

## Medieval English Songs (Middle English)

### The Cuckoo Song

Sumer is i-cumen in—  
Lhude sing, cuccu!  
Groweth sed and bloweth med  
And springeth the wude nu.  
Sing, cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb,  
Louth after calve cu  
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth,  
Murie sing, cuccu!  
Cuccu, cuccu  
Wel singest thu cuccu!  
Ne swik thu nauer nu

Summer is a-coming in—  
Sing loudly, Cuckoo!  
Seeds grows, meadow blooms  
And the wood springs up again.  
Sing, Cuckoo!

The ewe bleats after the lamb,  
The cow lows after the calf  
The bullock leaps, the buck capers [var. farts]  
Sing merrily, Cuckoo!  
Cuckoo, Cuckoo,  
Well you sing, Cuckoo!  
Don't ever you cease [from singing].  
(13<sup>th</sup> c.)

### Now goes the sun under the wood

Nou goth sonne under wode—  
Me reweth, Marie, thi faire rode.  
Nou goth sonne under tre—  
Me reweth, Marie, thi sone and the.

No goes the sun under the wood—  
I rue, Mary, your fair face.  
Now goes [the] sun under the tree—  
I rue, Mary, your son and you.

(13<sup>th</sup> c.)

### Ubi Sunt Qui ante Nos Fuerent?

Were beth they beforen us weren,  
Houndes ladden and hauekes beren  
And hadden feld and wode?  
The rich levedies in heore bour,  
That wereden gold in hoere tressour,  
With hoere bright rode.

Mayden moder, hevene quene,  
Thou might and const and owest to bene  
Our sheld ayein the fende.  
Help ous sunne for to flen  
That we moten thi sone i-seen  
In joye without ende.

Where are they who were before us,  
Leading hounds and bearing hawks  
And had [owned] field and wood?  
The rich ladies in their chambers  
That wore gold in their treasure  
With their bright faces.

Maiden mother, Queen of Heaven,  
You might and can and should be  
Our shield against the fiend [Devil]  
Help us flee from sin  
So we may see they son  
In joy without end.  
(?14<sup>th</sup> c.)

### Western Wind

Westron wynde, when wylle thow blow,  
The smalle rayne downe can rayne?  
Cryst, yf my love were in my Armys  
And I yn my bed a gayne!

O Western wind, when will you blow,  
The small rain down can rayne?  
Christ, if my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again!

(first printed c.1530.)

Surviving poems from the Medieval Age are quite mixed in provenance—some popular, some elite, and some ecclesiastical. Often these modes are mixed as, for example, in the case of “Western Wind” which seems to have originated among farmers or sailors but was incorporated into the the music for a Mass by more than one composer of the period, where it survived in a Church manuscripts. Orthographical variations reflect different regions and dialects as well as wider phonological changes going on throughout the period. Ultimately the dialect of the southern court came to dominate the literature—though spellings were only standardised in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.