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-Symposium 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