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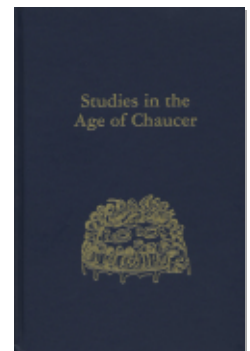
Interpretation and Performance: Essays for Alan Gaylord ed.
by Susan Yager and Elise E. Morse-Gagné (review)

Andrew James Johnston

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argument about the difficulties of personal spiritual reform in a theologically complicated moment. That reform is not encountered as a nested series of spiritual crises as in *Piers Plowman*, but through the lens of a day job reading and writing in the cogs of the bureaucratic, text-producing machine of early fifteenth-century London.

MATTHEW FISHER

University of California, Los Angeles

SUSAN YAGER and ELISE E. MORSE-GAGNÉ, eds. *Interpretation and Performance: Essays for Alan Gaylord*. Provo, Utah: The Chaucer Studio Press, 2013. Pp. xxxii, 214. \$60.00 cloth.

Alan T. Gaylord, Professor Emeritus of Dartmouth College, is a Chaucerian who merits a festschrift. Susan Yager and Elise E. Morse-Gagné have succeeded in assembling a band of highly respected scholars to pay tribute to Gaylord's achievements in the fields of Chaucerian and Middle English studies: achievements most emphatically, though by no means exclusively, connected with the issue of performing Chaucer's texts. The facet of "performance" that one most readily associates with Alan T. Gaylord is the practice of reading Chaucer aloud. Indeed, Gaylord's Kalamazoo seminars on how to present Chaucerian verse to an audience and how this kind of presentation matters in terms of understanding and interpreting Chaucer's texts have entered the world of scholarly legend. It comes as no surprise, then, that the volume embraces a notion of "performance" that follows closely in the footsteps of the approach so successfully championed by Gaylord himself.

This lends a certain coherence to the collection, though some readers would have been grateful for a more analytical and theorized take on the issue of performance. After all, "performance" has long ceased to be a scholarly field solely concerned with the theatricality or the public delivery of texts. The concept of performance has spread considerably beyond those original confines, so that nowadays notions of "the performative" have invigorated medieval studies in topics ranging from manuscript study to liturgy, from court culture to the rhetorical and disputational practices embedded in medieval Latin school texts. In other words, it could have been interesting to meditate on how these

proliferating notions of performance relate to the more traditional understandings of the concept, such as the “staging” or “reading aloud” of literary works.

Elise E. Morse-Gagné’s introduction offers generous and intelligent praise of Alan T. Gaylord, elegantly fulfilling the particular demands of the *festschrift* genre. Ann Astell pays tribute to Gaylord’s Robertsonian origins by exploring the relevance of the Gospels to *The Prioress’s Tale*. One example is Matthew 21:15–16, which depicts Jewish leaders chiding the children of Jerusalem for celebrating Jesus’ entry into the city; another is a parallel passage in Luke 19:40, in which Jesus counters Jewish criticism of the disciples with the words “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” In a beautiful interpretation of a literally central moment in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Winthrop Wetherbee expands the notion of the performative to the textual as he demonstrates how Chaucer, drawing on Dante’s *Paradiso*, succeeds in creating a moment of spiritualized love right before the climax of the consummation scene in Book III. Thomas Ohlgren evokes the image of a ghostly performance as he traces Robin Hood elements in a story from Thomas Walsingham’s *Chronicon Angliae*, in which the bishop of Lincoln, Henry Burghersh, atones for past sins by appearing in the green garb of a forester in the dreams of his former men-at-arms. The deceased ecclesiastic demands that the ills he did to his tenants during his lifetime be redressed. In a rhetorical tour de force, Betsy Bowden shows excellent horse sense by helping clarify the equestrian recklessness that Arcite displays on his victory ride after winning his tournament in various versions of the story related in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*. Howell Chickering’s excellent contribution draws, among other things, on Elizabethan Chaucer criticism in order to examine the exact nature of Chaucer’s so-called “riding rhyme,” the highly flexible precursor of the more restricted iambic pentameter. Chickering persuasively argues that Chaucer employs his version of decasyllabic couplets in the service of a narrative style that is particularly attentive to specific speech rhythms; this style achieves, moreover, a singular form of transparency by deemphasizing rhyme. Susan Yager offers an interesting analysis of the Host’s blunt rhymes and demonstrates how Harry Bailly is singled out through his idiosyncratic style of speech. Yager highlights the degree to which the Host shapes both the pilgrimage and the pilgrims and sees him as an intratextual stand-in for Chaucer, the poet. Fascinating as this take on Harry Bailly is, it is perhaps not sufficiently attentive to the Host’s incompara-

ble series of misinterpretations and to the way in which Harry Bailly tends to get things wrong whenever he comments on a tale. Paul R. Thomas's reading of *The Nun's Priest's Tale's* prosody is sensitive to the stress patterns, and hence the meaning, that result from Chaucer's self-conscious juxtaposition of frequently monosyllabic English words of Germanic origin with polysyllabic words of Latinate origin. Maura Nolan's highly perceptive article, arguably one of the two most important in the volume, perfectly encapsulates both the strengths and the weaknesses of this book as a whole. Nolan analyzes Lydgate's handling of his characteristic broken-backed version of Chaucer's pentameter line. She shows how the fifteenth-century poet uses what many critics have considered his inability to reproduce the mellifluous lines of his revered master for the purposes of constructing the Host in the Prologue to the *Siege of Thebes* not as an individualized character—like the Pardoner, for instance—but rather as an abstract marker of literary discourse whose “aggressive half-lines [are] designed to emphasize his discursive power” (113). According to Nolan, Lydgate—who had a strong interest in forms of medieval drama such as mummings—tends to construct characters as actors on a stage, whose poetic lines draw attention to their very artificiality. This is a truly impressive reading of Lydgate's dialogic engagement with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but, at the same time, Nolan's analysis seems to cry out for closer examination—nay, more rigid theorizing—of the notion of the performative and the way it is employed. Does Nolan's line of argument imply that the dramatic is by definition less capable of representing the subjective? And is Chaucer's text somehow less “performative” than Lydgate's?

Alan Baragona, Lorraine K. Stock, and Peter Beidler all demonstrate how performance matters in teaching. Baragona provides an insightful discussion of Chaucer's final *-e* and embeds this within the larger issue of what kind of poetic line Chaucer actually wrote. Arguing that the first line of the *General Prologue* has four stresses rather than being merely a looser version of iambic pentameter, Baragona reminds us of the degree to which Chaucer's verse imitates the rhythms of speech. Lorraine K. Stock explores the usefulness of introducing role-play and material props into the classroom, while Peter Beidler's personal version of *prodesse et delectare* takes us through a number of his conference papers, which include, among other things, live sword fights and, for a paper on *The Miller's Tale*, a wooden model of the type of window through which Alisoun would have displayed her physical charms. Laura

Hodges' contribution to the book establishes interesting parallels between the incongruous fabrics Sir Thopas is dressed in and the sound patterns that develop in the descriptions of them. William A. Quinn's essay may well constitute the other of the two most intriguing articles for readers interested in performance theory. His interpretation of *The Squire's Tale* as a narrative event exploiting various forms of textual performativity is important not least because it provides the volume with an altogether more rounded notion of "performance." The collection closes with a witty, original, and philologically impressive continuation of *The Cook's Tale* by Brian S. Lee.

A special treat that comes with the book is the CD with readings of Chaucer by some of the contributors. Although the CD is not essential for understanding the individual authors' arguments—and in their contributions hardly any of the contributors refer directly to the readings on the CD—it does serve as an interesting and effective illustration of the problems inherent in reading aloud. All the readers do a magnificent job despite the considerable differences in their reading styles. Whereas Susan Yager chooses a pragmatic approach typical of most present-day American Chaucerians and is, therefore, not too concerned with some of the niceties of Middle English phonology—she renders the short /u/ in words like "us" and "but" as one would do in present-day English and offers a spelling pronunciation of the short /u/ as represented by the letter <o> in Middle English words like "som" or "compaignye"—Alan Baragona's careful delivery offers a philologically near-perfect rendition of the Middle English sounds. And, though this may be considered too subjective a comment, both Paul Thomas and Lorraine K. Stock have beautiful voices that instill the poet's text with a degree of resonance and elegance that reaches beyond the scholarly.

And what is true of these two scholars' voices can also be said of the collection as a whole. The book persuasively urges us to continue thinking of Chaucer Studies—and Middle English Studies in general—as fields in which the issue of performance will increasingly yield interesting rewards.

ANDREW JAMES JOHNSTON
Free University of Berlin