FORMES FIXES IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE
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ABSTRACT

The term “lyric” as currently applied to Middle English poems extends to works of sorts so different as to have become almost meaningless. Nevertheless, establishing a much-needed new and more precise terminology to represent accurately poems as different as “Maiden in the mor lay” and Chaucer’s “Truth” is no simple task. Even a question as apparently simple as “Should the definition be based on strophic pattern?” generates more than one potential line of answer; and when elements of content are taken into consideration, the difficulty grows exponentially. This essay attempts to illustrate the problem, and then to give an example of one approach to solving it, beginning with formal considerations and looking ahead to the socio-political.

The remarks that follow are taken from a larger study-in-progress addressing a number of problematic issues in how we think and talk about “lyric poetry” of the later Middle Ages on the Continent and in England. I have two primary goals. First, I want to sketch an outline of one such problem; and then, second, by reconsidering the reception of *formes fixes* in England, looking at the work of Geoffrey Chaucer and particularly John Gower, I shall suggest how such a problem might be attacked.

To be brief about the larger problem: an aporia exists — latent and generally ignored — in the loose critical language we use to discuss a sprawling congeries of shorter, non-narrative poems found in English miscellaneous manuscripts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although such manuscripts are plentiful, and hardly alike, especially in regard to the sophistication of their collections, too often a single term, “lyric,” is applied indiscriminately to their contents. But that this brush is far too broad should be obvious. Here for limited purposes of making the point we can describe two very broad groups. One encompasses forms, often with folkic roots, whose musical origins are still clearly visible in the verse. The other sort, while ultimately traceable to similar musical beginnings, are nevertheless entirely literary products as they stand in the manuscripts. But the importance of making and maintaining a distinction between these sorts of poems should be as obvious as the difference in kind becomes when we consider representative examples side-by-side.

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson D. 913 contains a mixed collection of short poems commonly designated “lyrics,” and rightly enough, since most seem intended to accompany music now lost. The most famous of these perhaps will be familiar from its first line, “Maiden in the mor lay,” a piece that has received significant scholarly attention, and is thought to be of the early fourteenth century. (See Appendix Item # 1.) More characteristic of the poems of BL MS Rawlinson D. 913, however, is the one often called “Dronken,” seemingly composed later in the fourteenth century. (See Appendix Item #2.) Obviously intended to be sung (something not altogether certain about “Maiden in the mor lay,” though its form doubtless derives from musical imperatives), perhaps even a relic of a dancing game, this little poem “Dronken” gives evidence of what kind of lyric expression must have been commonest in England in the later Middle Ages.

No less obvious in another way is the difference between such a ditty, or even a more serious composition like “Maiden in the mor lay,” and poems written at the almost same time and on the same island in imitation of the *formes fixes*. Such a poem, by way of example, is Geoffrey Chaucer’s “balade de bon conseyl,” or “Truth,” as it is named in most modern editions: (See Appendix Item #3.) No one could mistake poems such as “Dronken” or “Maiden in the mor lay” for Chaucer’s “Balade de bon conseyl;” and yet in the discourse of American and British criticism all fall into the category of “lyrics.” This is the aporia I mentioned earlier. Chaucer’s “Truth” exemplifies what I refer to here as the “literary lyric.” By this I mean to distinguish poems composed according to strophic patterns formally learned from, and
passed about among, poets on both sides of the Channel who took themselves seriously as writers, and measured themselves competitively against each other’s achievements. Impossible to sing or to dance to, Chaucer’s poem represents the far arc of a lettered Darwinian process that transformed the musically performable, whether actual or potential, into the self-consciously literary. For adequate discussion, this process requires a learned parlance more nuanced and discriminatory than currently in use, one terminologically capable of pinpointing precisely for any given poem both the locus and the stage it occupies along the steady march away from voice and instrument toward ink and parchment page. It is to provide such a critical parlance that my larger project is directed.

Let me turn now toward England, to Chaucer and Gower, and a look at what we can learn from how — and why — they each took up *formes fixes*. But first a bit of definition and background. As is well known, the poetic structures commonly designated the *formes fixes* originated in thirteenth-century France as dance lyrics accompanied by music, and evolved over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries into purely literary constructions. The major patterns are three — the balade, the rondeau, and the virelai. Of these, extant examples of the balade are universally the most common, the virelai having been composed early on and infrequently, in France for the most part, before being transformed by Guillaume de Machaut about the middle of the fourteenth century and redefined quite out of existence as the *chanson balade*.¹ The rondeau (about which Professor Cerquiglini-Toulet has written most learnedly) saw a burst of popularity only relatively late in fifteenth-century France.² One may note, as illustration of the general pattern, the *oeuvre* of Charles d’Orléans, whose works include 123 balades, written mostly between 1415 and 1440 while he was imprisoned in England, but 435 rondeaux, nearly all produced in the years between his return home to Blois and his death in 1465.³ In England, then, the balade was king — and Gower’s and Chaucer’s experiments with *formes fixes* readily confirm this. To be sure, both poets acknowledge familiarity with all three forms. Gower names them on two occasions. (See Appendix Item #4.) Chaucer offers almost identical lists, in the *Legend of Good Women* [(F) 422-23], when the character Alceste remarks that “Chaucer” has written “many an ympne for your halydayes/ That highten balades, roundels, virelais” and again in the *Canterbury Tales* (*CT* V. 947-48), when the Franklin says of the squire Aurelius that “Of swich matere made he manye layes/ Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes.”

But what seizes the attention here is the formulaic nature of these references, which have the by-rote tone of lists. Gower’s two lines are identical, like products from an assembly line, and Chaucer’s nearly echo them, even to the extent that both poets on one occasion use “virelai” to form a rhyme with “lai.” Those rhymes are, moreover, as close as either Gower or Chaucer got to virelais: neither, as far as we know, ever wrote one. With the rondeau, the situation is slightly different, at least for Chaucer. He has left us one “roundel,” as he calls it (and perhaps a second, if the poem known as “Merciless Beauty” is truly his). This rondeau comes at the conclusion of the *Parliament of Foules* (ll. 680-92). (See Appendix Item #5.) Gower, however, either composed no rondeaux, or decided to exclude them from his *oeuvre* — in either case, a fact that registers unavoidably as an expression of choice, given his acknowledged oversight of the master manuscripts of his works. Thus, far from establishing either the virelai or the rondeau as compositional models desirable, or even especially available, to Chaucer and Gower, what these references seem to show is that for them these two *formes fixes* were essentially fungible synonyms for


love poetry of the lightest kind: hence, in the examples above, their repeated proximity to such generic terms — “lay,” “song,” “complaint,” “carole,” — none of them structurally so well-defined as a legitimate *forme fixe*.

The same cannot be said about the balade. Both Gower and Chaucer understood precisely the elements allowed in the construction of balades, and followed the rules with precision. Of the poems of theirs we may term “lyrics” — in accord with the loose terminology now current — balades predominate among Chaucer’s shorter poems, and among Gower’s too, although his case is a bit more complicated by the occasional pieces he composed in Latin. These shorter poems in Latin must be ruled out of present consideration, however, since their roots are sunk in an altogether different tradition, and to take them up here would bring us too far afield. In his two vernaculars of English and French, however (save but the so-called “Supplication” the Lover Amans raises to Venus in Book VIII of the *Confessio Amantis*, and the lengthier poem of address “To King Henry IV In Praise of Peace”), all of Gower’s non-narrative output takes the form of balades: eighteen, in the collection known as the *Traité pour essampler les amantz marietz*, and some fifty-four in London, British Library MS Additional 59495 (formerly known as MS Trentham). As their title suggests, the *Traité* balades are intended to form something of an argument; those in MS BL Add. 59495, however, amount to a true narrative sequence. Identified therein as the *Cinkante Balades* (but actually totaling fifty-one, since there are two numbered “III”) these poems tell the story of a love affair of about two years’ duration which ends unsuccessfully for the man, but not the lady, as she rejects one lover in favor of second seemingly more faithful. In the manuscript this sequence is prefaced by two additional balades dedicating the collection to Henry IV, and concludes with another, invoking divine blessings for England as *patria* and for Gower himself as poet. Notably, no balade in English by Gower is known to exist; the *Cinkante Balades* and those of the *Traité* are in French. All of Chaucer’s extant balades, however, are in English.

One question immediately arising from the examples of Chaucer and Gower, then, is why, of the various *formes fixes*, is it the balade that so dominates and directs the “lyric” output of the two foremost English poets of their period? To some degree, their choice was pre-determined. The preferred position granted the balade in England over the other *formes fixes* is apparent in a collections such as Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania MS French 15 that dates from 1350 or perhaps a bit later — a manuscript written in French but unquestionably in England containing 310 *formes fixes* lyrics, the majority balades, but best known for the eleven balades and four chant royaux ascribed to one “Ch” and heretofore raised up, doubtless incorrectly, as Chaucer’s juvenilia. Thus already by mid-century balades, then necessarily the labor of many hands, were the backbone of what was courtly discourse at its extension beyond mere manners.

And “courtly” is the key word here. The latter half of the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries saw political and socio-economic instabilities both in France and in England. Broadly speaking, self-definition became possible: as seldom before, one’s own actions could determine one’s wealth and status — the latter being a concept with special relevance in regard to the history of *formes fixes*, and the elevation of the balade in particular. As I make plain in greater detail in the larger project, *formes fixes*, as explicitly “courtly” modes, are in consequence inescapably political. This latter term I apply both in the usual manner, i.e., indicative of governments and the exercise of public policy, but also with regard to perceptions of power and supremacy in the literary realm as well.

These perceptions, while intertwined and greatly similar in France and England, nevertheless end by taking different postures. The inevitability of this should not be surprising, given the origin of the *formes fixes* in France, and the hegemonic presence of the French language, manners and aesthetics in post-Conquest England. We can see this readily if we note that, absent the centrality of royal and/or aristocratic power, medieval English “lyric” would undoubtedly have continued in directions closer to folkic musics and dance exemplified by “Dronken” and “Maiden in the mor lay” from MS Rawlinson, cited earlier. The

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trajectory of such occasional poetry as we find in that manuscript would have been more legitimately “lyrical,” in the narrowest sense of a musical origin, because at its core its inspiration was “illiterate” in the most basic — and I hope unsuggestive — use of the word. But French poetic forms, like French itself — or successive Frenches, to be more accurate — as the language first of government and subsequently of privilege, came initially to England along with the other baggage unpacked by the invaders. The presence of formes fixes among the natives could only come later, and by conscious adoption. Here it is worth reminding ourselves that formes fixes poetic modes grew from varieties of songs and dances indigenous to France; that in their earliest originations they paralleled the ur-forms of the contents of the English MS Rawlinson. Another way to say this is to note that the French court brought its own folk-rooted balata, rondet, vireli to an England where none of those dances were native, none of those roots were either lived with or recollected as we do the antique customs of elderly relatives. For the resident English, first supplanted, then serially marginalized, upstaged and up-dated, the formes fixes were yet another alien arrival on their soil, one purely literary from the beginning, with all the ramifications of power and manners that history — or lack thereof — implies.

This, of course, was the world in which Chaucer and Gower were learning, as young men seeking a way up, not simply to write, but more specifically, by assuming the identity of writer, to negotiate the vellities of aristocratic and urban power by means of, through the act of, writing. In consequence, we can state categorically that formes fixes—far from being externals for their discourse to add and make natural — were, rather, fully naturalized into that discourse, to the degree that form, content, and the purposes one might have for manipulating both, had become indistinguishable. Not only from each other but also — to move to a second point already anticipated in the foregoing — ultimately indistinguishable as well from one’s status as a participant in a closely controlled socio-political — and hence economic — community. Writing formes fixes, and balades especially, was, in short, a high status move with real-world implications and rewards.

“Status,” however, is not a simple condition, as it applies to literary influence. At its broadest — and I have employed it thus far in that way — “status” is of course an hierarchical concept, a demarcation of social class. The courtly discourse I have been describing, to which formes fixes poetry belongs, both identifies and empowers its speakers, simultaneously marking them as members of the upper strata and facilitating their acquisition, maintenance and exercise of wealth and privilege. In the cases of Gower and Chaucer, it was the transformative potency of this learned discourse which conferred upon these two sons of the mercantile the means and the occasions to “speak truth to power,” as the cliché has it presently.

But “status” by the end of the fourteenth century was gaining an application unique to poets, one that paralleled almost exactly the expanding inclusivity of “auctoritas” as a viable goal for ambitious writers of the vernacular. The ideological movement was, of course, outward from Italy, but by 1400 it was fully operative and in place in France, and no less so in England. Once again and as well, the literary and the political were inextricably mixed: the same ambitions prompting Machaut and Deschamps, and more urgently Christine de Pizan, on one side of the Channel and Gower and Chaucer on the other, to cast an Italianized concern toward an emergent idea called “posterity” (an exercise both seductive and, no doubt, completely wracking, especially alone with one’s book after sundown), prompted no less, and no lesser, beings than Charles V of France and the dukes of Berry, Richard II and Henrys IV and V of England. Notably, theirs is the patronage sought by writers of formes fixes in both countries. Yet these patrons were themselves looking outward and roundabout for models after which to define their own magnificence, first for their subjects but second — and increasingly — with an eye toward a posthumous legacy. As potential facilitators of monarchial fame, poets begin to acquire value proportionate to their perceived skills — skills more easily measured against the set patterns of formes fixes. The awakening consciousness of fame and status, present and posthumous, in their respective roles as poets and princes that thus intertwines politics, power and poetic form underwrites as well the ascendance of formes fixes.

Let me bring these remarks to a close by offering the case of John Gower’s Cinkante Balades as a concrete example of what I realize — with due apologies! — has been a series of sometimes-arid theoretical claims. I wish to consider two related questions raised by these poems. The first — why balades? — should finally close a loop opened earlier, when that query was initiated in general terms; the
second — why French? — is closely related. Unsurprisingly, to both the simple answer is “status,”poly-valently understood.

As I demonstrated several years ago, Gower’s Cinkante Balades owe their inspiration no less than their title to the Livre de Cent Ballades, begun by Jean de Saint-Pierre, Seneschal d’Eu, sometime in the latter 1380’s. The Livre de Cent Ballades was the most popular book in Paris in 1390 and stayed so for several years, owing no doubt to its steady engagement of so many significant noblemen and their circles. The thirteen “responders,” for example, include Regnaut de Trie, later the Admiral of France; Jean de Chambrillac, Seneschal of Périgord; the dukes of Orléans (“Monsieur de Touraine”) and Berry (“Monseigneur de Berry”); and interestingly, for our purposes, Guillaume de Tignonville, friend of Deschamps and Christine, and François d’Auberichicourt, whose father Eustache fought with the Black Prince in Spain, and whose relation Jean, a long-time Lancastrian retainer and confidant of John of Gaunt, probably was known to Gower and Chaucer.

It seems inconceivable that soon after 1390 Chaucer and Gower hadn’t heard about the new interest in ballades. In all likelihood, Chaucer and Gower took up writing ballades, Chaucer in English, Gower in French, under the influence of the popularity of the form in France in 1390. And like Deschamps, both were poets sensitive to the powerful and to the politics, domestic and international, of their times. Gower very probably made the future Henry IV a gift of ballades while the latter was yet Derbeie Comes (Earl of Derby), receiving as a reward the “SSS” collar visible today on his tomb effigy in Southwark Cathedral. (Whether he wrote them specifically for Henry remains in question; but clearly in 1392 or 1393, a gift of formes fixes verse — balades in particular, and especially one so titled — would have pleased the cosmopolitan young aristocrat Henry of Derby. Between mid-March and mid-April 1390, Henry had taken part in the tournament at St. Inglevert, situated between Boulogne and Calais. A truly international affair, the St. Inglevert tournament was organized to provide chivalric opportunity for high-blooded warriors idled by the truce. Its inspiration was a challenge issued by three French knights to take on all comers for the honor of France. One of these — perhaps not insignificantly — was the young Boucicaut, a contributing poet to the Livre de Cent Ballades. St. Inglevert was a leisurely gathering, of camaraderie off the field and much occasional talk. It seems unlikely that discussions at the tournament would have excluded the poems of the Livre de Cent Ballades then so popular, or that Henry could have missed learning about the collection. If he did, and praised them, word would easily have reached Gower, whose connections with the Lancastrian households at that time were apparently quite close.

Nor would Henry’s interest in an English answer to the Cent Balades have been whetted solely by jousting with his French peers. We must also take into consideration the influences of Italy, and attitudes the future ruler of England doubtless encountered there toward kingship and the value of poetry in shaping one’s posterity. In 1392 Henry spent several months in Milan, as the guest of Gian Galeazzo

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Visconti, whose sister Violante Henry’s uncle Lionel had married in 1368. He was royally entertained, and in the company of Gian Galeazzo he visited not only the tomb of his uncle, but also those of St. Augustine and Boethius.\textsuperscript{10} In the Visconti court the celebration of antiquity, and a neo-Roman desire for posthumous renown were much in evidence for Henry to soak up. Clearly it is this latter that gave impetus to the interest both Henry and Gian Galeazzo were soon to demonstrate in bringing poets into their courts, apparently to pen their praises for eternity. That, and probably their own insecurities as well, for both held power as usurpers, Gian Galeazzo of his brother Bernabò in 1385, and Henry of Richard II in 1399. It is in this context that their simultaneous interest in Christine de Pizan, who had composed her own \textit{Cent Ballades} collection in 1399-1400, is highly suggestive.\textsuperscript{11} In 1399-1400 and 1401, respectively, Henry, as newly crowned king, and Gian Galeazzo, separately saw fit to invite Christine to join their retinues, there to function in each case as a resident poet \textit{laudator}.\textsuperscript{12} At that relatively early point in her career, her \textit{Cent Ballades} must have been her chief claim to fame, and the source of attentions paid by Henry and Visconti.

Given this result, it is unavoidable to conclude that in 1392, poetry — balades especially — were a memorable topic of Henry’s conversations in Italy, as they were in France. To be sure, what he learned differed in each venue: France taught him that balades were the aristocratic form of choice, and that among the sophisticated and the powerful “jousting” at times could be done with a pen as effectively as on horseback; Italy taught him the worth of poets’ labors convincing others of his right to rule, and in subsequently crafting how he would be remembered by future generations. After that, to return to England to find \textit{Cinkante Balades} waiting for him could only have made Gower’s gift the more welcome, and the more likely to earn their poet a rich collar as a reward.

But if Gower recognized these ambitions and attitudes in Henry — as I have no doubt whatsoever he did — and specifically decided upon balades to address and impress them, he also very clearly made this choice of poetic form to fulfill precisely those aspirations, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, he felt in himself. No less than Petrarch (and doubtless under his influence), Gower — and Chaucer too — were perhaps the first English poets to know the competitive side of their aesthetic calling, a “jousting” at their own occupational St. Inglevert, a kind of tournament no less real because metaphoric, where at stake was authorial status, present and future.

For our purposes, it is precisely this core \textit{attitude} that is interesting — because the competitive spirit so present in the strategy of Gower’s legacy cannot be a last-minute permutation. This competitiveness as it surfaces in Gower’s relationship with Chaucer has been variously noted over the years by more than one reader, and there is no reason to imagine Gower confining to his countryman alone his impulses to challenge other poets — particularly since poetic contention would seem to have been a continental notion to begin with, and specifically associated with the emergence of the balade as the dominant lyric form at the end of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{13}

In this broader view, Gower’s \textit{Cinkante Balades} take shape as integral to a \textit{process} of conscious self-fashioning which intensified later in the poet’s life. That Gower would turn his hand to the new challenge from France — and that he would see balade-writing as a challenge to be met by mastering a fresh skill, and hence a conduit to bring reward and to enhance his stature as ‘auctor’ — seems a natural direction for a poet of his sort at that historical juncture. The news of the new form, in short, would have arrived

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Kirby, \textit{Henry IV}, 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Christine tells the story of these invitations in \textit{L’advision}, ed. Reno and Dulac, 112-114.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} On the competition between Chaucer and Gower (which may or may not have taken place), see John H. Fisher, \textit{John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer}. New York: New York University Press, 1964, 27-31.
\end{itemize}
packaged with contest. I have argued elsewhere that both *Cinkante Balades* and *Traitié* are overtly combative, and that they structurally target French models by deliberately borrowing lines and language from well-known poems of Machaut, Deschamps and other contemporary French poets only to reverse their meaning by writing them into new and staunchly moral contexts. Absent from that discussion was any speculation as to why Gower might have been drawn to this. I submit now that his motive was two-fold: (1) to respond, in his self-proclaimed “English” way, to the invitation posed by the *Livre de Cent Ballades*, and please his prince in the bargain; and (2) to stake forcefully his mastery of the *formes fixes* by composing what no Englishman had yet accomplished (and would not again, until Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* nearly 150 years later), a long, narrative sequence whose title — *Cinkante Balades* — leaves its origin (and target) the *Livre de Cent Ballades* in little doubt. If he subsequently saw these poems into Henry of Derby’s hands, as seems likely, or only planned to, Gower did not, I think, write them solely for England’s new ruler. The primary intended audience for his two ballade sequences is the same as that of the *Livre de Cent Ballades*: other poets and posterity — that is to say, all of us.

This is, then, a wholly different sort of ambition, and a wholly different sort of “lyric,” that Gower is writing: whatever anonymous soul it was who composed “Maiden in the mor lay” had none of this in mind. In consequence, the lyric of the latter ought not to be lumped together with Gower’s balades, or Chaucer’s, in any taxonomy of style. To expunge the aporia at which we began, we must use different criteria to classify poetic types. When we do, that some will continue to be termed lyrics, and others become known by another name entirely — one probably yet to be invented — ought to come as no surprise.

Appendix

#1. “Maiden in the mor lay’
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson D. 913, f. 1v, item 8

Maiden in the mor lay
In the mor lay
Seuenyst fulle
Seuenyst fulle
Maiden in the mor lay
In the mor lay
Seuenistes fulle ant a day

Welle was hire mete
Wat was hire mete
The primerole ant the
The primerole ant the
Welle was hire mete
Wat was hire mete
The primerole ant the violet

Welle was hire dryng
Wat was hire dryng
The chelde water of the
The chelde water of the
Well was hire dryng

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Wat was hire dryng
The chelde water of the welle spring

Welle was hire bour
Wat was hire bour
The rede ros an te
The rede rose an te
Welle was hire bour
Wat was hire bour
The rede rose an te lilie flour

#2. “Dronken”
Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson D. 913, f. 1’, item 12

D…….. dronken dronken
Dronken dronken ydronken
Dronken is Tabart
Dronken is Tabart atte wyne
Hay
Ye haveth al ydronken
Suster Walter Peter
Ye dronke al depe
And ichulle eke
Stondet alle stille
Stille stille stille
Stondet alle stille
Stille as any ston
Trippe a lutel wit thi fot
Ant let thi body go

#3. “Truth” (or “Balade de bon conseyl”)
Geoffrey Chaucer

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

Tempest the noght al croked to redresse,
In trust of hir that turneth as a bal;
Gret reste stant in litel besinesse,
Be war therfore to sporne ayeysns an al,
Stryve not, as doth the crokke with the wal.
Daunte thyself, that dauntest otheres dede,
And trouthe the shal delivere, it is no drede.

That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse;
The wrestling for this world axeth a fal.
Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;  
Hold thy heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede,  
And trouthe the shal delivere, it is no drede.

Therefore, thou Vache, leve thy old wrecchednesse;  
Unto the world leve now to be thrall.  
Crye him mercy, that of his hy gooodnesse  
Made thee of noght, and in especial  
Draw unto him, and pray in general  
For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich mede;  
And trouthe the shal delivere, it is no drede.

#4.  
Gower: And ek he can carolles make,  
Rondeal, balade and virelai.  
And with al this, if that he may [CA I. 2708-10]

And also I have ofte assaied  
Rondeal, balade and virelai  
For hire on whom myn herte lai  
To make, and also forto peinte  
Caroles with my wordes qweinte [CA I. 2726-30]

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Chaucer:  
Legend of Good Women (F) 422-23:  
…many an ympne for your halydayes  
That highten balades, roundels, virelais

Canterbury Tales V. 947-48:  
Of swich matere made he manye layes  
Songes, compleintes, roundels, virelayes.

#5.  
Parliament of Foules (ll. 680-92):  
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,  
That hast thes winters wedres overshake,  
And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!

Saynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte,  
Thus syngen smale foules for thy sake:  
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,  
That hast thes winters wedres overshake.

Wel han they cause for to gladden ofte,  
Sith ech of hem recovered hath hys make,  
Ful blissful mowe they singe when they wake:  
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe,  
That hast thes winters wedres overshake,  
And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!

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11 Characteristics of Medieval Literature

- Heroism: from both Germanic and Christian traditions, sometimes mingled in literature.
- The Green Knight: a work that presents an idealized behavior.
- Literature as a moral lesson.
- Loyalty to the king.
- Chivalry.
- Courtly Love: modeled on feudal relationships, serves his lady with same obedience.
- Idealized love: nonexistent in 'real life.'
- Formes fixes: the principal forms of music and poetry in 14th- and 15th-century France. Three forms predominated. The rondeau followed the pattern ABaAabAB; A (a) and B (b) represent repeated musical phrases; capital letters indicate repetition of text in a refrain, while lowercase letters indicate new.

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