

‘Synge we now alle and sum’:

Three Fifteenth-Century Collections of Communal Song

**A study of British Library, Sloane MS 2593; Bodleian Library,
MS Eng. poet. e.1; and St John’s College, Cambridge, MS S.54**

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Volume I: Thesis

I, Kathleen Rose Palti, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has
been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Kathleen Palti

Abstract

The manuscripts British Library, Sloane MS 2593, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. e.1, and St John's College, Cambridge, MS S.54 are compact collections of song lyrics written during the fifteenth century, largely without notation. My thesis seeks to develop responsive ways of reading these anthologies and uses the manuscripts to illumine the creative processes that produced and circulated their songs. I integrate attention to song lyrics within the material books and exploration of wider textual networks. As many of the anthologies' texts are in carol form, a combination of refrain parts and stanzas, the books provide an opportunity to examine the form's identity and significance within fifteenth-century English songwriting.

The thesis is in three parts and the first introduces critical approaches to the manuscripts and the carol, followed by an examination of the books and their contexts, especially manuscripts with which the anthologies have textual connections. The central section investigates the songs' production and circulation by examining textual networks, how the anthologies were written, how the songs may have been performed, and the role of memory in shaping the songs and anthologies. The final part explores women's role in the songs, the range of forms used, and the centrality of the many imagined voices and performances within the texts.

This is the first extended study focused upon these three sources, which as anthologies offer insight into ways songs were shared and organised. I investigate the role of short collections and booklets in the construction of longer anthologies, and the possibility of an especially productive song culture within

fifteenth-century East Anglia. Rather than repeating assertions familiar from earlier studies of carols that the anthologies' songs are either popular or clerical productions, I suggest how the anthologies engage with communal performance cultures and participate in varied song traditions, from liturgy to lullaby.

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
Bod.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CUL	Cambridge University Library, Cambridge
CURSUS	CURSUS: An Online Resource of Medieval Liturgical Texts (http://www.cursus.uea.ac.uk)
EEC	Richard Leighton Greene, ed., <i>The Early English Carols</i> , 2 nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)
EL	Carleton Brown, ed., <i>English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932)
ESPB	Francis James Child, ed., <i>The English and Scottish Popular Ballads</i> , 5 vols (New York: The Folklore Press and Pageant Book Company, 1956)
IMEV	Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, <i>A New Index of Middle English Verse</i> (London: British Library, 2005)
LALME	Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and Michael Benskin, <i>A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English</i> , 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986)
MC	John Stevens, ed., <i>Mediaeval Carols</i> , Musica Britannica IV, 2 nd edn (London: Stainer and Bell Ltd, 1958)
MED	Hans Kurath et al., eds, <i>Middle English Dictionary</i> (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954-2001)
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh

- OED** *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- RLXIV** Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924)
- RLXV** Carleton Brown, ed., *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939)
- SL** Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955)
- STC** A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave et al., *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640*, 2nd edn (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1986)
- TM** William A. Ringler, Jr, *Bibliography and Index of English Verse in Manuscript 1501-1558* (London: Mansell, 1992)
- TP** William A. Ringler, Jr, *Bibliography and Index of English Verse Printed 1476-1558* (London: Mansell 1988)
- Walther** Hans Walther, *Initia Carminum ac Versum Medii Aevi Posterioris Latinorum: Alphabetisches Verzeichnis der Versanfänge mittellateinischer Dichtungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959)

Conventions

All quotations from the three manuscripts use my own transcriptions, given in Appendix A. Numbers refer to those used in the Appendix, with the letter S to indicate Sloane, J to indicate St John's, and E to indicate Eng. poet. The songs' *IMEV* numbers are given in the Appendix. References where appropriate give stanza number and line number within the stanza, following the conventions in *EEC* (carol burdens disrupt attempts to number lines consecutively). For the sake of consistency, this method is used to number the lines of all songs in the manuscripts. Conventions of transcriptions are described in Appendix A. Quotations from other manuscripts giving folio numbers rather than references to editions used are also my transcriptions, used where appropriate (for example, to show how a manuscript represents a text). Where published translations are not specified, translations are my own.

Part One: Introduction to the Songbooks

Chapter 1. Introduction

The fifteenth century deserves a place of honour within the study of English song because it is the first period from which substantial volumes of English vernacular songs survive, written down either with or without music. They can be found in manuscripts that include authorial lyric collections and polyphonic music-books, and scribbled in margins and on flyleaves. Hundreds survive in coherently planned anthologies that testify to the confidence and popularity of written song in pre-Reformation England. This thesis focuses upon three such anthologies that together illuminate the ways that songs were written and shared in the fifteenth century.

The three manuscripts are British Library, Sloane MS 2593 (Sloane), Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. e.1 (Eng. poet.), and St John's College, Cambridge, MS S.54 (St John's). They are similar in appearance and contents, all compact, plainly written paper volumes containing song lyrics in English and Latin or combinations of the two but almost no musical notation (the exception is Eng. poet., which has three notated songs). The anthologies contain numerous textual correspondences with each other: Sloane and Eng. poet. share eight songs, while St John's contains two correspondences each with Sloane and Eng. poet. Although all have extensive correspondences with further manuscripts, these are the only surviving books from fifteenth-century England made up entirely of anonymously written song lyrics without substantial notation. Their origins are uncertain, but the dialect of all three has been identified by A

Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English as characteristic of Norfolk.¹ Dialect alone cannot prove that a text was produced in an area as scribes could move region and varied in their faithfulness to the language of exemplars that they copied, but it is a further point of connection between the three books and begins to associate them with East Anglia.

Sloane is likely to be the earliest of the three anthologies as its script dates it to the first half of the fifteenth century. It is a uniformly presented collection of seventy-four song lyrics written by a single scribe on paper pages measuring only 150 X 110mm. Eng. poet. is a similar size and also contains over seventy texts, written by two scribes during the second half of the fifteenth century and possibly into the sixteenth. St John's differs from these two anthologies in its brevity, containing only seventeen full texts and further fragments on pages measuring 145 X 100mm. It was compiled by two scribes, whose hands alternate throughout, and survives sewn into a worn parchment wrapper on which a hand contemporary with those of the main scribes has written more short snatches of song lyrics. In analysing a small group, this thesis seeks to balance the particular interest of the three manuscripts and their relationship with wider literary and cultural histories.

Approximately three-quarters of the manuscripts' texts are written in what is now called carol form, a type defined by Richard Leighton Greene in his 1935 edition *The Early English Carols* as 'a song on any subject, composed of uniform stanzas and provided with a burden', where a burden is a 'chorus, to be sung (or considered as sung by a reader) before the first stanza and repeated after

¹ *LALME*, I, pp. 64 (St John's: Linguistic Profile 8680, Grid 540 183), 116 (Sloane: Linguistic Profile 4279, Grid 581 289), 148; III, pp. 338-9, 365.

that and all succeeding stanzas'.² Greene traced the development of the carol from dance song, related to the French *carole*, to Christmas song. Although the form could be used for any subject, Christmas themes dominate, and particularly in anthologies containing large numbers of songs in carol form, anthologies that appear to justify treating the carol as a coherent and recognisable genre.

The term 'carol' does not appear in Sloane, Eng. poet. or St John's. A large number of texts in the manuscripts contain internal references to themselves as 'song', although only in Eng. poet. are any generic terms used in headings to texts: two items are entitled 'A song', both of which are contrafacta (E61 and E62),³ and a Latin text is headed 'cantus' (E55). Focusing upon a group of manuscripts may reduce the governing role of today's generic terms in studying Middle English verse, but questions about what kind of texts the contents are cannot be avoided by this focus. The primary term that I use to discuss these manuscripts' contents is 'song', largely because it is common within the anthologies, as will be discussed in the next chapter, and is appropriate to all the texts. The texts are crowded with references to singing and their own performance, although the only musical instructions are in Eng. poet.: three notated songs (E55, E56 and E65) and the two contrafacta for which tunes are indicated using titles. Eleven other texts within the manuscripts survive elsewhere in notated versions.⁴ The relationship between these written texts and possible performances will be explored throughout this thesis, and this will involve examining the significance of the carol form in which many of these texts are written.

² *The Early English Carols*, ed. Richard Leighton Greene (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. xxiii, xxii. References to *EEC* are from the second edition (1977) of Greene's work.

³ A contrafactum is a song whose words have been written to fit the tune of another song.

⁴ S50, S64, J8, E10, E14, E24, E31, E44, E49, E54 and E76.

The manuscripts present an opportunity to learn about how songs were created, shared and re-created in fifteenth-century England. The carol structure begins to indicate something of the character of these songs in that it is built upon a repeated choral element with which everyone could sing along. Burdens often explicitly invite or demand group participation:

Synge we now alle a *sum*
Aue rex gentes *anglorum* (S51)⁵

Mak we *mirthe* for *crystis* berthe
& syng we 30l til *candilmes* (S72)

make we mery in þis fest
for *verbum caro factum est* (E15)

Make we joy both *more* & *lesse*
one þe day of sent thomas (E48)

The language of repeated elements like these, with their insistent use of ‘we’, imperatives, and deictic words that emphasise the present time of the performance, is one element of the word ‘communal’ in my title. They draw attention to texts’ connections within the celebration of annual feasts, especially those during the Christmas period.

Encouraging the learning and singing of psalms, St Ambrose asked: ‘*quis enim non remittat ei, cum quo unam ad deum uocem emiserat? magnum plane unitatis uinculum, in unum chorum totius numerum plebes coire.*’⁶ Joining together in song is a forceful, sometimes emotive idea, and one fully exploited in

⁵ The first line of this burden provides the quotation in the title to this thesis, where ‘a’ has been silently regularised to ‘and’.

⁶ *Explanatio Psalmorum*, 1.9, *Sancti Ambrosi Opera, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, ed. Michael Petschenig, 64 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), p. 8; ‘who will not concede to him with whom one sings to God in one voice? It is after all a great bond of unity for the full number of people to join in one chorus’, trans. Bruce W. Holsinger, in *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 259.

the three anthologies' texts, where refrain elements could unite the group through a passionate demand, whether for redemption:

To blys god bryng vs al & sum
christe redemptor omnium (E49);

or for more drink:

Bryng vs *in* good ale & bryng vs *in* good ale
ffor owr blyssyd lady sak bryng vs *in* good ale (E57).

In their performance of group unity at times of religious festival, 'in *pis fest*', the songs are closely connected with liturgy. They regularly include lines of Latin familiar from hymns and other sung sections of the liturgy, as seen, for example, in the burden of E49 quoted above where the first line of a hymn used during Vespers services in the Christmas seasons is just the first of several liturgical borrowings in the song.⁷ Nevertheless, the manuscripts include texts in the same form that are drinking songs, suggesting that their songs cannot be fully described by a relation to liturgy or the term 'para-liturgical'. As will be seen, the documented role of carols within feasts positions such songs as a means by which liturgy was brought from the chapel into the hall, often by the same performers, crossing that shifting border between ritual and revel.

I have chosen the term 'communal' to describe the songs in the anthologies in order to express stylistic features and their function and performance context, rather than the term 'popular', regularly used by earlier critics.⁸ The word 'communal' is, regrettably, not drawn directly from the texts, but it responds to the way in which the songs present themselves as affirmations of a unified Christian group, either the 'cumpany' (S48, 4.3; S67, 2.2) joined at

⁷ Discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

⁸ Discussed in Chapter 2. Greene describes the carols as 'popular song', *EEC*, pp. cxviii-cxxxviii; see also Robbins' collection of 'Popular Songs', including many from the anthologies, *SL*, pp. 1-57.

the time of performance, or the wider community referred to in the very last words written in Eng. poet.:

Now lett vs *pray* both on & all
& specyally vpon god call
to send love & peace among vs all
Among all men in christente (E77, 6)

The anthologies with their numerous connected texts coupled with broad correspondences with further manuscripts are well-placed to contribute significantly to the discussion of many critical issues associated with Middle English lyric verse: its relation to liturgy and to the strengthening vernacular literary tradition; its social function; the creative networks formed by the multiple and changing written versions of the songs; and their movement between the page and performance. The first part of this thesis will prepare for analysis of the manuscripts' songs by reviewing critical work on the anthologies, carols and other Middle English lyrics, followed by a study of the manuscripts, including their regional associations and related sources. Part Two investigates the songs' production and circulation by examining textual networks, how the anthologies were written, how the songs may have been performed, and the role of memory in shaping the songs and anthologies. The approaches taken seek responsive and productive ways of reading the material, beginning with the physical pages before tackling questions around performance and cultural role. The final part of the thesis is an exploration of diversity within the manuscripts, of voices represented and of song types.

Critical discussion relating to the anthologies and their contents has been shaped by the study of genre (the carol and the lyric) and to a lesser extent of manuscripts, as will be explored in Chapter 2. Because these are anthologies of a fairly homogeneous kind, the two approaches are closely connected. Manuscripts

can make available to the modern reader aspects of contemporary production and reception so it is promising to find agreement between generic groups and manuscript organisation. But, as noted above, the manuscripts do not include the word 'carol' so why are their songs now referred to in this way and is the category appropriate to these anthologies? Chapter 2 begins to address these questions, with particular focus on how the carol has been shaped by critical discussion into a literary and musical category. It will return to the texts used to construct this genre in order to introduce some of the achievements and problems within scholarship in this area, identifying how the manuscripts may contribute to a better understanding of fifteenth-century song. Chapter 3 begins with a detailed examination of the manuscripts, followed by a survey of sources with which the anthologies have textual correspondences. The chapter will ask what is distinctive about the anthologies, and how they are connected with a wider written tradition. The range of ways in which the connected song texts are organised in different books shows that there can be no simple equation between manuscript organisation and genre, while at the same time offering a rich archive of late Middle English song with many intriguing connections to East Anglia. The manuscripts' associations with the region will be explored and aspects of religious and creative culture in Norfolk identified that may have contributed to the production of the anthologies.

Essential to the usefulness and interest of the anthologies is the wealth of textual correspondences their songs have, connecting with versions in further manuscripts and displaying extensive variation. Like much literature of the period, these texts were remade according to circumstance, enriching them for the modern reader with information about the production and circulation of these

festive songs. Chapter 4 focuses upon how the songs are represented on the page and examines the textual networks through which the songs were continually rewritten. How can the modern critical language of text and version describe this material, and in what ways did the carol form facilitate and respond to practices in the circulation of song?

The structure and verbal style of the songs, in which organised repetition and familiar themes and phrases proliferate, supports group participation, but focus upon manuscripts also draws readers' attention to literate processes and the individual decisions of writers. This is one of the problems that undermined nineteenth-century communalist theories about ballads, because it is unwise to argue that any written text could rise spontaneously from the 'common' people. The role of writers in organising the books and shaping the texts will be explored in Chapter 5, both those making the longer collections and those involved in the shorter sequences and booklets from which they were built.

In order to appreciate the identity and function of the anthologies and their songs it is essential to consider not only their writing but also their performance, which is central to their social role. A major difficulty in studying song from this period is that the written sources can only inform us about these performances more or less indirectly and incompletely, but there is far more information from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England than from earlier periods. Chapter 6 will use documentary and literary sources that describe festive song to establish performance contexts for the anthologies, but will also investigate how the written texts relate to these events and why song lyrics were written down in unnotated collections. The chapter will also ask why the texts

refer repeatedly to their own vocal delivery, and how the imagined performances they contain can contribute to our readings.

The divisions used in the first three chapters of Part Two, between text, writer and performance seek to clarify the different elements in the production and circulation of the songs, but not in a linear or hierarchic manner. The order was chosen as one way of taking a reading through the sources: texts are the least problematically available element to the modern reader and the written processes are rather more clearly inscribed in the manuscripts than their performances. But the songs were also social and literary phenomena in which group performance, individual agency and written traditions interact. In Chapter 7 this interaction is analysed by examining the role of memory in the organisation and circulation of texts, asking how the books and songs work as archives that organise cultural memory and communal identity, especially through religious narratives. In particular, the manuscripts provide textual witness to the exchange between the individual writer and the well-stocked group memory of images, stories and phrases that Mary Carruthers has explored so evocatively and that shaped the group identity.⁹ Part Two will conclude by investigating how this dynamic enabled the development of communal song and shaped the anthologies.

Part Three seeks to complement the attention given to the core of communal song within the anthologies in Part Two by examining some of the more ambiguous and various themes and song styles within the books. Investigating women's status and creative role in the songs will provide an opportunity to probe the social structures the songs represent and also to question what kinds of song were written down and how they might have interacted with

⁹ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

less thoroughly documented traditions. The final chapter will explore the relationship between the carols and song types including liturgy, ballad and parody, returning to the generic questions raised in Chapter 2 about what constitutes a carol and why the form flourished in this cultural moment. It will ask what kinds of involvement in fifteenth-century song cultures the anthologies represent, in their range of texts but also in the imagined performances integrated into the songs, from which new texts were created.

Chapter 2. Approaches and Categories

While Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's have received some attention in their own right, they have mainly been noticed for selected texts within them or in studies of the medieval carol, the song type that dominates the anthologies. This chapter begins with a review of critical approaches to the manuscripts but is largely concerned with the much fuller critical debate on Middle English short verse, or lyric,¹ and on the carol in particular. These are the categories that have been used to describe and explain the manuscripts' songs. In critical debate, the carol has been to a large degree distinguished from the wider and sometimes amorphous body of lyric and this chapter will examine how the carol was established as a distinctive genre by surveying scholarship in the area and revisiting the sources used. Since Greene's canon-forming edition a confident generic history has dominated literary comment on the carol, although musical research presents a more complex and developing situation. The competing narratives into which the anthologies' songs have been built continue to invite questions about how and why they came to be gathered into specialised collections in the fifteenth century.

I. The Manuscripts Debated

Since the manuscripts first came to scholarly notice, the question of whether the books had a clerical or minstrel origin, and the related question of whether their songs can be considered 'popular' has framed debate on the anthologies. Both Eng. poet. and Sloane were edited in the mid-nineteenth century by Thomas

¹ 'Lyric' is used to mean short verse throughout, discussed below.

Wright, in 1847 and 1855 respectively,² and St John's was published in 1915 by M. R. James and G. C. Macaulay with brief description.³ All of these editions reproduce the texts with little editing beyond punctuation, occasional corrections and regulated layouts. Since then only Sloane has been edited in full, by William Ian Miller for a PhD thesis in 1975.⁴ In the prefaces to his editions, Wright declared that Sloane and Eng. poet. were used by professional minstrels, a belief he supported with reference to the portable size and low cost of the manuscripts, as well as the scribal practices he observed:

The great variations in the different copies of the same song, shew that they were taken down from oral recitation, and had been often preserved by memory among minstrels who were not unskilful at composing... by stringing together phrases and lines and even whole stanzas from the different compositions which were imprinted on their memories.⁵

The case was repeated in the mid-twentieth century by Rossell Hope Robbins, who republished some of the manuscripts' songs in the 'Popular Song' section of *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*.⁶ Robbins' introduction was the first place to treat the three songbooks as a group: he included all three in his initial taxonomy of manuscripts containing lyrics under the heading 'The Minstrel Collections'.⁷ Robbins' anthology was first published in 1952, but in 1959 Robbins changed his stance entirely and argued that carols were processional, essentially liturgical songs, and that the 'portable

² *Songs and Carols now first printed from a Manuscript of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: The Percy Society, 1847) and *Songs and Carols from a manuscript in the British Museum of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: The Warton Club, 1855). Sloane was also edited by B. Fehr, 'Die Lieder der Hs. Sloane 2593', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 109 (1902), 33-72.

³ 'Fifteenth Century Carols and Other Pieces', ed. M. R. James and G. C. Macaulay, *The Modern Language Review*, 8 (1915), 68-87.

⁴ William Ian Miller, 'The Poetry of MS. Sloane 2593' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale University, 1975).

⁵ Wright, *Songs and Carols now first printed*, p. vii.

⁶ *SL* 4, 5, 7, 8, 13, 21, 24, 27, 39, 41, 43-46, 50-54, 57, 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

manuscripts' contain songs of monastic origin.⁸ Oddly, his 1959 article dismisses Wright's arguments, 'It would be a very unusual "minstrel" who would have two-thirds of his repertory corresponding to church hymns', without any reference to his own claims in the widely used *Secular Lyrics*.⁹

Greene included the bulk of the manuscripts' texts in his 1935 edition, *The Early English Carol*. He aimed to include all English texts written before 1550 with stanzas and a burden, and arranged these thematically, with the carols numbered and all variants represented either in parallel texts or collations. The model for Greene's edition is Francis James Child's monumental, five volume *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882),¹⁰ in which Child printed his numbered ballads in double columns, and used a system of upper case letters to record significant variants of a ballad (provided in full) and lower case letters to record versions with only minor variations (provided by collation). Considering that Greene is careful in his introduction to distinguish his carol corpus from that of the folk ballad,¹¹ it is perhaps surprising that he should have chosen to follow procedures designed to respond to the shifting texts of the ballad. The approach indicates his attempts to reconcile a concept of 'folk' origins for the carols with a corpus dominated by clerical productions.

Greene was obliged to leave the possible origins of St John's undecided ('The MS. is certainly from East Anglia but cannot be placed more exactly'¹²), but determined that the extent of the Latin in Sloane and Eng. poet., together with their scale and textual concordances close enough to suggest, in his opinion,

⁸ Rossell Hope Robbins, 'Middle English Carols as Processional Hymns', *Studies in Philology*, 56 (1959), 559-582, (pp. 572-575).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 574.

¹⁰ *ESPB*. Greene acknowledges the model, without explaining why it was chosen, *EEC*, p. clxxiii.

¹¹ *EEC*, pp. lxxv-lxxvi.

¹² *EEC*, p. 326.

written transmission, meant that they could only have been produced within sizeable clerical houses. His next step was to identify dialect and saints to whom particular honour was paid and thus to connect Sloane with Bury St Edmunds' Benedictine Abbey, and Eng. poet. with Beverley Minster.¹³ The origins Greene allocated to the manuscripts and the evidence that led him to do so will be reviewed in the next chapter. Although most critics who have discussed the anthologies since Greene have referred to his suppositions with a degree of caution, his analyses have been influential and recur regularly: Thomas Pettitt considers Sloane likely to have been used as a 'festive miscellany' within a monastic house, such as Bury, as Greene suggests; Andrew Taylor refers to his arguments as 'persuasive'; John C. Hirsh's recent edition of lyrics considers Sloane's association with the Bury abbey 'almost certain'.¹⁴

LALME's designation of the Eng. poet. dialect as Norfolk casts doubt upon Greene's already speculative hypothesis that it was made in Beverley, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. All three manuscripts are listed in Richard Beadle's 1991 'Prolegomena to a literary geography of later medieval Norfolk', since when there has been a single study of the three manuscripts as a group, Daniel Wakelin's 2006 article.¹⁵ Wakelin avoids following Greene's specific analyses but still argues for reading the books as the productions of clerics.

¹³ *EEC*, pp. 306-7, 318; he first proposed these origins in *A Selection of English Carols* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 173-174 and 179-180.

¹⁴ Thomas Pettitt, "'St Stephen and Herod" and the songs of the Sloane manuscript', in *The Ballad as Narrative: Studies in the Ballad Traditions of England, Scotland, Germany and Denmark*, ed. Flemming G. Anderson, Otto Holzapfel and Thomas Pettitt (Odense: Odense University Press, 1982), pp. 19-38 (p. 22); Andrew Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), 43-73 (p. 63); *Medieval Lyric: Middle English Lyrics, Ballads and Carols*, ed. John C. Hirsh (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 39.

¹⁵ Richard Beadle, 'Prolegomena to a literary geography of later medieval Norfolk', in *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts: Essays Celebrating the Publication of 'A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English'*, ed. Felicity Riddy (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 89-108; Daniel Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing: Three Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century Norfolk', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 9 (2006), 25-49.

The question of whether the manuscripts had a clerical or a minstrel origin has been addressed from a slightly different perspective in the case of Sloane, which contains two songs discussed by ballad scholars thanks to their inclusion by Child among the earliest examples of the English ‘popular ballad’: ‘St Stephen and Herod’ (*ESPB* 22, S44) and ‘Robyn and Gandeleyn’ (*ESPB* 115, S35). As rare examples of ballad from before the seventeenth-century Percy Folio, the songs appear regularly in ballad studies, and have received attention from David Fowler, Thomas Pettitt and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou.¹⁶ The two songs have been studied alongside a small group of verses within the anthology also written in ballad-like stanzas, whose form and connections with riddles and songs surviving in later oral traditions were the particular focus of a chapter in Boklund-Lagopoulou’s 2002 study. The ways in which scholars choose to categorise the songs, and the literary histories they assign to those categories, has clearly influenced their attitudes to these manuscripts. In one volume of the *Manual of Writings in Middle English* where Greene surveys the carol and Fowler the ballad we can find Greene’s statement about Sloane, ‘From Bury St Edmunds, probably from the great Benedictine abbey with its fine library’, and Fowler’s:

The matter has been disputed, but it may well be that this collection is representative of popular minstrelsy in the fifteenth century, and is therefore one of the best manuscripts available for the study of the emergence of the popular ballad from folk song tradition.¹⁷

¹⁶ David C. Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), pp. 37-42; Pettitt, “‘St Stephen and Herod’”; Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou, ‘*I have a yong suster*’: *Popular Song and the Middle English Lyric* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), pp. 64-86.

¹⁷ *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, vol. 6, ed. Albert E. Hartung (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1980); Richard Leighton Greene, ‘The Carol’, pp. 1743-1752 and 1940-2018 (p. 1941); David C. Fowler, ‘The Ballad’, pp. 1753-1808 and 2019-2070 (p. 1765).

The judgements arise from the scholars' different generic interests (as we shall see, Greene was convinced that the fifteenth-century carols were mostly clerical productions) and indicate how closely connected the interpretation of manuscripts is to ideas about genres.

II. Carol and Lyric

The studies of the manuscripts are situated within the larger field of generic criticism of the Middle English carol and lyric. Carols account for almost eighty per cent of the manuscripts' contents, the other pieces being short verses in other forms, giving a dual impression that carols can co-exist with non-carols, but that they do so in the context of overall domination. The ambiguous relationship of the carol form with the broader lyric is reflected in criticism. Carols are regularly considered alongside Middle English lyrics, but separately.¹⁸

In part, this may be because the canonical editions of the Middle English lyrics by Robbins and Brown largely left the carols to Greene's separate book. In the decades immediately following these publications, lyric scholarship followed a broadly generic approach, breaking up the great body of short Middle English verse into categories (religious and secular, popular and courtly).¹⁹ Rosemary

¹⁸ The most recent example of this is Karl Reichl, 'The Middle English Carol', in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 150-70. The titles of recent anthologies of Middle English lyrics also express this ambivalence: *Medieval Lyric: Middle English Lyrics, Ballads and Carols*, ed. Hirsh; *Late Medieval English Lyrics and Carols, 1400-1530*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).

¹⁹ Generic studies of the lyric in this period are Arthur K. Moore, *The Secular Lyric in Middle English* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951); Stephen Manning, *Wisdom and Number: Toward a Critical Appraisal of the Middle English Religious Lyric* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962); Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Sarah Appleton Weber, *Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric: A Study of Sacred History and Aesthetic Form* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1969); Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

Woolf, for example, relegated her sensible remarks on the carol to an appendix in her book, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, because her primary interest was in what she termed ‘meditative’ lyrics, even though this is not what her title implies. Terminological confusion recurs: ‘all the carols are public, celebratory poems, designed for singing, in contrast to the religious lyric, which was private poetry intended for private reading or memorizing’.²⁰ ‘Religious lyric’ is here silently restricted to the meditative tradition, and a dichotomy between private and public asserted to correspond with whether a text may have been sung or read.

Lyric scholarship since the 1980s has, however, been less forthright about generic certainties, with much questioning of the helpfulness of the term ‘lyric’, which lacks Middle English precedent, and of the categories established by Brown and Robbins.²¹ Susanna Fein put the case succinctly in her introduction to a study of BL, Harley MS 2253: ‘What is wanted at this point in the study of lyrics is not more anthologised groupings but rather a letting-go of the categorical terms by which we have laid canonical claim to them’.²² Emphasis shifted to manuscript-based studies, well represented by Julia Boffey’s study of manuscripts containing courtly love lyrics, and by work on Harley 2253, the Vernon manuscript and on books produced by individual writers, whether represented as authors, such as John Audelay, or as compilers, such as Richard

²⁰ Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 385.

²¹ The field is thoroughly surveyed by Rosemary Greentree in *The Middle English Lyric and Short Poem*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature 7 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001). Greentree’s introduction gives considered attention to the problem of defining ‘lyric’ for the period and its further categorisations, pp. 7-12.

²² Susanna Fein, ‘BL MS Harley 2253: The Lyrics, the Facsimile, the Book’, in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents and Social Contexts of the BL MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 1-19 (p. 7).

Hill.²³ Definitions of the lyric are offered only briefly, such as Boffey's 'non-narrative poem and usually a short one'.²⁴ Indeed, even this definition would exclude a large number of carols, which are often narrative. Among the fruitful areas of study within lyric scholarship enabled by this turning away from genre-based, definition-seeking approaches are explorations of the creative role of scribes in literary texts, encouraged by changes in the fields of textual criticism and authorship studies.²⁵ Related fields have included study of women's role in the production of lyrics,²⁶ and the role of preachers, particularly in Wenzel's studies of lyrics embedded in sermon literature.²⁷

²³ Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985); *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, ed. Fein; *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990); Susanna Fein, 'Good Ends in the Audelay Manuscript', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 97-119; Heather Diane Collier, 'Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century Manuscript Miscellanies: The Sources and Contexts of MS. Balliol 354' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The Queen's University, Belfast, 2000); Heather Collier, 'Richard Hill: A London Compiler', in *The Court and Cultural Diversity: Selected Papers from the Eighth Triennial Congress of The International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Evelyn Mullally and John Thompson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 319-29. The essays in *A Companion*, ed. Duncan, provide an accessible and fairly comprehensive overview of the English field.

²⁴ Boffey, *Manuscripts*, p. 3.

²⁵ The studies listed above, n. 23, are part of this movement. There is an extensive literature on these subjects, influencing lyric scholarship. For medieval history of the book studies and investigations of scribal practice (particularly in England) see *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and Its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Tim William Machan, *Textual Criticism and Middle English Texts* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994); Ralph Hanna III, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and their Texts* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996); Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and their Readers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); for authorship studies see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar Press, 1984); Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).

²⁶ *Vox Feminae: Studies in Medieval Woman's Song*, ed. John F. Plummer (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1981); Sarah McNamer, 'Female Authors, Provincial Settings: The Re-versing of Courtly Love in the Findern MS', *Viator*, 22 (1991), 279-310; Julia Boffey, 'Women authors and women's literacy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 159-182; Laurie A. Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (London and New York: Longman, 1999); *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen (Philadelphia: University of

Unlike 'lyric', the term 'carol' is generally wielded by literary critics as though it were unproblematic: it has medieval roots, is represented by organised collections and has a distinctive form and performance tradition, giving it a significant advantage over 'lyric'. For example, Rosemary Greentree states that carol is one type of lyric for which 'definition rather than description is possible'.²⁸ Yet a major explanation for this retrospective generic confidence is surely the lengthy and decisive literary history of the genre with which Greene introduces his edition.²⁹ Greene carries the reader with his conviction in his own definition, a conviction demonstrated by the fact that a second edition of the book issued in 1977, forty-two years after the first, carries little substantial change to the main introductory text. By repeating the information from this book, Greene's entry for 'The Carol' in the 1980 *Manual of Writings in Middle English* confirmed the impression that the bulk of work relevant to the carol had been satisfactorily completed almost half a century ago. By comparison with the literary research, musical scholarship on the carol has continued to be questioning and exploratory.³⁰ Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's have benefited little from this as they are mostly unnotated and therefore lie beyond musicology's immediate field of interest. The manuscripts contain short verses of various forms and could benefit more than they have to date from recent approaches to Middle English lyrics, but their strong association with the carol as

Pennsylvania Press, 2002); *Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: 'Fasciculus Morum' and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1978); Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Alan J. Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry in Late-Medieval England* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998); Alan J. Fletcher, 'The Lyric in Sermon', in *A Companion*, ed. Duncan, pp. 189-209.

²⁸ Greentree, *The Middle English Lyric*, p. 12.

²⁹ No other edition of short Middle English verse carries an introduction comparable with the length and depth of Greene's.

³⁰ See below, section V.

a genre, tightly defined by form and literary history, differentiates approaching these anthologies from analysing collections containing more various and scattered lyrics. The next section will begin to explore and raise questions about this generic context by examining how the definition of the carol form was decided upon and how critics have presented it, Greene in particular. Exploration of genre should not predetermine readings of the songs, but it is vital within consideration of how critical approaches to the anthologies have been established and beyond this presents an opportunity to develop our understanding of lyric writing in the period. Karl Reichl comments,

Within the context of the Middle English lyric, the importance of the medieval carol can... hardly be overestimated. An extensive textual corpus has been preserved that permits the study of a genre in both its homogeneity and diversity... Our understanding of the Middle English lyric would be much advanced if the other genres were as well documented textually and musically as the carol.³¹

The wealth of material containing or referring to carols documents many aspects of late medieval English song culture, providing insights into how songs were written down relevant to the fifteenth-century anthologies, while also showing where they can contribute to or redirect current approaches.

III. The Carol: Establishing a Genre

The majority of the songs within the anthologies are laid out in one way: a refrain is written as a single 'prose' line at the head of the songs and the stanzas are written as verse beneath it, connected by brackets with the final line of each stanza written to the right of the brackets. Only rarely do Sloane, Eng. poet. or St John's contain any indication that the line at the head of the songs is to be

³¹ 'The Middle English Carol', p. 170.

repeated after the stanzas.³² This has to be inferred from our knowledge of the form as it is represented in other sources. Some other manuscript texts indicate the repetition, usually by writing the first words of the pre-posed refrain followed by ‘&c’, as was standard practice in the printed carols.³³ Some notated manuscripts also contain instructions for the repetition.³⁴ Except for variation in the treatment of the external refrain after its first appearance, hundreds of songs survive written in this remarkably consistent format. Further, while many carols do survive singly within manuscripts, most are gathered together in anthologies, including six polyphonic songbooks containing more than six carols each,³⁵ and a further six manuscripts containing unnotated carols in double figures.³⁶ These books form the immediate generic context for the fifteenth-century anthologies, and are recorded in such a way as to suggest that the carol was perceived to be a coherent verse type. It is not immediately apparent that the texts are ‘carols’, however, because only two of the books contain this word (Balliol College, Oxford, MS 354 and Bod., MS Douce 302). No musical manuscripts contain it. The formal definition devised by Greene in *The Early English Carol* describes most of the three anthologies’ songs, now housed by his edition, but how did he come to label them as carols?

³² The exceptions are S69, S74, J8, J18, E6, E51, E51 and E65. More ambiguous are S35 and S39 (see Chapter 9). For full details see the table on scribal presentation of refrains in Appendix B.

³³ See the collection of printed booklets and fragments now gathered together as *Christmas carolles newly Inprynted*, San Marino, California, Huntington Library (the Huntington *Carolles*), discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁴ For examples from the earliest polyphonic manuscripts, Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.3.58 (the Trinity roll) and Bod. MS Arch. Selden. B. 26 (the Selden. songbook), see *EEC* 22, 234 B, 338b, 426a and b.

³⁵ BL, Egerton MS 3307; BL, Additional MS 5465 (The Fayrfax MS), BL, Additional MS 5665 (Ritson’s MS); BL, Additional MS 31922 (Henry VIII’s MS); the Selden. songbook; and the Trinity roll. All manuscripts are discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁶ CUL, MS Ee. 1. 12 (the works of James Ryman); Bod., MS Douce 302 (the works of John Audelay); Balliol College, Oxford, MS 354 (the commonplace book of Richard Hill); Sloane; Eng. poet.; and St John’s.

Arguably the most decisive evidence for naming songs of the type laid out as described above ‘carols’ can be found in Douce 302, an anthology containing the poetic works of retired chantry priest, John Audelay, dated to 1426. A group of twenty-five carols (in the formal sense of Greene’s definition) in this manuscript is preceded by the couplet:

I pray 3ow, syrus, boothe moore *and* las,
Syng þese caroles *in Cristemas*.³⁷

Four of Audelay’s carols use the word ‘carol’ in reference to themselves. Three of these references are variations upon a similar couplet:

I pray youe, seris, of your genre,
Syng this carol reuerently. (EEC 428, 15.1-2; IMEV 822)

I pray youe, seris, pur charyte
Redis this caral reuerently. (EEC 310, 13.1-2; IMEV 44)

I pray youe al, pur charyte
Redis this carol reuerently. (EEC 314, 30.1-2; IMEV 413)³⁸

This carol I made with gret doloure. (EEC 369, 8.3; IMEV 693)

Audelay is distinctive among writers of English carols for his self-consciousness, naming himself as an author, providing instructions on how the songs and his book as a whole were to be received, and providing generic signposts, such as these.³⁹ Greene collects almost 500 carols,⁴⁰ but only one text that is not written by Audelay uses the word ‘carol’. Written in a Welsh collection, this song is dated to the year 1500 and welcomes Yule festivities, concluding with the demand: ‘euery mon that ys here / Synge a caroll *on hys manere*’ (EEC 10, 2.1-2, TM 1105).

³⁷ *The Poems of John Audelay*, ed. Ella Keats Whiting, EETS OS 184 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 180.

³⁸ This carol is the only one in Audelay’s manuscript not to fall within the group of twenty-five written under the rubric quoted above. It is written immediately before the rubric.

³⁹ See Fein, ‘Good Ends’, and Chapter 5.

⁴⁰ The number would be far higher if it included the variations on the numbered carols.

Although early, Audelay is not alone in labelling songs in this form as carols using headings and other rubrics. Robert Thornton's London manuscript, dated mid-fifteenth-century, contains a carol in praise of the rose (symbolising Henry V) headed 'A Carolle for Crystynmesse' (*EEC* 427). As a semi-professional collector of vernacular verse, Thornton is comparable with Audelay in his poetic awareness. All other such headings date from the sixteenth century. An incomplete carol written in Tokyo, Takamiya 6 around 1531 is headed 'A carolle' (*EEC* 95). Writing at a similar date London merchant Richard Hill listed the three groups of carols that he included in his commonplace book as 'diuerys carolles', 'dyuers good carolles' and 'dyuers mery carolles'.⁴¹ All but five of the manuscript's seventy-eight carols appear in these groups,⁴² and within them only four songs are not in carol form, including pieces at the end of the first and third groups, which appear to have been attached independently.⁴³ There is similar clear and confident labelling of carols in printed collections, notably the front page of Richard Kele's *Christmas carolles newly Inpnynted* from around 1550, a booklet of four carols and one other song.⁴⁴ A fragment printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1521 preserves one carol and is also labelled 'Christmas carolles'.⁴⁵ A third example, thought to have been printed around 1547 by William Middleton,

⁴¹ Balliol 354, p. 7. Page numbers for Balliol 354 refer to the digital images provided by Oxford University at <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=balliol&manuscript=ms354>. I use these as the pages of the manuscript have been labelled with various methods of foliation over centuries and become muddled. The manuscript's short verse is edited by Roman Dyboski, *Songs, Carols and other Miscellaneous Poems, from the Balliol ms. 354, Richard Hill's commonplace-book*, EETS ES 101 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1907).

⁴² Carols not included in the main groups are *EEC* 322 A, 126, 419 Aa, 373, 230. Only one of these is listed in the contents, (*EEC* 419 Aa), called 'a song of go we gossippes'.

⁴³ The exceptions are 'I have xii. oxen', the last piece in the first group of carols (*Songs*, 73); 'Hogyn cam to bowers dore' (*Songs*, 134); 'Whan netillis in wynter bere rosis rede' (*Songs*, 139), which has a burden in Eng. poet.; and 'Lord how shall I complayn' (*Songs*, 145), the last song in the manuscript.

⁴⁴ *STC* 5204.3 and 5204.5.

⁴⁵ BL, Printed Book C. 21. c. 12. *STC* 5204.

is again labelled *Christmas carolles newly Imprinted*.⁴⁶ Given Hill's reliance on printed sources in other parts of his manuscript,⁴⁷ it is possible that he copied his groups of carols from similar printed booklets or otherwise imitated their style of labelling these verses.

The consistency of these fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century sources is striking and provides strong justification for Greene's definition, but they cannot prove that the compilers and users of the other anthologies thought of the texts contained as 'carols' because consistent general use of the term only arrives at the end of the fifteenth century. This is significant because Greene uses the history of the word 'carol' to construct a literary history for the genre, assuming equivalence between etymological development and genre. This begins with the *carole*, a type of dance widespread in twelfth- and thirteenth-century France, performed in both courtly and popular festivities. There appears to have been considerable freedom in the performance of *caroles*, but most records suggest that dancers joined a ring or chain while singing a song, usually with a refrain and stanzas divided among a chorus and soloist.⁴⁸ Surviving *caroles* are largely focused upon love. Some survive embedded within narratives, and others in *chansonniers*. An extensive Latin literature condemns carolling, which, it was argued, led the young towards lust and pride.⁴⁹

The word 'carol' makes its first Middle English appearance around 1300 in the *Cursor Mundi*:

⁴⁶ Bod., Douce Fragments f. 48. *STC* 5205.

⁴⁷ See Collier, *The Sources and Contexts of MS. Balliol 354*.

⁴⁸ For discussion of the *carole* see *EEC*, pp. xliv-lxiv; John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 159-198; Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France 1100-1300* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1989), pp. 110-133; Ardis Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 45-49.

⁴⁹ See Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, pp. 110-33.

To ierusalem þat heued bare þei.
þer caroled wiues bi þe way.
of þair carol suche was the sange.
atte þai for ioy had ham amange.⁵⁰

The scene represents women singing of David's victory over Goliath and greeting him as he approaches the city, recalling the medieval practice of welcoming nobles with song and dance. In using 'carol' as both a verb and a noun and associating the performance of carols with women, the carolling represented is directly comparable with that described in French literature. As in the *Cursor Mundi*, the Middle English word 'carol' in literary sources, particularly in the fourteenth century, usually translates the sense of the French *carole*. Chaucer's writings contain many such references to ladies dancing, sometimes with knights, notably in his translation of *La Roman de la Rose*.⁵¹ His style of courtly idealisation is echoed throughout Middle English literature, from Gower:

Sche waiteth upon his cominge
With dansinge and with carolinge

Ther was Revel, ther was daunsinge,
And every lif which coude singe,
Of lusti wommen in the route
A freissh carole that sunge aboute⁵²

to *Piers Plowman*:

Til the day dawed thise damyseles carolden.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Cursor Mundi*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 59, Part 2 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1875), ll. 7599-7602 (Fairfax).

⁵¹ See Fragment A, ll. 744, 745, 754, 759, 781, 793, 804, 810. All references to Chaucer are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Outside of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, Chaucer's uses 'carol(s)' (n.): *The Knight's Tale* (l.1931), *Legend of Good Women* (F.687); 'carol' (v.): *The Book of the Duchess* (849); 'carolyng': *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* (VIII.1346); 'carol-wyse': *Legend of Good Women* (G.201).

⁵² *Confessio Amantis*, in *John Gower's English Works*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, EETS ES 81 and 82 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1900-1), IV.1529-30, V.3143-6.

⁵³ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd edn (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), XVIII.427.

Alongside the idealised courtly *carole*, Middle English texts also contain attacks upon the practice. Gower, who aligns the carol with French fixed forms, assigns carolling as an activity first to Vain Glory and then Sloth:

And ek he can carolles make,
Rondeal, balade and virelai.

Bot Slowthe mai no profit winne,
Bot he mai singe in his karole.⁵⁴

Similarly, the tale of the dancers of Kölbigk, who disturbed Mass with their carolling and were cursed to dance without pause for a whole year, was translated from French into English in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*:

þese wommen zede and tolled here oute
wyþ hem to karolle þe cherche aboute.
Beune ordeyned here karollyng.⁵⁵

In using the word 'karolle', Mannyng translates into English the term's continental connotations of dissolute entertainments. This meaning is echoed elsewhere in didactic literature, for example in *Vices and Virtues*: 'in childhode and iolifte of folie songes, daunsynges, and carolynges, and of suche gamenes of vanitees þei spenden and wasten here tyme, and þerfore falle þei listliche in-to many synnes and ofte in-to þe pitt of helle'.⁵⁶ An image much passed around in sermon literature contrasts Christ crucified with the careless carolling of the sinning audience:

'Thow man for vanyte syngest and rowtes, and I for þe crye and wepe;...
thow hast þyn armes sprad on brode ledyng carallys, and I for þy loue
haue myn armes sprad on þe tre, and tachut wyth gret nayles.'⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Confessio Amantis*, I.2708-9 and IV.250-1.

⁵⁵ Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS OS 119, 123 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901-3), ll. 9039-41.

⁵⁶ *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, EETS OS 217, ed. W. Nelson Francis (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 228-229.

⁵⁷ John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, Part 1, EETS ES 96, ed. Theodore Erbe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1905), p. 113. This image is found elsewhere, for example in *A Stanzaic Life of Christ*, EETS OS 166, ed. Frances A. Foster (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1926), ll. 5937-40.

Greene marshals quotations such as these to prove the dance origins of the English carol form, but they are awkward evidence because they appear to translate or imitate the motifs of French and Latin courtly and didactic literature, rather than necessarily refer to an English song tradition, least of all in a fixed form. The relation to the French *carole* is put into question by the general lack of French or Anglo-Norman cultural or literary influence observable in the songs of Greene's edition: use of French is minimal, as is the representation of courtly love, which is mostly restricted to the somewhat exceptional (and late) carols circulating in the Tudor court.⁵⁸ Further, it is a matter of some discomfort in connecting the Middle English carol with the French *carole* that some two centuries fall between the peaks in popularity of the two forms: by the time the carol was flourishing, French lyricists had become enamoured with strict fixed forms, such as the *virelai*, *rondeau* and *ballade*. Although these are formally related to the carol, they differ in subject matter, style and social function.

'Carol' appears as a word meaning a song performed at Christmas regularly from the late fifteenth-century, as in a description of a royal Twelfth Night feast at Greenwich in 1487, at which the King's Chapel 'sange a Carall'.⁵⁹ More such records follow: the accounts of the Prior of Worcester, who hosted annual feasts for the city's officials, list several payments for carols in 1520, including 'caralls on cristmas day dynar 14d./ at supper 8d'.⁶⁰; carols were part of sixteenth-century Twelfth Night celebrations in the household of the Fifth Earl of

⁵⁸ Eight carols contain French phrases (other than the word 'noel'): *EEC* 6, 89, 235, 310, 314, 417, 420 and 421. Eleven carols are listed by Boffey in *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics*: *EEC* 442, 444, 445, 446.1, 448, 448.1, 449, 450.1, 451, 468 and 469.

⁵⁹ See *EEC*, pp. xxix, and Chapter 6.

⁶⁰ *EEC*, p. xl.

Northumberland and at the Inns of Court.⁶¹ Greene builds records such as these into a firm chronological narrative, according to which the carol was originally a kind of ring dance accompanied by a refrain song, which in the fifteenth century lost the dance element and was hijacked by clerics, mostly Franciscans, making palatable religious verse, so that by the sixteenth century it had become the Christmas song we still know today. The accounts of Christmas festivities within *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* hold an important position within this history because they appear to represent the transition between the *carole*, a courtly dance,

And syþen he mace hym as mery among þe fre ladyes,
With comlych caroles and alle kynnes joye,

and a song appropriate to celebrating the season:

At þe soper and after, mony aþel songez,
As coundutes of Krystmasse and carolez newe.⁶²

However, convincing as Greene's etymological history appears, the meanings of the word 'carol' are more chronologically dispersed than he suggests: Audelay uses the word to mean a song for Christmas in about 1426, while the contemporaneous *Mandeville's Travels* uses the word to refer to women's dance: 'þai make damysels to comme in carolland'.⁶³ This sense was still current when Caxton established his press as seen, for example, in his 1484 translation of *Geoffroy de La Tour Landry (The Knyght of the Toure)*, which

⁶¹ See Ian Lancashire, 'Orders for Twelfth Day and Night circa 1515 in the Second Northumberland Household Book', *English Literary Renaissance*, 10 (1980), 6-45; and *The Reports of Sir John Spelman*, ed. J. H. Baker, Selden Society 93 (London: Selden Society, 1977), vol. 1, pp. 233-4. Discussed in Chapter 6.

⁶² *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Malcom Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1987), ll. 1885-6, 1654-5.

⁶³ *The buke of John Maundeuill, the travels of sir J. Mandeville, a hitherto unpublished English version from the unique copy, Egerton MS. 1982, in the British museum*, ed. G. F. Warner (Westminster: Roxburghe Club, 1889), p. 116.

describes ‘feestes, Joustes, and carolles’.⁶⁴ It is often difficult to decide just what is being referred to by ‘carol’, whether song, dance, or a specific combination of the two, because ‘carol’ is listed together with these activities in expansive style, as in the mid-fifteenth-century *King Ponthus*, ‘after soper they hade carralles, daunces, and songys to mydnyght’.⁶⁵

Lydgate uses the word in a similar manner to Chaucer, in reference to a kind of dance: in *Reason and Sensuality* the author watches dancers in the Garden of Pleasure, ‘In karol wise I saugh hem goon’,⁶⁶ and in *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* Gladness of the World, a musician and performer, announces,

‘At weddynges, to do plesaunce,
I kan karole wel, and daunce.’⁶⁷

In around 1445, Lydgate presents saints taking part in a *carole* in heaven in his *Kalendare*, but then he writes,

Graunt us for to be with Thomas of ynde,
A curyous caral þis Crystemasse
As to syng nowel when þat we hens passe⁶⁸

This could be a reference to the kind of song preserved in the fifteenth-century anthologies, and according to Greene’s theory Sloane may have been produced in Lydgate’s own abbey at Bury St Edmunds contemporaneously with his poetic career there. Lydgate was the prolific literary resident of fifteenth-century East Anglia and as such the breadth of meaning that he expressed with the word ‘carol’ may help to indicate what the word meant to other producers of the books

⁶⁴ STC 15296, Chapter 23.

⁶⁵ *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone*, ed. F. J. Mather, *PMLA* 12 (1897), 1-150, p. 61, ll. 14-15.

⁶⁶ *Lydgate’s Reson and Sensuallyte*, ed. Ernst Sieper, EETS ES 84 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1901), l. 5245. The scene calls upon the passage in *Le Roman de la Rose* where the narrator observes a *carole*; Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Armand Strubel (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), ll. 742-863; see also Chaucer, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, A.729-816.

⁶⁷ John Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS ES 83 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1901), ll. 21529-30.

⁶⁸ *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Nobel MacCracken, EETS ES 112 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), ‘A Kalendare’, ll. 355-357.

in the region. He uses carol to mean a dance song, which could be performed at Christmas. At the time (and possibly in the region) Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's were written their contents were, therefore, not necessarily considered to be carols: this would depend upon their realisation in performance.

Greene's edition is an invaluable resource in studying fifteenth-century lyric, in part because of the wealth of textual detail that he collects and also because he identifies a verse form of major significance to fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century song. His pursuit of a clear and linear literary history for this form is, however, excessively restrictive, expressed not only in his long introduction but also in his notes on the manuscripts where he repeatedly allocates sources to religious institutions using tenuous evidence. His narrative of the carol's origin and character received strident challenge from Robbins in 1959, who adopted the formal definition established by Greene but argued that, far from originating in dance song, 'the Middle English religious carols were designed for singing in processions during the church services'.⁶⁹ He based his argument upon the formal similarity of the carol with Latin *cantilena*e developed from the processional *conductus* and on their verbal borrowings from antiphons together with the clerical origins of many manuscripts containing carols: 'The Middle English carol was patterned on Latin religious hymns with burden, stanza, and repeated burden. Its main tradition was not vernacular, secular, and foreign; but Latin, religious, and native.'⁷⁰ But Robbins does not limit his argument to an initial relation between carol and liturgy. He claims that use in

⁶⁹ Robbins, 'Middle English Carols', p. 562. In an earlier article Robbins had concurred with and developed Greene's theory of the popular dance origin of the form, see R. H. Robbins, 'The Earliest Carols and the Franciscans', *Modern Language Notes*, 53 (1938), 239-45. Greene's second edition of *EEC* contains several frank dismissals of Robbins' theory.

⁷⁰ Robbins, 'Middle English Carols', p. 582.

church processions is the function ‘of at least 80 per cent of all extant carols’.⁷¹ Robbins supports this rather extraordinary position with the presence of liturgical texts and music in three of the major polyphonic carol manuscripts (although in two cases it is clearly separated from the carols),⁷² and reads rubrication of carols in the Ritson manuscript (for instance, *In die natiuitatis*) to indicate that they were appropriate for specific services (although the rubrics could equally indicate use in festive celebration after the liturgical ceremonies).

Rejecting the processional hypothesis but still seeking to find a place for the carol within liturgical performance, Frank Ll. Harrison suggested that these vernacular songs might have replaced the *Benedicamus* in the Offices immediately following Christmas.⁷³ The best evidence for this is the survival of some Latin carols with a group of *Benedicamus* settings. Diplomatically, John Stevens attempted to reconcile the theories: ‘the various forms and manifestations of the *carole* and carol can be resolved into a coherent relationship: all share an association with movement, whether dance or procession, a division into burden and verse (chorus and soloist, people and priest) and a use of burdens and refrains of an ejaculatory kind.’⁷⁴ But Stevens admits that there is not ‘a single instance of a carol or vernacular song being expressly required or permitted in processional rites; and the ordinals do in fact prescribe the chants to be sung in processions during the whole year.’⁷⁵

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 560.

⁷² Processional music is collected together with carols and other forms of song in the Selden manuscript. The Fayrfax and Ritson manuscripts both include collections of liturgical music but these parts of the manuscripts are clearly separated from parts containing carols. See John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961).

⁷³ Frank Ll. Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 416-417.

⁷⁴ John Stevens, ‘Carol’, in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 2nd edn (London: Grove, 2001), 5, pp. 162-173, at p. 165.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

While there is some evidence that carols were occasionally performed in church, more frequent are documented performances of carols outside of church.⁷⁶ The question of the carol's relationship with liturgy is not to be solved by simply depositing the vernacular carol in the liturgy. There are no indications within Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's that they were used within church services, and plenty to suggest they were not (such as demands for alcohol and jokes about genitalia). Greene and Robbins' hypotheses appear to have suffered from an eagerness to explain the carol as a homogeneous genre with a linear history and unitary function. Just as the word 'carol' had a semantic range in Middle English not easy to restrict to a formal prescription at any temporal point, so also was there a diverse and developing body of verse taking the form that Greene catalogued, which was always in touch with verse of other shapes.

I will continue to use 'carol' to refer to the distinctive song shape that Greene identified, because the late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century evidence makes it appropriate and because it is useful to retain a term for the form. It is necessary to recognise, however, that the word had other meanings, more and less related to that formal prescription. Use of the term according to Greene's sense appears to have been quite fleeting, concentrated at the end of the fifteenth century and in the first half of the sixteenth century. After Greene's cut-off date of 1550 'carol' means Christmas song, while stanzaic songs with pre-posed burdens continue to appear in a range of contexts, again dispersing the shape in various directions within shifting song cultures.⁷⁷

The relationship between the corpus of fifteenth-century carols and the French *carole* or dance song is not satisfactorily solved by reference to the ways

⁷⁶ Discussed in Chapter 6.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 9.

in which the word 'carol' was used. Both dance song and liturgy are in their different ways connected with the songs,⁷⁸ but in constructing narratives of generic origins and identity too little attention was paid to the organisation of the manuscripts that do not contain generic labels. There is a balance to be struck between the way Greene shaped the array of sources that his impressive scholarship drew together into a dominating story and the more diffused, cautious approach that has been adopted towards lyric in recent decades. This is necessary because the carol does have features that make it a distinctive, confident written form in the fifteenth century, recognisable within the anthologies and of interest in the development of vernacular writing during a period that has in the past been perceived negatively.⁷⁹ But these features exist alongside indications that the form was always one in which more tentative exploration and connection with other literary and cultural material could take place. In order to clarify these points and begin thinking about the ways in which songs were written down the next two sections will present a brief history of the form and its representation.

IV. Fourteenth-Century Carols: Shape and Language

Independently of the etymological history, the carol form emerges in writing through witnesses of varied type, exploratory in form, together producing only a fragmentary testimony. The handful of carols that survive from the fourteenth century are too few and too disparate to represent a coherent genre, and are vulnerable to retrospective interpretation that seeks to find in them the origins of

⁷⁸ I return to liturgy in Chapter 7 and dance song in Chapter 8.

⁷⁹ See David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 761-799; Lawton's article began to counter this perception.

the fifteenth-century corpus. The range of sources shows the sometimes accidental and sometimes pioneering scribal activity typical in Middle English lyric sources, so that it is tempting to place these texts at the start of a movement ‘from song to book’, enabling the anthologies of the next century.⁸⁰ But these texts do not simply transcribe oral song into written form: they use the carol shape to translate French and Latin texts, put verses into different structural relations with one another, make new songs through *bricolage*, and compose lengthy religious histories.

None of the fourteenth-century texts in carol form are labelled as carols. Only one fourteenth-century English lyric preserved independently of a narrative context is called a carol. This is ‘Maiden in the moor lay’, preserved with other song lyrics on a single sheet of paper, Bod., MS Rawlinson D.913.⁸¹ Siegfried Wenzel discovered a reference to the song in a sermon dating around 1360, where it is called a ‘karole’.⁸² Several editors have attempted to expand ‘Maiden in the moor lay’ from the abbreviated notes made by the Rawlinson scribe, resulting in repetitive, elaborate verse structures but not carol form.⁸³ It is possible that the first verse could have been repeated as a burden, particularly as it has significant differences from the three verses that follow, but there is no indication of this repetition in the text and editors have not proposed it. The song

⁸⁰ The phrase is Sylvia Huot’s, see, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁸¹ *IMEV* 3891.

⁸² Siegfried Wenzel, ‘The Moor Maiden – A contemporary view’, *Speculum*, 49 (1974), 69-74 (p. 71). The other examples of lyrics directly associated with carolling in this period are the *ballade* in Chaucer’s *The Legend of Good Women*, which is described as being performed ‘carole-wyse’ by a group of dancing women, but is labelled accurately as a ‘balade’ (G.201-224); and a few lines of the ‘karolle’ performed by the dancers of Kölbick are provided by Robert Mannyng in *Handlyng Synne* in Latin and then in English translation (ll. 9039-51). As discussed above, these narratives use the word as the equivalent to *carole*, a dance song.

⁸³ *SL* 18; *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse*, ed. Celia and Kenneth Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 167; *Medieval English Songs*, ed. Dobson and Harrison (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 16b; Thomas G. Duncan, ‘The Maid in the Moor and the Rawlinson Text’, *The Review of English Studies*, 47 (1996), 151-162.

is built upon reiterated lines, and in stanzas 2-4 these take the form of questions and replies:

Welle wa[s] hire mete,
 Wat was hire mete?
þe primerole ant the –
þe primerole ant the –
Welle was hire mete,
 Wat was hire mete?
The primerole ant the –
The primerole ant the –
Ant the violet.⁸⁴

The sermon quotations from the song also present it as a series of questions and replies. The description ‘karole’ has, sensibly, been interpreted as identifying the piece as a dance song. In terms of the text preserved, however, and not performances that can be inferred from it, it is noteworthy that the piece has a responsorial form. The parts alternate within the strophes, rather than forming two separate organic units, burden and stanza, but the song is, like later carols, suited to performance by two groups of singers.

One fourteenth-century text in carol form appears in the famous poetic anthology Harley 2253, ‘Ichot a burde in boure bryht’ (*EEC* 440, *IMEV* 1395), where sophisticated, alliterative stanzas on a courtly love theme are accompanied by a simple burden:

Blow, northerne wynd,
Sent thou me my suetyng;
Blow, northerne wynd,
Blou, blou, blou. (*EEC* 440)

The repetition of these lines is indicated after the first and second stanzas by the words ‘Blou &c’. A disjunction between the simple, repetitive language of the burden and the densely accumulated imagery of the eight-line stanzas has

⁸⁴ Duncan, ‘The Maid in the Moor’, p. 159, ll. 10-18.

encouraged critics to read the two as originating from different sources.⁸⁵ Although this has not been proven, the lyric indisputably combines two distinctive elements, clearly arranged. The burden is written as prose, with the verse line ends punctuated, and the stanzas arranged as verse below this. Although it is the only text in this form in the manuscript, the scribe has employed the written conventions that would become so frequent in the fifteenth century.

Another fourteenth-century love song, an incomplete *pastourelle* beginning 'Als I me rode this endre dai' (*EEC* 450, *IMEV* 360), with a pre-posed exclamatory refrain and narrative stanzas, is found jotted on the back of a page of legal notes. The song is similar to the French *chanson d'aventure* type of lyric, and Helen Sandison identified its close parallels with a French song beginning 'L'autrier defors Picarni', which also has a refrain, but one that follows the stanzas rather than opening the piece in the style of a burden.⁸⁶ Reichl provides an assessment of this text and the Harley carol as follows:

Both poems... can be considered carols on formal grounds. On the other hand, they are more clearly linked to the French tradition of refrain-poems than to the later English carol tradition, so that it seems to me more appropriate to call these poems 'carols' only in inverted commas.⁸⁷

The same objection cannot be made of a nativity song recorded among sermon notes (*EEC* 12, *IMEV* 29) in a Franciscan manuscript compiled gradually over the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The carol is added by an early fourteenth-century hand on a blank page at the end of a late thirteenth-century quire. It consists of two mono-rhymed quatrains and two six-line stanzas, but the first quatrain is written in prose at the top of the page, and the following stanzas

⁸⁵ See *EEC*, p. 483.

⁸⁶ Helen Estabrook Sandison, *The 'Chanson d'Aventure' in Middle English*, Bryn Mawr College Monographs XII (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Bryn Mawr Collge, 1913), pp. 47-48.

⁸⁷ Reichl, 'The Middle English Carol', p. 168 .

are laid out as verse below it, connected by braces, and words from the first stanza (the burden) written to the right of the braces. The layout is striking, even closer than that of 'Ichot a burde' to that of the carols written in fifteenth-century anthologies, despite the burden being unusual, as a quatrain rather than a couplet, and the stanzas irregular. Indeed, the structural parallels within the two quatrains and the two sestets mean that if it were not for the decisive indications for the repetition of the first quatrain, they would be read as two separate lyrics. The voice in the burden and first stanza is plural first person, with parallel constructions in the beginnings of the second and fourth lines:

Honnd by honnd we schulle ous take,
And joye *and* blisse schulle we make,
 For the deuel of ele man hagt forsake,
And Godes Sone ys maked oure make.

A child is boren amo[n]ges man,
And in that child was no wam;
 That child ys God, that child is man,
And in that child oure life bygan.

(*EEC* 12, burden, 1)

The next stanzas then form a separate pair, switching to a hortatory second person address:

Senful man, be blithe and glad:
 For your mariage thy peys ys grad
 Wan Crist was boren;
 Com to *Crist*; thy peis ys grad
 For the was hys blod yshed,
 That were forloren

Senful man, be blithe *and* bold,
 For euene ys bothe boght *and* sold,
 Euereche fote.
 Com to *Crist*; thy peys ys told,
 For the he yahf a hondrefo[l]d
 Hys lif to bote.

(*EEC* 12, 2-3)

The repetitions in the first, fourth and fifth lines in these stanzas forge their unity here, although the third stanza is found independently in a later manuscript. The

transmission suggests that the carol form was not intrinsic to the verse, and the piece may have been patched together from two independent songs, themselves subject to dissolution in circulation. Unlike in 'Ichot a burde', however, the disjunction is not between burden and stanzas: instead lines that could easily have served as a stanza are made into the burden, and the scribe has taken pains to denote that the song is to be performed with a pre-posed refrain. The song contains conflicting suggestions: first of all it may be composed from previously existing verses, implying that there is little distinctive about carol texts, but secondly it suggests a deliberate intent to present the verses in carol shape, which implies that the scribe is motivated to produce, specifically, a song with a pre-posed refrain.

The song's place among Franciscan sermon materials (the same hand has squeezed a short Latin 'thema' below the song) puts it within one of the few trends observable in the fourteenth-century carols. Franciscans are responsible for the bulk of these (six of nine, the exceptions are *EEC* 59.1, 440 and 450). Two are written among Friar William Herebert's verse translations of Latin texts and another three are found in Norfolk-based preacher John of Grimestone's alphabetised book of notes from which to make sermons.⁸⁸ The creative engagement of Franciscans with popular song has been well documented, and Middle English evidence drawn from the early fourteenth-century Red Book of Ossory and the Kildare manuscript, both Anglo-Irish collections that preserve vernacular lyrics together with Latin compositions.⁸⁹ According to Greene, the

⁸⁸ Robbins identifies a fourth in 'The Earliest Carols', p. 244, 'Allas wo sal myn herte slaken', which has a typical carol form but the repetition of the burden is not clearly indicated.

⁸⁹ *The Lyrics of the Red Book of Ossory*, ed. Richard Leighton Greene (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974); the Kildare MS is BL, Harley MS 913, some of which is edited by Angela Lucas in *Anglo-Irish Poems of the Middle Ages* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 1995); see also Neil Cartlidge, 'Festivity, Order and Community in Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The Composition and Contexts

Franciscans used the form of popular refrain songs to create religious propaganda, while Robbins argues that the Franciscans actually invented the carol.⁹⁰ The evidence is not sufficiently extensive to support bold conclusions, but Herebert and Grimestone's books do show that Franciscans found it useful to write these kinds of song down and experimented with ways of doing so.

Herebert's carols, 'Wele, herizyng, and worshype boe to Crist' and 'My volk, what habbe y do þe?',⁹¹ date from around 1318 and although neither are included in *The Early English Carols* their layouts in the manuscript clearly indicate the repetition of the first stanza of each between the stanzas that follow.⁹² The stanzas of 'My volk, what habbe y do þe?' are not entirely regular, and there is no indication that the pieces are to be sung, but Greene does not strictly enforce these criteria elsewhere in his collection.⁹³ Both are translations of responsorial hymns. 'Wele, herizyng, and worshype boe to Crist' translates 'Gloria, laus et honor', a tenth-century hymn used as a processional for Palm Sunday, beginning:

Gloria, laus et honor tibi sit, Rex Christe, Redemptor:
Cui puerile decus prompsit Hosanna pium.

Gloria, laus *etc.*

Israel es tu Rex, Davidis et inclyta proles:
Nomine qui in Domini, Rex benedicte, venis.

of BL MS Harley 913', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 33-52. For the Franciscans' role in producing vernacular song see Robbins, 'The Earliest Carols', and David L. Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

⁹⁰ In *EEC* Greene describes the religious carol as 'one weapon of the Church in her long struggle... with the fondness of her people for unedifying entertainment', p. clix. Robbins, 'The Earliest Carols'.

⁹¹ *IMEV* 3872 and 2241.

⁹² Herebert's collection is BL, Additional MS 46919, edited by Stephen R. Reimer, *The Works of William Herebert, OFM, Sources and Texts* 81 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987). The carols are at pp. 113-6.

⁹³ Robbins argued for the texts to be considered as carols, 'Friar Herebert and the Carol', *Anglia*, 75 (1957), 194-8; Greene opposed him in a footnote, *EEC*, p. cliii.

Gloria, laus, *etc.*⁹⁴

The chorus (outside the church) responds to the first two lines sung by the soloists (who stand at the church entrance facing the procession) by repeating them, so they then function like a burden. Musical manuscripts with two settings for the burden, common from the second half of the fifteenth century, have a comparable structure in that the soloists begin with the first setting of the burden, and the chorus immediately repeats their words with the second.⁹⁵ It is possible that, as in ‘Gloria, laus’, the soloists only perform the refrain section at the beginning of the song, thus guiding the chorus into the performance. Medieval song had many different ways to treat repetition and these can be related to one another but as structures shared and developed, not strictly imitated. Herebert’s translation of ‘Gloria, laus’ indicates that the first repetition of the opening lines comes after the translated second stanza, ‘þou art kyng of Israel’, and thus he presents the hymn in what is apparently regular carol shape. Similarly, ‘My volk, what habbe y do þe’ is based on the responsorial refrain song for Holy Week ‘Popule meus, quid fecit tibi’, whose complicated structure has been simplified by Herebert into carol form.

Together Herebert’s verses and ‘Als I me rode this endre dai’ provide examples of Latin and French songs translated or developed in English, adapting forms used in one language into carol shape for the English versions, although in neither case are the resulting texts stylistically similar to the fifteenth-century corpus. By comparison Grimestone’s carols, from the later date of 1372, are

⁹⁴ *Liber Usualis Missae et Officii pro Dominicis et Festis*, ed. the Benedictines of Solesmes (Tournai: Desclée, 1953), pp. 588-9.

⁹⁵ Closer in date to Herebert and also associated with the Franciscans, the Kildare manuscript contains a Middle English lyric (‘Lollai, l[ollai], litel child’, *RLXIV* 28,) which has a similar structure in that the refrain is the lyric’s first line, see Chapter 8.

more clearly related to the fifteenth-century corpus.⁹⁶ One (*EEC* 155a) uses the quatrains made of flexible four-stress lines that is the carol's most common form. Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's all contain textual correspondences with Grimestone's manuscript.⁹⁷

The fourteenth-century carols are a mixed group with influences that encompass French lyric, love song, lullaby,⁹⁸ and liturgical song. Only Grimestone's verses, late in the century and originating in Norfolk, contain direct correspondences with manuscripts containing the sort of carols that make up the bulk of the fifteenth-century witnesses to the type. A fixed form in only the most generous sense, the carol is related to a wide range of verses with and without refrains, so the formal definition alone does not determine the carol's generic character, as suggested by the awkward status of some of the texts among Greene's corpus, including 'Als I me rode this endre dai' and 'Ichot a burde'. Greene even excludes some stanzaic verses that do have burdens from his edition, such as Herebert's translations and two ballad-like songs.⁹⁹

The carol shape is among the earliest vernacular English fixed forms, and had greater independence from the more textually established body of continental lyric than its contemporaries,¹⁰⁰ so it is appropriate that it maintained a certain experimental flexibility and an ambivalent relation with the two more established literary languages, Latin and French. Yet although some of these fourteenth-century texts have been preserved fortuitously, on the back of legal

⁹⁶ *EEC* 149a, *IMEV* 352; *EEC* 155a, *IMEV* 2024; *EEC* 271, *IMEV* 3691.

⁹⁷ The main correspondences are with J8 and S45/E33.

⁹⁸ Two of Grimestone's carols, *EEC* 149 and 155, are lullabies. The relationship between the carol and lullaby is explored in Chapter 8.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 9. In the *Manual* Greene describes five further poems left out of *EEC* for various, rather slight reasons, pp. 1751-2.

¹⁰⁰ Ballades and rondeaux were written in English in imitation of the French forms. The independence of the carol from continental traditions has also been noted in its music, see Manfred F. Bukofzer, 'Holy-Week Music and Carols at Meaux Abbey', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music* (New York: Norton, 1950), pp. 112-175 (pp. 148-149).

notes or squeezed between instructions for sermons, we are only able to recognise their form because in each case it has been clearly and deliberately indicated. Several of them already use the distinctive layout found in the fifteenth-century anthologies, where the burden is laid out as ‘prose’ and the stanzas displayed as verse beneath this. The Harley carol, ‘Honnd by honnd’ and Grimestone’s book all use this form.¹⁰¹ Whether put together from separate verses, translating a text from another language or producing new compositions, the pattern of a pre-posed refrain repeated after the stanzas was chosen and conveyed in written form. This is particularly striking in those texts translated from verses using different patterns, where carol form was chosen for the English verse but not on the basis of a French or Latin model. Lack of evidence from the fourteenth century obscures the motivations for selecting this form: in particular, lack of musical evidence. In the fifteenth century, this changes.

V. Fifteenth-Century Carols: Shape and Burden

Like the early examples, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century carols continually modulated and re-realised the form. Different stanza structures, verbal patterns, experiments with macaronic structures and networks of borrowing and rewriting renewed the carols’ relations with other literary forms. This is especially apparent when the music of the carols and their realisation in performance are considered. Chronological developments show the carol moving from fairly simple descant style, predominantly using major prolation to less constrained

¹⁰¹ The Harley carol is reproduced in *Facsimile of British Museum MS. Harley 2253*, ed. N. R. Ker, EETS 255 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), ff. 72v-73r. One of Grimestone’s carols (EEC 155) is shown in facsimile in *Liriche Religiose Inglesi Del Seculo Quattordicesimo*, ed. Alfredo Obertello (Milan: Valentino Bompiani &C., 1947), between pp. 118-119.

presentations, with perfect time and, later, duple measure freely used.¹⁰² Polyphony allows for endless variation through different combinations of vocal lines and many settings alternate between two and three voice parts.¹⁰³ Key to the musical development of the carol was the treatment of the burden, the carol's formal signature.

Greene suggests that in performance the burden was a choral section and those singers who did not have access to the words of the stanzas joined in with the repeated sections.¹⁰⁴ The earliest polyphonic source, the early fifteenth-century Trinity roll, contains no instructive rubrication but the music suggests this straightforward alternation of burden and stanzas, divided between chorus and leader sections.¹⁰⁵ However, it contains one song with two settings for the burden, the Agincourt carol, where one burden is for soloists and one for the chorus.¹⁰⁶ This became increasingly common practice: eleven of twenty-eight carols in the mid-fifteenth-century Selden. manuscript have two settings for the burdens, Egerton sets about half its burdens twice and all the carols in the Ritson manuscript are set twice. Parts of the choral sections are regularly embedded into the stanzas so the soloists' strophic parts are punctuated with refrain lines copied

¹⁰² This chronological development is ascertained through analysis of the early fifteenth-century Trinity roll, mid-fifteenth-century Selden. carol book, later fifteenth-century Egerton and Ritson carols, and the sixteenth-century Fayrfax manuscript and Henry VIII's manuscript. The shift is described in Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain*, pp. 419-22; Bukofzer, 'Holy-Week', pp. 165-6; Stevens, 'Carol', pp. 166-168; and John Caldwell, *The Oxford History of English Music: Volume I From the Beginnings to c.1715* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 165.

¹⁰³ Of many examples, one is 'Hail, Mary, full of grace' from the Trinity roll, which uses three voices for the burden and two for the stanzas, *MC 2*.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *EEC*, p. xlvi. In raising the possibility that there were other ways of performing the parts of the carol than by assigning stanzas to the soloists and refrains to the chorus, it is worth noting that the refrains of French *caroles* may often have been performed by the soloists, as Ardis Butterfield observes of refrain songs in Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose*: 'The strophic sections are commonplace and highly familiar, the refrains a means of providing individual point to the songs'. *Poetry and Music*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁵ See Stevens, 'Carol', p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ Stevens estimates that the carols of the earlier manuscripts would be sung by 'a choir of perhaps nine or ten adult male voices', whereas later manuscripts had more varied requirements, including possible parts for boys and amateurs. 'Carol', p. 166. See also Helen Deeming, 'The sources and origin of the "Agincourt Carol"', *Early Music*, 35 (2007), 23-38.

from the burden, creating elaborate, lengthy and highly repetitive compositions.¹⁰⁷ Sixteenth-century manuscripts from the Tudor court perform further experiments with song shape, truncating burdens to two-word refrains so that many texts cannot be considered as ‘carols’ strictly, although they are related to the form. Examples abound in the Fayrfax manuscript, such as ‘Woefully array’d’.¹⁰⁸ These texts show that the carols cannot be fully described by simple alternation of burden and stanza sections because the shape is fluid and amenable to expansion and development. The written arrangement of unnotated texts may have left unmarked various repetitions possible in performance.

The term ‘burden’ is entirely without support in the texts and was introduced by Greene in its current meaning. At the time the songs were written the word ‘burden’ meant bass-part or under-song, and both Chaucer and Shakespeare use it in this way, as has been stressed by David Wulstan.¹⁰⁹ Instead, two words were used for this part of a song in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: ‘fote’ and ‘chorus’. Hill sometimes labels the refrain sections of his carols ‘fote’.¹¹⁰ A curious stage direction in W. Wager’s *The Longer Thou Livest* (1559) has a character enter ‘counterfeiting a vain gesture and a foolish countenance singing the foot of many songs as fools were wont’.¹¹¹ ‘Chorus’ has a more complicated use, indicative of the multiple and complex identities of the section of text Greene labels ‘burden’.

¹⁰⁷ For example, MC 81.

¹⁰⁸ Stevens, *Music and Poetry*, pp. 369-70. This is just one of the many ‘modified carols’ that Stevens prints. The Selden manuscript also includes three songs printed by Stevens as carols but excluded by Greene (MC 36, 11A and 13A), see Greene, ‘Carols’, p. 1751.

¹⁰⁹ Chaucer uses the word in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. As the Pardoner sings “Com hider, love, to me!”, ‘This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun’, l.672-3. Shakespeare uses the word in *The Tempest* l.ii.383, and *As You Like It*, IV.ii.12; *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). See David Wulstan, *Tudor Music* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1985), p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Balliol 354, pp. 473-480, 507-8.

¹¹¹ W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough is as Good as a Feast*, ed. R. Mark Benbow (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p. 6.

The Selden. manuscript is the first source of carols to use ‘chorus’. Where there are two settings for the burden section the second is often marked ‘chorus’. The first settings usually have two vocal parts and the second three but the number of parts does not necessarily indicate the number of singers. Where there are two settings for the burdens soloists open the song, then the chorus repeats the burden to a different tune. The Egerton carol section and the fifteenth-century part of the Ritson manuscript also include songs labelled in this way,¹¹² as does a now-fragmentary fifteenth-century polyphonic manuscript, Bod., MS Bodley 88*. In his reconstruction of this source, David Fallows comments:

the rubric ‘chorus’ is visible at the beginnings of both three-voice sections in Bodley 88* 6, as also in 3, apparently implying that the two-voice sections should be taken by soloists. This rubric appears sporadically throughout the carol repertory; but its appearance at three of the four possible places in Bodley 88* gives the system more credibility as a regular feature of the carol.¹¹³

The rubric ‘chorus’ also labels refrain sections embedded in the stanzas, which can repeat parts of the burden.¹¹⁴ Repetitions could proliferate, such as in one Selden. carol which has two settings for its simple burden, ‘Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia’, the first for two voices and the second for three, marked ‘chorus’ in red, then a stanza arrangement as follows:

A nywe werk is come on honde	[2 voices]
<i>Chorus</i> A nyw werk is com on honde	[3 voices]
Thorw might <i>and grace</i> of Godys sonde,	[2 voices]
<i>Chorus</i> Thorw might <i>and grace</i> of Godis sonde,	[3 voices]
To saue the lost of euery londe,	[2 voices]
<i>Chorus</i> Alleluya, alleluya,	[3 voices]
For now is fre that erst was bonde;	[2 voices]

¹¹² MC 51, 77, 78, and 79.

¹¹³ David Fallows, ‘Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 88*’, in ‘New Sources of English fifteenth- and sixteenth-century polyphony’, compiled by R. Bowers and A. Wathey, *Early Music History*, 4 (1985), 313-329 (p. 321).

¹¹⁴ E.g. MC 27, 30, 91, and 118.

We mowe wel synge alleluia.

[2 voices]¹¹⁵

Settings such as this suggest that many repetitions may be lurking in the texts that could have been adopted in performance. The label ‘chorus’ provides evidence in favour of the distribution of parts between soloists and the group posited by Greene, but the term often introduces more numerous and more variable repeats than simple alternation between refrain and stanza sections. Chorus sections are usually refrain sections but can appear after the soloists’ performance of the refrain (where there are two settings for the burden) or within the stanzas.

The relation between performances of unnotated texts and the polyphonic art-music preserved in the notated carol anthologies is elusive so generalising from the notated sources is difficult, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.¹¹⁶ However, a vernacular nativity carol written in a late fifteenth-century hand on the final leaf of an incunable Latin Bible provides a unique example of ‘chorus’ written in an unnotated text.¹¹⁷ Here ‘chorus’ is written beside the burden and then between every stanza, aligning it quite simply with Greene’s idea of the burden. A. S. G. Edwards and T. Takamiya comment that this is without parallel: ‘‘Chorus’ is not recorded in Middle English in the sense of a refrain or burden; and its use here significantly antedates the earliest usage in this sense in the *OED*, which is for 1599.’¹¹⁸ The *OED* entry is in this case misleading as the Selden. manuscript dates to the mid-fifteenth century and clearly associates ‘chorus’ with refrain parts of the songs, although primarily referring to the

¹¹⁵ *EEC* 73, *MC* 30, *IMEV* 81.

¹¹⁶ Where monophonic and polyphonic sources survive of the same carol, they are not in agreement. See Chapter 6.

¹¹⁷ A. S. G. Edwards and T. Takamiya, ‘A New Middle English Carol’, *Medium Ævum*, 70 (2001), 112-115.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

manner of performance. The appearance of the term in an unnotated text usefully connects the evidence of the musical sources with less specialised writing.

The polyphonic manuscripts show that the burden was not treated uniformly. It could be repeated to different tunes by different singers, and pieces of it could punctuate the stanzas. These structures raise many questions for performers. Should burdens be repeated twice after every stanza? Where a choral section is integrated into the stanzas, such as the first words of the burden, might this mean that the burden is no longer repeated between stanzas? Are there further possible repeats? Some modern performances omit to repeat the burden after every stanza in longer carols and while there is no way of knowing whether medieval performances did this, it is a possibility.¹¹⁹ Stevens argues, however, that ‘The essence of carol form is the alternation of burden and verse... There are therefore only two permissible standard orders, $BV^1BV^2BV^3...B$; and $B^1B^2V^1B^1B^2V^2... B^1B^2$. The order... is the natural and right way of performing this essentially responsorial music.’¹²⁰ Stevens’ prescription may be overly rigid but the alternation he identifies is crucial. At its simplest, the carol form alternates two elements, refrain section and stanza section. The relationship between these is variable as they may be closely parallel, completely independent or anywhere between.¹²¹ These alternations can be amplified with further settings for the burdens and refrain sections within the stanzas.

¹¹⁹ For example, a recording of ‘Als I lay on 3oolis nist’ (which has sixteen stanzas) by Anonymous 4 (*Medieval Carols and Motets*. 1993. HMU907099), repeats the burden at the beginning and end and to mark changes in speakers. A more experimental example is Jeff Buckley’s performance of ‘Corpus Christi Carol’ on *Grace*. 1994. 01-475928-10. Further recordings of carols, including E55/66, can be heard on *English Medieval Christmas Carols*. The New York Pro Musica Antiqua. 1997. TCD1056.

¹²⁰ Stevens, ‘Carol’, p. 167.

¹²¹ On the musical ‘rhyme’ between burdens and stanzas see Stevens, ‘Carol’, p. 167. Likewise, the final line of the stanzas was sometimes a refrain line repeated from the burden or rhymed with the burden, see Appendix B.

The distinctiveness of the carol and its burden depends upon more than just alternation of parts, however: the burden precedes the first stanza, written separately at the head of the text. This order is questioned by Wulstan, who maintains the importance of the alternation between refrain and verse sections but argues that the appearance of the refrain might be ‘delayed until after the opening verse, as in the typical ballade’, and the ‘presence or absence of an initial refrain cannot therefore be held to be a necessarily formal quality of these fixed forms, particularly the carol.’¹²² If this is so, distinguishing between a carol and other refrain songs becomes problematic, based on a judgement as to whether the refrain is a separate unit from the stanza, rather than its written position. The way in which the carols are displayed is a clear and regular written convention but what is its significance?

The way of writing song lyrics has parallels in French. In the early fourteenth-century *chansonnier* Bod., MS Douce 308 about 200 songs are written under the heading *ballettes*, most of which have refrains, of which seventy-two are what the editors call ‘pre-posed refrains’.¹²³ Where a refrain is written at the head of a song, it is unlikely to be written after the stanzas, but where the refrain is first written beneath the first stanza, it is then most likely to be written in full or in part after every stanza: ‘The scribes appear to be following a convention according to which whenever the refrain is pre-posed there is no need to repeat it after every stanza; conversely, whenever the refrain does not appear before the first stanza, the scribes must indicate its presence in the text by

¹²² Wulstan, *Tudor Music*, p. 74.

¹²³ *The Old French Ballette*, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 308, ed., trans., and intro. by Eglal Doss-Quinby and Samuel Rosenberg, Musical Editions and Commentary by Elizabeth Aubrey (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2006).

copying it, in full or in abbreviated form, after every stanza.’¹²⁴ This parallels practice in Middle English, whereby the repetition of refrains that follow the stanzas or are embedded within them is usually indicated, but the repetition of a burden may not be made explicit, illustrated in Sloane by the contrast between two refrain lyrics in pseudo-ballade form (S40 and S41) and its carols. Where a refrain is embedded in a carol’s stanzas, it is always written in full or truncated form.¹²⁵ Thus the convention of writing the burden before the stanzas may be interpreted as a transparent guide to performance (the refrain section is to be sung first), or a way to save labour (writing the refrain at the head of the page means it does not have to be rewritten), or as indicating that this pre-posed type of refrain is an independent unit from the stanzas, perhaps performed in a different manner.

The rich collection of information about fifteenth-century carols held in notated manuscripts and other sources is valuable to the study of the anthologies but does not generate a clear identity for the carol that can be applied to their texts. At its simplest the carol form is characterised by two structurally independent, alternating units, one with fixed words and one with varying words, displayed according to written convention with the refrain section first. To form a prescription for the carol, this characterisation has to be qualified to allow for a variety of further possible repeats (variant settings of the burden and refrain lines internal to the stanzas) and relationships between the units. I considered adopting ‘pre-posed refrain’, the term used by Eglal Doss-Quinby and Samuel Rosenberg in reference to the *ballettes* of Douce 302, in the place of ‘burden’ because Greene’s term suggests an element of verse and music that is more fixed and

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. lxiii.

¹²⁵ Full details of the scribal representation of burdens and refrains in the anthologies are given in Appendix B.

reliable than the manuscripts present. The ambiguity around the word ‘carol’ is amplified here by the absence of a fifteenth-century term that can confidently be used to describe the form’s distinctive element. ‘Chorus’ is not accurate (many of the burden settings are not chorus parts) and ‘foot’ is sixteenth-century and awkward. However, I have retained ‘burden’ because it is now clearly understood and is less cumbersome than ‘pre-posed refrain’, although the latter remains useful.

‘Carol’ and ‘burden’ both suggest a form more fixed, more homogeneous, distinctive and limited, than the notated manuscripts present, but how does this compare with the songs written in the unnotated anthologies? How might they have been performed? Can their burdens be distinguished from other types of refrain and what relationship is there between the different elements of the songs? At once a written convention and a marker of song, the burden expresses one of the central problems in describing the carol and reading the anthologies: how to determine the relation between the written texts and their performance. This question is unlikely ever to be conclusively solved but in considering it the reader is also drawn to examine the ways in which songs were written down and what influence written activity had upon shaping the material. The burden and the carol form have significant roles in this process and exploration of the unnotated anthologies can contribute to understanding how they interacted with and shaped fifteenth-century vernacular song traditions.

VI. Methods

Variations in the way in which the carol form could be realised and in the identity and function of the burden, the carol's formal marker, signal the need for an appropriate balance between identifying the consistency and distinctiveness of the carol corpus and recognising that it could also accommodate variation and innovation, in part because the form is created through a combination of elements. Nevertheless, any attempt to interpret the diverse corpus of texts in carol shape and to understand whether and how this form functioned as a genre, in other words its institutionalisation, involves making distinctions among the texts. The making of categories, once begun, is potentially endless and can be used to build many different arguments. The final section of this chapter will survey how and why divisions have been made in previous studies and clarify the methods I propose to use in this thesis.

One silent division instituted by Greene was by language: while Greene's corpus includes liberal quantities of Latin within macaronic carols, Latin songs in carol form contained within English manuscripts are not represented. These songs are known under the broad term 'cantilena', meaning song, in the fifteenth century commonly meaning polyphonic song. Stevens included Latin songs in carol shape in his editions of the notated carols for the *Musica Britannica* series. John Caldwell has argued that the carol should be considered within the broader framework of the cantilena, making it easier to recognise the carol's connections with other song forms.¹²⁶ The question is of immediate interest because Eng. poet. opens with two Latin songs in carol form both displayed in the same format as the vernacular and macaronic carols that follow.

¹²⁶ John Caldwell, 'Relations between Liturgical and Vernacular Music in Medieval England', in *Music in the Medieval English Liturgy: Plainsong and Medieval Music Society Centennial Essays*, ed. Susan Rankin and David Hiley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 285-99.

Stevens categorised the musical carol ‘from a social point of view’: ‘(i) a courtly or popular dance song; (ii) a popular religious song analogous in many respects to the Italian *lauda*; (iii) a popular litany or processional song; (iv) ecclesiastical polyphony.’ As Stevens admits, these types overlap and ‘still leave other manifestations unclassified’.¹²⁷ The overlaps are especially visible when the texts of songs set in elaborate ecclesiastical polyphonic songbooks are found elsewhere in anthologies containing what might be considered ‘popular religious song’, or even as scribbled marginal fragments.¹²⁸ The words of a carol can travel between different social contexts (perhaps the music could too, but that is undocumented), a movement that disrupts standard terminologies used to describe writing’s social status and functions, and attempts to identify complete texts as opposed to textual networks.

Punctuating Stevens’ groups, the terms ‘popular’, ‘courtly’ and ‘ecclesiastical’ illustrate the concepts that have dominated the discussion and categorisation of Middle English lyric since nineteenth-century manuscript studies, as well as the debate over the carol’s connection with the *carole* and liturgy. Greene described the carol as ‘popular by destination’, because even if its origins were in dance song, it had been removed from the ‘folk’ by clerical authors and written transmission.¹²⁹ However, ‘degrees of popularity’ can be allowed, and his notes are scattered with assertions that particular carols are especially close to folk song.¹³⁰ This practice of identifying ‘folk song’ within

¹²⁷ Stevens, ‘The Carol’, p. 162.

¹²⁸ For example, *EEC* 21, discussed in Chapter 6.

¹²⁹ *EEC*, p. cxviii.

¹³⁰ For example, notes to *EEC* 136, 322, 323 and 440 (burden).

the larger corpus through stylistic markers such as structural repetition, direct dialogue, narrative and natural imagery continues to attract literary critics.¹³¹

Music scholars are most interested in the polyphonic songs, which Bukofzer emphasises were art music: 'The conformity with the general style of the fifteenth century, the skill displayed in counterpoint, the rigid form and its imitative variants, the melodic types, and the delight in hemiola patterns characterize the polyphonic carol as the product of trained musicians, as art music composed in the popular vein.'¹³² Caldwell distinguishes once again between the types with the help of class: 'The polyphonic carol is nearly always a high-minded genre; the musical settings of satirical, amorous, or erotic songs in this form have mostly disappeared. These will have been the province of a lower class musician, for production at a more advanced stage of an evening's entertainment; and the few surviving specimens with music are perhaps examples of the higher clerical wit rather than of a genuinely popular art.'¹³³

Many of these contrasts between clerical and popular art rest on the distinction between written and unwritten, with the assumption that the less securely embedded in a written tradition a text is, the more 'popular' it can be considered to be. While there is some justice in this, it is an uncomfortably pre-emptive way of reading that encourages automatic alignment of fragmentary texts with popular tradition.¹³⁴ Research into the creative interaction of oral and literate practices in related fields from medieval chant to early modern ballad has

¹³¹ Recently, Boklund-Lagopoulou, *I have a yong suster*.

¹³² Bukofzer, 'Holy -Week', p. 169.

¹³³ Caldwell, *The Oxford History of English Music*, p. 164.

¹³⁴ For example, the Rawlinson lyrics, and the short lines of English verse in the Red Book of Ossory, see *Lyrics*, ed. Greene; R. M. Wilson surveys fragmentary Middle English verse in *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1952). Discussed especially in Chapter 8.

developed this debate in ways that study of the carols can benefit from.¹³⁵ Furthermore, interest in the ways in which people of different social groups participated in fifteenth-century England in a vibrant, and in many respects shared, religious culture has encouraged more flexible, responsive reading models.¹³⁶

In this thesis, I choose to focus upon a group of manuscripts and to discuss the carol in so far as this song type forms the principle content of these books, combining a broader, more dispersed concept of what the carol could be with a focus upon its representation in specific collections. The anthologies gather songs in carol form alongside other forms that are also relevant to this study and enable examination of the relationships between different song types. The anthologies' carols represent only part of a larger corpus. I do not wish to suggest that they represent 'the carol' at its most characteristic, in reference to an imaginary essential carol, but I do hope that close attention to this group will illuminate what was possible within the form, the ways in which it could be realised and why it was successful in fifteenth-century England.

One of the key methods used is examination of the texts in the anthologies in relation to versions contained in other manuscripts, investigating the networks of communication through which the songs circulated that today present routes through fifteenth-century textual cultures. These connections provide the primary contexts for examining the anthologies, although other

¹³⁵ Leo Treitler, *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How it was Made* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹³⁶ Significant studies illustrating this include Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

sources, such as religious art and documents with information about performance practices, will contribute. Exploring the ways in which the songs change as they move between manuscripts, and the ways that they borrow, repeat and re-write from available texts also reveals aspects of the songs' social functions, because these textual interactions direct us to examine who owned the songs and in what ways that ownership was inscribed. Further, textual change and the cultural resources used in this process provide information about how the songs were fitted for their social functions.

Carols are the best-documented vernacular song type of fifteenth-century England and as such the manuscripts that contain them offer opportunities to explore the performance culture that, we deduce, motivated their writing. The manuscripts present critics, therefore, with the ongoing challenge of relating written materials with oral events in an especially direct form. There are significant limits to how closely our reading can bring us to those events, limits that have to be acknowledged. Yet perhaps in reading songs on the pages our situation today is not entirely and irreducibly different from that of fifteenth-century readers, who also had to construct relationships between those texts and performances, through memory and creative engagement. Enjoying the sources and the journeys they encourage us to take through them could connect us with those readings and the sounds they evoked.

Chapter 3. The Manuscripts and Their Contexts

Manuscripts are objects possessing their own material integrity, but also sites where the processes of textual communication and change took place, where verses were shared and remade. The fifteenth-century anthologies provide unusual insight into this sharing and rewriting of song lyrics as these books are far less miscellaneous than many of the manuscripts containing lyrics from the same period, and so their production was motivated by deliberate and focused interest in vernacular song. The consistency in the physical dimensions, page layouts and contents of Sloane, St John's and Eng. poet. not only makes them a group appropriate to study together but also contributes to the impression that these books were planned and produced according to a design answering to the demands of material utility and genre.

This chapter will begin with descriptions of the three manuscripts and the ways in which they represent the different forms of songs they contain. I will examine the anthologising process through exploring how the collections were built up from shorter exemplars. The anthologies will then be placed within their textual networks, the primary contexts for the songs, through a survey of manuscripts with which the collections' songs have correspondences. The final section will investigate the books' connections with Norfolk through examination of their dialect and other manuscripts from the region directly connected with the anthologies, and ask what significance Norfolk has as a cultural context for the books and their songs.

I. The Three Manuscripts

The earliest of the three manuscripts is Sloane, a compact book made of paper pages measuring 150 X 110mm. Although plain in appearance, it is neat and consistently produced, written by a single scribe in a regular mixed anglicana script, the main evidence from which the manuscript is dated to the first half of the fifteenth-century. It now consists of thirty-seven folios but there are signs that the collection was once longer. From the first medieval folio, f. 2, the pages are numbered in two different later hands: one sequence begins '2', and one begins '49' (this sequence has been crossed out on every page). The first song is incomplete but there are no signs of folios lost at the end of the manuscript, implying a manuscript that once consisted of eighty-five folios.¹ There is no way to know how much of the lost manuscript recorded song lyrics.

Moderate care has been taken over the presentation of the book. Each page has pricked and ruled margins at the top, bottom and left hand side of the page, forming a frame for the writing, although the script frequently runs over the lines. For the first six folios, the first letter of each new stanza is highlighted with red, as are the first letters of most words in the burden, but the ink grows faint and after f. 6v no coloured ink is used. The scribe has checked his work and corrected the texts tidily in many places at a stage after the initial writing.

The anthology now consists of seventy-four songs, the first incomplete. There is no explicitly indicated internal organisation of the contents: the texts follow on from one another without rubrics. The material has a level of

¹ The manuscript has been remounted so the original collation is not certain. Wakelin collates it as follows: I8, II8 (with a parchment slip added between 2 and 3, now numbered f. 12), III8, IV4, V8 (possibly added after a break), based on strings visible between ff. 5v-6r, 14v-15r, 22v-23r, 28v-29r and 34v-35r. He suggests that the missing forty-eight folios at the beginning may have been six quires of eight. Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', p. 41, n. 22.

homogeneity that may have obviated the need for further organisation in that all of the texts are short verse, in English or Latin, or a combination of both.² Fifty-three of the songs are entirely English, three are in Latin (two written together, S65 and S66) and eighteen are macaronic. Fifty-five carols make the majority of the collection, and a significant group of songs is written in long couplets.³ While patterns in subject matter are difficult to trace, ribald jokes on occasion sharing a page with Marian praise, the first part of the manuscript can be divided into two sequences of songs sharing similar formal patterns. The first twenty-four texts are all carols with quatrain stanzas and couplet burdens (except S1, which is imperfect at the beginning but likely to have taken this form). The next seven songs are written in long couplets (S25-S31), only one of which has a burden (S30). After these two groups, the patterns are less clear, consisting of short sequences of carols, punctuated by songs of different types, sometimes in pairs, for example the two pseudo-ballades (S40 and S41). After the seven long couplet songs written together, further songs written in this form appear regularly throughout the manuscript (S35, S44, S55, S69 and S74). The long couplet form does not appear in Eng. poet. or St John's and is distinctive of this collection.

The layouts of the manuscript's texts suggest scribal sensitivity to the different forms used and an effort to preserve the regular appearance of the collection. Carols are arranged as described in the previous chapter: the burdens are written as 'prose' at the top, with a paraph mark in the margin to their left. Each stanza begins with a slightly less elaborate paraph mark in the margin. A brace connects the lines of the stanza, and the final line of each stanza is written to the right of this brace. A plain line is drawn between each song. More

² Details of the contents of all three manuscripts are provided in Appendix B, including language, form and correspondences.

³ Long couplets may also be described as quatrains rhymed *abcb*.

elaborate layouts are adopted for the carols where complex rhyme schemes are used (especially S25 and S36). For the songs written as long couplets the mid-points of the lines are usually marked with a punctus, but the system varies according to the regularity of the meter (see Figure 3.1).

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 3.1

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British Library, Sloane MS 2593, ff. 10v-11r

The pattern of displaying a verse line only where it is a unit in a couplet rhyme agrees with layouts generally used in fourteenth-century Middle English verse. Elizabeth Solopova has described how the lyrics in Harley 2253 are set out differently according to their rhyme schemes, with cross-rhymed stanzas (*abab*)

written as long couplets with a punctuation mark to indicate the lines' internal breaks.⁴ By contrast, even short lines are displayed as independent verse lines if they are part of a couplet unit. According to Solopova, this was the regular practice in early Middle English, 'probably linked to the fact that the couplet was regarded as such a fundamental metrical pattern, that a line was not seen as complete unless it was part of a couplet', but 'this usage is more common in early Middle English manuscripts; it loosened in the later period with the spread of more complex stanza forms. In fifteenth-century manuscripts it is less consistent.'⁵ The Sloane scribe was, therefore, employing established written conventions in his work, whether in imitation of an earlier exemplar or on his own initiative, although informed by a practice slightly earlier than the date customarily given to this manuscript.

The manuscript's origins are unknown. As noted in the previous chapter, although the manuscript was once considered to be a minstrel collection, its predominantly religious contents and use of Latin, at its most elaborate in the goliardic '*Meum est propositum*' (S66), have been used since the mid-twentieth century to support the hypothesis of a clerical, possibly monastic origin. Greene argued that the manuscript 'is from Bury St Edmunds, almost certainly from the great Benedictine monastery there'.⁶ His evidence begins with the songs in honour of St Edmund and St Nicholas, the latter because he was honoured in boy-bishop ceremonies at Bury and with an altar in the monastery church.

⁴ Elizabeth Solopova, 'Layout, Punctuation and Stanza Patterns in English Verse', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, ed. Fein, pp. 377-389. There has been only limited discussion of the punctuation and layout of Middle English verse, but see M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), pp. 97-114 and Judith Tschann, 'The Layout of *Sir Thopas* in the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, Cambridge Dd.4.24, and Cambridge Gg.4.27 Manuscripts', *The Chaucer Review*, 20 (1985), 1-13. Both argue that layout formed an essential role in the understanding of verse forms by writers and readers.

⁵ Solopova, 'Layout', p. 381 and 389.

⁶ *EEC*, p. 306.

According to Greene, that the Latin song in praise of St Thomas of Canterbury (S65) is not defaced ‘shows that the MS did not continue in use in a secular house’.⁷ He suggests that any manuscript in a religious institution that survived the Reformation would have been censored if it continued to be used, and therefore Sloane is likely to have been owned by a monastic house. This argument does not consider the ease with which manuscripts could be passed between different owners: where Sloane may or may not have been in the mid-sixteenth-century would not be a definite guide to where it was made a century earlier. The dialect is East Anglian and a note on f. 36v, ‘Johanne Bardel debet istum librum the qweche bardel is of ... dwellyd ... In In’, contains further links to the area as Bardel is an East Anglian name. Greene identifies a monk at Bury named Johannes Berdwell in Bod., MS Holkham Misc. 37, f. 197v. However, the name ‘Bardel’ was common in East Anglia in its various forms, so this inscription supports the identification of the manuscript’s general regional provenance but not the more specific claim of origins in Bury St Edmunds, a claim for which songs in honour of two saints are not sufficient proof.⁸ *LALME* places the manuscript’s dialect north of Bury, in south Norfolk, close to Thetford, although this does not mean that the scribe stayed in this region.⁹

Unusually, one of the manuscript’s carols contains a place name, Lynn, in the course of a description of a series of disasters: a famine, two ‘pestelens’, a terrible gale and finally lightning:

Lytenyng at lynne dede grete harm
of tolboþe & of fryre carm (S52, 7.1-2)

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Daniel Wakelin comments on the proliferation of people with names like Bardel, or Berdwell, in Norfolk and Suffolk and offers several alternate candidates to Greene’s, in ‘Lightning at Lynn: The Origins of a Lyric in Sloane 2593’, *Notes and Queries*, 48 (2001), 382-385 (p. 384).

⁹ *LALME*, II, p. 388 (LP4279, Grid 581 289).

The carol, ‘Thynk man qwerof þou art wrout’, is the subject of an illuminating short article by Daniel Wakelin in which Wakelin notes that parallel events are described in additions made by a fourteenth-century Lynn Franciscan to an East Anglian chronicle. The annotator’s notes describe plagues of 1348-9 and 1360-1, a strong wind in 1361, and lightning strikes in 1363:

Isto anno in vigilia translationis sancti Thomae Cantuariensis archiepiscopi, in nocte quando fratres fuerunt in matutinis, fuit fulmen tam horribile quod cobussit ecclesiam et chorum Carmelitarum Lenn’ et tolbothe in eadem villa eodem tempore.¹⁰

From this information, Wakelin deduces that the carol dates from after 1363 and may have been written, like the chronicle notes, by a Franciscan at Lynn. The song’s focus upon these mid-fourteenth-century events suggests that its composition is likely to predate that of the Sloane manuscript considerably. Sceptical of Greene’s attempts to locate the manuscript in Bury, Wakelin further suggests that the friary at Lynn is ‘at least as likely a provenance as any hitherto proposed’.¹¹ The likelihood that some of the manuscript’s material dates back to the later fourteenth century agrees with the observation made above that the book uses layouts common to the earlier period. Because carols proliferate in the fifteenth century, the manuscripts contain few links to fourteenth-century manuscripts, although Sloane does contain a lyric also found in the late fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript (S41) and its related manuscript group, including one other fourteenth-century manuscript.¹² The manuscript’s only other

¹⁰ ‘That year on the eve of the feast of the translation of St Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the night when the brothers were at matins, there was such a dreadful stroke of lightning which burnt down the church and choir of the Carmelites at Lynn and the tollbooth in the same town at the same time’ (trans. Wakelin). Wakelin, ‘Lightning at Lynn’, p. 383. For details on the manuscript see Antonia Gransden, ‘A Fourteenth-Century Chronicle from the Grey Friars at Lynn’, *The English Historical Review*, 72 (1957), 270-278.

¹¹ Wakelin, ‘Lightning at Lynn’, p. 385.

¹² See especially John J. Thompson, ‘The Textual Background and Reputation of the Vernon Lyrics’, in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Pearsall, pp. 201-224. See also *The Vernon*

direct textual link with fourteenth-century writing is to the Grimestone preaching notebook with which all three anthologies have connections as will be discussed later in this chapter. ‘Thynk man qwerof þou art wrout’ is a conventionally shaped carol, with quatrain stanzas rhymed *aaab* so it is interesting to place it among other material in the manuscript that can be connected with the fourteenth century when the form was not common.

Sloane is early among the manuscripts containing carols and some of its texts look back to an earlier period, but the majority of manuscripts with which it has correspondences were written in the fifteenth century, the height of the carol’s popularity. Although its dating presents problems, Eng. poet. was probably written in the later fifteenth century and could have been continued into the sixteenth, so Sloane and Eng. poet. together span this fertile period. Physically and textually, Eng. poet. has many parallels with Sloane. Its paper pages are of similar dimensions (150 X 125mm) and like Sloane the collection is plain in appearance, with a little red decoration used on the first four folios. After this the scribes show no consistent concern with visual appearance, beyond the use of braces to mark rhymes, and the writing is less regular than in Sloane. Physical similarities between the two manuscripts are repeated in the proportions of their contents: Eng. poet. contains seventy-seven songs, of which sixty-three are carols, four are in Latin, fifty-two are English, and the rest combine the two languages. As in Sloane, the content of the songs is predominantly religious or moral, and the Christmas season prevails: while twenty-one songs specifically celebrate the Nativity and Annunciation, only one celebrates the Crucifixion. About twenty songs in the collection can be described as treating non-religious

Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library MS. Eng. poet.a.1, ed. A. I. Doyle (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

themes, of which eleven are on women and marriage and four are convivial songs.

Eng. poet. is less consistent and organised than Sloane in its visual appearance. It appears to have been written in a series of different scribal shifts over an extended period of time. Greene states that it was written by two scribes: A. ff. 11r-50r (ff. 1-10 are blank pages and do not belong to the original manuscript); B. ff. 50v-61r, part of ff. 41v-42r, two deleted lines on f. 34v.¹³ Taylor also identified two scribes, with the first scribe responsible for the first three and a half folios (songs E1-5) in which the songs are presented carefully as though the book was begun with good intentions: 'He used brackets to link rhymes, which he splashed with red and on one occasion yellow, and he decorated the initial capital N, adding finials and a jagged tail with tassels'. As the second scribe (according to Taylor's analysis) continued the work there followed a 'gradual decline in the standard of presentation'.¹⁴ Wakelin also identifies two scribes, whose work he divides according to a distribution similar but not equivalent to that found by Greene: A. ff. 11r-41r, ff. 41v-42r (main text), ff. 42v-48r; B. f. 41v (bottom), f. 42r (corrections); ff. 48r-61v.¹⁵ The identification of the two scribal hands made by Wakelin appears to me to be accurate. Scribe A's mixed anglicana script belongs to the second half of the fifteenth century, but scribe B's is harder to date. The mix of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century letter shapes suggests that this scribe may have continued to

¹³ *EEC*, p. 317.

¹⁴ Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p. 63.

¹⁵ This means that scribe A wrote songs E1-E62 and B wrote E63-E77, as well as the burden and first stanza of E57. Wakelin's article includes other descriptive details about the manuscript including an account of its complex foliation and collation (I-IV6, unclear from here but seems to continue V8, VI12, VII12, wants 10-12), and the watermarks on ff. 14, 20 and 23-5, pp. 33, 42-3. Scribe B also corrects parts of scribe A's work, most significantly adding an English burden to E48 (bottom of f. 34v).

write the anthology during the first half of the sixteenth century. The book was certainly in use during this period as it has been censored in accordance with ideological changes that followed the Reformation, especially the rejection of Thomas Becket's sanctification. One stanza and a whole carol in praise of St Thomas of Canterbury (E19, 5 and E48) have been crossed out (although so neatly as to allow the words to be read easily). Scribe B worked on the manuscript before this censorship took place as, although E48 was written by scribe A, scribe B has added a simple English burden to it as an alternative to the Latin one provided.

The difficulty in firmly identifying the distribution of the two scribes' work may have arisen because the manuscript has been produced discontinuously, with many short scribal stints rather than clear blocks of writing by each scribe. The opening five songs, for example, are written in the first writing shift in a style distinct from the songs that follow, and contain three of the book's four Latin songs.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 3.2

Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. e.1, f. 11r

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As seen in Figure 3.2, the writing here is regular and carefully arranged, so the manuscript might be expected to continue in the style of Sloane. However, while the anthology maintains overall consistency in the form, language and subject matter, it is visually variable, and scribe A often fits in the texts with minimal

concern for constructing an attractive layout, as seen in Figure 3.3, nine folios after the page shown in Figure 3.2.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 3.3

Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. e. 1, f. 20r

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After the first quire, scribe A fits more lines onto the pages. Figure 3.2 shows a page with eighteen lines, and the page in Figure 3.3 has twenty-six. From song

E6 the scribe begins one song immediately below the one above, whereas the anthology's first five songs each begin on a new side. For the last few songs scribe B resumes the practice of beginning new songs at the head of the pages (E72-E77).

As with Sloane, the manuscript appears to have been copied from a number of exemplars of different sizes, suggested by changes in writing patterns, type of material and dialect. The different shifts in which the anthology was written are clearly visible from changes of ink, format and material, and many of the changes are likely to have coincided with changes of exemplar. Mistakes where the scribe anticipates the next line (for example, E14, 1.4 and 4.4) suggest that written sources were used. These were of various types as some sections of the manuscript include information that is not found elsewhere, as in the notation given for songs E55 and E56 and the tunes suggested for songs E61 and E62 (a line of music is also given for E65). As will be detailed below, the dialect varies from song to song to a degree not equalled in Sloane or St John's. This suggests that in producing this book, the writers may have been inclined to reproduce their written sources with relatively little intervention. Sporadic groupings occur in the manuscript also suggestive of different exemplars, for instance the lullabies and nativity songs of ff. 17v-21v, three successive songs in praise of St. John the Evangelist on ff. 39v-41r, and the anti-feminist sequence on ff. 54v-59v. The shifts vary in size from single songs to longer sequences including one of twenty-six songs (E7-E32, nineteen of which are in carol form) and one of thirteen (E33-E45, ten of which are in carol form), suggesting lengthier exemplars, themselves

carol collections.¹⁶ The shifts inside the anthology give the book a degree of dynamism, as it developed over time and passed from one writer to another.

Greene argues that the manuscript was written in Beverley Minster, Yorkshire and again made the identification on the grounds of dialect, which Greene describes as ‘East Midland with some northern forms’, and of favoured saints: Beverley was dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, who receives three songs in his honour in the book. Greene goes on:

The generous selection of convivial poetry and especially the satire on abbots and monks in the Goliardic ‘Bonum vinum cum sapore’ accord well with the life of the prosperous and by no means ascetic canons of the college at Beverley. No other MS. except Balliol 354 has correspondences with so many of the known carol MSS. This indicates a place of much intercourse with other houses, and Beverley in the fifteenth century was a place of great importance... The fact that the carol to St. Thomas of Canterbury in this MS. ([*EEC*] No. 115) and the St. Thomas stanza of [*EEC*] No. 103 A b are defaced indicates that the book was in an institution continuing through the Reformation, such as Beverley Minster, rather than a monastery.¹⁷

The allocation, although confidently presented, is even less sustainable than that made for Sloane and, rather than reflecting any substantial evidence, it is characteristic of hypotheses offered in response to the desire to find fixed points of origin for medieval literary manuscripts. In this case, Greene’s initial identification of the dialect is misleading, as *LALME* identifies scribe A (according to Greene’s designations) as writing in Norfolk dialect. The language of the manuscript is not, however, constant and will be addressed in detail below. In a manuscript compiled from numerous exemplars groups of songs in praise of particular saints cannot reliably indicate where the larger anthology was made, and the song ‘Bonum vinum cum sapore’ does not rule out a monastic origin,

¹⁶ New shifts appear to begin at E1 (burden of E3 written in a different ink), E6, E7, E33, E46, E48 (first burden added by later corrector), E51, E53, E56 (burden and first stanza of E57 added by later scribe), E58 (burden of E59 in different ink), E60, E63, E64, E65, E66 and E68.

¹⁷ *EEC*, p. 318.

particularly as it derives from a parodic lyric commonly found in monastic manuscripts and described by Martha Bayless as ‘probably the single most popular parody composed in the Middle Ages’.¹⁸

Both Sloane and Eng. poet. show signs of having been made from numerous smaller exemplars, and St. John’s may illustrate one form these took. It is the smallest of the three anthologies, measuring 145 X 100mm and consisting of a single quire originally made of sixteen paper folios but now missing the first and most of the final three pages. The cursive anglicana scripts are the main evidence for dating the manuscript to the second half of the fifteenth century. The quire is preserved in its medieval wrapper, a thick piece of parchment into which the pages are sewn and that encloses the manuscript fully. A crease still running down the parchment shows that the manuscript was once folded in half lengthwise. In appearance, St John’s is the messiest of the three anthologies as the hands are cramped and irregular and the paper is extensively damaged through rubbing, tearing and staining. There is no colour or decoration beyond the conventional rhyme braces. Two scribes are responsible for the manuscript’s main text and alternate regularly throughout, sometimes both contributing to the writing of a single song, suggesting that both scribes were working on the collection together.¹⁹

The collection now contains seventeen complete songs, and four fragments on the first and last three folios. Of the complete songs, fifteen are carols, twelve are entirely in Middle English and five are macaronic. Religious or moral themes prevail, and particularly songs associated with the religious feasts

¹⁸ Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 109. The song is discussed in Chapter 9.

¹⁹ Hand A: J1, J7, J8, J12 (from l. 4), J13-J15, J16 (‘Nowell’ only), J18-J21 (f. 1r top, 3v bottom, 4r, 4v top, 7v bottom, 8r-9v, 10r top, 10v ‘Nowell’ only, 12r-14v); hand B: J2-J6, J9-J11, J12 (ll. 1-3), J16-J17 (the rest).

of Christmas season, although there are also general convivial songs (J1 and J5) and a carol in the voice of a woman regretting her seduction by a clerk (J7). The carols are laid out in the same manner as those in the other two anthologies. That the manuscript was in use is suggested by the way a contemporary hand has written a few lines from English and Latin songs on the parchment wrapper.

The wrapper together with the worn, torn and stained state of the manuscript and its cheap appearance encouraged Robbins to identify the book as a 'minstrel collection'.²⁰ Taylor, sceptical of 'the myth of the minstrel manuscript', admits that there is a possibility that St. John's is 'the genuine wanderer's copy, a torn and battered collection of lyrics hastily written down at different times and then... shoved into a pack or saddlebag.'²¹ However, he points out that the Latin is surprisingly good if this is the case. Wakelin counters the suggestion that St John's is a 'wanderer's copy' by noting that the alternation between two scribes, particularly where there are signs that work has been interrupted and resumed, suggests that the book was produced in a static environment, such as a parish church. In itself the manuscript contains no firm evidence to settle this dispute.

By contrast with the dispute and general lack of information about the origins of all three anthologies, there has been a longstanding critical consensus on their use as songbooks, only recently countered in part by Wakelin, who argues that the books may have been sung from but are nevertheless embedded in a written, even 'bookish' tradition. The direct musical evidence for recognising the texts as songs is not extensive, but all of the manuscripts do contain songs that are extant with notation in other sources. Sloane contains two songs with

²⁰ *SL*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

²¹ Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p. 64.

correspondences to notated versions in two manuscripts.²² St John's contains one carol that exists elsewhere in a monophonic version.²³ Eng. poet. has eight unnotated songs extant with notation in nine different sources.²⁴ Eng. poet. clearly has the strongest links with the traditions of written music: it contains three songs with notation, and two for which tunes are indicated. However, the evidence that the books are songbooks does not rely exclusively upon written notation. Musical literacy was a skill even more specialised than verbal literacy, as it still is, and the tunes of songs have never been solely reliant upon written transmission. This is clearly demonstrated by the large quantities of unnotated printed song produced in the second half of the sixteenth century, where song lyrics were disseminated through literate apparatus, but not their tunes. In commenting on the number of broadside ballads with headings instructing singers to perform the words to the tune of 'Fortune, my Foe', Tessa Watt notes the 'primacy of words over musical variety' in this period.²⁵

The manuscripts' texts clamour with reference to their sung performance: they contain fifty-nine uses of the noun 'song', and twenty-five texts in Sloane contain the word 'song' or one of its related forms,²⁶ seven in St John's,²⁷ and thirty in Eng. poet.²⁸ Neither are the verbal marks of song limited to such explicit reference, but to compile all the references to voice, feasting and occasion for

²² S50 and S64, both in Arch. Selden. B.28, and Trinity O.3.58.

²³ J8 in CUL, MS Additional 5943.

²⁴ E10, E14, E24, E31, E44, E49, E54, E76 in Arch. Selden. B.28; Trinity O.3.58; BL, Additional 5665; BL, Additional MS 5666; BL, Royal App. MS 58; Egerton 3301; University of Glasgow, Hunterian Museum, MS 83; CUL Ee.1.12; and the *The Shearmen and Taylor's Play* in Coventry *Corpus Christi Play*.

²⁵ Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 65-6.

²⁶ S1, S4, S6, S11, S13, S21, S25, S27, S28, S37, S38, S39, S40, S43, S48, S50, S51, S57, S60, S67, S68, S69, S72, S73 and S74.

²⁷ J2, J3, J7, J8, J11, J12 and J21.

²⁸ E3, E10, E12, E14, E15, E16, E19, E23, E26, E27, E35, E38, E41, E43, E44, E46, E51, E52, E54, E56, E59, E60, E61, E62, E64, E65, E70, E74, E75 and E76.

celebration involves reproducing such large quantities of the anthologies that it begins to suggest that proving these books are songbooks may be redundant. Beyond this there are the continual quotations from sung liturgy, and the frequent use of burdens suggestive of sung delivery, for example through the repetition of a word or a very short phrase. This occurs in thirteen burdens in Sloane, four in St John's and twenty in Eng. poet.²⁹ Alternatively a single syllable is repeated, presumably to denote a melismatic delivery, such as where 'Nowel' is written 'Nowel el el el el' (for example, in S24). This occurs six times in each of the anthologies.³⁰ Texts such as these gesture towards vocal delivery, as does the carol's form, which Chapter 2 explained was firmly connected with song.

However, there is no straightforward relation between the anthologies' texts and the sound of their performance. Vocal performance is inevitably hypothetical in relation to the material page: there is no certainty that these particular books were sung from, or that their texts were committed to memory for later performance, and there is no reason why some individuals should not have used the books as reading material, with no intention of singing. The books' relations to performance will be analysed in detail in Chapter 6.

The three songbooks have their unique features and histories yet are remarkably similar to one another in many ways and in particular in their contents. Although St John's is smaller, the texts anthologised show a proportionally similar mix of subjects, languages and forms. The two longer anthologies include a small quantity of Latin songs, and all three include English and macaronic song to similar extents. The bulk of their contents is religious, and

²⁹ S7, S9, S10, S13, S14, S17, S23, S43, S50, S53, S61, S63 and S74; J3, J14, J17 and J18; E1, E3, E4, E10, E13, E16, E21, E25, E31, E51, E56, E58, E62, E66, E67, E70, E72, E74, E75 and E76.

³⁰ S19, S24, S45, S46, S57 and S60; J3, J4, J6, J8, J10 and J18; E11, E22, E37, E38, E45 and E60.

especially related to the festive season, with songs of moral advice alongside, but each manuscript includes a smaller quantity of songs on other subjects, especially secular narratives, women and feasting. There are no love songs and no French. To some extent the exact content of such books is fortuitous, dependent upon what happened to be available, but the repeated combinations of text can also be explained by the needs of the manuscripts' makers and users in compiling a balance of song for festive celebration, and the way in which the carol corpus developed to meet those needs. Together this unique group of anonymous, largely unnotated songbooks illuminates the carol's fifteenth-century success, but also, individually, they represent some aspects of the wider range and development of song in the period.

All three anthologies are resistant to speculation about their exact origins, yet they are tethered in other ways within textual and regional contexts, through their dialects, which indicate Norfolk associations for all three, and through the many correspondences between their songs and other manuscripts. Songs appearing on the pages of these manuscripts can be found in versions elsewhere. First of all, these textual connections link the anthologies to one another. One text appears in all three, and Sloane and Eng. poet share a further seven texts.³¹ St John's also contains another text corresponding to one in Sloane, and a further one corresponding to an Eng. poet. song. Sometimes the songs are reproduced closely but they often vary greatly while retaining enough similarity to signal a relationship. Beyond immediate textual correspondences, the songs are also connected to one another through shared themes and language, and recurrent phrases and rhyme-words. Perhaps they shared music. Attention to

³¹ All details of correspondences are summarised in Appendix B.

the manuscripts plays a role in developing our responsiveness to these texts' capacity to change, how the songs were broken apart and re-created, developed and shared. Versions of the same songs are found represented in different sources in widely varying ways, complicating any attempts to link directly presentation of the verses and their generic identity. The songs' textual networks will be analysed in Chapter 4, but first this chapter will establish connections on a larger scale, between the manuscripts and how their appearance, production and strategies compare with related books.

II. Further Manuscripts and Printed Books

All three anthologies have extensive connections with further manuscripts (and printed material) from the period: versions of twenty-one vernacular songs in Sloane appear in twenty-four other sources, versions of five songs in St John's appear in another eight sources, and versions of thirty-two songs in Eng. poet. appear in thirty other sources.³² The books that survive to provide evidence of the anthologies' textual networks represent a fairly comprehensive range of sources in which carols are preserved, including author collections, miscellanies, marginalia, music books and printed books. A typology of such sources shows how difficult it is to align genres directly with the organisation of contemporary manuscripts, because these have such variety. The manuscripts do not define genres in simple ways, but they do enable experiences of the way their texts were produced and received. Furthermore, the manuscripts surrounding the

³² One stanza of E64 exists independently in many manuscripts but is excluded from these figures. Latin songs are dealt with separately, partially because their distribution patterns are different (international, connected with liturgy) and partially because their details are less well indexed.

anthologies assist in clarifying the character of these books through revealing what was common to other carol sources and what was unique to these.

There are five extant fifteenth-century anthologies containing unnotated carols in double figures, including Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's. The remaining two are collections organised around the poetic work of single writers. The earlier is Bod., MS Douce 302, containing the religious verse of John Audelay, a retired chantry priest who lived at Haghmond Abbey near Shrewsbury in the early fifteenth century.³³ Douce 302 is an attractive manuscript dated around 1426, measuring 275 X 200mm and written on parchment in ruled columns with occasional illustrations, coloured initials, rubrics, catchwords and quire signatures throughout and a consistent style. The poems may have been written at Audelay's dictation, or be a copy. All but one of the manuscript's twenty-six carols (all religious or moral) are found in a single section, surrounded by Audelay's longer verse compositions, and two of them are versions of carols also occurring in Sloane, 'A babe is born al of a may' (*EEC* 122, S57) and 'Wolcum be þou heuene kyng' (*EEC* 7, S68).

The second author collection, CUL, MS Ee.1.12, is dated 1492 and contains only one textual link with the anthologies, a version of the nativity carol in Eng. poet. beginning 'In bedlem þat fayer cyte' (*EEC* 21, E49).³⁴ The song is, however, a rather exceptional text within CUL, Ee.1.12, which contains few

³³ The manuscript is edited in *The Poems*, ed. Whiting. The most recent study of the book is Fein, 'Good Ends'.

³⁴ The best study of the manuscript is Karl Reichl, 'James Ryman's Lyrics and the Ryman Manuscript: A Reappraisal', in *Bookmarks from the Past: Studies in Early English Language and Literature in Honour of Helmut Gneuss*, ed. Lucia Kornexl and Ursula Lenker (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 195-227. The whole manuscript is edited by Julius Zupitza, 'Die Gedichte des Franziskaners Jakob Ryman', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 89 (1892), pp. 167-338 and 'Anmerkungen zu Jakob Rymans Gedichten', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 93 (1894), 281-398 etc. See also David L. Jeffrey, 'James Ryman and the Fifteenth-Century Carol' in *Fifteenth Century Studies*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1984), pp. 303-20.

correspondences with other manuscripts. The book consists entirely of short verse, dominated by the carol form and concluding with a colophon that reads: 'Explicit liber ymptorum et canticorum quem composuit Frater Iacobus Ryman'. Ryman was a Franciscan friar at the Canterbury friary, and may have been involved in writing or correcting the anthology, a medium sized (200 X 140mm) parchment book written in three hands, but dominated by one (ff. 11r-80v). It contains 166 pieces of religious and moral verse in Middle English and Latin, including 119 carols. The layout varies a little and there is no use of colour or decoration, but the main hand is neat and arranges the songs carefully with appropriate rhyme braces for all the many different verse forms employed, producing a collection that is methodical in appearance, compared by David Jeffrey to a modern hymnbook.³⁵

Although the principles of authorship in these books may not be equivalent to modern authorship since both writers drew from anonymous religious verse and incorporated and re-wrote pre-existing texts, the major difference between these two books and the three anonymous anthologies is the existence of named writers responsible for the material. These named writers explicitly manage the books' creative and organising principles.³⁶ Yet because both books share texts with the anonymous anthologies the distinction is more complicated than would be allowed by a dichotomy between anonymous and authored, decided by the mere presence or absence of a colophon. Is the distinction between the ways these manuscripts are organised as books repeated within the texts themselves? All manuscripts are necessarily individualised

³⁵ Jeffrey, 'James Ryman', p. 305.

³⁶ On these and similarly organised manuscripts, see A. S. G. Edwards, 'Fifteenth-century Middle English verse author collections' in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie and Ralph Hanna (London: The British Library, 2000), pp. 101-112.

productions, the unique creations of their writers whether described as scribes, compilers or authors, but because different kinds of control can be exercised by scribes over their material the way in which the anthologies' writers interact with their material will be explored in Chapter 5.

Ryman's and Audelay's books are unique among those sources connected with Sloane, St John's and Eng. poet. in being organised around a single author figure. By far the most common manuscript type containing correspondences with the anthologies' songs can be described loosely as 'miscellanies'. The term has been subject to extensive debate, partially because it can encompass so many medieval manuscripts, in which combinations of different materials are continually to be met with. Alternatives to 'miscellany', such as 'commonplace book', 'household library' and 'anthology', depend upon the critic's interpretation of the book's organising principles.³⁷ 'Miscellany' is sometimes objected to as indicating an absence of organising principles, but is used here, without that judgement, to refer simply to a book of mixed contents.

The manuscript with which the three anthologies share the most correspondences is amongst the best known miscellanies, Balliol College, Oxford, MS 354, with which St John's shares one text, Sloane eight and Eng. poet. a remarkable nineteen texts. The book was compiled by Richard Hill, a grocer of London, in the early sixteenth century over a period of about thirty

³⁷ See *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996); Julia Boffey and J. J. Thompson, 'Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ed. Derek Pearsall and Jeremy Griffiths, pp. 279-315; and *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*, ed. Gisela Guddat-Figge (Munich: W. Fink, 1976), pp. 26-7. The debate was recently reviewed by Derek Pearsall in 'The Whole Book: Late Medieval English MS Miscellanies and their Modern Interpreters', in *Imagining the Book*, ed. Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 17-29.

years, with the last datable entry being 1536.³⁸ It is largely written in Hill's hand, on paper measuring 290 X 115mm.

³⁸ See *Songs*, ed. Dyboski; Collier, 'Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century Manuscript Miscellanies'; Boklund-Lagopoulou, '*I have a yong suster*'; Collier, 'Richard Hill'; Alexandra Gillespie, 'Balliol MS. 354: Histories of the Book at the End of the Middle Ages', *Poetica*, 60 (2003), 47-63; *EEC*, pp. 320-1.

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Figure 3.4

Balliol College, Oxford, MS 354, p. 465

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This shape, known as a ‘holster book’, is a convenient format for setting out verse and was once connected with minstrel use but is alternatively understood to have been produced for account books.³⁹ Balliol 354 contains courtesy books in English and French, a London chronicle, useful information, and a wide variety of Middle English verse, including *The Seven Sages of Rome*, selections of *Confessio Amantis*, Thomas More’s ‘Fortune’ and other lyrics. Heather Collier has shown how Hill drew much of his material from printed sources, in particular from Richard Arnold’s *Chronicle or The Customs of London* (1502 and 1521), and put the manuscript together from a number of previously independent sections that he produced at different times. The manuscript contains seventy-eight carols, all but five of which are written in three groups with very few verses without burdens accompanying them.⁴⁰ The Balliol carols have concordances with a large number of manuscripts, as do many other texts in Hill’s book, suggesting that he drew his material from work circulating in London through the mixed manuscript and print cultures of the period.

Carols singly or in groups turn up frequently in manuscript miscellanies, but Balliol 354 is distinctive in containing such large numbers and Hill appears to have copied from carol anthologies themselves of substantial size. Many of the miscellaneous manuscripts with which Sloane, St John’s and Eng. poet. share texts contain few carols, sometimes only one or two. These include NLS, MS Advocates 19.3.1, a fifteenth-century ‘household library’ that contains three roughly written carols;⁴¹ New Haven, Yale University Library, MS 365, a

³⁹ See *Catalogue*, ed. Guddat-Figge, pp. 30-36. Another example of Middle English verse written in a ‘holster book’ is Bod., MS Ashmole 61 (see *Catalogue*, ed. Guddat-Figge, pp. 249-51). The first substantial collection of ballads, the seventeenth-century Percy Folio, uses the same format.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 2, III.

⁴¹ See *The Heege Manuscript: A Facsimile of National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 2000).

fifteenth-century Suffolk miscellany that includes a play and a single carol; Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Porkington 10, which includes five carols amongst its extensive later fifteenth-century vernacular verse material; and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 306, in which two carols are included with chronicle and religious verse. Not all of the manuscripts with which the anthologies are associated contain carols. Some have textual connections with other types of verse within the books. For example, Sloane contains a pseudo-ballade that appears in the massive Vernon manuscript, a religious anthology whose refrain lyrics appear in a range of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts.⁴² Sloane also contains Latin songs extant in other manuscripts, S36 in liturgical sources and S66 in a wide range of books containing Latin parody and satire, distributed over several centuries and beyond England.⁴³ A single stanza of E2 has a similar textual network to S66.⁴⁴ These sources lead into an international tradition of song writing connected to the anthologies but with many differences, highlighting the predominantly native written tradition of the anthologies' songs.

Many miscellanies with correspondences to the anthologies include vernacular verse alongside other kinds of material, such as theological or astrological treatises and medical recipes. For example, two carols are written together with a prayer in BL, Harley MS 7358, a theological miscellany.

⁴² The Vernon manuscript is Bod., MS Eng. poet. a.1; other manuscripts containing versions of S41, are Bod., MS Ashmole 343; BL, Cotton MS Caligula A.ii; and BL, Additional MS 22283 (the Simeon manuscript); Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.9.38; Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 143.

⁴³ S36 is Walther 14774, for which see *Analectica Hymnica Medii Aevi*, XX, *Cantiones et Muteti*, ed. Guido Maria Dreves (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1895), pp. 90-1. S66 is Walther 1098, also in Trinity College, Oxford MS 34, f. 136r; Volterra, MS 100 (8653), ff. 13r-4r; and connected to Walther nos 11004, 5274, 627, 18990; discussed in Bayless, *Parody*, pp. 105-109, 346-362.

⁴⁴ The first stanza of E2 is Walther 2225, also in British Library, Additional MS 34200, ff. 59v-60r; Bod., MS Rawlinson A.384, f. 116v; Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 12, f. 77v; and connected to Walther 20365. See Chapter 9.

Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, MS 383, a mid-fifteenth-century miscellany compiled by an Oxford student, contains French and Latin practice letters and grammatical notes, some music and several carols, including a version of one carol in Sloane in praise of St Thomas of Canterbury (*EEC* 114, S46). These manuscripts are a useful counterbalance to the anthologies as they show that while carols could be collected according to generic principles, they could also be comfortably recorded alongside very different material and that they were dispersed among various types of manuscript as well as collected together.

Middle English religious verse shifted easily between prayer, poetry and song, as seen, for example in Bod., MS Ashmole 189, a composite manuscript, which in one section contains treatises on astronomy and medicine copied with a small collection of carols and other religious verse. The manuscript, produced in the fifteenth century, is associated with two Somerset Benedictine monasteries in the early sixteenth century. The religious verses include a version of the nativity carol beginning ‘Saluator mundi domine’ (*EEC* 86, S23/E13) and *The Fifteen O’s*, a piece of verse on the Passion that in both its original Latin and in translations was popular as part of devotional practice and considered to be efficacious in winning time off purgatory.⁴⁵

A different but related dynamic can be seen on the spare leaves in Bod., MS Laud Misc. 601, following an illuminated copy of the *Prick of Conscience*.

At the top of f. 115v is written:

Sauior of þe world saue ous þat by þy cros and by þy blod yow hast
 bouzth ous. lorde god we prayet þe helpe ous.
 ffor al maner yuel temptacoun let a man say þys ywryt abowe. þre tymes
 & at yche tyme mak a cros in his brest and he ssal loue þe lyuerd & holpe
 anon

⁴⁵ See Charity Meier-Ewert, ‘A Middle English Version of the “Fifteen Oes”’, *Modern Philology*, 68 (1971), pp. 355-361.

The triple repetition of ‘ous’ suggests deliberately structured lines, themselves repeated three times in what could be interpreted as an inscription of poetry, prayer or incantation. Below this is written an incomplete text of a carol (*EEC* 413b, *IMEV* 1399). The first and last pages of this manuscript are covered in fifteenth-century scribbles, including some roughly written music with Latin words. Several hands have practised writing in different styles by writing the words ‘Ego sum bonus puer quem deus amat’. The carol, written in an extremely cursive hand, is the complaint of a schoolboy, written in a careless prose paragraph:

Hey y y y wat helpyt me thow y sey nay a Munday
in þe morenyg van y vp rise at seue a cloke at my deuse
to scole y must in eny wyse *Quoþ* y wat helpyed me
thow y seyde nay my master loke aboute he canat finde
me in al þe tyme y y wat hellpid me thou y sey nay
my mast loke as he *were* made wer haste þou be þou lityl

The text comes to a halt mid-sentence, although there is more space available, as though the writer was interrupted, or grew bored. The song’s theme appears to be particularly appropriate if this manuscript, whose main text is one of religious instruction, was given to schoolchildren both to read and to scribble in to practise writing.

‘A Munday in þe morenyg’ is an engagingly vivid example of a carol surviving in the spaces around a book’s main text. Several of the texts with connection to the anthologies’ songs are similar to this, fitted into flyleaves or margins. BL, Additional MS 31042, one of the fifteenth-century poetic anthologies produced by Yorkshireman Robert Thornton, contains as marginal

notes two texts with concordances to Sloane and Eng. poet.⁴⁶ Similarly, carols connected to the anthologies turn up on spare leaves at the end of the main texts in BL, Royal MS 20 A. i (after a French text of *Mandeville's Travels*) and BL, Harley MS 2330 (following English translations of works by St. Augustine). A version of 'When nettuls in wynter bryng forth rosys red' (EEC 402, E59) is written on the last pages of a copy of Trevisa's translation of Bartholomeus *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1495 (BL, IB55242, STC 1536). These books reflect the practice of writing short verse on spare pages at the end of professionally, or semi-professionally, produced texts of single works, demonstrating the interactive relationships readers had with their books and the freedom with which song texts could move between different types of written formats, often dependent upon the chance impulse of a reader and writer for their preservation.

In direct contrast with these fugitive texts are the carols systematically gathered together in the grandest of the formats in which versions of the anthologies' songs can be found: the polyphonic songbooks. Sloane and Eng. poet both contain songs with versions in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.3.58 (the Trinity roll) and Bod., MS Arch. Selden. B.26 (the Selden. songbook), two of the earliest major notated carol collections. In all, about a fifth of carols survive in notated settings, mostly in six manuscript sources: three were written in the fifteenth century (the Trinity roll, the Selden. songbook; BL, Egerton MS 3307), one begun at the end of the fifteenth century and continued in the sixteenth (BL, Additional MS 5665 [Ritson's manuscript]) and a further two in the sixteenth (BL, Additional MSS 5465 [the Fayrfax manuscript] and 31922

⁴⁶ EEC 21 and 157. See *Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript: British Library MS Additional 31042*, ed. John J. Thompson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

[Henry VIII's manuscript]).⁴⁷ Like the unnotated carol manuscripts, each of these books has its unique features and history, although the sophisticated music they contain connects them all securely with trained, professional production and use within the choirs at ecclesiastical institutions and the Tudor court. Carols are compiled with other types of songs in all of these sources, including Latin songs in the Selden. songbook and liturgical music in Egerton 3307 and Ritson's manuscript, although kept separate from the carols. The later part of Ritson's manuscript and the two sixteenth-century books contain a wide variety of English, Latin and French song as well as their carol repertoires. There are many correspondences of words and music within these manuscripts and fewer with texts in unnotated sources, such as Sloane and Eng. poet. This is partially explained by the obvious differences in the type of writing and reading skills involved in the production and use of polyphonic songbooks compared with unnotated song. The connections between the two types of collection are explored in Chapter 6, together with their relationship to fifteenth-century musical performance.

Important manuscripts such as the Trinity roll and the Selden. songbook are imposing in appearance, especially by contrast with the modest proportions of Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's. The music and texts are decoratively represented with extensive use of colour on durable parchment. However, not all the notated songs with connections to the anthologies survive in grand books. A version of a lullaby in Eng. poet. (*EEC* 150, E10) survives in BL, Royal MS Appendix 58, a plainly written early sixteenth-century music book measuring

⁴⁷ These are edited by John Stevens in *MC; Music at the Court of Henry VIII*, Musica Britannica 18 (London: Stainer and Bell Ltd, 1969); and *Early Tudor Songs and Carols*, Musica Britannica 36 (London: Stainer and Bell Ltd, 1975); and examined by Stevens in *Music and Poetry*. Most notated medieval manuscripts can be viewed in full or part on the excellent Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music, at <http://www.diamm.ac.uk/>.

150 X 200mm, which includes four carols among other English and French songs, instrumental and liturgical music. Another of the Eng. poet. lullabies (*EEC* 151, E14) occurs in an even plainer collection, BL, Additional MS 5666, a small early fifteenth-century manuscript of twenty-two folios containing Latin grammar, accounts and other notes, as well as a few folios of plainly written notated songs in English, French and Latin.⁴⁸ Among these songs are three English carols: one set for two voices, one monophonic, and the Eng. poet. lullaby, of which only the burden is set to music. Another version of the song survives in another early fifteenth-century version, in CUL, MS Additional 5943. This manuscript is very similar to BL, Additional 5666. It also includes a short sequence of plainly written notated songs in three languages among miscellaneous notes. The manuscript is mostly made up of Latin sermon notes, with unnotated songs scattered through the manuscript, including the lullaby, and a more concentrated sequence of trilingual songs in a notated section of the manuscript, among which is a monophonic setting of another lullaby carol found in St John's (*EEC* 149, J8). These books show that notated song, even polyphonic song, was not confined to imposing manuscripts produced for display. The carols were not inherently a genre of high or low status, and this could vary with their treatment in manuscript and performance. It is the less polished musical notebooks' style of including pieces of black-void notation to accompany songs where this was of interest or available to the writer that can be observed in the three notated songs in Eng. poet.

The last major type of written source with which songs in the anthologies have correspondences are the printed carol books. These collections in some

⁴⁸ Nothing is known of the origins of this intriguing manuscript, but its language is north-eastern, seen, for example, in its use of *es* and *hes* (is), *sal* (shall), *inmang* (among) and *flech* (flesh).

respects resemble more closely the unnotated collections than any of the manuscript types surveyed above. Their similarity lies in their deliberate collection of English and macaronic song lyrics, dimensions, presentation and selection of material. Printed carols mostly survive in collections that are now fragmentary. One book in the Huntington library, with textual correspondences with Sloane and Eng. poet., contains parts of six formerly separate booklets in a forty-eight page collection, starting with a complete eight leaf pamphlet printed in 1548 containing four carols and another song, entitled *Christmas carolles newley Inprynted... at London in the Powltry by Rychard Kele* (STC 5204.5). This is followed by another pamphlet that once had eight leaves but is now missing its first. It has, however, been identified as printed in 1528 by Treveris (STC 5204.3). The rest of the book contains pages from a further four pamphlets, and the pages of the collection measure 140 X 90mm, making them similar in dimensions to the manuscript anthologies. Although they are fairly plain, some woodcut illustrations are used: a crucifixion scene, a tailpiece design with a cherub, and two similar images of Christ in judgement. The layout used for the carols has some variations but generally paraph signs precede the burden and all stanzas except the first; repetition of the burden is indicated between stanzas by an incipit followed by '&c'; there are no gaps between stanzas and only sporadic gaps between songs, although 'Finis' often marks the end; some texts leave a line between the burden and the first stanzas, whereas others use an enlarged initial to begin the first stanza. This relatively standardised format substitutes that found in the manuscripts.

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Figure 3.5

Huntington Library, *Christmas carolles newly inprynted*, STC 5204.5, pp. 28-29

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Outside of this compilation few printed carol sources survive and none with correspondences to the anthologies. There are, however, a few further pages, separated from their original sources, to testify to the printed production of carols: these include a single sheet with ‘A caroll of huntynge’ on one side and a boar’s head carol on the other, with a colophon, ‘Thus endeth the Christmasse carolels newly enprinted at London in the fletestrete at the sygne of the sonne by Wynkyn de Worde. The yere of our lorde M.D.xxi’ (STC 5204). Four extant

leaves printed by W. Middleton in 1547 are also entitled 'Christmas carolles newly inprinted' (*STC* 5205). The regularity of these witnesses to the printed production of carols, totalling eight separate collections, may have been developed from the model of written anthologies, such as Sloane and Eng. poet., or, more closely, from the smaller collections from which they were copied. A few carols do appear in print in other types of sources: the carol form is found in broadsides, one carol occurs in a collection of short verse by John Skelton (*STC* 22604), another in a fifty-four leaf book dated 1530 containing the bass parts of twenty through-set songs (*STC* 22924). It was presumably one of a set as the songs are described on the first page as being for four or three parts.

The printed carol booklets are an intriguing conclusion to the form's popularity and the anthologies' textual networks. Their existence suggests that new technologies did not harm these songs' circulation, the decline in which may be better explained by the traumatic changes the Reformation brought to communal worship and festivities. It should be noted, however, that the idea of the decline of the carol has been encouraged by Greene's anthologising principles, closing at 1550, and a simple lack of research into the form beyond this date.⁴⁹ The printed booklets provide evidence of a market for booklets containing short sequences of song lyrics such as may have been common in manuscript form in the fifteenth-century but vulnerable to destruction over time. Many of these sequences appear to have been made up exclusively or predominantly of songs in carol form, the distinctive generic identity of which was settled by the sixteenth century, during which carol collections were consistently labelled in a manner consistent with Greene's definition.

⁴⁹ Carols flow over the medieval and early modern disciplinary divide in a way that has not yet been satisfactorily explored. Songs in carol form do continue to appear in the second half of the sixteenth century. See Chapter 9, n. 20.

By comparison the generic identity of the songs in the anthologies is less clearly labelled and their compilation, particularly for St John's and Eng. poet., more obviously dynamic as it took place over time through interaction between different scribes working with numerous exemplars. Nevertheless, the books show that these songs were being collected, perhaps as early as the end of the fourteenth century. Several of the miscellanies with connections to the anthologies contain sequences of short Middle English verse of various types, suggesting that they may have been compiled from previously separate booklet units or copied from such items, as has been suggested for Sloane and Eng. poet.⁵⁰ The circulation of verse in booklets was key to enabling widespread circulation, although they would have been extremely vulnerable to destruction over time.⁵¹ The compilation of groups of songs of the same formal type together in these booklets appears to have played a significant role in the establishment and circulation of the carol, a form that was especially successful under the fifteenth-century and early sixteenth-century written traditions. The next two chapters will examine this further through closer attention to the dynamics of songs' textual networks and the role of the carol's form in its circulation.

The range of different types of manuscripts from different origins introduced in this section situates the three anthologies in an archival context: in

⁵⁰ The collection of short Middle English verse of mixed types in booklets, particularly through commercial production, has been extensively discussed: Pamela R. Robinson, 'The "Booklet": A Self-Contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts', *Codicologica*, 3 (1980), 46-69; Thompson, 'The Textual Background'; Hanna, *Pursuing History*, especially pp. 22-32; A. S. G. Edwards, 'John Shirley and the Emulation of Courtly Culture', in *The Court and Cultural Diversity*, ed. Mullally and Thompson, pp. 309-17; *The Heege Manuscript*, ed. Hardman.

⁵¹ Several of the articles listed above mention this. On the likelihood that large numbers of cheap, small-scale manuscripts circulated in the medieval period and have subsequently been lost see, David L. d'Avray, 'Printing, mass communication and religious reformation in the Middle Ages and after', in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700*, ed. Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 50-70; and David L. d'Avray *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris Before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

relation to what remains to us in libraries, but also showing contrasting ways different versions of songs were archived within books. The next section will situate the anthologies differently, in association with a geographical region, Norfolk. The medieval books surviving from this area are still the most significant means for placing the anthologies, but introducing a specific region raises questions about how the anthologies belonged within their communities, networks that can be described not only as textual but also as geographical and cultural.

III. Norfolk

In his recent review of medieval literary manuscript studies, Ralph Hanna argued that in making the necessary ‘cultural move’ from palaeographical details and archival studies into literary culture, ‘one important holistic method of investigation concerns trying to link books and their texts with specific (almost by definition local) literary communities’.⁵² The reason Hanna gives for this is that before print, literature lacked a national tradition, being subject instead to the idiosyncrasies of manuscript dispersal. Sloane, St John’s and Eng. poet. are the only extant manuscripts of their type and all three can be associated with a single region, suggesting that a local literary community may have played a significant role in their production. The final section of this chapter will examine the evidence for linking the manuscripts to East Anglia, and more specifically with Norfolk. The song lyrics insist upon the context of Christian festive community, as, for example, in these lines from a nativity carol in Sloane:

⁵² Ralph Hanna, ‘Analytical Survey 4: Middle English Manuscripts and the Study of Literature’, *New Medieval Literatures*, 4, ed. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 243-264 (p. 248).

Nowel nowel in þis halle
make merye I prey 3ou alle (S6, 5.1-2)

Therefore, exploring the area's fifteenth-century religious culture is important for facilitating a rich reading of these songs.

The evidence for associating the anthologies with Norfolk is primarily dialectal. As stated in Chapter 1, the dialect of a manuscript is not a certain indicator of where it was produced. Scribes could move from their home region and use their accustomed language in a new location,⁵³ and alternatively scribes may faithfully reproduce an exemplar that was itself produced in a different region. However, the team behind the *LALME* project argue convincingly that the more common practice was for scribes to translate a text into their own dialect, particularly when writing in cursive script and producing a text for personal or local use.⁵⁴

The dialects of all three manuscripts are located by *LALME* within Norfolk. Both Sloane and St John's exhibit the clearest indicators of Norfolk language, throughout writing *x* for *sh*, especially in *xall/xul* (*shall*) and *xuld* (*should*), and writing *qw* for *wh*, as in *qwat* and *qwan*.⁵⁵ The manuscripts are less consistent in the use of *th* (or *t*) rather than (*g*)*ht* or *3t* for reflex OE **ht**, as in *ryth* (*right*) and *bowth* (*bought*), with a number of ways of representing these words,

⁵³ This mobility may explain the curious discrepancy in the designation in *LALME* of the dialect of CUL, Ee.1.12, the anthology of Canterbury-based Franciscan James Ryman's verses, as characteristic of Leicester.

⁵⁴ See Michael Benskin and Margaret Laing, 'Translations and *Mischsprachen* in Middle English manuscripts', in *So meny people longages and tonges: Philological essays in Scots and mediaeval English presented to Angus McIntosh*, ed. Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh: Middle English Dialect Project, 1981), pp. 55-106; also discussion in General Introduction, *LALME*, 1.

⁵⁵ The language of Sloane is close to that of *Dux Moraud*, to which the script also bears comparison. The play fragment is found with religious verse on Bod., MS Eng. poet. f.2, r, a roll cut from a thirteenth-century assize roll from Norfolk and Suffolk. The play dates to the second quarter of the fifteenth century. See *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS SS 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. c-cxi and 106-113; and *Non-Cycle Plays and The Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 33*, ed. Norman Davis, Leeds Texts and Monographs: Medieval Drama Facsimiles 5 (Leeds: University of Leeds School of English, 1979), pp. 69-72.

including with *th*. The language of these manuscripts is such that the editors of *LALME* are able to locate it precisely on their maps using a full linguistic profile, finding the dialect of Sloane to be characteristic of south Norfolk, close to Thetford, and that of St John's to be northeast Norfolk, northeast of Norwich.⁵⁶

A full profile is not provided for Eng. poet. as the manuscript was judged to be too late for the purposes of the *Atlas*, but the language was localised to Norfolk using analysis of the texts included in Robbins' *Secular Lyrics*, representing a reasonable spread of scribe A's work: E17, E20, E21, E22, E29, E30, E38, E40 and E57.⁵⁷ However, the language in Eng. poet. is not constant and exhibits shifts that coincide with changes of pen and breaks in the copying indicating a change in exemplar. The first significant shift takes place at the start of 'His body is wappyd all in wo' (E33), after a long shift of copying from what may have been a single source, E7-E32. 'His body is wappyd all in wo' exhibits the scribe's first use of *qw* spellings (*qwy*) and the omission of the *z* or *gh* letters, as in *myth*. The texts that follow continue to be littered with stronger dialectal markers than had appeared in the first part of the manuscript: *x* for *sh* appears; *i* sounds are dropped to *e*, for example in *peler* (E37, 5.1). These features appear regularly throughout the second sizeable copying shift, E33-E45.⁵⁸ The texts that follow these do not fall into any similarly substantial groups, but continue to use all of the stronger dialectal markers sporadically, although none are found in the work of scribe B or the last three songs written by scribe A.

⁵⁶ *LALME*, 2, p. 388 (St John's is LP 8680, Grid 540 183; for Sloane see above). The *LALME* editors follow Greene in dividing St John's into four hands, but find only two languages, coinciding with the two scribes' work. Their languages are very similar. Miller carries out a detailed linguistic analysis of Sloane, 'The Poetry of MS Sloane 2593', pp. 38-75.

⁵⁷ I am grateful to Professor Michael Benskin for providing this information and further suggestions.

⁵⁸ Less regionally specific shifts in spelling also suggest a different exemplar is being used. For example, the scribe writes 'yf' in E9, E10, E17, E21 and E30, but 'zyf' in E36, E39, E41 ('yf' appears in E43) and E45; the scribe writes 'hevyn' in E9, E13, E16, E19, E24, E27, E28; 'heune' in E35, 'heun' in E42, 'heunn' in E43.

The language of the first and final parts of the manuscript is not so definitely marked by the region's dialect as the mid-section is but is nevertheless appropriate to the region. The analysis performed by Angus McIntosh included six texts from the earlier section, and only three from the mid-section. The coincidence of changes in language with changes in pen indicates that scribe A reproduced the different dialects he encountered in his exemplars, some of which would naturally be more or less strongly marked by region, or more or less old-fashioned. In any one region a range of forms could co-exist; this is clearly displayed by the variation in the language used by the Paston family, whose letters show the different usages current in fifteenth-century Norfolk. Not only do the family members' spelling systems and vocabularies vary from one another, but individuals can use a number of alternative forms for the same words and sounds all of which were presumably acceptable.⁵⁹ Michael Benskin has argued that a scribe copying exemplars in different dialects current in his own locality might choose not to translate them into his own personal usage, exemplified by his analysis of a fourteenth-century Norfolk manuscript, copied from exemplars using two different usages, both localisable to the West Norfolk and Ely area.⁶⁰ In the case of Eng. poet., there is, however, the added problem of date, especially in the final section of the manuscript, as written English was increasing standardised in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁶¹

⁵⁹ See Norman Davis, 'The Language of the Pastons', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 40 (1954), 119-144.

⁶⁰ 'The Language of the Corpus Compendia' in *Three Receptaria From Medieval England: The languages of medicine in the fourteenth century*, ed. Tony Hunt, with collaboration of Michael Benskin, *Medium Ævum Monographs NS 21* (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2001), pp. 193-230.

⁶¹ See M. L. Samuels, 'Spelling and Dialect in the Late and Post-Middle English Periods', in *So many people longages and tonges*, ed. Benskin and Samuels, pp. 43-54.

The manuscripts show songs, mostly in carol form, circulating in Norfolk dialect. This does not prove that they were copied in Norfolk but it does associate them with the region: either the scribes wrote in their own dialect, or used exemplars written by Norfolk dialect speakers. Eng. poet. scribe A appears to have been less inclined to regularise the language of his exemplars according to his own idiolect than the producers of Sloane and St John's, but his exemplars appear to have been East Anglian and their language did not trouble him. The dialect evidence is strengthened by further connections between the manuscripts and East Anglia. Eng. poet. was found in the 1840s among the Ipswich Corporation Records, suggesting that it could have remained in the area.⁶² Further, one of its watermarks has been compared with those contained in the Brome miscellany, a later fifteenth-century manuscript found in the village of Brome, midway between Norwich and Ipswich.⁶³ Sloane contains reference to King's Lynn and the inscription of an East Anglian name, Bardel, suggesting that the manuscript continued in use in the region.

The manuscripts are connected with several other collections linked to Norfolk and East Anglia in ways that begin to suggest the role a local tradition of song may have had in the books' production. As seen above, the anthologies have correspondences with many different sources that come from around the country, dispersing attempts to make firm regional distinctions. However, three manuscripts linked with Norfolk have particular significance. Two manuscripts survive that show the circulation of carols in the region at a relatively early date.

⁶² Janet Ing Freeman explains how William Stevenson Fitch lent the book to Thomas Wright in the mid-1840s after it emerged from papers in Ipswich. *The Postmaster of Ipswich: William Stevenson Fitch, Antiquary and Thief* (London: The Book Collector, 1997), pp. 99-100.

⁶³ Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', p. 43, n. 43. The Brome miscellany is Yale University Library 365. It is described in *Non-Cycle Plays and The Winchester Dialogues*, ed. Davis, pp. 49-50.

The first is NLS, MS Advocates 18.7.21, the preaching book of Franciscan Friar John of Grimestone, introduced in the previous chapter.⁶⁴ The book is a collection of material for sermons, arranged alphabetically under various thematic headings, including about 250 English and Latin verses interspersed with the prose notes. Among the verses are three carols. One survives as a truncated version in St John's (*EEC* 149, J8), and a piece of dramatic verse in the book has connections to Sloane and Eng. poet. (*EEC* 157, S45/E33). The book's origins are known from an inscription on f. 9v: 'Orate pro anima fratris Iohannis de Grimistone qui scripsit istum librum cum magna solitudine Anno domino 1372 Aue maria pro anima sua pro amore dei'.⁶⁵ Grimston is a village near King's Lynn, although in *LALME* the language is identified as that of southwest Norfolk, just a few miles west of Sloane's linguistic origins. A marginal note (probably by Grimestone) names St Nicholas Church in Ipswich (f. 60v) and one of his stories refers to a tavern in the town (f. 87r).⁶⁶ The recurrence of these two place names, encountered in relation to Sloane and Eng. poet., is suggestive. At 170 X 120mm, Grimestone's book is slightly larger than the song anthologies, yet the preacher's notebook, containing sermons or material from which to form them, is in some ways as good a comparison with these books as other verse anthologies. The poems collected in Grimestone's manuscript were gathered primarily for use in sermons, so like the songs, they are notes towards performances, and to be delivered to communities gathered together for worship and religious instruction and celebration. The manuscript's texts thus gesture to

⁶⁴ Edward Wilson, *A Descriptive Index of the English Lyrics in John of Grimestone's Preaching Book*, Medium Ævum Monographs NS 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973).

⁶⁵ Wilson, *A Descriptive Index*, p. xiii.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. xiv-xv.

traditions of oral performance whilst being written texts organised in the highly literate form of the alphabetised reference book.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Grimestone's carols are among the earliest extant verses in the form, and the collection's connections with the anthologies are the more significant because the books contain so few correspondences with fourteenth-century sources. A slightly later collection of carols associated with Norfolk provides another first: the Trinity roll is the first surviving polyphonic carol source. The roll contains thirteen carols written in an early fifteenth-century script set to black-void notation with some coloured notes. According to *LALME* the dialect of these carols is south-central Norfolk. Helen Deeming has tentatively suggested the collegiate church of Mettingham two miles across the Norfolk border into Suffolk as the type of institution at which the manuscript may have been made and used.⁶⁷ The manuscript contains two texts with correspondences to carols in Eng. poet. (E49 and E54) and a further carol corresponding with one in Sloane (S64). Although its music is sophisticated and carefully written, the Trinity carols clearly represent an early stage in the development of the polyphonic carol, seen in the relatively simple treatment of the burden section and use of major prolation.

These two manuscripts together indicate that East Anglian individuals and communities played significant roles in the early development and writing down of songs in carol form. A local tradition of song writing such as this could have facilitated the production of the three fifteenth-century anthologies. Sloane and Eng. poet. suggest that a strong tradition of vernacular religious song existed in the areas they were produced in because they appear to have been built from

⁶⁷ Helen Deeming, 'The sources and origin', pp. 33-34.

multiple smaller exemplars, and St John's illustrates the form these may have taken. The sequences in Sloane and Eng. poet. have been seen to range between above twenty carols to a single text, putting St John's at the more substantial end of the spectrum. Remarkably, an example of a smaller sequence also survives with associations to the region, the first quire of Lincoln College, MS Lat. 141. The manuscript is a composite book put together around 1600 and the first quire contains a collection of song texts written in a late fifteenth-century hand. The quire is imperfect at the beginning, and now holds nine full texts and further fragments. The final two texts were edited by Edward Wilson in 1980, but the others remain unpublished.⁶⁸ The *New Index of Middle English Verse* lists only the two carols edited by Wilson and one other, a version of a carol extant elsewhere.⁶⁹

Lincoln Lat. 141 was compiled towards the end of the sixteenth century or at the start of the seventeenth for John Smith, born in 1563 and a graduate of Cambridge University, whose books now belong to Lincoln College, Oxford.⁷⁰ The manuscript is largely made up of lexicographical material, including two sixteenth-century Latin-English vocabularies and one sixteenth-century Greek-English vocabulary. The first twenty-two folios are written in a late fifteenth-century hand, and this section of the manuscript is fully described by N. R. Ker in *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*.⁷¹ The pages are paper measuring 153 X 103mm, plainly written without colour, and a single scribe, writing a

⁶⁸ Edward Wilson, 'Two Unpublished Fifteenth-century Poems from Lincoln College, Oxford, MS Lat. 141', *Notes and Queries*, 27 (1980), 20-26. My article on the manuscript with editions of the texts is forthcoming in *Medium Ævum*, 'An Unpublished Fifteenth-Century Carol Collection: Lincoln College, Oxford, MS Lat. 141'. My edition of the texts is reproduced in Appendix C.

⁶⁹ *IMEV* 1471/6, 1899.55/1, 3170.55/1.

⁷⁰ Smith writes some autobiographical notes in the margin of Lincoln College, Oxford, MS Lat. 122, f. 84v.

⁷¹ N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 638-640.

small current *anglicana*, is responsible for the main texts. Remounting has disrupted the foliation, and the numerical sequence includes strips used to strengthen the book. The contents are as follows (following Ker's description):⁷²

- i) Song lyrics, ff. 1-6; originally a quire of eight folios, now missing the first two folios and f. 1 largely torn away
- ii) Notes on grammar in various late fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century hands, and a contents list for item iii), ff. 9-10
- iii) English-Latin vocabulary, ff. 11-20, 23-24, 26; according to Ker, items ii) and iii) originally belonged to two quires as follows: 2⁸ wants 2, (ff. 9-13, 15, 14); 3⁹ (ff. 16, 26, 17-20, 23-5: 16 and 25, 19-24, and 20 and 23 are bifolia, so, unless a leaf is missing after f. 18, the quire is a twelve wanting 9-11 after f. 24)

A later writer has extensively annotated the items and although this was almost certainly John Smith, the owner of the complete manuscript, the annotator imitated the fifteenth-century script so the writing of these sections is often awkward with later letterforms slipping in only occasionally.

The pages contain no explicit information about their origin, but *LALME* identifies the dialect of the two carols published by Wilson as characteristic of Norfolk, towards the Cambridgeshire border, and the other texts appear to agree with this placing.⁷³ The spellings of 'ryth' (right), 'bryth' (bright), 'myth' (might) etc. are particularly indicative of Norfolk origins. The content, language and verse forms of these seven songs are typical of the carol corpus as represented in Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's. All would be suitable for performance during the feast days of the Christmas season, as the burden of the

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 639.

⁷³ *LALME*, 1, p. 153.

first full carol, a song for the Feast of the Holy Innocents, directs: ‘Syng we now þis holy feste’. They mix religious narrative, praise, prayer and moral advice delivered in combinations of familiar liturgical Latin and vernacular English. Six of the first seven texts are macaronic, with Latin lines typically placed within the burden and at the end of the stanzas. Two of the carols in the collection have correspondences with other manuscripts, including one with a song in Eng. poet., a carol beginning ‘In bedleem in þat fayr cyte’. This song, which will be discussed in Chapter 6, appears in a range of manuscripts, twice set to music: Eng. poet., the Trinity roll, Balliol 354, one of Thornton’s poetic miscellanies and Ryman’s collection. The other carol found elsewhere, ‘Ihesu of a maydyn woldyst be borne’, corresponds with a song set in two different polyphonic versions in Ritson’s manuscript. The correspondences connect this unnotated sequence securely with musical performance, echoed in its texts’ own internal references to song, similar to those in the larger anthologies.

The first quire of Lincoln Lat. 141 is comparable to the anthologies in its contents, a collection of carol texts, and in the dimensions and visual simplicity of its pages. There are also significant differences. Firstly, although the carol texts fill the first quire of the manuscript, it is not clear whether at any point they formed a separate booklet. The three quires evidently belong together because the same hand is responsible for the texts of the songs and for the Latin vocabulary, and the first quire contains a watermark that is also found on f. 11, demonstrating that the grammatical school notes were written using the same paper stock.⁷⁴ However, the collection of the song texts into a discrete quire

⁷⁴ The watermarks are in the top left corners of ff. 4, 5 and 11. On f. 4 and f. 11 crossing lines form designs of small diamonds within an irregular boundary, possibly representing a bag. On f. 5 three plainly drawn stalks of corn or fern fronds emerge from a ring. Neither of these designs is

leaves opens the possibility that the scribe could have kept the songs as an independent booklet for a period. The loss of the first folios from this quire and the confused order of the pages in the second and third quires supports this conjecture because it suggests that the pages were not from the start protected by the structure of a permanent book.

The association of the Lincoln carol sequence with lexicographical material suggests that its context was more written and pedagogical than performative. There is, however, an established connection between carols and schooling, expressed, for example, in Trevisa's observation that children are 'witty to lerne caroles'.⁷⁵ Other manuscripts contain both school notes and carols,⁷⁶ and there are further manuscripts in which carols appear to have been noted down as writing exercise, scribbled in spare space among other notes with which letterforms are practised, one of which is the carol expressing the complaints of a schoolboy quoted above.⁷⁷ Schools generally form a meeting place between oral and literate types of communication, as skills in writing have to be conveyed for the first time, and song had a particularly prominent position in education throughout the medieval period. This is highlighted by the role of song schools in preparing boys for roles in the church and by instruction in the liturgy through song, subjects that have recently been explored by Bruce

recorded in C. M. Briquet, *Les Filigranes*, ed. Allan Stevenson (Amsterdam: The Paper Publications Society, 1968).

⁷⁵ *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M. C. Seymour et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1987), vol. 1, p. 300.

⁷⁶ Gonville and Caius 383; Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 233; and BL, Cotton MS Titus A.xxvi.

⁷⁷ EEC 413b. A nativity carol (EEC 10) is preserved alongside a macaronic schoolboy's song in BL, Additional MS 14997. Other manuscripts where roughly written carols are included in free space include BL, Harley MS 1317 and BL, Royal MS 20.A.i.

Holsinger and Susan Boynton.⁷⁸ The survival of the Lincoln carols together with educative material suggests they may have been written and used by a student or teacher.

Another distinction between the Lincoln carols and those in other anthologies is the unusual layout of these songs. Only two carols in the Lincoln collection employ braces to connect their stanzas, the two published by Wilson. This pair, the last texts in the quire and the only verses in the collection not on religious subjects, are written in a new, lighter ink. Together the changes in layout, ink and subject suggest that these carols were written in a separate writing shift, possibly copied from a different source. The first group of songs is presented as single verse blocks within wide margins, without any marks or spaces to distinguish the stanzas or the burdens. Capitals begin each verse line and the texts are separated from each other by two horizontal lines, and sometimes by modest decorative borders formed of overlapping circles. Refrain lines at the end of the stanzas repeat words from the burden in six of the nine texts, including the two edited by Wilson, but repetition of the burdens is not indicated for any of the quire's texts. Such repetition might be inferred from the rhyme schemes and, in the cases of the two carols with textual correspondences to other manuscripts, by comparison with other versions, but it is not definitely prescribed.

A final distinctive feature of the Lincoln carols is the extensive annotation of the text by a later hand, probably that of John Smith, owner of the complete manuscript. The manuscript is mostly made up of lexicographical

⁷⁸ Bruce Holsinger, 'Langland's Musical Reader: Liturgy, Law, and the Constraints of Performance', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 99-141; Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*; and Susan Boynton, 'Training for the liturgy as a form of monastic education', in *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), pp. 7-20.

material, suggesting that the fifteenth-century section was included primarily on account of its Latin vocabularies. Nevertheless, that the carols were also of interest is suggested by the extensive corrections to the texts, which regularly standardise spellings or edit obscure meanings, in particular standardising obsolete dialect forms, such as ‘ryth’ and ‘myth’.

The Lincoln carols provide a vivid example of the kind of exemplars that may have been used by the compilers of the larger anthologies: anonymous collections of festive song in fragile, plain booklets. Norfolk and the surrounding region appears to have been particularly rich in such collections and productive in the carol’s earliest period. Manuscript survival was subject to chance and the extant archives are likely to represent a small proportion of the original material in circulation so the survival of one or two sources from a particular region cannot prove that the area was uniquely rich in a particular type of literature. However, the accumulation of associations between the carols and Norfolk is insistent. Further, these collections are not paralleled elsewhere. East Anglia is the one region from which a strong fifteenth-century carol culture remains visible.

In the early sixteenth century something similar can be said about London: the production of printed booklets moves the carol into the capital, as does the extensive collection in Balliol 354.⁷⁹ This shift is conveyed by the change in textual correspondences between the songs copied by Eng. poet.’s scribe A and those by scribe B. Whereas scribe A’s work has connections with five manuscripts associated with Norfolk (Grimestone’s collection, the Trinity roll, Sloane, St John’s and Lincoln Lat. 141), scribe B’s work connects with

⁷⁹ The polyphonic carols are less geographically fixed, although have clear associations with the early Tudor court, as explored in Stevens, *Words and Music*. The comments above are primarily concerned with unnotated songs more directly comparable with those in the anthologies.

none. It does share a text with a Suffolk manuscript, the Brome miscellany, but this is the song begun by scribe A on f. 41v and continued on a leaf that appears to have been removed (E56/66), and may well have been copied by scribe B from scribe A's original copy.⁸⁰ The rest of scribe B's work includes one carol that appears in a printed book and five songs that appear in Balliol 354.⁸¹ Carols can be found across the country throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but they are compiled into collections with notable frequency in fifteenth-century East Anglia, and sixteenth-century London.

Why might East Anglia have been a productive centre for carols and other types of song? The region had a very fertile literary culture, especially during the fifteenth century, conveyed in the convenient list of literary manuscripts associated with medieval Norfolk produced by Richard Beadle.⁸² The list totals 147 manuscripts, including numerous manuscripts containing lyrics, especially within sermon collections.⁸³ The list includes works that were known across the country, such as the *Prick of Conscience*, romances and the poetry of Chaucer and Langland. There is a wide range of devotional and

⁸⁰ Scribe A writes a melody setting the burden and first stanza of 'Tydynges trew' (E56) on f. 41v, together with a note at the bottom of the page explaining that 'Thys is þe tewyn For þe song foloyng', but the next text written by Scribe A at the top of f. 42r. is 'Bryng vs in no browne bred' (E57). This carol is missing its burden, which has been supplied by the Scribe B at the bottom of f. 41v. The foliation of the manuscript is confused from f. 42 and the pages may have been remounted, all of which suggests that a page has been lost. Scribe B includes the full text of the Annunciation carol on f. 51v (E66) and adds the note 'fo. 10' on f. 41v to direct the reader to the song. There is no indication that two scribes worked on the manuscript at the same time, but the second scribe clearly had access to the original Annunciation carol and to the burden cut from the next carol. This raises the possibility that Scribe B removed a page or more from after f. 41v.

⁸¹ These five songs also have connections with other sources: BL, Additional MS 22718; Lambeth 306; Cotton Titus A.xxvi (a sixteenth-century miscellany held by Greene to be from around Chester); BL, Cotton MS Vitellius D.xii (a single leaf of unknown origin); and the Coventry *Shearmen and Tailors' Play*.

⁸² Beadle, 'Prolegomena to a literary geography of later medieval Norfolk'. For further discussion of the region's literature see essays in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005).

⁸³ The scale of this list can be judged by comparing the list compiled for the Electronic Catalogue of Vernacular Manuscript Books of the Medieval West Midlands. This list covers six counties (Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire) and totals 172 vernacular manuscripts (see <http://www.english.bham.ac.uk/medievalstudies/MWMcat/list.htm>).

theological material. There are also manuscripts that relate closely to a local culture, notably the extensive corpus of Norfolk drama: the N-Town cycle, the Digby Plays (*The Conversion of St Paul, Mary Magdalene, The Killing of the Children and Wisdom*), the Macro Plays (*The Castle of Perseverance, Mankind and Wisdom*), the Croxton Play of the Sacrament, the fragment of *Dux Moraud* and parts of plays recorded in Robert Reyne's commonplace book. The region's vibrant religious culture is also reflected in the writings of two of the most remarkable women in late medieval England, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe (a native of King's Lynn). Other fifteenth-century writers connected to the county include John Metham, John Capgrave, Osbern Bokenham (who spent his adult life in Suffolk) and the Paston family, and John Lydgate lived in Suffolk.

As suggested by many of the works listed above, the region's literature is intimately linked with its religious culture. Gail McMurray Gibson's study of East Anglian literature, especially its theatre, emphasises that the thriving literary culture through the fifteenth century was generated by the region's religious institutions, themselves flourishing financially and creatively through a meeting of lay piety and clerical learning and traditions.⁸⁴ The county's architecture joins its literature in testifying to the region's creativity and wealth in the late medieval period, as extensive building and renovation of churches took place through the fifteenth century.⁸⁵ These buildings were the scenes for the expression of religious beliefs and worship in visual art, catalogued by Ann Eljenholm

⁸⁴ Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*.

⁸⁵ Fully described in Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *Norfolk I: Norwich and North-East*, 2nd edn, *The Buildings of England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997); Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *Norfolk 2: North-West and South*, 2nd edn, *The Buildings of England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999); Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984).

Nichols.⁸⁶ Even today the county has 659 medieval churches, advertised by the region as the greatest concentration in the world.

The region was densely populated and its religious culture found many local centres in parish churches, but Norfolk's largest urban centre, Norwich, most clearly reflects the area's character. Norman Tanner has argued that the city was 'remarkably religious' in this period, expressed particularly in its sixty or so parish churches.⁸⁷ Norwich also had a variety of religious houses: a large Cathedral priory, friaries for the Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian orders, as well as religious communities at St Giles' Hospital and the College of St Mary in the Fields.⁸⁸ These contributed to the city's musical creativity, including a choir trained in polyphony and three organs at St Giles'. Tanner claims that the numerous chantries in the city produced 'an almost daily concert of religious music'.⁸⁹ He calculates that in 1492 about five per cent of the city's population were clergy: eighty-nine priests were attached to churches, twenty-seven were in colleges or held other ecclesiastical offices, forty-six monks lived in the Cathedral priory and about thirty friars in the four friaries. Tanner argues that, 'the remarkable harmony or blending of old and new in the religion of medieval Norfolk' enabled 'the people of the city... to maintain both creativity and continuity in their religion, much to suit all tastes, preserving depth and variety, while also achieving relative harmony and unity'.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *The Early Art of Norfolk: A subject list of extant and lost art including items relevant to early drama* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002).

⁸⁷ Norman Tanner, 'Religious Practice', in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 137-155 (p. 137).

⁸⁸ See Christopher Harper-Bill and Carole Rawcliffe, 'The Religious Houses', in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 73-136.

⁸⁹ Tanner, 'Religious Practice', p. 146.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 154 and p. 152.

Yet the city and the region's harmony ought not to be exaggerated. Fifteenth-century Norfolk experienced conflicts and disruption just as other regions did in the period, such as the 1428 heresy trials after which three people were burned as heretics in Norfolk,⁹¹ and riots in the city in the 1430s and 40s over disputed elections, which led to the city's liberties being withdrawn between 1443 and 1447.⁹² The general political instability of the century was felt locally, vividly conveyed in the Paston letters. Without a reliable legal system to turn to during the mid-century political disruptions, the family struggled to maintain the security of their property. Early in 1462 Margaret laments, 'Peyll of this contré begynyth to wax wyld... God for hys holy mersy geue grace that ther may be set a good rewyll & a sad in thys contré in hast, for I herd never sey of so myche robry and manslavyt in thys contré as is now wyth-in a lytyll tyme'.⁹³

These documents make it difficult to propose a simple view of the communities that enabled the region's creative success. Likewise, Margery Kempe's biography presents passionate religious feeling supported by priests and lay people alongside suspicion and persecution from her neighbours and local religious authority figures. Among the calls for festive celebration that structure the anthologies, there are also many songs on the recurrent medieval theme of the untrustworthiness of the world, but more specifically on the untrustworthiness of one's companions, often accompanied by warning to guard one's speech. Indeed, as it now survives Sloane opens with the line 'þou wost wol lytyl ho is þi foo', the refrain of a song warning against 'Idel speche' (S1,

⁹¹ See Norman P. Tanner, *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1977).

⁹² See Phillippa Maddern, 'Order and Disorder', in *Medieval Norwich*, ed. Rawcliffe and Wilson, pp. 189-212; Ben R. McRee, 'Religious Gilds and Civic Order: The Case of Norwich in the Late Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 69-97.

⁹³ *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971-6), 1, p. 279.

4.1). The sequence of carols that opens Sloane is weighted with texts warning that ‘þis word lordyngis is but a farye / it faryt ryzt as a neysche weye’ (S4, 4.1-2). Later in the manuscript, the sole specific local reference, to the storm damage at King’s Lynn, is set in this context. The burden warns, ‘Man be wys & arys & thynk on lyf þat lestenit ay’ (S52).

Eng. poet. contains many similar texts: its first English carol warns in the burden ‘secuters be oft onekynd’. The stanzas expand this specific warning, an expression in song of situations such as the Pastons’ disputed inheritance cases mentioned above, to a more general warning about death. If the modern reader doubted that such subject matter is appropriate for singing, the carol’s conclusion appears to insist that it is:

Her ys a song for me
 Syng another for the
 god send vs love & charite (E3, 4)

The song rather hurriedly replaces the images of an untrustworthy world and community with an alternative of song and love.⁹⁴ A similar dynamic occurs in the manuscript’s last song, in which the burden calls upon God to ‘amend þis world’ while the stanzas chronicle its faults:

Envy is thyk & love thyne
 & specially among ovr kyne
 ffore love is *without* þe dore & envy *within*
 and so kyndnesse away gane fle (E77, 4)

But the final stanza, the manuscript’s last words, seeks to restore situation through joint prayer, just as the earlier song had done:

Now lett vs pray both on & all
 & specyally vpon god call
 to send love & peace among vs all
 Among all men in christente (E77, 6)

⁹⁴ On a similar theme, later in the manuscript the burden ‘Off al the *enmys* þat I *can* fynd þe *tong* is most *enmy* to *mankynd*’ (E65) is set to music.

The community, the songs insist, is not to be trusted, yet its construction is explicitly, repeatedly enacted by the texts, especially in the burdens and the closing lines, key moments within the songs. The triple repetition of the word ‘all’ in this stanza is in the context less secure than pleading. Although once subject to idealisation,⁹⁵ communities are now understood to be structures of ideological and social tension and change as well as stability, suggested by a rare use of the word in a short vernacular verse from fifteenth-century Norfolk, a ballade lamenting the country’s political instability and loudly supporting the cause of Richard of York, with a call upon readers to pray for ‘þe good comunité’ of his followers.⁹⁶ The community evoked here is partisan, and at the same time a plea for stability in a time of conflict.

The themes of the carols quoted above are well known to be conventional within medieval literature, but that should not detract from the value of being able to locate expressions of them within their geographical and temporal cultures. This identification helps to restore the meaning and expressiveness to the apparently formulaic language of fifteenth-century song. Establishing the patterns of production and circulation of literature within a region assists in recognising the agendas of participating writers, readers, performers and audiences.

⁹⁵ Raymond Williams claimed that ‘community’ was unique among ‘terms of social organisation’ ‘never to be used unfavourably’. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), p. 76. I do not think this is true of today’s English, in which ‘community’ is often used to mean groups identified by shared region or ideology, with good and bad characteristics.

⁹⁶ The verses begin ‘Cryst þat deyid vp-on þe rod’ (*IMEV* 621.44) and are edited and analysed by Richard Beadle, ‘Fifteenth-Century Political Verses from the Holkham Archives’, *Medium Ævum*, 71 (2002), 101-121, l. 101. See further Paul Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft Between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 192-6.

The carols associated with Norfolk and East Anglia signal the strength and success of the form, distributed easily in sequences that suggest they were a recognised and established part of fifteenth-century expression and media. David d'Avray has described the dissemination of sermons in medieval Europe as 'mass communication' because sermons circulated through small, cheap manuscripts, scribbled notes and, vitally, through performance.⁹⁷ The situation for the songs, and carols in particular, was similar, although their dispersal appears to have been more tightly restricted by regional trends, and they were not controlled by a single social group to the extent that sermons were. The different types of written sources in which the carols survive signal this adaptability to available routes of communication, while at the same time the anthologies show that writers also sought to gather song texts together according to principles of shared features (such as form and language) and utility.

⁹⁷ d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars*, p. 3.

Part Two. Approaching and Exploring Communal Song

Chapter 4. The Song Text

The song lyrics that readers of the anthologies encounter have been drawn together and fixed in textual form, but the experience of reading and thinking about them brings that fixity into question. Phrases recur from song to song, forms shift midway through the text, and other manuscripts introduce songs that are in some ways the same and in other ways different, as though the individual texts had gathered temporarily and unreliably from a shared cultural medium of words and music that now eludes us. These anthologies of short texts at once offer to illumine this creative process and challenge the modern reader's techniques and terminologies. This section of the thesis begins at the first point of encounter, the material page and the text written upon it, and from there pursues experiments in reading that move between the different aspects of the songs, recognising their apparent integrity on the page and how contexts now only partly accessible to us can put this under strain while also greatly enriching the songs' cultural identities.

The definitive requirement that lyric should be short emphasises the containment of the text,¹ yet current approaches also dwell upon the intertextuality of medieval poetry, including lyric, through attention to conventions and contingency within texts. This chapter looks at ways of identifying the text by recognising the boundaries drawn around it and also at ways that those boundaries can be crossed, thus exploring the apparent

¹ See Greentree, *The Middle English Lyric*, p. 11, and Boffey, *Manuscripts*, p. 3.

contradiction expressed above and the process of reading song lyrics. The act of reading the anthologies' texts appears to be necessarily partial, with the reader always conscious of an elsewhere that is either wholly or partially absent, but also partially recoverable. Firstly, the musical performance of song in convivial occasions may be implied by the text and other sources but will inevitably be, to a greater or lesser degree, absent from the reader's experience of these books.² The second context is the richness of the text's socialisation, the replete public memory that Mary Carruthers represents in the creative interface between a text's *res* and its *verba*.³

Reading the text involves interacting with contexts, whilst remaining attentive to where the texts draw up borders between these zones. This chapter begins with an isolated text on a page of Eng. poet. and contextualises it in stages through the manuscript, in relation to versions extant in other manuscripts, and within a broader generic context. I have chosen to open the second section of the thesis, on approaching and exploring the manuscripts' songs, with this method and analysis in pursuit of compromise between receptivity to the historical text or witness and the presence of the modern reader in constituting its meaning. This case study will establish what is meant by the text and versions, and explore corresponding ideas of sameness and difference, to examine songs as represented on the page and in our critical language. Of particular interest to the carol is the role played by the burden in generating the text, and this will come into focus in the second half of this chapter. The burden is an element separate from the song's main narrative, which it breaks up through repetition, but that literally

² For discussion of this subject see especially Paul Zumthor, *Essai de Poétique Médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972) (*Towards a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Phillip Bennett [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992]); *Medieval English Songs*, ed. Dobson and Harrison; and Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*.

³ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.

establishes the text's boundaries.⁴ The way in which burdens recur, change or are exchanged across different versions of songs or other related texts may indicate how the carol form facilitated and responded to practices in the circulation of song.

I. Identifying the Text: Page, Performance and Versions

For the reader, a number of possible markers identify the beginning of each carol within the anthologies. While stanzas form neat, bracketed lumps of text, divided up line by line as verse, burdens are written across the page, signalling the song to follow in the manner of a rubric. Further, a paragraph mark slightly larger than those beside the stanzas usually prefaces the burden. A line is sometimes drawn between songs. In Eng. poet. the scribes sometimes contrive to begin songs at the top of a new side of paper for a stretch (E1-E3, E53-E59, E72-E77). An example of this layout can be seen in the book's penultimate text (E76; *IMEV* 112; *EEC* 79), which takes up exactly one side of paper, as seen in Figure 4.1.

⁴ For a related discussion of the French *refrain* see Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, especially pp. 62-86.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 4.1

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. poet. e.1, f. 60r

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The couplet burden is displayed as a single line and simple line brackets link the first three lines of each stanza, with the refrain line written to the right of the bracket. The song's *AA₁ bbbA* rhyme-pattern is visually clear, as is the extent of the text. Its visual similarity to other songs in this form in this collection and elsewhere begins to indicate its character even before reading. Less typically, the song falls within a short sequence of carols (the last four in the manuscript) where a plain line has been drawn between each stanza, and between the burden and the first stanza, so that each part of the song is literally contained. Any threat of fragmentation implicit in this procedure is counteracted by the internal stanzaic refrain:

Tyrle tyrlo so merylye the shepperdes began to blowe

1. Abowt þe fyld þei pyped full right
 even abowt þe middes off þe nyght
 adown frome heven þei saw *cum* a lyght
 Tyrle tirlo

2. Off angels þer came a *company*
 with mery songes & melody
 þe shepperdes anonne gane them aspy
 Tyrle tyrlo

3. Gloria in excelsis þe angels song
 and said who peace was *present* among
 to euery man þat to the faith wold long
 tyrle tyrlo

4. The shepperdes hyed them to bethleme
 to se þat blyssid sons beme
 and þer they found þat glorious streme
 tyrle tyrlo

5. Now preye we to that mek chyld
 & to his mothere þat is so myld
 the wich was *neuer* defylyd
 tyrle tyrlo

6. That we may *cum* vnto his blysse
 Where joy shall *neuer* mysse
 þan may we syng in paradice

Tyrle tyrlō

7. I pray yow all that be here
Fore to syng & mak good chere
In þe worschip off god thys yere
tyrle tyrlō

Perhaps because there is little between this song and the still popular Christmas carol 'While shepherds watched', because the story itself is familiar from the gospel, while piping shepherds have a literary history that stretches centuries before and after this carol, and because of the carol's straightforward convivial atmosphere, it appears to present the reader with no particular challenges or problems: we probably think we already know all we need to. Such an impression is re-enforced by the apparent slightness of the language. With no imagery in need of interpretation, or meanings that need translating into prose, does such a song merit reading as poetry, let alone the 'close-reading' that is still deemed the appropriate response to lyric?⁵

From the opening words of the burden the song foregrounds its performance, the repeated words 'Tyrle tyrlō' being euphonic but semantically empty, or as Greene specifies, an 'onomatopoeic phrase for the sound of a pipe'.⁶ This burden and its performance introduces the first problem in establishing the text's boundaries. The rhyme scheme seems to focus attention upon the alternation of burden and stanza, here emphasised by the repetition of the refrain line at the end of each stanza at the start of the burden. However, the text alone does not make it certain that the burden is to be repeated. This information has to

⁵ The concept of 'close-reading' may seem old-fashioned, ousted in the last century by Marxists, feminists and new historicists, yet close-reading remains fundamental to the teaching of English, especially poetry, and appears in most school-level and undergraduate syllabi in the form of commentary examinations. Even deconstruction borrows from close-reading, and now Terry Eagleton, long-time proponent of Marxist theory, has written a book advocating close-reading of lyric poetry, *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

⁶ *EEC*, p. 360.

be inferred from recognising that the song is laid out like and among other carols, so if generally burdens are to be repeated after the stanzas, that would be the case here, allowing the group to join in with those singers who know the words for the verses. However, a doubt may be provoked by the fact that the refrain words, ‘tyrle tyrlo’ are the first words of the burden. Manuscripts of fifteenth-century French poetry frequently abbreviated a refrain to a mere two words after its first appearance, as seen, for example, in lyrics by Charles d’Orléans.⁷ The practice may be scribal shorthand for the full refrain, or faithfully reflect a truncated form of refrain for performers or readers.⁸ So might ‘Abowt þe fyld’ have been performed with an abbreviated refrain, not a burden as defined by Greene? As explained in Chapter 2, how the burden was or could be treated is now ambiguous, but at any rate, a silent reader is unlikely to repeat the burden mentally between each stanza, which blurs the text’s actual shape.

The song is itself about a sequence of musical performances. First, the shepherds ‘pyped full right’ down on earth. Musical performance by the shepherds is well-attested to in fifteenth-century literary and visual culture, for example the singing shepherds in the Wakefield plays, and a fifteenth-century stained glass window in Norwich’s St Peter Mancroft church that shows three shepherds with pipes within a Nativity scene.⁹ The instruments played by the shepherds in ‘Abowt þe fyld’ may be of a similar type. They then see a light

⁷ The technique is followed in Charles d’Orléans’ rondeaux, *The English Poems of Charles of Orléans*, edited from the *Manuscript Brit. Mus. Harl. 682*, ed. Robert Steele, EETS OS 215 (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 105-144; and Charles d’Orléans, *Ballades et Rondeaux*, ed. Jean-Claude Mühlethaler (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), pp. 344-700. See further Edith Yenal, *Charles d’Orléans: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*, (New York: AMS Press, 1984).

⁸ See John Fox, *The Poetry of Fifteenth-Century France, II: Versification and texts* (London: Grant & Cutler Ltd, 1994), pp. 18-24.

⁹ *The First Shepherds’ Play*, ll. 265-268, 415-431; and *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, ll. 182-189, 656-664, *English Mystery Plays*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975). The image can be seen on the University of Cambridge Faculty of English Medieval Imaginations site, <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/medieval/>.

from heaven and witness the celestial music of the angels: 'with mery songes & melody... Gloria in excelsis þe angles song'. The shepherds respond to this music with more of their own, either with the repetition of the full burden or in the refrain line (stanza 4). Stanza 5 shifts scene: the deictic 'Now' and communal 'we' introduce the performance of the carol itself: 'Now preye we...' By the time the refrain line, 'tyrle tyrlo', is reached it is no longer merely a quotation of the shepherds but has been appropriated by the carol-performers. The next stanza presents the singers' hope for salvation, a reward for their performance, in the form of song: 'þan may we syng in paradise'. The 'tyrle tyrlo' refrain follows immediately from this line, transformed into a song performed in heaven. The final stanza, however, moves back to the present, festive moment of performance:

I pray yow all that be here
Fore to syng & mak good chere
In þe worschip off god thys yere
tyrle tirlo

The song appears to be extremely simple, yet it is structured by a striking dynamic, a chiasm of song: song on earth (shepherds, st. 1), song in heaven (angels, sts 2-3), song on earth (shepherds, st. 4) / song on earth (carollers celebrating the nativity, st. 5), song in heaven (carollers in paradise, st. 6), song on earth (carollers making 'good chere', st. 7). Although a fairly elaborate example, this dynamic is characteristic of many songs in the anthologies. Songs such as this collapse linear time because they are for festive performance and embedded within a cyclical calendar, that of the Church year, which uses dates to remind Christians of God's eternal presence. This is true of a great deal of medieval literature, often heavily influenced by liturgy, that expansive ritual literature constructed to colonise time and with it lived experience. The

anthologies' carols commonly take part in this process through foregrounding the act of song, particularly by representing angels' song or Mary singing, as in the lullaby carols. The fact that they refer so often to their own performance is central to the inclusion of the carols' performers within the sacred narrative, and helps us today to recognise that even texts without music were to be sung.

The text at this stage of the reading appears largely transparent: we read it and read through it to imagine its extra-liturgical use, the occasion of performance which it so insistently inscribes. Content and form encourage this, but so does the carol's language. The conventionality of medieval poetry is often stated but can be difficult to convey in specific detail. Confining our attention to the manuscript in which the song is written, it may be noted that the songs (both in carol form) immediately before and after 'Abowt þe fyld' offer deictic conclusions similar to this song's 'Now preye we to that mek chyld'. The narrator of the song before 'Abowt þe fyld', a long anti-feminist satire of women who get drunk together in pubs (E75), ends the piece with a command, 'Now fyll the cupe & drynk to me' (25.1), in order that the performers and audience 'off owr syngyng mak a good endyng' (24.4). The last song, an attack on the immorality of the age (E77), ends more soberly: 'Now lett vs pray both on & all' (6.1). Verbal connections may be located throughout the manuscript, for example, stanza 5 of 'Abowt þe fyld' is the collection's fourth use of the *myld/chyld/(de)fyld* rhyme: songs E19 (8), E27 (2) and E31 (3) have made the language and sentiments of the stanza familiar. Although the manuscript contains no other text dedicated to the shepherds, where they do appear in a stanza of a nativity song the angels are presented in a similar language:

Gloria in excelsis þe angels song	& hem among þei song a song
and said who peace was present among	gloria in exclesis deo

(E76, 3.1-2)

(E12, 2.5-6)

Verbal parallels throughout the manuscript are not exact, but nevertheless render the text already known:

Bryng vs to þat heuenly blysse
The wych neuer shal mysse

(E64, 4.5-6)

That we may cum vnto his blysse
Where joy shall neuer mysse

(E76, 6.1-2)

The manuscript's songs are securely embedded in a wider written tradition discussed in the previous chapter, especially through their many correspondences with other sources. With thirty-two of its songs extant in other versions, Eng. poet. is second only to Balliol 354 in the number of carol texts it contains that are extant in versions in other sources. 'Abowt þe fyld' is one of these texts, and also one of the nineteen songs in Eng. poet. with correspondences to texts in Balliol 354. The version copied by Richard Hill consists of only five stanzas and the burden, with no parallels to the final two stanzas of E76. Stanzas 2-5 are the same apart from minor verbal changes (such as 'leme', instead of 'streme' in 4.3). The burden has the phrase 'Tyrly tirlow' sung twice, making it a four-stress line, more easily the equivalent of the couplet's second line, and the first stanza is more substantially different:

Abowt þe fyld þei pyped full right
even abowt þe middes off þe nyght
adown frome heven þei saw cum a lyght
Tyrle tirlo

(E76, 1)

Abowt the feld they pypyd ryght
So meryly the sheperdis began to blow
A down from hevyn þat ys so hygh
terly terlow

(Balliol 354, p. 465)¹⁰

The Balliol text has the same first line as E76, then repeats the second line of the burden, followed by the first half of E76's third line, completed by a semantically empty filler phrase that almost rhymes, but not quite. Clearly the stanza preserved in Eng. poet. is better because it follows the correct rhyme

¹⁰ Greene gives only a collation of this version of the text, *EEC* 79 Ab.

scheme, does not repeat itself, and, unlike these lines, it tells a coherent narrative. How might this confusion have occurred? Is it possible that the copy in Balliol 354 was at some point written from faulty memory? But the first stanza is always the most likely to be well remembered and it is the most confused, whereas subsequent stanzas are close to the Eng. poet. text, and supposing that memorial transmission is to blame for the changes would make the untrustworthy assumption that memorial transmission leads to more error than copying between texts. Memorial transmission may have played a role in the life of this carol, but does not explain the Balliol carol's jumble of a first stanza, which may be due to merely a lapse in concentration by a copyist that no one has troubled to correct.

The 'absence' of the last two stanzas in the Balliol text raises different possibilities. Perhaps they are missing because they were forgotten, or deemed redundant by some intermediary scribe or performer. Three stanzas of concluding prayer might be considered excessive where one will do. Alternatively, the stanzas could themselves have been an addition, even added by the Eng. poet. scribe, perhaps because he wanted to fill the page. We have no way of knowing. What is certain, however, is that the enthusiastic 'close reading' performed above in which I identified a neat chiasm of singing responds to the text as it happens to have been recorded in Eng. poet., a particular scribal performance of the song. The pattern is absent from the Balliol version, we cannot tell whether it was in the original, and by this stage we are far from certain what the 'original' might mean in this case.

Even the certainty that we are reading a carol is transformed by the final version of the song. The Coventry *Shearmen and Tailors' Play* of the Nativity

and the Slaughter of the Innocents, contains the following stanzas with music for three voices:

As I out rode this enderes night,
Of three joli sheppardes I saw a sight,
And all abowte there fold a star shone bright;
They sange terli, terlow,
So mereli the sheppards ther pipes can blow.

Doune from heaven, from heaven so hie,
Of angeles ther came a great companie
With mirthe and joy and great solemnitye;
The[y] sange terly, terlow,
So merely the sheppards ther pipes can blow. (EEC 79 B)

Greene includes the text as a version of the shepherds' carol. The similarities are clear, but it also differs extensively from the carols with which it has been aligned, firstly in that it is not a carol but a refrain song and secondly in its metre. It has also introduced a new character, the 'I' of the *chanson d'aventure* opening. The sense of the carol ran, unusually, straight from the burden into the first stanza, in that the 'pei' of the first line only makes sense in reference to 'the shepperdes' introduced in the burden. Here, with no burden, another opening is required and is easily supplied with one of the most common opening lines of the period's poetry. The extent of the differences between the stanzas is marked by the change in two of the three rhyme words. The first line of the next stanza, 'Doune from heaven, from heaven so hie', echoes the reading in Balliol 354, 'A down from hevyn þat ys so hygh', which I was quick to dismiss as an error when read in relation to the Eng. poet. text. This demonstrates how untrustworthy assumptions about error can be when discussing these fluid texts.

The Coventry play is a guild prompt copy written in 1534, and edited in 1591. The manuscript was destroyed by a fire in 1879 and the play survives only in a copy made by Thomas Sharp in his *Dissertation on the Pageants... at*

Coventry (1825), which means we cannot be certain if the song derives from the 1534 or 1591.¹¹ It was written at the end of the manuscript and provided with music for three voices, to be sung by the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem after hearing the angels. This may strike us as peculiar, given that it means the shepherds must sing of themselves in third person. The only other song given in the *Coventry* play (itself the only place where vernacular song survives with music in the Middle English play repertoire) is performed by the mothers of the murdered Innocents and convincingly conveys their own words and immediate suffering (*EEC* 112). By contrast, the shepherds' song breaks the dramatic illusion as the supposed shepherds outside biblical Bethlehem perform a song current among the English audience, thus dissolving the barriers between stage and town, rather as the related carol dissipated the distance between carol-singers and angels. This effect derives from the fact that while the mothers' lullaby appears to have been written especially for the play, 'As I out rode' was not.¹²

While this is clearly true of the words, it is not certain for the music.

Richard Rastall summarises the music as follows:

Its lively texture alternates homophony with simple imitation, the cadences are clear and invariably simultaneous in the three voices, the harmonic language is limited... Despite these limitations the piece has a considerable charm, and must have been written by a highly-skilled composer who knew how to manipulate very limited resources in an effective way.¹³

Rastall suggests that the song's interest derives from the way the composer 'maintains interest in such limited conditions', specifically in opposition to the verse: 'This fluidity is especially important in counteracting the effects of a

¹¹ See *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Hardin Craig, EETS ES 87, 2nd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

¹² See Richard Rastall, *The Heaven Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), p. 71.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 140.

three-line verse in which only one rhyme appears and in which there is no enjambment'.¹⁴ Music regularly provides a means of enabling close reading of medieval lyrics.¹⁵ There are several reasons for this, including the perception that the music is the primary trace of the lyric's oral performance, and thus gives a fuller and possibly more authentic understanding of the lyric's identity, and the practical consideration that the music provides something more to talk about, full of challenges for the interpreter.

More intriguing in the case of Rastall's reading is that his study of the music foregrounds the figure of the composer, skilfully manipulating his resources and adapting his work for the purpose. Rastall's description echoes discussions of medieval lyric that emphasise its 'conventionality', a limited set of rules for possible poems pre-existing the production of any single text, so his approach to the music may be analogous to possible readings of the words. Paul Zumthor's influential study, *Essai de Poétique Médiévale*, in many ways enabled a more subtle receptivity to this, particularly through his explanations of register, 'a reservoir of poetic functions' foundational to medieval lyric, specifically the courtly love lyric.¹⁶ Register integrates every chanson into 'an immanent thematic project... The individualising element in the elaboration of the chanson basically comes down to a distribution, within what are in any case narrow limits, of specific phenomena, whose type and kind belong to register.'¹⁷ This is not equivalent to what Rastall means by limited resources and the restricting

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For example, the detailed commentaries by Dobson and Harrison, *Medieval English Songs*. See also Stevens, *Words and Music*; and Ardis Butterfield, 'The art of repetition: Machaut's Ballade 33, Nes qu'on porroit', *Early Music*, 31 (2003), 346-60. The Coventry version of the song cited is sixteenth-century so can only be termed 'medieval' in a generous sense of belonging within a late medieval tradition.

¹⁶ Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, p. 183.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

circumstances of performance as he is specifically concerned with the song's music and stage-effect, but it is analogous. The tune to which the Eng. poet. text was sung is impossible to know, and with some manipulation of the words it may even have been that of 'As I out rode', perhaps in an earlier and simpler version. That books of carols were regularly written without music confirms that singers were used to adapting texts to familiar tunes and, perhaps, vice versa.¹⁸ More accessible is the way in which the song's text works with verbal resources: the standard rhyme scheme and much used rhyme words, the familiar gospel story and verbal formulas discussed above.

Pre-Reformation English songs on the shepherds' visit to the Christ child are less numerous than those on the Epiphany, which contain the more dramatic narrative of Herod's evil plotting and sensational revenge. Greene records eight carols that narrate the angels' appearance to the shepherds,¹⁹ although stanzas referring to the shepherds and to the angels' song appear regularly within other nativity songs. In following the gospel narrative unadorned by commentary these carols form a small, homogeneous group, and thus verbal similarities sometimes join narrative parallels, as in variations on the inevitable *night/light/bright* rhymes. Common rhymes and other words may be shuffled around within the narrative, as seen by comparing a stanza from 'Abowt þe fyld' with one from a Ryman carol:

They founde Joseph and Mary myelde, Wyfe, moder <i>and</i> mayde vndefielde, And in a stalle they founde that childe.	Now pray we to that mek chyld & to his mothere þat is so myld the wich was neuer defylyd
---	--

¹⁸ The Coventry songs are unusual within the early English play corpus in providing words and music. More typically, a stage direction will indicate that singing follows, and words may be provided, but the musical inserts into the plays mostly escape fixing in the scripts, and evidently song scripts were not required. The Coventry songs are anomalous and late, written down as the plays ceased to be performed.

¹⁹ *EEC* 75-82. The numbers are of carol works, within which may be numerous versions. The three songs looked at here are counted as one.

Variety in the different carols is found in the proportions of Latin (Ryman's 'Vpon a nyght' [EEC 75, IMEV 3837] alternates every English line in the stanzas with a line of Latin and uses an entirely Latin burden) and stanza length (the simplest rhymes *aaab* and the longest *ababcdcD* [EEC 77, from Balliol 354, TM 179]). The only carol to make any significant adjustments to the biblical information is found in Balliol 354, 'The shepherd vpon a hill he satt' (EEC 78, TM 1592), which sentimentally narrates the adventure of 'Joly Wat' a shepherd boy who is singled out for greeting by the angels, visits the holy family and presents the baby with various humble gifts. Greene points out the song's similarity to scenes in the cycle plays,²⁰ but it remains a unique and possibly sixteenth-century development of the songs about the shepherds typified by 'Abowt þe fyld'.

Having now read all extant versions of 'Abowt þe fyld', the manuscript contexts and noted thematically and stylistically similar songs, it is reasonable to identify, as Greene did, the texts in the two Oxford manuscripts and the Coventry play as versions of the same song, but is it possible to do so without positing a prototype 'Abowt þe fyld' and a general concept of sameness difficult to relate to the textual witnesses? Zumthor says, with enviable confidence, that a work is 'a complex but easily recognisable entity, made up of the sum of material witnesses to current versions... dynamic by definition'. He explains that a text is a 'trace of the work', and that 'the work's very mutability, from text to text and variant to variant never modifies what is essential to the poem. It displaces, excises, or adds

²⁰ EEC, p. 358.

to it, but can never touch what gives the song life and meaning'.²¹ Zumthor's style of formalist criticism emphasises intersecting and dynamic levels of textuality and meaning and enables the co-existence of these principles. In reading the fifteenth-century English songs, however, I would like to blur the terms 'work' and 'version' further than is suggested by the quotations above.

To state that 'As I out rode' is a version of 'About þe fyld' indicates their close relationship, but should not suggest the priority of one or other text, nor seal them from other cultural work (such as other nativity songs or plays). Fundamentally, it should not posit an archetype of which they are versions because for texts such as these there can be no such thing. Ardis Butterfield has stressed 'the complexity of connection' in relation to medieval lyrics (specifically fourteenth-century *formes fixes*), emphasising that 'medieval lyrics are not free-standing in any sense of the word: it is intrinsic to their character to be part of multiple compositional networks'.²² In the discussions that follow I will use the word 'version' but do so purely to tether certain texts together within those 'multiple compositional networks', while discarding the over-arching idea of them being the same 'work'. In reading the carols it becomes impossible to designate fixed boundaries to the texts as almost any line in a carol can be traced to an elsewhere. This may be direct, such as identifying a Latin line with a particular hymn or other part of the liturgy, or less so: the opening line of 'As I out rode' could connect the song to countless others in many languages opening in *chanson d'aventure* style. The manuscript page is physical and bounded, but it also recalls texts elsewhere and raises questions about how a particular set of words (or notes) arrived on the page.

²¹ Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, pp. 47-8, 190-1.

²² Butterfield, 'The Art of Repetition', p. 356.

A modern editor's decision to manipulate surviving texts to present a more metrically or semantically 'correct' text is a legitimate response to the provisional nature of extant witnesses but should not be coupled with the humanist assumption that the first version is the best. In this respect, discussion of editing Middle English lyrics has differed from that of romance because the argument arises that at composition a song's words must have fitted its music and therefore the original text will be best.²³ The survival of so many lyric texts without music demonstrates that finding the fit between words and music was largely a matter for performance, and one that editors may pursue without reference to any concept of the original. Evidence is rarely of a kind that will produce a stemma, the tool developed by textual scholars to show a text's family tree, to be read along a number of linear, prescribed routes. In summary, the reasons for this are that too many texts have been lost, that texts were changed greatly in copying and probably also in performance, and that songs were subject to non-written circulation. Instead, the comparison of readings may be locally productive in telling stories about a manuscript's production or a carol's transmission.

II. Burdens and bounding the carol

Reading the carol text began on the page with recognising the burden, whose repetition literally bounds the song. Yet as a repeated element, the burden also

²³ For statements of the need to edit Middle English lyric to achieve suitable metre see Thomas G. Duncan, 'Middle English Lyrics: Metre and Editorial Practice', in *A Companion*, ed. Duncan, pp. 19-38, and *Medieval English Songs*, ed. Dobson and Harrison. For rejection of editing Middle English texts to achieve the authoritative original, see Machan, *Textual Criticism* (especially on romance); and *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987).

blurs that containment because performance or reading of a carol involves decisions on how far to take the possibilities for repetition: the burden can come after every stanza, in full or abbreviated, or be omitted or perhaps be performed more than once given that some manuscripts provide burdens with multiple settings. The manuscript layout discourages the reader from reading the burden more than once, marking the remove of the written page from singing. Furthermore, the burden can seem detached from the stanzas, both visually and aurally, and musical manuscripts show that musical rhyme between the burden and the stanzas was optional just as verbal rhyme was. Semantically too the burden may be an independent unit, and some burdens are used by more than one carol, particularly simple 'Nowel' or 'Alleluia' lines but also full vernacular couplets.²⁴ Studies of French song have explored the movement of *refrains* between songs and narratives to discover how songs were generated and experienced.²⁵ Although burdens may be omitted, added or substituted with relative ease,²⁶ the movement of English carol burdens is not as extensive as that of the French *refrains*. This is exemplified by the fact that in the two sets of texts examined above the burden underwent very little change, except that 'As I out rode' shifted the burden to a post-strophic refrain position. This section will argue that where burdens undergo alteration this usually occurs in the process of making a pre-existing text into a carol and that, although modulated by the issues set out above, one of the burden's roles is to fix the carol text.

The first part of this argument may be demonstrated with the only song contained within all three of the anthologies, an epiphany narrative beginning

²⁴ Greene lists six full couplet burdens each of which appears in two carols, outside of Ryman's corpus, which frequently recycles burdens, *EEC*, p. clxiv.

²⁵ Stevens, *Words and Music*; Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*.

²⁶ *EEC*, p. clxi.

‘Now is þe twelþe day icome’ (S39, E43, J12, *EEC* 125; the song also appears in a fourth fifteenth-century manuscript, BL, Harley MS 541). Only in Sloane does the song have a pre-posed refrain:

Reges de saba venient
Aurum tus myrram offerent
alleluia (S39, burden)

The lines are drawn directly from an Epiphany respond and preface a song with an unusual stanza form for the carol, a bob-and-wheel pattern:²⁷

Now is þe twelþe day icome
þe fader & sone togeder arn nome
þe holy gost as þey wern wone
in fere
god send vs good newe 3er’ (S39, 1)

As if to dispel any doubt about the song’s formal shape, the scribe has re-written the burden at the end of the last stanza, an action that in fact marks the song’s difference from surrounding carols because this layout is almost unique in the manuscript.²⁸ Greene comments that these lines were ‘probably added by someone who wished to make a carol out of what was already a very good song for the Epiphany’.²⁹ The use of a stanza form rare in carols and the Sloane scribe’s atypical marking supports this argument, an example of the local narratives that differences between versions are sometimes able to tell. It does not, of course, prompt us to seek the archetypal ‘Now is þe twelþe day icome’, but rather raises the questions, why might someone wish to add a burden, and, correspondingly, what difference does this make to the song text? In part, the burden’s role is connected with performance function: as a piece of familiar liturgy it recalls and reformulates festive group worship. This aspect of the

²⁷ CURSUS Respond c7314. ‘R. Omnes de Saba venient aurum et thus deferentes et laudem domino annuntiantes. V. Reges Tharsis et insulae munera offerent reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent. *rep.* Alleluia. *rep.* Et laudem.’

²⁸ The only other example is S35, discussed in Chapter 9.

²⁹ *EEC*, p. clxii.

anthologies' songs will be examined in detail later, especially in Chapter 7, but I will begin here with textual evidence about the burdens' functions.

One group of songs bears witness to a more extensive desire to add burdens to pre-existing verse and thus make carols: four different carol texts take a core of shared verse material, first seen in a fourteenth-century lyric, in different directions, providing an opportunity to examine the processes by which carols were formed and to what effect. Two of the carol texts are in Sloane and Eng. poet. and represent a mini-Passion drama (*EEC* 157), opening:

Nowel el el el el el el el
el el el el el el el el.

Mary modyr *cum* & se
þi son is naylyd on a tre

Mary moder *cum* & se
þi sone is naylyd on a tre
{&} hand & fot he may not go
his body is woundyn al in woo·

his body is wappyd all in wo
hand & fot he may not go
þi son lady þat þou louyst soo
nakyd is naylyd vpon a tre

(S45)

(E33)

The songs continue roughly parallel, relating Mary's lament under the Cross followed by Jesus' own lament, except that the Eng. poet. carol designates only one stanza of speech to Mary, followed by three to Jesus and a concluding prayer, making the text's focus the Passion lament, whereas the Sloane carol gives two stanzas of speech each to Mary and Jesus, with no concluding prayer, making the song more symmetrical and based in dialogue. While the Eng. poet. carol maintains the *aaab* rhyme of the first stanza, the Sloane song shifts to an *aaaa* scheme after this first stanza of two couplets.

Both songs appear to derive from a version of a text recorded in John of Grimestone's preaching book, beginning:

Jhesus: Maiden *and* moder, *cum and* se:
Thi child is nailed to a tre,
Hand *and* fot; he may nouth go;
His bodi is wonden al in wo.

(*EEC* 157 D)

The piece continues with two more couplets spoken by Jesus, three by Mary and a further eleven by Jesus. Beyond the first stanzas, the texts continually drift apart and draw together again. Because of its initially confused rhyme scheme, the Sloane song demonstrates most clearly the process by which the text was made into a carol. The burden ‘Nowel el...’ could have been added with minimal effort and Grimestone’s first two couplets used before adopting a mono-rhyme scheme for the rest of the carol. The Eng. poet. carol makes a little more effort by transferring the first couplet to the burden and developing an alternative ending to the first stanza to establish the *aaab* pattern.

The Eng. poet. version of ‘Mary modyr’ is the first of a fresh scribal stint, one marked more strongly by Norfolk dialect than the previous section. Together the three sources suggest that the song was successful in the region, but the verses were not confined to Norfolk. The first quatrain and part of the first line of the second quatrain are also found in one of the manuscripts of Yorkshireman Robert Thornton (BL, Addit. 31042). The lines are scribbled in a margin by a late-fifteenth-century hand (not Thornton’s), together with the burden and first stanza of a nativity carol (*EEC* 21).³⁰ In this book, the text has no pre-posed refrain, although its survival alongside a song in carol form indicates similar use and transmission. Casual fragments such as this are also intriguing as they suggest widespread and possibly memorial circulation alongside written developments.

There are two further connected texts in sixteenth-century London sources. A version of the song was printed in a booklet now included with the Huntington *Christmas carolles*. The printed song provides the following burden:

³⁰ Intriguingly, both of these fragments have correspondences with three manuscripts associated with Norfolk: *EEC* 157 with Sloane, Eng. poet. and Grimestone’s book, and *EEC* 21 with the Trinity roll, Eng. poet. and Lincoln Lat. 141.

Gaudeamus synge we
In hoc sacro tempore;
Puer nobis natus est
ex Maria virgine.

(EEC 157 A)

This manifestly inappropriate quatrain is followed by a twelve-stanza carol, with an expansive redaction of the initial description of Christ on the cross in four stanzas delivered by John, a single stanza spoken by Mary, followed by four from Jesus and a concluding prayer. Like the Sloane carol, the first stanza rhymes *aabb* as it follows the Grimestone text closely, but thereafter it adapts to an *aaab* pattern like the Eng. poet. version. A final connected text turns up in Balliol 354, which parallels the burden and first stanza of the Eng. poet. version, but thereafter continues with three stanzas of complaint by Mary and one stanza of consolation by an unnamed witness. Whereas the printed sixteenth-century carol parallels the Grimestone verses in making Christ's *planctus* the key to the song's affective force, in the Balliol text it is Mary's sorrow. Through alternative distribution of the speeches the versions emphasise different aspects of the Crucifixion: Christ's suffering or Mary's, or at-the-scene dialogue.

The differences between the Balliol text and the others prompted Greene to print the Balliol carol separately as *EEC 158*. *IMEV*, meanwhile, divides the texts into four groups: the Grimestone verse (2036); the Huntington and Eng. poet. carols (1219); the Sloane and Thornton verses (2111); and the Balliol carol (1647). Nevertheless, even beyond the first stanza extensive parallels exist among the texts, as can be found, for example, mid-way through the dialogues in four of the six pieces (the Thornton text includes only the first stanza and the Balliol text is more radically divergent):

Jon, this womman for my sake –
Womman, to Jon I the betake.
Alone I am *withoten* make;

Womman to jon I þe betake
jon kyp þis womman for myn sake
fer synful sowlys my dep I take

On rode I <i>hange</i> for mannis sake. (<i>EEC</i> 157 D, ll.15-18)	on rode I <i>han</i> go for manys sake. (S45, 6)
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johan þis woman I þe betake kep þis woman for my sake on þe rod I <i>hyng</i> for mannys sake for synful man as þe may se (E33, 5)	Moder, to Johan I the betake; Johan, kepe this woman for my sake. On rode I am, emendes to make For synfull man, as ye may se. (<i>EEC</i> 157 A, 7)
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The group represents an extreme example of textual variation, among which Zumthor's Platonic idea of 'the work' is especially difficult to locate, or is especially irrelevant, yet the texts also gesture towards local stories of how they were generated, through their different foci.

The Grimestone verse signals its priority not simply because it is the oldest, but because of the way its couplet form disrupts the first stanzas of the Sloane and Huntington carols. Grimestone copied some of his texts from other sources and may have composed some of the verses in his book himself, but he used a reservoir of established lines and images to do so.³¹ However the 'Maiden and moder' verse came to him, its presence within a book of preaching materials indicates an intention to circulate these verses through oral 'publishing' in sermons, so that the lines would become remembered oral events. The verse would also continue to be available for written transmission if Grimestone's book was copied from, or the books that he copied from continued to be transmitted. The lines thus in circulation, at some point a writer considered them appropriate material for a carol and re-formulated them.

Each of the four carol texts could be an independent composition derived from a verse in a different form, or developed from the text or memory of a previous carol. In itself, the act of turning a Passion dialogue into a carol heightens the participatory possibilities of the text in performance, while at the

³¹ See Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets*, and also Chapter 8, discussion of Grimestone's lullabies.

same time breaking up the unmediated flow of the dialogue as represented in Grimestone's verse. Each of the burdens affects the text differently: the Balliol burden ('Mary moder cum & se/ thy swet son nayled on a tre') alternates Mary's lament with the insistent command that she look upon the Passion, a repetition which could contribute to the fraught emotions of the piece. The same burden used in Eng. poet., however, is disruptive because it breaks up the progression of this more narrative version. The Sloane burden acts as a series of musical interludes between the speeches, subject to whatever emotional emphasis the performers may wish to give it. The burden to the Huntington carol is the most puzzling, returning the singers to their celebration of Christmas, 'Gaudeamus syngwe we / *in hoc sacro tempore*' throughout a lengthy description of the Passion. Given that the majority of songs in the manuscripts in which these songs are found, and of the carol corpus in general, consists of Christmas songs,³² there appears to be some discomfort in adapting the Passion verse to carol form. This may be one reason why no single burden became established.

The spread and variety of the 'Mary moder cum & se' group's circulation suggest that its words and imagery had significant impact on its fifteenth and early-sixteenth-century audiences, and repeatedly prompted audiences to remake it according to their alternative designs. This demonstrates one element of what makes carols successful communal songs: their texts are not owned or even fixed by an author figure, but anyone may, and did, change the text according to their requirements using the wealth of established resources within the 'register'. But another element of a successful communal song is that it is recognisable to the group. In the 'Mary moder' texts there appears to have been a failure to establish

³² Greene prints only fourteen Carols of the Passion, including the two discussed above.

the identity of these verses in carol form by fitting them to a specific burden that would generate the stanzas to follow for its audiences and performers in communal performance.

One reason that this might have occurred is that Passion carols were less regularly performed and fully established than nativity carols, thus this text has been made anew for each of the four collections (or their exemplars) that preserve ‘Mary moder’ carols. Sloane, Eng. poet., Balliol 354 and the Huntington printed *Carolles* are four of the six largest collections of unnotated carols in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,³³ associating the form first with East Anglia, then London. As seen in Chapter 3, the songs in these books have correspondences with many other manuscripts and are often interconnected with one another, although never directly copied. Within them, the ‘Mary moder’ songs take their place within a programme of carol making which will come into focus in the next chapter as our attention shifts from the text and its boundaries to scribes and authors, the makers of written song. In the ‘Mary moder’ songs, as in ‘Now is the twelthe night icom’, we witness burdens attached to amenable verses, a process only visible through the survival of versions both with and without burdens. This should not suggest that all or even most carols were produced from pre-existing non-carol texts. ‘Abowt þe feld’ appears to demonstrate the opposite movement, but even it develops from a pre-established gospel narrative and an abundant set of conventions (forms, phrases, rhymes, narratives) available to exploit, develop and enrich. It too takes its place within the cultural enterprise of carol-making to which its manuscripts attest.

³³ The other two are Ryman’s and Audelay’s anthologies.

‘About þe feld’ manifests a degree of variation among versions but combines this with some stability, including a recognisable burden or refrain in each redaction. This is more typical of carols than the shifts seen in the ‘Mary moder’ group, as Greene says:

The greater part of those carols with burdens preserved in more than one version show none of these variations; in about two-thirds of the total number the burdens of the several texts are identical or vary only in a word or two.³⁴

Within Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s, there are forty-one carols with versions in more than one manuscript,³⁵ and the multiple versions make it difficult to observe clear patterns, but the variation in burdens can be summarised as follows:

- 25: the burden stays the same³⁶
- 4: half a line varies (but in 3 of these the burden remains the same in at least 2 versions)³⁷
- 4: one line varies, is added or omitted (but in 2 of these the burden remains the same in at least 2 versions)³⁸
- 4: the whole burden varies (but in 3 of these the burden remains the same in at least 2 versions)³⁹
- 4: one version has a burden and the others have none⁴⁰

³⁴ *EEC*, p. clxiii.

³⁵ Where the concordances are within one or both of the other songbooks the carol has only been counted once, according to Greene’s system.

³⁶ S8, S12/E41, S13/E16, S20, S34, S38/E46, S46, S48/E26, S72/E19, J4/E60, E10, E23, E24, E31, E44, E52*, E54, E55/66, E57, E69, E72*, E73, E75*, E76*, E77. Texts marked * also exist in versions (some fragmentary) without burdens.

³⁷ S47 (same in 2 versions), S50, S68, E14 (same in 2 versions).

³⁸ S23/E13 (same in 2 versions), S64 (same in 3 versions), J8 (same in 3 versions), E28.

³⁹ S45/E33*, S57 (2 versions share a line), E49 (same in 3 versions, 1 unique, 1 varies one line, 1 varies half a line), E74 (same in 2 version, all share half a line).

⁴⁰ S39/E43/J12, J10, J17/S37, E59 (S32 and S41 have no burdens but there are burdens in other versions).

A fairly tight connection between the burden and the stanzas of a carol emerges from these comparisons because there are relatively few texts with entirely unique burdens.

The total number of burdens in the forty-three carols in the anthologies added together with the number of burdens in other versions is 109, of which only ten burdens are wholly unique. Six of these have been ‘added’ to a text not otherwise written as a carol. Two more of them are in the ‘Mary moder’ group discussed above (S45/E33).⁴¹ This shows that once a verse is attached to a burden, the burden is unlikely to change.

As the repeated element, the burden is the part of the carol most likely to be remembered, but it does not automatically follow that it should be remembered in connection with a certain group of stanzas.⁴² Their lack of movement suggests that they played a mnemonic role within their songs, with which they developed a strong relationship. For them to function as generative elements prompting a memory of particular communal narratives in which the audience should participate, some degree of stability was necessary. Regardless of the conditions of circulation (oral and written) successful participation relies upon a balance between possible development and continuity, a balance the burden helps to achieve. This gives new significance to its layout on the page, where it looks and functions like a rubric.

In an essay on medieval improvisation, Leo Treitler comments that discussion of variation in musical performance and transmission too often elides the question of ‘what would have counted as “the same” in the musical culture

⁴¹ The other two are *EEC* 21 E, 122 D. Additionally, *EEC* 21 C and 401 Ab share only a half line with other versions.

⁴² An example of the burdens remembered and stanzas forgotten is seen in the song in Wager’s *The Longer Thou Livest* referred to in Chapter 2.

we are talking about'.⁴³ While performance in writing or sound confers a finished, bounded character to song, sameness among the texts can be traced not through a stemma, but through intersecting levels and boundary crossings: not in a title, but in moveable sets of words, a response to a festival or in a thematic idea or narrative, an image and a verbal way of approaching that image. Any text, or place in the topography thus created, is also temporally specific, although the very dynamism and interconnectedness of these texts serves, frustratingly, to blur chronological narratives of change. Furthermore, consciousness of just how many pieces are missing from the historical picture complicates identification of the text's boundaries and the way in which they developed. Nevertheless, this chapter has begun to explore the way songs in the anthologies manifest the interlocking of cultural information. The distinctive role that the burden plays in this process begins to suggest why so many songs were written down in the carol pattern throughout the fifteenth century, and it is this activity of writing that will be the focus of the next chapter.

⁴³ Treitler, *With Voice and Pen*, p. 54.

Chapter 5. Writing Songs

Individuals known to have written down or authored carols, and introduced in Part One, include John of Grimestone, a fourteenth-century Norfolk Franciscan; John Audelay, a chantry priest retired near Shrewsbury in the 1420s; James Ryman, a Kentish Franciscan producing carols at the end of the fifteenth century; and Richard Hill, a grocer in London during the first decades of the sixteenth century. The individuals who wrote down and authored Sloane, Eng. poet., St. John's and the majority of carols are unknown, and lack of information hampers attempts to build a social profile of the typical writer of carols or carol manuscripts. Manuscript production is an individualised process even where books were produced professionally but still more so when made for personal use. Nevertheless, manuscripts containing carols show regular, deliberate collection of carols, striking within a manuscript culture that treated lyrics variously.¹

It is difficult to produce generalities about lyric circulation in the period because short texts made their way into all sorts of written sources and confusion arises because the production of manuscript books was dominated by personal decisions, and often by the reader's requirements rather than the author's. In manuscript culture, therefore, the roles of author and reader are distributed in complex and often idiosyncratic ways throughout the production and reception processes. Bonaventure suggests something of this in his comments identifying the different individuals involved in composing books: scribes who do not change the material they copy, compilers who join together the material of

¹ See Julia Boffey, 'Middle English Lyrics and Manuscripts', in *A Companion*, ed. Duncan, pp. 1-18.

others, commentators who add their own material but give priority to that of others and the author who ‘scribit et sua et aliena, sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem’.² Studies of authorship in Middle English literature have expanded these observations in order to recognise the myriad possibilities in the writing and publication of vernacular texts, whether writerly or readerly.³

This chapter examines how the songs in Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s were written, in comparison with related, but contrasting, collections. The reader is not encouraged to read these songbooks as authorial productions: they contain no names and few of the codicological signs that can establish the authoritative status of the organised book, for example colophons, images and rubrics. However, their shared layouts and homogenous contents suggest similarities in the practices of the scribes who produced them, and this chapter will take this as a starting point for exploring the widespread programmatic production of carols referred to in the previous chapter. The songs in these books are not only anonymous but emerge from a process of sharing and re-writing material that disperses the creative process to an extent that the term ‘anonymous’ is not entirely satisfactory if it suggests unknown authorship, lack of knowledge rather than an attribute of writing that is not the product of a single author in possession of a name. Yet exploring the anthologising of songs, and beyond that the deliberate generation of songs, necessitates consideration of agents of writing,

² Prooemii Quaestio IV, Conclusio, *Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, 1 (Quaracchi: Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882), p. 15; ‘writes both his own materials and those composed by others, but his own are the most important materials and the materials of others are included in order to confirm his own’, trans. in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Wogan-Browne et al., p. 3.

³ Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*; Machan, *Textual Criticism; The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Wogan-Browne et al. ‘Writerly’ (*scriptible*) and ‘readerly’ (*lisible*) are terms used by Barthes to describe a continuum where ‘writerly’ texts make the reader ‘a producer of the texts’ and are open to play, whereas ‘readerly’ texts are ‘products (and not productions)’: Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970); *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), pp. 4-5.

possibly, at some stage authors. The conflict and contradiction here needs to be acknowledged and carefully negotiated, and that is the purpose of this chapter. I hope that the process of this negotiation will serve to illuminate the way the three songbooks were written.

Two manuscripts survive in which individual writers organised their carols as authorial productions, the manuscripts of John Audelay and James Ryman. I begin this chapter with a study of these anthologies to establish how individuals could manage the production of authoritative carol collections. Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's are not, however, directly analogous to the Audelay and Ryman books, particularly as they frustrate attempts to posit an author figure even for groups within them. The last two sections of this chapter will address the role of form in collections of song lyrics, and also the paradoxes encountered in examining manuscripts that maintain total anonymity while placing before us the writing of individual scribes compiling personalised anthologies.

I. The Authority of the Book

While it is worth emphasising the anonymity of many vernacular texts and books in late medieval England, the country's tri-lingual culture established contact with French and Latin books where a range of codicological methods could be used to mark authorship, or more broadly the authority of the book. Sylvia Huot's study of songbooks from medieval France highlights this in her examination of author images, rubrication and organisation of texts, and similar techniques have been traced by A. J. Minnis and Ardis Butterfield in manuscripts

of Chaucer and, more particularly, Gower.⁴ Single author manuscript books of English lyrics are extremely rare, although groups of lyrics by a single author within more diverse collections are more common.⁵ An early example is BL, Additional MS 46919, the early fourteenth-century manuscript containing the sermons and notes of Franciscan Friar William Herebert, of which the final folios (ff. 205r.-211v.) include a collection of nineteen poems in Middle English, all but one of which are translated from Latin sources, and which include two texts that may be considered the first surviving English carols.⁶ On the first page of his collection of verses, Herebert provides a note on his method of translation and claims a reward for his work in the form of prayer:

Istos hymnos et Antiphonas, quasi omnes, et cetera, transtulit in Anglicum, non semper de uerbo ad uerbum, sed frequenter sensum, aut non multum declinando, et in manu sua scripsit frater Willelmus Herebert. Qui usum huius quaterni habuerit, oret pro anima dicti fratris.⁷

He also writes his name above all but one of the verse translations, and gives notes about the authors of the original Latin texts where known.⁸ That Herebert marks his name beside translated texts warns the modern reader against over-emphasising the anonymity and lack of authority of Middle English literature, as authority was available for individuals to claim in different ways.

⁴ Huot, *From Song to Book*; Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*; Ardis Butterfield, 'Articulating the Author: Gower and the French Vernacular Codex', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 33 (2003), 80-96. One of the most fertile areas of research into the authorship of medieval song remains studies of the troubadours and trouvères, see overviews in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵ A. S. G. Edwards surveys and analyses author collections in 'Verse Author Collections'.

⁶ Discussed in Chapter 2.

⁷ *The Works of William Herebert*, ed. Reimer, p. 19.

⁸ One of Herebert's two carols is a translation of 'Gloria, Laus et Honor', a hymn by Theodulph of Orleans (itself based on Matt. 21:1-17 and Ps. 23:7-10). Herebert adds note below his translation: 'Nota quod hos versus, scilicet 'Gloria laus' etc., fecit Theodulphus, Aurelianus Episcopus, Andegavis custodie mancipatus', *ibid*, p. 114.

Herebert's sermon collection includes full Latin texts of his sermons to which these verses are appended. By contrast, the preaching notebook of John of Grimestone is an alphabetical collection of Latin quotations and Middle English translations and verses that could be incorporated into sermons, with a few vernacular lyrics, including two carols, written on the folios before this collection begins. Grimestone includes bits of vernacular verse in general circulation, but like Herebert, he notes the authors of Latin texts he translates, and includes near the beginning of his book a note on his role in making the collection and a request for prayer:

Orate pro anima fratris Iohannis de Grimistone qui scripsit istum librum cum magna sollicitudine Anno domini 1372 Ave maria pro anima sua pro amore dei⁹

Thus, in the fourteenth century, manuscripts with a role in the development of the carol and its establishment in writing already implicate the form in practices of producing books with named authorship. Herebert and Grimestone both produced practical, organised books, drawing upon other people's material and enriching it, and they give their names in part to claim the spiritual reward for producing these books, and to mark their role, which included not just composition but also physical writing.

Poetic author collections continue to be found in small numbers in the fifteenth century, such as BL, Harley MS 2255, a collection of Lydgate's verse where many of the poems are followed by comments, underlined in red, such as 'Explicit Johannes Lydgate' (f. 17r.) or 'Explicit quod Lydgate' (f. 157r.), a technique of marking authorship beside each poem reminiscent of the Herebert manuscript. BL, Harley MS 682 carries French methodology into English by

⁹ Wilson, *A Descriptive Index*, p. xiii.

providing translations of Charles d'Orleans's personal lyric sequence, prefaced by a verse announcement of his dedication to Venus that simultaneously establishes himself as author. The book is unfinished, with the verses written neatly and consistently throughout but spaces left for initials and illustration, or possibly for music.¹⁰

The only extant fifteenth-century book entirely made of English lyrics and announced as an author collection other than Harley 682 is the collection of Ryman's carols and verse translations. It concludes with the following colophon:

Explicit liber ymptorum et canticorum, quem composuit ffrater Jacobus Ryman ordinis Minorum ad laudem omnipotens dei et sanctissime matris eius Marie omniumque sanctorum anno domini millesimo [c]ccc.^{mo} [l]xxxxij^o.¹¹

The collection is a compact (200 X 140mm) parchment book written with three hands, identified by Karl Reichl in his examination of the manuscript: A is responsible for a few lyrics added on the first and last folios, B for variant stanzas and a psalm translation on ff. 3r-4v followed by carols on ff. 5r-10v, and C for carols and translations from f. 11r to the colophon on f. 80r, and one carol written after the colophon on f. 80v.¹² Ryman himself could be one of these scribes, either C or more probably B. The verses on ff. 5v-80r form a consistent and continuous body, but those on the outside pages are of doubtful authorship, or trials for texts in the main collection. From f. 5r, hand B writes the burdens in large textura letters, with capitals to start each stanza and careful bracketing and separation of the stanzas. Hand C is smaller and less elaborate, but writes carefully, distinguishing the script of the burdens from that of the stanzas and bracketing the rhymes in the stanzas. Although there is no colour or illustration

¹⁰ *The English Poems of Charles of Orleans*, ed. Steele.

¹¹ 'Die Gedichte', ed. Zupitza, p. 284.

¹² Reichl, 'James Ryman's Lyrics', pp. 196-8.

the manuscript is carefully presented and well preserved on its thin, good quality parchment. It fully integrates the carol into written tradition by preserving the texts within a carefully produced book.

Ryman covers the expected religious topics with a particular emphasis on Marian praise and only two carols moving away from religious themes, one to praise Henry VI and the second a fable about a fox written after the colophon and possibly not by Ryman. His carols have a variety of verse forms but also show continuity with the same phrases and rhymes used repeatedly (the first seven use the same burden: 'Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis'¹³) and a high proportion of macaronic verses using English and Latin, eighty-one of his 121 carols. Ryman's poetic output is not confined to the manuscript: two carols by him (with similarities to those in the manuscript but not direct correspondences) are found on a single page of four songs known as the Bradshaw Fragments,¹⁴ and there is a probable reference to him by name in an early sixteenth-century Kentish lyric ('let eure Ryman take hyede how he doht leue/ and not to ssynne hym sself to geue').¹⁵ The manuscript, the single largest extant collection of carols, represents Ryman's authorial corpus, a series of carols interspersed with other kinds of verse and translations from liturgical material. The book's given purpose, 'ad laudem omnipotens dei et *sanctissime* matris eius Marie', leaves us uncertain of how the manuscript was actually used. It was sufficiently available for texts and three simple monophonic tunes to be added on blank pages after the production of the main section, but it is not worn in the way that Sloane, Eng. poet. and St

¹³ 'Die Gedichte', ed. Zupitza, pp. 327-31.

¹⁴ Rossell Hope Robbins, 'The Bradshaw Carols', *PMLA*, 81 (1966), 308-10. The carols are identified as by Ryman through their similarity to others in the Ryman manuscript, but they are not marked with his name.

¹⁵ John Scattergood, 'Two unrecorded poems from Trinity College Dublin MS 490', *Review of English Studies*, NS 38 (1987), 46-9 (p. 48).

John's are. The survival of some music in the manuscript suggests that the words were to be sung, and this aspect of its function will be addressed in the next chapter, but the writing of the manuscript is motivated by two factors: a single author, and an organised, complete programme of religious praise, for which Ryman found the carol form especially amenable.

On a smaller scale, something similar can be seen in the carols of John Audelay, whose poetic works survive in Douce 302 and include a section of twenty-five carols, plus another written in an earlier part of the book. A lengthy colophon declares not just Audelay's authorship, but also demands that the integrity of the book be maintained:

No mon þis book he take away,
Ny kutt owte noo leef, Y say for-why,
For hit ys sacrelege, sirus, Y 3ow say,
Beþ acursed in þe dede truly.
3ef 3e w[i]ll haue any copi,
Askus leeue *and* 3e shul haue,
To pray for hym specialy
That hyt made 3our soules to saue,
Jon, þe blynde Awdelay.
The furst prest to þe lord Strange he was,
Of þys chauntre here in þis place,
That made þis bok by Goddus grace,
Deeff, siek, blynd, as he lay,
*Cuius anime propicietur Deus.*¹⁶

As with Ryman's manuscript, Audelay's own role in the production of the book has been disputed, especially given that he insists upon being blind and also deaf. As with Ryman, he is thought to have had some role, probably as the editor who corrects the text and adds rubrics throughout, a view supported by Susanna Fein.¹⁷ His insistence that the book be kept exactly as it is – to cut out a leaf 'ys sacrelege' – corresponds to the instructive tone of the rubrics throughout the

¹⁶ *The Poems*, ed. Whiting, p. 224; *IMEV* 1210.

¹⁷ Fein, 'Good Ends'.

book and also the commands to the reader within the texts, for example the rubric that introduces the carols:

I pray 3ow, syrus, boothe moore *and* las,
Syng þese caroles *in Cristemas*.¹⁸

He concludes his final carol:

I pray 3oue, *seris*, pur charyte,
Redis þis caral reuerently,
Fore I mad hit *with wepyng eye*,
3our broder Ion, þe blynd Awdlay.¹⁹

This self-conscious framing and controlling attitude promotes Audelay's authority. Fein explains:

the volume stretches what we might mean by the term 'author collection' because it records the poet's voice both internally and marginally, letting it resonate with the poet's own 'blynd Awdelay' insistence in ever-direct address to the reader... In its insistently named poet's multiple signatures, prayers, petitions, and sequences of matter, it demonstrates a contemporary motivation for the anthologizing impulse... To read the book is to pray for John Audelay's soul.²⁰

Authorship is not simply about composition of texts, but the structuring of the book, which assumes its own authority as a complete, organised object. To focus upon the group of twenty-five carols will draw out what this means within the carol.

All carols are headed with Latin titles in red ink, the first initial in the burdens are red, and paraph marks preface each stanza, although no braces are drawn. They therefore have a distinctive visual identity that guides reading and presents the verses as planned and complete. After the red rubric, the group begins with five doctrinal carols (on the Ten Commandments, Seven Deadly Sins etc.), none of which are found elsewhere, all of similar length, using the same *aa bcbcA* rhyme scheme, and similarly instructive, proverbial burdens. They

¹⁸ *The Poems*, ed. Whiting, p. 180.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 214, *IMEV* 44.

²⁰ Fein, 'Good Ends', pp. 109-10

provide ideal illustration of programmatic carol making, surely Audelay's. The next carol, 'Welcum 3ole', corresponds with a song in the roughly contemporaneous Sloane anthology, at least in its first three stanzas (S68, *EEC* 7). It is followed by a sequence of five carols, each titled as appropriate for the different feast days of the Christmas season. The first four are extremely similar to each other, with the same *aa bbba* schemes and similar burdens:

In reuerens of oure Lord in heuen
Worchip þis marter, swete Sent Steuen.

I pray 3oue, breder euerechon,
Worchip þis postil, swete Saynt Ion.

With al þe reuer[en]s þat we may,
Worchip we Childermasday.

I pra[y] 3ou, sers, al in-fere,
Worchip Seynt Thomas, þis hole marter.²¹

Following these is written a carol beginning, 'What tyþingis bryngest vs, messangere' (*EEC* 117, *IMEV* 21), versions of which are also extant in two musical manuscripts, including the early fifteenth-century Trinity roll. The group (Whiting's numbers 33-8) is united by the scheme of providing songs for the different days of Christmas, but Audelay's productions appear to be framed by carols for which his authorship is at best doubtful. It is not possible to prove that every time a version of a carol within Audelay's manuscript occurs elsewhere it was or was not originally authored by Audelay. However, his rather predictable style makes it likely that he was not the original author of 'Welcum 3ole' and 'What tyþingis' as they differ from those around them significantly and are found in manuscripts close to Douce 302 in date.

²¹ *The Poems*, ed. Whiting, pp. 187-90, *IMEV* 3057, 2929, 601, 838.

They are followed by a more miscellaneous group of carols, on Henry VI (Audelay names himself in the last verse as author), man's estate in life, childhood, and the Epiphany, the last of which is extant in far shorter versions in Sloane and Balliol and could be an expansion of a pre-existing carol (*EEC* 122). There follows a sequence of seven carols on themes relating to women: praise of St Anne and Mary followed by carols exhorting virginity and faithfulness in marriage. Two of the Marian carols are extant in very similar versions in Balliol (*EEC* 172 and 230). The exhortations are designed for a female audience: 'I pray 3oue maydys þat here be', 'Avyse 3oue wemen'. Whether or not Audelay is the author of the Marian carols, here again he produces a short sequence united by function, to instruct women, as the last two songs confirm. The three final carols have a more personal emphasis: on the speaker's love of God, 'I haue a loue is heuen Kyng', his fear of dying, 'Lade, helpe! Ihesu merce! / Timor mortis conturbat me', and a request to St Francis, 'Saue þi breder boþ nyzt *and* day'. These three concluding carols fit with Fein's analysis that the manuscript's recurrent theme is the desire to make a 'good endyng' (as he requests in the carol he entitles *Timor mortis conturbat me*). Audelay's purpose in putting together these texts is not confined to the intent to record his authorial productions, although this is a significant factor. He appears willing to draw moderately upon other texts where he can integrate them into his own scheme. All of the carols with correspondences are on the most common carol themes, Christmas celebration and Marian praise, either because these were the carols people most enjoyed performing and passing on from his collection, or because these were already available to Audelay as he put together his own carol programme.

Both Ryman's and Audelay's manuscripts signal the authoritative status of their texts with colophons and signatures and guide the reader using standard layouts and clear systems of decorations that draw attention to the manuscripts as books, in Derrida's sense of the book as a protective construct, a sign of totality.²² In both cases, as in the Herebert and Grimestone manuscripts, the authorial and scribal work is connected with prayer. The books function as archives, collected works and memorials. They were all produced by men who were members of the church and possibly for use within their religious institutions.

These two manuscripts make visible the individual agents of programmes of carol making. It is, however, intriguing to note how limited the evidence is of carols from these authorial books entering wider circulation, or of being 'published' by entering the public domain outside of the protective, organised book. Evidence of Ryman's carols in circulation is extremely limited given his output, and while it is possible that three of Audelay's carols circulated this is by no means definite, and his insistence on the totality of his book and the need for permission to copy it is discouraging. The book was passed on: an inscription on f. 35 records that it was once owned by 'Ihon Barkre', a canon at the Augustinian priory of St John the Baptist in Launde, Leicestershire, and that the book was given to him by 'Wyatt a mystral both curtess and [kynd]'. Below this another note states the book belongs to 'William Vyott both / kurtes a[nd] kynde A [min]sstrale / In coventry there yow schall / hym ffynde'. A minstrel appears to

²² Discussed in Jacques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967); *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), especially p. 18. See also Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language, Theory, Mythology and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

have transferred the book from one Augustinian house to another,²³ but it is hard to prove that Audelay's texts circulated more widely. This suggests that successful carol making (in terms of circulation) was different from that represented by these manuscripts. They show us possibilities inherent in the carol form for authorial production comparable to Charles d'Orleans' lyric cycle and later sonnet sequences, possibilities that were actualised but do not account for the form's more widespread success. The absence of colophons such as those in the Ryman and Audelay manuscripts, with their evidently well-established conventions, from Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's already indicates different origins.

The limited circulation of Ryman's and Audelay's verses contrasts with those found in Grimestone's manuscript. Two of his lullaby carols had widespread influence, including on texts in Sloane as well as direct correspondences in St John's, CUL 5943, Harley 2330 and Harley 7358 (*EEC* 149 and 155) and another of his verses lies behind the 'Mary moder' carol group (*EEC* 157-8), circulating through Sloane, Eng. poet., Balliol 354 and the Huntington *Carolles*. Grimestone wrote only three carols in his book, but his output was high in impact. One reason for this may be geographical: writing in Norfolk he was situated in the county with which most carol manuscripts are associated, especially a particular type of manuscript, the compact and anonymous anthology, indebted to a rich and multifaceted publishing culture. Further, correspondences to verses throughout his preaching book attest that Grimestone included verse already in widespread circulation, and the book itself is designed for dissemination orally in sermons. Where Ryman and Audelay are

²³ See Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p. 66.

making books, Grimestone is embedded in Norfolk devotional culture and its emerging literary wealth, fostered through shared resources and freedom to compile them differently according to varying needs.

Even so, it would be difficult to argue that the three anthologies, all coherent written collections, are more alike to Grimestone's preaching notebook than Ryman's verse anthology. The Sloane manuscript presents the most thorough uniformity of appearance and procedure in its neatly framed pages, regular script and standard layout maintained by a single scribe, but Eng. poet. and St John's aspire to something similar through homogeneity of layouts and contents. Although not as rigorously organised, they have this in common with Ryman's and Audelay's works. The copying of the texts in Sloane, St John's and Eng. poet. was planned to some degree on the level of form and function to produce coherent anthologies. The widespread circulation of their texts and the way in which their texts appear to have been drawn from smaller collections (seen in Chapter 3) precludes consideration of these books as authorial productions in the relatively simple sense that Audelay and Rymans' collections are, but the question of individual agency in the writing does not go away. There are five individuals directly responsible for writing these books: the single Sloane scribe, two Eng. poet. scribes and two St John's scribes. These individuals' practices are obscured by the existence before them of the producers of possible exemplars, and the involvement of prior scribes, poets, performers and compilers. With this difficulty in mind, the next section will look at ways in which the writing of the manuscripts can be characterised and to what degree they are organised to produce authoritative books, ones that protect their texts through their planning and present them to readers under written control.

II. Characterising writing

The closely interconnected texts contained within the three songbooks render individual characterisation of their texts problematic. As has already been seen, language and themes cross between carol texts within the manuscripts but also outside of the collections, so while it is possible to track the use of certain phrases and rhymes within the collections, much of their verbal material can be traced with ease to other sources. For example, Sloane contains two carols with the burden, ‘*Man be glad in halle & bour · þis tyme was born our sauyour*’ (S47 and S56), but this sharing of a burden by two texts does match the extent to which burdens and phrases are repeated in Ryman’s and Audelay’s carols. Summaries of the anthologies’ texts reveal their likenesses; for example, each uses a similar proportion of Latin (32% of songs in Eng. poet. and St John’s contain some Latin, as do 28% of Sloane songs). There are some distinctions. The Sloane carols are the least formally adventurous: of its fifty-five carols all employ quatrain stanzas except for one using five-line stanzas and the four carols in long couplets or ballad quatrains.²⁴ Eng. poet.’s sixty-five carols include forty-eight with quatrains, but fourteen have longer stanza forms, up to ten lines long. While it is possible that this reflects something of the poetic choices of the scribes, this is not necessarily so and the later date of Eng. poet., about half a century later than Sloane, may equally suggest that over this period the carol had been developed and adapted for different stanzaic complexity. This is supported by the wide range of stanza forms found in late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century

²⁴ For full details of verse forms see Appendix B.

carol collections, including Ryman's (also densely macaronic), Balliol 354 and the Huntington *Carolles*.

Themes are relatively standardised across the collections, although small-scale patterns are identifiable. The Sloane anthology includes a higher proportion of moral advice and songs about death, but also a higher number of songs about sex and drinking. Its favoured saints are St Nicholas, St Thomas Becket and St Edmund. Eng. poet. has a large number of anti-feminist songs, includes more doctrinal advice (songs about prayer, the Trinity and religious acquiescence) and favours St John the Evangelist and St Thomas Becket. St John's includes a high proportion of songs both for and against women and praises St Catherine. However, many of the thematic particularities of the two larger books are concentrated within sections. So, Sloane includes nine carols on death and moral advice in the first twenty songs but only three more in the remaining fifty-four, while all three of Eng. poet.'s songs of St John are written together (E53-55) and four of its anti-feminist carols are in another group (E72-75). Thematic clusters are likely to be determined by the anthologies' exemplars. In the two bigger collections, therefore, individual choices are disguised by pursuit of large scale anthologising.

This raises the question, might it be possible to characterise song writing by attention to the smaller groups from which these collections were built, just as it was, for example, possible to observe Audelay's characteristic style within his carols for the days of Christmas? To address this, I will examine a group of songs within the Sloane manuscript that are, for the most part, not carols, but stand together as an isolable group. Song S25 begins a new side of paper and is the first of seven songs written in a form that can either be described as long

couplets or quatrains rhymed *abcb*, and scanning, very irregularly, 4/3/4/3, what is now known as ballad stanza. The formal integrity of these songs encourages looking at them together, as does their appearance in the manuscript. They are the first songs not in carol form, and not in carol quatrains, and are all written the same way: set out as couplets in long lines, with punctuation usually but not always marking the mid-line break, either a punctus or a mark similar to a semi-colon. Paraph marks preface each stanza, brackets are drawn around the stanzas and lines drawn between the songs. They begin at the top of f. 10v and end at the bottom of f. 11v. Their subjects are as follows:

S25: Mary (Annunciation)

S26: Description of a cockerel (a sexual innuendo)

S27: A drinking song

S28: The Fall (Felix Culpa in praise of Mary)

S29: Riddles

S30: The Annunciation (with a burden)

S31: A riddling sexual narrative

This range of subjects does not entirely agree with the uniformity suggested in the songs' forms and layouts although it could be reduced to an oscillation between Marian religious praise and playful songs united by a riddling element.

These are the most extensively discussed songs in the manuscript, and include the famous lyrics 'I syng a of a myden' (S25)²⁵ and 'Adam lay ibowndyn' (S28). The praise they have won from modern critics contrasts with the fact that all are unique to the Sloane anthology, unlike the book's carols, eighteen of which have correspondences in contemporary sources. Outside of

²⁵ In future short references to this song I omit the first 'a' in agreement with the version of the line usually printed.

this group, texts that parallel versions in other manuscripts are distributed evenly throughout the manuscript, so the lack of correspondences to this section is marked. Verbal and stylistic patterns can be identified throughout the group, such as the characteristic openings ‘I syng’ (S25), ‘I haue’ (S26, S29, S31) and ‘I saw’ (S28). Repetition plays a prominent role in all these songs, and fundamentally structures S25, S26, S29 and S30. These similarities agree with the way the texts visually appear to belong together, and the high quality of at least some of the lyrics encourages the positing of an ‘I syng of a myden’ poet.

But these songs do not stand independently from the wider, continuous body of medieval lyric. We know ‘I syng of a myden’ was in general fifteenth-century circulation as a song from a reference preserved in a sermon for the feast of the Assumption in a later fifteenth-century manuscript, and that the song’s history stretches back much earlier than the Sloane manuscript, because it echoes a thirteenth-century lyric in a friar miscellany.²⁶ These two sources inscribe the song within written and performance traditions, and will be examined in Chapter 7. Another of the songs, ‘I haue a 3ong suster’ (S29), has connections beyond the manuscript through parallels to riddles in ballads and nursery rhymes recorded in later centuries from oral tradition.²⁷

The limited surviving evidence thus suggests that the group is less isolated than it at first appears. Although a single writer could have produced this series of couplet songs, perhaps drawing inspiration from a pre-existing text, such a construction offers limited assistance in interpreting them. One of the songs, ‘þe sunne of grace hym schynit in’ (S30), although structurally similar to the texts around it, is a religious carol provided with a burden, signalling that the

²⁶ For the sermon reference see Fletcher, “‘I sing of a maiden’”, and the lyric, *EL* 31.

²⁷ See *ESPB* 46.

couplet songs are not to be separated too decisively from the rest of the manuscript. There are in fact further couplet songs and texts written in similar stanza forms distributed through the book (S35, S44, S55, S69 and S74), some of which display techniques like those of the first group. Writing rather than authorship provides an appropriate framework for approaching these texts: they have been written down and circulated among like types, in a process that encouraged influence and interaction.

Lyrics in late medieval England are commonly written among others of the same form, exemplified by the Vernon refrain lyrics, carol collections and Charles d'Orléans' sequences of roundels and ballades.²⁸ Formal similarity appears to be as decisive a factor as authorship and often more so, and one reason for this is the close connection between form and function, including in musical performance. In a culture where lyric was still closely associated with performance, particular forms could be performed in particular contexts and with related musical structures. Within Sloane and Eng. poet. formal groupings and pairs appear regularly, suggesting that small-scale circulation in the form of pamphlets or single pages of song often observed criteria of formal similarity, as seen in the Sloane group of couplet songs. A clear example of this is found in the first quire of Lincoln Lat. 141, which preserves nine carol lyrics.²⁹ The texts are written by a single scribe, but apparently in two different shifts: the first seven texts are written in a different ink from the last two, which also differ in format and subject matter. The first seven texts are all in some way devotional, all short (only up to four stanzas long) and all but one are written in a combination of English and Latin, where the Latin is usually drawn from the sung liturgy and

²⁸ Smaller groupings of lyrics of similar formal type include CUL, Additional 5943, f. 170v; and BL, Harley MS 3810, ff. 10v-34r.

²⁹ Two of these nine are not certainly carols, see Appendix C, 2 and 5.

placed in the songs' burdens or the last line of the stanzas. Two of these songs are found in other sources, including manuscripts of an earlier date than Lincoln Lat. 141, such as the Trinity roll, so it would be implausible to claim that a single author produced the whole collection, and yet the continuity of the seven texts is nevertheless suggestive of an active compilation process in which songs of the same type were sought, and possibly material re-written to suit the compiler's needs, or new material created on the model of other texts in the collection.

Within Sloane the two songs in pseudo-ballade form are written together on ff. 18v-21v (S40-41). The second of these verses is a refrain lyric found in the Vernon manuscript, 'Be þe way wanderyng as I went', but the first, 'As I went brow a gardyn grene', is found on a flyleaf (Pembroke College, Cambridge, MS 313, fragment B3) and in Advocates 19.3.1, a fifteenth-century Lincolnshire poetic anthology with no correspondences to the Vernon refrain lyrics. The pseudo-ballade stanza is only found in these two verses within the Sloane anthology and even though they probably had two different original authors their formal similarity has drawn them together within the manuscript whether through the Sloane scribe's organisation or, more likely, in an exemplar. The long couplets, pseudo-ballade stanza and carol structure all provide forms individual writers could imitate, expanding upon songs they encountered. Sequences in manuscript circulation testify to this process, but the songs' formal, functional identities are often more visible in the manuscripts than authorship, and thus assume a significant role in production and reception.

The scribes of the Sloane and Eng. poet. anthologies built these short sequences into their anthologies, which are also motivated by formal and functional continuity but of a more flexible, inclusive kind. Texts that appear

generically isolated, such as the Sloane ballads, are protected by the larger construct of the book and integrated into the archive of song lyrics. The Sloane and Eng. poet. anthologies maintain this balance between inclusiveness and continuity throughout, in a way that contrasts with the far more programmatic Ryman and Audelay books.

III. Books Personal and Anonymous

Anthologising played a significant role in fifteenth-century song, especially the carol, but larger collections usually relied upon smaller ones. While there are several surviving printed carol booklets and pages from booklets, St John's is the only extant carol booklet in manuscript form, with the possible exception of the first quire of Lincoln Lat. 141 which may have spent time as a booklet before being incorporated into a larger manuscript. St John's is made of a single quire, sewn into its parchment wrapping, a robust wrapping to which we probably owe its survival, although even thus protected several pages have been torn away and the manuscript extensively damaged. The rubbing and tearing of the St John's booklet tells a story of extensive use and circulation, the kind of use that must have worn out other paper pamphlets of written texts, such as the one the Sloane couplet songs may have been written in. The scruffy appearance of the book and poor quality of its texts indicate that the collection represents a different process of grouping and gathering carols from that preserved in the Ryman and Audelay manuscripts, in that the compilers of this collection were less centrally concerned with the production of a book, or more precisely the protection of texts within an authoritative, physical construct.

This section will ask what the St John's scribes' principles of writing and selection were and explore an alternative type of carol collection to those in author manuscripts and large scale anthologies. The St John's manuscript is a paradoxical object. The casual way in which it appears to have been written signals a lack of concern for its status as a book yet its physical condition suggests that it was put to active use as a book. The absence of authorial marks, signs of the book's origins, the conventional texts and correspondences to other sources make this a thoroughly anonymous manuscript, yet observing the scribes' practices and how the book was created involves the reader in examination of individual choices by the two agents of the manuscript's production.

The manuscript is written in two hands, and the scribes contribute about equally and alternate throughout. Occasionally both contribute to a single lyric. In the only recent study of the manuscript, Daniel Wakelin suggests that the pattern of close cooperation may indicate that the two scribes were working together in a static environment such as a parish church where written exemplars were available to them.³⁰ This is, however, only a possibility. Another, given that the second scribe writes much more messily than the first, is that this low-grade notebook could be writing practice, and the book could have been produced in a school environment, as appears to be the case for Lincoln Lat. 141.³¹ However, if this was so the exercise was evidently directed at producing a useful item.

Five of the manuscript's seventeen complete songs are found in versions in other manuscripts and the texts in this manuscript are markedly variable. In

³⁰ Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', p. 32.

³¹ See Chapter 3.

four of the five cases in which there is more than one version of a St John's carol, the texts differ enough for Greene to print them below one another as separate versions of the 'same' carol.³² Only with one does a collation suffice and in this carol the St John's text has nine stanzas and Greene's base text, a lullaby in Grimestone's preaching book, thirty-seven: hardly an exact transmission.³³ The extensive variation correlates with the manuscript's appearance, insecurely rooted in textual culture. However, changes within the texts are unevenly distributed, even within single songs, signalling mixed modes of transmission. For example, versions of the Epiphany song beginning 'Now ys þe xij day com', extant in St John's, Sloane, Eng. poet. and Harley 541, show a typical distribution of minor verbal variation, with parallel rhyme-words and sense. The St John's stanza is particularly close to the Eng. poet. text, although even in the stanza compared below, chosen as one in which the St John's text was closest to other versions, there is a unique failure of sense as the different first line means that the third line no longer connects properly:

Of herowdys þat mody kyng
 he tokyn her' leue of eld & 3yng
 & for þey wente *with* her' offeryng
 In syzte
 & þer þey come be nyte
 (S39, 7)

Of harowd þat mody kyng'
 þei toke her leue both held and 3yng'
 & for þei 3edyn *with* her offeryng'
 be nyth
 þe stere 3af them lyth
 (E43, 7)

qwan he had seyde hys lykyng
 Syr herawd' þat mody kyng'
 & forth þe wente *with* þer offrynge
 Be nyth
 þe stere gauē hem ly3ht
 (J12, 8)

They toke her leve, both olde and yonge,
 Off Herode, that mody kyng;
 They went forth *with* there offrynge
 By lyghth-a,
 By the sterre that shoon so bryght-a.
 (Harley 541; EEC 125 C, 7)

³² EEC 125, 142, 148 and 232.

³³ EEC 149.

On either side of this stanza the St John's text preserves stanzas with no parallel in the other versions. The stanza immediately following that above runs:

Be þe stere þat schon so bry3ht
þe iij kyngys tok wey full' ry3ht'
Be þe hape of þat chyld' so bryry3ht'
Thoro *grace*
to þat holy place (9)

It is impossible to say where these formulaic and slightly rough (rhyming *bry3ht* twice) lines entered circulation, whether through the agency of the St John's scribe or that of an earlier writer. The different types of textual variation seen here, minor and significant, make it difficult to establish the regular practice of the St John's scribes.

In two places in the manuscript one scribe writes the first line of a song then the other scribe writes several lyrics before his partner returns to the song begun earlier: so on f. 3v scribe B writes 'Qwan crist was borne', below which scribe A writes two carols, before scribe B resumes on f. 4v 'Qwan crist was borne in bedlem', an Epiphany song (J9). Wakelin reads these interruptions and resumptions as evidence that written exemplars were being used. It is not, however, proof, because memorial transmission would also have allowed a scribe to begin one song, be interrupted and resume it. If the scribes were using written exemplars, even for the production of this anthology they would appear to be using more than one, different sources from one another. The songs thus appear to be circulating in increasingly fragmentary sources, further removed from authoritative anthologies such as Ryman's, but also from the coherent and lengthy productions seen in Eng. poet. and Sloane.

The textual identity of the St John's songs is also brought into question by the quality of several texts that, notwithstanding how freely carols could change, can only be described as faulty. The carol to St Catherine opens:

A a a a *salve caterina*

lystyn lordyngys qwatte I xall' sey
A grette maruell' tell' I may
Of a louely medyn tell' I may
salve caterina

Of god *grace* sche was full' wys
Sche was qweryd in hyrde wys
Of all' dottys þat were so wys

Wundir marwelys be godes *grace*
þer is no woman in þis plase
A woman is þe of *grace* (J6, 1-3)

Faulty rhyme is found in all three stanzas, with clumsy filler endings dominating the first two stanzas and an obvious omission in the last line of the third stanza. The third stanza, the song's mid-point, does not fit the carol's specific narrative, but seems to have been imported from another song on the value of women, a common fifteenth-century type which used similar phrases, as in this couplet from a carol in Sloane:

þer a womman is in plas
womman is þe welle of gras (S8, 2.2-3)

In attempting a song in praise of St Catherine, some scribe or performer connected his or her activity directly with the medieval debate on women's virtue, and lines such as those quoted were remembered as part of that debate. Perhaps the first line of the third stanza belonged to the 'original' narrative of St Catherine, which might, for example, have read something like this:

Wundir marwelys be godes *grace*
were done in many a place
by that mayd so fair of face

Instead of this the text tells us something of how poetic material was remembered and circulated, and of the way songs to female saints were thought about and used, in connection with debate on the worth of women. It demonstrates that the written text was emphatically not considered by the St John's scribe to be something that must be finalised and perfect. Instead, the page (in this manuscript) is a place where words are remembered and archived, but not scripted for exact repetition.

Faltering texts like those found in St John's do occasionally appear in Sloane and Eng. poet., but they dominate this short collection to an extent that throws doubt on whether it could have been produced within a tradition of written transmission equivalent to that which prompted the production of longer anthologies. We have already seen a variety of processes through which English song lyrics were gathered together on paper: authors preserved carefully sequenced carols within the protection of the written book, anthologists brought together groups of song texts, and small-scale collections of formally similar songs were made, whether united by authorial making or by function. On a small scale, the St John's scribes anthologised carols and other song texts similarly to the scribes of Sloane and Eng. poet., creating a lyric archive, but there are also significant differences between the manuscripts: length, the quality of the texts, the oscillation between scribes, the comparative lack of care about the appearance of the book. The differences raise the possibility that the booklet represents a more personal collection than the more carefully produced anthologies, a sort of medieval iPod holding a selection of songs in accessible form. The texts in this booklet were drawn from the general circulation of carols

and other vernacular songs and they thus provide access to a dynamic key to the carol's success, the dynamic between personal and group ownership of the songs.

Songs dense in variation suggest themselves as the first place to turn in seeking to identify the individualised improvising voice of a writer making his or her own collection of song lyrics, but the conventionality of the texts frustrates such a search. Nor with songs like these might seeking an individual writer be an appropriate response. Carols are designed to affirm homogeneity and group voice and the St John's songs' role in uniting the community in celebration is announced in the first surviving stanza of the manuscript:

þe borys hed haue we in bro3ht
lok 3e be mery in herte & tho3ht
& he þat all' þis worlde has wrowt
saue 3ow & eke me (J1, 1)

Yet responding to the book involves asking questions about a specific reception, that of the compilers', and compromising this fundamental anonymity. The subjects of the St John's anthology are an apparently unremarkable mix: religious songs on the days of Christmas, Mary, the Crucifixion, St. Catherine, along with moral carols and songs about women. However, isolating the songs of the second scribe reveals an incipient pattern:

- J2: Crucifixion
- J4: Mary's joys
- J5: Woman's Lament
- J6: St. Catherine
- J8 (part): Lullaby
- J9 (part): Epiphany
- J10: Lullaby
- J11: Praise of women

J16: Penitence

J17: Lullaby

Of these ten songs, seven give a central role to women. The sequence J4-J6 is particularly interesting because it frames a lament in the voice of a woman who has been seduced by a clerk and left pregnant, with two songs praising exemplary virgins. This provides a disciplinary, or inspirational, sequence for young women. I have already mentioned that scribe B has a rather messy hand, perhaps that of a learner or of someone unpractised in writing and less securely situated within scribal culture. It is not impossible that scribe B was a woman but this is speculation. What is certain is that scribe B's contribution is a remarkably positive selection from the woman debate. Scribe A writes another song in praise of women at the end of the collection, but most of this has now been torn away, and a playful attack on women that compares them with steel (bright, combative and untrustworthy, J14). This is mild in comparison with sequences of anti-feminism in other carol collections, notably Eng. poet. and Balliol 354, both of which advocate wife beating.

But in a manuscript that appears to have been so carelessly, even fortuitously put together, is it appropriate to seek such thematic threads? Manuscript transmission was often accidental as people wrote down what they happened to come across. Something of this is suggested by the way a few lines from other songs have been scribbled on the back cover of the manuscript by a contemporary hand. However, manuscript evidence suggests that carols were abundant in fifteenth-century Norfolk: the larger manuscripts surviving from the region, the booklets upon which they were based as well as the non-written circulation of songs made an environment that enabled selection. A small booklet

like the St John's songbook can thus represent a personal collection in a way a bigger one, seeking scope and completeness, is less likely to.

I have referred to the anthologies as repositories of 'communal song', which risks implying that their production was similar to the spontaneous folk creation of ballads imagined by 'communalist' theories in the nineteenth-century. My use of the term 'communal' is concerned with function, the festive use of song among local, hierarchical groups, and it is also a way of characterising the form and style of song texts, and carols in particular. Recognising what is shared in these cultural productions need not fuel fantasies of autochthonous art. The necessarily individual agency involved in manuscript production ideally allows us to witness the exchange between individual and group that enabled the development of the carol. This chapter has only addressed some of the ways in which the carol was written and texts distributed among different groups, ways most relevant to the compilation of the three anthologies, without exploring fugitive texts or musical songbooks. These will come into focus in the next chapter, concerned with performance. The production of manuscripts for personal use means that writing is inseparable from reception, so the next chapter will also continue this examination of the way that songs were written. The manuscripts attest to a strong written tradition in which songs could be manipulated for different purposes both in the construction of books and more ephemeral, personalised distribution and selection that effectively publicised the carol in a range of creative ways through fifteenth-century East Anglia and beyond.

Chapter 6. Performing Songs

The majority of the songs collected in Sloane, St John's and Eng. poet. share a functional identity that is expressed in their dominant theme, the celebration of the Christmas feast days. Having explored the text and writing in the previous two chapters, the subject of performance is now pressing. When approaching the words on these pages it is customary to remind ourselves that we are looking at the traces of social phenomena and insist that the fullest possible appreciation of the lyrics depends upon recalling the performance contexts.¹ Zumthor goes so far as to suggest we should conceive of early medieval songs as we might dances, which are unthinkable distinguished from their physical group enactments.² Etymologically and possibly structurally, carols originated in a type of dance song, so this suggestion appears both evocative and relevant, although it may invite some slippage between analysis and imagination.

That danger is one reason why this chapter follows the previous two and begins with extensive exploration of documentary records of contexts for performance. I will then examine songbooks containing music before exploring the relationship between the performances and the texts. Both oral events and writing contribute to the making of the songs in the three anthologies through interaction, even if the surviving texts contain only traces of that process.³ Unfortunately the anthologies contain little information external to the song

¹ In relation to the carol this approach is ubiquitous and is found throughout Greene and Stevens' work. For a recent statement of it see Reichl, 'The Middle English Carol'.

² Paul Zumthor, 'The Text and Voice', trans. Marilyn C. Engelhardt, *New Literary History*, 16 (1984), 67-92.

³ Ruth Finnegan's study, *Oral Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), emphasises the importance of considering performance contexts, including audience, in approaching any text with an oral life; on the interaction of oral and written culture, see especially Treitler, *With Voice and Pen*, and Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*. For a recent review of the field see Bruce W. Holsinger, 'Analytical Survey 6: Medieval Literature and Cultures of Performance', *New Medieval Literatures*, 6 (2003), 271-311.

lyrics themselves about their performance, so to some extent contexts have to be supplied from elsewhere.

I. The Performance Contexts

The environments where song and music were performed in late medieval England about which we are best informed were institutional and professional, dominated by the Church. Singing played an important role in ritual and ceremonial life within English cathedrals, monasteries and household chapels, especially under the flexible structure of liturgical performance, and these contexts have been studied in rich depth by music scholars including John Caldwell, John Stevens, and Frank Ll. Harrison among many others. Definitions of liturgy vary but even the most encompassing allow that it is in some way ‘formal’: John Harper includes ‘the whole body and practice of corporate worship’, provided it is ‘formal worship’⁴, while Barbara Hagg expands this to ‘a formal expression of faith, either public or private, communal or individual’.⁵ The formality of liturgy greatly assists its study because it is expressed through documentation that fixes how the performance should proceed, whereas the carols and associated songs could be realised in different environments and along a continuum between formal and extremely informal performance. Documentary evidence of song outside of the liturgy is most likely to exist surrounding performance that has been paid for and was therefore associated with some level

⁴ John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy From the Tenth to the Eighteenth Centuries: A historical introduction and guide for students and musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 12.

⁵ Barbara Hagg, ‘The meaning of sacred ritual and secular piety’, in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, ed. Tess Knighton and David Fallows (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 60-8 (p. 62).

of professionalism. Despite this limitation, sources, including accounts, letters, ordinances and descriptions of specific occasions, survive that establish the role of songs, including carols, in festive performance, associated with feasting and group ritual and revel.

Account books include records where professional singers were employed for feasts, although the late development of the word 'carol' to signify Christmas song, particularly stanzaic songs with burdens, means that sources specifying this type of song are from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The accounts of the Prior of Worcester, who hosted annual feasts for the city's officials, list several payments for carols in 1520, including 'caralls on cristmas day dynar 14d./ at supper 8d.'⁶ More carols were sung on St John the Evangelist's day (December 27), listed along with other payments for singing and music and a note on William the lute-player who sang and played but was not paid (the reason is not given).⁷

Even where sources do not specify carols, accounts of payment for singing at feasting provide possible contexts for performance of songs like those in the anthologies, including within East Anglia, such as payments made by the guild of St John the Baptist in Wymondham, Suffolk, to musicians and entertainers at feasts between 1500 and 1544. One entry records a payment made to 'ij Mynstrelle(s) for gyff of songys To ye brethern'.⁸ Although the word 'minstrel' most commonly referred to an instrumentalist, this entry demonstrates that such musicians could also provide singing, just as William the lute-player

⁶ Quoted *EEC*, p. xl.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Records of Plays and Players in Norfolk and Suffolk, 1330-1642*, ed. David Galloway and John Wasson, Collections 11 (Oxford: The Malone Society, 1980-81), pp. 121-130; see also Sheila Lindenbaum, 'Rituals of Exclusion: Feasts and Plays of the English Religious Fraternities', in *Festive Drama*, ed. Meg Twycross (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), pp. 54-65.

did at Worcester. Account books provide some information about how the Christmas period was celebrated in larger households, inscribing the religious year within these apparently most ‘secular’ of sources as ritual celebration overlaps between church and home. The early fifteenth-century accounts for the household of Alice of Bryene, at Acton Hall, Suffolk,⁹ list impressive quantities of food (including seventy-two loaves of bread, beef, bacon, a young pig, a capon and a rabbit) bought to supply the numerous guests on Christmas Day. On top of Alice’s usual household, twenty-two guests are listed, including a harper who stayed until January 2, during which time many more guests joined the gathering. Singing or other entertainments are not listed among the expenses, but this harper could have led the guests in performing songs:¹⁰ such a communal, household gathering suggests itself as being an ideal environment within which a relatively informal performance of the carols could have taken place.

Account books are appealingly factual and close to historical events, and they show that music was present in feasts taking place in a variety of contexts, hosted by religious officials, guild feasts or within ordinary households. However, it was not their role to record details about the performance of song, for which other types of document are required. A descriptive report on a royal Twelfth Night feast in 1487 at Greenwich informs us that ‘At the Table in the Medell of the Hall sat the Deane and thoos of the Kings Chappell, which incontynently after the Kings first Course sange a Carall’.¹¹ Elaborate

⁹ *The Household Book of Dame Alice of Bryene, of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412 to September 1413 with Appendices*, trans. M. K. Dale, ed. Vincent B. Redstone and J. M. Ridgard, Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History (Bungay, Suffolk: The Paradigm Press, 1984), p. 25. Acton Hall is about twenty-five miles south of the approximate origin (according to *LALME*) of the Sloane songbook, with which the accounts are roughly contemporary.

¹⁰ Among the various owners of CUL, Additional 5943, which includes carols and other songs, is one ‘hennyngis harper’ (f. Vv).

¹¹ *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de Rebus Britannicis Collectanea* (London: Impensis Gvl. & J. Richardson, 1770), 4, p. 237.

celebrations to be staged on Twelfth Night are detailed in ordinances in one of the household books of Henry Percy, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland for around the year 1515. Epiphany was the climax to a fortnight's feasting, and brought together liturgical worship and other types of festivity, as evensong was followed by the whole household coming together for plays, dancing, pageants and carols. The Earl's household chapel provided the singing between other entertainments, 'the chappell sing bitwixte the wassail and the voidy for a passetyme such carrailles as they be *perveid* of', distinguished in this case from the playing of minstrels who also provided music while the feast came to an end.¹² Further carol singing was used to mark the end of the festive celebrations in a particularly formal, ritualised manner:

And when the lord and the laidy is redy to come vpp toward their chamber All the chappell to be redy to go befor them vp to the knightes Chambre with suche a carrail as they think best to be songyn from the place that the lord and the laidy cummes fro out of the Hall vnto they entre into their owne chambre to Sing still and when the said Chappell cummes to the knightes chambre to stond still and sing oute their carrail half vppon the oon side of the said Chambre and half vpon the outhir side of the said Chambre and when the lord and the laidy cummes by them to make the<i>r obeisaunce. And when they are entrid into their own chamre and the Carall doon than they to departe to their lodging.¹³

This document takes the form of instructions for the ceremonies, which, with the repetitions, contributes to a pedantic, slightly exhausting impression. Yet even here many details are left out about what and how the Chapel actually sang. Emphasis is upon the social role of the ritual.

Carol singing at Northumberland's household is offered as a gift to the lord and lady, reconfirming their status at the turn of the year after the potentially riotous festive season. The household book includes details of a 'Barne-Bishop'

¹² Lancashire, 'Orders for Twelfth Day and Night', p. 40.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 42-3.

visiting from Beverley or York for the feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28) and an Abbot of Misrule holding court on the Feast of Fools (New Year's Day). It is unknown whether carols were sung during those revels, but they did have a place in affirming dignified hierarchy on Epiphany, the day that marks the giving of gifts, and therefore fealty, to the Christ Child. Peter Greenfield has noted the production of plays at Christmas to strengthen the status of aristocrats within their households and in the eyes of neighbours and guests, arguing that 'authorised festive misrule within the household reaffirmed the authority of the lord, by providing aristocrats and commoners alike with a reassuring representation of the lord's power to contain the forces of disorder.'¹⁴ According to the Northumberland ordinances carols were also part of this dynamic.

Ritual and revel on such occasions overlapped, to the concern of many English sermon writers. Some homiletic material shows a wish to dissociate ceremonial festive worship from feasting: 'When þat good men ben at þer seruyce on þe halydaye, þan þe [glotons] sitt faste in þe devels seruyce, with many rybald wordes *and* songes of lecherie'.¹⁵ The fourteenth-century English Dominican John Bromyard criticises people who offer to Christ at Christmas only 'a feast of words, with dancing and ditties'.¹⁶ One sermon criticises

¹⁴ Peter H. Greenfield, 'Festive Drama at Christmas in Aristocratic Households', in *Festive Drama*, ed. Twycross, pp. 34-40 (p. 37). Greenfield's study grows out of M. M. Bakhtin's more generalised descriptions of medieval 'holiday laughter', especially in 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 41-83. Bakhtin's theories are discussed in Chapter 9. The foundational study of festive play in medieval England is E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols (London: Clarendon Press, 1903). For a recent discussion, see Warren Edminster, *The Preaching Fox: Festive Subversion in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁵ *Middle English Sermons, edited from British Museum MS. Royal 18 B. xxiii*, ed. Woodburn O. Ross, EETS OS 209 (London: OUP, 1940), p. 101.

¹⁶ Quoted in G. R. Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), p. 483.

behaviour during ‘these Cristemas halydays, that wer ordenyd in holy chyrch for greth solemnyte and the merytes of Cristes feyth’:

in the old tyme men and women wer ful glad for to make them clene in sowle from all maner of unclennes of syn. But now-a-dayes that solemnyte ys turnyd to syn and unclennes, not only yn pryde but all the vii dedely synnys, and in ouzthragyng, drynkyng, wakyng, pleyng veyn pleys with all rybawdry and all harlotry. And so he [that] can most rybawdry in spekyng or in syngyng, he [is] most sett by, and he ys callyd a joly felowe and a stowte revelour. Thus these holydayes of Cristemasse, that wer ordend to goddes worschyp now be turnyd to gret offence to almighty God. Wherefor, our moder holy chyrche, seyng to her chyldern thus drownyd with de[d]ly syn, as a kynde moder full of [com]passyon and forgevynes, sche hath ordenyd this day for them, and layde downe this day *Allya* [= *Alleluia*] and oder songes of melody and gladnes, as *Gloria in exclesis* and *Te deum*; and takyth forth tractes that be songes of morning and hevenes.¹⁷

The contrast between legitimate, worshipful song and ‘rybawdry’ is a familiar one, one that the Church seeks to clarify through its provision of the liturgy and ‘tractes’ containing ‘songes of morning and hevenes’. The ‘oder songes of melody and gladnes’ could refer to some of the anthologies’ contents, but it is not clear whether any non-liturgical or vernacular songs are meant here.

The difficulty of knowing which songs are legitimate and which are not can be seen in a tract attributed to Wyclif:

I gesse wel þat zonge wymmen may sumtyme daunsen in mesure to haue recreacion and listnesse, so þat þei haue þe more þouzt on myrþe in heuene & drede more & loue more god þer-by, & syngge honeste songis of cristis incarnacion, passion, resurexion & ascencion, & of þe ioies of oure ladi, & to dispise synne & preise vertue in alle here doynge; but now he þat kan best pleie a pagyn of þe deuyll, syngyngge songis of lecherie, of batailis and of lesyngis, & crie as a wood man & dispise goddis maieste & swere bi herte, bonys & alle membris of crist, is holden most merie mon & schal haue most þank of pore & riche; & þis is clepid worschipe of þe grete solempnyte of cristismasse... litel þenk þes woode men & women on cristis pouert & cold & pouert of his modir & what lif he lyuede in þis world in so gret penaunce & dispit & wepyngge for oure

¹⁷ Gloucester Cathedral Library, MS Sermo Domin. i (unpaginated) Septuages, quoted in Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit*, p. 483; the passage closely follows one in *Mirk’s Festial*, p. 63.

synnys & what schameful deþ he suffrid at þe laste.¹⁸

Here discussion of ‘honeste songis’, songs on subjects similar to those contained in the anthologies (and specifically performed by women), leads seamlessly to concerns about riotous behaviour closely connected with ‘worschipe of þe grete solempnyte of cristismasse’. Although these sermons seek to establish a dichotomy between ‘honeste songis’ and ‘songis of lecherie’, there is evidently anxiety that, in practice, feast days are often occasions on which such distinctions were of little concern.

From within Norfolk another type of source, the letter, suggests how this affected ordinary household activity. When the Paston family were organising their mourning after the death of Sir John Fastolf in November 1459, whose large estate John Paston sought to secure, Margaret informed her husband that she had sent her son to their neighbour Lady Morely to seek advice on how the mourning household should be conducted during the festive season. Margaret reports that after Lady Morely’s husband died, ‘þere were non dysgysynggys nere harpyng nere lvyng nere syngyn, nere non lowde dysportys, but pleyng at the tabyllys and schesse and cardys, sweche dysportys sche gave here folkys leve to play, and non odyr’.¹⁹ Singing is just one activity among many, only mentioned because it will not take place when it ordinarily would. It is placed immediately before ‘lowde dysportys’ in Margaret’s list and deemed inappropriate to a mourning household, once more marking its potential to be less a ceremonial activity and more one of festive revelry.

¹⁸ In a tract on the *Ave Maria* in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 290; *The English Works of Wyclif hitherto unprinted*, ed. F. D. Matthew, EETS OS 74 (London: Trübner & Co, 1880), p. 206.

¹⁹ *The Paston Letters*, ed. Davis, 1, p. 257.

Margaret Paston's comment reveals that singing at Christmas was part of the unremarkable texture of the year but the letter's primary focus is the organisation of correct mourning so once again details are absent. A rare document that does provide quite specific details about the performance of carols is the colourful retrospective description written by Sir John Spelman of revels he participated in at Gray's Inn around 1500.²⁰ Freed from their studies over the Christmas season, students at the Inns of Court participated in a schedule of worship and feast during which singing played a central role in the Christmas day activities. Spelman's account is written mostly in French but he names several of the songs performed in Latin or English: 'le antheme nescienz mater' was sung after grace; everyone processed to church in order with oldest last, singing, 'what shall we singe in worshipe of this daie etc'; once at the church 'le marishal trou[era] vn carolle pur que il paiera xl. d.';²¹ after vespers and back at the Inn the company sang 'ther shall none reigne downe reigne etc.' followed by 'rounde abowt the fier' which was performed 'plus hastiuement que deuaunt ouesque un showt al fine' (Spelman writes 'showt' in English, marking the exuberant moment with an almost onomatopoeic touch).²² As at the Earl of Northumberland's, singing closes the festivities on Epiphany, when the marshal and steward approach 'solempment al fier ouesque torche light chauntant fare

²⁰ *The Reports of Sir John Spelman*, ed. Baker, 1, pp. 233-4. Spelman was himself from Norfolk and worked and was buried at Narborough, close to King's Lynn, so provides an example of the kind of individual who could facilitate the spread of carols between this county and London. For further details on singing in the Inns of Court see Olga Horner, 'Christmas at the Inns of Court', *Festive Drama*, ed. Twycross, pp. 41-53.

²¹ 'The marshal shall find a carol, for which he shall pay 40d.', trans. Baker, *The Reports of Sir John Spelman*, p. 234.

²² 'more quickly than before with a shout at the end', trans. Baker, *The Reports of Sir John Spelman*, p. 234.

well et have good daye quex apres ii. foitz chaunte aler[ont] hors le [Aule] toutz foitz chauntant iesque ilz ont finishe lour songe'.²³

J. H. Baker suggests the final song may be a carol from Balliol 354 (a manuscript with an appropriately London base) with the burden:

Now haue gud day, now haue gud day!
I am Crystmas, *and* now I go my way. (EEC 141, TM 579)

Spelman's account is therefore particularly useful in that it connects directly with the information contained within the songs about their own performances, which frequently specify contexts. Similar burdens appear for different stages of the festivities, as in one example for the end of Advent:

Farewell, Aduent, *and* haue good daye!
Chrystmas is come; nowe go thy waye. (EEC 4, TP 454)

One Sloane carol welcomes in the Christmas season:

Wolcum 3ol þou mery man in worchepe of þis holy day
Wolcum be þou heuene kyng
Wolcum born in on morwenyng
Wolcum for hom we xal syng
Wolcum 3ol (S68, burden, 1)

The other stanzas continue to welcome the coming feast days (St Steven, St John, St Thomas, New Year, Twelfth Day and Candlemas), and the whole procedure is repeated in a longer carol a few pages later (S72). Spelman's account suggests that such songs could be built into ritual celebrations and performed according to the instructions contained within the burdens. This would suit the series of carols by John Audelay for the different days of the Christmas season, discussed in the previous chapter. Such songs blur distinctions between liturgical song and other types, showing how ritualised performance took place in different environments.

²³ 'solemnly [approach] the fire with torchlight, singing "Farewell and have good day". After singing which twice they shall go out of the hall, [continuing to] sing until they have finished their song', trans. Baker, *The Reports of Sir John Spelman*, p. 234.

In Spelman's account the procession to church is accompanied by song, once at church a carol is purchased before Vespers, and more singing follows the service, culminating in the licensed jollity of singing one song increasingly fast and ending with a shout. The role of singing within the different environments shows that it was a significant element through which, at least during the festive season, religious worship moved between churches, homes and other institutions that structured fifteenth- and sixteenth-century lives.

The level of ritual suggested in the various descriptions of festive celebrations aligns carols with a range of activities that were not primarily musical, from the acting of interludes to attendance at Mass. Just as some carols specify religious festivals that provided contexts for their performances, others indicate that they belong with dramatic activities, such as the forester carols in the Tudor court books, which were written for interludes and pageants. But of the songs within the anthologies that most stridently present the contexts of their performance drinking songs are especially prominent, suggestive of less formalised ritual. A macaronic song in Sloane concludes:

ley stykkys on þe fer wyl mot is brenne
 zeue vs onys drynkyn er we gon henne (S27, 5)

A carol in Eng. poet. uses the burden to insist:

Bryng vs *in* good ale & bryng vs *in* good ale
 ffor owr blyssed lady sak bryng us in good ale (E57)

A few pages later a song with a repetitive structure similar to 'Bryng vs in good ale' unsettles straightforward reading of drinking songs. The stanzas attack alcohol:

Ale make many a mane to styk at a brere
 Ale mak many a mane to ly *in* þe myere
 & ale mak many a mane to slep by þe fyere (E67, 1)

The worst outcome of drinking is reserved for the last line: ‘ale mak many a mane to hang upon þe galows’ (6.3). Yet the burden presents the song as a drinking song by using the imperative form so common in carols, which may or may not indicate their performance contexts: ‘Doll þi ale doll doll þi ale dole’. The song provoked some debate among mid-twentieth-century critics as to whether it is ironic or moralising and how this instruction should be read.²⁴ Greene states confidently that ‘The situation is humorous, but the words are not ironic’, but certainty about how to read humour and irony from this period is notoriously elusive. A few pages later the same scribe has written a lengthy dialogue between women drinking in a tavern, framed by mockery of the women’s drinking, ‘small drynk þei will forsak / but wyne off the best shall han no rest’ (E75, 22.3-4). The narrating voice, however, also insists upon maintaining good feeling:

Now fyll the cupe & drynk to me
 And than shal we good fellows be
 And off thys talking leve will we
 And speak then good off women (E75, 25)

Does the song ridicule women and drinking or is it itself a drinking song? Just as with ‘Ale make many a mane’, this depends on how the song is performed, although it seems likely that both songs are primarily exuberant entertainment, capable of absorbing moralistic censure into the fun. What is clear is that the carol form and drinking were closely associated, and the anthologies accommodate this relationship variously.

The association of carolling with drinking was strong enough to last late into the sixteenth century: a collection of song texts from the 1570s preserved in

²⁴ Greene argues that it is the moralising work of a religious, and Arthur K. Moore agrees that it is ‘prohibitionist’, but John Speirs finds it comic, with the burden undermining the ‘rolliking’ stanzas, a view with which Francis Utley agrees, see *EEC*, p. 470.

BL, Cotton MS Vespasian A.xxv includes one drinking song entitled ‘A Cristenmus caroll’ in which the singer complains in brief, lively stanzas made of short lines that he can hardly sing because of a bone lodged in his throat, to remove which he urgently needs a drink.²⁵ One of the important polyphonic collections of carols, Egerton 3307, includes a Latin drinking song with two detailed illustrations of groups of drinkers.²⁶ Intriguingly the pairing of song and drink can be implicated in the movement of carols in and out of the Church illustrated by documentary sources. In the warden’s accounts for the London church St Mary at Hill, payments for singers and carol books appear regularly from the end of the fifteenth century, but we also learn that the musicians were provided with means to entertain themselves in return for their performances within the church, such as this from 1524-5, ‘paid to Iohn’ Norfolke & the conductes & the Children in þe playng weke aftur *christemas* for to Sport them, iijs iiijd’. Another record from 1483-5 records a payment, ‘to syngers on S3 Barnabees even yn wyne spent at tavern, and at many other festes of the yer to syngers *within* the queer’. There are regular records of the costs of food, ale and wine supplied to the singers at Christmas time from the 1480s.²⁷ It is impossible to know whether these trained singers continued to sing while enjoying their alcoholic rewards, but the accounts are suggestive of a possible context for the songs quoted above. Another is witnessed in the account book of the Sheriff of Norfolk, who paid four pence in the 1460s to a priest who sang a song for him in

²⁵ f. 159v. The song is not in carol form, although other pieces within the collection are (discussed in Chapter 2 and below).

²⁶ ‘O potores exquisiti’, ff. 72v-75r. See *The British Museum Manuscript Egerton 3307*, ed. Gwynn S. McPeck (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 50.

²⁷ *The Medieval Records of a London City Church (St. Mary at Hill), 1420-1559*, ed. H. Littlehales, EETS OS 125, 128 (London: Kegan, Trench and Trubner, 1904), pp. 327, 117, 149, 163.

a tavern in Lincolnshire.²⁸ What this song may have been, whether a religious song we imagine appropriate to a priest, such as ‘In Bedlem, in that fair city’ (*EEC* 21), a carol found in fifteenth-century manuscripts from Norfolk to Yorkshire, or something more suited to the tavern, such as the goliardic song preserved in Sloane ‘*Meum est propositum in taberna mori*’ (S66), was evidently less necessary to record than the four pence spent on the song.

Sources contribute to a picture of the contexts for carol performance that is incomplete but also manages to be coherent, through the focus upon feasting, the ease with which professionalism and informality could be accommodated and rituals could move between different environments within the structure of festive celebrations. Less formalised occasions for song were more likely to escape record, the payment to the priest in the tavern being a partial exception. The account books, instructions and retrospective descriptions provide information that can be compared with the information that the songs themselves offer about their performance, but they are also useful to read alongside the anthologies because they refer to actual, singular events: the harper’s stay with Dame Alice in Suffolk over New Year, the priest singing in the Lincoln tavern, a Christmas during which a difficult mourning prevents a Norfolk family from singing. The song texts preserved in manuscripts have been explored in previous chapters in terms of how we read them and how they were written, but aligning them with the events of their sung performance is especially challenging as these oral events move from the written page and become historically unique moments, accessible only in a limited sense. The next section will explore ways in which the manuscript pages inscribe performance, beginning with those containing

²⁸ John Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989), p. 138.

notated carols, in order to develop the story told by the sources of carols as musical events. Although the anthologies contain little notation, they can nevertheless be considered in the context of music writing, and contribute to our understanding of the history of attempts to store and share musical culture.

II. The Notated Repertoire

About a fifth of carols survive in musical settings, and these are heavily dominated by a group of six polyphonic manuscripts, all of which were edited by John Stevens for the *Musica Britannica* series.²⁹ Stevens establishes three ‘musical’ categories for these carols: ‘those intended to “improve” the minds of the congregation, those which reflect the more instructed piety of composers and singers, and those which by their brilliance directly enhance the splendour of their ceremonial setting’.³⁰ At first sight these may not look like musical categories, but, as Stevens argues elsewhere, ‘questions of form and function are very closely bound together in medieval music’.³¹

The first of the major musical sources, the Trinity roll, originates in Norfolk on the evidence of its dialect, and is the only example from the period of carols written in a roll format.³² Thirteen English carols were written by a single scribe in the first half of the fifteenth century onto three sheets of parchment, sewn together and totalling 2007 X 178mm. An attractive, elaborate format is

²⁹ *MC*, *Early Tudor Songs and Music at the Court of Henry VIII*. These manuscripts were introduced in Chapter 3.

³⁰ *MC*, pp. xiv-xv.

³¹ John Stevens, ‘*Angelus ad Virginem*: The History of a Medieval Song’, in *Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett*, ed. P. L. Heyworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 297-328 (p. 312).

³² A later scribe has added religious treatises to the reverse side. For descriptions of other medieval European songs written on rolls see Taylor, ‘The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript’, pp. 68-70. Although there is no definite information about the roll’s origins, Helen Deeming suggests the collegiate church of Mettingham, ‘The sources and origin’.

used with black void notation and occasional coloured notes,³³ and red and blue initials for the text, confined to ruled spaces below the notation. The inclusion of ‘The Agincourt Carol’, leads Andrew Taylor to argue that, ‘Given the complexity of the music it would be suitable for a triumphant procession on Henry’s return’.³⁴ However, ‘Deo gracias Anglia’ is the only song in the collection unrelated to a Christmas theme, the others being mostly Nativity or Annunciation songs, along with praise for St Stephen and St John the Evangelist. The context for the performance of this manuscript’s songs was festive celebration, into which a note of stirring religious patriotism has been added.

Like the carols in Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s, the texts in the polyphonic manuscripts commonly appear in versions in other manuscripts, but the textual connections are particularly strong among themselves, so that of the Trinity roll’s thirteen carols nine occur elsewhere of which six are found in the Selden. carols and one in Ritson’s manuscript. About half the Selden. songs have concordances, dominated by polyphonic collections: the six concordances with the Trinity roll, another six with Egerton 3307 and four with Ritson’s manuscript. There are also connections among the Tudor court songbooks, thoroughly explored by Stevens, and the versions are usually musically close enough to suggest written transmission.³⁵ When David Fallows reconstructed the pieces of a polyphonic fifteenth-century carol book from the scraps used to strengthen a later book, Bodley 88, he recognised two of the seven fragments as versions of carols in Egerton 3307, but nevertheless notes that the survival of further pieces ‘is particularly welcome because the strongly hermetic nature of

³³ For more on notation see *English Carols*, ed. Fuller-Maitland, p. viii.

³⁴ Taylor, ‘The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript’, p. 68. For a full discussion of the Agincourt Carol see Deeming, ‘The sources and origin’.

³⁵ See tables in *MC* that set out these relations, pp. 126-137. The sixteenth-century manuscripts are analysed in Stevens, *Music and Poetry*.

the four large carol manuscripts can sometimes leave the impression that they contain virtually the entire repertory'.³⁶

Connections with non-musical carol books occur, for example both the Selden. songbook and the Trinity roll share texts with Eng. poet. and Sloane,³⁷ but it would be fair to represent the major collections of unnotated carols and the polyphonic repertoire as two circles of a Venn diagram, overlapping, but not much. Practical considerations can account for this in that musical literacy was a specialised skill so copying and using musical manuscripts would be restricted to those possessing this skill, promoting the development of separate corpuses. Verbally, the carols in polyphonic manuscripts are similar to the unnotated texts, but differences in performance contexts could also have encouraged this partial separation, as written music for several voices is at least suggestive of a more formalised situation led by trained singers than notebooks containing song lyrics but no music.

The awkwardness of copying songs from a polyphonic manuscript into unnotated form can be witnessed in BL, Additional MS 60577, known as the Winchester anthology, into which a later fifteenth-century scribe copied seven songs as prose paragraphs. Marginal notes beside each song lyric read '*ij partis*', and two of them have concordances with two-part songs in the Fayrfax manuscript. Iain Fenlon considers that 'It may be that the seven songs in the Winchester Anthology were written down as a performance aid to singers who had committed the notation to memory', but the elaborate settings of the Fayrfax songs lead him to decide on the 'more likely explanation... that they were copied from a music source by a scribe who also included, perhaps without realising its

³⁶ Fallows, 'Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 88*', p. 328.

³⁷ See Appendix B.

meaning, instructions only relevant to the exemplar'.³⁸ Read this way, the example suggests the incompatibility of notated and unnotated carol books.

However, while recognising the differences between these repertoires, occasional concordances and some similarities in the way that they display carols suggest that they ought not to be separated radically. Visual similarities can be illustrated with a typical page from the Selden. carols:

³⁸ *The Winchester Anthology: A facsimile of British Library Additional Manuscript 60577*, ed. Edward Wilson and Iain Fenlon (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), p. 42; the songs are on ff. 115v and 116v.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 6.1

Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden. B. 26, f. 7r

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This macaronic nativity carol (*EEC* 29, *MC* 16, *IMEV* 753) follows the typical *mise-en-page* of a polyphonic carol with the texts of burden and first stanza aligned below the music, then the rest of the text fitted below. The music appears to have been written first and the text aligned beneath it, rather than the other way round as was more common in the period, suggesting the priority of music in this manuscript. Nevertheless, the text is clearly represented and the stanzas displayed at the bottom of the page with paraph marks, coloured initials, red braces and the refrain line in red to the right of the braces. This follows the same system as carols written in unnotated anthologies and raises the possibility of a relation between the two types of carol writing, particularly because the burden is customarily represented as ‘prose’ and its rhymes ignored in unnotated manuscripts just as it is when written below notation. In terms of page layout, the song is recognisably the same type of song as, for example, a standard carol from Eng. poet., such as that shown in Figure 4.1. Both these pages display the carols on a single side. This is typical of the Selden. carols, although longer texts are usually fitted onto facing sides. The layout facilitates any performance directly from the page but is not uniform procedure in either unnotated or polyphonic manuscripts: the fragments of fifteenth-century polyphonic carols reconstructed from the margins of Bodley 88 provide an example of a songbook using a similar style of notation but that would require performers to turn the page mid-performance.

This raises the vexed question of how the manuscripts might actually have been used in performance, a point upon which it is difficult to reach certain conclusions. Taylor dismisses any direct use of the Trinity roll for ‘singing in the field’, stating that ‘this elegant decorated roll can hardly have been what they

held in their hands; it must have been produced after the celebration to be kept and treasured'.³⁹ If, however, the roll was used for performance in a hall, the customary environment for Christmas celebrations, direct use becomes less problematic. Flexibility in interpreting the use of both notated and unnotated manuscripts is appropriate, especially given the different ways written music or hymnbooks can be used today (memorised, used in preparation, elaborated upon, sight-read, kept at hand in case of need). Layouts that assist a performer in reading the page while singing would also make the page easier to retain in the memory, but the issue remains because it is central to the relation between the manuscript witness and the song as an event as it took place in 'real life'.

Songbooks may be compared with other records of performance literature from late medieval England, such as drama and sermons, where a variety of relationships between the words on the page and the oral event can be identified. Play texts survive in manuscripts compiled from prompt books, texts edited according to what took place in the performance, as scripts developed from an accumulation of successive performances and as written compositions.⁴⁰ In his study of fifteenth-century English sermon collections Siegfried Wenzel insists that the surviving sermons are 'the result of a literary effort and activity that reflects the form of their actual delivery at best dimly. In the absence of unedited verbatim transcripts of the preacher's words, we can only guess at what was actually said in the pulpit and heard by the congregation.'⁴¹ Yet Wenzel goes on to locate a number of stylistic 'marks of orality', such as 'addresses to the

³⁹ Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p. 70.

⁴⁰ See *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); for an alternative view of the N-Town Play see Peggy Granger, 'Devotion to Drama: The N-Town Play and religious observance in fifteenth-century East Anglia', in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. Harper-Bill, pp. 302-317.

⁴¹ Siegfried Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England: Orthodox Preaching in the Age of Wyclif* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 16.

audience, imperatives in the singular..., rhetorical questions, the use of the inclusive first person plural, and a more leisurely style of telling narrative exempla', which 'may indeed reflect actual preaching quite closely'.⁴²

With each of these genres, oral performances took place and texts representing these genres survive, so it would be perverse to refuse to consider the relationship between the texts and events on the basis that texts cannot be events. At some level that relationship is particular to each manuscript. Ardis Butterfield finds that medieval French manuscripts containing song display 'a range of kinds of writing that at one extreme may represent literate communication at its furthest from an oral event, and at the other may approximate to an oral event with uncanny closeness'.⁴³ Our awareness that we rely upon written sources encourages us to position sources at the 'literate' end of this range, as where Taylor finds that no manuscript offers 'direct access to medieval oral narrative'.⁴⁴ Written music provides more information about the possible sound of a performance, but it does not settle the relationship between event and text.

Of the three anthologies, only Eng. poet. presents any songs with notation. Its three notated texts are all monophonic: a Latin processional song in honour of St John the Evangelist, given the only generic heading within the anthologies, 'cantus' (E55); an Annunciation carol immediately after it (E56); and ten pages later the burden for a moral carol (E65, in full black unmeasured notation). The burden and first stanza of the Annunciation carol are given on f. 41v by the first scribe, but the full text is copied on f. 51v in the hand of the second scribe.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁴³ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Taylor, 'The Myth of the Minstrel Manuscript', p. 73.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 6.2

Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. e.1., f. 41v

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After writing the tune, the scribe adds an explanatory note: ‘Thys is þe tewyn For þe song foloyng yf so be þat ze wyll have anoþer tewyn it may be a 3owr’ plesur for I haue set all þe song’. Whether the scribe, inspired by the song to St John, has indeed ‘set’ this carol or is copying a previous note cannot be determined,

but the comment suggests awareness of a degree of redundancy in providing this tune at all.⁴⁵ Commenting on the notation in Eng. poet., Wakelin argues that ‘the book is not a record of performances but a suggestion for them – a script that may not have been acted’ and continues, ‘The books of carols from Norfolk do not *record* a lost oral culture: they *script* it’.⁴⁶ The emphases clarify a dichotomy according to which a written song can be a record, the faithful capturing of live performance, or a script, which would dictate future performances. The comment and the word ‘script’ do gesture towards the songs’ cultural role in forming communal identities, but the dichotomy between ‘record’ and ‘script’ is inadequate when trying to establish relationships possible between text and performance. The scribe’s hesitancy in offering a tune, ‘it may be a 3owr plesur’, gives us a remarkably clear signal that these anthologies offered resources for performance, but not scripts.

Another form of explicit instruction to performers within the manuscript is found in the two known contrafacta: ‘Swet Jhesus / is cum to vs’ is headed ‘A song *in* the tvne of (And I were a mayd &c)’ (E61), and ‘vnder a tre / *in* sportyng me’ (E62) is headed ‘a song vpon (now must I syng &c)’. Wakelin criticises these because they are ‘not spontaneous songs but songs dependent upon conscious re-writing and then textual transmission in a formal *mise-en-page*: a “top-down” process... The imposing of authorised fun through writing is typical of contrafacta’.⁴⁷ In support of this he cites Bishop Ledrede’s religious contrafacta in the Red Book of Ossory and also notes that the rounded brackets in the headings were rare before the sixteenth century and therefore connect it

⁴⁵ The absence of the song text immediately after the setting and the way scribe B supplies it is described in Chapter 3. The third notated song, E65, is immediately before the complete text of the only other notated vernacular carol, suggesting a possible relationship.

⁴⁶ Wakelin, ‘The Carol in Writing’, p. 36 and p. 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 36.

with scholarly works in which the marks were used for quotations and other comments.

Considering format first, rounded brackets were used in the sixteenth century to mark similar contrafacta. The collection of songs written in the 1570s in Cotton Vespasian A.xxv contains roughly written, unnotated lyrics, many of which are headed 'ballet' while others are headed 'carol', on subjects ranging over the nativity, moral advice, pastoral laments and love songs. One song, a 'ballet' on the Christian soldier, is headed 'to be songe after (Row wel you marynes)' (f. 150v), in exactly the manner of the Eng. poet. contrafacta.⁴⁸ It is more likely that the format in Eng. poet. is related to this practice because this part of the book must have been written late in the fifteenth century or possibly early in the sixteenth century. Reading in the light of sixteenth-century developments suggests that Eng. poet. is an example of an emergent scribal practice at the boundary between written and remembered music.

The creative process of making contrafacta is an important one for the period and probably vital in performing the majority of carols that do not have tunes written with their words. While providing any words may be interpreted as 'imposing... authorised fun', especially religious words, the process of borrowing and re-writing is the major creative dynamic in producing the songs and in the interaction between their written form and performances. Furthermore, contrafacta prove that writing song lyrics was not far removed from writing musical notation, in that words alone could evoke a tune. They remind us how much of the creative activity was taking place in the interaction between the words on the page and memories of performances, or while transforming these

⁴⁸ See *Tudor Songs and Ballets from MS Cotton Vespasian A-25*, ed. Peter Seng (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

words into performances. They make visible something of the movement between performance, page, back to performance and so on that opens spaces for all sorts of other creative possibilities.

The inadequacy of a straightforward opposition between texts that record song and those that script it can be further illustrated by attending to the rich variety of ways that different manuscripts represent the ‘same’ carol. The song ‘In bedlem þat fayer cyte’ (*EEC* 21, *IMEV* 1471) occurs in Eng. poet., Lincoln Lat. 141 and Balliol 354 as a text only, with substantial variation, and in the Trinity roll set for two voices, with more (lexical) variation. The burden of the Trinity version is used by a carol in the Selden. songbook, which has similar music throughout but different words for the stanzas.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the first two lines of the first stanza turn up scribbled in the margin of one of Robert Thornton’s poetic anthologies, BL, Additional 31042, where the burden is a line that appears as the final line of the last stanza in the other versions (except the truncated text in Lincoln Lat. 141). So far the song is found in three substantial verbal texts, one polyphonic version, another version of the music but with different words, and one fragment apparently scribbled from memory. A final version of the carol appears on the first page of James Ryman’s anthology, with a melody provided for the burden in rough, non-mensural notation. Survival in both a polyphonic setting and a monophonic version makes this carol unique, but the tunes in these versions are unrelated. Ryman cannot be the song’s author because the Trinity roll precedes his collection by over half a century. The music and words of the carol in the Ryman manuscript are written in a hand responsible only for a few texts on the beginning and end pages, and the addition of a line of

⁴⁹ The Selden. carol is the one reproduced above, Fig. 6.1.

monophonic music to one of the carols in the body of the collection. In his study of Ryman's work, Karl Reichl notes that the melody given to the burden of this version of 'In Bethelhem', 'Synge we now both all and sum: / *Christe redemptor omnium*' (EEC 21 D), is similar to the tune added to the burden of Ryman's carol, 'Of thy mercy lete vs not mys, / *Fili Marie virginis*' (EEC 276). From this Reichl deduces that 'Of thy mercy' is a contrafactum, and that Ryman's carols were meant to be sung.⁵⁰ In this case, the apparently popular carol 'In Bethelhem' has been added as an example to guide performance, providing a witness to some of the activity that took place off the written page.

Is it possible to decide which of these texts is closest to a performance? The musically notated versions might be preferred as definite attempts to represent the song's sound in written form, or the fragment in the Thornton manuscript might be favoured as the possible record of a memory of an actual performance, or as being the least 'textualised' through written transmission. The song provides an unusually wide-ranging example of the different kinds of transmission a late medieval carol could be subject to and various and unpredictable ways it could be realised in written form, and to some degree also in performance, but to represent the texts as records of performances or scripts for them over-simplifies this process. The dichotomy persists because of the need to articulate the generally insoluble problem: what was the relation between these pages and performance of the songs? This question remains insistent because it is written into the songs themselves, which continually refer to their own performance and structure their generic identity upon the group voice. The next

⁵⁰ Reichl, 'James Ryman's Lyrics', pp. 216-7.

section will explore how and why they do this, and introduce some alternative considerations that break up the dichotomy between text and performance.

III. The Representation of Song: Why does Performance Matter?

Any reading of the carols has to be affected by the obsessive reference these texts make to their own performance. Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's contain over eighty uses of the word 'sing' and its derivatives, not taking into account all the other types of self-reference, the mentions of making merry in this moment in this place in this way. Noting the recurrent use of the word 'song' in French lyric, Zumthor argued that these repetitions construct 'the circularity of song', through which the lyrics unwind 'in a series of spirals', in contrast to narrative method.⁵¹ Chapter 4 analysed an example of self-reference within a carol and the way this procedure sought to engage its performers and audiences with a moment of sacred history, to sacralise the present moment of performance. This section will begin to examine how and why the songs locate value in the living voice. As Derrida explained, 'an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/ absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of a subordination',⁵² and the oppositions of performance and page, record and script, take this form.

As it survives, St John's opens with a stanza ushering in the communal feast, the last stanza of a boar's head carol:

þe borys hed haue we in bro3ht
lok 3e be mery in herte & tho3ht
& he þat all' þis worlde has wrowt

⁵¹ Paul Zumthor, 'On the Circularity of Song', in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 179-91 (p. 187).

⁵² Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', *Glyph*, 1 (1977), 172-197 (p. 195).

It ends, on the tattered margins of the final folio, with the barely legible words, ‘synge... thyng’ (J21). The chance fragmentary survival of these words reminds us that the manuscript is a ‘thyng’, both vulnerable to damage and enduring, and yet that it is also the witness to songs that were performed in their wholeness, with groups of people eating, singing, praying, seeking life. The survival of these particular words framing this anthology is less of a coincidence because in almost every song within this book reference to some kind of song or other performance can be found. The songs work hard at producing an atmosphere in which everyone is involved with the voice (‘3ow & eke me’): it is the communal celebration that gives the songs their identity and worth.

Voice and song are not always positive. Riotous or lascivious performance can be contrasted with devout song, just as Ledrede provides Latin *contrafacta* to replace the lecherous songs his clerics are fond of, or Dante represents the love song ‘Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona’ as a distraction in Purgatory, whereas an anonymous spirit’s performance of ‘Te lucis ante’ leads the group towards God:

Ella giunse e levò ambo le palme,
 ficcando li occhi verso l’oriente,
 come dicesse a Dio: ‘D’altro non calme.’
 ‘*Te lucis ante*’ sì devotamente
 le uscìo di bocca a con sì dolci note,
 che fece me a me uscir di mente;
 e l’altre poi dolcemente e devote
 seguitar lei per tutto l’inno interno,
 avendo li occhi a le superne rote.’

He joined his palms and lifted them together, fixing his eyes on the east as if he said to God: ‘For naught else do I care.’ ‘*Te lucis ante*’ came from his lips with such devoutness and with notes so sweet that it drew me out of myself, and then the rest joined him sweetly and devoutly

through the whole hymn, keeping their eyes fixed on the celestial wheels.⁵³

Medieval music theory does not necessarily denigrate all secular song, as exemplified by Johannes de Grocheio's treatise on music in which he states that through *vulgare* music 'the innate adversities of men may be mitigated' (*mitigentur adversitates hominum innatae*).⁵⁴ The devotional possibilities of group singing are, however, especially exploited within the anthologies' songs. An example of this is a carol in Eng. poet. that takes the form of a litany, with each stanza forming a prayer to Jesus, Mary, the angels and saints, framed by a burden:

Prey we to þe *trinyte*
And to al þe holy *compane*
ffor to bring vs to þe blys
The wych shal neuer mysse (E64)

The final stanza envisages the different figures prayed to as a group repeating the earthly song in heaven:

All the *company* celestyall
þe wych do syng so musycall
To þe kyng pryncypall
Pray fore vs terrestyall
That we may *cum* to þat blysse
þe wych neuer shall mysse (E64, 9)

The first stanza of the carol, beginning 'Jhesus for þi holy name', is found in over twenty other manuscripts, but here is developed uniquely into a form suitable for group prayer through song. The carol is, however, immediately followed by a warning against misuse of the tongue (E65), the second notated

⁵³ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, II. Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) II.112-123, and VIII.13-18, trans. Sinclair. The contrast was explored by Mary Carruthers in the R. W. Chambers Memorial Lecture, University College London, 16/11/06.

⁵⁴ Johannes de Grocheio, *Concerning Music*, trans. Albert Seay (Colorado Springs: Colorado College Music Press, 1967) p. 15; *Die Quellenhandschriften zum Musiktraktat des Johannes de Grocheio*, ed. Ernst Rohloff (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), p. 130. See discussion in Christopher Page, *Discarding Images: Reflections on Music and Culture in Medieval France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 65-111.

carol in the manuscript. In every stanza of this next carol direct reference is made to its performance as song, as in the final lines:

ffrome þis tong a venamus serpent
Defend vs fader to þe we pray
As þou onto vs þi sone haue sent
ffore to be borne þis present daye
Lesse þat we syng & euermore saye

of all [the *emmys* þat I can fynd
þe tong is most *enmy* to mankynd] (E65, 5, burden)

The attack upon the tongue as an ‘instruement off dyscord’ (2.1) is coupled with the self-representation of the group joining together in song on Christmas day (5.4), undoing the ‘grett dystans / Betwyne the subiecte & þe lord’ (2.2-3). All sorts of carols exist from devotional to bawdy within Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s, but group involvement and unity is consistently stressed, ‘all and some’, ‘more and less’. This unity is constructed with commands and warnings as much as through invitation, but to take part in the songs is to listen to that emphatically repeated imperative to ‘joy all in one’ (E20, 2.9).

Our awkwardness towards the words upon the page, separated in time from the group enactment, comes directly from texts that determinedly remind a reader that they are not reading right if they are not singing. In her study of French songbooks Sylvia Huot examined the ways in which the books themselves perform, particularly through their visual, structural organisation, but in comparison with the miniatures, illumination and rubrication of French *chansonnières* Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s are minimally ‘theatrical’ or ‘cinematic’, as Huot calls the French books.⁵⁵ Visually, these books deflect attention from themselves and cannot be securely placed in a narrative from song to book.

⁵⁵ Huot, *From Song to Book*, p. 3.

Nevertheless, for all the books' plainness and the incomplete state of some of their texts, the songs are systematically written and collected into an organised textual state. An alternative conceptual space has to be made that can take account of the songs' shifting identities between performance and book, as well as their realisation on the written page. In asking why medieval chant was written down, Leo Treitler argues:

there must be other ways of understanding the function of written scores... than as blueprints for performance and closed texts representing fixed works. They served to bestow canonical status on certain traditions, and to bestow authority on their possessors. They served as touchstones for the regulation of oral tradition... The replication of written documents can be understood in the light of such symbolic, exemplar, and regulatory roles.⁵⁶

Treitler insists that not all manuscripts had to be held by the singer in performance:

For musical documents in particular the relation to performance may be less direct than we are accustomed to in literate traditions... The performer would study the book and make a piece like the one represented, rather than reading out from the score. This is evident from the small, postcard- and even cigarette package-size of the earliest books with musical notation.⁵⁷

Treitler maintains a flexible position towards notation, which could function as 'controls... against the habits and constraints that the performer brought to the performance',⁵⁸ but also as an 'autonomous' system, 'performing more and different functions than just the prescriptive one vis-à-vis performance'.⁵⁹ Treitler's propositions are subtle and flexible enough to adapt in ways appropriate to different material, in which notation fulfils diverse roles.

⁵⁶ Leo Treitler, 'Oral, Written, and Literate Process in the Transmission of Medieval Music', *Speculum*, 56 (1981), 471-491 (p. 486).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

⁵⁹ Leo Treitler, *With Voice and Pen*, p. 67.

Like the musical manuscripts to which Treitler refers, the three song anthologies are too small for direct group use in performance, but by thinking of them instead as archives of song texts that fulfilled ‘exemplar and regulatory roles’ within festive performance, it is possible to reconcile the organisation of song on the pages with the way they gesture outwards to the temporal moment of the songs realised as events. The texts facilitate future events and organise memories of past performances, but also have identities as textual objects. From this perspective, the next chapter explores the significance of memory, its role in structuring the texts and creating routes and spaces in which different realisations of the songs interact.

Chapter 7. Remembering Songs

In Part Two my exploration of songs collected in the anthologies has been organised within the terms ‘text’, ‘writing’ and ‘performing’. I chose the two participles in an attempt to replace the more traditional ‘author’ and ‘reader’ (or reception) with concepts better suited to the anthologies and sought greater flexibility by using action-based terms, while leaving the agents uncertain. Even so, it has been necessary to repeat regularly that these concepts must, to varying degrees, be integrated with one another as a consequence of the communal ownership of and participation in the songs. This chapter concludes the section by exploring whether the action and concept of memory can perform such integration, and what it can reveal about the songs.

Mary Carruthers, in her groundbreaking discussion of memory in the literature and thought of the Middle Ages, emphasises that *memoria* socialises literature: it is ‘the process by which a work of literature becomes institutionalised – internalised within the language and pedagogy of a group’.¹ Every step in this process is a mediation: a writer engaged in composition gathers together images and words from his mental inventory and works in dialogue with voices he has encountered and internalised; at publication the work enters into public conversation, and this is achieved when readers internalise the text and position it within their own inventories. Carruthers asks:

When one’s relationship with a text is not ‘to encounter another mind’ (or subdue it, as one sometimes suspects) or ‘to understand it on its own terms’, but to use it as a source of communally experienced wisdom for one’s own life, gained by memorising from it however much and in whatever fashion one is willing to do; when one’s head is constantly filled with a chorus of voices available instantly and on any subject, how

¹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 9.

does such a relationship to the works of other writers differently define the meanings of such literary concepts as ‘reader’, ‘text’, ‘author’?²

The medieval concept of memory encourages modern critics to question their terminologies; these categories can overlap and interact once *memoria* is considered as a creative activity, a gregarious meditation.

In this chapter I will trace the role of memory in the production and reception of the songs now conserved on the pages of Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s, first by looking at where the texts can most clearly be seen to function as mnemonics and then by further considering associated questions of transmission, how *memoria* can mediate between written texts and performances. The second half of the chapter will address the macaronic and rhetorical structures of the carols and other songs and ask what kind of institutionalisation these enacted, particularly through their relationship with the liturgy. This is of central importance to how the communal character of the songs is shaped and expressed. Finally, I will consider the anthologies as archives, as sites of power in the construction of memory.³ My focus throughout this last chapter of Part Two will be upon the Sloane manuscript because of the active engagement displayed in many of its texts with the issues explored and because this chapter will provide opportunities to re-examine and contextualise the excellence of its most celebrated contents.

² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³ On archives as sites of power, see Jacques Derrida, *Mal d’Archive: une impression freudienne* (Paris: Galilée, 1995); *Archive Fever, a Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

I. Mnemonic Songs

The songs contained within Sloane, Eng. poet. and St. John's commonly speak with the imperative, not only ordering their audiences to sing, but also to 'think' so that they are no longer a passive audience, but active participants. These injunctions make demands upon the memory, the treasury of cultural knowledge structured through images, stories and phrases, and alert readers and audiences to the way in which they are expected to interact with the texts. The burden of the second song in Sloane demands 'No beþing þe gentil man how adam dalf & eue sp[an]' (S2). Although the couplet is related to the proverbial slogan of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, 'Whan Adam dalfe and Eve span, who was than a Gentleman?',⁴ this carol is not concerned with questioning political hierarchies. The burden frames a narrative of the Fall, presented by dialogue between Adam, the Devil and God. The couplet burden is not a question but a command and demands active attention for the retelling of this fundamental story.

A few songs later another burden, 'Gay gay gay gay· þink on drydful domis day' (S7), demands that audiences consider the ultimate outcome of fallen man's state. These two events, the Fall and Doomsday, frame the already determined Christian narrative of history: although in the future, Doomsday is already a familiar story that must be held in the Christian's memory. 'Gay, gay' is a common refrain in French songs and Siegfried Wenzel has shown that the exclamation was used, in a sense parodied, in a well-known fourteenth-century Latin exemplum about a frivolous man named Gay and the devils who surrounded his deathbed, chanting his name as they danced around him in

⁴ See *EEC*, p. clxxi.

readiness to seize his soul.⁵ One fifteenth-century redaction of the story in an English manuscript includes the taunts as vernacular verse beginning, ‘Gay, Gay, þou ert yhent, / Gay, þou schalt deyn.’⁶ These lines and their lurid story were evidently designed to remain in the memory of the terrorised sermon audience and are alluded to by the Sloane carol’s burden, which encapsulates the story’s message in its command. The stanzas continue in the same imperative mood and present a programme of moral doctrine that should be held in the memory in order to avoid Gay’s dreadful fate:

Thynk man on þi wyttis fyue
do *sum* good qwyl þou art on lyve
go to cherche & do þe schryve
& bryng þi sowle in good aray.

Thynk man on þi synnys seuene
þink how merie it is in heuene
prey to god *with* mylde stefne
He be þin helpe on domys day. (S7, 2-3)

The carols do not debate moral doctrine but they reformulate the body of common Christian knowledge. Included is the need for confession (‘do þe schryve’), where the penitent will have to consider the seven deadly sins and remember occasions on which they have themselves participated in them (‘Thynk man on þi synnys seuene’).

Sequences such as the Five Wits (2.1) and the Seven Deadly Sins structure information and aid in storing and recollecting it. The Sloane carol only alludes to them, whereas Audelay, with his systematic, conscientious approach to carol-making, spells them out one by one (*EEC* 325 and 328). Numbered sequences like the Five Wits are themselves mnemonics, for which Audelay’s carols provide supporting apparatus. The anthologies contain a few carols built

⁵ Siegfried Wenzel, ‘The “Gay” Carol and Exemplum’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 77 (1976), 85-91.

⁶ Worcester Cathedral, MS F. 126; see *EEC*, p. 430.

upon similar systems: numbered sequences are found in carols on Mary's Five Joys (S13/E16, S21 and E60/J4) and the feast days of the Christmas season (S58 and S72/E19), while anagrams are used to build discursive praise on holy names (S48/E26, J2 and J18).

Medieval iconography also included visual mnemonics, and one of the more elaborate of these, the Tree of Jesse, is represented verbally in another of Sloane's carols, falling between the two quoted above. The song provides an excellent example of mnemonic features within the carols, and how a song could connect with a wider visual and scriptural tradition. The burden, 'O flos de Jesse virgula laus tibi sit & gloria' (S5), cites Isaiah, where the prophet dreams of a flowering branch. Medieval exegetes read this as a reference to the lineage of Christ through a pun upon *virgula*, 'green shoot', and *virgo*, 'virgin'. The verse inspired an iconographic tradition in stained glass and manuscript illustration representing biblical history in the form of Christ's 'family tree'. The representation of this supreme dynasty resonates with the dynastic struggles that characterised the period. Witnesses to the tradition survive from medieval East Anglia, including the early fourteenth-century Gorleston Psalter, BL, Additional MS 49622, where the tree is drawn within the 'B' of the first psalm and surrounded by a heraldic border containing the arms of England and France, shown below in Figure 7.1.⁷ Further kings and prophets are enclosed by the page's outer border. At the bottom of the page the flowing border encircles scenes from Christ's birth (Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration). The images are framed separately by the same system that connects them, in a style

⁷ Another East Anglian book from the same period, the Howard Psalter and Hours (BL, Arundel MS 83, f. 14r), uses a similar iconography to represent the same text and includes the arms of Ely and Bury St Edmunds in its design. Images from both manuscripts can be seen on the British Library website, at <http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/index.asp>.

that is a visual correlative of the carols' method of enclosing each narrative scene within the stanzaic space, framed by a burden.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 7.1

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British Library, Additional MS 49622, f. 8r; the Gorleston Psalter, 1310-1325

The first psalm was presumably connected with the image through its third verse, on the righteous man, ‘he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither’ (‘erit tamquam lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum quod fructum suum dabit in tempore suo; et folium eius non defluet’).⁸ The psalm also describes the blessed man as one whose ‘delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night’ (‘in lege Domini voluntas eius, et in lege eius meditabitur die ac nocte’ [2]). The Tree of Jesse icon is at once the product of a righteous man’s dream and also a meditative tool for structuring one’s memory of biblical history, uniting the second and third verses of the psalm because the image of the fertile tree enables meditation upon God’s teachings.

The interaction of text and image in deluxe, aristocratic manuscripts organised information in ways that may have aided its memorisation, but in the visually unexciting songbooks words alone had to do this work. The Sloane song, ‘*Adam our fader was in blis*’ (S5) constructs a verbal Tree of Jesse and maintains a steady narrative progression from various Hebrew patriarchs and prophets to the Annunciation and Nativity, with the image of the Tree of Jesse threaded through the song by the Latin burden, and also placed in the triumphal central stanza:

Isaac *withoute* lesyng
profeciid in his *prechyng*
of jesse rote a flour xuld spryng
De virgine purica. (S5, 5)

Unfortunately either the writer or someone else involved in the transmission of the song did not remember his biblical history entirely accurately as the

⁸ *Biblia Sacra, Vulgatae Editionis* (Torino: Marietti, 1959); trans. *The Holy Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1898).

references to Moses (4) and Jeremiah (6) as Messianic prophets are misleading and the attribution of the dream of Jesse's rod to Isaac instead of Isaiah is quite a major mistake considering that this is a crucial image within the song, but it is an error that could have occurred through simple miscopying. Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah all feature in the sequence of prophets in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman play known as *Le Mystère d'Adam*, itself a development from the *Sermo contra Judeos, Paganos et Arianos de Symbolo* attributed to Augustine, recalling how such arrangements of biblical information could circulate in a wide range of media.⁹ The burden of 'Adam our fader' relates the sequence of biblical figures to the Tree of Jesse, which is less significant within the earlier texts, although these may suggest how Moses and Jeremiah came to feature as they do in the song. Only the reappearance of Isaac disrupts the chronological flow of the narrative through important biblical figures to Mary and salvation in the inevitable present-tense Christmas celebrations: 'Now is he born þat blyful chyld' (9.1). Like the Gorleston illumination, the song moves from dynastic family tree to its conclusion in the tale of Christ's conception and birth. The song's short pieces of Latin frame the vernacular information with their single rhyme, linking them back to the burden, potentially a rhyme that could have been amplified in the now unknown music.

Mnemonics facilitate memory through structures, and in doing so form it: the iconography of the Tree of Jesse groups together individuals from the Bible

⁹ *Le Mystère d'Adam: An Anglo-Norman Drama of the Twelfth Century*, ed. Paul Studer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918); *Adam: A religious play of the twelfth century*, trans. Edward Noble Stone, University of Washington Publications in Language and Literature 4.2 (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1926), pp. 159-193; and *A Translation of Chapters XI-XVI of the Pseudo-Augustinian Sermon Against Jews, Pagans and Arians, Concerning the Creed*, trans. Edward Noble Stone, University of Washington Publications in Language and Literature 4.3 (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1928), pp. 195-214.

and fits them into a highly linear Christian narrative, presented in a way that makes ready sense to a dynastically organised society. Such a text gives a new significance to the faded concept of memorial transmission, because it is designed to work upon the memory and to be held in the memory in conjunction with related information, even if its route onto its pages in the Sloane anthology was via other pages.

II. Song and Book: Representations of Transmission

The terms orality and literacy were subject to extensive debate in the last century, but the rise of manuscript studies increasingly marginalised the concept of medieval oral poetry transmitted without writing for the simple reason that all surviving verse is written, and for the more complex reason that medieval society was extremely well-equipped with literate technologies. Some critics have sought to introduce new terms, notably Joyce Coleman with her work on ‘aurality’, examining the practice of reading medieval poetry at social gatherings from a written text.¹⁰ Such work helps to integrate into textual studies some of the insights into the performance of verse traditionally associated with orality. At the time of Greene’s study of the carols, memory was firmly aligned with oral transmission, a process for which the strongest evidence was considered to be widespread variation between texts.¹¹ Work by Carruthers, Treitler, Fox and others has since complicated the idea that memory is the concern of oral literatures, and instead explored manuscript and early print cultures that

¹⁰ Coleman, *Public Reading*.

¹¹ See *EEC*, pp. cxxix-cxxxii.

produced written material in which remembering is a rhetorical and creative process that draws upon words known through writing and performance.

Although memory was traditionally associated with oral poetry, reliant upon individual and group memory for its transmission, Carruthers insists that *memoria* can supersede the opposition between orality and literacy:

Where literature is valued for its social functions, works... provide the sources of a group's memory. Societies of this sort are 'textual communities', in Brian Stock's phrase, whether those texts exist among them in oral or written form.¹²

The inadequate terms, oral and written, might be replaced by tools for rhetorical analysis, which are more sensitive to the material of the Middle Ages and the case-specific questions, what is the origin of the information, how is the information encoded and how is its recollection stimulated? However, the mediation that memory provides does not obliterate the distinctive material functions of written technologies, as Carruthers implies:

I do not believe that the book mimes memory; its relationship to *memoria* is not that of a mirror or copy, any more than letters on parchment mime their contents. The relationship is functional; the book 'supports' *memoria* because it serves its requirements, some of which are biological, but many of which, in the memorial cultures of the Middle Ages were institutional and thus conventional, social and ethical.¹³

This stands as a useful warning not to use memory as a panacea for the frustrations of critical terminology, especially when the slippage between concepts of text, author, reader, performer and audience can blur the shapes of medieval literature.

The examination of mnemonic texts reveals that the producers of literature in this period were actively interested in these processes by which texts move between page, memory and voice, and I suggest that this is specifically

¹² Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 12.

¹³ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 194.

explored in song, and especially in the texts gathered together in Sloane. The clearest place where this endeavour can be seen is in the pair of lyrics in pseudo-ballade form, S40 and S41, the first of which is a nativity lyric organised as a series of songs, and indeed as an exposition of a nativity song, while the second is a moral lyric organised around the exposition of a written text. The lyrics, especially the second, exemplify the recurrent technique in Middle English religious verse identified by Julia Boffey of using ‘focal texts’ as ‘easily memorable epitomes of the more extensive advice or argument of the poems’.¹⁴ Both lyrics are extant in versions in other manuscripts, but even though the second is from the substantial collection of refrain lyrics found in the Vernon manuscript and elsewhere, nowhere else are the two lyrics found together and it is this juxtaposition that I will explore here.

Both lyrics begin with *chanson d’aventure* openings. The speaker goes out into the landscape:

As I went þrow a gardyn grene
I fond *an* erber makyd ful newe (S40, 1.1-2)

Be þe way wanderyng as I went (S41, 1.1)

The narrator of the first lyric encounters a landscape of joy and song:

a fayrer’ syte had I *non* sene
on euery tre song a turtil trewe
þerin a womman bryzt of hewe
che seyde in her’ song not lest
þis was he carpyng as I knewe
verbum caro factum est (S40, 1.3-8)

The narrator of the second is bowed down by sorrow, but encounters a ‘blysfyl’ written text:

¹⁴ Julia Boffey, “‘Loke on þis wrytyng, man, for þi devocion!’: Focal Texts in Some Later Middle English Religious Lyrics”, in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. O. S. Pickering (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 129-145 (p. 145).

sor' I scyid for sorwenis sad
 for harde happys þat I haue hent
 murnyng makyd me masyd & mad
 To a letter alone I me ledde
 þat wel was wretyn vpon a wal
 a blysful word þeron I redde
 was eueremor' þank god of al

(S41, 1.2-8)

In both of these lyrics the refrain lines are situated within landscapes. The moral advice to 'eueremor' þank god of al' is inscribed upon a wall and the rest of the lyric is a meditation upon this advice. It dwells upon the fickleness of fortune and the transience of the world, punctuated by instructions to 'þynk ryzt wel' upon our own weakness. The lyric asks that personal experience of loss be mentally connected with Job's story, or those figured on Fortune's wheel. It is a lyric of 'counsel' within which the refrain line expresses resignation rather than joyfulness.

By contrast, the first lyric is consistently joyous and is built upon an adventure of songs. First, the narrator hears a woman singing in an arbour, according to the *chanson d'aventure* tradition. The narrator asks her about the song:

I alkyd þat mayde quat che ment
 che bad me abydyn & I myzt ler'
 to her' song þan tok I intent
 che seyde a song woys cler'
 þe pryns þat is without per'
 is born & leyd betwyn tweyn best
 þerfor' I synge as þou myzt her'
 verbum caro factum est

(2)

The second half of this stanza, sung by the woman, is like a carol stanza contained within the larger construct, particularly as the refrain line 'verbum caro factum est' often appears in carols (including S59, J12 and E15). The narrator continues through the forest and encounters another performance:

In þat wone forzt gan I wynde

a semely song þan herd I þo
of þre schepperdis þat wern ful hynde
Gloria in excelsis deo (3.1-4)

This is the only other piece of Latin in the lyric, from a song performed in the scriptures and intimately connected with the shepherds, such as in carol texts as discussed in Chapter 4. The narrator pursues these singers and asks them to explain their song. Next, ‘3yt ferþeremor’ in þat fryth’ (4.1), he meets three kings who explain that they are travelling to Bethlehem ‘ffor *verbum caro factum est*’ (4.8), and they explain the significance of the refrain once more. Ultimately Mary is represented, pictured rather than physically encountered. It is not clear whether she is a singer but she is a performer: ‘with trewe tunge che told þe tale’ (6.7). In one the two other extant versions of the lyric, in the Lincolnshire miscellany Advocates 19.3.1, the final lines of the text give the song to Mary:

ffor I hard when sche sange & said
‘*Verbum caro factum est.*’ (RLXV 78, ll. 55-56)

The Sloane version is less polished than the more consistently alliterative Advocates text and the final three stanzas stumble, partially because they try three times to present the same material while expanding it differently:

þis is as meche for to say
as godis sone becum is fleych
he was born þis ilke day
a blysfyl weye vs for to wych¹⁵ (5.1-4)

Godis sone becomyn is fleych
þat bote hazt of al our bale
A blysfyl weye vs for to wych
þat mayde hym herberwyd in her’ hale (6.1-4)

verbum caro is to say
þat godis sone becomyn is man
he was born þis ilke day
to sauyn vs fro þe fend sathan (7.1-4)

¹⁵ This line is an example of one that is clearer in the Advocates version, which has ‘A-wey oure synnus forto wesche’ (l. 43)

Three times the narrator unpacks the meaning of the refrain (the paraphrase is certainly driven home for anyone who did not understand Latin), and finally in the lyric's unique last lines joins in the song:

þerfor' I synge 3ou as I can
verbum caro factum est (7.7-8)

The Advocates version is the stronger text, but the Sloane lyric contributes its own distinctive reading: the narrator's determination to explicate the song, 'verbum caro factum est', delays his final participation, but in these last two lines he speaks directly with the audience for the first time and sings.

A third and incomplete version of the song is written carelessly on a blank page of a manuscript later used as a pastedown, Pembroke College, Cambridge, MS 313, fragment B3.¹⁶ In this version the song is headed by a burden, '[Make] we joy now in this fest for *verbum caro factum est*', a couplet very similar to the burden of E15 and recalling those of S59 and E12. The now fragmentary text is closer to the Advocates version, although in abbreviated form, but the use of a burden strengthens the lyric's association with song.

The two refrain lines in the Sloane lyrics are expansively developed and the words, stories and ideas are situated in a landscape that the person of the narrator enables us to move through. This is especially the case in 'As I went þrow a gardyn grene', and recalls the mnemonic technique of arranging material one wishes to retain within a scene. In part, the responses expressed in the lyrics to the refrain lines – the material from which the lyrics are generated – are very similar. In 'Be þe way wanderyng as I went' the narrator considers the message on the wall seriously:

¹⁶ The lyric is unpublished but is described in N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 124; and Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', p. 27.

3yt I redde wel ferþeremor'
with trewe intent I took þertyl (2.1-2)

Yet it is not clear whether the whole lyric was written on the wall, or merely the refrain. This may be because it does not matter: the lyric is a meditation, an exposition, in which relevant stories are remembered along with proverbial moral advice. The narrator of the first lyric likewise seeks the meaning of his refrain: in the Advocates version the narrator listens to the maiden with 'gude tent' (l. 11), whereas Sloane has 'to her' song þan tok I intent' (2.3). The purpose of the lyrics is to expand upon this 'intent', the *res*, and in doing so they mediate between song and writing through a spatialised, imaginative process, engaging the senses of sight and hearing.

That the lyric focused upon a written text is one of isolated sorrow while the one focussed upon song is full of sociable joy may not be significant since there are carols within the anthologies in which songs carry a mournful message, such as E52 in which a bird sings of mortality. However, the explicit appearance of a written text is unusual within Sloane. In fact, amongst an extraordinary number of references to song and speech, there is a single other mention of writing, found in 'Adam lay ibowndyn':¹⁷

And al was for an appil · An appil þat he tok
As clerkis fyndyn wretyn · in her' book (S28, 2)

The singular 'book' is presumably the written Bible, here placed at a distance as the possession of clerics who are presented in the third person, while the song concludes:

¹⁷ Something similar is found in two Epiphany songs written very close together, both using the line '& clerkis redyn in her' seqwens' (S32, 11.3; also S34, 6.3), rhyming with 'presens' and 'francincens'. However, a sequence is a type of Latin chant, sung within the liturgy, so although it is possible that the clerks were 'reading' from a written sequence, the connotations of vocal performance are stronger. 'Read' could mean to chant as part of a church service, see *MED* 'reden', 2b. There is similar ambiguity in S50, 5.3.

Blyssid be þe tyme þat appil take was
perfor' we mown syngyn · deo gracias (4)

The clerks find the narrative of the Fall written, so 'we' can sing joyfully and thankfully. Is this an opposition between written tragedy and communal, vocal celebration? Because the book-controlling clerics are a 'they', an opposition must at some level be acknowledged. However, the lyric proceeds to its conclusion without any words of debate and conflict but through the logical, even scholarly argument of the *felix culpa*:

Ne hadde þe appil take ben þe appil taken ben
ne hadde neuer *our* lady · a ben heuene qwen (3)

Further, the joyous song is Latin: 'deo gracias'. The centrality of this phrase to sung liturgical ceremony made it available to both the literate elite and those with no direct access to the clerics' book. The lyric acknowledges difference between book and song, but in the construct and imagined performance of the song itself the lyric achieves a harmony appropriate to the demands of the narrative according to which we were all implicated in the taking of that apple and we all take pleasure in glorifying 'our lady'. Likewise, the scribe presents the pseudo-ballade lyrics as a pair (written together in the same format, between carols), and reading them as such gives an insight into the shared and divergent capacities of song and text, mediated but not merged by *memoria*.

Throughout this study examination of texts that initially appear simple has revealed self-consciousness, active interest in the creative process suggesting a level of critical thinking occurring within late Middle English lyric verse that over-emphasis upon such material's conventionality and utility obscures. The creative processes put on show in the Sloane pseudo-ballades and 'Adam lay ibowndyn' can inform reading of the collection's lyric most celebrated by

modern scholarship. ‘I syng of a myden’ occurs uniquely in this book, but it is possible to trace a textual history for the song that places it securely within the communal arts of memory responsible for the songs. We know that ‘I syng of a myden’ was in general fifteenth-century circulation as a song because of a reference preserved in a sermon for the feast of the Assumption in a later fifteenth-century manuscript:

vnde communiter de eo [*sic*] canitur,
 Mayde, wyff and moder whas neuer but ye;
 Well may suche a Lady Goddys modyr be.¹⁸

The reference was discovered by Alan Fletcher, whose brief comments upon it suggest that he read the adverb *communiter* as ‘commonly’.¹⁹ This is a strong and interesting possibility, but another translation is ‘communally’, a reference to group singing. The adverb *communiter* was widely used in classical and medieval Latin to mean both ‘communally’ or ‘together’ and ‘commonly’ or ‘ordinarily’.²⁰

The sermon reference connects ‘I syng of a myden’ with sung performance, but the words are also known to parallel a thirteenth-century lyric from a friar’s miscellany in its opening and closing couplets:

I syng a of a myden · þat is makeles
 kyng of alle kyngis · to her’ sone che ches (S25, 1)

of on ic wille singen þat is makeles,
 þe king of halle kinges to moder he hire ches. (EL 31,
 ll. 3-4, IMEV 2366)

¹⁸ Alan J. Fletcher, ‘I sing of a Maiden’: A fifteenth-century sermon reminiscence’, *Notes and Queries*, 25 (1978), 107-8 (p. 108). The manuscript is Bod., MS Barlow 24, f. 188v.

¹⁹ ‘In the third subdivision of the first division of this sermon’s theme, there appears the following couplet, which Selk [the compiler of the sermon collection] tells us is commonly sung about the Virgin Mary... Selk’s awareness and use of this lyric (and note the choice of adverb ‘communiter’) proves that it was more widely known in the fifteenth century than its solitary appearance in the Sloane manuscript might suggest.’ *Ibid.*

²⁰ R. E. Latham, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), gives ‘jointly, communally’ as the first meaning of *communiter*. Other relevant meanings include ‘generally’, ‘publicly’ and ‘ordinarily’, but ‘commonly’ is not specifically listed, 1, p. 401.

*moder & maydyn · was neuer non but che
wel may swych a lady · godis moder be* (2)

Maiden and moder nas neuer non wimon boten he-
wel mitte he berigge of godes sune be. (ll. 19-20)

Both lyrics begin with that striking declaration of intent, at once conventional and grandly Virgilian, ‘of on ic wille singen’, ‘I syng’. Something comparable (although less vigorous) has already been encountered in Sloane, in the burden to a carol on Mary’s Five Joys: ‘I may syng of a may of joyis fyve & merþis most’ (S21). The opening words are the only explicit reference to the creative process in ‘I syng of a myden’ but the Sloane text, the thirteenth-century verses and the sermon reference together are witnesses to a tradition of sung praise that enable appreciation of how this tradition developed through text and song.

The final stanza of the Sloane song is closer to the couplet given in the fifteenth-century sermon than to the earlier verse, although it is not directly parallel to either. The later versions have transformed the description of Mary, ‘berigge of godes sune’, to something grander, ‘godis moder’. The thirteenth-century lyric lacks the Sloane song’s central stanzas, built as they are upon a much-commented on technique of ‘folk-song’ style incremental repetition:

he *cam* also styllē · þer his moder was
as dew in aprylle · þat fallyt on þe gras

he *cam* also styllē · to his moderis bowr
as dew in aprille · þat fallyt on þe flour

he *cam* also styllē · þer his moder lay
as dew in aprille · þat fallyt on þe spray (S25, 2-4)

This repetitive style is comparable with another of the collection’s couplet songs, ‘I have a young sister’, a song unique in medieval sources but that re-emerges in

the nineteenth century as a nursery rhyme written down from oral tradition.²¹ But repetitive style is not exclusive to folk-song. Another text in Sloane using extensive repetition is a version of a thirteenth-century nativity hymn, beginning:

Procedenti puero
Eya nobis annus est
virginis ex vtero
gloria laudes
Deus homo factus est et immortalis.

Sine viri semine
Eya nobis &c'
Natus est de virgine
gloria laudes
Deus homo &c'

(S36, 1-2)

The song proceeds varying the first line and the first half of the third, but maintaining the rest of the text. Here the manuscript layout provides commentary upon the cultural dialogues taking place. The hymn follows the 'ballad' of Robin and Gandeleyne, 'Robyn lyth in grene wode bowndyn' (S35), the first surviving song of Robin Hood in the 'grene wode'. The Latin song has been squeezed in below this piece, together with a few decorative leaf-designs, suggesting that the scribe is filling space at the end of his folio. His filler text is, however, not some vernacular 'snatch' but a liturgical song.

The Sloane anthology presents a rich intermixing of medieval song traditions developed through continual contact between performance and written texts. In both cases where it represents a written text, the writing is said to be found: the words written on a wall discovered 'Be þe way wanderyng', and the story of the Fall that 'clerkis fyndyn wretyn in here book'. This finding situates the writing in public space, and thus as resources that can be remembered, passed

²¹ This song is the subject of extensive study by Boklund-Lagopoulou, 'I have a yong suster', pp. 73-77.

on and developed. While this treatment of written texts is not the same as the group performance of song it enables exchange between the two, informing the manuscript's written texts throughout.

'I syng of a myden' is both like and not like the songs around it. The lyric fully participates in the process outlined above as a song of worship able to cite biblical imagery and a text two hundred years old, but it is placed next to a riddle-song with which it shares stylistic features, and a contemporary sermon attests to its circulation in performance tradition. It manages to synthesise the story of the Annunciation and imagery of dewfall where a biblical reference (to Gideon's fleece) unobtrusively finds a place within a representation of natural growth. Stanza by stanza the rhymes germinate and grow: grass, to flower, to spray. In this chapter we have encountered a natural world alive with song, meaning and memory: the flowering rod of Isaiah's dream in 'Adam our fader was in blis' (S5); trees full of singing doves, garden, arbour and forest in 'As I went þrow a gardyn grene' (S40); the fateful 'appil tre' and its 'lef & frewt' in 'In þe vale of abraham' (S2) and 'Adam lay ibowndyn' (S28). The central stanzas of 'I syng of a myden' are a culmination of this fecund vision of nature endlessly re-living the fundamental human narratives.

The initial statement that Mary chose her pregnancy is especially significant because not only does it reverse the thirteenth-century text, 'þe king of halle kinges to moder he hire ches', but the song before this in the manuscript is a carol of the Annunciation in which Mary, 'meke & mylde' (S24, 1.1), is a passive vehicle for the Incarnation. Her passivity is emphasised by the burden, 'mary was gret *with* gabriel', and the way the stanzas' narrative voice informs her of her role stage by stage:

Mary moder be not adred
jhesus is in 3our body bred
& of 3our bryst he wil be fed (S24, 2.1-3)

By contrast, ‘I syng of a myden’, celebrates Mary as a hero, but feats of arms have been replaced by stillness and fertility. Mary’s situation within the bower delicately aligns her with Nature, ‘moder & maydyn’. This ecosystem of a lyric combines an abundance of various elements within its steady, repetitive development and even, yet flexible, rhythm. The song lives within its expansive tradition, the group memory of song and text, but it is still worth dwelling with as a particular *verbum* in which something remarkable is achieved.

III. Rhetoric and Liturgy

In the previous section we encountered two found texts built into larger constructs. The songs are full of such texts, although usually the phrases or quotations from which they develop are not written words, but pieces from the sung liturgy. As a rich source of shared song and narrative, directly linked with communal celebrations through the year, liturgy was intimately connected with vernacular festive songs. In emphasising the centrality of liturgy to medieval cultural production, Bruce Holsinger has recently raised a series of challenging questions for literary studies in the period:

What modes of convergence and mutuality affiliate the liturgical and the literary? How are such affiliations negotiated within specific religious and political localities, and how do they determine the forms and aesthetics of specifically literary writing? More radically, perhaps, in what sense might literature be seen as in part an *effect* of liturgy, a curious by-product of the immense cultural industry invested in the Word of God by the institutions that performed it?²²

²² Bruce Holsinger, ‘Liturgy’, in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 295-314 (p. 296). Holsinger has written elsewhere on this subject, see especially, *Music, Body, and Desire* and ‘The

As festive songs that could also be read, the anthologies' songs occupy an uncertain territory between the liturgical and the literary, making them especially pertinent to this area of research. This section returns to the manuscripts' songs in carol form and examines the rhetorical functions of the liturgy within their texts, especially from the perspective of its role as a rich source of cultural memory.

Liturgy had the capacity to generate vernacular verse around it through macaronic structures well attested to in the anthologies and elsewhere. The carols respond intimately to the liturgy as communal song, and although in Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's this response is dispersed throughout their texts, in other carol collections it can be a consistent technique, especially in Ryman's anthology and in the first section of Lincoln Lat. 141. Of the seven carols written at the same time at the start of Lincoln Lat. 141, six are macaronic. All place the Latin in the burden or the last line of the stanzas, pivotal moments in the songs. For the most part, the lines are not hard and are drawn from parts of the liturgy familiar through sung performance. If the carols were to be performed with the burden forming a repeated choral unit, the Latin lines were precisely those with which a larger group could participate. Occasionally carols paraphrase their Latin lines in English:

Agnus dei hodie natus de pura virgine.
Ihesus lombe for hys fadyr is [b]orne;
He is comtyll a pure virgynys wombe... (2, ll. 1-3)

Ihesu, fili virginis, miserere nobis.

*Ihesu, of a maydyn woldyst be borne
To sawe mankind þat was forlorne,*

Parable of Caedmon's *Hymn*: Liturgical Invention and Literary Tradition', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 106 (2007), 149-175.

And all for ovr mys: miserere nobis. (6, ll. 1-4)

More commonly, Latin is included without explanation and the English and Latin co-exist. The Latin might be rendered more familiar by the expansive vernacular, for example in a penitential carol, opening:

A blyssydfull songe þis is to vs,
Miserere mei deus.

Thow þat know þi selfe gylyt,
Azens þi god þou hast done wrong,
For goddys lowe lerne þis of me,
With hertely will to syng þis song:
Miserere mei deus. (4, ll. 1-7)

The first complete carol in the manuscript exemplifies the process of vernacular expansion from a liturgical core:

Syng we now þis holy feste,
Vox in rama audita est.

Rachel þat wepyth *withowt* consalacoun,
ffor her chylderne is ded þat suke[d] her brest,
f[i]gurit þe chyldern' of I[s]rael destructioun,
ffor vox in rama audita est.

Thys day in bedleem þes Innocens
Herod martyrd for þe luf of cryste;
This glorius blod was offyrd to hevyn,
ffor vox in rama audita est. (1)

The burden and refrain line is part of an antiphon, 'Vox in Rama audita est ploratus et ululatus Rachel plorans filios suos', sung on the feast day of the Holy Innocents and is the only extant use of this antiphon in a carol.²³ The striking opening lines to the first stanza translate not the quoted part of the antiphon but the text that follows, based on Matthew 2.18, itself derived from Jeremiah 31.15. A brief explanation is given, and then the second stanza returns attention to the feast day being celebrated with a simple explanation of distant events rendered

²³ CURSUS Antiphon c5508. The text is also used as a respond in the same Mass, Respond c7920.

þre personys in trenyte
blyssid mot þey alle be
deo patri sit gloria·
(S23, 5)

þre persons in trinite
worshepe þat chyld so fre
de virgine maria
(E13, 4)

Gloria tibi, Domine,
Joy *and* blysse among vs be,
For att thys tyme borne ys he;
[Alleluya Deo.]
(EEC 87 B, 4 [Ashmole 189])

The leading Latin lines are preserved closely in parallel not through a more ‘literate’ circulation than the English, but through repeated familiarity from performance. The raised register of the Latin is balanced, not by aureate English, but by simple phrases, entirely monosyllabic in the stanza from the Ashmole version quoted above. The third stanza of the Sloane song is unique to the manuscript and contains a vernacular couplet that Greene points out appears almost verbatim in the *Coventry Shearmen and Taylors’ Play*:²⁴

betwyx an ox & an as
cryst hymself born he was
(S23, 3.2-3)

Comparable couplets also occur in carols, including within Sloane:

betw^yin an ox & an as
godis sone born he was
(S32, 4.3-4)²⁵

These lines constitute a remembered rhyme-image, referring to traditional iconography that shows the ox and ass as onlookers in nativity scenes.²⁶ The composition of the carol, built from regularly sung, liturgical Latin and familiar vernacular images and phrases, demonstrates a memory-based *bricolage*. The

²⁴ *EEC*, p. 362.

²⁵ See also variations on these lines in E14, 4.3 and Balliol 354 songs *EEC* 52, 4.1 and 78, 7.4.

²⁶ The ox and the ass are not referred to in the Gospels but feature in many visual representations of the nativity, including in late medieval East Anglia, for example, the elegant nativity scene in a fourteenth-century Book of Hours belonging to Alice de Reydon of Wherstead (Suffolk) CUL, MS. Dd.4.17, f. 6r; stained glass representations in East Harling church (Norfolk) dating around 1480; and in a fifteenth-century carved roof boss in the nave vault of Norwich Cathedral. All images can be seen on the University of Cambridge Faculty of English Medieval Imaginations site.

liturgy, holding a structural position in the texts, generates vernacular verse around it rather in the way that tropes were built up around scriptural extracts.

This is not to suggest that Latin lines are always fixed points in the songs. The fourth lines of the stanzas in ‘Saluator mundi domine’ vary widely. The Sloane carol uses three different lines in this position, but the Eng. poet. version has a refrain line ‘de virgine Maria’, the second line of its burden, while the Ashmole text uses another refrain, either ‘Alleluia, alleluia’, or ‘Alleluia deo’.²⁷ Such phrases were easily interchangeable, but change the effect of the song: the Eng. poet. carol focuses on Marian praise and the Sloane and Ashmole texts praise God the Father. The stability of the first lines in this song follows from the familiar liturgical source that provides the song with its unifying structure.

A simpler and more frequent way in which liturgical Latin could generate and structure songs is where a single line is repeated throughout, similar to the ‘Verbum caro factum est’ refrain in ‘As I went þrow a gardyn grene’. Two carols in Sloane use, or respond to, Marian antiphons in this way. One, an Annunciation carol, takes the line ‘Alma redemptoris mater’ for its burden, and the words, ‘Redemptoris mater’ as a refrain line in the stanzas, rhymed *aaab* where the *a*-lines are vernacular (S64). Exactly the same treatment is given to another Marian antiphon, the ‘Regina celi letare’, in another of Sloane’s carols (S50). Both songs also appear in the Selden. polyphonic carol collection. The songs are not attempts to translate the antiphons: they build the Latin songs’ familiarity and associations with group worship into new songs.

²⁷ For another example of interchangeable Latin lines, see Sloane song 46, found in another three manuscripts in which the Latin fourth line of each stanza is subject to a high degree of variation, as seen in Greene’s collation, *EEC* 114.

The song using the ‘Alma redemptoris mater’ exemplifies carefully constructed interplay between vernacular and Latin parts, best recognised if musical settings are also considered. The Sloane text opens:

Alma redemptoris mater.

As I lay vpon a nyzt
my þowt was on a mayde bryzt
þat men callyn mary of myzt
Redemptoris mater

to her’ cam gabriel so bryzt
& seyde heyl mari ful of myzt
To be cald þou art adyzt
Redemptoris

(S64, burden, 1, 2)

Familiar and simple (mostly monosyllabic) vernacular words and the first line of a famous antiphon present a narrative song. The third line of most of the stanzas gestures towards the Latin refrain line that follows and the vernacular parts of the song develop as a narrative gloss upon this name for Mary. Semantically, the focus of the song returns again and again to those three words from the antiphon. The visual and verbal distribution of the song gives the vernacular exposition far more space, but the musical settings found elsewhere show that the performance of this text may well have involved greater concentration upon the Latin section.²⁸ In the Selden. manuscript the burden is set twice, once for two voices and once for three, and the three words of the burden, ‘Alma redemptoris mater’, are stretched over fifteen bars in both settings. In the stanzas the three lines of vernacular narrative are given fourteen bars and the refrain line, ‘redemptoris mater’, is given ten bars, so the performance time of the verbally short Latin sections is far longer than the vernacular sections. The music for the vernacular lines is set for two voices but is

²⁸ *MC 23; MC 4.*

actually the same and so monophonic, with the two voices diverging only from the word ‘Redemptoris’, suddenly enriching the sound. The song therefore contrasts a clearly delivered vernacular narrative with relatively extravagant musical display on the Latin sections and the repetitious structure of the song means that these sections are extensively expanded. Of course, the Selden. setting is not a reliable indicator of how the Sloane song was performed musically (even the Trinity setting of this song is entirely independent) but it does show a striking agreement between the song’s verbal semantics and musical organisation and so can enrich our perception of possible ways in which the different parts of these songs could interact, the liturgical and the vernacular here in creative contrast.

The Sloane recreation of ‘Regina celi letare’ opens in its burden with a direct statement of the performance taking place, followed by simple but confident end-stopped vernacular lines:

Synge we synge we Regina celi letare·

 holy maydyn blyssid þou be
 godis sone is born of þe
 þe fader of heuene worchepe we
 Regina celi letare·

(S50, 1)

Unusually, the rhyme is preserved throughout the entire song, creating unity and a strong forward motion. Unlike ‘As I lay vpon a nyzt’, the Selden. setting of this song is evenly distributed in that it treats the English and Latin sections of the song similarly in all ways, even beginning and ending the burden and stanza sections on the same cadence.²⁹ The vernacular sections of the song accumulate short phrases using anaphora, apostrophe and isocolon:

²⁹ MC 21.

heyl wyf heyl maydyn heyl bryt3 of ble
heyl dowter heyl suster heyl ful of pete
heyl chosyn to þo personys þre
Regin[a] (S50, 2)

Stanzas following this rhetorical pattern (4 and 6) alternate with stanzas that are less repetitively structured, avoiding monotony. The third line of each stanza also interrupts the patterns:

þou art empresse of heuene so fre
worþi maydyn in mageste
now worchepe we þe trenyte
Regina &c'

lady so louely so goodly to see
so buxsum in þi body to be
þou art his moder for humylite
Regina celi letare

þese ben curteys kyngis of solunte
þey worchepyd þi sone *with* vmylite
mylde mary þus rede we
Regina

So gracios so *precyows* in ryalte
þus jentyl þus good þus fynde we
þer is *non* swych in *non* cuntre
Regina

& þerfor' knel we doun on *our* kne
þis blyssid berþe worchepe we
þis is a song of humylyte
Regina (S50, 3-7)

Stanzas 4 and 6 are unique to the Sloane text and here contribute to the lavish praise, as dense rhetorical patterning within this song drives its copious accumulation. The Sloane version uses 'humility' as a rhyme three times: to describe Mary, the Magi and finally the carol itself in the last vernacular line: 'þis is a song of humylyte' (7.3), drawing the virtues of the subjects into the song itself.

Mariolatry need not be so lavish, however, as seen by contrasting this carol with the opening to one of the manuscript's couplet songs:

Aue *maris* stella· þe sterr' on þe see
dei *mater* alma· blyssid mot xe be

atque *semper* virgo· prey þi sone for me
felix celi porta· þat I may come to þe (S55, 1-2)

The lines combine smoothly using a six-stress largely trochaic rhythm to create a simple prayer lyric in which almost wholly monosyllabic vernacular balances the first stanza of the hymn, 'Ave maris stella', well-known from use in the Divine Office and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. The language contrasts with the way macaronic forms are used to raise the vernacular in some aureate fifteenth-century poetry. The lyric shifts wholly into the vernacular after the opening couplets, and concludes with a promise of reward for everyone engaging in praise of Mary, on the condition that they have first engaged in the Church's required penitential practices:

all þat arn to grete [þe] *withoutyn* dedly synne
forty dayis of *pardoun* god grauntyt hym (S55, 5)

Like 'holy maydyn blyssid þou be', the song is articulated within the Church's community, and contributes to the strengthening of that community, praising Mary in the sanctioned manner.

IV. Making and Using an Archive of Communal Song

One of the carols referred to in the section above makes prominent use of the Marian antiphon 'Alma redemptoris mater'. This antiphon is an especially significant one in the context of scholarship on song in late medieval England

because of the role it plays in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*. I would like to use it here to highlight some questions and concerns involved in the arguments made in this chapter, in order to clarify them but also to acknowledge the complexity of the creative processes explored above in preparation for the final section of this thesis. In the *Prioress's Tale* a 'litel clergeon' (VII.503) overhears the 'Alma redemptoris' being taught at his song school. Instead of using the grammatical and somatic systems of the school, the clergeon learns the song by heart through listening alone and with little understanding of the words. The boy walks between his school and his home through a Jewish neighbourhood, while singing the antiphon 'Ful murily... everemo' (VII.553-4). The consequence of these performances is that the Jews murder the boy and in revenge, the people of the town wipe out the entire Jewish population, whose neighbourhood was introduced in the Prioress's opening lines as 'Hateful to Crist and to his compaignye' (VII.492). The clergeon's piece of remembered Latin in praise of Mary raises questions about the role of song within the 'compaignye', articulating its acceptable identities and boundaries, and implicated in the potential for violence within and between communities.

Because of its dark subject matter and place in one of the foundational texts of English literature, the *Prioress's Tale* has been a site of troubled critical debate about how we approach medieval literature, provocatively expressed by Louise Fradenburg:

medieval studies has functioned as a kind of machine for the transformation of Christian concepts and allegiances into 'culture', or into a responsible attentiveness to the cultural alterity of the past. This has been done in the name of a sacrificial conception of the historiographical project... wherein the historian sets aside preconceptions, desires,

political commitments, all that is held dear, in quest of the secret truths of history.³⁰

Fradenburg warns that our determination to respect ‘the cultural alterity of the past’ can suppress alterities within the past, and notes that in its painstaking attention to manuscript detail, ‘the new philology has sought specifically to recover the very means whereby medieval culture preserved itself, remembered itself, guarded and protected its past, and did not’.³¹ This sentence describes aspects of my own study of the fifteenth-century anthologies, and also aspects of the work of manuscripts themselves.

This chapter has examined the significance of memory in shaping the songs, the way the texts create memorable constructs and organise shared narratives. The anthologies can, therefore, be described as archives of song, not in the primary sense of housing resources for researchers, but as organised collections that look both back and forwards in time. The books do not exactly publish their songs, because they have not been issued from a source of private creativity into the public world, but instead the anthologies gather together their texts from circulation and public conversation to form a corpus, prepared for continued public dissemination in the future. This dual motivation was observed by Derrida in *Mal d’archive*, where he argues that archives are material sites of power, at once ‘*institutive* and *conservative*. Revolutionary and traditional.’³² Derrida finds that archival activity, rather than being subsumed by memory, takes place at the limits of remembering:

³⁰ Louise Fradenburg, “‘So That We May Speak of Them’”: Enjoying the Middle Ages’, *New Literary History*, 28 (1997), 205-230 (p. 27). Fradenburg examines this in relation to the *Prioress’s Tale* in ‘Criticism, Anti-Semitism and the *Prioress’s Tale*’, *Exemplaria*, 1 (1989), 68-115. See also Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire*, pp. 259-292.

³¹ Fradenburg, ‘Enjoying the Middle Ages’, p. 57.

³² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 7.

the archive... will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory. *There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside.*³³

Derrida's theory of archive helps to clarify why the archive or book, as deliberate physical constructs, should not be mistaken for a mimic of memory. The archive marks the limits of memory and opposes to the evolving, amorphous group *memoria* and conversation something fragmentary. The anthologies are thus cultural constructs that remember and provoke memory of a restricted, legitimate narrative.

This is particularly significant because these texts insist upon group identity, address their audience with commands or subsume them within 'we' and 'us', and, as Derrida has said, 'we' is always an imposition.³⁴ Wakelin argues that the imperatives within the carols make them sound 'not only like a voice of the people but also like a written diktat'.³⁵ Wakelin's judgement here is balanced, but the second half repeats a tendency in criticism on the carols to present them as though they were religious propaganda, implicit in Greene's widely accepted argument that they were 'popular by destination', but not in origin.³⁶ However, the linearity of this characterisation cannot fully account for the anthologies' texts, especially as the notion of propaganda contains, as argued by John Watts, the 'implication of a hermetically sealed authority in full control

³³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 41.

³⁵ Wakelin, 'The Carol in Writing', p. 37.

³⁶ *EEC* p. cxviii. For recent support of Greene's argument, see, for example, Reichl, 'The Middle English Carol', p. 169, and Boklund-Lagopoulou, 'I have a yong suster', p. 42.

of the initiative'.³⁷ This section has argued that texts in the anthologies were arrived at and circulated through discursive, hegemonic processes, engaging written and performance mediums, especially within the spreading networks of cultural *memoria*, and I have sought to identify and analyse these processes at a textual level.

The identification of the songs contained within the anthologies as 'communal' depends upon the belief that religious culture in late medieval England included communal, participatory activity and was not entirely an ideology imposed by an exclusive elite.³⁸ However, social status shaped the extent and type of individuals' participation; this is exemplified in the liturgy itself, in which parts are distributed among different figures and groups. These songs contain little explicit social comment and it is difficult to identify the participation of specific social groupings, but they do contain extensive debate about women. The next chapter will seek to recognise some of the differences and conflicts within the community through attention to the representation of women within the songs and how women may have participated in the creative processes that shaped and shared the songs as explored in this section: reading, writing, performing and remembering.

I do not wish to exaggerate equivalences between the songs and social structures of fifteenth-century East Anglia, communal or otherwise. The purpose of this study is the examination of a group of manuscripts and the creativity of their contents: as argued in Part One I chose 'communal' primarily as a critical, 'literary' term to enable exploration of the making and dissemination of these

³⁷ John Watts, 'The Pressure of the Public on Later Medieval Politics', in *Political Culture in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Linda Clark and Christine Carpenter, The Fifteenth Century 4 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 159-180 (p. 179).

³⁸ See especially Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

texts, their shapes and textures, and their contexts, so the final chapter will return to questions of genre, informed by the foregoing study of creative processes. Thus, Part Three will progress from the findings and approaches developed in this thesis in order to consider a wider range of material and some interpretative cruxes found within the anthologies in two main areas: gender and genre. Examining the role of *memoria* in shaping the songs has, in this chapter, focused upon dominant institutionalised narratives and performance traditions, but it also provides the routes for other, less expected, types of material to find its way into the songs.

Part Three: Mixed Voices and Forms

Chapter 8. Women and Communal Song

I. Introduction: Whose communal song?

When the Sloane scribe concludes a carol celebrating Mary, ‘sawe now al þis cumpany’ (S48, 4.3), the question of who is in the ‘cumpany’ and how they rank in relation to one another is not an explicit concern. The song appears to refer quite simply to whoever is present. This type of reference to the group present at the performance can be found throughout the texts contained within Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s and I have used these moments to illustrate the communal character and function of the songs, strengthening group identity through participatory performance. Such gestures to the group do not make clear who makes up the company, and how that group relates to wider social structures beyond the festive moment. This chapter will begin to address this issue by searching within the texts for where the songs make reference to specific social identities. I will then examine in depth the role of women in the songs, because, although women were not a unitary social group within medieval communities, they were subject to explicit debate within the songs as an identifiable group. Furthermore, women’s role in the development and performance of song is significant within the representation of song in late medieval England and has shaped critical discussion of the corpus.

Most of the songs in the anthologies are delivered anonymously, without information about the social position or gender of the speaker. Where the

personae narrating the songs are specified these include unmarried women (J5), married women (E72), married men (S49 and S63), unmarried men (E22), travelling salesmen (S54), and one disappointed courtier (E6). The subjects of the songs tend to be of general applicability, especially when religious or moral.¹ Where songs do draw attention to particular social structures, the results are rarely helpful to a reader seeking direct information about the community involved. For example, Sloane contains a carol that laments the absence of truth from ‘þis cuntre’, where each stanza describes a group of people: great lords, ladies, men of law, the members of the Church, and the religious orders (S15). But the verdict on each of these groups is the same: they do not value truth. From the same manuscript warnings about the instability of the world are directed at everyone, from kings (S12), to servants, addressed, for example, in a burden: ‘Bewar sqwyer or zeman & page for seruyse is non erytage’ (S18). The manuscripts contain direct addresses to kings, lords, ladies, wives and husbands, young women, and young men,² but most common of all is the general address, ‘man’.³

Instead of dwelling on social difference, the songs prefer to represent song passed from one group to another. This is illustrated in ‘As I went þrow a gardyn grene’ (S40), where the unspecified speaker listens to the same song performed by a young woman, a group of shepherds, a group of kings, and then the Virgin Mary, before performing it herself, or himself.⁴ This may explain why the songs have been comparatively neglected in studies of fifteenth-century literature that seek to rectify generations of critical denigration of the period by

¹ This is suggested in the first song of Sloane where the advice is said to be relevant to all, ‘qweþer þou stond walke or ryde’ (S1, 4.3).

² For examples, see respectively S12, E41, E70, E72, S46, and S49.

³ These songs are numerous, but see S1, S7, S10, S12 etc; J16; E3, E23, E29, E30 etc.

⁴ Cf. the transferral of Audelay’s book from priory to minstrel and back to priory (Chapter 5).

emphasising the public, cultural work undertaken by writers, especially poets.⁵ Furthermore, the carol is an unlikely place to seek politicised debate. Its association with polyphony places it firmly within orthodox religious tradition since polyphony was attacked in radical religious discourse as ornamentation that obscured God's word. For example, one sermon complains that liturgical services were 'ordeyned of synful men, to be songen wiþ heize crynge to lette men fro þe sentence & vnderstondyng of þat þat was þus songen, and to maken men wery & vndisposid to studie goddis lawe for akyng of hedis'.⁶

Holsinger has suggested that polyphonic music may have flourished in the fifteenth century after Arundel's 1409 Constitutions censored theological debate, while religious verse suffered a corresponding decline because it had to take a conservative position.⁷ The position is exemplified by a song in Eng. poet., which begins:

Why why what is þis whi but *virtus verbi domini*

whan nothyng was but god alone
 þe fader þe holy gost *with* þe son
 on was iij & iij was on
 what is þis why
 To frayn why I hold but foly
 it is *non oþer* sertenly
 But *virtus verbi domini*

(E25, burden, 1)

The last four lines of this stanza are a refrain, repeating the verdict that it is folly to question the Church's teaching on the nature of the Trinity, creation, miracles and, lastly, transubstantiation:

herytykes wonder of þis thyng most

⁵ Especially Lawton, 'Dullness'; James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution, 1350-1547*, Oxford English Literary History Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Strohm, *Politique*.

⁶ *The English Works of Wyclif*, ed. Matthew, p. 191.

⁷ Holsinger, 'Langland's Musical Reader', p. 133. See also Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-864.

how god is put *in þe* holy host
her & at rome & in euery cost
what is why
To frayn why &c (E25, 6)

An argument in support of transubstantiation is not even made because it is declared stupid to ask about it. This is the only song in the anthologies from which it would be possible to discern that religious debate existed in the fifteenth century.

Social unease, by contrast, is more apparent in a general sense because many carols critique discord between neighbours and in particular the destructive effects of unregulated speech. The carol immediately preceding ‘whan nothyng was but god alone’, for example, advises:

lok þat þou no man defame
Ne apeyer no mans fame
Ryzt as þou woldest haue þe sam
amend me & [peyer me novzt] (E24, 5)

Many of the carols caution their audiences to assume that those around them cannot be trusted, even their friends. Unregulated speech is a recurrent concern. Beyond the initial impression of a shared voice regulated by the clerical establishment, the songs belong to a more plural, polyvocal community.

The visibility of women as a group within this community arises, perhaps ironically, from the misogynist discourse that seeks to marginalise them in a number of the carols, and this marginalisation remains largely uncontested in critical discussion of fifteenth-century carols. In the previous section the emphasis upon manuscript production, liturgy and religious practice presented a group of songs that appear to have little in common with the carolling represented in literary sources introduced in Chapter 2, such as Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*:

I sawgh hir daunce so comlily,
Carole and synge so swetely,
Laughe and pleye so womanly.⁸

The relation of the songs in the anthologies to the performances by women represented in literature is obscure, but does this mean that we should follow Robbins in declaring that Middle English carols were clerical productions patterned purely on Latin hymns?⁹ There is no clear evidence to support female authorship of any surviving pre-Reformation English songs, and most critical studies of the anthologies and carols more widely have argued that the songs were clerical productions, possibly imitating vernacular traditions, but designed to replace these with church-sanctioned song.¹⁰ Effectively this argument makes the texts propaganda. Wakelin suggests that at times the carols sound like ‘a written diktat’,¹¹ and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou uses one carol from the Sloane and Eng. poet. manuscripts (S48/E26) to illustrate a similar view:

the poet is copying external features of orally composed lyric, without himself working within an oral tradition. From an imitation of popular song, it becomes a didactic, written composition probably meant to replace popular song.¹²

While this narrative gives some space to non-clerically sanctioned voices because by imitating oral traditions, written songs will inevitably carry their traces, such propaganda is a deliberate production issued from a unitary source of authority for prescribed consumption.

⁸ *The Book of the Duchess*, ll. 848-850.

⁹ Robbins, ‘Middle English Carols’.

¹⁰ This narrative underlies many of the critical studies introduced in Chapter 2, but especially via Robbins and Greene (for example, Reichl, ‘The Middle English Carol’, especially pp. 166-7). Where carols are introduced with short summaries the trajectory is particularly clear, for example David Wulstan introduces it, ‘The carol... began as a dance. Since these dance songs were extremely popular, the Franciscans took over the tunes for their own purposes, substituting loftier Latin sentiments’. Wulstan goes on, however, to stress that the carol was ‘not so easily tamed’, particularly because of its role in festivities, *Tudor Music*, p. 73.

¹¹ Wakelin, ‘The Carol in Writing’, p. 37.

¹² Boklund-Lagopoulou, ‘*I have a yong suster*’, p. 42.

Underlying Greene's widely supported definition of the carol as 'popular by destination' are theories of popular culture widely held in the early twentieth century:¹³ that popular culture was a mass-produced product generated by a restricted group for passive consumption by the masses, as opposed to the spontaneous and authentic art of the folk.¹⁴ When Theodore Adorno examined the way in which standardised music was generated by the culture industry to form 'social cement' in the twentieth century, he connected the process, ultimately, with silence:

music for entertainment... seems to complement the reduction of people to silence, the dying out of speech as expression, the inability to communicate at all. It inhabits the pockets of silence that develop between people moulded by anxiety, work, and undemanding docility.¹⁵

I suggest that the enthusiasm with which Greene's modelling the carols as 'popular by destination' was met is responsive in part to theories and perception of twentieth-century popular music as a mass-produced product, surrounded by silence.¹⁶ Studies in popular music since Adorno have contested or modified mass culture theories, commonly drawing inspiration from Gramsci's theories of hegemonic culture and adapting to the way today's technologies enable active participation in musical culture.¹⁷ Modelling the carols as propagandistic productions by clerics whose survival confirms the silence of an original

¹³ See Chapter 7, n. 35.

¹⁴ For an overview of twentieth-century theories relating to the culture of the folk and the masses, see John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

¹⁵ Theodor Adorno, 'On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 26-52 (p. 27).

¹⁶ For a provocative study of the way critics re-shape medieval music according to their own society's ideologies see Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Modern Invention of Medieval Music: Scholarship, Ideology, Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Katherine Bergeron, *Decadent Enchantments: The Revival of Gregorian Chant at Solesmes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁷ See John Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), and Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990). More recently, MySpace, YouTube and the iPod are all making consumption more creative and personalised.

tradition cannot be resolved with the type of creativity explored in the previous section that affords such limited space to the *auctor* and at every stage offers possibilities for participatory activity. It is necessary to recognise that the anthologies' texts were produced within a hierarchical community, not one equally accessible to all, but the possibility that late medieval cultural production involved hegemonic processes deserves consideration.

Numerous critics have sought to reclaim women's voices within late medieval England, either by reinterpreting texts known to have been written by women, such as the writings of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and the Paston women (all Norfolk residents), or by considering other creative ways in which women could be involved in literary culture, including as patrons and readers.¹⁸ Discussion of the fifteenth-century carols, however, has focussed upon male control of this textual tradition, including control over the female voice. For example, John Plummer argues that 'popular songs in the female voice existed in medieval Europe' but 'were assimilated by sophisticated courtly culture... serving as a meaning-giving counterpoint to the male-voiced love song'.¹⁹ The songs within the fifteenth-century anthologies cannot, however, be fairly described as belonging to 'sophisticated courtly culture' and the visibility of women within their texts and in critical negotiation of wider written and musical traditions suggests that questions of gender can illumine key aspects of the

¹⁸ See *Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Dinshaw and Wallace; *Women and Literature*, ed. Meale, especially Boffey, 'Women authors'; *A Companion to 'The Book of Margery Kempe'*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004); Julia Boffey, 'Lydgate's Lyrics and Women Readers', in *Women, The Book and the Worldly*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, 2 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 139-149.

¹⁹ John F. Plummer, 'The Woman's Song in Middle English and its European Backgrounds', in *Vox Feminae*, ed. Plummer, pp. 135-154 (p. 151). See also Bernard O'Donoghue, "'Cuius Contrarius': Middle English Popular Lyrics" in *A Companion*, ed. Duncan, pp. 210-226; and Judith M. Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms: When Maidens Speak in English Songs, c. 1300-1500', in *Medieval Woman's Song*, ed. Klinck and Rasmussen, pp. 187-204.

songs' generic identities, the relation between performance traditions and texts, and the extent of communal participation.

II. Women Singing and Women Sung

The majority of the songs contained in the three anthologies do not allocate the gender of the performer. Sloane's most celebrated lyric begins, 'I syng of a myden', which might be read as positioning women as objects for representation in these texts, but who is to say that 'I' is either male or female? The evidence of women performing songs professionally is less extensive than for men, who could attend song schools, perform the liturgy in church, and find employment in choirs at court or in religious institutions and household chapels where polyphonic songbooks were produced. As explained in Chapter 6, where performance was not professional it was unlikely to be documented, so the evidence of women singing is limited.

The richest sources of references to female performance traditions are literary. Late medieval writers frequently depict women participating in song, especially *caroles*. A substantial proportion of references to carolling quoted by Greene and found elsewhere refer to women. Examples can be found in Chaucer's poetry, such as in his translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, or in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*:

Was nevere noon that luste bet to syng;
Ne lady lustier in carolyng (VIII.1344-5)

Often the women taking part in *caroles* are young:

Til the day dawed these damyseles carolden...
(*Piers Plowman*, XVIII.427)

Damisels carols ledeþ *(Arthur and Merlin)*²⁰

Fair is þe karole of maydens gent,
Boþe in halle and ek in tente. *(King Alexander)*²¹

The Maydenys made songes of Quene Constaunce, And euermore
thorowgh the londe they songe Carolles of here
*(Trivet's Life of Constance)*²²

Occasionally, the practice depicted is of women carolling beside roadways to
celebrate entries:

Sche waiteth upon his cominge
With dansinge and with carolinge...
*(Confessio Amantis)*²³

To ierusalem þat heued bare þei.
þer caroled wiues bi þe way. *(Cursor Mundi)*²⁴

Also common are depictions of men dancing with ladies in carols, such as in *Sir
Gawain and the Green Knight*, where dancing contrasts with the all-male activity
of hunting:

‘Wel bycommes such craft upon Cristmasse –
Laykyng of enterludez, to laze and to syng –
Among þise kynde caroles of kny3tez and ladyez.’

And syþen he mace hym as mery among þe fre ladyes,
With comlych caroles and alle kynnes joye...²⁵

This Middle English tradition of depicting women singing and dancing
resembles the much richer Continental literary tradition of the *carole*, celebrated
in romances and lyrics but often condemned in sermons and other religious

²⁰ *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. O. D. Macrae-Gibson, EETS OS 268 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973-1979), (Auchinleck) p. 127, l. 1714.

²¹ *Kyng Alisaunder*, ed. G. V. Smithers, EETS OS 227 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 1, p. 105, B.1843-5.

²² *Originals and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Edmund Brock and W.A. Clouston (London: N. Trübner, 1872-1888), vol. 3, CS 2nd Series 15 (1876), p. 236.

²³ IV.1529-30.

²⁴ II, ll. 7599-7600.

²⁵ ll. 470-3, 1885-6.

literature.²⁶ Medieval women singing and dancing were depicted in writing and visual arts, and there are even lyrics that were probably written by women, of which those by the *troubairitz* are best known.²⁷ Arguing for women's participation in musical life in the church, court and elsewhere Judith Tick summarises the situation:

The lack of compositions attributed to women has occasionally been interpreted as evidence of their exclusion from late medieval musical life. But too much circumstantial evidence shifts the burden of proof away from assumptions of exclusion towards more sophisticated interpretations of performing practice. Many examples of literary allusion and visual imagery document the ubiquitous presence of women in the musical culture of the late Middle Ages.²⁸

Women are known to have learned to read and perform music in convents, and two notated manuscripts survive associated with late medieval English convents.²⁹ Women could also be professional performers and were able to join the Musicians' Company of London founded in 1462.³⁰ Accounts kept for Henry VII show that he paid 6s. 8d. 'To the women that songe before the king and Quene' on 2nd August 1495, and 2s. 'To a woman that singeth with a fidell' on 2nd November of the same year.³¹ Depictions of women carolling at the roadside receive some early documentary support from a 1303 record that Edward I paid

²⁶ See Chapter 2. Women were also depicted participating in carols in heaven, see Alan J. Fletcher, 'The Dancing Virgins of *Hali Meïðhad*', *Notes and Queries*, 40 (1993), 437-439.

²⁷ See *Troubairitz: Der Beitrag der Frau in der altokzitanischen höfischen Lyrik. Edition des Gesamtkorpus* ed. Angelica Rieger (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1991); *The Women Troubadours*, ed. Meg Bogin (New York: Paddington Press, 1976); *The Voice of the Troubaritz: Perspectives on the Women Troubadours*, ed. William D. Paden (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); and Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, 'Fictions of the female voice: the women troubadours', *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 865-91.

²⁸ Judith Tick, 'Women in Music: Western Classical Traditions in Europe and the USA', in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Sadie, vol. 27, pp. 521-537 (p. 524). This article contains a bibliography of the subject.

²⁹ An early fifteenth-century hymnal from Barking Abbey, Trinity College, Cambridge, MS O.3.54; and a Processional from the Benedictine nunnery of St Mary at Chester, Huntington Library MS EL 34 B 7.

³⁰ *The Worshipful Company of Musicians*, ed. H. A. F. Crewdson, 2nd edn (London: C. Knight, 1971), pp. 28 and 101. See also Susan Boynton, 'Women's Performance of the Lyric Before 1500', in *Medieval Woman's Song*, ed. Klinck and Rasmussen, pp. 47-65.

³¹ Southworth, *The English Medieval Minstrel*, p. 139.

3s. to seven women who met him on the road and sang ‘in the way in which they were wont to do in the time of Lord Alexander, lately king of the Scots’ (Alexander III was King of Scotland from 1249 to 1286).³² Thus, although records of female musical performance do not equal those of male performance in scale they do suggest that women participated in much of late medieval musical culture. Can the same be said more specifically of the texts preserved in the Sloane, Eng. poet. and St. John’s anthologies and related songs? One of the most relevant references to female performance can be found in a Wycliffite sermon:

I gesse wel þat zonge wymmen may sumtyme daunsen in mesure to haue recreacion and listnesse, so þat þei haue þe more þouzt on myrþe in heuene & drede more & loue more god þer-by, & synge honeste songis of cristis incarnacion, passion, resurexion & ascencion, & of þe ioies of oure ladi, & to dispise synne & preise vertue in alle here doynge...³³

The preacher suggests that singing and dancing can provide women with an experience that will encourage them to think of heaven’s pleasures, but the songs approved are on religious matters, such as those contained within the anthologies.

There is no evidence showing direct female involvement in the production of the anthologies themselves, although the possibility of a female scribe was encountered in relation to St John’s in Chapter 5. There are no known examples of carols written by women in fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century England, but the way in which the composition of carols and related songs was dispersed through different stages of writing, performance, reception and re-composition means that there were many more opportunities for women to be involved in the creative process than solely scribal ones. In order to look at

³² *Ibid*, p. 137.

³³ *The English Works of Wyclif*, ed. Matthew, p. 205.

where this might have occurred, or whether the discourse established in the carols was so misogynistic as to exclude women I will first examine texts that participate in the debate on the worth of women.

Debate between the sexes in the anthologies and the carol more broadly focuses upon women, with the female sex either slandered or defended. Several of the anthologies' texts represent this debate in the form of holly and ivy songs, and it has been suggested that women participated in this particular ritualised battle of the sexes.³⁴ The holly and ivy songs in *Eng. poet.* (E40, E70 and E71) and *St John's* (J18) clearly gender the plants by the pronouns used, male for holly and female for ivy, but do not specify the gender of the singer. The ritualised contest is presented in terms of vocal performance, governed by male voices:

Whosoeuer ageynst holly do syng
he maye wepe & handys wryng (E70, 4)

The most worthy she is in towne
He that seyth o^{per} do amyssse (E71, 1.1-2)

The debate is presented in terms of slanderous dispute, and the texts can present this dangerous speech or attempt to resolve it:

All' how holy be zoure ffon'
And wuld 3ow towch' *with* tray & tene
Mekenes of Ivy xall hym ouergonne
And ffayer [w]urdys ouer betwene (J18, 7)

þan spak holvyr & set hym downe on his kne
I prey þe Ientyl heyvy
sey me no veleny
in londes qwer we goo (E40, 4)

Elsewhere songs argue about the worth of women, while men are not discussed as a gender group. The anti-feminist side of the debate is exemplified

³⁴ *EEC*, pp. cxxiii-cxxvii.

in Eng. poet., which contains numerous songs of this type (E4, E21-2, E39, E47, E58-9, E73 and E75). St John's also contains a carol attacking women (J14) and Sloane contains two carols advising men not to marry (S22 and S49). Both Sloane and St John's contain carols in praise of women that use the example of Mary as a defence (S8 and J11). It is not clear whether the performers of these songs would have been men or women. A carol in St John's containing strident praise of women refers to the sexes in the same way, as 'þeis women' (J11, 1.1, 6.2) and 'þies men' (5.1). A neutral first person singular voice is maintained through the stanzas as so often in this manuscript, alternating with a burden open to general participation, '*pray we to 3oure lady dere for here holy grace*'. However, the line 'I loue hem all iwys' (3.2) suggests a male voice. Clearer than the gender of the speaker is the insistence in both the St John's and Sloane carols on women that the presence of women within the group is valuable:

Yche a cu[m]pany is wele amede
 yf a woman be in a plase (J11, 2.3-4)

þer a womman is in plas
 womman is þe welle of gras (S8, 2.2-3)

We know that the type of festivities at which carols were performed were commonly occasions where men and women mixed, whether at guild feasts or in household celebrations such as that taking place at the home of Alice of Bryene or in the household of the Fifth Earl of Northumberland where the chapel sing to lord and lady.³⁵ Even in ecclesiastical institutions religious men and women enjoyed music together, sometimes attracting censure, as seen in the case of Dame Isabel Benet, a purchasing agent for the Cistercian priory of Catesby in Lincoln in 1442:

³⁵ See Chapter 6.

Item dicta domina Isabella die Lune vltimo preterito pernoctauit apud fratres Augustinianos Northamptonie et ibidem cum ipsis saltauit et citherauit vsque mediam noctem, et nocte sequenti pernoctauit cum fratribus predicatoribus Northamptonie consimiliter citherisando et saltando, etc.³⁶

Where carols address the ‘cu[m]pany’, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that both men and women can be meant, making up the audience even if not the performers. This is sometimes made explicit where a text is labelled as especially relevant to women:

Alle maydenis for godis *grace*
worchepe 3e seynt nicolas (S3, burden)

In another carol the audience addressed includes a clerk surrounded by female company:

Moder clerk wedue & wyf
worchepe 3e thomeys *in* al 3our lyf (S46, 9.1-2)

The songs make clear that women were at least present to hear themselves debated.

After the pair of holly and ivy carols Eng. poet. contains four carols on the subject of women that might be described as anti-feminist in that they represent women as domineering, fickle and drunk, yet even these contain lines that address women in the company directly:

Who sey ye women þat husbondes haues (E72, 8.1)

Who sey yow women is it not soo (E75, 24.1)

³⁶ ‘Also the said dame Isabel on Monday last past did pass the night with the Austin friars at Northampton and did dance and play the lute with them in the same place until midnight, and on the night following she passed the night with the friars preachers at Northampton, luting and dancing in the like manner’ (trans. Hamilton Thompson). *Visitations of Religious Houses in the Diocese of Lincoln*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson, 2.1 (Horncastle: Lincoln Record Society, 1918), p. 50.

Not only are women addressed, but they are asked (goaded) to speak. The last of these carols is the lengthy comic narrative of the gossips in the tavern, mocking female speech through the representation of ‘gossip’. It concludes:

Now fyll the cupe & drynk to me
And than shal we good felows be
And off thys talkyng leve will we
And speak then good off women (E75, 25)

This is, at some level, an invitation to debate, yet the negative portrayal of women’s speech forecloses response by having already denigrated and trivialised women’s words. One possible, but ambiguous response can be found within this sequence of Eng. poet. carols, a song that may be spoken by a woman (E72). The opening stanzas announce, at length, the speaker’s intention to reply to the slandering of women:

Many a man blame his wif *parde*
yet he is more to blame þan she
Trow ye þat ony such there be
in villa

ye ye hold yowr peasse fore shame
be owr lady ye be to blame
wene ye þat womens tonges be lame
in villa

Nay god forbed / it is naturall
ffor *them* to be right liberall
I now report me ouer all
in villa

Euerywhere I haue espyed
all women be not tong tyed
& if þei were / þei be belied
in villa

If ought be said to *them sertayn*
wene ye þei will not answer agayn
yes by christ fore euery word twayn
in villa (E72, 1-5)

The speaker's gender is uncertain, but this could be a woman employing the anti-feminist cliché that women are excessively talkative to demand the right to reply. Next the speaker defends women's behaviour by attacking husbands' obsessive constraint of their wives, but then announces that such attempts to control women are useless (6-7). The speaker then addresses women directly:

Whosey ye women þat husbondes haues
Wyl not yow owr honour saves
And call them lowsy stynckyng knaves
in villa (8)

The word 'owr' (8.2) aligns the speaker in this text with the women, defending the gender not with the example of Mary, who is after all well known to be exceptional and so not a wholly reliable resource in the defence of women, but instead using satirical and fabliaux type imagery. The speaker stays in the satirical register as she advises that husbands should 'Lett yowr wyffis haue þer entent' (12.2), because women hold sexual power that might be turned against their husbands through adultery.

The carol's burden is Latin, 'In villa quid vidistis in villa', which might encourage reading the piece as ventriloquism, mocking women with the usual charges of being verbally incontinent and unfaithful. Greene suggests the line might be a parody of a line from the Easter prose 'Victimae paschali laudes', 'Dic nobis maria, quid uidistis in uia'.³⁷ This makes for a rather sophisticated text that recalls the invitation to Mary to talk of Christ's death, but the joke is that here the female voice that responds is reminiscent of the Wife of Bath: contemporary, determined to speak at length, self-justificatory and promiscuous. Like the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, this verse tempts the modern reader with the assumption that because misogyny was such a dominant discourse in late

³⁷ *EEC*, p. 458.

medieval England, this text has to be read from within that discourse to be correctly understood.

Before taking this position, however, it is important to remember that this carol appears in Eng. poet. within a sequence of texts that form a debate, and where debate is allowed there must be different voices and ideas. This carol is followed by an obviously antifeminist piece that lavishly praises women in the stanzas, only to reverse the praise in the burden:

Of all creaturs women be best
cuius contrarium verum est (E73, burden)

If the burden was performed between each of the stanzas, it punctuates vernacular praise of women with a Latin retraction, so that men enjoy a secret laugh at women in the elite language to which they had better access.³⁸ The next carol announces its intentions in the burden, ‘Women Women Women Women / a song I syng even off women’, but the stanzas allow that women are endlessly variable people, not all of the same type:

Some be mery & some be sad
& some be good & some be bad
some be wyld be sent chad
yet all be not so
ffore some be lewd & some be shrewd
go shrew wher so euer ye go (E74, 1)

That the carols in Eng. poet. allow for such variety of arguments enables us to recognise that ‘Many a man blame his wif *parde*’ could be read as it is presented, a comic defence of women.

The carol has not been noticed as a female defence of women because Greene prints only a collation of the Eng. poet. text (*EEC* 410b), giving instead

³⁸ Compare Chauntecleer’s praise of Pertelote in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, VII.3163-6.

the text as it appears in Balliol 354 (*EEC* 410a). The Balliol version is not clearly in a female voice because it lacks the crucial ‘owr’:

How say ye women þat husbondis haue
Will not ye ther honowr saue
& call them lowsy stynkyng knave (Balliol 354, p. 503)

In this version, the stanza does not make sense because it is the husbands’ honour, not women’s, with which the speaker is concerned: how does calling them ‘lowsy stynkyng knave’ follow? Likewise the opening lines of the carol in the Balliol remove the defence of women to the detriment of sense:

Many a man blamys his wyffe parde
yet she ys more to blame than he

In his edited version of this carol Greene changes the second line to ‘Yet he ys more to blame than she’, because the Balliol text is obviously problematic. He does not discuss the text, but does give it an appropriate title: ‘Women Will Have their Word’. The text as it is written in Balliol 354 reveals that in transmission someone has either misunderstood or deliberately altered a song from a defence of women spoken by a woman using satirical discourse into a more straightforward anti-feminist satire. A clearer example of this is a third version of the song, of only the final five stanzas of the Eng. poet. carol, that appears in BL, Additional MS 22718, a section in which women are discussed in a satiric ungendered voice.³⁹ The minor changes disrupt the Balliol text (many of the stanzas seek to excuse women and the lengthy declaration of the speaker’s intentions in the opening stanzas is no longer appropriate if not spoken by a woman as a reply to male attacks) but they are made possible or even encouraged by the fact that this song draws heavily upon anti-feminist motifs, so reading it is

³⁹ The text is not in *EEC* but is printed in Curt F. Bühler, ‘The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers’, *Library*, 4th Series 15 (1935), 316-329 (p. 318).

a destabilising experience. It is possible to imagine a woman delivering the words but also a man, perhaps performing a mocking imitation of female speech. So who is making the joke, and who is the joke's object? Remarkably, this text shows that the modern reader's uncertainty about how to read humour from this period is less a problem of our distance from the text than a property of the text itself: the satire draws on a certain anarchic polyvocality that appears in this instance also to have either worried or confused a contemporary reader.

By contrast, where praise of women employs the example of Mary we are less likely to detect humour and more likely to treat the praise as straightforward. Greene entitles the Sloane and St John's carols on this subject 'In Praise of Women', and declares of the St John's example, 'The reaction of the honour paid to Mary on the earlier medieval attitude of disapproval of women is well shown in this piece'.⁴⁰ The assumption is that when it comes to religion, medieval discourse is transparent, 'sincere'. The Sloane carol contains the line, '*wommen ben of wordys ffewe*' (S8, 3.3), which Greene admits 'is unusual even in poems devoted to the praise of women'.⁴¹ This understates the case, as women are habitually described in medieval literature as incapable of controlling their speech, but Greene goes on, 'here it is rested on the tradition of Mary's reticence.' This is a reasonable explanation, but lacks strong textual support, and the stanzas remain uncomfortably excessive in their praise and in their reversal of more common descriptions of women's behaviour:

*þey louyn men with herte {fre} trewe
 he wyl not chaungyn for non newe
 wommen ben of wordys ffewe
 Wytnesse.*

⁴⁰ *EEC*, p. 429.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 430.

Wommen ben trewe *without* lesyng
wommen be trewe in alle þing
& out of car' þey mown vs bryng
Wytnesse of marie (S8, 3-4)

The scribal error in the first line of these stanzas suggests that the scribe recalled the more familiar charge. These lines are not necessarily satirical, but Greene's presentation of them demonstrates the modern reader's tendency to simplify medieval literature so that a voice must be sincere if talking about religion and Mary, but when the text is 'secular' it is rapidly subsumed within masculine anti-feminist discourse.

The exact claims made in the Sloane stanzas are presented as the opposite of true in the anti-feminist Eng. poet carol opening:

Of all creaturs women be best
cuius contrarium verum est

In euery place ye may well se
þat women be trew as tyrtyll on tre
not liberall in langag but euer in secrete
& gret ioy among them is fore to be (E73, burden, 1)

These texts can co-exist because the culture that produced them was not ideologically homogeneous and its contradictions and diversity could find expression in song. Some people may have heard the claim, 'Wommen be boþe good & trewe wytnesse of marye' (S8, burden), and thought it ridiculous, and others may have heard the accusation 'So be þes wemen' both falce & fekyll' (J14, 3.2) and thought it unjust. The songs contain evidence for this type of diverse reception and of creative response because they continually re-write the debate. The similarity of the defences of women to the attacks suggest that their writers were using the strategy of claiming possession of the opposition's own words, a strategy still used within modern identity politics. The songs in these anthologies show that defenders of women could find space within discourses

associated with misogyny, both religious and satirical verse. Because men largely controlled these discourses, reading defence of women in their terms is puzzling, but such texts are also rare places where hegemonic negotiations can be observed. The debate encouraged inventive contributions, notably the absurdist fantasies in ‘When nettuls *in wynter* bryng forth rosys red’ (E59), or the response in ‘In euery place ye may well se’ (E73), which uses extreme praise of women and turns it back against them. The fact that there was a debate on the worth of women indicates a society that restricted, monitored and sometimes resented female participation in the community, but the carols suggest that the arguments were not entirely on one side. Women are not, however, in control of the terms of this debate. In the next section I will look at other places where women’s voices are heard in the songs, and at the possibility that the carols and other songs in the anthologies interacted with traditions of female song.

III. Women’s songs

The literary depictions of female performance practice encourage the modern reader to seek women’s song in dance song. Numerous critics have examined the surviving lyric corpus in search of such material, for which one of the best candidates is a couplet quoted in a thirteenth-century sermon:

Atte wrastlinge my lemman i ches,
and atte ston-kasting i him for-les.⁴²

The preacher explains that the words are sung by ‘wilde wimmen & golme i mi contreie, wan he gon o þe ring, among manie opere songis, þat litel ben wort þat

⁴² *EEC*, p. 1.

tei singin'.⁴³ Only knowledge of how a song was performed can reliably show it to be a dance song, so this couplet is an ideal example. Unfortunately, the preacher's valuation of such literature as of little worth presents a problem: such songs were rarely preserved in writing in England and the few that have survived tell little about form and the wider body of women's dance song. Other texts that have been claimed as examples of dance song are all fragmentary, notably the lines indicating popular tunes that accompany the Latin songs of the Red Book of Ossory and a few short songs in Rawlinson D.913.⁴⁴

By contrast, a series of fifteenth-century carols refer to dancing, all of which are first-person narratives delivered by women describing how they have been seduced. Three carols spoken by women are preserved in a student's exercise book, Gonville and Caius 383. One begins:

Ladd Y the daunce a Myssomur Day;
 Y made smal trippus, soth for to say.
 Jak, oure haly-watur clerk, com be the way,
 & he lokede me vpon; he thout that he was gay.
 Thout yc on no gyle. (EEC 453, 1, IMEV 1849)

The narrative unfolds as the speaker describes Jak dancing with her in the ring and succeeding in a speedy seduction. Inevitably, the girl becomes pregnant and regrets her holiday romance. The carol displays playful sophisticated technique, for example the mixture of coy details and direct speech:

Jak tho began to rowne in myn ere:
 'Loke that thou be priuey, & graunte that thou the bere;
 A peyre wyth glouus ic ha to thyn were.'
 'Gramercy, Jacke!' that was myn answer.
 Thoute yc on no gyle. (EEC 453, 4)

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Lyrics*, ed. Greene; J. A. Burrow, 'Poems without Contexts: The Rawlinson Lyrics', in *Essays on Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 1-26; Boklund-Lagopoulou, 'I have a yong suster', pp. 33-9.

The carol form is particularly appropriate to the song because, we assume, it echoes the performances of women at ring-dances. Several other carols follow a similar narrative line, including one in St John's (J5) and one in Sloane (S74). Of critics who have addressed these carols Plummer and Bernard O'Donoghue have both argued that that they are goliardic parodies written within an anti-feminist tradition.⁴⁵ The oral tradition of women's dance songs appears to have been usurped by a sophisticated, literate discourse. Judith Bennett argues that they may have been performed by women, but were produced to police women's behaviour, to warn against licentiousness among single women, a group growing in independence in fifteenth-century England as more adolescents and young people served out apprenticeships away from home.⁴⁶

In the Sloane and St John's examples of this type of 'woman's song' the goliardic character of the songs is especially marked because they make fun out of respected religious ideas and language. The St John's song begins:

þis enþer day I mete a clerke
 & he was wyly in hys werke
 he prayd me with hym to herke
 and hys cownsell' all for to lene (J5, 1)

The words associated with the clerk in lines 3-4, 'prayd', 'cownsell' 'lene', recall his religious duties, although the *chanson d'aventure* opening and the burden, 'A dere god qwat I am fayn / for I am madyn now gane', means that the audience is aware of what kind of 'cownsell' is meant here. At the end of the song the speaker decides to explain her pregnancy by saying 'þat I haue bene of pylgrymage' (4.2), presumably because such trips were often occasions of sexual licence, once again subverting the language of religion. The same practice can be

⁴⁵ Plummer, 'The Woman's Song'; O'Donoghue, "'Cuius Contrarium'".

⁴⁶ Bennett, 'Ventriloquisms'.

seen in the final song in the Sloane anthology where the music of the Mass is sexualised in the burden: ‘kyrie so kyrie jankyn syngyt merie *with* aleyson’ (S74). The stanzas are spoken by a woman who describes the clerk taking part in the procession, singing the ‘Sanctus’, and participating in the Mass, the outcome of which is:

Benedicamus domino cryst fro schame me schylde
deo gracias *perto* alas I go *with* chylde (7)

The macaronic structure and centrality of parody to the song creates a comic distance from Alison’s situation, with Latin used to demonstrate the writer’s ingenuity and for the audience to appreciate the ironic mixing of discourses. The texts show interest in creative use of female voices, particularly in the Gonville and Caius manuscript, which includes four lyrics spoken by young women: two who have been seduced by clerks, one who laments her distance from her lover, and one who celebrates her unconventional beauty. Nevertheless, the lyrics’ irony, appearance in clerical manuscripts, and use of misogynistic stereotypes together render visible the ventriloquists’ illusions.

Focus upon dance songs has largely allowed another type of song in which female voices are heard to pass unrecognised: the lullaby. Each of Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John’s contain lullabies: three in Sloane (S37, S38, S69) and Eng. poet. (E10, E14, E46) and two in St John’s (J8, J17). These songs contain ‘lulling’ words (variations on ‘lullay’) and depict Mary singing to the baby Jesus. All but one are carols, as are most extant Middle English lullabies, of which Greene prints fourteen and *IMEV* lists seventeen.⁴⁷ The anthologies’ lullabies are entirely vernacular, with the exception of one that includes the phrase

⁴⁷ *IMEV* nos 352, 361, 503, 1264, 1351, 1352, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2551.8, 3284, 3329, 3596, 3597, 3627, 3868.5, 4242.5. Greene’s carols are *EEC* 142-155.

‘Benedicamus Domino’ (S37/J17), and only one other lullaby carol contains Latin (*EEC* 152).

One lullaby carol occurs in closely parallel versions in Sloane and Eng. poet. (S38/E46) and illustrates some of the typical features of the lullabies in carol form. It begins:

moder qwynt as lylie flour 3our lullyng lassyt myn langour

As I me ros in on morwenyng
myn þowt was on a mayde 3ynge
che song a slepe with her’ lullynge
her’ der’ sone {1} our sauour (S38, burden, 1)

The burden here is in the voice of the baby Jesus, who often has a precocious command of language in the lullabies. In the *chanson d’aventure* opening of the first stanza the medieval everyman has a vision of the nativity scene. This establishes the performer as an eyewitness, an outsider but one who has been allowed to participate in sacred history through vision and then through song. *Chanson d’aventure* openings begin eight other Middle English lullabies and provide a frame for description of the intimacies of the nativity scene. Next, Mary sings to her baby and feeds him. Christ then predicts his own death.

To his moder þan he gan say
for þis mylk me muste day (S38, 3.1-2)

Lullabies commonly anticipate the Passion and invoke the visual echoes between nativity scenes and pietas. The lullabies are at once songs that soothe and laments:

þat mayde frely began to synge
& in her’ song che mad murnyng (S38, 4.1-2)

More markedly than the carols in women’s voices discussed above, the lullabies are self-reflexive: they both are songs and are about the act of singing. This makes them especially rich sources in the exploration of the relation between

written texts and performance traditions, but also of the space given to women's voices within the anthologies.

Although 'As I me ros in on morwenyng' takes its subject from Mary's song, it is a depiction of an ancient cradle scene and not necessarily a song fifteenth-century mothers sang to their children. Medieval lullabies have been dismissed repeatedly as imitations. Nicholas Orme states that 'No real lullabies survive from medieval England, but there are lyrics that copy their form'.⁴⁸ Greene's section of 'lullaby carols' consists largely of dialogues between Mary and the Christ Child, using burdens that include lulling words. He claims that their burdens are 'in imitation of real folk-lullabies', but does not elaborate upon this claim.⁴⁹ Likewise, discussion of the earliest medieval lullaby, 'Lollai, lollai, litel child, whi wepistou so sore?', has focussed upon the question of whether or not it is 'genuine'.⁵⁰ The critical debate creates a clear distinction between songs sung to soothe children, and lyrics that imitate or depict such songs, establishing an opposition of the primary, oral song and the secondary, written lyric. It is interesting to note that critics reassert the dichotomy of voice and text in relation to exactly the songs that create continuity between the two. A dichotomy between authenticity and imitation underlies responses to both the dance songs and the lullabies: female voices are held to have been lost and only male (written) songs survive. This homogenises the texts' voices, ignoring the highly creative tension between the text and the imagined voice in many songs.

In the rest of this chapter I will examine the ways in which the anthologies' lullabies express women's voices. Because we lack anything so direct as a female scribe or a vernacular songbook that belonged to a fifteenth-

⁴⁸ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 132.

⁴⁹ *EEC*, p. clxix.

⁵⁰ See Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets*, p. 165.

century female choir it is necessary to allow for a flexible, far-reaching approach to exploring the textual connections between different songs in order to discover creative traditions that did not dominate written record and amplify distinctive voices within the songs. In order to avoid talking of ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ lullabies, I will retain the term lullaby for lyrics with clear internal textual signatures, either the depiction of a scene in which a mother lulls her baby or lulling words. I will refer to songs used to soothe children as cradle songs, distinguishing them by the performance context rather than more evaluative criteria.

We know that medieval mothers did sing to soothe their children from occasional references to this practice that confirm the existence of an oral tradition, for example Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomew states that nurses ‘singe lullinge[s] and opir cradil songis’ to babies.⁵¹ One fourteenth-century sermon refers to the practice and even records a few lines from such a song:

Karissimi, bene scitis quod iste mulieres cum posuerunt filios in cunabulis, þay lulle þe child wyth þair fote and singges an hauld sang, sic dicens [*read dicentes*]: ‘Wake wel, Annot, þi mayden boure, and get þe fra Walterot, for he es lichure.’⁵²

Like ‘Atte wrastlinge my lemman i ches’, ‘Wake wel, Annot’ appears to be a fragment that has chanced to be written down in a context that provides a commentary upon its use making it possible to claim the text as a cradle song. ‘Wake wel, Annot’ is not like the Middle English lullabies because it does not refer directly to a lulling scene, but indicates that women might sing any type of song while soothing children.

The text is not truly a fragment because it is embedded within a sermon and its contexts illustrate the complexity of medieval song traditions. The sermon

⁵¹ *On the Properties of Things*, 1, p. 299.

⁵² ‘Dearest friends, you know well that these women, when they have put their children in the cradle, they lull the child with their foot and sing an old song, saying thus...’, trans. Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, pp. 32-3; BL, Cotton MS Faustina A.v, f. 10r.

continues in a combination of Latin and English, first giving details of Annot's story:

Ista Agnes quadam vice sicud iuit til þe ryng at scheue hir burel, contigit quod obuiauit omnes hos quattuor amasios venientes contra eam in via. Cogitauit qualiter potuit placere omnibus et venit et salutauit eos, et istum magnum regem Walterum cepit per manum. Eius vicinum Thomam þe Tom posuit pedem eius super pedem suum. Super diuitum de eadem patria Gilbertum Gilman fixit oculum, et wynked super eum. Et cum forti atleta Alleluia loquebatur, ita quod placuit per eius contenance omnibus preter unum, scilicet, Alleluia, qui voluit habuisse eam solus.⁵³

The explanation that follows this interprets the significance of each of the characters: Annot is the soul, Walterot the devil, Thomas Stowe the flesh, Gilbert the wealth of the world and the fourth lover is God. The preacher repeats the song in relation to each of the three bad lovers: “Kepe wel, Annot”, et cetera, “et custody te Thome Stow þi wycked neckeboure”... “Kep wel” et cetera “et custody te de Gilbert þe Gilman”. These quotations suggest that the preacher recalls a song warning a woman against the men with whom she dances:

...
Wake wel, Annot, þi mayden boure,
and get þe fram Walterot, for he es lichure.
...
Kepe wele, Annot, [þi mayden boure,]
and get þe fram Thome Stowe, þe wycked neckeboure.
...
Kepe wel, Annot, [þi mayden boure,]
and get þe fram Gilbert, [the rich traitour.]
...

Structural repetition of this kind is found elsewhere in vernacular verse, including in the long couplet songs in the Sloane anthology and in the Rawlinson

⁵³ ‘Once upon a time this Annot went to the ring-dance to show off her clothes of baize, it happened that all these four lovers met up with her on the way. She thought how she could please all of them and came and greeted them, and took this great king Walterot by the hand. She set her foot on the foot of his neighbour, Thomas the Idle. She set her eye upon the rich man from the same native land as hers, Gilbert Gilman, and winked at him. And she spoke with the mighty champion Alleluia, so that through her bearing she pleased them all except one, that is, Alleluia, who wanted to have her for himself alone’, trans. Fletcher, *Preaching, Politics and Poetry*, pp. 32-33.

Curiously, the scribe has written two versions of the lullaby in the manuscript, one in English on f. 32r and one in Latin on f. 63v. Why the scribe has done this and which version came first is not known, but the independence or at least the popularity of the English version is supported by a fifteenth-century sermon found by Siegfried Wenzel that quotes the song:

De cuius dibilitate cantabatur vulgariter sic:

þer nys no best olyue, made of bon and blod,
þat hwen he comet3 into world ne kan dun himself sum god,
But a barn unbliþe, a brof of Adam blod.

Et quod sic iniocundus patet per cantum eius, quoniam vel est cantus eius wal vel we. Si mulier, nec mirum, quoniam ad dolorem huius vite venit et nisi bene faciat ad dolorem sempiternum. Unde et predictus cantus sic incipit:

Lullay, lullay, litel schild, hwu wepust þou so sore? –
Nede mot Y wepe, hyt was me 3arkud 3ore.
For to liuen in sorwe and kare, now and ewermore,
Als myen eldres han don þat warn me beforne.

Ecce quod [in] ingressu magna miseria est.⁵⁶

Because the preacher says that the text was sung popularly, ‘cantabatur vulgariter’, and refers to the possibility that the words are performed by a woman Wenzel says, ‘One may momentarily wonder if it is folk poetry’.⁵⁷ He rejects this possibility, however, arguing that ‘the Kildare poem is far too learned’ because the lyric contains scriptural imagery and connections with Innocent III’s *De miseria humanae conditionis*.⁵⁸ Yet before relegating the lyric to the literary, imitative side of the voice/text divide it should be recognised that for all its strength and coherence as a piece of poetry, the lullaby is a patchwork of images and verses circulating elsewhere. The poem’s fourth stanza, a meditation on the

⁵⁶ ‘On his [man’s] weakness there used to be a popular song as follows... And that his is joyless is evident in his song, which is either ‘woe’ or ‘weylawey’. If [the speaker] is a woman, it is no wonder, for she comes to sorrow of this life and, unless she does well, to eternal sorrow. Therefore, the quoted song begins as follows... Behold, there is great wretchedness in man’s coming into this world.; Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets*, p. 166; Worcester Cathedral, MS F. 10, f. 100v.

⁵⁷ Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets*, p. 165.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

changeableness of fortune beginning ‘Ne tristou to þis world, hit is þi ful vo’, has been likened to a quatrain beginning ‘þe leuedi fortune is boþe frend and fo’ found in fourteenth-century texts in both English and French.⁵⁹ The second stanza re-writes biblical images (Matthew 8.20 and Luke 9.58, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head’):

bestis and þos foules, þe fisses in þe flode,
and euch schef aliues, imakid of bone and blode,
whan hi commiþ to þe world hi doþ ham silf sum gode –
Al bot þe wrech brol þat is of adam-is blode. (ll. 7-10)

The lines correspond more closely to a late thirteenth-century two-part song fragment:

Foweles in þe frith,
þe fisses in þe flod,
And i mon waxe wod.
Mulch sorw I walke with
for beste of bon and blod. (EL 8, IMEV 864)

The text connects with literary and musical culture, with Latin and the vernacular, and with scholarly and popular (according to the sermon writer’s testimony) culture. This complex textual network is not a simple matter of literary imitation of oral song traditions.

The Harley lullaby has a place of importance in the development of the carol because of its form and its manuscript connections. The first half of the lyric’s first line is repeated at the end of the stanza, and this half-line recurs as a refrain through the text, so each stanza is made of a quatrain followed by a couplet beginning with a refrain section. In the manuscript the sections of the stanzas are clearly demarcated: rounded paraph marks preface the start of the stanzas and square paraph marks are written beside the start of the refrain

⁵⁹ *IMEV* 3408, *RLXIV* 42 and p. 260.

sections. The lyric is probably slightly earlier than any surviving carols, but the way it is written shows a relation with the processes of composition through which the form was developed during the fourteenth century.

Furthermore, the manuscript has textual connections with another that was especially important in the development of the carol, Franciscan John of Grimestone's 1372 preaching book. Grimestone includes three lullabies in his manual, of which only one is not in carol form. This text directly parallels the form of the Harley song. It opens 'Lullay, lullay litel child, child reste þe a þrowe' and has the same half-refrain in the fifth line of each stanza, 'Lullay l<ullay> litel child'.⁶⁰ The song is, however, addressed to the Christ child (all of Grimestone's lullabies depict the nativity scene). One of his carols employs the opening lines of the Harley lullaby for its burden:

Lullay, lullay, litel child,
Qui wepest thou so sore? (EEC 155a, IMEV 2024)⁶¹

Grimestone had knowledge of at least a version of the Harley lullaby, whether through Franciscan circulation or the wider tradition implied in the later sermon. The prominence of lullabies amongst Grimestone's carols gives this type of song a clear role in the development and circulation of the carol in medieval Norfolk. Several of Grimestone's texts are connected with songs in Sloane and Eng. poet., and St John's contains a truncated version of one of his lullaby carols (EEC 149, J8).

The lullabies in the fifteenth-century anthologies share with Grimestone's lyrics a tendency to lament and the use of lulling words as refrains, but they also share more unusual formal features, where the different voices are recorded in a

⁶⁰ *RLXIV* 65, *IMEV* 2023. Even the scribal technique of abbreviating the second 'lullay' to 'l' only repeats the practice of the Harley lullaby.

⁶¹ See also S37, 10.1.

characteristic textual shape. A number of lullabies use stanza shapes that can roughly be described as long couplets, relating back to the Harley lullaby whose stanzas are made of three long couplets. For example, the Sloane lullaby ‘I saw a fayr maydyn syttyn & synge’ (S69), is entirely made of metrically irregular couplets that can be divided into a quatrain rhymed *abcb*, with lines of two to four stresses. The form is unusual for a carol and the scribe appears to recognise this because he has written words from the burden below the first two stanzas to indicate that the text is to be sung carol-wise. This is very unusual practice for this scribe. The only other carol for which the repetition of the burden is indicated between stanzas with a shortened incipit is the last carol, the song of Jankin and Alison. Not only does that song also include female speech, it is in a similar form in that its stanzas are couplets with six or seven stress lines.

The lullaby’s long couplets are less regular than those used in ‘I syng of a myden’ and the songs in that group. In his unpublished edition of the manuscript Miller states that ‘I saw a fayr maydyn syttyn & synge’ is compiled from two fragments, the burden and first two stanzas, which have five or six stress lines, and the last three stanzas, which are septenary. He even suggests that because the third stanza begins a new verso page, the scribe may have taken a break between the two fragments and begun again at the wrong place, forming a composite song.⁶² While I agree that the two halves of the song probably came together from two separate sources, the song may still have circulated as it appears in Sloane. This is supported by another lullaby in the manuscript, which has also been compiled from distinctive units, and shows clear use of the long couplet in

⁶² Miller, ‘The Poetry of MS. Sloane 2593’, p. 357.

its lullaby section (S37). This song's first four stanzas celebrate the nativity in four stress couplets followed by a refrain line, beginning:

A new 3er a newe 3er a chyld was iborn
vs for to sauyn þat al was forlorn
so blyssid be þe tyme· (S37, 1)

These are followed by six lullaby stanzas spoken by Mary, each made of roughly septenary couplets and the refrain line, beginning:

Lullay lullay lytil chyld myn owyn der' fode
how xalt þou sufferin be naylid on þe rode
so (S37, 5)

The final two stanzas follow the same style as the opening stanzas. The piece is included as a carol in Greene's collection, but there is no indication that it is a carol in this manuscript: the first stanza has the same layout as the ones that follow, and is not marked by the elaborate paraph mark that usually identifies a burden in the collection. Another version of this song is preserved in St John's (J17), where the first stanza is marked as a burden. Although there are significant differences between the two texts both preserve the rhythmic and rhetorical distinction between the lullaby middle section and the surrounding nativity stanzas.

Each of the lullaby stanzas of 'A new 3er' begins 'Lullay lullay lytil chyld', followed by a lament for Christ's future suffering. The form comes close to what is now known as ballad stanza, a quatrain rhymed *abcb*, where the first and third lines have four stresses and the second and fourth three. Later, ballads were commonly written this way, but the Sloane manuscript itself contains two ballads using the structure (S35 and S44). The metre of the song's lullaby stanzas is not regular, but ballad form is best seen in the last stanza of the section:

Lullay lullay lytil chyld qwy wepy þou so sor'
& art þou boþin god & man quat woldyst þou be mor' (S37, 10)

The first line here is the opening line of the Harley lullaby, also found in the Grimestone manuscript as a burden to a lullaby carol. As it survives in both Sloane and St John's, 'A new 3er' preserves difference of form within the text where it shifts to a representation of Mary's song, connecting this text with the wider lullaby tradition.

A lullaby carol found in Eng. poet. uses a similar structure in its burden:

lullay my chyld & wepe no more
 Slepe & be now styll
 þe kyng of blys þi fader ys
 as it was hys wyll (E14, burden)

This song is extant in a further two fifteenth-century manuscripts, including one which includes a monophonic setting of this burden, BL, Additional 5666:

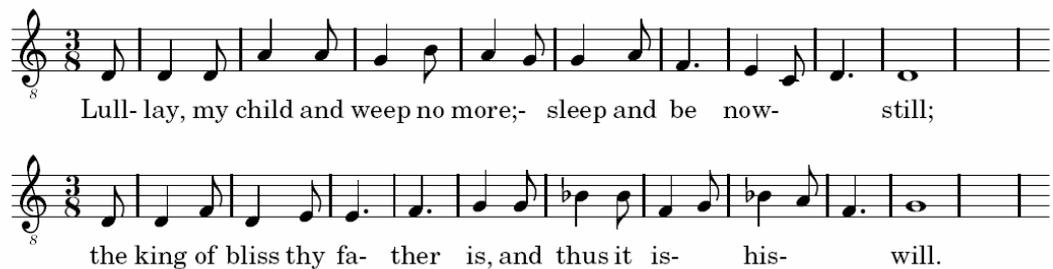


Figure 8.1 MC 2A

The music clarifies the relation to ballad form because it is set syllabically and the melody, especially in the alternation of quavers and crotchets, exemplifies the stress patterns expected for ballad stanza. We therefore witness a specific formal tradition, both literary and musical, emerging intermittently in the English lullaby from its earliest records: in one text in the Harley manuscript, two recorded by Grimestone, two in Sloane, and one each in Eng. poet. and St John's, as well as elsewhere.

Only three English lullabies, all carols, survive with musical settings in fifteenth-century manuscripts. Two of these are in BL, Additional 5666, a small manuscript with a few, plainly written notated songs in English, French and Latin. As well as the burden of the lullaby shown in Figure 8.1, the manuscript contains another fully set for two voices. The third notated fifteenth-century lullaby is again monophonic, found in CUL, Additional 5943, which also contains an unnotated version of the lullaby shown in Figure 8.1. The manuscripts BL, Additional 5666 and CUL, Additional 5943 are visually very similar and contain Latin treatises and other notes (such as accounts) among which the song texts are included, using a comparable plain black void notation. The music of these songs has some of the characteristics of other carols from the period, such as the use of major prolation and a flexible approach to musical rhyme between burden and stanza.⁶³ That two of the three notated lullabies are monophonic could point to modes of composition and transmission less controlled by literate artistry than the carols set in the Trinity roll and Selden manuscript. In the sixteenth century notated lullabies occur in two polyphonic manuscripts (BL, Royal Appendix 58 and Additional 5465), but also more various sources: a printed collection of bass parts called *XX Songes*, a polyphonic song to be performed by the mothers of the Holy Innocents in the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors' Play*, and a Processional used by nuns in a Benedictine abbey. When examined as a group it emerges that lullaby songs connect with the written and performance song traditions of pre-Reformation England but are not constrained to the most prominent sources.

⁶³ In 'I saw a swete semly syght' (*MC* 1, *EEC* 144, *IMEV* 1352), the polyphonic lullaby in BL, Additional, the first phrase of voice two in the burden (bar 2) becomes the first phrase of voice one in the stanza (bar 19). Both stanza and burden gravitate around *g*, to which both voices return frequently and particularly at the end of phrases, so that the voices are continually meeting each other.

Despite the breadth of textual connections, lullaby songs also display a distinctive identity. They share subjects and words, use recurring verse forms including comparatively unusual stanza structures, and circulated in an interrelated group of manuscripts where they were written down in visually similar ways. They also include song performed in a female voice within song texts in a self-reflexive dynamic that pursues a degree of unity between the different elements while allowing the co-existence of different singing voices, exemplified by one of the Sloane carols, in which the burden is spoken by Mary:

lullay myn lykyng my der' sone myn swetyng
lullay my der' herte myn owyn der' derlyng (S69)

By positioning these emotive words in the burden, the carol enables the singing group to participate in the intimate speech of the mother to her child. The stanzas continue with a *chanson d'aventure* opening, introducing a vision through the anonymous narrator:

I saw a fayr maydyn syttyn & synge
sche lullyd a lytyl chyld a swete lordyng (S69, 1)

After description of Mary's song, the piece depicts the song of the heavens greeting the Incarnation:

þer was a mekyl melody at þat chyldis berthe
alle þo wern in heuene blys þei made mekyl mirþe

aungel' bryzt þei song þat nyzt & seydyn to þat chyld
blyssid be þou & so be sche þat is boþe mek & myld (S69, 3-4)

In the final stanza the performance refers back to itself, and the company joined together in celebration:

Prey we now to þat chyld & to his moder dere
grawnt hem his blyssyng þat now makyn chere (S69, 5)

In performance, each of these stanzas describing the different celebratory songs alternates with Mary's burden, which enacts the cradle song, demonstrating how

the carol form of this composite text enabled the religious community to participate in the sacred cradle song.

A similar dynamic occurs in one of the Eng. poet. songs already referred to, which begins with a direct representation of Mary's song:

lullay my chyld & wepe no more
Slepe & be now styll
þe kyng of blys þi fader ys
as it was hys wyll (E14, burden)

The first three stanzas introduce the nativity scene as personally witnessed by the narrator:

þis endrys nyȝt · I saw a syȝth
A mayd a cradyll kepe
& euer {among} she song · & seyde among
lullay my chyld & slepe

I may not slep · but I may wepe
I *am* so wobegone
slep I [w]old · butt I *am* cold
& clothys haue I none

me thovȝt I hard · þe chyld answard
& to hys moder he sayd
My moder der · what do I her
In crybbe why *am* I layd (E14, 1-3)

The song oscillates between the speaker's statement of his or her vision and dialogue between Mary and her child. The burden responds to the stanzas, primarily in Mary's voice, but the instability of voices through the text makes these words available for the performer to claim in order to address the Christ child.

Women as well as men were familiar with the participatory aspects of late medieval religion, and the way in which lullaby carols such as this one place the performer or audience at the scene of the nativity through vision and then participation is reminiscent of scenes in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. In a

lengthy meditation on the nativity Margery imagines herself present at key moments from Mary's birth to the Epiphany and herself clothes the baby Jesus:

Also sche beggyd owyr Lady fayr whyte clothys and kerchys for to swathyn in hir sone whan he wer born; and whan Jhesu was born, sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in wyth hir blyssyd chyld. Aftyward sche swathyd hym with byttyr teerys of compassion, havynge mend of the scharp deth that he schuld suffyr for the lofe of sinful men, seyng to hym: 'Lord, I schal fare fayr wyth yow: I schal not byndyn yow soor, I pray yow beth not dysplesyd wyth me.'⁶⁴

The account of this fifteenth-century Norfolk woman's ability to make personal to herself one of the key stories of her religious culture undermines the critical move of labelling lullabies as literary imitations issued from a clerical elite. Further, Margery made a direct connection between children she encountered and the Christ child:

whan sche sey women in Rome beryn children in her armys, yf sche myth wetyn that thei wer ony men children, sche schuld than cryin, roryn and wepyn as thei sche had seyn Christ in hys childhode. And yf sche myth an had hir wille, oftyntymes sche wold a takyn the childeryn owt of the moderys armys and a kyssed hem in stede of Christe.⁶⁵

The way in which this woman interacted with infants shows how mothering and childhood could be and were connected with religious narratives.

Margery Kempe is an extreme example of religiosity, but the experiences described in her *Book* nevertheless agree with the imagery circulated in the lullaby songs and elsewhere. While it is usually difficult to prove that women performed lullabies, one source is an exception, the lullaby preserved within the early sixteenth-century Processional belonging to the Benedictine nunnery at Chester, 'Qui creavit celum'. Lingering attention is given to the domestic nativity scene, presented in easy Latin:

Ioseph emit panniculum byby byby by.

⁶⁴ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 2000), 580-589, pp. 77-78.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2824-2830, pp. 190-191.

Mater inuolui puerum lully lully lu.
Et ponit in presepio byby byby by.

Inter animalia lully lully lu.
Iacent mundi gaudia byby byby by.
Dulcis super omnia lully lully lu.

Lactat mater domini byby byby by.
Osculatur paruulum lully lully lu.
Et adorat dominum byby byby by.

(2-4)⁶⁶

The song is through-set syllabically to a simple, monophonic tune of uncertain rhythm.⁶⁷ The manuscript contains various Latin liturgical texts with English rubrics and some vernacular prayers at the end in verse and prose. Keyte and Parrott state that this song appears to have been developed from a sequence and inserted ‘at random’ into the manuscript, not with the other Christmas processions, but that it could have been involved in a procession for blessing the crib between Christmas matins and midnight mass.⁶⁸

That ‘Qui creauit celem’, the unique example of a pre-Reformation lullaby known to have been recorded in manuscript from which women performed, is in Latin and was performed by women sworn to celibacy might be considered disappointing. It would be possible to interpret this text as a signal of the hopelessness of looking for women’s songs from medieval England, but instead I think that the song should challenge assumptions about written song in the period. That the late medieval nuns sang this lullaby together is a compelling idea, as they were an enclosed community for whom Mary’s motherhood had to become a surrogate for their own. The text recalls the practice recorded in late

⁶⁶ Text from facsimile *The Processional of the Nuns of Chester*, ed. J. Wickham, Henry Bradshaw Society 18 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1899), p. 18. ‘Joseph buys rags... Mother wraps the boy... And places him in a manger... Between animals... Lie the joys of the world... Sweet above all things... Mother of the lord gives milk... Kisses the child... And adores the lord...’

⁶⁷ *The Shorter New Oxford Book of Carols*, ed. Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 46-49.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 47-8.

medieval convents and beguinages in central Europe where women wrapped and rocked child effigies within their worship of the Christ child.⁶⁹ These practices break down realms and discourses we tend to separate: the male church and female domestic rituals. The song is in part the co-option of cradle song by the Church, but this act is a complicated and creatively productive one in which women participated, integrating different aspects of their lived experiences.

Evidence of a tradition of women's song related to the anthologies' texts is found only in traces and fragile textual histories, such as a distinctive stanza form repeated in a few texts. While I do not wish to deny the likelihood that there was a particular song tradition within which women had a dominant role, speculation on such a tradition is problematic if it corresponds to reading surviving sources as though they were opposed to women's song. The fifteenth-century carols in particular were made through combinatory, participatory processes and the presence of female song within the texts is not satisfactorily explained by straightforward, propagandistic co-option. Initially, the space given to women within the lyrics does not seem promising: dance songs present lascivious young women in contrast to the image of holy motherhood found in the lullabies. These roles are clearly dominant in the cultural imagination expressed within the anthologies, and yet they are not the only ways in which women are represented and addressed: there are female saints, bossy wives, anxious wives, women who sing Christ's praise, women who give gifts, women who drink, maidens who refuse to be prostituted and maidens who pray, wives who get beaten, wives who beat, and, in one song, a long list of women of many

⁶⁹ See Walter Salmen, 'Dances and Dance Music, c. 1300-1530', in *Music as Concept and Practice in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 162-190 (p. 167).

types and who defy description.⁷⁰ Many of the songs use an unspecific voice articulating generally accessible narratives, and that women could participate in these songs is signalled by the way some incorporate female experiences and voices.

The words of the songs in the anthologies persistently draw the performing voice into the texts, creating continuity between different traditions, and directing future performances. The dominant song tradition of the liturgy had a powerful role in this process but the songs are vernacular and form an important stage in the development of the English lyric through creative contact with other vernacular and aurally encountered verse. Compiled using numerous sources and containing texts able to change and incorporate new sections and voices, the songs within the anthologies do not articulate a unitary perspective. The challenge for modern readers is to recognise that there are important differences between voice and text, sung performance and written lyric, while not making these into a rigid and evaluative dichotomy precluding responsiveness to textual witnesses.

⁷⁰ Examples of each of these personae are, respectively: J6, S22, E75, S40, S29, E75, S3, E4, S61, and E74.

Chapter 9. Breaking up the songs or breaking into song

Modern anthologists have split up the songs contained within the three anthologies in various ways, especially according to form, language and subject matter. The perceived quality of the verse has also meant that some texts are printed repeatedly while others appear only when the whole manuscript is considered. In this study I have tried to examine the texts with a relatively fluid attitude to category and have primarily referred to them as songs or, more interpretatively, as communal songs. The main section of this thesis concentrated on processes and concepts that emphasised continuities, but this does not mean that differences in form, language and subject lack significance and previous chapters have often located significance in formal patterns. Continuing from the exploration in the last chapter of differences within the anthologies through attention to gender and the perspectives the songs articulate, this chapter explores possible generic differences within the anthologies' contents.

One problem in studying the anthologies is to find a balance between responding to the dialogues between the songs and song types and being receptive to the stories that genres can tell us about literary identity and development. Recognising that there have been several attempts by critics to analyse these and similar texts according to category, and the frustrations as well as the successes of these studies, this chapter does not seek definitions, but will consider whether these books and their texts encourage a schematic treatment of genre and what patterns of song writing informed their production.

I. Singing Scripture

The dominant category of texts within the anthologies is of course the carol, a genre capable of making modern critics happy because it combines a clear formal definition, a name contemporary with its popularity and a corpus readers have found to have ‘a comparatively homogeneous core’.¹ As argued in Chapter 2, it is not at all certain that those who produced, performed, read and listened to the songs within the anthologies thought of them as carols, but it is nevertheless useful to have a name for a group of songs that appear together in anthologies and share many formal, functional, thematic and stylistic characteristics. How homogeneous and distinctive these songs are as a group and within the manuscripts depends upon the extent to which they are shaped in relation to each other – songs also written in the carol form – or in relation to other types of verse and further cultural productions. The processes explored throughout this thesis, whereby shared cultural memories and narratives were rewritten, crossing between and intermingling artistic media, complicates positing a distinctive generic identity for the carol form. This section will investigate this dynamic with particular attention to a group of songs in carol form that share a common narrative drawn from the wider cultural imagination and specifically from the scripture: the Annunciation.

Both Eng. poet. and Sloane contain songs on the Annunciation scattered throughout their anthologies: all the texts in Eng. poet. are in carol form, three in English (E28, E31, E56/66) and one in Latin (E1); while Sloane contains a more mixed group of songs to which the story is central, English songs in carol shape

¹ Reichl, ‘The Middle English Carol’, p. 168.

(S24, S60, S64) and songs without burdens in English (S25), Latin (S36) and both (S55). Greene collected twenty-five ‘Carols of the Annunciation’, of which thirteen are by Ryman and a further six appear in Balliol 354. All of the vernacular Annunciation carols in Eng. poet. occur in Balliol 354. The narrative in the Eng. poet. carols is especially consistent because they closely follow the scriptural account, Luke 1. 26-38, and do not greatly expand upon it. They open by describing Gabriel’s flight to Nazareth:

Gabryell of hyze degree
 Cam down from þe trenyte
 to nazareth in galilee
 with nova (E31, 1)

Next, the angel kneels before Mary and a dialogue begins, as presented in Luke’s gospel account. There is some variation between the carols as to how much of the dialogue is represented. For example, ‘Gabriell þat angell bryzt’ (E28) has only Gabriel’s speeches, although Mary’s fear of the angel’s words is reported, while in ‘Gabryell of hyze degree’ (E31) a fuller account is given, complete with Mary’s responses (stanzas 4 and 7).

The third Annunciation carol in the manuscript, ‘Tydynges trew þer be cum new sent frome þe trinite’ (E56/66), is close to the anthology’s other Annunciation songs in terms of narrative content but reads differently on account of its long lines and comparatively ornate language. This can be seen by comparing Gabriel’s greeting in this song with that in ‘Gabriell þat angell bryzt’:

Heyll mary full of grace
 God is with þe & euer was
 He hath in þe chosyn a place (E28, 3)

Hayle virgyne celestial þe mekest þat euer was
 Hayle temple off deitie & myrroure off all grace
 Hayle virgyne puer I þe ensure within full lyty[l] space
 þou shalt receyue & hym conceyue þat shal bryng gret solace (E66, 3)

‘Tydynges trew’ is also one of the three texts in the manuscript to be provided with notation. Lines of up to fifteen syllables make the syllabic monophonic setting of this carol, described by Stevens as ‘roughly written’,² sound breathless with its runs of quavers and narrow pitch range: all notes sit between *d* and *b* below middle *c*, but the majority are within a single tone above or below *g*. The song is, therefore, a good example of Stevens’ category of ‘popular religious song’ where the focus is upon the verbal message.³ The musical information provided in this song recalls a major problem in describing categories for the songs within the anthologies because it is a reminder of how much detail is missing: different musical settings or deliveries could be utterly transformative. One text Greene classifies as a ‘Carol of the Annunciation’, ‘As I lay vpon a nyzt’ (*EEC* 234) exemplifies this: it survives in Sloane, but also in the Trinity roll and the Selden. manuscript, where its highly melismatic, rather leisurely setting is in clear contrast with that of Eng. poet. ‘Carol of the Annunciation’ ‘Tydynges trew’.⁴

What makes these songs a group is the narrative they tell, or what Mary Carruthers stressed as the *res* behind the *verba*.⁵ The contrast between idea and words is not entirely clear, however, because the songs respond to two fixed texts: the biblical narrative and the *Ave Maria*, one of a select few texts every fifteenth-century English person was expected to know by heart. The words of the songs, by comparison, change and render the Latin freely, embodying the invariable words of the *Ave Maria* in the fluid vernacular and in popular

² *MC*, p. 123.

³ Stevens, ‘Carol’, p. 163.

⁴ Discussed in Chapter 7. ‘Leisurely’ because where ‘Tydynges trew’ typically moves in runs of quavers, ‘As I lay vpon a nyzt’ is dominated by crotchets and minims.

⁵ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, esp. pp. 190-5.

understanding. Considered as translation of the scripture, the Annunciation carols can be related to James Simpson's characterisation of medieval culture as one that encouraged the 'accretive reception of texts', including of the Bible.⁶ This occurs in Latin as well as English: the first song of Eng. poet. is a Latin Annunciation carol unique to this manuscript that reverses the usual distribution of Latin and vernacular words by opening its burden with a repeated word drawn directly from the register of festive vernacular song:

Nowell nowell nowell nowell
myssus est ad virginem angelus gabriell (E1, burden)

The same story is retold in other forms within the manuscripts, such as in the Sloane lyric 'I syng of a myden' (S25), in which the Annunciation is figured in each stanza by the image of falling dew, providing another way of taking possession of the scriptural story. Beyond these books, the Annunciation narratives are found in many lyrics, such as 'Gabriel fram heven-king', a thirteenth-century translation of a Latin song, 'Angelus ad virginem'. The song appears to have been well known in medieval England and France.⁷ Nicholas, the clerk of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, sings 'Angelus ad virginem' when making 'a-nyghtes melodie'.⁸ Audelay appears to have used the song in producing his Annunciation lyric, 'The angel to þe vergyn said'.⁹

These texts are the verbal equivalent of the Annunciation images, which also constitute a recognisable type throughout the medieval period and show Gabriel greeting Mary, often holding a scroll inscribed with the *Ave Maria*. Examples of this image from fifteenth-century England include a stained glass

⁶ Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, p. 558 and p. 489.

⁷ See Stevens, 'Angelus ad Virginem'.

⁸ I.3214-6. 'Gabriel, fram evene-king' is printed in *ELXIII*, but receives fuller discussion and is edited with the Latin text and music in *Medieval English Songs*, ed. Dobson and Harrison, pp. 176-83, 261-8, 303-5.

⁹ *The Poems*, ed. Whiting, 21.

window in the domestic chapel of Hampton Court, dating around 1420-35, and the Annunciation image of the Beaufort/Beauchamp Hours, painted during the same period by the German immigrant miniaturist Herman Scheere.¹⁰ A similar image of the Annunciation from mid-fifteenth-century Norwich is still seen in the east window of the church of St Peter Mancroft.

[Image removed from e-thesis]

Figure 9.1. The Annunciation to Mary and The Visitation¹¹

Fifteenth-century stained glass, Norwich, St Peter Mancroft

Gabriel holds a scroll inscribed ‘Ave gr[atia] plena dominus tecu[m]’ and to Mary’s right another reads ‘Ecce ancilla domini’. Like the songs, the images foreground the words of the dialogue as it was reported by Luke. The window in

¹⁰ Both reproduced in *Gothic: Art for England 1400-1547*, ed. Richard Marks, Paul Williamson and Eleanor Townsend (London: Victoria and Albert Publications, 2003), plates 217 and 223.

¹¹ Copyright could not be traced.

St Peter Mancroft embodies the Annunciation doubly by depicting the dove of the Holy Spirit descending to Mary on golden rays, followed by a tiny Christ Child carrying his cross. The representation of Christ's conception using the imagery of sunbeams is traditional and appears, for example, in an Annunciation carol in Sloane: 'Ryzt as þe sunne schynt in glas / so jhesus in his moder was' (S64, 4.1-2). The window can both portray the image and embody it by using stained glass as a medium.

A categorical approach to the anthologies' songs might seek to identify any distinctive aspects to the way in which the songs in carol form portray this key scriptural story. A less prejudicial question might be, what does the carol form contribute to its telling? One possibility is that where the image shown above emphasised embodiment taking place at the Annunciation, the songs express the vocality of the moment. The burdens demonstrate this where they frame the text with Gabriel's words:

Nowell nowell
þis is þe salutacion off the aungell gabriell (E56/66)

Nowel el
mary was gret *with* gabriel (S24)

Here (and in burdens of other carols) Gabriel's greeting is 'Nowel' rather than 'Ave' or 'Hail', words usually shifted into the stanzas. This effectively reduces the distance between the angel and the festive performers who use the same words, 'Nowel' being a common exclamatory interjection and especially frequent within Christmas songs. Elsewhere the refrain section is an announcement made by the performers of the song:

Noua noua
ave fit ex eva (E31)

In this couplet the declaration of news is coupled with a lexical pun, but one that recalls the markedly vocal opening to the famous prayer. A similar opening is found in another of the Eng. poet. carols, where the Annunciation is itself a declaration of news:

Tydynges trew þer be cum new sent frome þe trinite
 Be gabriel to nazaret cite off galile
 (E66, 1.1-2)

A simple and highly formulaic refrain introduces one of the Sloane Annunciation songs, ‘Nowel el el’. The first two stanzas of this song show how the narrative of the Annunciation was framed by a concentration upon song:

Nowel· el· boþe eld & 3yng
 nowel· el· now mow we syng
 In worchepe of *our* heuene kyng
 almyty god in trinite·

 lestenyzt lordyngis boþe leue & der’
 lestenyt ladyis *with* glad cher’
 a song of *merþe* now mow 3e her’
 how cryst *our* broþer he wolde be
 (S60, 1-2)

Emphasis upon announcements is a consistent feature of the anthologies’ Annunciation carols but can also be seen elsewhere, such as the burdens of the three Annunciation carols that are in Balliol 354 but not Eng. poet., and another printed in the Huntington *Carolles*:

What, hard ye not? The Kyng of Jherusalem
 Is now born in Bethelem. (EEC 241, TM 684)

 Now we shuld syng *and* say, ‘Newell!’
 Quia missus est angelus Gabriell. (EEC 240, TM 448)

 Now syng we all in fere,
 ‘Alma Redemptoris mater.’ (EEC 234 D, IMEV 354)

 ‘Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell!’
 This sayd the aungell Gabryell. (EEC 256, TP 1089)

Ryman's texts are a more mixed group although several do put speech and declarations in their refrain section and even deliver 'tydyngys' (EEC 255, 244-5, 248, 250-1).

The Annunciation is presented in Luke's gospel as a dialogue and this is fully treated by the songs' stanzas. Mary's words conclude two of the Eng. poet. songs, one using an English translation of her declaration, and the other switching into Latin for these words, although the rest of the song is entirely vernacular:

The ve[rgyn said] vnto þe fere
Now hys we[ll be] don *in* me here
& godes mayd now se me here
with nova (E31, 7)

Thane ageyne to the aungell she answered womanly
Whateuer my lord *commaund* me do I wyll obey mekely
Ecce sum humilima ancilla *domini*
Secundum verbum tuum she seid fiat mihi (E66, 7)

Putting this powerful speech act in the final stanza of these songs highlights its importance. The Sloane carol depicts Mary making her reply in the form of a heroic oath, through her posture and freely elected dedication of her whole self:

Mary on bryst her' hand che leyd
style xe stod & þus xe seyde
lo me her' *godis owyn* hand mayd
with herte & wil & body fre (S60, 7)

This story is well suited to treatment in the carol form because speech acts are central to it and also because it is a story of dialogue, easily distributed among the stanzas and then developed through the responsive carol structure that alternates different parts and possibly different singers. The Annunciation was a popular carol theme primarily because the story is crucial to Christianity and also to Christmas celebrations. The story was familiar through visual imagery but also as a narrative and in the form of authoritative, much-repeated Latin texts.

Beyond this, the story is fundamentally one of dialogue, of speech and response, and focussed upon the role of the voice (including the female human voice).

One of the features of the anthologies' songs that has emerged through this study is their explicit and often self-conscious interest in vocal performance, especially where several voices are involved. Rather than push this observation into forming part of a definition of a category of song, I would like to draw attention to it in order to deepen our understanding of and appreciation of these texts. Repeatedly, creative engagement with the voice develops key religious narratives. In the Annunciation songs it can strengthen Mary's role in the story, and it enables performers to participate in the Annunciation itself, most dramatically by turning the angel's 'Ave' into the carollers' 'Nowell'. Further than this, the responsive alternation of refrain and stanza section adds another layer to the dialogue between Gabriel and Mary and opens up the exchange into something immediate and shared, still news. Where it is related to the shape of these songs, I find this dynamic different from Annunciation lyrics that do not use a pre-posed refrain section, but it emerges from reading and analysis and cannot be transformed into a more absolute categorical approach.

II. Latin Songs and Translation

The Annunciation songs quoted above explore different ways of presenting a dialogue whose fundamental source was a text written in fixed Latin. The contrast recalls the long-standing critical debate about authority in medieval languages, in particular the opposition between authoritative Latin and vernaculars yet to prove that they too could be vehicles for authoritative texts.

Language is one of the established ways of organising groups of medieval English literature, despite regular critical opposition.¹² Eng. poet. opens with a Latin song on the Annunciation in carol form that begins with a repeated ‘Nowell’ and the frequency of macaronic texts in the anthologies could suggest a relaxed continuity between Latin and the vernacular. However, further attention to the patterns in the distribution of the languages in the anthologies’ texts moderates this supposition: only seven songs are entirely in Latin compared with 118 entirely in English, and the macaronic texts usually place Latin lines in particular places (especially refrain sections). This section will examine the anthologies’ Latin songs and how they compare with the vernacular and macaronic texts.

The forms of Latin songs in the manuscripts are not categorically distinct from the vernacular texts and are so varied that they discourage grouping these songs together. The Latin Annunciation song in Eng. poet. (E1) uses mono-rhymed quatrains typical of hymns, similar to those used in a short Latin song a few sides later, ‘*Et virgine natus christe es sine macula*’ (E5), and in Sloane’s ‘*Meum est propositum in taberna mori*’ (S66), a goliardic song that parodies hymn form, neither of which have refrain sections. The vernacular carol on the Annunciation, ‘Tydynges trew þer be cum neu sent frome þe trynyte’ (E56/66), is one of several written in mono-rhymed quatrains, and it has lines of roughly similar length to those in the Latin texts. The second song in Eng. poet., ‘*Bonum vinum cum sapore*’ (E2), uses a typical carol structure: four stress stanzas rhymed *aaab* where the *b*-rhyme is that of the couplet burden.

¹² See, for example, Marilyn Corrie, ‘Harley 2253, Digby 86, and the Circulation of Literature in Pre-Chaucerian England’, in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*, ed. Fein, pp. 427-443.

The first Latin text in Sloane, ‘Procedenti puero’ (S36), a song on the Incarnation and Nativity, is built from repeated short or half lines expanded differently in each stanza. Its method of building up stanzas from repeated elements can be found in vernacular texts within the manuscript, especially where the pre-posed refrain is combined with stanzas containing internal refrains, but only ‘þe sunne of grace hym schynit in’ (S30) convincingly compares with ‘Procedenti puero’ in the extent of repetition used within the stanzas. The other Latin hymn in the manuscript begins imperfectly, ‘Non pudescit corpore’ (S65), and also uses short lines of varying lengths. The song alternates four- (*abab*) and six-line stanzas (*aabccb*), each followed by the refrain word ‘Dies’, and describes and celebrates different days of the festive season, beginning with a fragment on St John the Evangelist (December 27), then proceeding with two stanzas each on the Holy Innocents (December 28), martyrdom of Becket (December 29) and the Circumcision (January 1). The song may be missing further stanzas at the beginning to describe the Nativity and St Stephen. The subject of the text is also that of a vernacular song a few pages later, ‘þe ferste day of 30l we han in mynde’ (S72, also E19). The exact form is not found in the vernacular within the anthologies but the alternation of two different stanza forms is clearly related to the carol form and can be directly compared with ‘þis endrys ny3t’ (E14), which uses a burden rhyming *abcb* and stanzas rhyming *aabccb*.

The only clear reason for considering these songs together is that within two particular written sources they share a language: neither formally nor thematically do they form a group but instead are easier to relate to vernacular songs in the same books. There may still be a case for arguing that the Latin

songs are different from the vernacular texts in terms of how the language is used. For example, ‘Non pudescit corpore’ describes St Thomas in two rhetorically extravagant stanzas full of apostrophe and condensed imagery:

*Bonus pastor prodiit
Gaude grex anglorum
cuius primus extitit
thomas flos pastorum
dies*

*Thoms cantuarie
omni carens carie
pro lege luctaris
Dans mucroni mylitis
Tinam tui capit^{is}
sic quod coronaris
dies*

(S65)

The good shepherd came forth. Rejoice English flock, of which the best stands out: Thomas, the flower of the shepherds.
Thomas of Canterbury, lacking every fault, for law you struggle. To the sword of the knight you give the vessel of your head. In this way you are crowned.

The vernacular carol in praise of St Thomas in the same manuscript takes a more narrative, explanatory approach, from the opening stanzas:

*Lestenyȝ lordyngis boȝe grete & smale
I xal ȝou telyn a wonder tale
how holy cherche was brow in bale
cum magna iniuria·*

*ȝe greteste clerk of al þis lond
of cauntyrbery ȝe vnderstond
slawyn he was wykkyd hond
Demonis potencia·*

(S46, 1-2)

But other vernacular songs in the manuscripts do use language dense in apostrophe and similar rhetorical flourishes, for example ‘holy maydyn blyssid þou be’ (S50), so style would not be a satisfactory way of breaking up the anthologies’ contents. Instead, these Latin songs have slipped into the anthologies because like so many other texts in the manuscripts they are involved

in the creative expansion of the liturgy or are suitable in various ways for communal, festive celebration. The primary interests of the compilers were evidently vernacular, but this did not dictate exclusion from creative involvement with Latin.

Emerging from this it can be seen that although Latin was still the more authoritative written language, as the language of the scriptures and of the liturgy, its relationship with the vernacular in these anthologies is not one of contestation, nor do the English verses merely imitate Latin models. The anthologies contain a single example of translation, 'Enmy herowde þou wokkyd kyng' (S70), which translates 'Hostis herodes impie', a hymn sung at Vespers on the Vigil of Epiphany and comprised of a section of the alphabetical hymn 'A solus ortis cardine' by Sedulius. The song is not a carol, although it could have been easily turned into one, and very few extant songs in carol form can be considered translations. Exceptions are three fourteenth-century verses described in Chapter 2 and several verses by Ryman that paraphrase Latin sources, especially the *Te Deum*. While vernacular and macaronic English carols have a close relation with Latin song traditions they also have some independence from them. English song responded to hymn, whether through translation, imitation, sampling or re-writing, but this is not to say that it merely repeated it in another language. This has already been suggested in the analysis of the Annunciation carols, all of which respond to central Latin texts (the gospel and the *Ave Maria*). The anthologies' songs use lines of Latin, and ideas or stories known from Latin sources confidently and integrate them into a kind of song with its own identity, so their response brings new ideas and remakes old ones. Their active remaking of the narrative for a different type of performance cannot be fully described by

the primary sense of the word 'translation', which emphasises equivalence in another language. By contrast, the most famous Middle English Annunciation lyric, 'Gabriel fram heven-king', is a translation of a Latin text. Not much can be drawn from a single example like this, but it does assist recognition of the confidence with which these fifteenth-century songs were produced. Songs in carol form had fundamental and complex affiliations with other types, but these did not involve a clear hierarchy of genres, nor a subordination of the vernacular to Latin.

III. Ballads and Stories

Asserting the self-confidence of the anthologies' songs in carol form can be clarified by comparison with the ballad. In the *Manual of Writings in Middle English* carols and ballads share a volume and these are the among clearest categories of 'lyric' types used in the *Manual*, although short verses appear in other sections, such as those on named authors, 'Poems dealing with contemporary conditions', 'Dialogues, debates and catechisms', 'Proverbs', and most recently Susanna Fein has provided a section on 'The Lyrics of MS Harley 2253'.¹³ To treat the ballad with justice would be to enter a new field of scholarship and to move into a different period of literature and song, but the relationship between the critical treatment of the ballad and the carol is relevant to the mix of texts within Sloane. It also shows that generic boundaries can be useful and informative in telling histories but are also deeply involved within critical agendas manipulating the material.

¹³ *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500: Middle English Sermons and Homilies, and The Lyrics of MS Harley 2253*, ed. Peter J. Beidler, vol. 11 (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2005).

Greene highlighted three differences between his carol and the ballad as collected by Francis James Child. First, method of transmission: according to Greene, the ballad is transmitted orally while writing disseminated the carol. Secondly, the ballad is definitively narrative: ‘The interest is in the tale; none is diverted to the emotions of the teller or its hearers’. Finally, ballads and carols have different metrical forms.¹⁴ Each of these distinctions may be objected to: both carols and ballads circulated in conditions that did not necessitate an antithesis between oral and literate modes;¹⁵ carols may be narrative, and even the separation of ballad as narrative folk-song from other kinds of folk-song is open to question as the construct of collectors led by Child; ballad and carol forms may and do overlap, with ballad stanza and ballad-like refrains occasionally used by carols and burdens occasionally used by ballads. Of these objections, the third is the weakest, the number of formally overlapping songs being small.¹⁶ As collected by scholars, carol and ballad are highly distinct (it would be impossible to confuse Child’s *Ballads* with Greene’s *Carols*) but the most immediate distinction is that of date.

In introducing the ballad within the *Manual of Writings in Middle English*, David Fowler had a difficult task because ‘scarcely more than half a dozen of the 305 Child ballads actually survive in a form earlier than the year 1500’. His definition of ballad is ‘a traditional narrative song’, but the corpus is heavily reliant upon that produced by Child in the nineteenth century. This reliance is so great that to refer to a text as a ballad is more or less to refer to a

¹⁴ *EEC*, p. lxv.

¹⁵ For discussion of this for ballads, especially in ‘Early Modern’ England, see Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture*.

¹⁶ Four carols in Sloane have stanzas in a form similar to ballad quatrains: S30, S35, S69 and S74, see also parts of J17. For a comparison of ballad refrains and carol burdens see *EEC*, pp. lxvi-lxxii. Greene estimates that ‘about one in sixty’ of Child’s ballads have a pre-posed, external refrain.

text either in Child's collection or similar to his ballads. Arguing that many ballads later recorded may have medieval origins, Fowler chooses to preserve 'the unity of the ballad canon' by describing twenty-five sources from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century. Sloane is the fourth of these sources because it includes two Child ballads, and Fowler describes it as 'one of the best manuscripts available for study of the emergence of the popular ballad from the folk song tradition'. The source is, therefore, of interest to the ballad scholar primarily because of where it leads to in the development of the genre. In his *Literary History of the Popular Ballad* Fowler characterises the Middle Ages as an 'incubation period' and singles out the Sloane manuscript as 'a remarkable showcase of stylistic traits destined to influence the popular ballad'.¹⁷ Rather as Greene sought to do for the carol, Fowler constructs a strict narrative of generic development, but this casts little light on the fifteenth-century songs that are relegated to the status of antecedents.

The Sloane manuscript contains two songs that were included in Child's *Popular Ballads*, 'St Stephen and Herod' (*ESPB* 22, S44) and 'Robyn and Gandeleyne' (*ESPB* 115, S35), both of which are written in ballad form. The latter has a burden and, therefore, may be considered a carol, although it was not included in Greene's collection. The song tells the story of Robyn and his knave, Gandeleyne, who go hunting together. When Robyn shoots an unmarked deer he is himself shot by 'a lytil boy' called Wrennok. Gandeleyne and Wrennok spar verbally and then shoot each other. The text follows directly below an Epiphany carol and opens with the line 'Robyn' lyth in grene wode bowndyn'. It is generally described as written in prose, which Greene considers a marker of its

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, and Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad*, p. 39.

‘unlikeness to its companion poems’,¹⁸ but this interpretation exaggerates the significance of the layout, which appears to be primarily pragmatic. Line endings are observed for the first three lines but the next line is excessively long and cannot fit across the page, so from here the scribe has copied the poem as ‘prose’, with line endings marked by dashes or *puncti*. Midway through the poem shorter lines briefly allow the scribe to lay it out once again as verse (stanzas 11 and 12). The poem’s structure is variable but most of it can be divided into quatrains rhymed *abcb*. These stanzas are sometimes extended to six lines by lines that may or may not rhyme. The song’s first line does not fit into the rhyme scheme and is copied again at the end of the poem. Because ‘its repetition at any point is not indicated’ Greene is reluctant to call the line a burden,¹⁹ yet only four songs later the scribe has used the same procedure on an Epiphany song, ‘Now is þe twelþe day icome’ (S39), which Greene has included as a carol. This ‘carol’ has an unusual stanza form, *aaabb*, where the first *b* line is a *caude* line. The scribe appears to have recognised this and repeated the burden at the end of the song to clarify that it is to be sung carol-wise. The procedure followed in copying this song may have applied two pages earlier: the scribe noticed the stanza form was unconventional for a carol, so copied the burden twice.

Definite formal parameters (a burden and stanzas) appear to promote a degree of certainty about the carol’s generic identity, but critics sometimes seek to disregard them if a piece does not seem to fit the general picture. The narrative of ‘Robyn and Gandeleyne’ is ballad-like and unusual for a song in carol form. Following his analysis of the fourteenth-century poems ‘Blow, northerne wynd’ and ‘Nou sprinkes the sprai’, Reichl notes that while the pieces are formally

¹⁸ *EEC*, p. lxxii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

carols, ‘Despite variation and diversity, the fifteenth-century carols form a group with a comparatively homogeneous core, to which these early poems do not seem to belong’.²⁰ The same might be said of ‘Robyn and Gandeleyne’, although unlike these verses it was copied among carols. Both the fourteenth-century pieces mentioned are included in *The Early English Carols* on the basis of form and ‘Robyn and Gandeleyne’ belongs there too, but unlike them it does not play a significant role in Greene’s literary history of the carol. Either the corpus of carols has to be complicated, or its definition made more specific and not exclusively formal.²¹

A similar example of a narrative song excluded from the carol corpus is found in Balliol 354. ‘Here beside dwellith as riche barons dowghter’ is written in the midst of a series of carols and is set out in exactly the same way as other carols in the manuscript. The song begins:

Drawe me nere draw me nere
 Drawe me nere þe joly jugglege

Here beside dwellith as riche barons dowghter
 She wold haue no man þat for her love had sowght her
 So nyse she was

She wold haue no man þat was made of molde
 but yf he had a mowth of gold to kiss her whan she wold
 so *dangerus* she was (Balliol 354, p. 509)

It is a tale of how a magician, the ‘joly juggeler’, tricked the baron’s daughter into sleeping with him by altering his shape to that of a handsome knight and

²⁰ Reichl, ‘The Middle English Carol’, p. 168

²¹ Another way in which Greene’s anthology produces a sense of homogeneity is through his decision to end the collection at 1550 as though the form ceased to be used after this date. This is not the case. *Elizabethan Poetry: A Bibliography and First-line Index of English Verse, 1559-1603*, ed. Steven W. May and William A. Ringler, Jr., 3 vols (London; Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), lists ninety-six verses with burdens, III, pp. 2173-4. For example, five texts in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 168 in carol form date to the second half of the sixteenth century. The manuscript is connected with the Bishops of Ely and Norwich, see *Six Ballads with Burdens from MS. No. CLXVIII in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, ed. James Goodwin (London: The Percy Society, 1844).

then shamed her by changing into ‘a blere eyed chorle’. The story is told with a large amount of repetition and using alternating six and seven stress lines, like those of ‘As I went on 30l day in owr’ *prosessyon*’ (S74), with a *caude* line. The only reason Greene can have had for omitting this song from his edition must be that its contents would have been unusual within his corpus, although there are plenty of other bawdy narratives in his collection. He does include another unusual song from the same manuscript with affiliations to later ballad traditions, the song now known as the Corpus Christi Carol (*EEC* 322). This text is not written within a sequence of other songs in carol form, but Greene is clearly fond of it as he describes it as ‘hauntingly beautiful’²² and includes five densely written pages of notes on it, twice as many as on any other text.

The decision of what is or is not a ballad rests upon a body of texts surviving only in substantial numbers from the seventeenth-century Percy Folio and the extended effort of scholarship begun in the eighteenth century. The Corpus Christi Carol is sometimes claimed within this endeavour.²³ In the sixteenth century the term ‘ballad’ was used to label texts very different from those in Child’s collection, particularly because of its relation to ballade, which had encompassed verses of varying style and subject, introduced to English literature by Chaucer in imitation of the French *forme fixe*.²⁴ The sixteenth-century broadside ballads were printed on single sheets of paper for wide, cheap dissemination and are regularly contrafacta, with the tune the words are to be sung to indicated at the top of the page. These ballads’ themes can be political,

²² *EEC*, p. 423.

²³ It is included in *The Ballad Book*, ed. MacEdward Leach (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1955), p. 692, and is discussed in Fowler, *A Literary History of the Popular Ballad*, p. 58.

²⁴ See Albert Friedman, ‘The Late Medieval Ballade and the Origin of Broadside Balladry’, *Medium Ævum*, 27 (1958), 96-110; and Flemming G. Anderson, ‘From Tradition to Print: Ballads on Broad-sides’, in *The Ballad as Narrative*, ed. Anderson, Holzapfel and Pettit, pp. 39-58.

theological, narrative, erotic or religious and some can be found using a pre-posed refrain.²⁵ Yet in identifying fifteenth-century ballads Greene and Fowler refer to particular types of songs from the seventeenth century and later. Ways of telling a narrative can be fruitfully analysed and compared with later traditions, as Thomas Pettitt argues:

We cannot define the ballad, if by that we mean recovering the concept of the ballad current among those who composed, sang and listened to it, for there was no such concept... A ballad is, indeed, not a poetic genre, but a way of telling a story in verse and melody... there is a balladic mode of narration, to which traditional narrative songs approximate in proportion to the extent that their transmission is memorial, their performance oral, social and recreational.²⁶

Of several hagiographical narrative songs in the Sloane collection ballad critics including Child, Fowler, Boklund-Lagopoulou, Pettitt and Hill have singled out for attention ‘*Seynt steuene was a clerk*’ (S44) as a text approximating to ‘balladic mode’. Their reasons can be summarised as follows:

1. It is written in long couplets, rather than four-stress quatrains.
2. It employs structural and incremental repetition, for example:

I forsak þe kyng herowdis & þi werkis alle
þer is a chyld in bedlem born is beter þan we alle

Quat eylyt þe steuene quat is þe befalle
lakkyt þe eyþer mete or drynk in kyng herowdis h[alle]

lakit me neyþer mete ne drynk in kyng herowdis halle
þer is a chyld in bedlem born is beter þan we alle (4-6)

3. It tells a dramatic narrative focused upon a single climactic scene:

Stephen casts down the boar’s head in Herod’s hall and claims allegiance to the Christ child. He is subsequently stoned to death.

²⁵ For example, *A balade agaynst malycyous sclaunders*, STC 1323.5, printed in 1540; *A lytell treatyse agaynst sedicyous persons*, STC 22880.4, printed in 1540; and *An inuectyue agaynst Treason*, STC 25105, printed in 1553.

²⁶ Thomas Pettitt, ‘The Ballad as Narrative’, in *The Ballad as Narrative*, ed. Anderson, Holzapfel and Pettitt, pp. 1-15 (pp. 3, 5, 13).

4. It tells the story through unmediated dialogue, as seen in the above quotation, ‘objectively’ and without comment.²⁷
5. It ignores biblical history in favour of ‘folk’ religious culture, as Thomas Hill points out, by transferring Stephen’s martyrdom from the apostolic age of the Church to the morning of Christ’s nativity.²⁸

These features are characteristic of later popular narrative traditions but can be found more immediately in different combinations in other texts within the anthologies, for example the first complete song in the same collection, ‘In þe vale of abraham’ (S2). This compact narrative chops out Eve’s role in the Fall for the sake of simplified, direct impact, negotiated through two key speeches: first God’s (S2, 2-3), then Satan’s, the latter of which is entirely unmediated and verbally prefigures Herod’s question in ‘Seynt steuene was a clerk’:

Quat eylyt þe adam art þou wod
 þi lord hast tawt þe lytil good
 he wolde not þou vnderstod
 of þe wyttis þat he can·

Tak þe appil of þe tre
 & ete þer of I bidde þe
 & alle hese joyis þou xalt se
 Fro þe he xal hedyn non·

(S2, 5-6)

The song does not use extensive repetition (although compare 2.4 with 4.4 and 6.3 with 7.2), and employs the most common form of carol, four-stress quatrains rhymed *aaab*, but it maintains distance from the narrative. Only the burden suggests an attempt to inject some didactic purpose into the song. The song does not strictly adhere to doctrine: Eve is omitted and after the Fall rather than being compelled to work Adam is represented as unable to work, ‘For labour coude he

²⁷ On points 2-4 see Boklund-Lagopoulou, ‘I have a yong suster’, pp. 80-1.

²⁸ See Thomas D. Hill, ‘“The Ballad of St Stephen and Herod”: Biblical History and Medieval Popular Religious Culture’, *Medium Ævum*, 70 (2001), 240-49.

werkyn non' (8.4). The line presents a strong image of Adam's bleak situation and could be viewed as creative re-interpretation of the biblical story.

'In þe vale of abraham' is followed by a hagiographic carol of Saint Nicholas that tells of how Nicholas saved three sisters from prostitution, with their laments represented in dialogue of a strikingly folkloric form:

þe eldest dowter swor be bred of qwete
I haue leuere beggyn myn mete
& getyn me good qwer I may gete
þan ledyn myn lyf in lecher[i]

þe medil dowter seyde so mote che the
I hadde leuere hangyd & drawyd be
with wylde hors to or þre
þan ledin myn lyf in lecher[i]

þe zonger' lechery gan to spyse
& preyd saynt nicholas as che was wise
saynt nicholas as he was wise
Help vs fro lechr[i]

(S3, 4-6)

The song is then rapidly wrapped up in a single stanza declaring that Nicholas provided the women with 'husbondis þre good & hind' (7.4). Its focus is upon these declarations, responses to the father's speech (2.3-3.4), making this a call-and-response carol intimately associated with oral performative method. Nor is this repetitive, three-fold representation of speech unique within the manuscript: the same method is applied to the representation of the three kings in an Epiphany song (S32, 8-10). Methods that ballad-scholars have made central to definition of their genre are freely employed within Sloane's songs. By comparison, St John's and Eng. poet. contain many narrative songs but they do not so clearly use the methods described above.

The difficulty of piecing together the ballad as a genre in this period is in contrast to the rich material surviving within the songbooks, and in particular the carol form stands out in comparison as well documented and clearly historically

situated. Part of the attraction of these anthologies with their mixed and yet by no means arbitrary contents is that they provide important evidence for stories of genre (especially about the carol form) while also recalling the need for flexibility. The risk in using generic labels is that they can appear to explain a text, particularly short and apparently simple texts like those within the anthologies. Genres are critical constructs amenable to manipulation and to being used as manipulative tools, as is clearly seen in the treatment of Sloane's ballads, where a retrospective approach can exaggerate the distinctiveness of song types. For the purposes of understanding the way in which songs were written down in Sloane, how helpful is it to think of the book as 'a remarkable showcase of stylistic traits destined to influence the popular ballad'? This draws attention to some features of the texts, which is helpful, but neglects to notice that song writing was a flourishing activity in the fifteenth century. I think that greater recognition of this simple point, the vibrancy and success of fifteenth-century English song, would help us to move on from a long period of mourning for the losses and silences within English lyrical tradition, even blaming what survives for deliberately eradicating what we really want to hear, towards a renewed enjoyment of this period's songs.

IV. Playful songs and parody

One way in which confidence in an artistic form can be exhibited is through play, especially through parody, a type of creativity that requires an understanding of and interest in techniques, the ways in which art makes meaning. In a

characteristically pan-cultural comment, Bakhtin celebrates the relationship between festive song and parodic humour:

The Middle Ages, with varying degrees of qualification, respected the freedom of the fool's cap and allotted a rather broad license to laughter and the laughing word. This freedom was bounded primarily by feast days and school festivals. Medieval laughter is holiday laughter... 'Christmas laughter' (*risus natalis*)... expressed itself not in stories but in songs. Serious church hymns were sung to the tunes of street ditties and were thus given a new twist. In addition a huge store of special Christmas carols existed in which reverent nativity themes were interwoven with folk motifs on the cheerful death of the old and the birth of the new. Parodic-travestyng ridicule of the old often became dominant in these songs, especially in France, where the 'Noël', or Christmas carols, became one of the most popular generic sources for the revolutionary street song.²⁹

Although Bakhtin's comments are sweeping and poorly evidenced, his ideas are provocative. There is plenty of 'holiday laughter' within surviving fifteenth-century English festive songs, but is there parody? Within the anthologies there are few songs that can be described as parodies in the strictest sense, texts that deliberately copy a type of writing in a satirical, comic way. Sloane contains a parody of a hymn, and Eng. poet. of a medical verse recipe. Beyond these, however, there are many places in the anthologies characterised by heteroglossia, Bakhtin's term for writing that juxtaposes and plays with different voices in ways that are tumbling and creative, rather than hierarchical. This final section will examine places where this is important to the texts and explore instances of self-conscious manipulation of different song types and voices.

Nonsense and play can display self-conscious enjoyment of words and verse forms, and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century songs show significant creative interest in nonsense, for example in lying songs and related songs of

²⁹ M. M. Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 41-83 (p. 72).

impossibilities.³⁰ One Eng. poet. carol against women, ‘When nettuls *in wynter* bryng forth rosys red’, goes far beyond the needs of its argument to construct lengthy and extravagant fantasies, built up in each stanza according to different patterns. For example, animals are imagined to be skilled in learned arts:

Whan swyn be conyng *in* al poyntes of musyke
 & asses be docturs of euery scyens
 & kattes do hel men be practysyng of fysyke
 & boserds to scryptur gyfe ony credens
 & marchans by *with* horne insted of grotes & pens
 & pyys be mad poetes for þer eloques
 þan put women *in* trust & confydens (E59, 4)

The impossibilities of this song belong within an established tradition of anti-feminist verse and are motivated by the point to which the text returns in the refrain lines of each stanza, but there is nevertheless an obvious glee in generating such images as ‘cammels *in* þe eyer tak swalows & larkes’ (6.3) and ‘bulles of þe see syng a good bace’ (2.4). Elsewhere in the manuscript, one short text that follows a series of moral quatrains presents a fantasy less clearly controlled by an argument:

I saw iij hedles playen at a ball
 On hanles man served hem all
 Whyll iij movthles men lay & low
 iij legles away hem drow (E29, 4)

A similar pleasure in absurd and contradictory words can be found in a parody of a rhymed medical recipe, beginning:

A good medycyn for sor eyen

 for a man þat is almost blynd
 lat hym go barhed all day agey þe wynd
 tyll þe sozne be sette
 at even wrap hym *in* a cloke
 & put hym *in* a hows full of smoke
 & loke þat euery hol be well shett (E17, 1)

³⁰ See G. L. Kittredge, ‘Note on a Lying Song’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 39 (1926), 195-199. *IMEV* lists four songs of impossibilities and thirteen examples of nonsense verse (including E17 and E29.4), pp. 332 and 336, and see *EEC* 471-473.1.

Parody requires norms, and this verse responds to the outlandish and often unhelpful cures found in medical verses of the time by constructing ludicrous advice. These texts display verbal humour, exploiting the anarchic potential within language to muddle up the world. This self-conscious use of words is associated with Bakhtin's 'laughing word', a way of fooling with song that could take place in many different kinds of setting.

Another context for 'holiday laughter' within the manuscripts is the drinking song, where riotous enjoyment often met verbal ingenuity. Sloane contains a particularly accomplished parodic drinking song, a goliardic hymn beginning:

Meum est propositum in taberna mori
& vinum appositum stitienti ori
Vt dicant cum venerint angulorum cori
Deus sit propicius iste potatori
(S66, 1)³¹

The first stanza of this song is derived from a stanza in the *Confession* of the Archpoet, the anonymous writer to whom many goliardic pieces are conventionally attributed.³² The whole 'hymn' survives in several manuscripts of a later date than Sloane, with widespread and fundamental verbal and structural changes.³³ One version appears in 'A Drinker's Mass', the *Confitemini Dolio*, within a sixteenth-century Low German manuscript in which the scribe has recorded the provenance of his exemplar:

Een Boeck gevonden in Engelant in een Abdie tussen Norwits en Londen
 in den Jaere 1535 also Conick Hendrick de achste alle de Cloosters

³¹ 'It is my intention to die in the tavern and have good wine placed there for my thirsting mouth, so when the choirs of angels have come they may say, "May God be kind to this drinker"'.
³² The Archpoet, 'Confessio', in *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*, trans. Helen Waddell, 4th edn (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1952), pp. 182-195. But Bryan Gillingham has argued against Waddell's portrayal of the 'Archpoet' as a goliardic figure, proposing instead the central role of monastic institutions in recording such songs, in connection with courts and schools. See Bryan Gillingham, *The Social Background to Secular Medieval Latin Song* (Ottawa: The Institute of Medieval Music, 1998).

³³ See Bayless, *Parody*, pp. 105-109, pp. 346-362.

ruyneerde ende alle de Monicken ende Bagynen ten Lande uyt-dreef, waermede de vorsehen Monicken der Abdye op feestdaegen haere recreatie mede Hielden.

[A book found in England in an abbey between Norwich and London in the year 1535, when King Henry VIII destroyed all the monasteries and drove all the monks and Beguines out of the country, which the aforementioned monks of the abbey used for their recreation on feast days.]³⁴

The rubric gives support to speculation that such songs were used during the recreational part of feast days, and although such texts were international this one is associated with a similar region to the Sloane manuscript.

The song plays with the idea and form of the hymn in the language of clerical authority, but it should be recognised that religious parodies were widespread and not necessarily subversive in effect, as Martha Bayless emphasises: ‘in the willingness to play with sacred institutions we see an ease with religion, a levity born of security’.³⁵ The appearance of ‘*Meum est propositum*’ within Sloane shows how wide a range of songs the compiler had access to. It falls within a sequence of songs clearly associated with festive performance. Immediately before it is ‘*Non pudescit corpore*’, the Latin song listing and celebrating the feast days of the Christmas season, and after it comes a short English text in quatrains in which the speaker complains that he is a poor and reluctant singer:

If I synge 3e wyl me lakke
& wenyn I wer’ out of myn wyt
þerfor’ smale notis wil I crake
so wolde god I wer’ qwyt (S67, 1)

This song is followed by ‘*Wolcum be þou heuene kyng*’, a vernacular carol that welcomes in the days of the festive season (S68). The goliardic hymn is,

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 346, 349.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 202.

therefore, clearly integrated within a context of festive celebration within which Bakhtin might have found support for his proposal that Christmas laughter was expressed in song. Eng. poet. contains something similar in the first stanza of its second song:

Bonum vinum {in tabernam} cum sapore
 Bybit abbas cum priore
 Sed *conuentus* de peiore
 Semper solet bibere (E2, 1)³⁶

This is a version of the first stanza of a parodic drinking song that Bayless describes as ‘probably the single most popular parody composed in the Middle Ages’,³⁷ a song that responds to a hymn to Mary, ‘Verbum bonum et suave’. The Eng. poet. song is about money rather than praise of wine, but it draws upon the same body of Latin verse parodies and satire from which Sloane’s ‘*Meum est propositum*’ emerges.

It is intriguing that a drinking song displays the most sophisticated use of Latin within Sloane. This is part of the joke, as the final line states: ‘Loqui facit socios optimum Latinum’.³⁸ The display of linguistic confidence is comparable with a drinking song in Eng. poet. that alternates English and Latin lines in a lengthy defence of wine (E50). The song, which is also found in Balliol 354, is not so riotous as ‘*Meum est propositum*’, contains a large quantity of biblical, scholarly and medical references, and advises moderation. It is presented in a fairly straightforward way, but the speaker’s conclusion is practical and not necessarily moderate:

Me thynkyth syrs by þes causys
 Que *sunt* racionabiles
 þat wyne is best of al drynkkys

³⁶ ‘Good wine with savour the abbot drinks with the prior but the monastery only ever drinks from the worse wine.’

³⁷ Bayless, *Parody*, p. 109.

³⁸ ‘[Wine] makes companions speak the best Latin.’

Inter potus notabiles

ffyl þe cop wel bealeamy

...

ffyll þe cope by þe brynk

(E50, 19, 20.1, 21.3)

The song's effect might depend upon context and delivery, but it does revel in controlling the discourse of scholarly argument, gathering together authorities and biblical precedents in support of the company's pleasure.

Another drinking song that mixes English and Latin is found in Sloane: 'Omnes gentes plaudite', a curious dialogue between different songs, between the performing voice as it is represented and the whole text into which it is incorporated (S27). This song falls within the couplet song group, between 'I haue a gentil cook' and 'Adam lay ibowndyn'. The text begins with a request for applause rather than the more customary silence, whether because the singer is embarrassed (as in S67) or muddled, and the speaker then begins a vernacular song in the second line:

Omnes gentes plaudite

I saw myny bryddis setyn on a tre

(S27, 1)

The speaker sustains the song for four lines then interrupts himself with a complaint:

he tokyn her' fleyzt & flowyn away
with ego dixi haue good day

many qwyte federis hast þe pye

I may noon mor' syngyn my lyppis arn so drye

(S27, 2-3)

The last line above appears to be a familiar phrase in drinking songs as something similar is found in 'The best tre if 3e tak entent': 'I haue seyde tyll my lyppes be drye' (20.3). The speaker resumes the song for one line, but then gives up, instead complaining and calling for more sticks on the fire and, again, more drink:

Manye qwyte federis ha3t þe swan
þe mor' þat I drynke þe lesse good I can

ley stykkys on þe fer wyl mot is brenne
zeue vs onys drynkyn er we gon henne (S27, 4-5)³⁹

By presenting a monologue delivered by a drunken performer a strange text is created, whose clever comedy is comparable with the drunken song in the fourteenth-century Rawlinson lyric group, 'D... dronken'.⁴⁰ 'Omnes gentes plaudite' presents the reader with a scene from the tavern, condemned by sermon writers as the song school of the devil, but the song itself is a representation, imitating drunken song on the page. The process of incorporating vivid, performing voices within new textual constructs is typical of this manuscript. In this case we even find a song within a song within a song if we read 'ego dixi haue good day' as the birds' song. Appropriately even the birds sing macaronic lines, at least according to the drunken singer.⁴¹ Embedded at every level of the song is the interaction between musical voices, between songs and representations of song, and between English and Latin. The extent of interplay suggests that it would be mistaken to organise these into clear dichotomies or hierarchies.

The technique of breaking up songs and integrating – or juxtaposing – them with other pieces of text and song seen in 'Omnes gentes plaudite' is by now familiar: it is a key feature of the way songs in these anthologies were put together. The potential for parody and radical dialogue within this method is

³⁹ In *SL* Robbins mistakenly calls the song a 'nonsense song', p. 228, but it is accurately described in Miller's notes to the text in 'The Poetry of MS. Sloane 2593' (no. 27).

⁴⁰ *IMEV* 694.11, *SL* 117, but see also, Burrow, 'Poems without contexts', pp. 11-12.

⁴¹ Other songs representing birds singing in Latin include one in Eng. poet. where a bird sings 'Timor mortis conturbat me' (E52). Another bird sings Latin in *EEC* 378. The Sloane represents a bird offering moral advice in English, S1. A bird offers similar vernacular advice in E23. On medieval representations of bird song, see Elizabeth Eva Leach, *Sung Birds: Music, Nature, and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

decisively realised in the last song in Sloane, ‘As I went on 30l day in owr’ *prosessyon*’ (S74). The song’s burden explicitly draws attention to Jankyn’s singing but transforms the songs of the Mass into sexual cries, barely language:

kyrie so kyrie jankyn syngyt merie *with* aleyson (S74, burden)

The stanzas express Alison’s interest in Jankyn’s musical performance:

Jankyn at þe *sanctus* crakit a merie note
& 3yt me þinkyt it dos me good I payid for his cote

Jankyn crakit *notis an hunderid on a knot*
& 3yt he hakkyt *hem smaller’ þan wortis to þe pot* (S74, 4-5)

The description of Jankyn ‘cracking’ his notes suggests that he performed technically difficult short notes, as the same imagery is used in the Wakefield *Second Shepherds’ Play*, where one shepherd says of the angel’s song, ‘Hard ye not how he crakyd it? / Three brefes to a long’, and another agrees, ‘mary, he hakt it’.⁴² A Wycliffite sermon condemns the practice of elaborate singing, especially in polyphony: ‘þanne strumpatis & þeuys preisen sire iacke or hobbe & williem þe proude clerk, hou smale þei knacken here *notis*’.⁴³ Here, Alison responds in exactly the way the preacher describes, and in the last stanza she takes over the performance of words from the Mass:

Benedicamus domino cryst fro schame me schylde
deo *gracias* þerto alas I go *with* schylde
K[yrieleyson] (S74, 7)

The female voice responds to the professional male performance of song with words from a language that, officially, belonged to men. Several levels of ventriloquism take place here that distribute song and text in ways that simply labelling ‘As I went on 30l day’ ‘anti-feminist’ limits. The label is partially justified, but it is also a reaction against the text’s play.

⁴² *English Mystery Plays*, ed. Happé, p. 291.

⁴³ *The English Works of Wyclif*, ed. Matthew, p. 192.

This song is the last in the manuscript and although this is most likely to be fortuitous, nevertheless these words are the last we see when closing the book. They are the last for which an imagined performance is offered, and it is a multi-layered and possibly disconcerting performance. In the course of the song words introduced as part of a celebration of Mass become an orgasmic cry and finally a pregnant woman's lament. The technique of incorporating remembered fragments of song into new texts is used to surprising effect. This is not to say that the song is necessarily subversive: as with Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, with which this song has some similarities, its disruptive energies may be contained by disdain for the speaker. However, the song does show how encouraging people to hold texts in their memories and recreate them in different ways could potentially be subversive. Similar techniques were used within anti-fraternal satires printed in the mid-sixteenth century, such as one song in the Huntington collection that punctuates a story of how a friar seduced a nun with the refrain, 'Inducas, inducas, / In temptationibus' (*EEC* 461, burden).⁴⁴

These songs parody Latin texts and do not obviously direct their parody at vernacular song, or at the carol form. One reason may be that, formed by combination, the songs easily absorb different voices. This would also mean that they do not have the type of clear, bounded generic character that parody reacts to. What might a parody of the carol look like? One answer is that it could just look like a badly written carol, but two mid-sixteenth-century texts suggest other possibilities. One is from the same printed pamphlet that contains the song of the friar and the nun quoted above:

Gebit, gebit, gebit, gebit,
Lux fulgebit hodie.

⁴⁴ See also *EEC* 461.1.

Ipsē mōcat mē;
An aple is no pere tree
In ciuitate Daid.

Notum fecit Dominus:
By the byll one knoweth a gose
In ciuitate Daid.

Aparuit Esau:
A red gowne is not blew
In ciuitate Daid.

Uerbum caro factum est;
A shepe is a peryllous beste
In ciuitate Daid.

(*EEC* 474, TP 953)

The song is made of juxtaposed lines that do not follow from one another, recalling the boy in Wager's play who sings 'the foote of many Songes' to make his own improvised nonsense. The Latin phrases are from services for Christmas day, and some are familiar from other carol texts.⁴⁵ The refrain line, 'Gebit, gebit, gebit, gebit', is generated from repetition of part of the line 'Lux fulgebit hodie'. This recalls the way some of the carol refrains use repetition, such as 'A a a gaudet cely domina' (J4), or, 'War yt war yt war yt wele' (J14). Selecting the strange sounding word, 'gebit', creates a gabbling effect. Like many carols, the song sticks in lines with little concern for continuity of sense. However, the song also creates a playful mixed-up schoolroom logic to reach its comical conclusions and equivalences. It is not exactly a parody of the carol, but it can be related to such an idea because it makes clever nonsense out of techniques familiar from such songs.⁴⁶ It is not impossible that the maker and audiences of the song were aware of and amused by these methods, the way that many songs

⁴⁵ 'Lux fulgebit' appears in *EEC* 29, 4.1; for 'Uerbum caro factum est' see *EEC* 38, 39 and 169. See *EEC*, p. 506 for details of references.

⁴⁶ It is also the last text in Greene's anthology before the appendix of fragments. Perhaps Greene responded to the idea of parody as a conclusion to his monumental work. For conclusions and fragmentation, see Chapter 10.

break up and juxtapose other texts, producing creative opportunities but also potentially destabilising texts and causing formal inconsistencies and semantic breakdowns.

The second text relates to a different aspect of the anthologies' songs. It is a broadside ballad entitled *Antipus* attributed to Luke Shepherd, a reformist who wrote numerous anti-Catholic satires.⁴⁷ *Antipus* belongs within a debate on religious controversies, printed separately in 1548 by John Day in London and again in the same year accompanied by other texts involved in the debate. The text has a clear pre-posed refrain and is laid out in a similar format to songs printed as carols in booklets of the period. It is, however, markedly different in character. The heading, 'Antipus', is derived from Greek and means 'one diametrically opposed to us'. Although 'antipus' is not in the OED, there is an entry for 'antipos', dated 1631, which records a usage that is also related to related to religious controversy: 'A Zealous Brother... is an antipos to all church government'.⁴⁸ Each stanza of the text refers to a biblical event but gives stories opposite to the Bible's, beginning:

AS verily as Adam created firste his God
So verily he tasted not, the fruite that was forbod (ll. 1-2)

The pre-posed refrain states:

To heare of such thinges ye be not wont
Nam horum contraria verissima sunt

The last three stanzas before the envoy reveal the song's sectarian position:

As verily as the deuyll hath perfecte loue and hope
So verily goddes worde doth constitute the pope

As verily as Isesicles wythin be hote and holowe

⁴⁷ *An Edition of Luke Shepherd's Satires*, ed. Janice Devereux, Renaissance English Text Society 26 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), pp. 58-59. *STC* 683 and *STC* 5605A; TP 188.

⁴⁸ Richard Brathwait's *Whimzies*, 115.

So verily proude prelates oure master Christe do folowe

As verily as bread doeth make and bake the baker
So verily these thefes the prestes can make their maker. (ll. 17-22)

The envoy accuses William Leighton, a preacher at St Paul's, of being a 'Papiste... and the popes owne knight.'

In her edition of Shepherd's work Janice Devereux describes the text as 'beginning with a two-line heading that summarises the text with a Latin tag about truth'⁴⁹, and does not note the similarity of the text's form and appearance to carols of the same date. There is no indication that the first couplet is to be repeated between stanzas, but it is similar to a pre-posed refrain in the carol against women:

Of all creaturs women be best
cuius contrarium verum est (E73, burden)

The carol also uses the technique of stating obvious untruths (from the speaker's perspective) in the stanzas and undercutting them with the macaronic refrain section, and it is extant in Balliol 354, so circulated in sixteenth-century London. The comparison suggests that the author of *Antipus* was familiar with the types of song contained within the song anthologies. *Antipus* was reprinted with two further texts in a debate pamphlet where it is presented as long verse paragraphs, but the first broadside version has spaces separating the couplets, presenting them as stanzas between which a refrain could be repeated. The relation to carol form is, therefore, clearer in the first printing of *Antipus* but appears to have been lost when the text was incorporated into a lengthy argument. Initially the form may have been chosen because of its Catholic associations: with yearly religious feasts, with clerical and fraternal writers and with liturgy.

⁴⁹ *Luke Shepherd's Satires*, ed. Devereux, p. xli.

A text in carol form that articulates division on theological issues within a slanderous contest between two individuals is an abrupt contrast with those songs contained within the fifteenth-century anthologies, where theological debate is almost entirely absent.⁵⁰ It is hard to say whether the song is a parody, turning a form used for sharing the community's key narratives into a mockery of what was in the writer's view Catholic error. Even if this was not the writer's specific intention when choosing this form, the strength of the contrast enables this interpretation. Being essentially responsive, the carol form allows Shepherd to frame the false claims of the stanzas with a rebuttal. Within the dialogue, however, one position is ridiculed and ruthlessly undermined, in contrast with the many fifteenth-century carols that encourage connections and group unity through the interplay of stanza and refrain. This is further seen by alignment of the Catholic position with political disloyalty in the envoy:

A thefe, a robber, by preachinge sedition
 Is better regarded than the kings *commission*.
 Amonge Papistes. (ll. 29-31)

Once again, I do not wish to argue that the fifteenth-century songs reflect a society that was in fact unified, but rather to show the ways in which the song forms were used. In *Antipus* the emphasis is evidently on disjunction and conflict in contrast with earlier songs using the same structure.

The compilers of the anthologies show an active interest in exploring the possibilities for festive song, in English and Latin, with different forms and stylistic approaches. The range of songs and the different voices that can be heard in the books testify to this interest, especially in the longer manuscripts. The more unusual texts (the examples of narrative in ballad quatrains, parody,

⁵⁰ Compare the broadsides with refrains listed above, n. 24.

translation and macaronic argument) are firmly grounded within the books because the songs around them form a written tradition of song that is at once confident and flexible. In the Annunciation carols a traditional story is distinctively portrayed with sensitive understanding of the original texts but also of what the chosen vehicle, a stanzaic song alternating fixed and variable parts popular in group festivities, can bring to the story. Exaggeration of the formal distinctiveness of the carols risks ossifying them, yet this way of making songs is highly flexible and often playful. Dialogue, or heteroglossia, is at the heart of these songs.

To give one final example, the first surviving page of Sloane opens part way through a text with a rather inauspicious warning: ‘þou wost wol lytyl ho is þi foo’ (S1, 1.1). It transpires that this piece of advice is being offered by a bird, presumably overheard by a narrator, but where the bird’s speech stops and starts is unclear. The final stanza suggests:

If þou wy[l]t beryn away þe prys
 lestene þis song & synge þer too
 of þi speche þe wil avys
 þou wost wol lytil ho is þin foo

(S1, 5)

The song’s message is cynical and suspicious in regard to human solidarity, and advises caution when speaking, yet it offers the shared resource of song itself, to be heard, repeated, passed on. Although ‘þe prys’ referred to in the first line of this stanza most likely refers to general success in life, a secondary meaning the next line produces is that ‘þis song’ is ‘þe prys’ we are invited to ‘beryn away’. Against the message of the refrain, something else emerges: song, heard, written and performed as something to pass around. Not only do the songs speak: crucially, they listen.

Chapter 10. Conclusion

Can the three books on which this thesis has focused be said to conclude? I have quoted the last words of each anthology at different points in my study and return to them here in my own conclusion. Sloane's songs end with Alison's macaronic prayer and lament:

Benedicamus domino cryst fro schame me schylde
deo gracias þerto alas I go *with* schylde
K[yrieleyson] (S74, 7)

Eng. poet. ends by calling for everyone to pray and call for a united Christian community:

Now lett vs *pray* both on & all
& specyally vpon god call
to send love & peace among vs all
Among all men in christente (E77, 6)

The torn last pages of St John's leave us with only fragments of words, but these are:

synge
...
...
...
wy thynge (J21)

As has been made clear, these books are not consistently structured in terms of the order in which they present their texts and the reader is not guided through the songs as they are through, for example, Audelay's carols by means of rubrics and thematic groupings. Instead songs jostle alongside each other in apparent equality and the role of the compilers in bringing them together is often impossible to extricate from that of chance. Nevertheless, fortuitously or not, these last words make meanings. Sloane ends with a playful and somewhat disconcerting layering of song and voice, of religious, social and sexual

experience. In contrast, Eng. poet. gestures to the way religious constructs and rituals seek social cohesion. The last words in St John's point, by chance, to the materiality of the manuscripts, the ways in which time has fragmented them and the persistent desire that they might still sing. Through these lines runs the common concern with words performed and remembered, things being broken up and brought together: words, voices, books and people.

Endings are always likely to be the places where the processes at work in the book are perceived to be vulnerable, whether faced by the encroaching blank space or enduring at the edge of the torn page. That this is the case here can be seen in Eng. poet.'s over-insistence on the word 'all', the unstable remembering of Latin song in Sloane and the persistence only of fragments at the edge of the physical disintegration of St John's. The endings also speak to the concerns that many readers will bring to these anthologies, concerns about whose songs these were, the relationship between vernacular and Latin expression, their role in group religious practice and the performance of group identity and how the relationship between the material textual objects and the performance events they inscribe can be properly approached. These last words are not conclusions because the anthologies are too variously and freely arranged to justify such a term but they provide useful points of departure.

The probability that the endings of the manuscripts may not have had much significance to the original compilers is suggestive of the curious effects of reading old manuscripts, which may have been casually produced and unremarkable at the time of production but are transformed by time and scholarship into something precious, mysterious and in need of decoding. Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's are now archives of fifteenth-century song culture

within which they played dynamic roles, storing and sharing songs, remembering and remaking them. In this study I have experimented with ways of reading that might encourage interaction between what they are now and were then. This has involved exploring textual change and the networks between different manuscripts, examining where the books record the ways in which they were written, thinking about the books and the songs as archives and highlighting the role of voices in the texts.

Although this thesis has not sought to present a traditional genre-based literary history, the carol form is of central significance within these books. The groupings of songs within the longer anthologies and in shorter collections show that texts circulated primarily with others formally similar to them, and this type of circulation appears to be more significant to the anthologies than grouping according to author or subject matter. These groupings encouraged participation in the making of song texts through imitation and expansion. The carol form dominates the anthologies and exemplifies this process, all the more so because its flexible two-part shape is well suited to practices of composition that borrowed from familiar sources and combined words and tunes in new ways. The structure of the carols creates dialogue between its different parts that can allow different voices to enter into the text, but also frames and controls this interaction. On the page this is achieved with a pre-posed refrain that looks like a heading, and often with repeated elements within the stanzas, and in the imagined performance through structured alternation between the different parts and the repetition of a stable element before and after the variable stanzas. These songs have a clearly visible written identity and the verbal texts often show how

writers managed the form skilfully to construct rhetorical patterns and manage the words' effects in performance.

It has emerged that each of the manuscripts contains texts that present degrees of self-awareness in how they represent voices, suggesting active interest in the capacity and construction of English song. This agrees with the way in which the books themselves have been constructed as anthologies. Further than this, many of the texts use voices carefully as a creative element to be manipulated for different effects, such as creating group participation in sacred moments, juxtaposing and sometimes even eliding Latin and English song, producing dialogues and creating new texts and narratives from old ones. The texts show greater interest in voices than writing, a focus that might be read as agreeing with the unassuming visual appearance of books. However, the ways in which voices are represented are multiform: the songs describe encounters with other songs, they repeat fragments of liturgical song, they call for singing, and they refer to themselves as song. This complicates the relationship between the words of the texts and possible performance events, and means that it is not appropriate to generalise about the ways in which the voices effect 'presence' or authority within the texts. Instead, the representations of voice are often useful places to examine the various ways in which the texts relate to performances through memory, recreation and publication of song, and how the makers of these songs were exploring and expanding the capacity of their medium.

Of the many possibilities for future research into the carol, among the most pressing is for study of what happens to the form and related song structures in the sixteenth century. The later musical manuscripts show intriguing experimentation with song structures related to the carol, and although Greene

closes his edition at 1550 the form endures on the later sixteenth-century stage and elsewhere. Its interaction with new types of lyric and the effect of the Reformation upon it are worth closer investigation and may shed new light on the shifting terrain between the so-called medieval and Early Modern periods. Meanwhile, research into the fifteenth-century songs might be furthered by new types of editions of these texts. In particular manuscript-based electronic editions could allow interactive texts that would promote exploration of the textual networks in which the manuscripts are embedded.

Many questions about Sloane, Eng. poet. and St John's remain as a result of the lack of evidence about who wrote these books, exactly where and when, and how they were used. Supposing that such evidence existed, what would definite answers to these questions achieve? One useful point would be to confirm whether these books are certainly from East Anglia, establishing a specific local culture of song writing and associating the history of the carol form intimately with a particular region. Knowing who wrote the books would also be of interest. The absence of information about this leaves many possibilities open, but a clear pattern for the involvement of specific social groups, such as clerics, particular religious orders, guildsmen, women, schoolboys or musicians could significantly affect our understanding of the texts. The evidence that can be drawn from other sources does not, however, predict such a clear pattern beyond suggesting that clerical involvement is highly likely to be significant. Inadequately founded hypotheses about the precise origins of Sloane and Eng. poet. have been offered in the past, partly because these appear to provide the critic with security. Analysis of material of uncertain origin involves risk, but much can be gathered from contextual information and the books themselves.

The lack of individualising information about the books encourages us to notice the dynamic between personal and group ownership of the songs that helped to enable the success of communal song in this period. In East Anglia, in particular, the vibrant, participatory religious culture of this period appears to have supported and dispersed festive song within a newly confident written tradition. Where possible and appropriate I have tried to avoid using the term ‘anonymous’ to describe these anthologies and their texts because the word usually indicates that a piece of information is lacking, the name of the author, without displacing the concept of the author. Another definition of ‘anonymous’ is ‘lack of individuality or distinctiveness’. Again the word represents an absence. Implicitly, a judgement is being made: if we valued the kinds of creativity that might not be primarily characterised by ‘individuality or distinctiveness’ we would have more terms for them and ways of talking about them. This is one benefit of using the word ‘communal’, which does have positive connotations despite its problems, to describe the songs in these anthologies.

These three manuscripts represent a considerable achievement within English song and writing. They show confident use of different forms, especially the carol form, and provide evidence that many songs circulated in small collections in the fifteenth century while also attracting the interest and energies of compilers on a larger scale. The songs are communal because writing down these texts happened through intimate engagement with ideas about song, written resources, remembered voices, liturgical performances, the rituals of the festive year, and images and stories that shaped fifteenth-century English identities. The range of imagined performances within the manuscripts encompasses festive

celebration, satirical complaint against the world, drunken exuberance, lullaby and prayer. By grouping together the last lines of the anthologies at the start of this conclusion I represented some of those imagined performances as fragments. This approach appeals in part in response to the different kinds of fragmentation occurring in the books and texts: the fragmentation of the liturgy in Sloane, the literal disintegration of the page in St John's, and in Eng. poet. a plea for unity uttered in response to a song that represents human society as broken apart by envy. The mode of representation I used exaggerates the fragmentation when two of the songs are preserved in full and within substantial collections (one can also be found in another, larger collection, Balliol 354), but bringing the lines together illustrates the powerful dynamic between realisations of communal song and fragmentation. The concepts are familiar to the modern reader of the anthologies who attempts to piece together from archived remains textual and conceptual networks to understand these songs. The ways in which words and ideas can be broken apart and brought together are essential to communal song and shape the texts and books themselves, in the arrangement of the carol form, in songs that respond to others, and in the activity of anthology making.

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