

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

BONNIE WHEELER, *Series Editor*

The New Middle Ages is a series dedicated to transdisciplinary studies of medieval cultures, with particular emphasis on recuperating women's history and on feminist and gender analyses. This peer-reviewed series includes both scholarly monographs and essay collections. The following books have all been published by Palgrave:

Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety

edited by Gavin R. G. Hambly

The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages:

On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics

by Gregory B. Stone

Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition

by Sherry J. Mou

The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard:

Perceptions of Dialogue in

Twelfth-Century France

by Constant J. Mews

Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault

by Philipp W. Rosemann

For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh

by Frances A. Underhill

Constructions of Widowhood and Virginit
in the Middle Ages

edited by Cindy L. Carlson and Angela
Jane Weisl

*Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon
England*

by Mary Dockray-Miller

Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a

Twelfth-Century Woman

edited by Bonnie Wheeler

The Postcolonial Middle Ages

edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory:

Bodies of Discourse

by Robert S. Sturges

*Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays
on Medieval European and Heian Japanese
Women Writers*

edited by Barbara Stevenson and
Cynthia Ho

*Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading
in the Later Middle Ages*

by Laurel Amtower

*Robes and Honor: The Medieval World
of Investiture*

edited by Stewart Gordon

*Representing Rape in Medieval and Early
Modern Literature*

edited by Elizabeth Robertson and
Christine M. Rose

*Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in
the Middle Ages*

edited by Francesca Canadé Sautman
and Pamela Sheingorn

*Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages:
Ocular Desires*

by Suzannah Biernoff

*Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum
and the Formation of Religious Women in
the Middle Ages*

edited by Constant J. Mews

*Science, the Singular, and the Question of
Theology*

by Richard A. Lee, Jr.

*Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages
to the Renaissance*

edited by Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A.
Lees

*Malory's Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian
Tradition*

by Catherine Batt

*The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval
Religious Literature*

edited by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski,
Duncan Robertson, and Nancy
Warren

*Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages:
Image Worship and Idolatry in England
1350–1500*

by Kathleen Kamberick

*Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality,
and Literary Structure in Late Medieval
England*

by Elizabeth Scala

*Creating Community with Food and Drink in
Merovingian Gaul*

by Bonnie Effros

*Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses:
Image and Empire*

by Anne McClanan

- Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images*
edited by Désirée G. Koslin and Janet Snyder
- Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*
edited by Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons
- Isabel La Católica, Queen of Castile: Critical Essays*
edited by David A. Boruchoff
- Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century*
by Richard Zeikowitz
- Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage, and Politics in England 1225–1350*
by Linda E. Mitchell
- Eloquent Virgins: From Thecla to Joan of Arc*
by Maud Burnett McNerney
- The Persistence of Medievalism: Narrative Adventures in Contemporary Culture*
by Angela Jane Weisl
- Capetian Women*
edited by Kathleen Nolan
- Joan of Arc and Spirituality*
edited by Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler
- The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries*
edited by Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam
- Charlemagne's Mustache: And Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age*
by Paul Edward Dutton
- Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*
edited by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills
- Queering Medieval Genres*
by Tison Pugh
- Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*
by L. Michael Harrington
- The Middle Ages at Work*
edited by Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel
- Chaucer's Jobs*
by David R. Carlson
- Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity*
by John M. Ganim
- Queer Love in the Middle Ages*
by Anna Klosowska Roberts
- Performing Women: Sex, Gender and the Medieval Iberian Lyric*
by Denise K. Filios
- Necessary Conjunctions: The Social Self in Medieval England*
by David Gary Shaw
- Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages*
edited by Kathryn Starkey and Horst Wenzel
- Medieval Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, Volumes 1 and 2*
edited by Stephanie Hayes-Healy
- False Fables and Exemplary Truth: Poetics and Reception of a Medieval Mode*
by Elizabeth Allen
- Ecstatic Transformation*
by Michael Uebel
- Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures*
edited by Lawrence Besserman
- Tolkein's Modern Middle Ages*
edited by Jane Chance and Alfred Siewers
- Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England*
by Frank Grady
- Byzantine Dress*
by Jennifer Ball
- The Laborer's Two Bodies*
by Kellie Robertson
- The Dogaresa of Venice, 1200–1500: Wife and Icon*
by Holly S. Hurlburt
- Medieval Theology of Work: The Contributions of Peter Damian and the Medieval Movement*
by Patricia Ranft
- On the Purification of Women: Churching in Northern France, 1100–1500*
by Paula Rieder
- Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille: Words in the Absence of Things*
by Eileen Sweeney
- Voices from the Bench: The Narratives of Lesser Folk in Medieval Trials*
edited by Michael E. Goodich
- The Theology of Work: Peter Damian and the Medieval Religious Renewal Movement*
by Patricia Ranft
- Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays*
edited by Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones
- Lonesome Words: The Vocal Poetics of the Old English Lament and the African-American Blues Song*
by M. G. McGeachy

LONESOME WORDS

THE VOCAL POETICS OF THE
OLD ENGLISH LAMENT AND THE
AFRICAN-AMERICAN BLUES SONG

M.G. McGeachy

palgrave
macmillan



LONESOME WORDS

© M.G. McGeachy, 2006.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2006 978-1-4039-6291-1

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

First published in 2006 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS

Companies and representatives throughout the world.

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-73172-5

ISBN 978-1-137-11765-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-137-11765-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McGeachy, M.G. (Margaret G.)

Lonesome words : the vocal poetics of the Old English lament and the African-American blues song / M.G. McGeachy.

p. cm.—(New Middle Ages)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Elegiac poetry, English (Old)—History and criticism. 2. Laments—England—History and criticism. 3. American poetry—African American authors—History and criticism. 4. African Americans—Songs and music—History and criticism. 5. Literature, Comparative—English (Old) and American. 6. Literature, Comparative—American and English (Old) 7. Oral tradition—England—History—To 1500. 8. Blues (Music)—History and criticism. 9. Oral tradition—United States. 10. Loneliness in literature. I. Title. II. New Middle Ages (Palgrave Macmillan (Firm))

PR207.M38 2006

829'.1009—dc22

2005040189

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: May 2006

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Transferred to Digital Printing in 2013

To Kim, David, and Rob

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	viii
<i>Text Credits</i>	ix
Introduction: Don't the World Seem Lonely. . .	1
1. Captivated Performance	9
2. Recording the Formula	27
3. Blues and Trouble. . .Sorg ond Slæp [Sorrow and Sleep]	61
4. Anthologizing Sorrow	99
Conclusion: Strange yet Familiar	117
Appendix: A Formulaic Analysis of Robert Johnson's Recorded Blues	121
<i>Notes</i>	143
<i>Bibliography</i>	169
<i>Index</i>	178

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to David Townsend, whose graduate course in Old English at the University of Toronto opened up new perspectives, beginnings, and possibilities for me. I also thank Roberta Frank, Ted Chamberlin, David Galbraith, and Nicholas Howe for their invaluable expertise and support of this study throughout the years.

I am particularly grateful to Michael Taft for his foundational work on the blues formula, of which his *Anthology* and *Concordance* made this study possible. I owe special thanks to Stephen LaVere for his correspondence to me on the lyrics of Robert Johnson and for the information he provided on blues recording.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to following authors and publishers for permission to reprint material:

Passages and material from *Blues Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*, by Michael Taft, New York: Garland, Copyright © 1983 by Michael Taft and *Blues Lyric Poetry: A Concordance*, 3 volumes, by Michael Taft, New York: Garland, Copyright © 1984 by Michael Taft, are reprinted with the permission of the author. Michael Taft also generously granted permission for the use of passages and materials from “The Lyrics of Race Record Blues, 1920–1942: A Semantic Approach to the Structural Analysis of a Formulaic System,” by Michael Taft, Ph.D. Dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Copyright © 1977 by Michael Taft.

Passages from *The Exeter Book* are reprinted with permission of the publisher from *The Exeter Book*, edited by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie © 1936 Columbia University Press.

Passages from *The Junius Manuscript* are reprinted with permission of the publisher from *The Junius Manuscript*, edited by George Philip Krapp © 1931 Columbia University Press.

Robert Johnson’s song lyrics are transcribed with the permission granted through Music & Media International, Inc. The lyrics of *Kind Hearted Woman Blues*, *Ramblin’ On My Mind*, *When You Got a Good Friend*, *Come On In My Kitchen*, *Phonograph Blues*, and *Cross Road Blues* were written by Robert Johnson © 1990 Lehsem II, LLC/Claud L. Johnson.

TEXT CREDITS

Chapter 2—Lyrics by Robert Johnson credit line:

Written by Robert Johnson © 1990 Lehsem II, LLC/Claud L. Johnson.

Blues Lyric Poetry credit line:

Courtesy of Michael Taft.

Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records Junius Manuscript credit line:

From the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records. The Junius Manuscript*, by George Philip Krapp © 1931 Columbia University Press. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.

Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records Junius Manuscript credit line:

From the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records III. The Exeter Book*, by George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie © 1936 Columbia University Press. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher.