An Encounter of Lyric and Epistle:
Textualization of "Partyng"
in Late Middle English Epistolary Love Lyrics*

Ju ok Yoon

Yonsei University

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This paper aims to closely examine the ways in which the theme of "partyng," absence, or separation is textualized in three late medieval English epistolary love lyrics. The genre of love letters in poem (or love poems in the epistle, as Giles Constable rightly suggests (12)) has a long history, in which, if a single one by Sextus Propertius is put aside, a more familiar Roman poet Ovid's *Epistulae Heroidum*, or more commonly known *Heroides*, will make the first salient example of this interesting genre (Spearing 212). Exactly how medieval English epistolary love poems began to take the form and gain currency by the late Middle Ages is still speculated upon among commentators. Normally, it can be assumed that

the rapid spread of letters as a popular mode of written communication, which benefitted from the development of literacy among laity and also from the increasing availability of paper at lower prices in place of expensive parchment, has defining bearings upon the proliferation of this particular literary genre in the late fourteenth century and especially in the fifteenth century (McNamer 198; Barratt 262). It is nonetheless a pity that the relations between the wide circulation of the genre and these cultural and material changes in the fields of literacy, written communication, and writing materials in the late Middle Ages have been no subject of serious discussions and, if ever, only in passing and negligibly. Overall, the general epistolarity and the peculiar medieval epistolary practices embedded in these epistolary love lyrics are not given proper attentions, and these poems are most likely appraised diversions within the corpus of fortuitous medieval English lyrics. Hopefully, paying attention to how the idea of absence, distance, or separation is textualized in some poems will illuminate this.

II. Lyrics and Letters in the Middle Ages

Admitting that the ideas of medieval lyrics and letters are working together in Middle English epistolary love lyrics, it should be a due course to look into the general attributes of these two medieval modes or genres of writing, prior to discussing some specific examples of the poems. First, believed to have originated in ancient Greece as a song accompanying a string instrument called a lyre, lyrics in the late Middle Ages, "song" and "literary," unexceptionally included love lyrics, still carried some "song-like qualities" prominently conveyed in such forms as stanza, rhyme, alliteration, and rhythm (Duncan, *Companion* xxiii-iv). This being said of some qualities of lyrics in antiquity and the late Middle Ages is far from

meaning that lyric is a fixed and thus easily grasped genre, as it looks. On the contrary, as some literary critics and historians of the pre-and early modern periods, including A. C. Spearing (175-76) and Brian Boyd (26-32), have rather despairingly confessed, lyric seems to be one of the literary terms that are notoriously slippery from the attempts of demarcation. I share Thomas G. Duncan's observation that the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of lyrics as "short poems ⋯ *directly expressing the poet"s own thoughts and sentiments*"(my italics) is redolent too much with the nineteenth-century tastes and tempers for the genre (*Companion* xxiii) that is expected to be personal, intimate, and spontaneous and can be therefore applicable to earlier lyrics only in reserved respects. The poets of Middle English love lyrics do write of intimate sentiments, but only in their own veins of the term.

The vast majority of Middle English love lyrics are anonymous, without the contexts of authors and with "lack of coherent collections or anthologies"(Boffey, "Middle English" 3; Boffey, "Manuscripts" 8; Duncan, *Companion* xvi).[1] Despite the absence of authorial contexts and casual provenances of production, medieval English love poets nonetheless bear a striking resemblance to one another, in that they work within, or rather work with, the ethos of the conventional "*fin amor*" or "fyn lovynge" in English, wherein the devoted, obedient, yet abject lover as *cavaliere servente* is idealizing and worshipping his perfect yet unattainable lady and pleading with her for mercy as the only remedy for his profound sorrow and death-like pain (Duncan, *Companion* xiii; Scattergood 39-40). The

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[1] "Surviving texts of lyrics seldom if ever have the status of authorial copies. On the contrary, they are all too frequently the seemingly casual productions of careless, unprofessional scribes, versions not only characterized by bizarre spellings but also frequently marred by textual corruption"(Duncan xvi); "[Middle English] lyrics tend to be jotted down in odd places, blank pages in manuscripts or in invitingly wide margins. Some snatches of secular lyrical poetry have survived only because they were included in other texts"(Scattergood 44).

routine obstacles that are thrown before the lover take on multifarious forms, as illustrated with the lady's married status, her indifference to him, her changed attitude, social and geographical distances located between the lover and the lady, "spiteful guardians" of the lady, and the like (Scattergood 40). Though in what specific manners the culture of *fin amor* made its debut on late medieval English soil is still an on-going debate among literary historians and commentators, it may be relatively fair to suggest for our present purpose that this *topos* of *fin amor* conveyed in Middle English love lyrics can find its most readily recognizable literary precedent from high medieval French literature, most prominently "the troubadour poetry of Provence, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, and Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*"(Scattergood 39). The significance of the ostensibly self-contradictory phenomenon that late medieval English poets of love lyrics, as their French predecessors did, make the most of the highly formulaic and thus considerably impersonal discourse of *fin amor* in attempts to write of such personal sentiments as love, lovesickness, despair, will certainly merit extended considerations in a separate essay. For the moment, suffice to say, as Duncan emphatically states, medieval English love lyrics should be considered to be "public events operating within and through well recognized conventions" of *fin amor* (*Companion* xxiii), and therefore viewing the medieval lyrics as genuine self-expressions of the persons, fictional or historical, may be anachronistic as well as misleading. I would propose that the defining nature of medieval English love lyrics is less the individuation of love and other adjacent private sentiments, as it seems from the vantage point of Romantic and modern readership, than the particular textualization of love as "privation or absence" in Scattergood's terms (40), as "separation" in Spearing's sense (212), or as "partyng" in a term by one anonymous medieval English poet whose poem will be examined later in this essay. I would argue that the epistolarity embedded in late Middle English love lyrics works to magnify this theme of absence

or separation, not necessarily to emphasize the genre's "status as a private communication between one person and another," as medieval critics including Sarah McNamer maintain (198). A brief examination into some features of the medieval epistolary genre will hopefully attest to the validity of this point.

Contextualizing his accounts for the medieval epistolary genre in the specific intellectual and cultural grounds of the Middle Ages, Constable expresses his earnest reservations about any hermeneutic attempts to assimilate medieval letters to modern standards and practices of letters, according to which the epistle is a medium of personal, intimate, original, and spontaneous communication between persons:

> Whereas intimacy, spontaneity, and privacy are now considered the essence of the epistolary genre, in the Middle Ages letters were for the most part self-conscious, *quasi-public literary documents*, often written with an eye to future collection and publication. In view of the way in which letters were written and sent, and also of the standards of literacy in the Middle Ages, it is doubtful whether there were any private letters in the modern sense of the term . . . . *[M]edieval letters were often intended to be read by more than one person even at the time they were written.* They were therefore designed to be c*orrect and elegant rather than original and spontaneous*, and they often followed the form and content of model letters in formularies.[2] (11: my italics)

Among literary historians and critics who are interested in medieval literate practices, there is now no significant dispute about the observations that reading and writing in the Middle Ages were esteemed as characteristically

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[2] Medieval letters were expected to be operating within the particular custom of letter-writing called *ars dictaminis.* In theory, the letter consists of five parts or steps that include salutation, exordium, narration, petition, and conclusion. In practice, of course, these rules were often disregarded by letter writers and were gradually simplified into the two parts of the salutation and subscription, which are respectively the greetings and the farewell of the writer (Constable 16-18).

disparate activities, and that even when people could read and write for themselves, they were mostly "read aloud to hear" documents and dictate their words to scribes.[3] When it comes to the production of the epistle in particular, letters being dictated in abstract or full text by authors to secretaries, who were professionally called *dictatores*, was sustained as the dominant practice until the late Middle Ages and through the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries when, probably with the increased literacy and the higher availability of paper in place of expensive parchment, a more overtly modern sense of personalized letter-writing, i.e., writing a letter in one's own hand, started to gain currency as a new practice of letter-writing (Constable 42-48). To sum up, customarily, more than at least two persons had to be involved in the production and consumption of medieval letters,[4] and therefore, as Constable rightly observes, medieval letters should be no less than a (quasi-) public mode of communication in a modern respect.

The most fundamental *raison d' être* of letters, whether they are medieval, early modern, or modern, as Gary Schneider asserts,[5] is predicated upon the physical separation or distance that exists between writer and recipient. Letters, as Spearing notes plainly, "normally exist only because of the absence from each other of the sender and the

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[3] Regarding the general cultures and practices of reading and writing in the Middle Ages, see Michael Clanchy, *Early Medieval England*, 383-96; Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus eds, *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, 3-4; Steven Roger Fischer, *History of Reading*, 141-204, and Ju ok Yoon, "Literate Practices of Medieval Women: In Case of Marie de France and Her Breton Lais," 203-04.

[4] A recent discussion of literary examples of this particular letter production and reception in the late twelfth century may be found in Yoon, 203-04.

[5] Though his immediate concerns are with the letters written from the early modern period to the end of the eighteenth century, many of Schneider's questions and observations elaborated in *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* are oriented to address the key thrusts and functions of the epistolary genre in general and therefore quite applicable to medieval letters as well.

recipient"(211). This geographical or physical separation or absence of the sender and the recipient from each other necessitates the "epistolary situation" (Schneider 28; Constable 13-14), in which letters as writing are assumed to represent speech or spoken words. This notion of the letter as a substitute for conversations carried only in writing on parchment or paper with the involvement of a "quasi-presence" of the writer and the addressee (Constable 13) is epitomized by St. Ambrose in his Epistle 66 that was sent to a Romulus:

> There is no doubt that letter-writing was devised that *the absent may converse with those far away*, and this improves in service and in form when many pleasant words are exchanged . . . for then truly there is conveyed to those far removed in the body *a seeming likeness of the other's presence*. (484: my italics)

In "the most frequently repeated medieval statement about letters" (Spearing 211) made by the famous twelfth-century English bishop and author John of Salisbury, letters even become the direct words of the absent, only without voice: "*Littere*[6] ... *absentium dicta sine voce loquuntur*" [Letters ... speaks voicelessly the utterances of the absent][7] (qtd. in Spearing 211). The quasiness or seemingness of the epistle, which was wittingly kept in Ambrose's discourse, is seen to be shed off and to be donned anew with substantiality by John. Despite these medieval masters' emphatic suppositions or beliefs of letters as speech minus voice and (pseudo-) reality of the epistolary presence, "the disembodied epistle that only *represents*[sic] that body and self at a distance in time and space"(Schneider 28) can nonetheless never become

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[6] To John of Salisbury, *littere* means "both epistles and the letters of the alphabet" (Spearing 211, n. 1).

[7] In *The Metalogocon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, Daniel D. McGarry translates the same sentence, as follows: "they[letters] even communicate, without emitting a sound, the utterances of those who are absent"(38).

equal to the spoken words exchanged between the present two in the fullest sense. It is because, as German sociologist Georg Simmel illumines in his short essay, the letter as a specific type of written communication in nature cannot transmit such para-lingual elements as "sound of voice, tone, gesture, facial expression," as speech normally does:

> Individuals in physical proximity give each other more than the mere content of their words. Inasmuch as each of them *sees*[sic] the other, is immersed in the unverbalizable sphere of his mood, feels a thousand nuances in the tone and rhythm of his utterances, the logical or the intended content of his words gains an enrichment and modification for which the letter offers only very poor analogies. (353)

These non-verbal signs may induce both clarity and ambiguity in oral communication. In principle, letters seem to be immune to the confusion and misinformation that these signs might bring about and therefore deliver "the pure sense of the words" (Simmel 354). The reality, however, as Simmel adds, is that in many cases, the addressee of the letter needs more than "the logical sense" even to comprehend "the mere logical sense" of the words inscribed on page (354). Both writers and recipients involved in epistolary communication are therefore anxious about the potential misinterpretability as the consequence of the absence-presence dynamic characteristically operating in this particular type of written communication. Letter-writers' customary deployments of peculiar forms of "epistolary rhetoric," not least of "the language of orality and physicality"(Schneider 16),[8] are undoubtedly indicative of their deliberate attempts to control such

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[8] Schneider takes the great humanist Erasmus for the one who was masterly at employing epistolary bodily and affective language. In his return letter to Servatius, Erasmus is said to have written: "as I often read it, which I do almost hourly, I think I am listening to the *sweet tones* of my Servatius' *voice* and *gazing* at his most friendly *face*. Since we are seldom permitted to talk face to face, your letter is my consolation; it brings me back to you when I am absent, and joins me

anxieties that are in essence conditioned upon the physical separation or distance of their selves and recipients. Personal and love letters, on account of the special concerns that are relatively more private and intimate than others, are likely to be more active at resorting to this linguistic strategy. However, there is a considerable paradox, as Spearing acutely notices, that "the more intimate [and desperate] their concerns, the more conscious sender and recipient are likely to be of their bodily separation, and of the fact that writing can never be fully equivalent to presence"(211-12). Given all this, the chains of happenings featured in many medieval English epistolary love lyrics—that the epistolary language of proximity and physicality are employed in the wish to make the lady available to the abject lover more on personal and intimate level, but it conversely makes her absence even more in prominence, and correspondingly the lover's distress becomes more unbearable and hopeless in the end—may no longer sound like chance arrangements.

III. Three Middle English Epistolary Love Lyrics

Now I would like to discuss as examples three Middle English epistolary love lyrics, all of which are included in Rossell Hope Robbins's second edition (1954) of the seminal *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries.* Robbins locates our first poem "Myn hertys Ioy" under the division of "Lyrics by the Duke of Suffolk." Our other two poems, "In my hertt" and "As I my-selfe lay," appear under the immediately following category of "Love Epistles," in which all the eleven anonymous poems

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with my friend though he be away"(qtd. in Schneider 118: my italics). The meticulous cataloguing of bodily parts of the lady often witnessed in medieval epistolary love poems may be better appreciated in the same context of this particular epistolary language that works to evoke the effects of presence elaborated as orality and physicality.

pursue the routine *topos* of *fin amor*, namely, of the male lover expressing his frustration and despair towards the absent and unattainable lady, adopting the language of medieval epistle, albeit in different conspicuity. It is not hard to surmise that Robbins may have decided to place "Myn hertys Ioy," though it amply suggests itself as one love epistle, separately from the body of the epistolary love lyrics, most likely in deference to the fact that, unlike in the case of the vast majority of medieval lyrics whose authors remain obscure, this poem has been attributed to the Duke of Suffolk[9] as the author, though, as Spearing (221) and Douglas Gray (125) note, this apparently clear authorship is still considerably speculative and therefore subject to further examination. I have chosen these three epistolary love poems as examples because they appear to illustrate most overtly the characteristics of the *fin amor* of love lyrics and of medieval epistle, out of the dozen ones compiled in Robbins's *Secular Lyrics,* if "Myn hertys Ioy" is included. However, I do not follow his naming of the poems, in that although convenient, it does not sound distinguishable enough. Hence, I will refer to each poem with its first words, as normally rendered so in referring to untitled poems. In hopes to better facilitate understanding and engagement of readers, I will present each poem in its entirety, keeping a modern English translation in parallel on the right. The translations are mine, with some help from published versions in case of "Myn hertys Ioy" and "In my hertt."

Our first lyric "Myn hertys Ioy" survives in three manuscripts, one of which is Bodleian Ms. Fairfax 16, an anthology of Chaucerian verse (Boffey, "Middle English" 3), from which Robbins took the poem. This poem consists of three seven-line rhyme-royal stanzas, in which the lover continues to

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[9] His name, according to Spearing (221) and Gray (134), was William de la Pole who married Chaucer's grand-daughter, presumably Alice Chaucer. He was a patron of John Lydgate and one of the hosts of the French duke and accomplished lyric poet, Charles of Orleans, during his twenty-five-year captivity in England, after captured in Agincourt in 1415.

present himself as a humble and devoted servant to the lady who is absent. Compared with the lover of the other two lyrics, however, this lover does not sound as intimate and desperate as he intends but rather prosaic in his voice, arguably on account of a lack of explicit bodily and affective language, which is frequently deployed in many other epistolary love poems, and of the entailing "paucity of content," as Spearing already points out (223), though he does not venture to elaborate on that point:

Myn hertys Ioy, and all myn hole plesaunce,
Whom that I serue and shall do faithfully
Wyth trew entent and humble obseruaunce,
Yow for to plese in that I can treuly,
Besechyng yow thys lytell byll and I
May hertly, with symplesse and drede,
Be recomawndyd to your goodlyhede.

My heart's joy, and all my whole pleasure,
Whom I serve and shall do so faithfully
With true mind and humility,
To please you truly in what I do,
Beseeching you that this little bill and I
May heartily, with innocence and reverence,
Be recommended to your beauty.

And yf ye lyst haue knowlech of my qwert,
I am in hele — god thankyd mot he be —
As of body, but treuly not in hert,
Nor nought shal be to tyme I may you se;
But thynke that I as treuly wyll be he
That for your ese shall do my payn and might,
As thogh that I were dayly in your sight.

And if you wish to know my health,
I am well — God must be thanked —
As for body, but truly not in heart,
Nor shall I be until I may see you;
But please know that I will be truly the one
Who shall suffer for your comfort,
As though you saw me daily.

I wryte to yow no more for lak of space,
But I beseche the only trinite
Yow kepe and saue be support of hys grace,
And be your sheld from all aduersyte.
Go lytill byll and say thou were wyth me
Of verey trouth as thou canst wele remember,
At myn vpryst, the fyft day of Decembre.
(Robbins 1954, no. 189)

I can write no more due to lack of space,
But I beseech the Holy Trinity that
That He may keep & save you in his grace,
And shield you from all adversities.
Go little bill and say that you were with me
In all truth as you can remember well,
At my rising, on the 5th day of December.

    Though constantly referred to with the second person pronoun "yow"/ "ye," as if in the face-to-face discourse or one-on-one conversation, and thereby creating the illusion of orality and proximity, the lady as the lover's "heart's joy" and all his "pleasure" (line 1) 'however' is not with him. And

her very absence from him (lines 11and 14) causes him to suffer in heart (line 10) and creates the epistolary situation, where he is writing this "bill," i.e. the verse-letter, which he wishes to recommend to her alongside himself, as if it were himself (lines 5-7), and which will hopefully represent the lover to the lady in a complete form (lines 19-21). The specific rhetorical expressions－"Be recomawndyd to" (line 7) and "I beseche the only trinite / Yow kepe and saue be support of hys grace, / And be your shield from all aduersyte" (lines 16-18), which respectively reflect the rules of the *exordium* and petition of the general *ars dictaminis* (see note 2 of this essay) －suggest that this poem is conscious of its epistolary textuality as a written communication. The poet's remarks that he "can write no more due to lack of space" (line15) might be accepted literally, as a truth that he is indeed out of paper, on which he has perhaps hastily scribbled this "bill" as a "personal letter" (*MED* 6. a), right after he is awake in the morning of the specific date (line 21). The *locus* on which he has jotted this letter down could be a small scrap paper, a fly-leaf, or one margin of a document that has been prepared for another purpose, as indeed evidenced very often in manuscripts where love lyrics survive (Duncan, *Medieval* xlv; Boffey, "Manuscripts" 6; Scattergood 44). Or, the same line may be appraised the lover's conventional employment of an epistolary device that works to give the recipient, if anyone, the impression that the writer is about to wrap up the letter and thus to make her ready for the completion of the letter. It is in fact worth noticing that the petition part, where the lover entrusts the lady to God, immediately comes right after this line. If this second scenario is the case, the whole point of composing this letter-poem cannot avoid being doubted. For up to this line the lover has not done much in the two first stanzas, except adopting the routine *exordium* and stressing that he will serve loyally the lady, as if she were present with him. There is no detailed idealization of the lady's beauty and virtues or emphasis upon the intensity of the lover's sentiments, but only written words that remind readers, as

mentioned before, of the status of this bill as writing. Hence, the "verey trouth" that the lover asks his bill to "say" to the lady (line 20) as his substitute is subject to speculation, primarily because he has not spent much language on elaborating what the very truth might be and what truth the bill ought to "say" to the lady. It can be instead said that the lover's words are spent mostly on magnifying the absence of the lady from him and on the presence of the bill as a written mediator between him and her. "Go lytill byll" in line 19 reminds readers of the ending of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Chaucer directly addresses his work in a similar manner of "Go, litel bok" (V. 1786). Treating a writing like (a messenger of) oral message is in fact within a long history of the Western tradition, as epitomized in the beginning of this essay with the two medieval masters of letters. It is likewise peculiar that the bill in the last two lines of this poem is addressed with the second person pronoun "thou," as if it were a person messenger who could "remember" (line 20) and "say" (line 19) the lover-writer's message orally to the recipient. Such personification of the letter in these final lines is conducive to engendering the aura of propinquity that the writer does (or perhaps can) not have with the lover in reality due to their separation from each other.

Our second lyric "In my hertt" is from Bodleian Ms. Rawlinson poet. 36, a late fifteenth-century manuscript, in which John Lydgate's "Valentine to Our Lady" is compiled along with other anonymous verse and prose ("Ms. Rawl. poet. 36"):

In my hertt is þer nothing off remembrauns	In my heart is there nothing to remember
That to Ioy sownyth, saue only to thing vpon yow,	That creates joy, but only to think of you,
Þis ys continually myn ech day vsaunce;	I continually do so every day;
And thing ye verily þat I sey yow now	And please think that I say to you now
That wold god ye wyst in what wyse & how	That, if God allows, you know in what way
I leue, wyssh, couete, & desire also,	& how I live, wish, long & desire,
How yow to plese, what me ys best to doe.	To please you in the best way I can

How ye be my souerayne lady, I-wyss I can-not wryte.   I cannot write indeed how you are my sovereign lady.

Ne ffynd I þerto papyr nor yng;   I cannot find paper or ink;

Wel I wote a hole ȝere it ys to lyte   I know well that a whole year is too little

To make yow to know so mych on yow I thynke;   To make you know how much I think on you;

So farforth þat when I sclepe or wynke   So much so that when I sleep or close my eyes

Me thynkith I see yow verily in ffygure   It seems that I see you truly in figure

The ffeyryst þat leuyth of any creature,   The fairest of all living creatures

To whom I recommaund me with all obeysaunce,   To whom I recommend myself very obediently,

My hert, my loue, my trowth, & dylygence;   My heart, love, truth & diligence;

So þat yt may be yowre hertes plesaunce,   So that this may please your heart,

And to yow also worchyp and reuerense,   And also worship and revere you,

Prayng yow the effect of my sentence   Praying that the result of my sentence

Ye take in gre, how þat my wrytyng be rude,   you may take favorably, though my writing might
                                                           be imperfect,

To trowth yt sownyth; and so y conclude.   & that it may grant truth; and so I conclude.

(Robbins 1954, no. 192)

Like "Myn hertys Ioy," this lyric consists of three seven-line rhyme-royal stanzas. However, whereas the former lyric sounds rather controlled emotionally, "In my hertt" seems to be "driven by feeling" so strongly that, as Spearing observes (225), such overflowing emotions break the convention of the *exordium* ("I recommaund"), which normally appears in the beginning of the epistle, as shown in "Myn hertys Ioy," and pushes it far behind to the last stanza (line 15) of the poem. If the insufficient space is the problem for the lover in the preceding lyric to write the truth, though what the truth may remain uncertain, the lover of "In my hertt" is suffering from his inability to write down how he feels and what he thinks about the lady who is, of course, absent from him. What is really at issue in this new poem is the gap that the writer-lover feels between "trowth" (line 21), if it may be identified as his feelings and thoughts that he wants to transmit to the lady, and his "sentence" (line 19) or "wrytyng" (line 20) as the only available medium of communication, when the separation between

him and her makes the face-to face communication unavailable. By virtue of the lover's struggles and frustration caused by such gap, in other words, this lyric appears to pose a fundamental question to the general assumption about writing, not least the epistle included, as a representation of the affective cosmos of the writer.

Such highly formulaic language employed to idealize the lady as "my souerayne lady" (line 8) and "The ffeyryst þat leuyth of any creature" (line 14) are indicating that this poem operates within the convention of *fin amor.* The profundity of the lover's lovesickness is suggested in the first stanza by the fact that he spends every day thinking about the absent lady and about how to delight her. His plight however occurs because there is no way for him to convey to her in writing the sovereignty that the lady holds in his heart: "How ye be my souerayne lady, I-wyss I can-not wryte" (line 8). How he feels and what he thinks about her are not the matters that can be expressed with the help of "paper," "ink", or time (lines 9-10). This *topos* of "inexpressibility" (Scattergood 56) or "impossibility" (Spearing 225) is already proposed earlier in the poem with the conditionality of the phrase "would god ye wyst" (line 5), implying that there will be no way for "yow"[the lady] to "wyst"[know] the depth of the speaker's affections toward her. Such inexpressibility or impossibility that the speaker experiences in real life, concerning writing as a communicative media, is markedly contrasted with the expressibility or possibility that he can enjoy in his dream－"when I[he] sclepe or wynke" (line 12). All that are detailed from line 12 until the end of the poem seem to take place in the speaker's (day)dream or fantasy, where he may "see" the lady (line 13), talk ("recommaund") with her, and plead ("praying") with her in person. Though they are happening only in fiction, these actions are still certain examples of communication predicated upon presence and corresponding orality, all of which "wrytyng" can only represent but never embody in the fullest sense.

   The final poem "As I my-selfe lay" that we will take a look at has
survived in Bodleian Ms. Rawlinson C. 813, which is, according to Edward
Wilson, "one of the major repositories of late medieval and early
sixteenth-century courtly love lyrics" (12). Of the three lyrics discussed in
this essay, this poem elaborates the theme of absence or separation in the
most overt manner. Also, the lover of this poem manifests himself as one
typical *cavaliere servente* ("seruaunt") (line 38) of *fin amor* who is weeping
and mourning immeasurably on account of the lady who has become both
inaccessible and unattainable to him because she is believed to have
rebuffed him for a new lover. Albeit in his fantasy, as other abject lovers
of *fin amor* do, he is seen to attempt to make the routine exaltation and
idealization of the lady, by comparing her to a flower, a "delectable
daysys" (line 33), and to "oder precyouse stoune or golde," against which
she is "more richer vnto my[his] sight" (lines 34-35). The convention of the
medieval epistle is however shown to be pursued less in prominence in this
poem than in the other two lyrics; the *exordium* where the writer
customarily recommends himself to the recipient appears to be omitted,
and only the petition where the sender entrusts the addressee to God is
maintained: "Iesus kepe yow wher-so-euer ye go" (line 46). If demarcated
according to Constable's classifications of medieval letters, therefore, this
epistolary verse appears to demonstrate, more overtly than the other two
poems do, the features of the "fictional" letters which may not be intended
to be sent but could be still considered letters because it follows "to some
extent the rules of the epistolary genre" (13):

As I my-selfe lay thys ender₃ nyght,	As I lay by myself another night,
all alone with-owten any fere,	All alone without any companion,
thys dremyd I of yow, my trewloue dere,	I dreamed this of you, my true & dear love,
me thought þat ye were layd me nere.	I thought that you were laid near me.
Then was I glade as bryde on brer,	Then I was glad as a bird on briar,

me thought I hade yow vnto my paye;
& yn my mynde we made good chere –
but when I wakyde, ye were a-wey!

I thought I had you to my satisfaction;
& In my mind we made good gaiety –
But when I was awake, you were gone!

Alas! Alas! then can I saye,
  to wette my-selfe soo woo-be-gone;
for she þat might my sorowe deley,
  she was depertyd full farre me frome.

Alas! Alas! Then I could say,
I would weep so much that I may undo woo;
For she who could stop my sorrow,
She was separated so far from me.

And I lay styll my-selfe alone,
  & yn no wyse my sorrow cowld slake,
but euer styll mourning with full greate mone
  vnto the tyme that I dyd wake.

And I lay still myself alone,
& In no way my sorrow could be slakened,
But ever still mourning with full great moan
Until the time when I was fully awake.

then was I sorrowful owt of solas;
my wytt from me ytt was almost gone;
& euer I said, 'alas, my harte, alas!'
for I lye styll here my-selfe alone.
yow ar a-wey soo farre me frome,
  that to me ytt was a full greate peane;
I pray to god þat we may soone to-geder come,
  & þen wyll I showe yow þis matter playne.

Then I was full of sorrow and discomfort;
I almost lost myself;
& ever I said, "alas, my heart, alas!'
For I lie still here myself alone.
You are so far away from me,
That it is a full great pain to me;
I pray to God that we maybe together soon,
& Then I will show you this matter plainly.

your loue closyd soo farre yn my hart ys,
  &euer shalbe, whyles I haue space,
besechyng hym þat ys kyng of blysse
Þat I may be receyvyd yn-to your grace.

Your love is closed so deeply in my heart,
& ever shall be, while I am away from you,
Beseeching God that is king of bliss
That I may be received into your grace.

ytt ys full many a day ago
  Syth þat I wythe yow dyd last speke,
my specyall comfort & my swetyng also,
o my dere loue, ye be wyse & meke!

Yet it is many days ago
Since I spoke with you last time,
My special comfort & my sweetheart also,
O my dear love, you be wise & meek!

A delectable daysye ye be to beholde,
  yow be more richer vnto my sight
then oder precyouse stoune or golde;
  thys wyse I dreamyd all þe nyght.

You are a delectable daisy to behold,
You are even richer to my sight
Than other precious stone or gold;
I dreamt each night like this.

I haue pryntyd yow yn my harte soo depe－   I have printed you in my heart so deeply－
  wold to god I were able your seruaunt to be,   I pray to God that I would be your servant,
Euery nyght yn your armes þat I might slepe;   Every night in your arms I might sleep;
rewarde me with your loue; I asked non oder   Reward me with your love; I asked no other
                              fee   reward.

Onys ye promysyde me for to be trew,   Once you promised me to be true,
  & we were neuer soo farre betweyne;   & we were never so far from each other;
& now ye haue refusyd me for a new－   & Now you have refused me for a new love－
  alas, my harte dothe blede with peyne.   Alas, my heart does bleed with pain.

no more to yow I can now saye,   I can say to you no more,
  but Iesus kepe yow wher-so-euer ye go;   But Jesus may keep you wherever you may go;
thys to yow I wryte, & also saye,   I write this letter to you, & also say,
  Þat partyng ys þe gronde of my woo.   That our separation is the reason of my woo.
  (Robbins 1952, no. 200)

As a lyric, "As I my-selfe lay" presents itself as a relatively long poem, made up of twelve four-line stanzas, more than double in length in comparison to the preceding two lyrics. And this appears to be long enough for the lover to unwind a clear strand of a telling narrative, unlike in the other two shorter poems where no narrative as such seems to afford to be harbored. To recapitulate: The lover of this poem is "mourning with full greate mone" (line 15) and "sorrowful owt of solas" (line 17), while his heart "dothe blede with peyne" (line 44), all because "ye[the lady] haue refusyd me[the lover] for a new" (line 43) and would no longer grant him the "grace" to speak with her face-to-face (lines 28-30). There is no means for readers to determine whether this lover is a truthful reporter or an exaggerating liar because he is in full control of the entire narrative as the only voice present, and because the lady exists only as part of his narration. The lines－"ytt ys full many a day ago / Syth þat I wythe yow dyd last speke" (lines 29-30) and "we were neuer soo farre betweyne" (line 42)－ suggest that the lady must have been physically accessible to the speaker,

if not attainable, in the past. The repetitive emphases of his current companionless state－"with-owten any fere" (line 3) and "my-selfe alone" (lines 13 and 20)－and his wish that "Euery nyght yn your armes þat I might slepe" (line 39) hint at the sexual accessibility that the speaker used to be granted by the lady but is now taken back from him. Now, such intimacy can be felt only in his dream, where "ye were layd me nere" (line 4) and "I hade yow vnto my paye" (line 6).

Needless to say, the physical and geographical separation or "partyng" (line 48) that exists between the speaker and the lady precisely mirrors their affective distance. Such physical and emotional separation or distance of the lover from the lady is constantly repeated by a multitude of deictics[10] deployed throughout the poem. It must be the consequence of deliberate arrangements that such proximal spatial deictic words as "nere"[near] (line 4) are used only rarely, whereas distal spatial and temporal deictics, including "a-wey" (line 8), "full farre" (line 12), "soo farre" (lines 21 and 25), "many a day ago" (line 29), and "so farre betweyne" (line 42), are overflowing the lyric. And the temporal and spatial deictic words, "here" (line 20) and "now" (line 45), which normally engender the sense of presence and proximity, work in this poem to stress the lover's peculiar reality that he is all alone and separated from the object with whom he wants to be together here and now. This special linguistic deployment plays a defining role to make the sense of separation, distance, or absence pervade the entire poem and paralyze the lover in the end of the poem,

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[10] Deixis, as the function of deictics, according to the authors of *Stylistics*, "refers to the linguistic encoding of spatial and temporal relations between objects and entities⋯.[W]e can distinguish five different types of deixis: (i) place deixis, (ii) temporal deixis, (iii) person deixis, (iv) social deixis and empathetic deixis"(157). Adverbs such as *here* and *there* and this and *that* are typical place deictics, and temporal deictics include *now* and *then*, and *yesterday*, *today*, and *tomorrow*. Personal pronouns, such as *I, you, he, she,* etc. makes of social deixis. More examples and different functions of deixis/deictics can be found in the same book (Jeffries and McIntyre 157-61).

where he despairingly announces that "no more to yow I can now saye" (line 45). He admits that the "grounde" of such paralysis or inability is no other than the "partyng" (line 48), i.e. the physical and emotional separation and distance existing between himself and the lady. The lovers of this poem and the preceding "In my hertt" appear to share an affinity with each other in their inability to transmit in writing their thoughts, feelings and beliefs to their lady. However, the lover of this lyric, as far as I can observe, should be the more helpless and less mobilizing, principally owing to his deictic vocabulary that conversely fixes the absence of the lady, against his desire to efface it. Hence, the lover's last outcry－"thys to yow I wryte, & also saye, / Þat partyng ys þe gronde of my woo" (lines 47-48)－not merely repeats the medieval view of the letter as a surrogate for spoken words ("saye"); more significantly, it emphasizes "the "partyng" which is at once a reality that frustrates the lover and a psychological result that his written language has produced.

IV.

To sum up, I started this essay with the purpose of investigating the ways that three late medieval English epistolary love lyrics textualize the theme of "partyng," absence, or separation. As necessary steps to establish the grounds for my discussion, I first point out that, as peculiar cultural artifacts of the late Middle Ages, medieval love lyrics are less genuine manifestations of the poets' personal affects than conventional and (near-) public performances, one salient theme of which is the separation or distance between the lover-speaker and the lady. Then, I look into the medieval epistolary practices, where at least two persons are involved in the productions and consumptions of letters; in so doing, I follow the footsteps of such leading authorities of medieval epistle as Constable who

recognize medieval letters as one (quasi-) public mode of communication. In this connection, I examine implications of the epistolary situation, in which geographical or physical separation or absence of the sender and the recipient from each other is the most fundamental *raison d' être* of all letters, without regard to their specific chronology. Despite the predominant medieval assumption or belief of the epistle as a loyal representation of the spoken words, it cannot be denied that letters only represent and cannot be equivalent to the writer and the recipient themselves. The development of sophisticated epistolary language that creates the nuance of orality and physicality may be one consequence of letter-writers' deliberation to blur this reality, only in imagination. I argue that the epistolarity embedded in late Middle English love lyrics works to magnify this theme of absence or separation, not necessarily to emphasize the genre's often claimed individuation of personal and intimate emotions, as much naturally expected of modern letters. The three late Middle English epistolary love lyrics that I examine in this paper more or less showcase this idea, I believe.

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ABSTRACT

An Encounter of Lyric and Epistle: Textualization of "Partyng" in Late Middle English Epistolary Love Lyrics

Ju ok Yoon

In this essay, I want to closely examine the ways in which the theme of "partyng," absence, or separation is textualized in three late medieval English epistolary love lyrics. Medieval English epistolary love poems are believed to have taken the form and gained currency by the late Middle Ages. It is normally assumed that the rapid spread of letters as a popular mode of written communication, alongside the development of literacy among laity and the increasing availability of paper at lower prices in place of expensive parchment, proliferated this particular literary genre in the late fourteenth and especially fifteenth centuries. In the course of elaborating the main theme, I point out that, as a peculiar body of cultural artifacts of the late Middle Ages, medieval love lyrics are less genuine manifestations of the poets' personal affects than conventional and (near-) public performances. It is an interesting phenomenon that, against the post-Renaissance and Romantic expectations of love letters as private, secret, intimate, one salient theme that the medieval love poems feature is the separation or distance between the lover-speaker and the lady. Then, like some medievalists, I also recognize medieval letters as one (quasi-) public mode of communication, considering the medieval epistolary practices that welcome this line of interpretation. I argue that despite the predominant medieval assumption or belief of the epistle as a loyal representation of the spoken words, it cannot be denied that letters only represent and cannot be equivalent to the writer and the recipient themselves. I hope that examining the three late Middle English love lyrics will more or less showcase this idea.