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 Daid 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 Daud, whan Abselon his sone pursuyd hym.'[...] And þer-for þis psalme representyt to ous þe story of þe repentant Daud' ('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.

liturgical nature; its effectiveness is related directly to its penitential recitation. To borrow from the words of a short monograph on liturgical hermeneutics, as in the case of the liturgy, so in the case of Brampton's paraphrase, the treatise 'must be recognised as simultaneously text and performance'; its true significance is realised only in its recitation and enactment.³⁹ In the case of Maidstone's paraphrase, liturgical and sacramental affiliations are less obviously foregrounded, but incidental references to 'shrifte' ('confession') suggest that the friar saw his poem as complementing rather than supplanting the formal observances of the church.⁴⁰

Despite such similarities, however, each paraphrase is marked by a distinct character and emphasis. Maidstone, always careful to divide his biblical translation from his interpretative material, and resolutely Christological in his interpretation of the psalms, might be characterised as the more cautious of the two exegetes. Brampton, meanwhile, is less consistent; in his passionate and impulsive text, translation and commentary often merge into each other, and devotional engagement with the psalm on which he is elaborating is, on occasion, replaced by urgently voiced contemporary social criticism.⁴¹ Additionally, where Maidstone's not infrequent references to 'we' as readers and speakers of his psalm paraphrase indicate a consciousness of the text's applicability to an audience beyond himself, Brampton is rather more overtly and dramatically aware of his poem as aiming at listeners in addition to the

39 Bridget Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics: Interpreting Liturgical Rites in Performance*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996, p. 15.

40 See, for example, Maidstone's comment on Psalm 31: 16: 'pour3e shrifte wol I fro me browen / Al my mysdede & mourne among' ('through confession I will throw from myself / All of my wrongdoings, mourning all the while') (Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 54/123-124). Staley, 'The Penitential Psalms', suggests that Maidstone's poem 'speak[s] directly to a reader whose desire for spiritual enlightenment finds expression in private reading, but a reader who can expect that reading to be guided by a clerical figure.' (p. 231). A similar point is made by Edden in *Carmel in Britain*, in which she states '[t]hroughout [Maidstone's poem] it is assumed that the penitent sinner will receive the merits of the atonement through the normal channels of the institutional church' (p. 117).

41 Such, for example, is the case with Brampton's remarks on Psalm 101: 17 ('For the Lord hath built up Sion: and he shall be seen in his glory') in which translation is supplanted entirely by social comment: 'Syon that was dauyches toure / Hyt sygnyfyeth þe orde of knyght / That schulde be hooly chyrches socoure / And mayntene trefwe day and nyght / But now tyrauntrys ys holden ry3t / And sadnesse ys turned to sotelte / Awake wt mercy and mesure þy myght / Wt ne reminiscaris domine' (Syon, which was the tower of David / signifies the order of knighthood / That should be the succour of holy church / And should maintain truth day and night / But now tyrants are regarded as just / And that which is serious is turned to obscurity / Awake with mercy and exert your power / With 'do not remember, Lord.') (Kreuzer, p. 393).

God whom his penitent speaker is addressing.⁴² Indeed, his narrator appears to veer between an understanding of what he is doing as sacramental penance before the divine (supervised by a clerical intermediary):

I syghed and made full Ruthefull chere
 Myne hert for sorowe began to blede
 I sent aftir a brodir ful dere
 Of hym me thought I had grete need...⁴³
 I sighed and assumed a very sorrowful expression,
 My heart for sorrow began to bleed.
 I sent for a most excellent brother
 For I thought I had great need of him.

and an awareness of his actions as forming part of a public performance of exemplary value to a wider audience:

Myne help myne hele it lieth in the
 For euer I cry in town and felde
 Aftir * * * Ne reminiscaris et cetera.⁴⁴
 My help and my salvation rely on you
 For I constantly cry out in town and field
 In the same manner as 'Lord, do not remember etc'.

The respective prologues of the two psalm paraphrases also indicate authors with different understandings of their own role and of the function of their devotional texts. Maidstone's serves as a straightforward and factual introduction to the penitential poem which it precedes:

To Goddes worshepe þat [dere vs] bou3te,
 To whom we owen to make oure moon
 Of oure synnes þat we haue wrou3te
 In 3ouþe and elde, wel many oon;
 Be seuen salmes are þour3e sou3te
 In shame of alle oure goostly foon,
 And in Englisshe þei ben brou3te
 [For synne in man to be fordon] ⁴⁵
 To the praise of God who redeemed [us at a high price],
 To whom we ought to make remembrance
 Of our sins that we have committed
 In youth and in old age, very many a one;

42 Michael P. Kuczynski, *Prophetic Song: The Psalms as Moral Discourse in Late Medieval England*, Pennsylvania 1995, refers to Maidstone's speaker as 'a model of Davidic interiority' (p. 134). This is accurate to an extent, but it does not register the friar's awareness of his text as involving penitent readers beyond himself.

43 Kreuzer, p. 370.

44 Kreuzer, p. 373. This forms part of a comment on Psalm 6: 8: 'My eye is troubled through indignation: I have grown old amongst all my enemies.'

45 Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 47/1-8.

The seven psalms are thoroughly examined
 To the shame of all our spiritual enemies,
 And they have been translated into English
 [In order that sin in man might be defeated]

These 'seven salmes', the friar tells us, have been translated into English because their recitation combats the effects of sin and brings 'shame' to 'oure goostly foon'. Maidstone makes no mention of his role as translator (he states that 'pei' [have] ben brou3te' (translated) into English, rather than that 'I have translated them') and nothing is couched in terms of the exclusive first person singular. Instead, the text is very explicit in making itself relevant and available to all penitent readers; every personal pronoun is plural and inclusive. Brampton, by contrast, is not interested in bare facts, but immediately fictionalises his poem's process of creation. Setting a vivid scene from the outset, his narrator tells us that he is bed-ridden and sick but unable to sleep due to a grief stricken heart:

As I lay in my bed
 And sickenes Revid me of my rest
 What maner life þt I had led
 For to thynke me thoughte it best
 A non my hert began to brest
 I saide lord haue mercy on me
 I cryed knockyng on my brest
 * * * Ne reminiscaris domine.⁴⁶

As I lay in my bed
 And sickness robbed me of my rest,
 On the sort of life that I had led
 I thought it best to meditate.
 Immediately my heart began to burst
 I said 'Lord, have mercy on me',
 I cried out, beating on my breast,
 'Lord, do not remember'.

His is a more dramatic prologue than Maidstone's, by which I mean that it is more 'staged'; not only does it insist on the particular experience of a first person singular narrator, but it also invites us, as audience, to eavesdrop on and view an apparently private world. And although it clearly introduces a poem of devotional intent, there is no explicit reference, such as we find in Maidstone's prologue, to its nature as psalm paraphrase.

In fact, Brampton's poem sounds, initially at least, more like a medieval dream vision than a biblical translation. Often opening with an elaborately imagined scene involving a troubled and sleepless narrator, dream poetry was exceptionally popular in the Middle Ages and may well

46 Kreuzer, p. 370.

have been a conscious influence on Brampton. The opening lines of Chaucer's earliest dream vision, *The Book of the Duchess*, are particularly illuminating in terms of the generic light that they shed on Brampton's later *Penitential Psalms*:

I have grete wonder, be this lyghte,
 How that I lyve, for day ne nyghte
 I may nat slepe wel nygh noght:
 I have so many an ydel thoght,
 [...]
 Defaulte of slepe and hevynesse
 Hath [slain] my spirite of quyknese,
 That I have loste al lustyhede;
 Suche fantasies ben in myn hede,
 So I not what is best too doo.
 But men myght axe me why soo
 [I may not slepe and what me is.
 But nathelesse, who aske this
 Leseth his askyng trewly.
 Myselfen can not tel why
 The soothe, but trewly as I gesse,
 I holde it be a sicknesse
 That I have suffred this eyght yere.⁴⁷

I have great wonder, by this light,
 At how I continue to live, for by day and night
 I scarcely manage to sleep at all.
 Lack of sleep and slothfulness
 Have destroyed any vigour in my spirit,
 So that I have lost all joyfulness.
 Such fantasies are in my head,
 That I do not know what is best to do.
 But men might ask me why it is
 That I may not sleep and what is the matter with me.
 But nevertheless, whoever asks this
 Truly wastes his question.
 I myself cannot tell why
 In truth, but honestly as I guess,
 I believe it to be a sickness
 That I have suffered from this past eight years.

Chaucer's introduction is obviously more discursive and detailed than that of Brampton; his narrator is overtly preoccupied by the fact that he cannot sleep and he is more expansive on the subject. Further, Chaucer's

47 *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. by Helen Phillips, Nick Haveley, London 1997, pp. 50-52/1-4 and 25-37. For prefatory material to other late medieval dream visions, see *The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* in the same volume. See also, for example, *Pearl*, ed. by E.V. Gordon, Oxford 1953 and *Piers Plowman*, ed. by A.V. C. Schmidt, 2nd edn, London 1995.

text lacks the obvious devotional tenor so apparent in *Brampton*. But there are certain similarities in the situations of the two narrators; both are alone in bed (this becomes apparent slightly later in Chaucer's poem), neither can sleep and both blame this on sickness. And the similarities persist; *Brampton*'s narrator, troubled by his sleeplessness and blaming it on an acute awareness of his own sin, sends (as quoted above) for a 'brodir ful dere':

Myne hert for sorowe began to blede
 I sent aftir a brodir ful dere
 Of hym me thought I had great nede
 I schroue me to hym or I yede
 Of thought of worde þeis thre
 I cryed to god wt great drede
 Aftir * * * Ne reminiscaris domine.⁴⁸

My heart began to bleed for sorrow
 I sent after a most excellent brother
 I thought that I had great need of him.
 I made my confession to him before I went
 Of thought, of word, of these three,
 I cried out to God with great fear
 In the manner of 'Lord, do not remember'.

who advises the narrator to read and recite the Penitential Psalms as remedy for his sins:

This brodir was ful wise of lore
 And saide theis synnys forgeuyn are
 If þou purpos to syn no more
 God of his mercy will þe spare [...]
 Ferthir more for thy trespass
 That þu hast done to god of heuyn
 If god will lend þe life and space
 Thou schalt sey the psalmys sevyne
 The better with god þu maist be evyn.⁴⁹

This brother was most wise in learning
 And said 'these sins are forgiven.
 If you do not intend to sin any more
 God will spare you, out of his mercy [...]
 Furthermore, for the trespass
 That you have done to God of heaven,
 If God will grant you life and space
 You shall say the seven psalms
 In order that you might be clear of debt before God.'

48 Kreuzer, pp. 370-371.

49 Kreuzer, p. 371.

In a not unrelated move, Chaucer's narrator also resolves to deal with his sleeplessness in a 'text based' manner, by asking someone to fetch him a book to read:

So whan I sawe I might not slepe
 Tyl nowe late this other nyght,
 Upon my bedde I sate upright
 And bade one reche me a booke,
 A romaunce, and he it me toke,
 To rede and drive the nyght away.⁵⁰
 So when I saw that I was unable to sleep
 Until just recently this other night,
 I sat upright on my bed
 And asked someone to fetch me a book,
 A romance, and he brought it to me,
 To read and to drive the night away.

Again, obviously, there are real differences between the two: Brampton's narrator is clearly operating within a devotional sphere and is set his reading as penance ('[t]he better with god þu maist be evyn'), whereas Chaucer's chooses his own book (a 'romaunce') and reads simply to pass the time (to 'drive the nyght away').⁵¹ And finally, although the similarities between Brampton's preface and the conventions of dream poetry seem incontestable, the friar's poem of course lacks the one defining ingredient of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and of dream poetry as a genre—namely, the dream itself. Indeed, while Chaucer's narrator proceeds to fall asleep and to re-emerge into a dream landscape, Brampton's does not sleep and is virtually erased from the poem by the psalm paraphrase that follows the preface.

Given this, what did Brampton have to gain by generically quoting from the dream vision in his introductory lines?⁵² What does the allusion

50 Phillips and Haveley, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, p. 52.

51 I am indebted to Dr. Nicholas Perkins for pointing out that just as Brampton might be drawing on devices associated with dream poetry, so Chaucer may allude to some conventions and commonplaces of devotional poetry at the outset of *The Book of the Duchess*. The dreamer's 'ydel thought' ('idle thought') (4) and the fact that he has 'felynge in nothyng' ('feeling in nothing') (11) could suggest that he has fallen prey to the sin of sloth, and there may also be a parodic sense that although he should have chosen to read the bible as a remedy for this sin, the 'romaunce' which he actually picks up appears to be the Lover's Bible (ie., Ovid).

52 Of course, Brampton is by no means the only late medieval author to draw on the conventions of dream poetry in a poem that does not actually feature a dream. Some devotional lyrics also appear to set themselves within this generic context; see, for example, 'Als i lay vp-on a nith / Alone in my longging, / Me þouthe i sau a wonder sith, / A maiden child rokking' ('As I lay one night / Alone in my longing, / It seemed to me that I saw a wonderful sight, / A maiden rocking a child') (*Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown, revd. by G.V. Smithers, 2nd edn, Oxford 1952, pp. 70-75). See also

lend to his poem that we do not find in that of Maidstone? Put simply, literary dreaming was taken very seriously in the Middle Ages, and certain types of dreams were thought to carry messages of real import and often supernatural significance.⁵³ So by opening in a manner reminiscent of the conventions of such visionary literature, Brampton's preface leads us very deliberately to expect a poem in which we are granted access to an authoritative voice. And despite the absence of the dream itself, this is indeed exactly what happens; following immediately upon the confessor's injunction to recite the Penitential Psalms ('Be gyn and sey wt mylde stevyn / Oft * * * Ne reminisc et cetera') ('Begin and say repeatedly with a gentle voice / 'Do not remember', etc'), the narrator's voice modulates into the biblically authoritative voice of the Psalmist (or at least a vernacular paraphrase of the same) and the fictionalising prologue gives way to scripturally based meditation.⁵⁴

The observation that the narrator's voice modulates into that of the Psalmist raises an important question, a question that this essay has touched upon already, and one that is of as much relevance to Maidstone's poem as it is to that of Brampton. Throughout these penitential paraphrases, who is actually performing the psalms, in both senses of the word outlined above? Is it David, whose acute awareness of his own sin was believed to have given rise to the sequence of Penitential Psalms? Or are the performers Maidstone and Brampton, as respective authors? Alternatively, are both texts performed by the poetic personae that they have constructed? Or are we, as audience, the true performers of the psalms? Are we in fact participants in, rather than observers of, the text? The answer is surely that at different times and to differing degrees almost all of the above can legitimately be regarded as key performers of the paraphrases in question.⁵⁵

'As I lay vp-on a nyth / My powth was on a berd so brith / That men clepyn marye ful of myth / Redemptoris mater' ('As I lay one night / My mind was on a bird so bright / Whom men call Mary full of grace / Mother of the Redeemer') in *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown, Oxford 1939, pp. 108-109. I am again indebted to Dr. Nicholas Perkins for his observation that, at its outset, Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* also positions itself as a 'waking dream' in a manner which bears quite some similarity to Brampton's opening. See 'Musyng upon the restelesse besynesse [...] / As I lay in my bedde apon a nyght, / Thought me byrefte of slepe the force and might' ('Musing on the restless anxiety [...] / As I lay in my bed one night, / Worry bereft me of the efficacy and power of sleep') (*Thomas Hoccleve – Selected Poems*, ed. by Bernard O'Donoghue, Manchester 1982, p. 73/1, 6-7).

53 For an accessible account of medieval dream theory, see the introduction to Phillips and Haveley, *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*.

54 Kreuzer, p. 371.

55 The one exception to this is David. Neither Maidstone nor Brampton seems interested, for the purposes of their paraphrases, in the historical role of David as supposed author of the

At the most basic level, the poems are performed by Maidstone and Brampton as respective authors; after all, the translations have been devised by them, and they are responsible for setting them in poetic form. But this notion of author as key performer is problematic in both cases; in Maidstone's because he is rigorous in deleting any traces of authorial individuality from his poem, and in Brampton's because we know virtually nothing about him as a historical individual.⁵⁶ Indeed, given the fact that we know of his existence only by means of his identification in association with the penitential paraphrase attributed to him, one might say that the text actually performs him rather than vice versa; in a curiously paradoxical move, Brampton is brought into being by the poem that has been attributed to him.⁵⁷ To make this claim obviously involves an understanding of performance as creation, an understanding supplementary (although not unrelated) to those which have been introduced already in this essay. But the legitimacy of such an understanding is highlighted once again by the Middle English Dictionary which, among its definitions of 'performen', lists the sense 'to make or construct'; our perception of Brampton is constructed in and by the text with which he is associated.⁵⁸

Yet Brampton can also be argued to take on an active role in constructing the vivid narrative persona and situation with which his poem begins, and in a sense, one could say that it is this persona who truly performs the text and the penitential activity associated with it. To return to a section of the preface from which I quoted previously, the penance enjoined upon the narrator by the confessor involves performance both in the sense of doing God's will by retreating from sin:

If þou purpos to syn no more
God of his mercy will þe spare

psalms. Instead, as this essay has suggested, their priority is one of encouraging the reader's devotional appropriation of the speaking voice of the Psalmist.

56 As I have suggested already, Brampton foregrounds his narrative persona as performer of the text more obviously than does Maidstone. Although, in both paraphrases, authorial individuality is largely effaced in favour of identification with the speaker of the psalms, Maidstone is more rigorous in his self-deletion. Not only does his poem lack Brampton's particularising and dramatic prologue, but it is littered with alliterative formulae (eg., 'For foule wiþ feþer ny fische wiþ fynne / Is noon vnstidfaste but I' ('For no foul with feather nor fish with fin / Is as unsteadfast as me.') (Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 49/35-36)) and with images typical of the religious lyric (eg., 'þenke þi corruptible cors / Is nou3te but wormes mete, iwis' ('Think that your corruptible body / Is nothing but food for worms, indeed') (Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 57/173-174)) that make it difficult to define his poetic voice as anything other than conventional.

57 A similar point, much more fully developed, is explored in Manuele Gragnolati's essay in this volume, 'The Performance of the Author in Dante's *Vita nova*'.

58 For this interpretation of 'performen', see MED 3(a), as quoted in footnote 3 of this essay.

If you do not intend to sin any more
 God will spare you, out of his mercy

and in the sense of engaging wholeheartedly in the act of penitential recitation:

Ferthir more for thy trespas
 That þu hast done to god of heuyn
 If god will lend þe life and space
 Thou schalt sey the psalmys seyn
 The better with god þu maist be evyn.⁵⁹

Furthermore, for the trespass
 That you have done to God of heaven,
 If God will grant you life and space
 You shall say the seven psalms
 In order that you might be clear of debt before God.

But, as noted above, the distinct narrative persona who features so strongly in Brampton's preface does not maintain his presence throughout the poem. Indeed, the pseudo-autobiographical particularity of his situation disappears as soon as the psalm paraphrase begins, and he is not revisited at the end of the text.⁶⁰ He was, it would seem, a useful but dispensable device, whose individuality is absorbed easily into the non-specific 'I' who voices the rest of this poem, and who also features throughout Maidstone's text.

Reference to the role of the non-specific 'I' in Brampton's and Maidstone's paraphrases alerts our attention once more to the ways in which both texts make themselves available to us as readers.⁶¹ By presenting their translations as articulated in such a manner, these authors invite us to assume the voice of the psalmist, to play our part in the performance of penance that the texts require.⁶² Indeed, in both texts, the imperative placed on us as readers to involve ourselves in penitential

59 Kreuzer, p. 371.

60 When viewed in light of the generic norms of dream vision, one might say that Brampton's poem lacks the resolution often (although not invariably, particularly in the case of Chaucer) associated with the moment of waking at the end of the dream/poem. His narrator remains stranded in the text, effaced by the generic 'I' of the psalm paraphrase.

61 In thus effacing their individuality in favour of the non-specific, Maidstone and Brampton differ markedly from the compiler and scribe Ivan, discussed in C. M. MacRobert's essay in this volume ('Remember me in your prayers': Reading the Church Slavonic Psalter as an act of commemoration), who personalises his Psalter manuscript by inserting his own name throughout.

62 This assuming of the psalmic voice would have been all the more striking in a medieval context, in which private reading could be a voiced activity. For background, see, for example, Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, Stanford 1997. For a thought-provoking investigation of performativity and private (primarily monastic) reading in the late Middle Ages, see Jessica Brantley's aforementioned monograph, *Reading in the Wilderness*.

activity is reinforced by the occasional modulation of the singular 'I' into the plural 'we'. So, for example, in the midst of the first-person particularity of Brampton's preface, we find ourselves implicated:

Of *my* mysdedis avenge þe nought
 But graunte *me* mercy and pite
My wordis werkis and wicked þou3t
 Spare *thi* *pepill* þt is outrage
We cry to þe Full pytuously...⁶³
 Do not avenge yourself on *my* wrongdoings
 But grant *me* mercy and pity
My words, deeds and wicked thoughts
 Spare *your people* who are wanton
We cry to you most piteously.

and Maidstone involves us from the very first line of his treatise:

To Goddes worshepe þat [*dere vs*] bou3te,
 To whom *we* owen to make *oure* moon [...]
 Þe seuen salmes are þour3e sou3te
 In shame of alle *oure* goostly foon...⁶⁴
 To the praise of God who redeemed [*us* at a high price],
 To whom *we* ought to make *our* remembrance [...]
 The seven psalms are thoroughly examined
 To the shame of all *our* spiritual enemies

In fact, without our participation, both of these poems would be incomplete. In order to fulfil their intended function of reconciling the individual with God, they require our penitential engagement, without which they would not *mean* as they should. Put another way, these texts

63 Kreuzer, p. 370 (Italics mine). It is also noteworthy that, on occasion, Brampton leaves behind the reflective first person voice of the Psalmist, and becomes more overtly instructional, addressing his comments to a second person. See, for example, his response to Psalm 31: 5: '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', which reads: 'If þou wt gode advisement / Of thy synys wilt þe schryve / Thy soule schall neuer in hell be brent / While þu wilt here þi penance dryve / Amend thy life I Red þe blyve / Or euer thy wittis from þe fle / And think þe while þu art alive / Of * * * Ne reminiscaris et cetera' ('If, after thorough reflection / You will make confession of your sins / Your soul shall never be burnt in hell / As long as you will perform your penance here. / I advise you to swiftly amend your life / Otherwise your wits will flee from you forever. / And while you are alive, bethink yourself / of the words 'Do not remember etc') (Kreuzer, p. 375).

64 Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 47/1-2 and 5-6. Both authors, on occasion, also involve us as readers by clearly setting up their individual 'I' as an example to all readers. For example, see the concluding couplet of Maidstone's comment on Psalm 6: 7: 'I have laboured in my groanings, every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with my tears', which reads: 'þefore I wepe & water out wrynge, / As I wel au3te and euery wi3te' ('Therefore I weep and wring out water, / As I, and every person, certainly ought') (Edden, *Maidstone's Psalms*, p. 50/55-56).

require us to perform them, not simply in the sense of *voicing* their words, but also in the sense of *completing* them, of executing their imperatives. To return once more to the Middle English Dictionary, 'to perform' is 'to perfect, [to] make perfect, [to] make whole'; it is our duty as readers to perfect the text.⁶⁵

Furthermore, one might say that just as we 'complete' the text (insofar as we enact the precepts and principles of the Penitential Psalms) so, in a reciprocal move, the text offers us the chance of 'completing' ourselves (in that it provides us with the tools to reconcile our sinful selves with the divine); we both perform, and are performed by, the poems that we read. Viewed thus, Maidstone's and Brampton's paraphrases can be understood to share characteristics with the liturgy, for just as liturgical repetition implies that the speaking individual (or community) is affected and changed 'by the words that constitute the rite (eg. couples are married; the unbaptized are baptized ...)', so, these poems suggest, the recitation of the Penitential Psalms effects change in the individual's relationship with God:

Thou schalt sey the psalmys seyn
The better with god þu maist be evyn...⁶⁶

You shall say the seven psalms
In order that you might be clear of debt before God.

And, of course, 'a claim of this order' places Maidstone's and Brampton's poems, alongside the liturgy, 'in the category of performative speech acts.'⁶⁷

In the final chapter of her *Revelation of Divine Love*, the fourteenth-century English mystic Julian of Norwich writes:

This booke is begunne be Gods gift and his grace, but it is not yet performid, as to my syte.⁶⁸

65 See footnote 3 of this essay, definition 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**. Echoing this definition, in his influential work on ritual and theatre, Victor Turner characterised performance thus: '[T]o *perform* is to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act.' (Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York, 1982), p. 91). See also Holsinger, 'Medieval Literature and Cultures of Performance' where he points out that Turner traced the etymology of performance to the Old French *parfourmir*, 'a verb that connotes a furnishing forth, a completion, or the thorough accomplishing of a task – various forms of *doing*, in other words' (p. 274).

66 Kreuzer, p. 371.

67 Nichols, *Liturgical Hermeneutics*, pp. 145-146.

68 *Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe, Exeter 1976, revd. 1993, chapter 86, p. 134.

This book is begun by God's gift and his grace, but as far as I can see, it is not yet performed.

Despite the completion of her book, Julian sees her visionary experience and its ramifications as remaining incomplete, unperformed, until we, as readers, involve ourselves in the text, and allow it to affect and alter our lives and experience. And in invoking notions of performance and (in)completion just as her treatise nears its end, Julian anticipates Bampton, whose remark '[t]eche me to performe thy wyll' (with which this essay began) forms part of his translation of Psalm 142, the last of the Penitential Psalms; the real performance of the treatise – and of the godly life, he suggests, lies beyond the confines of the written page.⁶⁹ Indeed, there is a very real sense in which texts such as those which have been explored in this essay are not performed (ie., complete) until we have performed (ie., read and done) them, and allowed ourselves to be performed (ie., re-created and re-constructed) by them.

69 Kreuzer, p. 403.