

# WILLIAM FITZHERBERT'S DIVINE OFFICE

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A Resource Text for Continental Poetic Traditions

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## Abstract

A Breton lai or lay is a lyrical, narrative poem written in couplets and refrains and is based on Greek, Arabic and Persian poetic structures and themes. Lais were mainly composed in France, England, the low countries and Germany during the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries. The Breton *lai* were similar in purpose to Skolion σκόλιον which were songs sung by invited guests at banquets in ancient Greece and they evoked the ancient Persian *ghazal* in their tributes. Their enormous contribution to the linguistic cultures of Europe impacted language development for centuries.

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## Introduction

The roots of lai development are found in ancient Greek and Arabic-Persian culture. Often extolling the virtues of the gods or heroic men, Greek *skolia* were improvised to suit the occasion and were accompanied by a lyre, which was handed about from singer to singer as the time for each scolion came around. "Capping" verses were exchanged, "by varying, punning, riddling, or cleverly modifying" the previous contribution. Skolia are often referred to as 'banquet songs,' 'convivial songs' or 'drinking songs'. The term also refers to poetry composed in the same form. In later use, the form was used in a more stately manner for chorus poetry in praise of the gods or heroes.

The *ghazal* is a poetic form consisting of rhyming couplets and a refrain, with each line sharing the same meter. A ghazal may be understood as a poetic expression of both the pain of loss or separation and the beauty of love in spite of that pain. The form is ancient, originating in ancient Arabic poem in Arabia long before the birth of Islam. It is derived from the Arabian *panegyric qasida*.

## I.

Bretonese *Lai* poetic structure provided a similar format for trouveres to retell epics, tragedies, fables or comedies in a variety of vernaculars. The tradition of “capping” may explain the curious “circular” variation quality of traditional Bretonese *lai* refrains. The secular English term is a loan from the Old French 13th century *lai*. The origin of the French term itself is not clear and may be a loan from the German *Leich*, meaning *lai* or funeral, reflected in archaic or dialectal English *Lake* meaning "sport or play." Musical settings were improvisations on standard melodic forms.

The *Leich* MF 165, 10: *Swaz Ich Nû Niuwer Maere Sage* is a poem about the complaints of a spurned lover by minnesinger Reinmar von Hagenau d. 1205. It was so popular that poet Walther von der Vogelweide d. 1230 included it in his obituary. This minnesinger repertoire was collected in the Codex Manesse, Große Heidelberger Liederhandschrift completed in 1330 for the Manesse family in Zurich. The text of *Swaz Ich* expresses traditional themes of the troubadour or minnesinger in the court of love in a brilliant reworking of the line structure of the Breton *lai*; *abc adc be def gf*. It is a retort to Marie de France’s fabulist contemplation on the subject.

Swaz ich nû niuwer mære sage,  
 des endarf mich nieman frâgen:  
 ich enbin niht frô.  
 Die friunt verdriuzet mîner klage.  
 Des man ze vil gehœret,  
 dem ist allem sô.  
 Nû hân ich beidiu schaden  
 unde spot.  
 Waz mir doch leides unverdienet,  
 daz bedenke got,  
 und âne schult geschiht!  
 Ich engelige herzeliebe bî,  
 sône hât an mîner freude nieman niht.

Bretonese *lai* structure of couplets and refrain also recall the Arabic-Persian *ghazal* which had spread into South Asia in the 12th century due to the influence of Sufi mystics and the courts of the new Islamic Sultanate. Trade partnerships with the Middle East and Asia included a transmission of court culture to Frankish-Gall centers of trade and power in Cadiz, England, Sicily, Paris, Utrecht, Aachen, Nijmegen, Ghent, Mainz, Leipzig and Wörtzburch in the form of luxury trade, poetry, music and art. Persian poetry was promoted by strong court patronage and was popular because of the demand for panegyrics and the سبک فاخر "exalted style."

In some forms each couplet in a Ghazal ends on the same word or phrase *radif* and is followed by the couplet’s rhyming word *qafia*. The last

couplet includes a proper name, often the poet's. William of York's antiphons recall a modified ghazal form suitable for a spiritual leader which was to provide a model for the court poets of the day. Musicians performing his divine office would have been able to demonstrate the ability to improvise 'sur,' melody and 'lai,' rhythm; the arrangement of rhythmic *lai* in a cycle known as *taal* formed a foundation over which improvised scales or *raga* were played.

Iubilemus regum *regI* qui concedit nos hic *regI* per *Guillelmi* meritA  
 Iesu nostra fiduciA honor noster et gloriA amor virtus leticiA  
 Vita veritas et viA iustorum pax et patriA tua nos clemenciA  
*Guillelmi* per suffragiA de mundi miseriA transfer ad palaciA

Like William of York's Latin antiphons, the poetic form of the Breton *lai* was structured around stanzas of 5 or 6 lines containing couplets and refrains. The accompanying music was varied, not repeated. It is this characteristic that distinguished the *lai* from the *rondo* and the *ballad*. Marie de France's famous rendering of Aesop's Fables were ironic statements about the limitations of caste, sexuality and race using a *lai* sequence hymn structure: *y aa bb cc dd*.

Saveir poez par ceste fable  
 la maniere de meinte gent  
 mult le puet l'uum sovier sovent  
 ki tant se vuelent echalcier  
 e en tel liu aparagier  
 ki n'avient pas a leur corsage  
 ensurquetut a leur parage  
 A meint en est si avenu  
 cum a l'asne ki fut batu.

Marie de France's Aesop's fables were translated into Dutch in the 13th century by Jacob van Merlant (1230-1300). He hints in *Spiegel Historiael* at an earlier source for the fables and adroitly points attention to the "mixed" heritage of a poetic tradition that expressed cultural attitudes of the day, using a *lai* sequence hymn structure without a refrain, *aa bb cc dd ee*:

In Cyrus tiden was Esopus  
 De *Favelare* wi leffent dus  
 Die *favela* conde maken  
 Hoe heefden en vogel spraken  
 Hierute is gemaecht *Aviaen*  
 En andere boeken sonder waen  
 Die man Espopus heet, bi namen  
 Waren oec di si bequamen  
 Die havet Calfstaf en Noydekyn

Ghedict en rime scone en fyn.

The famous 14th century French allegorical *Roman de Fauvel*, traditionally attributed to French royal clerks *Gervais de Bus* and *Chaillou de Pesstain*, tells of Fauvel, a fallow or "muddy beige" colored horse who has risen to prominence in the French royal court in a series of interlocking songs in a variety of formats. The anti-hero's name, which, when broken down, forms the name *fau-vel* or "false veil," in an acrostic outlining a sin for each letter: *Flatterie* Flattery, *Avarice* Greed, *Vilenie* Guile, *Variété* Inconstancy, *Envie* Envy, and *Lâcheté* Cowardice. In *mari miserie*, an extract from *Roman de Fauvel*, BNF fr. 146, 1316 illustrates the blended Christian and "Levant" references of the ghazal-lai, *aa b cb b*:

In marie miserie maris stella  
 erantes cotidie a procella  
 defende nos et precare  
 cominm pie ut at portas glorie  
 nos trahat per hoc mare  
 nos que *Fauvel* faciat superare

The *lai* reached its highest level of development as a musical and poetic form in the work of Guillaume de Machaut d. 1377; 19 lais composed by the famous 14th century *Ars Nova* composer survive. The musical settings of these *lai* are the most sophisticated and highly developed among Machaut's secular works. Machaut's use of *Lai* poetic form recalled the original Breton line structure of two "long" phrases, two "short" and a "refrain, *abb a a ccc a*:"

Amis, t'amour me contreint  
 Si qu'il me convient descrire  
 Le martyre  
 Qui empire  
 Mon corps et mon cuer esteint  
 Et de grieés si m'enseint  
 Que je ne saroie eslire  
 Le meins pire;  
 Dont matire  
 N'ay qui à joie me meint

Machaut's legacy is followed in a famous example of Dutch "gheselle" lied, *Edigdius waer bestu bleven* (Anonymus) which has been sung in Dutch culture since 1400, *aba bbab aab aab aab aab*.

Egidius, waer bestu bleven?  
 Mi lanct na di, gheselle mijn.  
 Du coors die doot, du liets mi tleven!  
 Dat was gheselschap goet ende fijn,  
 Het scen teen moeste ghestorven sijn.

Nu bestu in den troon verheven,  
 Claerre dan der zonnen scijn:  
 Alle vruecht es di ghegheven.  
 Egidius, waer bestu bleven?  
 Mi lanct na di, gheselle mijn!  
 Du coors die doot, du liets mi tleven.  
 Nu bidt vor mi, ic moet noch sneven  
 Ende in de weerelt liden pijn.  
 Verware mijn stede di beneven:  
 Ic moet noch zinghen een liedekijn;  
 Nochtan moet emmer ghestorven sijn.  
 Egidius, waer bestu bleven?  
 Mi lanct na di, gheselle mijn!  
 Du coors die doot, du liets mi tleven.

Examples of late medieval uses of the *Lai* form are also found in the work of Pierre de Nesson. The *Lay de Guerre* was composed by Pierre de Nesson to mourn the defeat of the French at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415; “*Guerre*” as the “author” of the poem proclaims against a rival, “*Paix*.” Nesson’s *Vigiles des Morts* renders the ancient sequence hymn structure y aabbcc x as a modified *lai* in a rhyming scheme *aa b c cb*, using closed line pairings to emphasize the closed nature of death.

Et lors, quand tu trépasseras,  
 Dès le jour que mort tu seras,  
 Ton orde chair commencera  
 À rendre pugnaise pueur.  
 Que ne gouttes-tu de sueur  
 Quand tu penses que ce sera ?

Hartmann Schedel, a student in Leipzig from 1461-2 had returned from Padua with sketchbooks of lute tablature. Schedel was a student of Johannes Ciconia (c. 1370--1412) who was a composer and music theorist of the late Middle Ages. Ciconia was born in Liège, but worked most of his adult life in Italy, particularly in the service of the papal chapel(s) and at Padua cathedral. Although Ciconia lived in Italy, he continued to compose French *virelai* which were often heard by audiences as instrumental music.

The lied *Myn trud gheselle* (anonymus) was compiled in Schedel’s tablature books and stands as a classic of the genre for lute. It is likely that the melody and text were copied from the collection of Heinrich Laufenberg who lived and worked between c.1390 and 1460 in the Swiss canton of Argovia, southern Germany and Alsace. He was the author of a vast body of works, comprising of spiritual hymns, didactic epics and religious prose. A manuscript had been housed in the Strasbourg Library for centuries until a

fire destroyed it in the late 19th century. A copy did survive, however and this had allowed scholars and musicians to maintain the tradition.

Jacob Obrecht's *1457/8 – 1505* "Roman" *Liedteksten* or Little Songs, attained pan European fame around 1500. Deeply imbedded in the culture, the texts of the *liedteksten* evoked Bretonese lai and provided both a snapshot of harsh reality and a ribald retort to Marie de France's Fables. Since Obrecht's usual compositions were masses for the church, his instrumental renderings of the *lied* stood outside of his standard repertoire. He may not have known the lyrics of these popular songs--but he did know the tunes because by 1500 the genre had almost completely become instrumental. Obrecht left more than thirty secular songs, although some are weakly attributed and are likely arrangements only.

The courtly song genre seems to have held little appeal for Obrecht, as the songs overwhelmingly survived without text, graced with light-hearted or folk titles. Many, and perhaps most, seem to be explicitly instrumental and are of modest length. Obrecht's polyphonic instrumental settings of these famous drinking songs helped him to pay off debts at a time when his patronage was uncertain. Obrecht's elegant settings of delightful melody was what made him famous. Obrecht's treatment of the profane had influence upon the paintings of Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569).

Meiskin es u cutkin ru  
 Ick draghe de mutse clutse  
 Wat scheefjes en wat schuin  
 Bekroont hij mijn kruin  
 Half gruijs Half bruin  
 Ik kan daar niet veel meer aan verprutsen  
 Meschine su chut chiru  
 uadebtighi mete done  
 Laetemitas tendat bideghu  
 Obien tot morchent moen  
 Jeso luaer Jeso daschar  
 it asternaer obie tot morghent moen.

William of York's antiphon settings and cast of characters biblically mirrors the stylized images of the ghazal world--garden, desert, wine-house, prison--and its supporting cast of characters-- the Rival, the Messenger, the Doorkeeper, the Advisor, the Ascetic--as each figure played a role in this passion play. The antiphons are set between Glorias, Gospels, Psalms and Alleluya chants which provided additional commentary on William's vita. The Alleluyas found in early manuscripts containing William's office resemble the famous "In Hoc Anni Circulo" chant, which, in Aquitaine, was heard as sacred processional music. The ghazal format of the antiphons

provides a perfect structure to express William's mysticism and longing for the divine.

Marthe ministeriO copulat mariaM rachelis amplexibuS  
 fruitur post *liaM*  
 Fide fuit *phineeS* ut iob mansuetuS paciens ut israel ut noe  
 discretuS  
 Fidelis ut abraham ut lot hospitaliS sagax ut samuel uT  
 ioseph liberaliS

A French variant of Wilhelme's historia is found in the Oscott Psalter, 1261. Willelme's reworked vita recalls *Orfeo's* alien existence in the Romanz poem *Sir Orfeo*. The Oscott Psalter was written in Oxford at a time when Henry III was seeking relief from the Oxford Provisions in a period of great social unrest. Henry III's mission was to reach outward and so he developed credit relationships with Flemish textile markets that helped to reestablish trade relations between Flanders and England.

The now separate folio from *MS 54215* depicts an image of a clergyman wearing a miter and a yoke shown without pallium or crozier. The image may refer to St. William of York's troubled episcopal tenure of the previous century. The Oscott *lai*, written in vernacular French refers to a false allegation, the identity of the "real" culprit, a correct attribution of authorship of the metrical vernacular psalms and a benefit to repair the damage. The *lai* is both panegyric and epigram, *aab cc b*.

'Cil est benure  
 Ki nest pas ale  
 As conseils as feluns:  
 Ne estut el sentier  
 Out *Ceus* Ki uunt pecher  
 Ne as seges a bricuns."  
 'Willelme ki me escrit  
 Seit de deu beneit  
 Kil nul a rachete.  
 Est li doint la grace.  
 Kil maigne vant la face  
 kant sera trepasse'

William's Fitzherbert's antiphons *ca. 1177* bear resemblance in structure, tone and subject matter to The Romanz *The Wooing of Etain* from the Irish *Tochmarc Étaíne ca. 1106* and the Anglo-Norman *Partonapeus de Blois*, or *La Vie Seint Edmund le Roi ca. 1148-56* by Bury St. Edmund's Benedictine monk *Denis Pyramus*.

*Tochmarc Étaíne* begins, *abc dec*:  
 Gabais Eochaid  
 Airium rigi

nErenn ro  
 Giallsad  
 coiceadaigh

Erenn do

*Partonapeus de Blois* begins, *aaa*:

Jeo ai nun *Denis Pirus*

Les jurs jolis de ma joenesce

S'en vunt, si trei jeo a veilesce

Following in the poetic traditions established in the Angevin and Capetian courts, the fragmentary child Ballad 19 "*King Orfeo*," a Middle English narrative poem written ca. 1330 treats the familiar subject matter of hidden identity, exile, wandering and the underground world of music through the *lai* format *aba cdd*, with refrain interpolations:

19A.1 Der lived a king inta da aste,

Refrain: Scowan ürla grün

Der lived a lady in da wast.

Refrain: Whar giorten han grün oarlac

19A.2 Dis king he has a huntin gaen,

He's left his Lady Isabel alane.

In lines 47-50 a couplet rhyme scheme *ee ff* marks the material as prefatory, outlining the complex heritage of the narrative, *aa bb*:

"This king sojournd in *Traciens*,

That was a cité of noble defens -

For *Winchester* was cleped tho

*Traciens*, withouten no."

Modern revisitations of this tradition are found in Longfellow's *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*, published in 1847 which immortalized the tragic story of deportation for New World audiences and *Ave Maris Stella*, an Acadian anthem, deeply rooted in the Romanz culture of the Breton and Poitevin diaspora.

## Conclusion

William of York's antiphon chant settings found in Andrew Hughes' edited edition of the Lambeth Palace Sion College ms. L1: Noted breviary of York: olim Sion College *MS Arc. L.40/2/L.1* are intricately related to Persian and Arabic classifications: C (C), re (D), mi (Eb), F (F), ground (G), La (A) if (b flat) if (b / flat half). It is very likely that the scribe of William's office wrote what he heard with imperfect knowledge of the complex structure of maquam permutation in more familiar Gregorian modal terms. A Western rite system adequate enough to record micro tunings did not exist in 12th century France. Early renderings of William of York's divine office were written using a system that allowed for ease of transcription; only insiders

who had training in the tradition would be capable of lifting its performance from the page.

## Appendix

### A. In Hoc Anni Circulo, ca. 1130 (translated from Latin)

In hoc anni circulo

♩ = 140

Staff

In the end - ing of the year Life and  
light to man ap - pear; And the Ho - ly  
Babe is here, De Vir - gi ne; And the  
Holy Ba - be is here, De Vir - gi ne Ma - ri a.

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a Latin hymn. It consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 140. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is simple, using mostly quarter and half notes. The lyrics are: 'In the end - ing of the year Life and light to man ap - pear; And the Ho - ly Babe is here, De Vir - gi ne; And the Holy Ba - be is here, De Vir - gi ne Ma - ri a.'

### B. In Mari Miserie, ca. 1310

In Mari Miserie

aus dem Roman de Fauvel

In ma - rie mi - se - ri - e ma - ris stel - la er - ran - tes co -

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a Latin hymn. It consists of two staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef staff, and the accompaniment is on a bass clef staff. The lyrics are written below the notes. The lyrics are: 'In ma - rie mi - se - ri - e ma - ris stel - la er - ran - tes co -'.

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### C. Egidius, Waer Bestu Bleven, ca. 1400

R E - gi - di - us, waer bes - tu ble - ven? Mi lanct na di, ghe - sel - le  
 Cl Nu bes - tu in dentroon ver - he - ven Claer - re dan der son - nen  
 R E - gi - di - us, waer bes - tu ble - ven? Mi lanct na di, ghe - sel - le  
 C2 Nu bidt vor mi, ic moet noch sne - ven, Ende in de we - reld li - den  
 R E - gi - di - us, waer bes - tu ble - ven? Mi lanct na di, ghe - sel - le

mijn. Du coors die doot, du liets mi tle - ven.  
 scijn, Al - le vruecht es di ghe - ghe - ven.  
 mijn. Du coors die doot, du liets mi tle - ven.  
 pijn; Ver - ware mijn ste - de di be - ne - ven;  
 mijn. Du coors die doot, du liets mi tle - ven.

R Dat was ghe - sel - scap goet en - de fijn, Het sceen teen moeste ghe - stor - ven zijn.  
 C2 Ic moet noch singheneen lie - de - kij, Noch - tan moet emmer ghe - stor - ven zijn.

### D. Myn Trud Gheselle, ca. 1430

D-Wa cod. VII B Hs Nr. 264, fol. A'  
 diplomatic transcription: Marc Lewon, 2013

Myn trud gheselle

### E. Meiskin Es u Cutkin ru, ca. 1500

Jacobus Obrecht

Ick dra - ghe de mut - se clut - se, Wat scheef - jes en wat  
 Ick dra - ghe de mut - se clut - se, de mut - se clut - se, Wat  
 Ick dra - ghe de mut - se clut - se, de mut - se clut - se, Wat

### F. Ave Maris Stella ca. 1150

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### Ave, maris stella

1 A - ve, ma - ris stel - la, De - i  
2 Su - mens il - lud A - ve Ga - bri -  
3 Sol - ve via - cla re - lis, Pro - fer  
4 Mon - stra te es - se ma - trem: Su - mat  
5 Sit lass De - o Pa - tri, San - mo

Ma - ter al - ma, At - que sem - per Vir - go,  
é - lis o - re, Fun - da nos in pa - ce,  
lu - men cae - cis: Ma - la no - stra pel - le,  
per te pec - ces, Qui pro no - bis na - tus  
Chri - sto de - cus, Spi - ri - tu - i San - cto,

Fe - lix cae - li por - ta,  
Mu - tans He - vae no - men,  
Bo - na cum - cta go - sce,  
Tu - lit es - so tu - us,  
Tri - bus ho - nor u - nus. A - men.