Street Scenes: Late Medieval Acting and Performance
Sharon Aronson-Lehavi
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"Christ never laughed, so far as we know," says a priest in Samuel Beckett's novel *Molloy*; to which a parishioner responds: "Can you wonder?" If it was no laughing matter to *be* Christ, nor was it apparently to *act* his part in medieval drama. Sharon Aronson-Lehavi cites a well-known fourteenth-century Latin sermon exemplum describing a theatrical "game", in which a participant expresses his extreme reluctance to repeat the experience: "I was Christ and was crucified, beaten, mocked … And therefore I tell you for sure that if I must play again, I do not want to be Christ ... but a tormentor or a demon." Getting crucified, it seems, was not all it was cracked up to be, but there was fun to be had in other roles.

For the authors of the late medieval anti-theatrical tract "A treatise of miraclis pleyinge" — which Clifford Davidson has described as "the most important piece of dramatic criticism in Middle English" — it was the solemn reality of the sacred subject matter that made it inappropriate for the levity inherent in dramatic performance. This uncompromisingly humourless treatise, which was once assumed to be Wycliffite in origin, is at the heart of Aronson-Lehavi's short but extremely thought-provoking book, where its various arguments are scrutinized in order to reconstruct "a late medieval performance theory" and "a poetics of religious theatre". *Street Scenes*, which engages usefully with recent theoretical writing by Sarah Beckwith, Jody Enders and Theresa Coletti among others, is the most sustained reading to date of the "Treatise", a modern English translation of which is offered in an appendix.

The overall argument of the treatise is that only the original deeds of Christ are real and effectual, and that their mimetic representation as "play" is both mendacious and profoundly — indeed blasphemously — disrespectful. ("Men thane pleyinge the name of Goddis miraclis … they scornen his name and so scornyn him.") The precise target of the treatise is, however, contested. Lawrence Clopper has long argued that it is not aimed against religious drama at all, doggedly maintaining that "miraclis" refers not to "miracle plays" but exclusively to "*miracula*" — unruly and parodic summer games practised by the clergy. Aronson-Levi avoids taking on Clopper's arguments in detail, but nonetheless her book makes a strong case for the more traditional view that the treatise's criticisms are aimed at religious drama in general and at the mystery plays in particular. Her analysis of the crucial word "miraclis" is persuasive, and she thoroughly examines the way it is used in the text to refer to two kinds of performance: the actual miracles originally performed (ie carried out) by Christ and the staged miracles performed (ie represented) by late-medieval actors.

Central to Aronson-Lehavi's reading is one of the treatise's most memorable images, one that is both iconic and homely: "And right as a nail smitten in holdith two thingis togidere, so drede smitten to Godward holdith … oure believe to him." Conversely, the treatise argues, the playfulness and levity of theatrical performance can only serve as a hammer on the other side of the wood "driv[ing] out the nail of oure drede in God". The point, as Aronson-Lehavi puts it, is that "there should be no *space* between the nail and what it holds together, and performances … explicitly create such space." For Aronson-Lehavi, however, this space between the original miracles and their dramatic representation is not only what the treatise finds objectionable but also what the plays themselves celebrate. They repeatedly draw attention to the simultaneous presence of the performing actor and the performed role but also to the "ontological" distance between them.

In a performance, medieval actors therefore have a dual function: as characters in a biblical story and as citizens in a late-medieval street. Here Aronson-Lehavi sees an anticipation of Brecht, and her use of twentieth-century dramatic theory to shed light on medieval practice, though not new in itself, is deftly handled. It is in fact Brecht's essay "The Street Scene: A Basic Model for Epic Theatre" that gives the book its title. Here Brecht compares his ideal actor to "an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place": the objective is not to give a lifelike portrayal of the chauffeur, but simply to demonstrate what happened. The demonstration admits to being a demonstration and does not try to be the actual event. With well-chosen examples drawn mainly from the York cycle, Aronson-Lehavi shows how in various ways late medieval drama draws attention to and successfully exploits the gap between the narrated event and what she repeatedly refers to as the "liveness" and "eventness" of the performance itself — a liveness that is always charged with the risks of the material and the contingent. (Here she cites Sarah Beckwith's eyewitness account of a production of the "Entry Into Jerusalem" in which the donkey "strolled on with a massive erection".)

After an introduction that sets out many of the issues at stake, *Street Scenes* is divided into three substantial chapters. The first sketches an overview of current scholarship on the "Treatise", including brief mention of its likely date (1380–1425) and provenance (between Northampton, Peterborough and Huntingdon). (Unfortunately, no discussion of its manuscript context is given.) The chapter then goes on to analyse the structure and six main arguments of the treatise, using them to support the author's contention (*pace* Clopper) that it was directed against "intentionally devotional" performances such as biblical drama. The chapter also discusses a number of key words used in the treatise, including "bourding" (joking, jesting, playing), and "game" (a word with a surprisingly wide semantic range). Aronson-Lehavi's discussion of these terms is succinct but informative. Nevertheless, she might have engaged more fully with V.A. Kolve's classic work on the ludic aspects of the Corpus Christi plays, and with Johan Huizinga's theories of play, which were Kolve's inspiration.

The second chapter provides a much closer reading of the anti-theatrical arguments of the treatise and its four key "concepts of performance". The first such concept is "contrariety and simultaneity" or "the dialectical co-existence of different ontological levels of performance". Aronson-Lehavi dwells especially on the treatise's assertion that just as no man can serve two masters, so it is impossible to hear the "voice of Crist" when distracted by the "voice of the fleysh" — the material body of the actor. The second concept is "signification and efficacy". Here the focus is on the treatise's apparently Platonic argument that spectatorial experience is a kind of "fals witnessinge" because events performed on stage, despite their material presence in front of the spectator, are less "real" and certainly less efficacious than the works actually performed by Christ. The third concept is the "emotionality" of performance — its affective and cathartic function. The fourth, dealt with rather cursorily, is "communality" — the rootedness of performance in urban life and civic politics.

The final chapter moves away from the treatise itself and instead examines a sequence of examples from the York plays. In order to demonstrate that much medieval acting was "epic" in Brecht's sense, the discussion focuses illuminatingly on a fairly familiar series of characteristic elements: emphatic and repetitive deictic language; masks; the use of multiple actors playing a single role (four different processional plays involving Adam and Eve meant the use of four pairs of actors); and quotable gestural leitmotifs. The final section discusses representations of the passion sequence as "total theatre" and examines the idea that in drawing attention to the extreme physical discomfort of the central actor the plays undergo a "shift from the semiotic to the phenomenological realm" so that "the *real* infliction of pain creates a theatrical emphasis on the performer as distinct from the character". The actor who suffers — in one sense a contradiction in terms — not only represents Christ and performs affective mimesis, but also demonstrates and exhibits his own pain.

Which returns us to the medieval actor's alleged account of his experience: "If I *must* play again, I do not want to be Christ." Given the nature of the game, we can hardly wonder.

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Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England,* C. *800*–C. *1250
Ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler
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This book makes a significant contribution to the growing field of the study of medieval multilingualism. There are eighteen contributions in total (including the 'Introduction'), catering to a wide diversity of interests, and providing a wide range of readings of medieval multilingualism. Areas covered include vernacular multilingualism, the bilingualism of Latin versus the vernacular, as well as written and oral multilingualism. I will discuss the contributions thematically, altering the order from that in which they appear in the volume.

Since the volume arose from a conference, it presents a multiplicity of voices. It is also clear that the project had outgrown the original limitations set by the title. While the title of the book limits it to England, which would seem to indicate that Welsh, Irish, Cornish, Scots Gaelic, and Pictish would be discussed only insofar as they were spoken within its boundaries, the individual contributions venture beyond the geographical bounds suggested by the title, encompassing Wales (Helen Fulton), Ireland (Julia Crick), and relations to the Continent (in particular, Elizabeth Tyler and Thomas O'Donnell).

To turn to the individual contributions, the first article, Thomas Bredehoft's 'Multiliteralism in Anglo-Saxon Verse Inscriptions' [pp. 15-32], focuses on the co-existence of different scripts in inscriptions and analyses the interrelation between this 'multiliteralism' and the corresponding multilingualism. Bredehoft's analysis of the Franks Casket and the Ruthwell Cross suggests that in the case of the first, literacy in both scripts was anticipated, while the second represents a group where the anticipation was that readers would be familiar with only one of the scripts used.

Multilingualism in written texts is also the theme of Orietta Da Rold and Mary Swan's 'Linguistic Contiguities' [pp. 255-70], which draws on the AHRC-funded project 'The Production and Use of English Manuscripts 1060-1220' <www.le.ac.uk/ee/em1060to1220/> (accessed 28 April, 2012). They address the problems associated with deploying categories such as original text/copy or Old/Middle English, English/French in textual databases. The example examined in the article is Cambridge University Library MS Ii 1.33 (s. xii^{2}), which contains contemporary annotations in French, English and Latin. One of the most interesting questions the article raises is that of whether contemporaries saw Old and Middle English as distinct languages, which leads to the question of how multilingualism was perceived in the Middle Ages. One can only hope that these, as well as the series of more specific questions posed in this article [p. 263], will eventually be tackled in further publications. Finally, the information on XML, tagging, and the Appendix to this article [pp. 267-70] are particularly useful for anyone contemplating a similar project.

The issue of medieval perception and use of multilingualism also arises from Stephen Baxter's 'The Making of the Domesday Book' [pp. 271-308]. Baxter examines the Domesday survey as a multilingual event. Indeed, his examination of the formulae employed in the Domesday Book [pp. 293-8] not only exposes the processes by which the Book came into being, but also shows the uses to which the commissioners put their multilingualism.

On a smaller scale, the issue of a multilingual creation process is addressed by Rebecca Stephenson who discusses Bryhtferth's *Enchiridion* [pp. 121-43]. Stephenson argues that although Bryhtferth presents English as inferior to Latin, the former is, in fact, the primary language of instruction in the *Enchiridion*. According to Stephenson, although there is less material in English in the text, the hermeneutic tendencies of the Latin mean that the English reader receives the same amount of information, minus the 'scholastic ornamentation' [p. 128]. She shows that by creating a bilingual treatise Bryhtferth avoided the problem of English being an unacceptable medium for pedagogical instruction at the time.

The issue of attitudes towards multilingualism, again focusing on an individual, is addressed in the context of Continental connections in Roger Wright's discussion of Abbo of Fleury's stay in Ramsey [pp. 105-20]. Wright highlights the contrast between English and Continental attitudes to Latin. He also raises the issue of the links between the intellectual worlds of England and the Continent before the Norman Conquest.

This theme is also taken up in the editor's article [pp. 171-96], which examines the role of royal women in the development of a multilingual culture in eleventh-century England. The study is particularly interesting because it highlights the differences between the ways women and men 'crossed the conquests' of the period [p. 173]. Tyler concentrates on the figures of Emma, Edith, Margaret of Scotland, and Edith/Matilda, who were not only multilingual but also multicultural, with experience of both England and the Continent. Tyler's argument is that their literary patronage brings England into the frame of European literary development.

In 'Can an Englishman Read a *Chanson de Geste*?' [pp. 321-36] Andrew Taylor takes the issue of connections with the Continent further, challenging what he calls the 'national sequestering of the *chanson de geste*'. Most of the article is dedicated to the discussion of the Austin cannons, culminating in an argument for the Osney provenance of the Digby *Roland* [p. 332].

Matthew Townend's contribution, 'Cnut's Poets: An Old Norse Literary Community in Eleventh-Century England' [pp. 197-215], also involves the Continent. He examines Old Norse poetry produced at Cnut's court in the context of medieval multilingualism and the interaction of Old English, Latin, and Old Norse. His study offers the possibility of different literary cultures co-existing at Cnut's court, and provides an interesting comparison between the vision of history presented in the Old Norse poems of Cnut's court and in Anglo-Saxon chronicles [pp. 208-15].

The subject of court poets is also at the centre of Samantha Zacker's 'Multilingualism at the Court of King Æthelstan' [pp. 77-103], a fascinating study of the possible literary context and of the demonstrable multilingual influences on *The Battle of Brunanburgh*. A minor point to raise in relation to this article is that although the Welsh Armes Prydein Vawr, which is briefly mentioned here, has been sometimes argued to date to Aethelstan's times and refer to Aethelstan himself, it is not strictly speaking a poem about the Aethelstan's court, as Zacher's wording might imply [p. 84].[1]

The issue of translation is dealt with in Nicole Discenza's 'Writing in the Mother Tongue in the Shadow of Babel' [pp. 33-55] and Bruce O'Brien's 'Translating Technical Terms in Law-Codes from Alfred to the Angevins' [pp. 57-76]. Discenza produces a fascinating analysis of the techniques of translation from Latin into the vernacular in texts associated with Alfred's court, bringing to the fore major differences between the various texts, in particular in terms of code-switching and borrowing. Translation techniques between Latin and the vernacular (and also between vernaculars) are also dealt with by O'Brien. He identifies three distinct techniques available to translators: transcription, etymological replication, and cultural equivalence [p. 63], and argues that the choice of technique depends on the preferences of individual translators. He also points out that techniques differed between translations to and from Latin [p. 71], and that etymological replication appears to have been generally avoided.

The use of terms taken from another language within a monolingual text is also examined in David Trotter's 'Intra-Textual Multilingualism and Social/Sociolinguistic Variation in Anglo-Norman' [pp. 357-68]. Trotter's focus is on the use of Middle English in Anglo-Norman texts, and he presents a convincing picture of the long process of co-existence and overlap of languages in England, with only gradual displacement. Trotter's discussion of English words in Anglo-Norman texts reminds one of (but does not refer to) Discenza's discussion of the social implications and attitudes towards code-switching and borrowing [p. 49-50]. As a separate note, one wonders if the pre-1066 entry in his schema should not read A + C rather than A + B, where C is Latin and B is French, since, unlike French, Latin was present in Anglo-Saxon England [p. 360].

The issue of multilingualism and language development is also central to the contribution of Juan Camilo Conde-Silvestre and M[a] Dolores Pérez-Raja [pp. 239-54], who bring together sociolinguistic theory and archaeological evidence to tackle the problem of why the change from Old to Middle English appears to have occurred faster in the North of England. Their arguments centre around the 'social-network hypothesis', arguing that such factors as the formation of nucleated (but not stable) villages, the development of trade, migration, and social mobility, differentiated the North of England from the rest of the country and may have facilitated linguistic changes in the region.

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[1] For a recent discussion of the poem, see G. R. Isaac, '*Armes Prydain Fawr* and St David', in J. W. Evans and J. M. Wooding ed., *St David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 161-181.

The Celtic world features in the contributions of Helen Fulton [pp. 145-70] and Julia Crick [pp. 217-37]. Crick contextualises the meagre historical evidence of Irish-English dialogue by looking at the conquest of Ireland and the traces of historical contact. She offers the possibilities of other language mediation, including Latin for ecclesiastical contacts and, although there is no direct evidence for it, of Old Norse for dialogue between Hiberno-Norse traders and the Norse-speaking elite of England post-Swein [pp. 231-3]. Her theory, however, is also that the Irish themselves learned French and English, and that translators (mostly Irish) existed to mediate between the parties.

Fulton's 'Negotiating Welshness' [pp. 145-70] provides a delightfully thorough overview of the complex patterns of language and status politics in Wales and the Marches. She ties language survival with the existence of a political and social powerbase – an elite to support and use it. This theory ties the death of a language to abandonment due to socio-economic considerations ('language suicide'), and explains the flourishing of Welsh vernacular literature at the time when English was being marginalized and suppressed by the Normans [p. 148]. In medieval Wales and the Marches the socio-economic conditions appear to have promoted bilingualism [pp. 154, 158]. It would be enormously interesting to see a more in-depth study of multilingualism in Wales, since, as Fulton points out, after 1066 at least six languages were used in Wales: Welsh, Norman French, English, Flemish, Irish and Latin [p. 159]. One also cannot but desire a comparison between the *latimers* (translators) of Wales and Ireland in the context of Crick's and Fulton's contributions.

Also dealing with the idea of language perception and language status is Thomas O'Donnell's delightful discussion of the notion of a 'pure' French language in the twelfth century [pp. 337-56]. He contextualises the statement by Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence *Mis languages est bons, car en France fui nez* ('My language is good, for I was born in the Île-de-France') [p. 339], interpreting it as an attempt to give French, and his own French-language writings, the status to rival Latin through an appeal to 'what would have been an "artificial" grammar for most of the Francophone world' [p. 351].

Like O'Donnell, Lars Boje Mortensen, in 'Roman Past and Roman Language in Twelfth-Century English Historiography' [pp. 309-320], examines the role of language in medieval history-writing. He notes the different 'constructions' of Latin in Romance and non-Romance-language Europe (England, even post-1066, he puts in the latter group) [pp. 311-12]. Towards the end of the paper he introduces a useful new term: 'chronotope', to signify the 'indications of time and place implicit in the language' [p. 318]. While the term seems to have great potential in the context of the discussion of medieval texts, it is a pity it is introduced so late in the discussion.

Overall, therefore, this multi-voiced volume contains valuable contributions to the study of medieval multilingualism, although they do not appear to engage with each other (possibly due to the conference origins of the book). A theme that did run throughout the volume, however, is the contrast between the wide-ranging multilingualism of medieval England, and the much narrower multilingualism of modern scholarship. That no single scholar has the linguistic expertise necessary to 'open up the

multilingualism of medieval England' [p. 12] is first stated by Tyler in her introduction and repeated by Baxter towards the middle of the book [p. 273]. It seems to me that this collaborative volume succeeds brilliantly in the task of opening up the field to wider discussion, and that it may also prompt an increase in modern scholarly multilingualism on the part of those who may wish to engage in the field.

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