

Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture

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Edited by
Manuele Gragnolati · Almut Suerbaum

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Preface

The current volume is the result of close collaboration between a group of colleagues who discovered in the course of college lunches that we shared more than day-to-day responsibility for undergraduate teaching. Indeed, once we started discussing our research interests in a series of informal and more structured workshops and colloquia, it became evident that notions of performance had a bearing on what at first sight seemed quite diverse subjects and disciplines. Somerville College provided the framework in which these discussions took shape, and we are grateful for many different forms of support: the Rosalind Countess of Carlisle and Constance Ann Lee fund provided a travel grant which allowed us to invite those who had moved abroad back for a colloquium; Anne Wheatley and Dave Simpson made sure we had a congenial meeting room and sandwiches which fuelled the discussions; the college library provided all-day access to books and materials. We are grateful to Professor Heiko Hartmann and the editors of the series for accepting the volume, and for their encouragement. The volume would not have been possible without the support of friends and colleagues, in particular Christoph Holzhey and Peter West. Finally, we owe a debt of gratitude to our predecessors in Somerville College: Barbara Harvey, Christina Roaf, Olive Sayce. Their distinguished scholarly record has set us high standards to emulate, their wise counsel has helped us along, and this volume is dedicated to them.

Manuele Gagnolati

Almut Suerbaum

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Almut Suerbaum
in collaboration with Manuele Gagnolati

Medieval Culture ‘betwixt and between’: An introduction

Uns ist in alten maeren wunders vil geseit
von helden lobebaeren von großer arebeit
von fröden, hôchgeziten von weinen und von klagen,
von küener recken strîten muget ir nû wunder hoeren sagen.

We have been told in ancient tales many marvels of famous heroes, of great toil, of joy and festivities, of weeping and lament, and of the fighting of brave warriors—of these, you may now hear marvellous things.

What the anonymous poet of the German *Nibelungenlied* offers in these opening lines, written around 1200, is a complex form of fictional orality—the creation of a spoken, collective voice evoking poetic presence, but doing so by means of a consciously literate and literary written text.¹ The lines illustrate the way in which poetic endeavour appears to be seen as mediating between oral presence and written remembrance, in a culture that was as aware of the central importance of signs and signification as of their inherent fragility. Programmatically, these opening lines negotiate the contrast between two quite distinct spheres: bookish representation and embodied voice. These are often articulated as alternatives within medieval works, yet they also define the two poles around which recent scholarship has focussed in analysing medieval culture. On the one hand, medieval culture is seen as dominated by the transition from orality to

1 ‘Vocality’ is the term coined by Paul Zumthor to describe this state of textuality; see Paul Zumthor, *Introduction à la poésie orale*, Paris 1983, and *La lettre et la voix: De la “littérature médiévale”*, Paris 1987. Cf. also Ursula Schulze, ‘Hearing from Books: The Rise of Fictionality in Old English Poetry’, in *Vox intertexta: Orality and Textuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. by A. N. Douane and Carol Braun Pasternak, Madison 1991, pp. 117-136, and ‘Zum Problem der Mündlichkeit’, in *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. by Joachim Heinzle, Frankfurt 1994, pp. 357-375. On vocality in the German *Nibelungenlied*, see Jan-Dirk Müller, *Rules for the Endgame. The World of the Nibelungenlied*, trans. by William T. Whobrey, Baltimore 2007, here pp. 22-27.

literacy, by a focus on writing, signs, signification, and hermeneutics.² On the other hand, aspects of ritual, gesture, and process are at the forefront of current interest.³ Often, therefore, studies construct a dichotomy of contrasts between ‘static’ hermeneutics and a ‘process-oriented’ focus on presence. Yet the question arises whether such polar oppositions really capture the characteristics of a culture which so often favoured tripartite rather than bipartite structuring,⁴ and whether in fact medieval culture is best understood as inhabiting the liminal space, in other words, whether it should, in the title of a recent study, be seen as situated ‘between body and writing’.⁵

1 Performance and performativity

At first glance, the so-called ‘performative turn’ of cultural anthropology may seem to privilege an interpretation of the middle ages as a culture of ‘presence’.⁶ Yet the contention of this volume is that a focus on performative acts offers a means of seeing central phenomena of medieval culture in a way that transcends the rigid dichotomies of other models. Study of the performative aspects of medieval culture allows a focus on

2 The term ‘bookishness’ to describe medieval concern with the written word was first used by Carl Lofmark, *The Authority of the Source in Middle High German Narrative Poetry*, London 1981 (Bithell Series of Dissertations 5), p. 10-17, in summarizing the position of C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image. An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, Cambridge 1964, p. 5. Both studies highlight the paradox of a culture in which literacy was not widespread, yet books and reading take on a central role as sources of truth. On the shift in reading practices and its significance for the status of manuscript transmission see Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words. The Origins of Silent Reading*, Stanford 1997. Dennis H. Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading. The primary reception of German literature 800-1300*, Cambridge 1994, offers a case study of the interaction between different modes of receptions which leave their traces in the literary works themselves.

3 Cf. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence—What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford 2004, p. 39, who contrasts ‘modern’ hermeneutic culture (“Sinnkultur”) and its focus on the mind and on time, with a medieval culture of presence (“Präsenzkultur”) in which the body and space are the focal criteria.

4 Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Why all the fuss about the body? A Medievalists’ Perspective’, in *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995), pp. 1-33, esp. pp. 13-15.

5 Cf. Christian Kiening, *Zwischen Körper und Schrift. Texte vor dem Zeitalter der Literatur*, Frankfurt a. M. 2003, esp. pp. 7-31.

6 William Egginton, ‘Performance and Presence. Analysis of a Modern Aporia’, in *Journal of Literary Theory* 1 (2007), pp. 3-18, highlights the shifting use of the term ‘presence’; originating in the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, it was used to describe ‘the ultimate and pre-existing reference to material practices of various sorts’ (p. 6), so that presence and performance could be seen as binary opposites. Under the influence of Derrida’s critique of Heidegger, Gumbrecht (n. 3), p. 6, re-positions the term and uses it to designate ‘the very materiality of those practices’.

the ways in which medieval texts, but also medieval forms of recording human behaviour and action, manage to convey both presence and absence simultaneously, thereby creating a space which is open to interpretation. In other words, medieval culture could be thought of as a culture in which the written text is endowed with potential to create presence, or indeed as a culture of presence that is at the same time aware of the fact that it is liable to be given meaning through interpretation.

What the essays of this volume aim to demonstrate is that John Austin's original concept of performatives may be particularly useful for a study of medieval culture, in that it allows to move beyond seeing words and actions as polar opposites. In particular, Austin's notion of performatives challenges the view that words are always secondary, recording and stating actions which have preceded the utterance. Instead, Austin offers a model which sees speech, or at least certain speech acts, as forms of actions - or, in the famous title of his lecture, as an investigation of 'how to do things with words'.⁷ In this sense, Austin's concept of a speech act may be particularly helpful in enabling us to think of presence as created through language in the performative act.

Some definition of terms may be required here, because the term 'performance' has been used in a variety of quite different ways in recent scholarship. Thus, it may refer to a specific form of a speech act as well as to a form of staging; sometimes, these two senses are differentiated in that such staging is referred to as 'performance' while the term 'performativity' is reserved for the speech act.⁸ Austin himself concentrated his analysis of speech-acts on specific, highly ritualized processes such as naming, or swearing an oath, though he himself formulated this as restricting himself to speech-acts which he considered as drawing on 'ordinary language', but also, more contentiously, as 'serious', in contrast to fictional utterances which he explicitly wished to exclude:

A performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on a stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in any and every utterance - a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use - ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolation* of language.⁹

7 John L. Austin, *How to do things with words*, ed. by J. Urmeson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd edn, Oxford 1975.

8 For a differentiation of the terms, see *Performance and Performativity*, ed. Andrew Parker, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, New York, London 1995.

9 Austin (n. 7), p. 22.

This rejection of the theatre may in itself be a form of conscious staging,¹⁰ and interpretations of quite what was meant by a speech act outside the realm of ordinary language, especially in fictional texts, became the subject of a subsequent heated debate between John Searle and Jacques Derrida.¹¹ For Searle, literary fiction was a prime example of 'parasitic discourse',¹² while Derrida highlights that so-called 'normal', substantial performatives, by nature of their conventionality, rely on the same process of citation or 'iteration' which Searle claims as a hall-mark of fictional speech-acts.¹³

In the context of this volume, three areas in particular will be explored: the central role of ritual speech acts, especially where they exist as spoken words transmitted in writing; secondly the way in which authorship, the category often declared to be dead by critics focussing on the materiality of literary communication, is reintroduced as a performative element, no longer described as a given, but created through the performance of the text; finally, questions surrounding the phenomenon of citation and repetition, especially in forms which appropriate and transform literary and aesthetic traditions in constituting poetic 'voice'. While the three parts of the volume explore different aspects of medieval performativity, they also demonstrate that these aspects are all interrelated.

Performance, according to Victor Turner, is not a 'pale imitation of a real life lived elsewhere',¹⁴ but an essential aspect of humanity: 'If man is a sapient animal, a toolmaking animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans*.'¹⁵ As is apparent from Austin's own examples, rituals such as naming, baptizing, or swearing an oath, take on a special significance if human beings are defined not in terms of ontological propositions, but through their actions. Ritual performance, which transforms its participants while allowing them to enter a liminal space 'betwixt and between'¹⁶, thus

10 On this aspect, see Sybille Krämer, 'Sprache - Stimme - Schrift: Sieben Gedanken über Performativität als Medialität, in *Performanz: Zwischen Sprachphilosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by Uwe Wirth, Frankfurt a. M. 2002, pp. 323-346, esp. p. 325; cf. Monika Otter in this volume, on Austin's 'playfully diabolical performance' (p.101).

11 John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge 1969; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass, London 1978; John Searle, 'Reiterating the Difference: A Reply to Derrida', in *Glyph* 1 (1977), pp. 198-208.

12 Searle, 'Reiterating the Difference' (n. 11), p. 205.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. by S. Weber, Chicago 1988, 17f. Cf Jonathan Culler, 'Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative, in *Poetics Today* 21 (2001), pp. 503-519, and James Loxley, *Performativity*, Abingdon, New York 2007, pp. 74f.

14 Loxley (n. 13), p. 154.

15 Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York 1987, p. 81.

16 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London 1969, p. 95.

permits 'an instant of pure potentiality' with special resonance for the creative and innovative.¹⁷ Hence, ritual can be seen as a normative processes, shaping and controlling everyday social reality,¹⁸ while at the same time it can be used productively to set free creative energies.¹⁹

The 'performative turn' of the last decades is largely animated by an anti-hermeneutic impetus which is suspicious of the assumption that meaning, authorial intention, identity, substance, or essence could be pre-existing in works of art or literature, or even theatre performances and everyday actions. The focus instead lies on how that which was once believed to have pre-existed its expression is actually constituted through an articulation considered to be less as a form of description than an act of creation, a performative act. In this respect, Austin's analysis of utterances which cannot be accommodated in a model of descriptive statements that are either true or false may be linked to Barthes' death of the author as a guarantor of the coherence, identity, and meaning of texts;²⁰ to the emergence of performance art in the 1960s and 70s producing events to be experienced in their corporeal presence rather than to be interpreted and understood as representation;²¹ and to an interest in practices showing that personal identity is constituted through

17 Victor Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual. An Essay in Comparative Symbolology', in Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York 1982, pp. 20-60, here p. 44.

18 Cf. Victor Turner, 'Dramatic Ritual—Ritual Drama. Performative and Reflexive Anthropology', in *From Ritual to Theatre* (n. 17), pp. 89-101. Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid' (n. 17), pp. 44 f., notes that in tribal societies, the liminal is almost immediately contained by 'taboos', checks and balances, and 'put into the service of normativeness almost as soon as it appears.' This view of ritual as inextricably linked with the sphere of the normative is most prominently explored by Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth Of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth 1979, pp. 79 f., who describes pre-modern punishment as a ritual of marking that 'is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy.' Cf. Seth Lerer, "'Repesentyd now in yower sight': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late-Fifteenth-Century England", in *Aufführung und Schrift in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. DFG-Symposion 1994*, ed. by Jan-Dirk Müller, Stuttgart, Weimar 1996, pp. 356-380, esp. pp. 357 f.

19 This link between the performative and specific aesthetic qualities has become the focus of recent philosophical studies, especially where, in the wake of a dialogue with Heidegger, aesthetic objects are defined not as essence ('So-sein'), but as bringing something into being ('Erscheinen'); cf. Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, Munich 2000, Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen* Frankfurt a. M. 2002, and, for a first attempt at analysing the specific conditions of aesthetic perception and production in medieval texts, Manuel Braun, 'Kristallworte, Würfelworte. Probleme und Perspektiven eines Projekts "Ästhetik mittelalterlicher Literatur"', in *Das fremde Schöne. Dimensionen des Ästhetischen in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. by Manuel Braun, Christopher Young, Berlin, New York 2007, pp. 1-40, here pp. 27-29.

20 Roland Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur', in *Essais Critiques*, vol. IV: Le Bruissement de la Langue, Paris 1984, pp. 61-67.

21 Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004 (stw 2373).

continuously repeated performance rather than following on from essential substance.²²

The relationship between textuality and voice takes on a specific significance for many medieval genres. As Paul Zumthor insisted, in a medieval text, 'written' and even bookish as it may come down to us, its voice, the sense that it is or could be vocalized, is never far below the surface.²³ This 'vocality' yields a textuality that is somewhat different from the modern, but this is a difference of degree rather than category. Medieval textuality, by being more transparent in respect to voicing, to performance, can help to clarify other forms of textuality, including what we take for granted in modern texts. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, the term 'performance' covers pragmatic questions (how was this text received, used, experienced) as well as theoretical issues of text linguistics (how does this text suggest a voice, posit an 'I', how does it achieve coherence as 'a text' from those operations), and often attempts to enter into the psychological or anthropological implications of these questions as well. It may even serve to highlight what the consequences of those textual operations and social interactions that involve texts can be, what we can infer from them about subjectivity, the experience of interiority, even 'individuality'.

2 'Präsenzeffekte': creating a performative presence in ritual acts

The first group of essays in this volume explore aspects of what medieval texts and authors mean when they use verbs such as Middle English 'parfourmen' in its sense of 'bring something to completion'. Turner summarized the semantic transformation of the term as follows:

'performance' as we have seen, is derived from the Middle English 'parfournen' later 'parfourmen', which is itself from the Old French 'parfournir' ('to furnish') - hence 'performance' does not necessarily have the structuralist implications of manifesting 'form', but rather the procedural sense of "bringing to completion" or "accomplishing". To 'perform' is to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act.²⁴

22 Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. by Katie Conboy, New York 1997, pp. 401-417; *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, London 1990.

23 Paul Zumthor, *La lettre et la voix. De la littérature médiévale*, Paris 1987, argues forcefully that a medieval text, however strongly it may be determined by features of writing, retains a 'voice', a sense that it is, or could be, vocalized, even if that voice may not be visible at the surface of its textuality.

24 Turner, 'Dramatic Ritual—Ritual Drama' (n. 17), p. 91; cf. Annie Sutherland, in this

Such performative practice can manifest itself in a variety of ways: liturgy, courtly lyric, and parliamentary practice are singled out here as three of the most important areas of performative practice within medieval culture. All of them show a double interest in mediality, in that all three examples discussed in this volume allow us to glimpse speech acts being performed, but these speech acts are in all cases mediated through the transformation into a written record. What the essays demonstrate is, however, that these records are not simple descriptions, or, in Austin's terms, declarative acts, but are instead characterized by complex relationships between ritual practice and written record.

The study of two late medieval English paraphrases of the penitential psalms allows Annie Sutherland to argue that the recitation of the psalms is performative in Austin's sense, because it constitutes an effective performance of penance. She highlights how the metrical paraphrases respond to a theological interpretation of the psalms which sees them as concerned with living the good life, linking them to an exegetical tradition which sees them not as human-authored or divinely inspired poetry, but as a form of doing in words. While Maidstone offers a form of Davidic interiority in his explicit use of general pronouns, constructing a textual 'I' which is inhabitable by the individual reciting as part of a collective, Bampton highlights performance as an act of creation, both in the fictionalized process of the poem's creation, and in the insistence that recitation of the psalms in turn completes the psalms and, if successful, helps to complete the self in the act of penance.

Liturgical practice in the Easter Church differs considerably from that of the West, yet the example chosen by M. C. MacRobert highlights that use of the psalter as part of liturgical commemoration of the dead has to negotiate comparable difficulties of mediating between an inherently collective practice and the desire for individuals to be remembered. MacRobert presents evidence of a fourteenth century Church Slavonic psalter manuscript, in which the scribe Ivan unusually inserts his own name in eighteen of the twenty-one interpolated prayers. This rare departure from the normal practice by which the place for the reader's name was indicated in the text by a standard formula ('saying the name') means that anyone reading the text would at the same time be commemorating the scribe. The textual 'I' of the psalms contained in the manuscript is nevertheless constructed as one inhabitable by everybody even when the space is actually filled by the named scribe; here, the focus on the exemplarity of the 'I' appears strong even in the face of concern for an individual to be remembered.

volume, on Bampton's use of 'to performe' as a translation for Latin 'facere' in Ps 142:10.

The relationship between text and performance is an issue for political as well as religious and artistic practice of the Middle Ages, as is apparent from Benjamin Thompson's assessment of late-medieval English rolls of parliament, which vacillate between narrative report and formal record: they describe the events of parliament in a narrative manner comparable to that of chronicles, yet they also record in more formal and non-chronological terms the decisions taken in parliament. Concern for the accuracy of these texts is another facet of the interaction between ritual action of parliament and its governmental acts: the work of government was performed by the king, with the counsel and aid of his subjects, both through publicly-attested ritual actions, and through texts on whose precise wording much depended, and which could themselves be performed. Thompson demonstrates that the ambiguity of register in the rolls thus attests the interaction in the political system between divine executive power of the king in person, and the developed framework of law and counsel through which governance was mediated.

3 Performing the self: constructions of poetic identity

Whereas for questions of ritual, the collective aspect of performative practice is of central importance, if only as a foil against which to rub and express an individual 'I', such processes become more strictly individualized once they concern an 'I' which is no longer predominantly the penitent, or aristocratic singer, or politician, as part of a larger collective, but instead, in an act of self-reflection, is presented as the author of the text. In this section, a group of four essays focuses more specifically on the question of how performative practice can help to shape aspects of an authorial 'I', and how this textual 'I' may relate to expressions of subjectivity or even individuality.

Where Austin was concerned primarily with the felicity of speech acts, focussing on successful acts of communication, Monika Otter presents an interpretation of Anselm of Besate's *Rhetorimachia* as a playfully 'diabolical' performance, in which the author stages his own 'I' as an exemplum, embracing and acting out his own 'scurrilitas' while creating an equally fictional 'you' in the figure of Rutiland with whom he engages in combat. Part of the aggression of the textual construction lies in the way in which Rutiland's position is reduced to 'nothingness', turning the opponent into a fiction. Otter sees the *Rhetorimachia* as thus displaying a whole range of possible performances, from the self-staging of the author as 'Anselmus' to others inhabiting that role, yet unlike the psalms, where others in their

reading or recitation perform the named subject, there is no act of identification or indeed impersonation.

Like the school-room debate, courtly love lyric, traditionally associated with actual performance, is characterised by the tension inherent in using a medium embodying social practice and representative norms, a textual 'we', as the means of articulating poetic individuality or a textual 'I'. While in Italian lyric poetry the performance of a social 'I' had lost its importance much earlier than in Romance or German lyric traditions, Manuele Gragnolati demonstrates how Dante's *Vita nova* is nevertheless imbued with performance in two ways: both in staging the author's past according to an ideal spiritual and poetic development that is presented as a model for the other poets forming the public to which the text is addressed, and in creating a new identity for its author through language. Indeed, by studying the double life of the *rime* as an autobiographical workshop, Gragnolati shows that the *Vita nova* is performative, not constative, in that it is not an author's representation or description of his own past, as the *Vita nova* itself claims, but a new creation which successfully replaces the old texts and creates a new identity. Thus, the significant change in which Dante's *Vita nova* breaks with traditions of the courtly love lyric entails not the disappearance of performance, but rather, its move from the court into the textual space created by the emerging dialogues between poets.

Almut Suerbaum presents two late-medieval poets whose oeuvre incorporates autobiographical references, yet reveals complex strategies of negotiating a textual 'I'. Where Hugo of Montfort uses conventional form to articulate a shift in perspective, Oswald of Wolkenstein stages the paradox of conflicting roles. Both poets are shown to situate their own work within a context of ritualized performance; what marks their aesthetic interest is the way in which their reference is paradoxically both a means of inclusion in which the 'I' is part of a courtly audience and participates in performance as a courtly activity, and of exclusion, presenting the 'I' as set apart from this public by its experience of isolation, and by its ability to reflect on its own isolation.

A concept of performativity which sees subjectivity as staged in language is central to the Italian poet Vittorio Sereni. As Francesca Southerden is able to demonstrate, Sereni relates to Dante's *Purgatorio* as well as Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* 126 in dealing with themes such as the role of memory, the reversibility of time and loss, and the ability of poetry to redeem the past. For each of the three poets, poetry does not reproduce a predetermined version of selfhood, but rather constructs and literally 'performs' the coming into being of a subject whose existence depends upon the accomplishment of a poetic speech

act. Two main dimensions of performativity are discussed and elucidated, both in the context of key theories drawn from the philosophy of language (Austin, de Man, Beneveniste): the first aspect considers the relationship between autobiography and the speech act, showing how the 'I' is constructed in dialogue with an absent other who may conceivably return, but is fully recuperated in the case of Dante. The second deals more particularly with the discourse of desire at the heart of this conception of subjectivity, and considers Petrarch and Sereni's reworking of the Dantean narrative of conversion.

4 Embodied voice: reading and re-reading

The third section of this volume brings together essays which address the phenomenon of interpretation, either in the form of musical performance, as a communication between composer and performer, or as re-reading and adaptation. Whereas poetry by Dante and Oswald constructs an implied audience as a function of the literary text, late medieval musical notation allows more concrete glimpses of the relationship between the composer and the singers. Traditionally, singing of polyphony requires quasi-grammatical analysis of the piece, with decisions about the melodic line, the consonance with other part, and the cadences to be taken as the singers progress through the piece. The period after 1500 however sees a gradual shift in how singers approach the task of performing polyphonic music, gradually moving away in some respects from a relationship in which, according to Margaret Bent, singers were 'collaborators with the composer in making the music happen — realising it — within the limits of his intention.'²⁵ Owen Rees argues that in Josquin's setting of the Marian sequence 'Inviolata, integra et casta est virgo Maria', the composer asserts his authority over the presence of the actual performance even while physically absent. The paper offers a close reading of how Josquin 'plays this game' in the manipulation of singers' choices when they perform the motet: for example, by leading them into an initially discordant rendition of the phrase 'dulcisona' ('sweet-sounding') and obliging them to work hard to achieve a harmonious solution. By thus challenging and directing the singers performing his composition, Josquin encourages reflection not just on the practice of performance, but on the harmonic structure of the work, and the creative presence of the absent composer. In an area of notation which to modern eyes appears so much less composer-defined than the marking-laden scores of later periods,

25 Margaret Bent, 'Diatonic *ficta*', in *Early Music History* 4 (1984), pp. 1-48, here p. 13.

Josquin's practice highlights the composer's 'direction' of the piece despite being superficially absent in the notation.

A textualized authorial voice is prominent in a different way in twelfth century Arthurian romance, the genre developed and quickly brought to fame in France by Chrestien de Troyes and adapted for a German audience, within the space of about twenty years, by Hartmann von Aue. Melanie Florence highlights how the process of adaptation visible in Hartmann's *Erec* draws on concepts of performance on more than one way. Like its original, Hartmann's text was intended for recitation and employs a very prominent narrator persona. More importantly, in adapting the instances of extended description, Hartmann re-presents the romance for a new audience, situating it in a different linguistic, geographical, socio-cultural and literary space. Here, elements of the visual are clearly not restricted to the purely ornamental, but serve to articulate central concerns of the story overall.

Where Florence analyses a case of textual adaptation, a process involving the transformation of one text into another, late medieval literature is characterized by the way in which it draws on less specifically text-based knowledge of cultural contexts. Alastair Matthews highlights a specific case of such appropriation: classical authors are re-invented as figures within a narrative. Whereas the best-known of these is perhaps figure of Virgil in Dante's *Commedia*, Matthews chooses Artistole as his example and highlights how he is developed as a character in his own right, at times retaining his status as a source of erudite authority, as in the Alexander romances, at others, as in the short verse narrative *Aristoteles und Phyllis*, turning into the object of bawdy comedy. Late medieval plays incorporating the figure of Aristotle illustrate this vividly: Aristotle often takes on a dual role, offering instruction to those within the play, but at the same time, serving as an example of the heathen expert who fails in the world of Christianity, especially when dealing with women. The figure thus serves to articulate both a sense of distance, seeing Aristotle as the author of texts - especially texts of moral instruction - within texts, and of presence, where moral lessons about proper behaviour are no longer texts written by Aristotle, but enacted by, or better, through him. In this sense, they are performative not because they are written records of actual performances, but because they articulate through the figure of Aristotle that instruction requires the transposition of declarative rules into human behaviour.

Whereas medieval appropriation of classical writers presupposes a notion of proximity, modern reception of Dante is dominated by a sense of distance. Fabian Lampart in his analysis of nineteenth and twentieth century German adaptations highlights that it is the way in which Dante

designs strategies of textual performance which stimulates modern authors in their re-reading of Dante's text. In terms of performance, Dante's text is—as Teodolinda Barolini has put it—characterised by complex truth claims; by poetic means Dante attempts to create a vision of the world which he believed to be true. It is this quality which modern writers try to integrate into their texts. Meyer's novella, incorporating Dante as the fictional narrator, Borchardt's translation of Dante into a medievalizing, fictive form of German, and Peter Weiss's post-war drama reviving the performative structure of Dante's *Commedia* in an ironic and contrafactual way each illustrate facets about how this truth claim can be creatively transformed into modern poetics.

5 Interdisciplinary approach

The present volume has its origins in the specific form of scholarship at an Oxford college, in which colleagues from a range of disciplines are thrown together by the task of undergraduate teaching. As so often, organisational frame-works can generate opportunities as well as constraints, and in time, it became obvious that there were links which went beyond the needs of day-to-day teaching, so that a dialogue about ways in which various disciplines engage with the concepts of performance and performativity ensued. The result is a volume which, in its obvious gaps, betrays its origins in a particular dialogue, yet hopes to offer a contribution towards a multi-disciplinary discussion of an area which so far has mostly only been approached from within individual disciplines.

I. 'Präsenzeffekte':

Performative presence in ritual acts of
remembrance

Annie Sutherland

Performing the Penitential Psalms in the Middle Ages

In his early fifteenth-century paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms, commenting on Psalm 142: 10 'Doce me facere voluntatem tuam, Quia Deus meus tu es' ('Teach me to do your will, because you are my God'), the Franciscan friar Thomas Brampton remarks 'Teche me to performe thy wyll'.¹ 'To performe' functions here as a translation of the Vulgate's 'facere'; an alternative translation would be, of course, 'teach me to do thy will'. But 'to performe' is a perfectly valid rendition of 'facere'; indeed, evidence that this word was used to denote a range of actions is provided by the Middle English Dictionary, which, among its definitions of 'performen', offers the following:

2. (a) To act; accomplish (a deed, task, service, etc.), carry out from beginning to end, achieve, perform (a duty, an office, a crime, penance, etc.); make (a pilgrimage); ~ **up**, ~ **out**; (b) to carry out (a promise, agreement, command, threat, law, etc.), fulfill, comply with; satisfy (desire, lust); put into effect or into practice (a plan, purpose); follow (advice); of a dream: come true; ~ **wille**, carry out the request or desire (of sb.), act under the sway (of sb. or sth.)²

Of these possible sub-definitions, 'to carry out, fulfil, comply with' is most obviously relevant to Brampton.³ The simple act of *doing* is clearly what

1 *Thomas Brampton's Metrical Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms*, ed. by James R. Kreuzer in *Traditio* 7 (1949), pp. 359-403, p. 403. Thomas Brampton's paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms survives in two versions, conventionally labelled 'A' and 'B'. 'A' was edited by W.H. Black (*A Paraphrase on the Seven Penitential Psalms in English Verse*, ed. by William Henry Black, London 1842 (Percy Society 7)), and 'B' by Kreuzer. For reasons which will be explained later, this paper focuses throughout on 'B'.

2 *Middle English Dictionary* ed. by Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn et al, Ann Arbor 1952-2001, O-P, pp. 814-815.

3 Other definitions (abbreviated) are - 1. (a) To complete (work, a task, a course, etc.), finish; (b) of persons: to live out (time); (c) to perfect (sb. or sth.), make perfect, make whole; dedicate (a house), consecrate; **not performed**, incomplete, imperfect; ~ **to knouen**, know (sth.) perfectly; (d) to complete the number of (sth.), comprise; ~ **up**. 2. (c) to execute (the provisions of a will or testament); pay (costs, debts); (d) to conduct (an examination, operation); make use of (powers); (e) ~ **to falsnesse**, to speak deceitfully; *ppl.* **performed**, of a text: discoursed or lectured upon. 3. (a) To make or construct (a building, wall, statue, etc.); **ben performed**, of a building, garment, etc.: be made, be finished; **after the performed**, after it had been made, after the Creation; (b) *ppl.* **performed (up)**, of the human body: formed, shaped; (c) *ppl.* **performing up**, ?established, ?formed; (d) *ppl.*

the friar is talking about; having meditated on and prayed using the psalms, his expressed desire is that he might put into practice that which he has been considering.

This sense that any profitable reading of the psalms should result in a performance of their penitential precepts is commonplace; Augustinian exegesis, for example, is insistent in its emphasis on authentic psalmody as consisting not only in reading and reciting songs of praise and penitence, but also in an active living out of godly principles.⁴ And that such emphasis found its way into conventions of medieval reading is demonstrated not only by Brampton, but also by that most prolific of Middle English psalm commentators, the Yorkshire hermit Richard Rolle, whose *English Psalter* is shot through with the awareness that ‘doing’ the psalms is the most meaningful way of reading the psalms.⁵

It is the goal of this essay to investigate notions of ‘doing’ or ‘performing’ as relevant to readings of the psalms in the English Middle Ages and to ask what it meant to ‘do’ the psalms in a medieval context. Particular attention will be given to Thomas Brampton’s paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms, although other contemporary texts will be alluded to as relevant. This investigation will consider the notion that an ideal reading of the psalms is one which results in the performance of a godly life of penitence and praise. However, I will also focus on the ways in which the very act of devotional reading and recitation is itself a performance before God; actively engaged upon, it contributes to the reconciliation of the penitential self with God and in itself constitutes part of that devout life towards which ideal psalm reading leads. To initiate this investigation, I would like to set psalm reading and, in particular, Penitential Psalm reading, in something of its medieval context.

It is a commonplace that the medieval liturgy, both ecclesiastical and monastic, was centred on the Latin Psalter; we know that the entire

performed, of dishes, walls, etc.: ?decorated. **4.** To cause (love, woe, peace, etc.), produce, bring about; ~ **to enducen**, succeed in inducing (sb. to a state).

- 4 For example, see Augustine’s comment on Psalm 119: 104 in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (PL 37, 1566): ‘Sed quid est quod ait, *A mandatis tuis intellexi*? Aliud enim est, Mandata tua intellexi; aliud est, *A mandatis tuis intellexi*. Nescio quid ergo aliud se significat intellexisse a mandatis Dei: hoc est, quantum mihi videtur, *faciendo mandata Dei* pervenisse se dicit ad earum rerum intelligentiam, quas concupiverat scire.’ (‘But what do these words mean, “Through thy commandments I get understanding?” The expressions “I have understood thy commandments” and “I get understanding through thy commandments” are different. Something else then he signifies that he has understood from the commands of God: that is, as far as I can see, he says that *by doing the commandments of God* he has arrived at the understanding of those things which he had longed to know.’) (Bold and italics mine).
- 5 For further evidence and exploration of this awareness in Richard Rolle’s *English Psalter*, see Annie Sutherland, ‘Biblical Text and Spiritual Experience in the English Epistles of Richard Rolle’, in *The Review of English Studies* 56 (2005), pp. 695-711.

Psalter would have been read through on a very regular basis, and that the average monk would have known the text of all the psalms by heart.⁶ Less investigated has been the significant role that vernacular versions of the psalms played in the devotional life of the English Middle Ages. Surviving in four complete late Middle English translations, and in several paraphrased and abbreviated versions, the Psalter occupied a unique position in the meditative and intercessory life of the period.⁷ Indeed, it was, according to Richard Rolle, a 'shynand boke', 'a chosen sange byfor god, als laumpe lyghtnand oure lyf' ('a shining book', 'a chosen song before God, as a lamp lighting our life.')⁸ But what afforded the psalms their liturgical and devotional preeminence?⁹ What did they possess that other biblical texts did not?

In the context of their role in prayer and devotion, the answer is relatively straightforward; they are deeply felt and wide-ranging first person utterances, whose nature as uniquely intimate intercessions is

6 For in-depth analysis of the ways in which the memory could be trained to recall the psalms (and other texts) in detail and in a manner more flexible than rote learning would suggest, see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge 1990. For a fascinating recent account of the role of the Psalter in the life of the medieval monk, see Susan Boynton 'Prayer as Liturgical Performance in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Monastic Psalters', in *Speculum* 82 (October 2007), pp. 896-931. Boynton's article contains other observations to which my essay will return.

7 For editions of these four complete Psalters, see *Anglo-Saxon and Early English Psalter*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson, 2 volumes, London 1843-1844 (Surtees Society); *The Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter* ed. by Karl D. Bulbring, 2 volumes, London 1891 (EETS os 97). *The Psalter or Psalms of David and Certain Canticles with a Translation and Exposition in English by Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. by Henry Ramsden Bramley, Oxford 1884. The fourth is that found in the Wycliffite Bible; see *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books, in the Earliest English Versions Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his Followers*, ed. by Josiah Forshall, Frederic Madden, 4 volumes, Oxford 1850. For an index of abbreviated and paraphrased Psalters, see *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, gen. ed. by Jonathan Burke-Severs, New Haven 1967-, volume 2, 1970.

8 Bramley, *Psalter*, p. 3.

9 Conventionally, 'liturgy' has been understood to refer to 'all the prescribed services of the Church, as contrasted with private devotion' (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 2nd edn, Oxford 1977, p. 306), while 'devotion' has been taken to denote rather more personal, informal intercessory practice (For an invigorating investigation of such definitions, see Clifford C. Flanigan, Kathleen Ashley, Pamela Sheingorn, 'Liturgy as Social Performance: Expanding the Definitions', in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Ann E. Matter, Kalamazoo 2001, pp. 695-714). However, recent years have witnessed some debate regarding such delineated use of the terms 'liturgy' and 'devotion', as scholars have begun to argue that private devotion can allude to and involve devices conventionally associated with the liturgy, and vice versa (for further exploration of this area, see Boynton, 'Prayer as Liturgical Performance'). As the penitential paraphrases examined in this essay will demonstrate, much late Middle English devotional writing deliberately invokes and associates itself with the liturgy, for reasons which I will explore.

highlighted thus by the eighth-century ecclesiastic Alcuin of York in his *De Usu Psalmorum*:

In psalmis invenies tam intimam orationem, si intenta mente perscruteris, quantum non potes per teipsum ullatenus excogitare.¹⁰

In the psalms, if you study them with an attentive mind, you will find prayer so intimate that you would not yourself be able to devise any greater.

As such, their first-person narrative offers itself up for appropriation by the individual (or community) who prays using them.¹¹ As one reads them, one adopts their voice as one's own, assuming the persona of the Psalmist as it were.¹² Indeed, the psalms are insistent in drawing attention to themselves as personal utterances, as performances before the divine, and frequently seem caught between anxiety lest God will not hear:

Hear, O Lord, my prayer: and let my cry come to thee. Turn not away thy face from me: in the day when I am in trouble, incline thy ear to me. In what day soever I shall call upon thee, hear me speedily.¹³ (Psalm 101: 2-3)

and certainty that He is able to hear:

for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication: the Lord hath received my prayer.¹⁴ (Psalm 6: 9-10)

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- 10 Alcuin of York, *De Usu Psalmorum*, PL 101: 465D. This phrase is quoted in Rachel Fulton, 'Praying with Anselm at Admont: A Meditation on Practice', in *Speculum* 81 (July 2006), pp. 700-733, p. 712.
 - 11 Of course, drawing on patristic traditions, medieval exegetes understood different psalms to be spoken in different voices (for example, the voice of David, of Christ, of God, of the Church etc). However, the paraphrases on which this essay focuses are interested in the psalms primarily as straightforward models for the penitent utterance of the reading individual. For brief discussion of the 'shifting grammatical voices' that one hears in the psalms, see *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, London 1987, p. 253. For a more comprehensive investigation of the voicing of the psalms, see Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, London 1984, esp. pp. 85-94, 103-112.
 - 12 The performative implications of this manner of reading the psalms will be explored later in the essay. For a fascinating recent discussion of performativity and devotional usage of the psalms, see Monika Otter, 'Entrances and Exits: Performing the Psalms in Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*', in *Speculum* 83 (April 2008), pp. 283-302.
 - 13 All vernacular psalm quotations in this essay are taken from *The Holy Bible: Douay Version Translated from the Latin Vulgate*. For specifically Penitential Psalms exhibiting a similar anxiety, see, for example, Psalm 129: 1-2 'Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication'; Psalm 142: 1 'Hear, O Lord, my prayer: give ear to my supplication in thy truth: hear me in thy justice'; Psalm 142: 7 'Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit hath fainted away'.
 - 14 For other such declarations, see for example, Psalm 37: 10 'Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hidden from thee'; Psalm 37: 15 'For in thee, O Lord, have I hoped: thou wilt hear me, O Lord my God.' Robert Alter makes a similar point about the psalms' preoccupation with themselves as utterances; see Alter and Kermode, *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 260.

In the context of this latter quotation, what is particularly noteworthy about the psalms is their oft-expressed confidence in the efficacy of speech that is heard by God. When one speaks the psalms in a true penitential spirit, it seems that the act has the potential to effect change in one's relationship with God, to afford one the opportunity of achieving individual reconciliation with the divine:

I have acknowledged my sin to thee, and my injustice I have not concealed. I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin. (Psalm 31: 5) Italics mine

There is, in fact, as Sandra Boynton puts it, a 'redemptive instrumentality' inherent in 'the act of psalmody' as 'one of its salvific effects'; to return to a point made above, the very recitation of the psalms is an effective performance of penance.¹⁵ Viewed thus, the speaking of the psalms might be placed within John L. Austin's category of 'performative utterances' (utterances that 'do' something) as distinct from 'constative utterances' (utterances that simply describe something). For as in Austin's description of performatives, so in the penitential recitation of the psalms, 'the issuing of the utterance *is* the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something.'¹⁶

However, to revert to the aforementioned sense of performing as doing ('carry[ing] out, fulfil[ling], comply[ing] with') as distinct from saying, it is important to note that preoccupied as they are with the efficacy of penitential recitation itself, the psalms are equally preoccupied with the living of a good life. Psalm 1: 1 is, indeed, a case in point; the blessed man is he who has lived well:

Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence.

An effective performer of the psalms is one who not only prays with true penitential intent, but who also enacts the godly life upon which the psalmist elaborates.

Turning specifically to the Seven Penitential Psalms (6, 31, 37, 50, 129 and 142 in the Vulgate numbering), it is arguable that the notion of performance is of particular relevance to them in both of the senses outlined above; for not only was their recitation believed to have the potential to actively restore one to a right relationship with the divine, but they are also closely focused on the performance of God's will ('Make the

15 Boynton, 'Prayer as Liturgical Performance', p. 906.

16 John L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words*, Oxford 1962, pp. 6-7. Italics mine. While employing Austin's performative/constative distinction, I am aware of the fact that this is not a rigid categorisation which he maintains throughout *How to Do Things with Words*.

way known to me, wherein I should walk').¹⁷ That the ideal reading of the Penitential Psalms entails performance in both of these senses is emphasised by Richard Rolle in his *English Psalter's* comments on Psalm 37: 19 ('For I will declare my iniquity: and I will think for my sin'). There are, says Rolle in response to this verse, 'twa maners' of 'perfite penaunce' ('two kinds' of 'perfect penance'), and while one involves recitation ('prayer and teris') ('prayer and tears'), the other involves activity ('almusedede' and 'be[ing] besy to clens [...] syn') ('almsdeeds' and 'being intent upon the cleansing of sin').¹⁸

First isolated as a distinct group by Cassiodorus in his sixth-century *Expositio Psalmorum*, the Seven Penitential Psalms have always played their part in the western monastic office, and were also adopted into medieval ecclesiastical liturgy.¹⁹ In fact, the dominant role of the psalms in the liturgy draws our attention to them as dramatic texts, as texts whose liturgical recitation inevitably requires the individual to perform the part of the Psalmist as he or she reads.²⁰ When imagined as the personal utterances of David, the psalms voice a personal biblical drama that is only highlighted by their deployment in the quasi-theatrical context of the

17 Psalm 142: 8.

18 Bramley, *Psalter*, p. 141. See also Dame Eleanor Hull's fifteenth-century translation of the Penitential Psalms, in which she comments 'But wenyth not that by þe symple seyyng of þe wordys of þes vij psalmys that dedly synnys mow be forþeuyn, but yf ye folow þe doctryne that þey teche you of gode, and that ye for-sake al euel that put you ferre from your hele.' *A Commentary on the Penitential Psalms Translated by Dame Eleanor Hull*, ed. by Alexandra Barratt, Oxford 1995, p. 184/11-14 (EETS os 307) ('But do not think that by the simple saying of the words of these seven psalms, deadly sins may be forgiven, unless you also follow the doctrine of goodness that they teach you, and forsake all wickedness that removes you far from your salvation').

19 For a comprehensive exploration of the background to the Seven Penitential Psalms, see Michael Driscoll, 'The Seven Penitential Psalms: Their Designation and Usage from the Middle Ages Onwards', in *Ecclesia Orans* 17 (2000), pp. 153-201.

20 While the verb 'to perform' had many resonances in Middle English (as listed in footnote 3), it is interesting to note that it does not seem to have carried quite the resonances of *acting* or *representing* that it does now. In fact, according to the OED, it did not accrue such resonances until much later; OED dates the first recorded use of 'perform' in the sense 'to present (a play, ballet, opera, etc.) on stage or to an audience; to play or sing (a piece of music) for an audience' to 1567. Additionally, it dates the first recorded use of 'perform' in the sense 'to act or play (a part or role in a play, ballet, etc.); to represent (a character) on stage or to an audience' to 1598. The closest that the MED comes to associating performance with pretence of some sort is under heading 2(e) '~ to falsnesse, to speak deceitfully'; and the closest that it comes to associating it with acting in a theatrical sense is under the same heading, '*ppl.* **performed**, of a text: discoursed or lectured upon'. However, for a subtly articulated argument that, in the late Middle Ages, 'performen' began to accrue something of the modern sense 'play a musical instrument, act, sing', see Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England*, Chicago, London 2007, pp. 16-17.

liturgy.²¹ And such intensity is all the more apparent in the case of the Penitential Psalms which, if understood to form a coherent narrative, ‘adumbrate a drama that begins in abject self-consciousness and ends in the acceptance of God’s merciful sovereignty.’²² That such an understanding of these seven psalms as a distinct and personal dramatic sequence was quite common in the Middle Ages is once again emphasised by Richard Rolle who, in commenting on Psalm 6: 1, writes:

The seven psalmes of the whilk this is the first begynnys all in sorowand gretynge and bitternes of forthynkyng, & thai end in certaynte of pardoun.²³

The seven psalms of which this is the first all begin in sorrowing lamentation and in bitterness of repentance, and they end in certainty of pardon.

This being the case, it should come as no surprise that in the medieval period the Penitential Psalms were often detached from their familiar Latinate liturgical context, and came to play a prominent role in vernacular devotion.

Of course, the question of what and how the non-Latinate prayed in the late Middle Ages is notoriously vexed. Although vernacular devotional and instructional manuals abound, the intercessory guidance that they provide is not always as precise or comprehensive as the literary historian might like.²⁴ Nonetheless, the sheer number of surviving psalm translations, as well as frequent admonitions to pray using the psalms, do

21 The theatricality or otherwise of the liturgy has been a topic of much debate among medievalists, with Hardison emphasising its nature as ‘sacred drama’ and Clopper, for example, arguing against this notion (see Osborn B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama*, Baltimore 1965, and Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*, London 2001). For a convenient summary of this scholarship, see Bruce W. Holsinger ‘Medieval Literature and Cultures of Performance’, in *New Medieval Literatures*, ed. by David Lawton, Rita Copeland, Wendy Scase, Volume 6, Oxford 2003, pp. 271-312.

22 Lynn Staley, ‘The Penitential Psalms: Conversion and the Limits of Lordship’, in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (Spring 2007), pp. 221-269, p. 230. Staley also (p. 222) alludes to the Penitential Psalms as a voicing of ‘the interior drama of conversion’.

23 Bramley, *Psalter*, p. 21. See also Dame Eleanor Hull’s comments on the seven psalms as a sequence: ‘[t]he fyrst begynnnyth with drede and with terys [...] And the laste endyth in certainte of ioye [...] By this we may wel vnderstond that tho that begynnnyth with Daud and abydyn with him in wepyng and in penance, that they schal be reioyssyd in the laste ende with him.’ Barratt, *Hull’s Commentary*, p. 9/266-p. 10/274. (‘The first begins with dread and with tears [...] And the last ends in the certainty of joy [...] By this we may well understand that those who set out with David and remain with him in weeping and in penance, they shall be made glad at the last end with him’).

24 For discussion of vernacular devotional and instructional material circulating in the late Middle Ages, see for example Vincent Gillespie ‘Vernacular Books of Religion’, in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain: 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths, Derek Pearsall, Cambridge 1989, pp. 317-344.

tell us that the Psalter, or at least parts of the Psalter, played a central role in devotional practice. And the particular intercessory significance of the Penitential Psalms (most notably Psalm 50) is highlighted by the survival of two distinct late medieval paraphrases of these seven psalms in their entirety.²⁵ It is to these two paraphrases that attention now turns.²⁶

The first is, of course, the aforementioned metrical version dated to the early fifteenth century and attributed to the Franciscan friar Thomas Brampton. As the twentieth-century editor of this psalm paraphrase tells us, very little is known about Brampton; indeed ‘except as author of the metrical version of the *Seven Penitential Psalms*, the name of Thomas Brampton does not appear anywhere in the many available accounts of literature and literary figures of the Middle Ages’ and although his treatise survives in six manuscripts, only two name him as author.²⁷ Yet since it is beyond the remit of this essay to investigate further questions of authorship, this version will be referred to as Brampton’s throughout.

Brampton’s *Seven Penitential Psalms* take the form of one long poem divided into eight-line stanzas, and in general his method is to devote each stanza to paraphrasing and commenting upon each individual verse of the seven psalms. Thus the first stanza (following the prologue, to which I will

25 The devotional pre-eminence of the Penitential Psalms is also emphasised by their role in contemporary Primers. Although we do not have evidence that vernacular Primers were in use in England before the end of the fourteenth century at the earliest, the Latin texts on which they were modelled would almost invariably have featured the Seven Penitential Psalms as part of their intercessory program. (For background material on the contents of Books of Hours and Primers, see the very useful essay by Bella Millett, ‘*Ancrene Wisse* and the Book of Hours’, in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Christiana Whitehead, Denis Renevey, Cardiff 2000, pp. 21-40).

26 As referenced in footnote 18, a third Middle English (prose) translation and commentary on the Seven Penitential Psalms survives – that of Dame Eleanor Hull, who actually translated her text from French. However, as Hull’s work is more discursive and less straightforwardly devotional than the two paraphrases explored in this essay, it does not play a major part in my current investigations.

27 Kreuzer, *Brampton’s Metrical Paraphrase*, p. 365. For discussion of the six manuscripts, see pp. 360-363. The two manuscripts containing attributions to Brampton are London, British Library, MS Sloane 1853 (in a sixteenth-century hand) and Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.3.20 (in ‘a later hand’ according to Kreuzer). Three manuscripts (Trinity MS R.3.20, Cambridge University MS Ff 2.38 and Magdalene College, Cambridge MS Pepys 1584) contain what Kreuzer calls ‘a variant version of the text’ (the B version alluded to in footnote 1). He states that although the two versions ‘unquestionably stem from the same original, [t]he variant version [B] differs from the normal version [A] in about 130 lines scattered throughout the poem.’ In some places, only a few words are changed, and in others, ‘entire stanzas’ are altered (p. 359). It has been speculated that A is an anti-Lollard text and that B’s alterations are decidedly pro-Lollard. Such speculations are not, however, relevant to this essay, which focuses on B as the more distinctly performative of the two versions.

return), based on Psalm 6: 2 ('O Lord, rebuke me not in thy indignation, nor chastise me in thy wrath'), reads:

Lord wilt þu not me schame ner schend
 Whan þu schalt be in thy fersenes
 To dredefull dome whan I schall wend
 Hold not thy wrahte on my frelenes
 Thy derworthe childirn whan þu schalt bles
 And bid þem euer to Ioy wt þe
 My wyckid werkis more and les
 * * * Ne reminiscaris et cetera.²⁸

Lord will you neither shame nor condemn me
 When you are at your most severe.
 When I must go to the dreadful judgement
 Do not maintain your anger at my frailty.
 When you shall bless your precious children
 And ask them to rejoice with you eternally,
 My wicked works both great and small
 Do not remember, [Lord].

and although this straightforwardly meditative response to the biblical material is not altogether characteristic of Brampton's poem in its entirety, the stanza does share two key features with the rest of the text. The first is Brampton's assumption of the first person in his paraphrasing comments on the verse, and the second is his conclusion of the stanza with the Latin 'ne reminiscaris domine'. Borrowed from the antiphon that in both Sarum and York Breviaries concludes the recitation of the Seven Penitential Psalms and precedes the Litany, Brampton's inclusion of the phrase seems designed to key his devotional text into the conventions of the liturgy, and to present it as straddling the divide between private intercession and public observance.²⁹

The second penitential paraphrase in which this essay is interested is the late fourteenth-century version attributed to Richard Maidstone (d. 1396), known to have been a Carmelite friar and a fierce opponent of John Wyclif. Several works have been attributed to Maidstone, but although relatively few survive, there does not seem to be any reason to

28 Kreuzer, p. 371.

29 'Ne reminiscaris, domine, delicta nostra, vel parentum nostrorum, neque vindictam sumas de peccatis nostris' ('Lord, do not remember our faults, or the faults of our parents, nor exact vengeance for our sins'), in *The Prymer or Lay Folks' Prayer Book*, ed. by Henry Littlehales, volume 2 London 1895, 1897 (EETS os 105 and 109), p. lx. In her aforementioned 2008 *Speculum* article 'Entrances and Exits', Monika Otter makes a similar observation regarding the psalmic intercessions that Goscelin of St. Bertin prescribes for Eva of Wilton: 'They are intensely, emotionally private but also keyed to communal worship. They give the individual worshipper a way to make the liturgical prayer his or her own, to fill it with personal content' (p. 292).

doubt his authorship of the *Penitential Psalms*; his name appears in two of the surviving twenty-seven manuscripts and the treatise is also recognised as his by Bale.³⁰

Like Brampton, Maidstone creates from the Penitential Psalms one long poem of eight-line stanzas, and such are the formal similarities between the two versions that it seems quite possible that Brampton knew of Maidstone's version when he was composing his own.³¹ Both, for example, follow the same basic scheme of devoting each stanza to paraphrasing and commenting upon each individual verse of the seven psalms, although the rhyme schemes of each are different.³² Thus, Maidstone's first stanza, based on Psalm 6: 2 and following the prologue, reads:

Lord in þin angur vptake me nou3te
 And in þi wrethe blame þou not me,
 For certes synne haþ me þour3e sou3te,
 Þat I were lost, nere helpe of þe.
 Þe wantounnesse þat I haue wrou3te,
 For3ete hit lord, for þi pite,
 Þat I be not fro blisse brou3te
 To place þere þat peynes be.³³

Lord do not reprove me in your anger
 And do not blame me in your wrath,
 For surely sin has assaulted me so on all sides,
 That I would be lost, were it not for your help.
 Forget it lord, out of your compassion,
 So that I am not taken from bliss
 There, to that place where pains are.

In its fairly clear delineation between translation (lines 1-2) and commentary (lines 3-8), this stanza is characteristic of the poem as a whole.³⁴ However, it is noteworthy that even when commenting on the Psalmist's words, Maidstone (like Brampton) remains resolute in his use of the first person 'I' (which, throughout his paraphrase, modulates on

30 *Richard Maidstone's Penitential Psalms*, ed. by Valerie Edden, Heidelberg 1990, p. 10. Of these twenty-seven manuscripts, five contain only Psalm 50, highlighting this particular psalm's devotional pre-eminence (pp. 16-17). Edden suggests that the manuscripts should be divided into three variational groups ($\alpha\beta\gamma$) and chooses Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson A 389 as her base text. This contains the β version of the text which is, she argues, the earliest version.

31 Staley, 'The Penitential Psalms' also speculates that Brampton might well have read Maidstone's version (p. 224).

32 Maidstone reads abababab and Brampton ababbcb.

33 Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 47/9-16.

34 On occasion, Maidstone's translation (as distinct from his commentary) stretches over four lines.

occasion into the plural 'we'), allowing neither himself nor his reader to retreat from direct devotional appropriation of the penitential voice of the Psalmist. As Valerie Edden states, Maidstone's overall scheme leads him to favour:

spiritual interpretations in which the penitent reader may become the speaker of the poems. At no point is there any suggestion of the "literal" (historical) reading in which the speaker is David ... The speaker in Maidstone's psalms is indeed normally the penitent sinner, i.e. the reader.³⁵

In thus assuming, with relatively few exceptions, the first-person voice throughout, Maidstone's poem reveals a devotional disposition akin to that which we find in Brampton's later paraphrase; both texts are insistent in demanding an engaged and actively penitent reader.³⁶

That the two share a similar devotional disposition is also emphasised by the fact that they both create coherent intercessory monologues from the Seven Penitential Psalms. Prefaced with prologues and concluding in 'Amen', the two poems ask for sustained meditative reading and engagement.³⁷ Further, both poets seem eager to associate the devotional material provided by their texts with the liturgical and sacramental practices of the church. In Brampton's case, this is achieved by his prologue's introduction of a confessor, a 'brodir ful dere' ('a most excellent brother'), to whom the narrator tells us he 'schroue' himself ('made confession') prior to his penitential recitation of the psalms.³⁸ And it is further reinforced by his aforementioned quotation of the Latin antiphon 'Ne reminiscaris domine' at the end of each eight-line stanza. Indeed, this quotation highlights the fact that the text requires performance of a

35 Valerie Edden, 'Richard Maidstone's Penitential Psalms', in *Carmel in Britain: Essays on the Medieval English Carmelite Province*, ed. by Patrick Fitzgerald-Lombard, vol. 2, Faversham 1992, pp. 106-124, pp. 108-109.

36 The particularity of their lyrical insistence on the first person is highlighted by comparison with the commentaries of Richard Rolle and Eleanor Hull. In the writings of both of these latter figures, we find recognition of different voices at work in the Penitential Psalms. See, for example, Rolle on Psalm 31 'Here the prophet spekis in his person that does penaunce for his synn' ('Here the prophet speaks in the person of one who does penance for his sin') (Bramley, *Psalter*, p. 111) and Hull on Psalm 142 ('þe tytl of þe psalme ys, 'Of Dauid, whan Abselon his sone pursuyd hym.'[...] And þer-for þis psalme representyt to ous þe story of þe repentant Dauid' ('The title of the psalm is, 'Of David, when Absalon his son pursued him' [...] And therefore this psalm represents to us the story of the repentant David.')(Barratt, *Hull's Commentary*, p. 184/5-6, 19-21).

37 Edden in *Carmel in Britain*, p. 106: 'Maidstone's psalms move beyond psalm paraphrase, using the psalms as the basis for a single, continuous penitential meditation to be used in private devotion [...] the psalms are joined together in one meditation with no breaks between individual psalms. Links are made between them, a single theme unites them and they have a coherent structure.' As this essay will suggest, the meditative coherence of Maidstone's version is perhaps greater than that which we find in Brampton.

38 Kreuzer, pp. 370-371.