
Through your dear son's power.

Moder, for that hithe blode
That he sadde upon the rode,
Led us into hevene liht.

RETURN

28

Why have ye no reuthe on my child?
Have reuthe on me, ful of murning.
Taket down on rode my derworthy child,
Or prek me on rode with my derling.

More pine ne may me ben don
Than laten me liven in sorwe and schame;
As love me bindet to my sone,
So lat us deyen bothen isame.

RETURN

29

The milde Lamb, y-sprad o rode,
Heng bi-ronnen al o blode,
For oure gilte, for oure gode,
For he ne gilte nevre nought.
Few of hise him were bi-leved,
Dred hem hadde him al bi-reved
Whan they sawen here heved
To so shanful deth y-brought.

His moder, ther him stod biside,
Ne let to ter other abide,
Whan she saw hire child bitide
Swich pine and deyen gilteles.
Saint Johan, that was him dere,
On other halve him stod eek fere,
And beheld with mourne chere
His maister that him loved and ches.

Sore and harde he was y-swungen,
Fet and hondes thurgh y-stungen,
Ac most of alle his other wunden

68

Mother, for that precious blood
He shed upon the cross,
Lead us into heaven's light.

RETURN

28

Why no pity from you for my child?
Pity me. I am so full of grief.
Take down my precious child from off the cross,
Or nail me with my darling on the cross.

More pain cannot be given me
Than make me live in grief and shame;
As love so binds me to my son,
So let us both together die.

RETURN

29

The gentle Lamb, stretched on the cross,
There hung all drenched in blood,
And for our guilt and for our good –
He never sinned at all.
Few of his friends were left to him;
Fear had deprived him of them all
When they saw the man who'd led them
Brought to so vile a death.

His mother stood beside him there,
Tears running down her face
To see her child endure such pain,
And dying guiltlessly.
Saint John, who was so dear to him,
Stood opposite – he was his friend –
And looked up with a sorrowing face
Upon the man who'd loved and chosen him.

Beaten sore and hard he was,
Feet and hands pierced through;
But more than all his other wounds,

69

Him dide his modres sorwe wo.
In al his pine, in al his wrake,
That he dreigh for mannes sake,
He saw his moder sorwe make –
 Wel rewfuliche he spak hire to.

He seyde, ‘Woman, lo! me here,
Thi child that thou to manne bere;
Withouten sor and wep thou were
 Tho Ich was of thee y-born.
Ac now thou most thi pine dreyen,
Whan thou seest me with thin eyen
Pine thole o rode and deyen
 To helen man that was forlorn.’

Saint Johan th’evangeliste
Hir understood thurgh hese of Criste;
Fair he kept hire and biwiste
 And served hire from hond to fot.
Rewful is the mineginge
Of this deth and this departinge;
Therin is blis meind with wepinge,
 For ther-thurgh us cam alle bot.

He that starf in oure kende, NOTE
Leve us so ben ther-of mende,
That he yeve us atten ende
 That he hath us to y-bought.
Milsful moder, maiden clene,
Mak thi milce upon us sene,
And bring us thurgh thi swete bene
 To the blis that failleth nought.

RETURN

30

Whyt was hys nakede brest
 and red of blode hys side,
Bleyc was his fair andled,
 his wnde dop ant wide,

70

His mother’s grieving caused him pain.
In all his pain, in all the agony
That he endured for mankind’s sake,
He saw his mother grieving so,
 And in compassion spoke to her.

‘Woman,’ he said, ‘look, hear me now,
The child you bore in human form.
You felt no hurt, no sorrowing,
 When I was born of you.
But now you must endure your pain,
And see me with your very eyes
Tormented on the cross, to die
 And heal mankind who once was lost.’

The evengeliste Saint John
Supported her at Christ’s command.
He kept her safe, looked after her,
 And served her hand and foot.
Piteous is the memory
Of this death and this departing.
Joy is mingled with the tears,
 For in this way we all were saved.

The man who died – as we will die –
Keep us mindful of it all,
That he may give us at the end
 What he has bought for us.
Kindly mother, pure young girl,
Make your mercy seen in us,
And bring us through your sweetest prayers
 The bliss that never fails.

RETURN

30

His naked chest was white,
 and blood-red was his side;
His lovely face was pale,
 his wounds were deep and wide.

71

And hys armes ystreit
hey upon the rode;
On fif studes on his body
the stremes ran o blode.

RETURN

31

Whyt is thi naked brest
and blodi is thi side,
Starke are thine armes
that strecchede are so wyde.
Falwe is thi faire ler
and dimmyeth thi sighte,
Drie is thin hende body
on rode so y-tighte.
Thine thighes hongen colde
al so the marble-ston,
Thine thirlede fet
the rede blod by-ron.

RETURN

72

Stretched out were his arms,
so high upon the cross,
Five places on his flesh
the streams of blood ran down.

RETURN

31

White is your naked chest
and bloodied is your side.
Your arms are rigid, stiff,
and are stretched out so wide.
Your lovely cheeks are pale,
your sight begins to dim.
Your gracious body, lifeless now,
stretched out upon the cross.
Your legs hang down so cold,
just like the marble-stone,
Your pierced feet are quite drenched
with your red blood.

RETURN

73

Meditations upon the Passion

32

Whan Ich se on rode
Jesu mi lemman,
And biside him stonde
Marie an Johan,
And his rig y-swongen,
And his side y-stongen,
For the love of man,
Wel ow Ich to wepen
And sinnes forleten,
Yif Ich of love can,
Yif Ich of love can,
Yif Ich of love can.

RETURN

33

Steddefast crosse, inmong all other
Thow art a tre mykel of prise,
In brawnche and flore swylk another
I ne wot non in wode ne rys.
Swete be the nalys, and swete be the tre,
And sweter be the birdyn that hangis upon the!

RETURN

34

Worldes blisse, have god day!
Nou fram min herte wand away.
Him for to louen min hert is went
That thurgh his side spere rent.
His herte blod shadde he for me.
Nayled to the harde tre,
That swete bodi was y-tent,
Prened wit nayles thre.

74

Meditations upon the Passion

32

When I see on the cross
Jesus my sweetheart,
And standing beside him
Mary and John,
And his back whipped,
And his side pierced,
For love of mankind.
Well ought I to weep,
Renounce all my sins,
If I can but love,
If I can but love,
If I can but love.

RETURN

33

Faithful cross, before all others
You are a tree of such great worth.
I never knew, for blooms and branches,
Of one like you in thickets or in woods.
Sweet the nails, and sweet the tree,
But sweeter the burden that hangs from you now.

RETURN

34

Wordly bliss – good bye to you!
Steal off from my heart.
My heart has turned to love the man
In whose side the sharp spear tore.
He shed his heart's own blood for me,
Nailed to the hard, hard cross.
That lovely body was stretched out,
Pierced with three nails.

75

Ha Jesu! Thin holi heved
Wit sharpe thornes was by-weved,
Thi faire neb was al bi-spet
Wit spot and blod meynd al by-wet.
Fro the crune to the to
Thi body was ful of pine and wo,
And wan and red.

Ha Jesu! thi smarte ded
Be my sheld, and mine red
Fram develes lore.
Ha, swete Jesu, thin hore!
For thine pines sore,
Tech min herte right love the
Whos herte blod was shad for me.

RETURN

35

I sike al wan I singe
For sorue that I se,
Wan Ic with wepinge
Biholde upon the tre.
I se Jesu, my swete,
His herte blode forlete
For the luv of me.
His wondis waxin wete –
Marie, milde and suete
Thou haf merci of me!

Hey apon a dune,
As al folke hit se may,
A mile wythute the tune
Abute the mid-day,
The rode was op areide
His frendis werin afered –
Thei clungin so the cley –
The rod stont in ston;
Marie hirselle alon –
His songe was 'wayleway!'

76

Oh Jesus – your holy head
Was wrapped all round with pointed thorns.
Your lovely face was spat upon,
And spit and blood there mingled, drenched.
And from your head down to your feet,
Your body agonised in pain,
So pale and red.

Oh Jesus – let your painful death
Remain my shield, and save me
From the devil's ways.
Oh, sweet Jesus, give your mercy!
For all your awful pain,
Teach my heart how best to love you,
Whose dear heart's blood was shed for me.

RETURN

35

And when I sing, I grieve
For the sorrow that I see,
When I, through all my tears,
Look there upon the cross.
I see my sweetest Jesus,
His heart's blood pouring down,
And all for love of me.
His wounds are growing wet –
Oh Mary – gentle, sweet –
Take pity on me now.

High up upon a hill
So all the world could see,
A mile outside the town,
At the middle of the day,
The cross was raised up high.
His friends were all afraid,
They crumbled just like clay.
The cross, though, stood in stone.
Mary herself, alone,
Began to cry, 'Oh no...'

77

Wan Ic him biholde
Wyt ey and herte bo
I se his bodi colde,
His ble waxit all bloe.
He hongeth al of blode
Se hey apon the rode
Bitwixin thefis two –
Hu soldi singe more?
Mari, thou wepe sor,
Thou wist of al his woe.

Wel ofte wan I sike,
I make mi mone;
Ivel hit may me like.
And wondir nis hit non,
Wan I se honge hey,
Ande bitter peynis drei
Jesu mi lemmon;
His wondis sor smerte,
The sper is at his herte
And thorch his side gon.

The naylis beit al to stronge,
The smyth is al to sleye;
Thou bledis al to longe,
The tre is al to heye.
The stonis waxin wete –
Allas! Jesu mi suete,
Feu frendis hafdis neye,
But sin Jon murmind
And Mari wepind,
That al thi sorue seye.

Wel ofte wan I slepe
With soru Ic am thourhsot,
Wan I wake and wepe
I thenke in mi thoht:
Allas! that men beit wode,
Biholdit an the rode
And silit (Ic li noht)
Her souelis into sin
For any worldis win
That was so der iboght.

RETURN

And when I look on him
With both my eye and heart,
I see his blood run cold,
His face becomes quite pale,
He hangs all bleeding there
So high upon the cross,
The two thieves either side.
What more then can I say?
Mary, you weep so bitterly,
All his grief you know.

So often when I grieve,
Give voice to my lament,
It gives me such great pain.
There is no wonder there,
When, hung on high, I see
Him suffer awful pain,
Jesus, my beloved.
His wounds are torturing,
The spear is at his heart,
And through his side has gone.

The nails are all too strong,
The blacksmith all too skilled.
You bleed for far too long,
The cross is far too high.
The stones grow wet –
Oh, Jesus, my sweet,
You had few friends around,
Saint John alone in grief,
And Mary weeping there,
Who saw you in your pain.

So often when I sleep,
I'm pierced all through with grief;
And when I wake and cry,
I think deep in my mind
That men are mad.
They look upon the cross
And sell (I do not lie)
Their souls for sin and
Any wordly gain – souls
That were so dearly bought.

RETURN

My trewest tresowre sa trayturly was taken,
 Sa bytterly bondyn wyth bytand bandes –
 How sone of thi servandes was thou forsaken,
 And lathly for my lufe hurld with thair handes!

My well of my wele sa wrangwysly wryed,
 So pulled owt of preson to Pylate at prime:
 Thaire dulles and thaire dyntes ful dreerly thou dreed
 When thai schot in thi syght bath slaver and slyme.

NOTE

My hope of my hele sa hyed to be hanged,
 Sa charged with thi corsce and corond with thorne,
 Ful sare to thi hert thi steppes tha stanged;
 Me thynk thi bak burd breke – it bendes forborne!

My salve of my sare sa saryful in syght,
 Sa naked and nayled thi ryg on the rode,
 Ful hydusly hyngand, that heved the on hyght,
 Thai lete the stab in the stane all stekked that thar stode. NOTE

Ma dereworthy derlyng, sa dolefully dyght,
 Sa straytly upryght streyned on the rode;
 For thi mykel mekenes, thi mercy, thi myght,
 Thow bete al my bales with bote of thi blode.

My fender of my fose, sa fonden in the felde,
 Sa lufly lyghtand at the evensang tyde;
 Thi moder and hir menyke unlaced thi scheld –
 All weped that thar were, thi woundes was sa wyde.

My pereles prynce als pure I the pray,
 The mynde of this myroure thou lat me noght mysse;
 Bot wynd up my wylle to won wyth the ay,
 That thou be beryd in my brest, and bryng me to blysse.

RETURN

My truest treasure so treacherously taken,
 So awfully bound up with chafing rope –
 How quickly your servants left you abandoned,
 Threw their blows on you terribly, for love of me.

My fountain of joy so wrongly accused,
 So dragged out of prison to Pilate at dawn:
 You suffered in sorrow their strokes and their blows,
 As they spat in your eyes their spittle and filth.

My hope of salvation thus driven to hang,
 So weighed with your cross and crowned with your thorns,
 Your steps pierced then such pain to your heart,
 Your back ought to break, as it bends with the weight.

The salve of my pain so wretched to see,
 So naked and nailed there, your back on the cross.
 Hideously hanging, they raised you up high,
 Then jolted you down in the rock that held it in place.

My most precious darling, so shamefully treated,
 Held upright so tightly, stretched out on the cross,
 Because of your meekness, great mercy, and might,
 You cured all my ills that were healed by your blood.

My defence against foes, so tested in fight,
 So gently descending at evensong time;
 Your mother, those with her, unfastened your shield,
 All wept who were there, your wounds were so deep.

My unequalled prince, I cannot beg more,
 Let me never forget your example to me.
 Increase my desire to stay with you always,
 So you're deep in my heart, and bring me to bliss.

RETURN

*Lovely ter of lovely eye,
Why dost thou me so wo?
Sorful ter of sorful eye,
Thou brekst my herte a-two.*

Thou sikest sore,
Thi sorwe is more
 Than mannes mouth may telle;
Thou singest of sorwe,
Mankin to borwe
 Out of the pit of helle.
Lovely ter of lovely eye...

I proud and kene,
Thou meke and clene,
 Withouten wo or wile;
Th'art ded for me,
I live thurgh thee,
 So blissed be that while.
Lovely ter of lovely eye...

Thi moder seeth
How wo thee beeth
 And therfore yerne she yerte;
To hire thou speke,
Hire sorwe to sleke –
 Swet suite wan thin herte.
Lovely ter of lovely eye...

Thin herte is rent,
Thi body is bent,
 Upon the rode tre;
The weder is went,
The devel is shent,
 Crist, thurgh the might of thee.
Lovely ter of lovely eye...

RETURN

*Lovely tear from lovely eye,
Why cause such grief to me?
Sorrow's tear from sorrow's eye,
You break my heart apart.*

You sorely grieve,
Your sorrow's more
 Than mankind's mouth can speak;
You sing of grief
To save mankind
 Out of the pit of hell.
Lovely tear from lovely eye...

Me proud and bold,
You meek and pure,
 Without a fault or guile;
You're dead for me,
I live through you,
 So may that time be blessed.
Lovely tear from lovely eye...

Your mother sees
What grief is yours,
 And fervently cries out;
You speak to her
To ease her grief –
 Sweet pleading won your heart.
Lovely tear from lovely eye...

Your heart is torn,
Your body bent
 Upon the wondrous cross;
The storm has passed,
The devil crushed,
 Christ, through the power of you.
Lovely tear from lovely eye...

RETURN

Gold and al this werdis wyn
 Is nouht but Cristis rode;
 I wolde ben clad in Cristis skyn,
 That ran so longe on blode,
 And gon t'is herte and taken myn in –
 Ther is a fulsum fode.
 Than yef I litel of kith or kyn,
 For ther is alle gode.

RETURN

Crist makith to man a fair present,
 His bloody body with love brent;
 That blisful body hys lyf hath lent,
 For love of man that synne hath blent.

O love, love, what hast thou ment?
 Me thinketh that love to wratthe is went.

Thi loveliche hondis love hath to-rent,
 And thi lithe armes wel streit itent;
 Thi brest is baar, thi body is bent,
 For wrong hath wonne and right is schent.

Thi mylde boones love hath to-drawe,
 The naylis thi feet han al to-gnawe;
 The lord of love love hath now slawe –
 Whane love is strong it hath no lawe.

His herte is rent, his body is bent
 Upon the roode tre;
 Wrong is went, the devel is schent,
 Christ, thurgh the myght of thee.

For thee that herte is leyd to wedde;
 Swych was the love that herte us kedde,
 That herte barst, that herte bledde –
 That herte blood oure soulis fedde.

Gold and all this world's great joy
 Are naught without Christ's cross;
 I would be dressed in Christ's own skin
 That blood ran down so long,
 Go to his heart and make my home
 Where there's abundant food.
 I'd little care for kith or kin
 For there would be all good.

RETURN

Christ gives mankind a lovely gift,
 His bloodied body fired with love;
 That blissful flesh gave up its life
 For love of man, all blind from sin.

O love, love, what o do?
 It seems that love has turned to wrath.

Your lovely hands love's torn apart,
 Your gentle arms so tightly stretched;
 Your chest is bare, your body bent,
 For wrong has won, and right's destroyed.

Your gentle bones love's pulled apart,
 The nails have cut your feet to shreds.
 The lord of love love now has killed.
 When love is strong, it knows no law.

His heart is torn, his body bent
 Upon the wooden cross;
 Wrong is destroyed, the devil crushed,
 Christ, through your mighty power.

That heart was given as a pledge;
 Such was the love that heart showed us,
 That heart which burst, that heart which bled,
 That heart's own blood which fed our souls.

That herte cleft for treuthe of love,
Therefore in him oon is trewe love;
For love of thee that herte is yove –
Kepe thou that herte and thou art above.

Love, love, where schalt thou wone?
Thi wonyng-stede is thee binome,
For Cristis herte that was thin hoome,
He is deed – now hast thou noone.

Love, love, whi doist thou so?
Love, thou brekist myn herte atwo.

Love hath shewid his greet myght,
For love hath maad of day the nyght;
Love hath slawe the kyng of ryght,
And love hath endid the strong fight.

So inliche love was nevere noon;
That wewith wel Marie and Joon,
And also witen thei everychon,
That love with hym hath maad at oon.

Love makith, Crist, thin herte myn,
So makith love myn herte thin;
Thanne schulde myn be trewe al tym,
And love in love schal make it fyn.

RETURN

That heart was split for faithfulness in love;
True love, therefore, is found in him alone.
For love of you that heart was given.
Keep that heart safe, and victory is yours.

Love, love, where will you live?
Your resting-place is taken away,
For Christ's own heart – that was your home.
But he is dead, and you have none.

Love, love, why do all this?
Love, you break my heart apart.

Love has shown his mighty power,
For love has made night out of day;
Love has killed the king of good,
And love has stopped the bitter fight.

Such heartfelt love was never known
As John and Mary knew,
And also everyone who knows
That love for him has made them whole.

Love makes, my Christ, your heart my own,
And so love makes my heart your own;
Mine shall stay true at every hour,
And love in love shall make it pure.

RETURN

NOTES

and ladde thee thurgh wel wide

the sense here is that there is ample space (*wel wide*) on either side of the divided sea for the multitude to pass easily. The passage over the bed of the sea is wide.

RETURN

‘Acros thou berest thyn armes, / Whan thou dauncest narewe...’

a reference to ‘ring dances’, in which the participants held, and crossed, hands as they danced close together. The clear contrast is between the physical pleasure and intimacy of the dance and Christ’s physical agony with his arms wide apart on the cross.

RETURN

‘Opyne thou hast thi side – / Spaiers longe and wide – ...’

a reference to contemporary fashion, and to clothing and gowns which had long, wide slits (*spaiers*) up the side, from which knives or daggers could protrude. Again, the clear contrast is between the sensual allure of this fashion, especially when revealed by women’s gowns, and the physical agony of the spear in Christ’s side.

RETURN

He that starf in oure kende

in oure kende = in/according to our nature/kind. In other words, Christ died a human death, just as we will.

RETURN

So pulled owt of preson to Pylete at prime

prime is the second canonical hour of prayer, appointed for the first hour of the medieval day (i.e. 6 a.m.). ‘Dawn’ is probably the nearest equivalent in modern English.

RETURN

Thai lete the stab in the stone all stekked that thar stode

A difficult line, in terms of both meaning and rhythm. The overall reference seems to be to the raising of the cross with Christ’s body already nailed to it, and then the dropping of the cross into the mortice joint that had been built of stones. *Stab* could be a verb (‘thrust’) or a noun (‘stake’, i.e. the cross). *Stekked* could mean ‘pierced’ or, more likely, ‘fixed’, as in ‘fixed in position’. The rhythmic awkwardness of the

NOTES

line suggests the difficulties of conveying a relatively complex image within a single line of verse.

RETURN

FURTHER READING AND LINKS

Texts and partial translations

As indicated in the Introduction, there is currently no parallel-text translation of medieval religious lyrics into modern English poems. The selected editions below present either the original text by itself, followed in the end-pages by a glossary of 'difficult' words, or the original text, with problematic words glossed in the margins and at the bottom of each page:

- Brown, Carleton *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932.
[original texts, with a concluding glossary].
- *English Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, 2nd ed. rev. G.V. Smithers. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
[original texts, with a concluding glossary].
- Davies, R.T. *Medieval English Lyrics*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964.
[original texts, with glosses at the bottom of each page].
- Duncan, Thomas G. *Medieval English Lyrics 1200–1400*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995.
[original texts, supported by glosses in the margin].
- *Late Medieval English Lyrics and Carols 1400–1530*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2000.
[original texts, supported by glosses in the margin].
- Gray, Douglas *English Medieval Religious Lyrics*. rev. ed. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992.

FURTHER READING AND LINKS

[original texts, with a concluding glossary].

- Hirsh, John C. *Medieval Lyric*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
[a few but well presented religious lyrics, with glosses in the margins and end-pages].
- Luria, Maxwell S. and Richard L. Hoffman *Middle English Lyrics*. New York: Norton & Company, 1974. [Norton Critical Edition].
[original texts, with glosses in the margins and the bottom of the page. Also contains a useful collection of extracts from critical discussions].
- Silverstein, Theodore *Medieval English Lyrics*. London: Edward Arnold, 1971. [York Medieval Texts].
[original texts, with a concluding glossary].
- Stevick, Robert D. *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1964.
[original texts with glosses at the bottom of each page, as well as a concluding glossary].

Links

Although there are numerous studies of medieval religious lyrics from historical, textual or interpretative points of view, almost nothing has been written about the problems of translating them into a convincing modern idiom. Bella Millett's *Wessex Parallel Web Texts* (www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt) contains a helpful guide for students translating from Middle English, as well as prose translations and parallel-text versions of both longer and shorter medieval poems. More generally, Anniina Jokinen's web-site *Luminarium* (www.luminarium.org/medlit/mltexts.htm) is a beautifully presented, multimedia collection of medieval texts, illustrations, music and critical resources, containing a number of religious lyrics. *The Labyrinth* (www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth, and for more recent material, labyrinth.georgetown.edu) lists many general resources for medieval studies.