



Drama and Sermon in Late Medieval England

Performance, Authority, Devotion

Charlotte Steenbrugge



EARLY DRAMA, ART, AND MUSIC

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Chapter 5

Audience Interaction in Sermons and Plays

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS it has become increasingly clear that many medieval English dramatists purposefully opted for a dialogic relationship with their spectators that acknowledged and even solicited the audience's participation in the hermeneutic process and in ascribing value, unlike the sermon which tends to assume a monologic stance with regard to its listeners. While the didactic aims of medieval sermons and religious plays were often deemed to be similar by contemporaries, as we saw in chapter 1, this difference in tone would seem to point to subtle differences in these genres' specific role in religious instruction as well as their didactic aims. In this chapter I therefore want to explore further what these plays' and sermons' use of engagement with the audience can tell us about their precise literary and educational aims and objectives.

It is often assumed that, because the sermons and plays under discussion both have a strong didactic aspect and are fundamentally performative genres, their relationship with their audiences is construed along similar lines. Scholars go even further and claims about sermon influence on medieval English drama are frequently encountered in connection to audience address in particular. Edgar T. Schell and J. D. Shuchter, for instance, argue that "the close relationship between morality drama and sermon literature practically guarantees that it [i.e. morality drama] will be drama of direct address."¹ Marianne G. Briscoe, one of the few scholars to have paid close attention to the connections between sermons and plays, repeatedly attributes the use of audience address in the latter to the influence of preaching, as in "The most straightforward example of such sermonizing occurs when characters, in imitation of a preacher, address the audience and make a moral or interpretative point."²

However, as we shall see, plays and sermons employ audience address for divergent reasons and with different effects, and there is no good reason to assume that cross-fertilization between these two genres was of particular importance. While both preaching and drama were

undoubtedly influenced by a common rhetorical tradition and hence display certain similarities, it is more productive to assess what their unique relationship with their audience can tell us about the role of sermons and plays in the devotional culture of late medieval England, as well as about the audiences' generic expectations and how these, in turn, shape the texts.

Unfortunately, detecting instances of audience address is not as straightforward as one would wish, largely because both genres have survived in written forms that are hard to relate to actual performances. It is probable that there were extra instances of direct address in performance which are not reflected in the existing texts. As noted in chapter 2, those elements of a sermon which needed to be customized to the individual situation of the performance, which doubtlessly included engagement with the audience, were those least likely to be recorded in detail. The same is undoubtedly true for medieval drama.

Instances of audience address are at times difficult to pin down as well. When Bonus Angelus in *The Castle of Perseverance* tells Humanum Genus "Man, bynke on byn endynge day" (407),³ is he addressing the protagonist only or is the audience included in this directive? The distinction between the audience as "overhearers" (where the listeners' presence is ignored), "ratified listeners" (where the listeners' presence is in some way acknowledged without there being direct address), or "addressees" (where discourse is specifically aimed at the listeners) in theater is especially fluid.⁴ The point is not that in these instances there is one right reading, that is there is audience address or not, that the audience was engaged indirectly or not, but that all interpretations are potentially valid. (In performance, the inclusion of the audience may have been pointed enough to avoid ambiguity or it may not; different performances could have staged it differently.) An audience can always react and respond to the performance, but implicit and especially explicit audience address actively creates an opportunity for the actors (or characters), or preacher, on the one hand, and the audience, on the other, to engage with each other and with the performance. As a result, they present moments of special dramaturgical interest.

It is of course important to bear in mind that individual members of the audience are likely to have experienced the same utterance diversely, affected by factors such as disposition, gender, social status, religious inclination, and physical location vis-à-vis the performance space.⁵ Any analysis of the use and effects of audience address in late medieval English plays and sermons is of necessity tentative and subjective, and is likely to miss

much of the variation in delivery and reception. On the other hand, “One of the hallmarks of live theatre is that we experience it collectively” and that this collectivity affects individual responses;⁶ the same surely applies to preaching. The “generalized experience” of the audience of both plays and sermons is therefore of considerable importance.⁷

I shall begin by looking at opening sequences, mainly because the start of a text is a moment when that text tends to reveal its genre and, by doing so, engender a set of audience expectations. Moreover, many of the claims that sermons had great impact on medieval English drama are made with references to direct address at the beginning of plays. For example, Marianne G. Briscoe states the following concerning the opening monologue in *Mankind*:

Mercy’s speech in *Mankind* is filled with similar preaching devices. First there is the clear establishment of rapport with the audience: line 1 uses the [first] person plural pronoun “owr” and it is repeated often throughout the passage.⁸

A similar link is implied in Mark Eccles’s description of the beginning of *Wisdom*: “The play begins ... as a sermon. Wisdom ... speaks first to the audience.”⁹ I have already argued in chapter 3 that neither Mercy’s nor Wisdom’s opening speeches are sermon-like. Their use of audience address does not alter this. In fact, the most common purpose of audience address in sermon openings, namely to establish the superiority of the preacher, is utterly unlike the use of audience address at the beginning of plays.

A standard sermon opening using direct address—and one parodied by Mischief in *Mankind*—is to quote and explain the Latin theme to the listener, as in:

“Qui manducat mean carnem et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in eo.” Et ideo “reuertar vnde exiui.” Worshippull sirs, þese wordes þat I haue taken to sey at þis tyme to you ben þe wordes of Criste hymselfe, written in þe gospell of þis daye, and ben þus meche to sey vn-to youre vndirstondyng ...¹⁰

Many sermons combine the theme and a prayer, as here:

Christus semetipsum optulit Deo, Christus etc. ad Heb. 9no. The help & te grace of Almiþty God, þorwth þe besechyng of His blissside modir, Marie, be with vs at ovr bygynnyng, help vs & spede vs in vr forth-leuyng and bryng vs al to a good endyng, amen. Cristen peple, þes wordes þat ich ha take to prech of at tis tyme, þei be þe wordes of

Seint Poul, writen e þe pistel o þis day & tus miche to seie on englistunge to 3oure vndirstondyng, “Crist hath offred Him-silf to God, Crist etc.”¹¹

A typical sermon opening in John Mirk’s *Festial* is “Such a day 3e schal haue þe fest of”¹² and variations thereof. The sermons in *The Northern Homily Cycle* as a norm commence with a Latin rubric (at least in the manuscript), followed by a Gospel paraphrase which is emphatically directed at the congregation, as in the following:

*Dominica in Septuagesima. Evangelium secundum Mattheum.
Simile est regnum celorum homini patrifamilias. Et cetera.*
Lythis [listen] all I sall yow tell
What Mathewe sais in this Gospell. (14.1–2)

The range of the uses of audience address and their effects at the beginning of surviving sermons is then relatively unified. Audience address was regularly used in this position to create a sense of fellowship and even conviviality with the audience (“frendis,” the use of the first person plural pronoun) yet it is also used—frequently in the same breath—to reinforce the spiritual and intellectual inferiority of the congregation (“þus meche to sey vn-to youre vndirstondyng,” “I sall yow tell”).

On the other hand, interaction with the audience was not deemed necessary for many sermon openings, possibly because the setting of many of these texts (predominantly during mass), the authority of the preacher, and the acknowledged meritorious content of the discourse anticipated an attentive and deferential audience to some extent. Emphatic overt engagement with their congregation at the beginning of a sermon is then not a ubiquitous feature of medieval English sermons. Of course, the sermon audience always consists of at least ratified listeners, as there is no other possible recipient for the discourse, but quite a number of sermons do not specifically engage with the listeners at their beginning (at least as they have survived), as in Mirk’s sermon on St. Thomas of Canterbury (“Thys day ys Sent Thomas Day, a marter þat was slayn for þe law of Holy Chyrch and for þe ryght of þys reeme. ...”¹³), a sermon for the eleventh Sunday after Trinity (“After the discription of the gospel of this day, Criste seythe þat þer were two men ...”¹⁴). Some thematic sermons also do not explicitly address the audience at the start, as in

“*Exibite membra vestra, et cetera. ubi prius.* These been the wordes of Seynt Paule the appostell and are thus myche to saye, “Gyf 3e

youre membres to serue vnto ryghtwysnes." Euery member that man hase, God made it for this cause ...¹⁵

Audience address was then by no means a *sine qua non*.

The great majority of preaching manuals also pay no special attention to establishing a relationship with the audience, the implication being that the audience is assumed to be automatically quiet and attentive from the very start of the sermon. Humbert of Romans, for example, lists various necessities for ensuring a successful preaching performance, such as clear diction and a delivery that is neither too fast nor too slow, but there is no mention of the need to employ devices to attract the audience's attention at the beginning of the sermon. Robert of Basevorn's *Forma praedicandi* contains a section on "Winning Over of Audience," but this merely lists the kinds of content that would intrigue the audience, such as a dreadful narrative or a reminder that the preacher's aim is to convert the listeners and not to beg from them—clearly, the assumption is, again, that the audience is already paying attention. In fact, this section does not come at the start of the actual sermon, but follows the statement of the theme. Scant attention is paid to the listeners in the discussion on the "Invention of the Theme," although Robert recommends the selection of "such a theme that immediately excites the audience to devotion."¹⁶ These preaching treatises then presuppose that the congregation will be listening from the very opening words of the sermon, although various ways to enhance the audience's engagement with the discourse or simply stop their minds from wandering can be used by preachers. As seen in the examples above, actual sermons normally commence straightaway with important content.

All the evidence suggests that, on the whole, plays had greater difficulty attracting and quietening their audiences. Many plays commence by asking the audience to be quiet, whether it is a presenter figure requiring silence, as in *The Pride of Life* with "Pees, and herkynt hal ifer" (1), a heavenly creature (probably preceded or accompanied by music and special stage effects in at least some instances) enjoining the audience to pay heed, as in "Alle creatures to me take tent" (1) in the York *Expulsion*, or a tyrant demanding attention, as in the Towneley *Offering of the Magi*:

Peasse, I byd, both far and nere!
I warne you leyf youre sawes sere;
Who that makys noyse whyls I am here,
I say shall dy. (Towneley 14.1–4)¹⁷

Other means are also used to ensure that the audience is quiet and pays attention. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Aristorius prays for the salvation of only the quiet members of the audience: “Vnto hys endelesse joye myghtly he restore vs, | All tho þat in hys name in peas well them hold” (83–84). The exclusive nature of this prayer, which does not encompass badly behaved spectators in its remit, presents a small but crucial difference compared with the prayers at the beginning of sermons, which include all members of the congregation, whether silent or not. Several plays have some stage action to signal the beginning of the play. In Henry Medwall’s *Nature*, for example, the play stages an entry procession of various characters before any text is spoken. Similarly, the entrance and above all the regal appearance of Wisdom functioned as a kind of audience quietener at the start of the eponymous play, so that the character could start by introducing himself in the very first lines. Here the setting of the play may also have played a part. The raging tyrants, for instance, all occur in plays that appear to have been intended for outdoor performances, whereas *Wisdom*, in which the opening character starts the play by calmly introducing himself, was seemingly written for indoor performance.

Plays not only frequently commence by a request for quiet, many of them, unlike most Middle English sermons, also have a relatively unimportant preamble before imparting information vital for the comprehension of the story. For example, although the interest in labor and virtuous behavior evinced in the opening lines of *Occupation and Idleness* is certainly relevant to the message of the play, the first piece of genuine information is the revelation of the speaker’s name at line 31. The lengthy prologue to *The Pride of Life* (it is over a hundred lines long) contains a summary of the plot but if one missed most or even all of this speech, one could still follow the play. This, again, suggests that playwrights could not take for granted that the audience would be silent from the very beginning of the performance—perhaps this was especially the case for outdoor plays like *The Pride of Life*—unlike writers of sermons, who usually expect an attentive congregation. These differences that emerge between the opening strategies of sermons and plays point to a different level of authority for each genre and its performers, and attest an essential, as well as practical, distinction in the reception of these two performative genres.

Moreover, audience address is used for a range of theatrical purposes at the beginning of plays, including setting the tone of the play and introducing the kind of character who is speaking. As a result, the tone of the interaction with the audience can differ significantly, as becomes clear

in the examples referred to above. *The Pride of Life* prologue is courteous toward its audience (e.g. “Lordinges and ladiis þat beth hende, | Herkenith al with mylde mode” 5–6), while the opening rant of the tyrant treats the audience as negligible underlings. There are no exemplars in the surviving sermons for these different colorings of audience address that are to be observed in the drama. Furthermore, these opening addresses serve to set up the dramatic world, or purposefully to blur the boundary between the real and play worlds, and consequently have a specific theatrical purpose for which there is no equivalent in the sermons. Of necessity, in sermons the audience is always addressed as an audience by the preacher as preacher; there is evidently no scope for play with any boundary between worlds in the sermon, as there is in the plays. It is then clear that, although many Middle English sermons do address their congregation in their opening lines, direct audience address at the beginning of the plays serves specifically theatrical purposes for which there is no sermonic equivalent and that there is too much variety in its tone and usage to ascribe all, or indeed any, instances to the influence of sermons, even if that address is of a more sedate and didactic kind, as in the openings of *Mankind* and *Wisdom*.

Of all the opening strategies in plays, that of the raging tyrant seems to be the most compelling. In the plays overall, the apparent strategies for creating interaction between the audience and the less virtuous characters appear to modern readers and spectators especially effective and memorable. Not only is this kind of audience engagement clearly not based on the sermon, again demonstrating that audience address and sermons were not associated in the playwrights’ minds, it serves a uniquely theatrical and didactic purpose. As Meg Twycross has cogently argued:

moralities are a struggle between good and evil principles for the attention and loyalty of the audience as well as soul of the protagonist; since he represents them, the audience have to feel as well as observe the attraction of vice.¹⁸

What better way to capture the audience’s attention than to interact with them? This also has as a result that the audience address of the virtuous characters is nearly always a foil for that of the negative ones: the former, if there is any, has to be less engrossing than the latter (a point to which I shall return). This is evidently what happens in *Mankind*. In *Occupation and Idleness*, similarly, both the “virtuous agrarian labourer-cum-husbandman”¹⁹ Occupation and Doctrine, the virtue character in this play, estab-

lish rapport with the audience, as when Doctrine instructs the men in the audience with regards to their children's education: "Sette youre children unto scole, | Ye that ben good men of fame" (412–13). But these forms of address are apparently completely eclipsed by that of the sinful protagonist Idleness, who, among other things, uses an unfortunate spectator as witness to his assumed name, "Besynesse" (109), and seems to push the audience out of his way when entering "verry kuppe-shote" (236).

There are, of course, exceptions to the "rule" that negative characters engage with the audience most effectively. In the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* the (perhaps additional) interlude with Colle and the quack Brundyche is memorable for its audience engagement. However, the audience seems to be required by Episcopus to form a barefoot procession (812–13, 837) and to chant (840–41), with the result that the spectators are explicitly under pressure to become active participants in witnessing the miracle enacted in the play. The bishop's sermon (866–87) also appears to include the spectators in its target audience. While it is possible that this speech is directed to on-stage characters, references to "all ye peple that here are" (810) and "all and summe, | And all tho that bene here, both more and lesse" (838–39) makes the inclusion of the audience at this point more than plausible. His closing speech with instructions on how to live a virtuous life is possibly exclusively aimed at the spectators as all the other characters may have left the acting area by this point. In this play audience engagement is therefore predominantly associated with a preacher figure; it is presumably no coincidence that there are no truly evil or vice characters in this play.

In *Wisdom*, audience address, strictly speaking, is mainly associated with Wisdom's soliloquy on the "nyne poyntys" (998),²⁰ when he teaches the audience the nine actions and ways of life that best please God (997–1064). On the other hand, the most unexpected and memorable instance of actual physical interaction with the audience occurs when Lucifer snatches a boy from among the spectators: "Wyth þis fals boy, God gyff hym euell grace!" (550), followed by the stage direction "Her he takyt a schrewde boy wyth hym and goth hys wey cryenge." Furthermore, the theatrical effect of the soliloquy (325–80) in which Lucifer reveals his evil plan and disguise to the audience, though without overt audience address, is arguably especially potent, in that it casts the spectators more or less in the role of co-conspirators. When Lucifer reappears disguised as "goodly galont" (sd. after l. 380) and sets out to deceive Mind, Will, and Understanding exactly as he had outlined previously, the audience's

inability to stop the action on stage strongly suggests they are complicit in Lucifer's deception. Such an assumption of willing cooperation on the audience's behalf by vicious characters hints at an uncommitted moral status for that audience.

Comparable indirect didacticism is also evident in those instances where immoral characters claim to be well acquainted with the spectators, as when, in *Occupation and Idleness*, Idleness says:

Be God, ther ben many of yow
That Y knowe wel and fyne.
This worthy man, though Y it say,
He hath know me many a day,
For he and Y spente, in fay,
Oure bothis thyrst at wyne. (51–56)

As many of the plays under discussion were put on in front of audiences that were intimately acquainted, and very possibly knew the actors as well, these kinds of interactions in medieval performances had presumably an even bigger impact than they do in modern productions where most audience members are not known to each other. The effect of Idleness's speech would be very different depending on whether the actor was known to the addressee and on whether the "worthy man" Idleness claims to have as drinking partner was the parish priest, a virtuous layman known for his abstemious habits, or the local drunk. The effect of these lines would have been especially marked if the actor and spectator were known to drink together. As different people were assuredly addressed in different performances—assuming the play was put on more than once—the effect of this speech would have been unique to each performance. At the same time, the close association between the immoral character Idleness and the audience suggests a shared world, a shared way of life, and a similar moral outlook.

These comic yet didactic interactions between negative characters and spectators are very illuminating for our understanding of how these playwrights, and presumably their audiences, generally conceived the didacticism of plays. Clearly didacticism and entertainment are not polar opposites; on the contrary, these two elements frequently reinforce one another. Moreover, the dramatists preferred an indirect mode of teaching and stimulated an experiential mode of learning on the part of the audience through their vice characters' interactions with them. This suggests that didacticism was an important function of these plays, but that the dramatists were not aiming for an authoritative tone.²¹

Such an indirect, experiential mode of didacticism is also evident in audience engagement by fallible human characters. These are the characters to whom the spectators ought to relate most, and this connection is established partly through the use of direct address. Often in the so-called morality plays, references to the audience occur at moments when the fall into sin, or the return to virtue, happens.²² When Man dismisses his nurse Innocencye in *Nature*, he suggests that the spectators would do exactly the same thing in his place:

I suppose there ys no man here
 What soever he be
 That could in hys mynde be content
 Allwayes to be called an innocent. (I.644–47)²³

In *The Castle of Perseverance*, the protagonist's oscillation between sin and virtue is consistently linked with the audience and their real-life experiences. Humanum Genus dismisses Confessio with the hint that he is no more sinful than the audience members: "We haue etyn garlek euerychone." (1369). A little later he admits to and amends his sinful life, again with interaction with the audience: "Lordynges, 3e se wel alle þys, | Mankynde hath ben in gret bobauce." (1420–21). In this case, the audience is indirectly linked with sin through the *vers ambiguus* of the protagonist's name as well.²⁴ When the Castle is attacked by the Seven Deadly Sins, Humanum Genus again turns to the spectators and explicitly likens his own experience of virtuous living to theirs:

Whanne Mankynd drawyth to goode
 Beholde what enmys he schal haue!
 Þe Werld, þe Deuyl, þe Flesche arn wode;
 To men þei casten a careful kauē;
 Byttyr balys þei brewyn on brode
 Mankynd in wo to weltyr and waue,
 Lordynges, sothe to sey.
 Þerfore iche man be war of þis,
 For whyl Mankynd clene is
 Hys enmys schul temptyn hym to don amys
 If þei mown be any wey. (1997–2007)

When he abandons the Castle, he calls upon the audience to support this decision with:

Certys þis 3e wel knowe,
 It is good, whouso þe wynde blowe,

A man to haue sumwhat of hys owe,
 What happe so-euere betyde. (2540–43)

In such instances, direct address of the spectators is used to implicate them in the protagonist's fall (and redemption) without, however, directly inferring the audience's sinful status. At the same time the play works didactically by reminding the audience that their action is delegated to the protagonist within the logic of the allegory.

This picture of the tenuous authority and commensurate preference for indirect, experiential didacticism of these plays remains surprisingly intact when we consider the use of audience address by virtuous characters. It is here that one would expect the greatest influence of preaching, but instead an analysis of direct address by the most preacher-like characters demonstrates how little the playwrights were affected by sermons.

In sermons, the use of audience engagement is normally straightforward, linked to the assertion of authority and the provision of information. In a sermon for the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, the preacher highlights the auditors' duty to listen and learn when he stipulates "Bot I wold ilke man and woman wald note and bere away an ensampyll ... and for Goddys loue, take hede."²⁵ In Mirk's sermon for *Domenica iiija Quadragesima*, audience address is solely used to teach the audience: "As 3e knowen wel, þis is þe furþe Sunday of Lenton,"²⁶ "Hereby 3e may knowon how grete vertu is wyth almys dede,"²⁷ "Also for we spekon of þe synne of avoutry ... þefore I telle 3ow þis ensaumpul,"²⁸ and

þe þree commandementis þat longuth to God ben þese: þou schalte
 luf þi God and worcheppon hym beforon alle þing ... þe tenþe is:
 þou schalte not desyre þi neyhburres wyf ne consayle hur be way to
 done euel²⁹

In a sermon on the theme *Estote sicut filii*, Hugh Legat repeatedly calls for an unquestioning, docile sermon audience, even when the preacher is not known for his personal virtue, and compares suitable audience members to good children, as in

Bot 3it, gode men, naw3twhythstondyng scuch [i.e. sinful priests] su
 [follow] naw3t the stepys of Crist in that þey conforme na3t here
 dedys to here thechyng, 3yt do 3e as he betaw3the and buthe [be] as
 gode chydrun ow3t to be, as Y seyde at þe bygynnyng. ... Qwerefors,
 3e that desyrþe to be edyfyt be worde of God, herit withe deuoyt
 and meke spyryt that hys spoken for 3owre profyt and honeste. "Et
 estote sicut filij," and but [be] as gode chydrun ow3t to be.³⁰

There are innumerable examples of similar kinds of overtly authoritative and didactic audience address in surviving sermons (some more instances can be found particularly in chapter 2). In many of these instances there is a strong sense of the preacher's desire to aid the listeners by sharing his greater knowledge: while relatively patronizing and uniform in form and intent such interaction with the congregation is not dry. This engagement with the listeners must have enlivened the performance of many a sermon; successful didacticism need not be unpalatable.

Of course, some virtuous characters in plays on religious topics do speak directly to the audience in order to teach them. We have already seen that the preacher-like bishop in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* repeatedly offers instruction to the audience (868–87, 988–1005). Jesus's sermon at the beginning of the N-Town *Woman Taken in Adultery* directly tells the spectators to repent their sin, to love God, and to forgive their neighbors (1–40). Likewise, St. Paul gives the audience all kinds of sage counsel in relation to the Seven Deadly Sins toward the end of *The Conversion of St. Paul* (502–71), as we have seen in chapter 3. There are then undeniably instances in which good characters on the stage engage with the audience in ways that enhance both the theatricality and the didactic impact of the plays.

On the other hand, playwrights often do not take advantage of the potential for audience address by such characters. In many plays instructional material directed at the audience is framed as dialogue between characters on stage, casting the audience as eavesdroppers. This preference for dialogue over direct instruction was probably partly due to the importance of disputation and debate in contemporary pedagogy. But the playwrights' use of dialogue on stage to teach the audience indirectly often also allows for subtle theatrical effects that direct interaction with the audience would have made more difficult to achieve.

For example, the bishop's direct teaching and the Jews' debate on the eucharist in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* have very different effects. Episcopus's instruction, which is probably directly addressed to the audience, is more pragmatic and less theologically intricate or controversial than the Jews' conversation on the sacrament (especially 197–220 and 393–441). Thus the audience is urged to keep the Ten Commandments, but they are not even told what those Commandments are: "Crystys commandementys ten there bee: | Kepe well them; doo as I yow tell" (996–97). The Ten Commandments were an uncontroversial topic with which the audience was supposed to be familiar, and nobody

would presumably have taken exception to the bishop's mention of them. The eucharist, on the other hand, was very controversial at this time and sermons frequently tell audiences not to think about the eucharist, but simply to accept the Church's teaching on the matter (for some examples, see pp. 35–36, 37, 79–80). The playwright carefully avoids teaching the audience directly about the eucharist by opting for the format of a dialogue between on-stage characters. The play does not explicitly address contemporary debate surrounding the sacrament either, but presumably the Jews' incredulous tone is meant to reinforce the audience's belief in the miraculous nature of the eucharist and transubstantiation:³¹

þe beleve of thes Cristen men ys false, as I wene;
 For þe beleue on a cake—me thynk yt ys onkynd.
 And all they seye how þe prest dothe yt bynd,
 And be þe myght of hys word make yt flesh and blode—
 And thus be a conceyte þe wolde make vs blynd—
 And how þat yt shuld be he þat deyed upon þe rode. (199–204)

The unbelieving Jews' dialogue about the nature of the eucharist encourages a more affective response from the audience than direct didacticism might have done. The bishop's brief mention of a well-known fundamental religious tenet is unlikely to have had a great emotional impact on the audience. Although each spectator's reaction to the discussion between Jonathas, Jason, Masphat, and Malchus about the eucharist would have been unique, this scene encourages the audience to view the Jews' denial of the eucharist with anything from amused disdain to angry dismissal and, simultaneously, to confirm (silently) their own belief in the eucharist.

A similarly affective response is envisaged by the use of dialogue at the beginning of *Wisdom*. Wisdom explains, among other things, his own and the soul's properties, as well as the ideal relation between Wisdom and the soul, in a "question and answer" session with Anima. This section of the play is undeniably instructive and Anima's speeches have the pragmatic function of dividing this discourse into more manageable chunks and of highlighting the content of the various passages, all of which aids the transfer of knowledge. But the function of Anima is not limited to merely easing transfer of knowledge in an objectively didactic way. Instead, these speeches are scripted to stir an affective response in the audience, through the use of the first person plural pronoun, exclamations, and Latin, among other features, as in:

O worthy spowse and soueren fayer,
 O swet amyke, owr joy, owr blys!
 To yowr loue wo dothe repeyer,
 All felycyte yn þat creature ys.
 Wat may I yeue yow ageyn for þis,
 O Creator, louer of yowr creature?
 Though be owr freelte we do amys,
 Yowr grett mercy euer sparyth reddure.
 A, soueren Wysdom, sanctus sanctorum,
 Wat may I yeue to yowr most plesaunce? (69–78)

It is Anima's emotional tone that is of foremost theatrical importance, because (ideally) it inspires a correspondingly loving and grateful disposition in the hearts of the spectators.

In the same vein, in *The Castle of Perseverance*, the Four Daughters of God do not teach the audience directly how to attain salvation. Instead, they debate the relative importance of the Passion, a virtuous life, and heartfelt repentance for salvation, first among themselves and then before God (3129–560). This passage conveys some religious instruction, such as the notions that baptism washes away Original Sin (3392–95) and that the Passion enabled salvation (3363–65). Given that the outcome of this debate will decide the fate of Humanum Genus's soul, it is infused with tension which incites the audience to support Misericordia and Pax, rather than simply listen objectively to the discussion. As the audience has just witnessed Humanum Genus's far from virtuous life, it is difficult to take issue with Justicia's and Veritas's calls for damnation. The fact that God eventually decides to save the soul was presumably welcomed with some relief and gratitude for God's boundless mercy.³² Again, the playwright does not seem primarily interested in conveying basic theological information—although the play does that as well—but rather seems to want the spectators to experience, almost first-hand, the precariousness of their salvation and thereby come genuinely to appreciate how much grateful love they owe God. The use of dialogic, indirect instruction can, therefore, be very theatrically potent and this is undoubtedly the major reason for its use. The theatrical potency of such exchanges would presumably have made them especially memorable, which would, in turn, have increased their didactic efficacy.³³ Again, theatricality and didacticism work together in these plays.

But there also seems to have been a disinclination to teach the audience directly, which may have contributed to the frequent use of dialogue-

based teaching on stage. Virtuous characters are often presented as adopting an impersonal tone for their strictures. The Bishop in *The Pride of Life*, for instance, uses audience address only in a four-line prayer:

Yif ou gras or lif to led
 Þat be 3our soulis to bot;
 God of Heuin for his godhed
 Leu þat hit so mot. Amen. (386–90)

His long lament on the state of the world (327–82) contains no marked acknowledgment of the audience and neither does he include the audience in his lecture to the King (391–406), nor in his leave-taking (435–48).

Pater in *The Castle of Perseverance* seems to include the audience to some extent in his address to the soul of Humanum Genus, so that whereas “My mercy, Mankynd, 3eve I þe. | Cum syt at my ryth honde” (3598–99) is clearly directed to the character, the conditional “If þou me loue and drede | Hevene schal be þi mede” (3607–8) is more appropriate if spoken explicitly to the audience. Nevertheless, the main part of this closing speech is not in any overt way directed to the audience and uses the third person pronoun throughout, as can be seen in, for example, “All þe statys of þe werld is at myn renoun; | To me schal þei 3eue acompt at my dygne des.” (3615–16), “And þei þat evyl do, þei schul to helle lake” (3639), and even “All men example here-at may take | To mayntein þe goode and mendyn here mys.” (3643–44). The spectators are then, on the whole, ratified listeners at most for Pater’s religious instruction and not the acknowledged addressees of the didactic messages. Targeting these warnings directly at the audience would arguably have been more theatrically compelling, although the objective finality and generality of this impersonal summary of man’s fate is awe-inspiring.

To give another example, in the York *Temptation* pageant, the devil repeatedly addresses the spectators. Upon his first appearance he apparently forces them to make way for him with lines such as “Make rome believe” (1) and “High you hense, high myght 3ou hang” (3); it is entirely possible that these lines were accompanied by physical horseplay between the actor and some people in the audience. Later on, he explains his plans to tempt Jesus with reference to at least one spectator: “To dere hym nowe haue I no doute, | Betwyxte vs two” (35–36). As I have mentioned before, the audience’s inability to intervene in the dramatic action ensures that the addressee of the latter remark is put in the uncomfortable position of somehow enabling and endorsing the devil’s actions. This playwright was,

then, willing and able to exploit direct interaction with the audience for theatrical and didactic purposes; it is therefore especially noteworthy that he (or she) chose not to employ this method for the virtuous, didactic character in this play. Instead, this Jesus never overtly engages with the audience and delivers His teaching consistently using the third person plural, as in “Þare myrroure may þei make of me” (195). Even His final leave-taking is not explicitly addressed to the audience:

My blissing haue þei with my hande,
 Þat with silke greffe is noȝt grucchand,
 And also þat will stiffely stande
 Agaynste þe fende.
 I knawe my tyme is faste command,
 Now will I wende. (205–10)

In such instances, the audience is ostensibly cast in the role of overhearers—when the speeches are addressed to other characters—or ratified listeners—when the actor faces the audience directly—although there can be little doubt that the messages and information are included for the spectators’ benefit. It is difficult to measure the exact difference in the audience’s experience, depending on whether they are addressed directly, in a more indirect manner, or not at all. A cognitive stylistic approach would argue that overt direct address explicitly “reminds the audience of their own deictic field,”³⁴ thus binding the utterance to their own experiences. Likewise, in both theatrical and linguistic theory it is generally agreed that “only the speaker and the addressee are actually participating in the drama,”³⁵ whereas the use of the third person suggests a non-participant who functions as a passive object.³⁶ Michelle M. Butler argues that medieval drama uses “unmarked direct address” most commonly, “reserving marked direct address to create intensity and emphasis.”³⁷ We can then perhaps argue that in cases of overt direct address it is harder for the spectators to ignore the intended personal application of the on-stage speech compared with instances when they are not addressed directly or when their presence is not explicitly acknowledged.

The reasons for this limited use of direct audience address by many virtuous characters are not entirely clear. To some degree, the playwrights exploited the theatrical means of indirect instruction through on-stage dialogue which the genre offered them. But it is possible that playwrights also feared to lecture their audiences too directly. However serious and didactic the majority of surviving English plays may be, we have some con-

temporary evidence to suggest that spectators did not always behave appropriately. As mentioned in chapter 1, whereas the friar William Melton praised the didactic York Corpus Christi Play, he also lamented that the audience was unruly and, as a consequence, did not derive spiritual benefit from the performance. In 1432 the York Masons petitioned to be allowed to discontinue staging the *Funeral of the Virgin* pageant because it generated not devotion but laughter and uproar, and even resulted in fights.³⁸ In the Low Countries, seven audience members of a romance play, *Spel van Strasengijs*, were involved in a fight during the performance.³⁹ While such records highlight the exception rather than the rule, and always refer to a (small) section of the audience only in all probability, it was presumably quite a vocal minority and the threat of such unruliness must have lain always just under the surface at holiday events.

In fact, sermon audiences did not always behave with proper restraint and decorum either, which makes my hypothesis about the prohibitive effect of the playwrights' anxiety about disruptive audience responses more likely. Even famous preachers like Bernard of Clairvaux and Bernardino da Siena were interrupted or expelled when their topic was not to the audience's liking. In fact, Bernardino da Siena was subjected to a number of assaults, including being slapped in the face and having the pulpit tampered with so that it collapsed under him.⁴⁰ And there is evidence from medieval England that audiences did at times criticize and disturb sermons. An East Anglian sermon promoting a crusade was interrupted by a listener who urged his fellow audience members not to heed the call to go to the Holy Land, and Stephen Langton was called a liar during a sermon at Paul's Cross.⁴¹ Although most preachers betray no anxiety about teaching their congregations, some sermons reveal uneasiness about potential reactions from the listeners should they feel the lesson was aimed too directly at them. One preacher is careful to pass on the responsibility for his pointed criticism:

merueyle 3e nawth, sere, þat i speke so miche to 3ow as i do vor truliche i se nat tis o myn owne heued, vor ich was in a certeyn place with-in þis six wokkis wher þis mater was somynd boþe e general & e special a-mong grete men þat longid to þe kyng & rith preue of his consel, & ter ich was preid and e-charged boþe þat y schild preche to 3e þis same mater whan i prechid next her.⁴²

In another example, the preacher takes pains to assure the audience that he is not attacking them individually: "I speke noyþer of Richarde, nor of

Robert, nor of William, nor of Dan Ion, & tervorin no man ha me suspect þat i speke of hym."⁴³ It is consequently by no means improbable that playwrights opted for instruction in dialogue format and through impersonal references partly to ensure that audience members did not react badly to being directly criticized or lectured.

There is a closely related issue: namely that it is more important for virtuous, authoritative characters to receive an appropriately submissive response from their addressees than it is for vice figures. Audiences "are always a potentially disruptive force."⁴⁴ Perhaps an awareness of the audience's latent unruliness helps further to explain from a theatrical point of view the playwrights' general disinclination to have virtue figures teach the audience directly. There simply does not seem to be the same scope for improvisation or physical interaction with the audience to accommodate their unpredictable responses for virtue characters compared with devils and other vice characters. If the boy whom Lucifer wanted to drag off to hell in *Wisdom* fought back and managed to escape his clutches, it would not be a serious issue because we can see various ways for the actor playing Lucifer to react to such an unexpected turn of events. He could snatch someone else from the audience, he could leave the acting space chasing after the boy, he could roar with frustration and retreat defeated, for instance. None of these alternatives would affect the meaning of the play. But an uncooperative response to Episcopos's request to the audience to form a barefoot procession at the close of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* would be much more difficult for the actor to mask or gloss over, and would significantly undermine the authority of the character and his whole speech. In effect, it would ruin the end of the play, if not the whole play. Reducing direct interaction between virtue characters and the audience lessens the chances that uncooperative audiences might undermine the didactic import and theatrical success of the performance.

But above all, the limited amount of interaction with the audience of virtuous characters may have served to make that of the less positive characters all the more noticeable and appealing. This effect enhances the overall message of many of these plays, namely that it is harder to do good than it is to be distracted by less moral inclinations or people. This it is not simply a matter of making the negative characters most appealing: because virtuous characters often do not engage directly and emphatically with the spectators, audience members have to make a more conscious decision to pay them attention and to take on board the lessons they are providing.

While the vices, devils, sinful humans, and other such characters tend to engross the spectators willy-nilly, the playwrights construct the virtues in such a way that the audience members have to choose to give them their attention and goodwill. To say that these characters are boring is simplistic and mistaken, but it is probable that the playwrights consciously opted to make such characters less obviously palatable to the audience—just as virtuous behavior appeared to be less easy to adhere to in real life in many instances. As Nowadays puts it in *Mankind*, “Men haue lytyll deynthe of yowr [i.e. Mercy’s] pley | Because 3e make no sporte” (267–68). Again, the use of, and absence of, audience address is an important aspect of this characterization of virtue characters, as it was for the construction of the negative characters’ appeal. The relatively restrained, and to some degree perhaps even untheatrical, audience interaction of good personages is therefore used in a theatrically effective manner to bring home the message of the plays. But whatever the reasons for the rather limited interaction between virtuous characters and the audience, it is clear that the playwrights generally preferred not to adopt the authoritative, expressly didactic stance of the preacher and instead sought to teach their spectators in a more indirect fashion.

Indeed, the relationship between a preacher and his congregation, and a virtuous character and his audience is construed rather differently. Again, as with the opening strategies of plays and sermons, this points toward a very different level of authority for the two genres. Preachers seem to have been able to rely on their spiritual authority, and they rarely make allowances for a superior social or educational status of their auditors. On the contrary, they often demand respect: one preacher urges his congregation to be obedient to “haly kyrke, and specially to þam þat hauys cure of 3owre sawlys.”⁴⁵ Another preacher reminds the listener that “presthode ... ys more of dyuynte, more of worschep than regally, kynhode, or eny other astat of temporal power.”⁴⁶ In a similar vein, *The Northern Homily Cycle* mentions the “gret derworthines [preciousness]” (1.61) of preachers. Actors, on the other hand, had no special spiritual license and this is noticeable in how they interact with the spectators. Thus the audience is treated politely, as social superiors and, axiomatically, this convention is honored in the breach by the insulting behavior toward the audience on the part of immoral characters.⁴⁷ In fact, the generally polite stance of plays may also have been partly due to the fact that many actors, producers, and playwrights were financially dependent on their audiences and thus courted their goodwill.

Sermons, of course, also rely on the goodwill of their listeners (and in the case of friars at least, possibly on their financial support as well) and we regularly encounter polite forms of address in preaching, such as “Cristen peple,”⁴⁸ “worshippull bretheren and susteren,”⁴⁹ and “Gode men and wymmen.”⁵⁰ But we also find a few rather less flattering descriptions in sermons, as “þu vnkinde wrech,”⁵¹ “þu synful creature,”⁵² and “þu synfull man and women.”⁵³ One of the main purposes of these sermons was to teach their congregations to live better lives and, that being so, preachers were not afraid to castigate their audiences and often take for granted their sinfulness. One preacher, for instance, closes his sermon by directly asking his listeners why they are so sinful: “qwerto, þen, luf3e so mekull þe vanytez of thys worde [world], and luste3 to ocubye þe lyfe afur þe lust and þe lykyng of þi flessche?”⁵⁴

Prayers for the success of the sermon at the beginning of the discourse display a similarly negative opinion of the congregation’s moral state when they highlight the listeners’ dire need for the preacher’s aid in attaining salvation. One preacher asks the audience to pray

for grace þat is nedful boþe to 3ow & to me, to 3ow, þat 3e may dewowthliche her þe word o God, & to me, þat i may tell sum crafte wher þorw 3e may deliuere 3oure sowles owt oþ þe seruise o dedli sinne⁵⁵

In a sermon for the feast of St. Mary Magdalene we find:

Bygynne we þan owre sermon wyth haly bedys byddyng, besekand allmyghty God for þis grace and þis moystour þat hys worde may swa be sawyn emang 3ow, and so wattyryd be ys grace þat yt may be to hys plesyng and so profete to 3owre lyuyng þat 3e may aftyr come to þe ioye þat neuyr schall haue ending⁵⁶

This sermon also openly casts doubt on the virtue of the congregation: “and þis loue schuld nowondayis be weele assayed, I drede me, we schuld fynde many febyll frendys and louers” or “and for als mekyll yt is vncertayn to me qwedyr 3e haue þis trowth.”⁵⁷ Preachers derive their authority from their spiritual superiority; by emphasizing the concomitant inferiority of the listeners, these preachers are consequently asserting both their authority and the congregation’s need to listen and to accept unquestioningly the lessons presented.⁵⁸

Dramatists and actors had no such position of acknowledged superiority, spiritual or social. The social, or relational, deixis of virtuous char-

acters reflects this precarious standing and, as a result, virtuous characters in the plays, generally speaking, treat their audiences with more circumspection than do preachers.³⁹ A traditional form of address for the plays is “sovereigns” (e.g. Brome *Abraham and Isaac*, 435, *Mankind*, 13, 25, 29), which acknowledges the social superiority of the public; it is a term which is not found in surviving Middle English sermons. Whereas several preachers assume a sinful audience, virtuous characters, on the whole, do not. As ever, the picture is not entirely uniform. The Brome Doctor takes for granted that the spectators would not willingly sacrifice their children should God command them to do so, but he does not otherwise stress their sinful nature, and even allows for the fact that to mourn the loss of a child, however silly, is “As nater woll, and kind” (Brome *Abraham and Isaac*, 451). His condemnation of the spectators is therefore circumscribed. Mercy carefully balances his assumption of the audience’s sinful nature with an acknowledgment of their social superiority in the opening speech of *Mankind*: “O souerence, I beseche yow yowr condycyons to rectyfye” (13)—Mercy’s supplicating tone also draws attention away from the presumption of the audience’s sinful status. Most of this speech, and indeed his closing speech, merely implies, rather than claims, that the audience might well be sinful, as in “In goode werkys I awyse yow, souerence, to be perseuerante | To puryfye yowr sowlys, þat þei be not corupte” (25–26).

In the same vein, Pater in *The Castle of Perseverance* is very careful not to label his audience as sinful in his closing speech, through the use of the conditional and the lack of direct audience address. At the end of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Episcopus, one of the more preacher-like figures in the surviving corpus, seems to tell the audience directly how salvation is to be attained, but he never states that the audience is sinful (988–1003), and the same can be said for Wisdom’s speech on the *novem virtutes* in *Wisdom* (997–1064). Similarly, the Bishop in *The Pride of Life* does not blame his audience explicitly during his “Abuses of the Age” speech (327–82) or his strictures to the King (391–406). In *The Conversion of St. Paul*, the protagonist is also circumspect in his sermon. Thus, in the following stanza, there is a shift in syntactical subject from the listener to the sins (highlighted by the use of Latin), followed by the use of the more impersonal third person, all of which lessens the impression that the listener is indeed sinful:

But drede alway synne and folye
 Wrath, enuy, couytys, and slugyshnes;
Exeunt owt of thy syzt glotony and lechery

Vanyte and vayneglory, and fals idylnes –
 Thes be the branchys of all wyckydnes.
 Who þat in hem thes vyces do roote,
 He lackyth all grace, and bale ys þe boote. (530–36)

This is very different from claims which stress the active sinfulness of the listener, which we find in sermons, such as “couetyse, where-in þe worlde temptes þe in at all tyme, for þou canste not hold þe a-payed with þoʒ goodes þat God haþ sende þe,” “slouthe, glotenye, and lechery; in þe wiche þi flesh temptes þe euermore,” and “þou muste prey God of forʒeuenes also for brekyng of þi v wittys,” all of which can be found in a single sermon for Palm Sunday.⁶⁰ In any case, there seems to be an on-stage congregation for St. Paul’s sermon, so these lessons on how to attain virtue and salvation might be primarily or exclusively aimed at them; there may also be an on-stage audience for Episcopus’s speech in the Croxton play.

The plays do not merely address their audiences as social superiors on a regular basis and avoid labeling them sinners, they also tend to treat their audiences as intellectually capable human beings. In *Mankind*, Mercy flatters the audience’s understanding: “I prey haue me excusyde, | I nede not to speke of yt, yowr reson wyll tell it yow” (183–84). In *Nature*, the protagonist encourages the spectators to read Aristotle “yf ye covet now to know theffecte | Of thyngys natural by trew conclusyon” (I.57–58). Such an apparent high regard for the audience’s intellectual and spiritual powers is often lacking in medieval English sermons, and at times the audience is dealt with in a downright patronizing manner. Hugh Legat refuses an explanation on the grounds that

To telle ʒow how þis mith, it were to long atariing, for þei i stode
 here al þis twelue monthe i chain secur, i schulde nauth make summe
 of ʒow clirlich to conseyuen it.⁶¹

This dismissive attitude is completely the opposite of Mercy’s appreciation of the spectators’ intelligence. In chapter 4, we observed a similar divergence in the appraisal of the audience by expositor figures on the one hand, and preachers on the other hand.

To a degree, the different positional rhetoric and the limited use of direct address by virtuous characters in plays may be due to historical circumstances of sponsorship and funding. However, different expectations on the part of the audience also seem to be at play. One attends a sermon anticipating instruction on how to behave well, and to have one’s bad habits criticized and corrected by a spiritually superior speaker; one seemingly

did not go to a play with the same expectations.⁶² Although play audiences were apparently expected to tolerate some didacticism aimed directly at them, on the whole, playwrights were careful not to overdo it. Here some variation can be detected between plays, presumably dependent on the content of the play, its cast, its occasion, its intended audience, and the inclination of the playwright and/or patron. For instance, *Wisdom* is more willing to teach its audience directly than *Mankind*. Some sermons are likewise more willing to depict a sinful or mentally inferior audience than others; again, we can assume an influence of the intended setting and audience of the sermon and of the prestige and personality of the preacher. But, overall, the different stance with regard to the audience in plays and sermons indicates a very different level of authority for each genre, and presumably also disparate assumptions about the audience as well as distinct expectations for each genre on the part of the audience.

To conclude, despite the fact that both plays and sermons were ultimately performative genres and depended on their rapport with their audiences for their success, and despite the fact that both genres do have a didactic content to a greater or lesser degree, they use audience address in disparate ways and for apparently different reasons. There are too many examples of audience address in the surviving Middle English plays and sermons to pin them down to a complete and coherent list of purposes and effects, but we can make some generalized statements that highlight the divergent application and appreciation of this aspect of performativity in each genre. True, the use of audience address in sermons and plays ordinarily helps to bring home the moral message of the text performed. To that extent, both genres use audience engagement to similar ends.

But some important differences emerge that demonstrate how these genres stimulated piety in unique ways. Though sermons depend on the goodwill of the congregation, their use of audience address reflects very little apprehension about their authority and right to correct and teach their listeners (collectively rather than as individuals). Conversely, the relatively polite and limited rapport between especially virtuous play characters and their public indicates the fragility of the plays' claims to didactic authority as well as an awareness of their need to entertain and to maintain the audience's favor and support.

The didacticism of the plays is also usually much less direct and focuses more on encouraging emotional reactions in the spectators (and presumably the actors) than that of sermons. In sermons, audience address is predominantly used to reinforce the sense of a spiritually superior

speaker delivering a useful and necessary message that is directly relevant to the morally inferior listeners. The surviving Middle English sermons are normally prescriptive and concentrate on promoting specific virtuous behavior and religious actions, such as going to confession, and on sharing useful information, rather than on stimulating internal religious experiences. In plays, conversely, audience address is carefully used to create audience involvement in the actions on stage, by tricking their audiences into being more absorbed by less virtuous characters, by encouraging identification with fallible humans on stage, and by making it ever so slightly harder to engage with morally good characters. It is widely accepted that the spectators of plays are supposed to experience the attraction of sin while watching the play, and that they are seen as a plaything “with the potential to be recruited, manipulated, and used in a festive, combative game.”⁶³ What has been less widely acknowledged is the extent to which the portrayal of the virtuous characters, including their limited use of direct audience address, contributes to this experiential didacticism. Plays tend to present religious tenets not so much as objective material to be accepted unquestioningly and remembered by the spectators; instead, playwrights incorporate such material in ways that promote an active, emotional, and even personal reception by the listeners. The playwrights’ desire for the audience to feel and to experience, to become to some degree active participants both in the drama and in its didacticism, differs from the preachers’ construction of the audience as docile, unquestioning, passive recipients of well-defined, objective religious instruction.

The use of audience address in the surviving Middle English religious plays strongly suggests that these plays complemented sermons by responding to lay desire to take ownership, to a degree, of their own devotion in a way that preachers were not able or willing to accommodate. At the same time, by often presenting their audiences as intelligent agents, these plays also encouraged lay people to engage critically with their faith. Through encouraging and enabling such a personal, active engagement with religious matters, these plays perhaps not simply complemented preaching, but were deemed to exceed the sermon as a spiritual exercise by some people, a possibility that was much feared by some churchmen, as we saw in chapter 1. While sermons also aimed to increase their listeners’ piety, they focused mainly on communal, ritual, and external actions. There was an understanding, of course, that without internal spirituality such outward actions are worse than useless, but nevertheless the point remains that sermons often emphasized aspects of faith that could be

regulated by the Church. The plays, conversely, stimulated inward piety in a way that makes them more akin to mystical treatises, and especially those that encourage an imitative and performative approach to devotion (despite the rather basic theological content that is referenced in the plays), than sermons. While the focus on fostering personal affective piety is perhaps especially effective in performance, some of the same effect would have been achieved by reading play texts, and it is indeed possible that many of the plays were preserved in writing in order to be used in devotional exercises as scripts to cultivate proper religious sentiments. Certainly, the N-Town manuscript has additional material that suggests that the scribe-compiler did have a pious interest in the material.

The plays' focus on the personal and interior, aspects which could not be regulated by the Church, has the potential to challenge the Church's autonomy. In fact, writers of late medieval English devotional texts tend to be concerned about interiority's capacity to draw people away from communal and approved forms of worship, and, as a result, are somewhat ambivalent about private, individual spirituality.⁶⁴ The public nature of many performances arguably further enhanced this potentially subversive aspect of the plays.⁶⁵ One of the concerns expressed in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* is precisely that these plays corrupt "an hool comynte" rather than simply "oon singuler persone."⁶⁶ And given that not all plays are emphatically aligned with Church doctrine, as we shall see in the next chapter, such plays could indeed have guided the devotion of audience members in unusual directions that might have been perceived as problematic by orthodox authorities.

NOTES

¹ Schell and Schuter, p. x.

² Briscoe, "The Relation," p. 191.

³ Eccles, *The Macro Plays*.

⁴ For the characterization of the audience as either overhearers or ratified listeners, see Bubel, "Film Audiences as Overhearers," and Dynel, "'You talking to me?'" The definitions above are my own, based on Bubel's. In sermons, the listeners are always ratified, never simply overhearers.

⁵ The importance of the acknowledgement of a heterogeneous public is discussed in Livingstone, "Audience Research at the Crossroads," among others. See also McGavin and Walker for examples of how such heterogeneity might have affected medieval and early modern performances.

⁶ Warner, p. 177.

⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

⁸ Briscoe, "Preaching," p. 159. Briscoe has "second person plural pronoun."

⁹ Eccles, p. xxxv.

¹⁰ Ross, p. 61.

¹¹ Gridale, pp. 50–51.

¹² Powell, p. 51.

¹³ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁴ Morrison, p. 305.

¹⁵ Ross, p. 301.

¹⁶ Murphy, *Three*, pp. 133–34.

¹⁷ In Stevens and Cawley, *The Towneley Plays*.

¹⁸ Twycross, "The Theatricality," p. 73.

¹⁹ Beadle, "*Occupation and Idleness*," p. 11.

²⁰ Eccles, *The Macro Plays*.

²¹ Of course, the importance of the didacticism can vary from text to text, and from performance to performance. As Alexandra Johnston remarks: "We must rid ourselves of the idea that all plays using biblical narratives must be pious, didactic and performed by the people for the people as an act of devotion" (Johnston, "English Biblical Drama," 199).

²² For the label "morality play" in late medieval England, see also pp. 11, 138.

²³ Nelson, *The Plays of Henry Medwall*.

²⁴ For *vers ambigus*, see Helmich, *Die Allegorie*, p. 45.

²⁵ O'Mara, *Four*, p. 120.

²⁶ Powell, p. 88.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁰ Fletcher, *Late Medieval*, p. 87.

³¹ This need not mean that the Jews represent Lollards, although some such connection is, in my opinion, hard to avoid altogether. For the debate about the anti-Lollard nature of this play, see also Cutts, "The Croxton Play," Lampert, "The Once and Future Jew," and Chemers, "Anti-Semitism."

³² God's decision would not come as an entire surprise to people who had previously heard the Banns, but awareness of the plot does not prevent an audience from experiencing tension during a performance.

³³ Of course, the visual elements of the performance would have enhanced the emotional and mnemonic impact considerably; it is not simply a matter of spoken text. Indeed, in the later Middle Ages, "vision was considered an active endeavour (unlike hearing that was thought to be passive), and as such was considered to have greater emotional impact, thus allowing it to impart a more effective and lasting impression on the memory" (Plesch, p. 112). Despite the preacher's ability to gesticulate and even use the occasional prop, the visual element of a sermon is likely to have been bare compared to that of plays. The difficulty of concentrat-

ing on an orally delivered monologue of considerable length and of absorbing its complex content troubled later preachers, and various treatises were published in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that outlined methods the congregation could employ in order “to heare well” (Hunt, p. 65).

³⁴ McIntyre, p. 120.

³⁵ Lyons, *Semantics*, 2:638, as quoted in Elam, p. 143.

³⁶ Lyons also argues that the use of “a name or some other term of address ... in the vocative function” is used to distinguish the addressee from other possible receivers and to invite the addressee to pay attention or respond to the utterance (Lyons, *Semantics*, 1:34). Stylistics sees third person pronouns being used for people who are “neither sanctioned speakers nor addressees at the time of the speaker’s utterance” (McIntyre, p. 97).

³⁷ Butler, p. 104.

³⁸ “Magis risum & clamorem causabat quam deuocionem,” “contenciones et pugne” (Beadle, *York*, 2:429).

³⁹ Mantingh, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Kienzle, p. 122.

⁴¹ Arnold, p. 49.

⁴² Grisdale, p. 79.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Escolme, p. 113.

⁴⁵ O’Mara, *Four*, p. 113.

⁴⁶ Fletcher, *Late Medieval*, pp. 91–92.

⁴⁷ This would perhaps apply especially to (semi-)professional actors, whose spiritual status was often judged to be poor by clerical authorities, as noted in chapter 1. Many of the plays under discussion would have been performed largely by local players who were known to some spectators at least, and whose social standing was probably on a par with that of many audience members.

⁴⁸ Grisdale, p. 51.

⁴⁹ Ross, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Powell, *Festial*, p. 105.

⁵¹ Grisdale, p. 12.

⁵² Morrison, p. 229.

⁵³ O’Mara, *Four*, p. 136.

⁵⁴ Fletcher, *Late Medieval*, p. 221. The ending of this sermon does seem abrupt, which may imply that additional material was to be added in delivery (*ibid.*, p. 179).

⁵⁵ Grisdale, p. 25.

⁵⁶ O’Mara, *Four*, pp. 107–8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 115.

⁵⁸ There was, of course, debate about the efficacy of immoral preachers, and not all preachers can have been morally exemplary. Nevertheless, the idea of the preacher’s spiritual superiority, due to his office as representative of the Church

and of God as well as, ideally, to the individual's virtue, was prevalent. See also Waters, esp. chapter 2.

⁵⁹ For social deixis, or relational deixis, see McIntyre, pp. 97–98.

⁶⁰ Ross, pp. 31–32.

⁶¹ Gridale, p. 16.

⁶² While some preachers did criticize individual's traits, such as Margery Kempe's excessive weeping (Book I, Chapter 61), on the whole preachers avoided specifically correcting individuals in the audience and dealt with such sins as would apply to many or most members of the congregation. Chaucer's Pardoner boasts of attacking individuals in the congregation in such a way that everyone will know to whom he is referring even though he does not name the individual in question (*Pardoner's Prologue*, 413–22), another sign that this was not regarded as acceptable practice.

⁶³ Ramey, "The Audience-Interactive Games," p. 66.

⁶⁴ Bryan, p. 54.

⁶⁵ Jennifer Bryan notes that the connection between "the material practices of silent, solitary reading" and "expectations of privacy, inwardness, and self-reflection" explored in late medieval English devotional texts is not as transparent as the texts suggest, and that it was primarily "the *idea* of solitude and bodily containment that was important to the reader's experience" (pp. 12–13). The plays never participate in this construction of solitude (and indeed never explicitly address "expectations of privacy, inwardness, and self-reflection" either), although they may have been experienced privately in reading.

⁶⁶ Davidson, *A Tretise*, p. 100.