Introduction

WOMEN AND MEDIEVAL DRAMA

THE EVIDENCE FROM ENGLAND

IN THE EARLY fifteenth century, the Benedictine House of Barking, under the leadership of Abbess Sybil of Felton, commissioned the writing of an Ordinal and Customary destined to record its liturgy and customs for the benefit of future abbesses.[1] The Ordinal and Customary's account of Easter day describes two ceremonies generally named in scholarly literature the *Elevatio* (elevation/raising) and the *Visitatio sepulchri* (visit to the sepulchre).[2] On that day, the nuns, clergy, and laity of Barking had gathered in the abbey church early in the morning to attend and celebrate the office of Matins. As Matins drew to a close and the third responsory had been sung, the abbess began the *Elevatio*. She led her nuns, as well as priests and clerics, to the Mary Magdalen chapel. Once they had reached the chapel, they closed its door behind them: they were now representing the scriptural patriarchs and prophets, trapped in Hell, awaiting Christ and their deliverance. They would not have to wait long: a second group of priests and clerics, along with the officiating priest who represented Christ, soon came towards them. Christ knocked on the chapel's door three times, commanding that it open. When it did, the two groups reunited; they processed, as one, towards another part of the church where a sepulchre had been prepared to repre-

1 Harper, *Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 60–61. Ordinals are focused on the organization of the liturgy. They do not necessarily feature the full content of liturgical chants, but they detail their order in liturgical services. As for customaries, they collect the customs and duties of a religious community, including those relating to its liturgy. The only extant manuscript of the Barking Ordinal and Customary (University College, MS 169) is now in the Bodleian Library. It contains chant *incipits* as well as rubrics detailing the movements of the performers. Notated chant is however missing from the manuscript. It would probably have been written in other liturgical books owned by the house (graduals, processionals, or antiphonals). The *Visitatio sepulchri* from the Abbey of Wilton is for example recorded in a processional and contains musical notation. For more on liturgical books see Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England* and Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*.

2 All citations from the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* are taken from the transcript given at the end of this introduction. All translations and chant expansions are taken from the forthcoming edition of the ceremonies, Robinson, Dutton, Blanc, and Salisbury, eds., *Theatre in the Convent*.

sent the tomb of Christ. At the tomb, the officiating priest entered the monument, took from it a Host, and lifted it, facing the congregation assembled in the abbey church.[3] He was representing Christ's Resurrection, his miraculous rising from the tomb three days after his death. Once this moment of "Resurrection" had passed, the religious men and women of Barking turned and processed towards the altar of the Holy Trinity; they were this time representing Christ and his disciples on their way to Galilee.

Then, the *Visitatio* began. Three nuns, chosen for this task on the previous day, made their way out of the ranks of the conventual community and into the Mary Magdalen chapel. There, instead of their usual black habits, they were vested in surplices and helped into white veils by their abbess who proceeded to absolve them. Carrying silver *ampullae* (liturgical vessels) in their hands, they were ready to represent the three Marys (named here Mary Magdalen, Mary mother of James, and Mary Salome)—the women who visit Christ's tomb. Lamenting the cruel death of Christ, the women slowly advanced towards the sepulchre. They met a first angel there (represented by a deacon), and then a second inside the tomb. They kissed the place where the body of Christ had been lain and Mary Magdalen took the *sudarium* (cloth wrapped around Christ's head) with her. Yet in spite of the angels' words, they could not believe in Christ's Resurrection, and they continued to lament even as they exited the sepulchre. However, the women soon understood what had happened, as Christ appeared from behind the altar, first to Mary Magdalen alone and then to all three Marys. Overwhelmed with joy, they kissed his feet before turning to the congregation and announcing the Resurrection to them. The rest of the nuns echoed the Marys and proclaimed the news of the Resurrection to the congregation. The priests and clerics representing the disciples then walked towards Mary Magdalen who told them what had happened. The ceremony ended with all its participants singing the good news.

The Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* constitute remarkable examples of female performance in medieval England. While evidence of women performing in medieval drama remains infrequent for England,[4] particularly in

3 Many of the reflections on the lay congregation present in this book were published in Blanc, "Performing Female Authority."

4 Women are recorded as having performed publicly in Passion and Saints' plays, as well as in convent drama, in France, the Low Countries, and German-speaking territories. Muir, "Women on the Medieval Stage," 107–19; Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe,* 54–56. The term "convent" was used in the Middle Ages to "designate a foundation whose members had not taken full vows, especially not

the case of cycle plays, morality plays, interludes, miracle plays, or saints' plays, further evidence of this practice has been revealed in recent scholarship focused on other performative activities.[5] James Stokes, Katie Normington, Alison Findlay, Gweno Williams, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, and Lynette Muir have begun to locate and analyse such evidence. Their work already demonstrates—according to Stokes—that women's contribution to "dramatic culture" was "significant" in the late medieval and early modern period.[6]

Extant records show women from various social strata taking part in public parish entertainments[7] including May games, dancing, hocktide games, and performances sponsored by local guilds, as well as in court-related performances involving Christmas revels, masques, plays, and tournaments. Stokes even states that women-inclusive parish drama—rather than Corpus Christi drama—was at the centre of traditional entertainment in most Lincolnshire parishes. From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, some women are also described in records as tumblers, dancers, acrobats, minstrels, and singers. A few documents even suggest that women took part in public civic pageants. The London Goldsmiths' castle pageant, for example, seems to have included four maidens in 1377, three in 1382, and one in 1392.[8] In Coventry, the Smiths' accounts of 1562 reveal the apparent participation of two women in their pageant. In Chester, one of the guild pageants—the *Assump-*

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that of poverty, which allowed them to be active in secular life." Koslin, "Robe of Simplicity," 256. The word *monasterium* would have referred to enclosed houses of men and women religious. However, *conventus* was also used to designate the "corporate body" of these houses. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 5. This is for example the case in the Barking Abbey Ordinal and Customary. In this book, I will be using the term "convent" in its modern, broader sense, to mean house or community of women religious.

5 Women's participation in medieval drama could also consist of "backstage" work: women acted as stagehands, they made and cared for props, costumes, sets, and banners. They prepared the performance space, nursed sick players, lodged them, and provided food and drink. They could also exert a more direct influence on the content of dramatic entertainment by sponsoring it. Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama*, 41–44; Stokes, "Women and Mimesis," 180, 183, 186–87; Stokes "Women and Performance," 37; Williams, Findlay, and Hodgson-Wright, "Payments, Permits, and Punishments," 48–49.

6 Stokes, "Women and Mimesis," 188.

7 From the fourteenth century onwards.

8 Stokes, "Women and Performance," 25–43; Stokes, "Women and Mimesis," 176–82, 183–87. For more on the Goldsmith's pageant, see Osberg, "The Goldsmiths' 'Chastel' of 1377."

tion play—may have been performed by "wives" as early as 1499–1500.[9] In Wells, during Queen Anne's 1613 visit to the city, two shoemakers' adolescent daughters seem to have taken major parts in the guild's play.[10] In Norwich, a pageant in a Lord Mayor's show featured four maidens representing the "fower Carnall vertews," each giving a speech. When the queen visited the town in 1578, a pageant incorporating women, men, and children was presented to her.[11] The Coventry Shearmen and Tailors' pageant—written in a late fourteenth century manuscript—may have included women singing, although female roles were otherwise played by men.[12] Girls perhaps also participated in the Digby play, *The Killing of the Children*.[13]

These examples all feature lay women, but religious women also performed according to the Barking Ordinal and other medieval records. Dramatic activities are regularly mentioned in relation to medieval monastic houses.[14] In 1329, for instance, Bishop John de Grandisson sent a mandate to the Augustinian canonesses of Canonsleigh Abbey, instructing them not to leave the enclosure of their abbey, and if they did, only to go so far as to be able to return within a day. One of the reasons the bishop gave for

9 The term "wife" could apparently designate a "female dignitary, working woman, widow who continued her husband's trade, widow, or married woman." Williams, Findlay, and Hodgson-Wright, "Payments, Permits, and Punishments," 49. Dillon believes that the mention of the Chester wives refers to their funding of the pageant rather than to their performance of it. Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, 70.

10 Stokes, "Women and Mimesis," 177. Four more guilds may have used female players on this occasion.

11 Stokes, "Women and Mimesis," 183.

12 Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama,* 41–44.

13 Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe,* 55. The list of players on fol. 157v makes reference to female virgins. See *Late Medieval Religious Plays*, ed. Baker, Murphy, and Hall Jr., lxii–lxiii, 115. Gibson also believes that "Anna Prophetissa" seems to have been played by a woman. Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 99.

14 For examples from male monastic houses, see *REED: Kent*, ed. Gibson, lxxxvi–lxxxvii; Johnston, "Bicester Priory Revisited," 16–17; Johnston, "'Amys and Amylon,'" 15–18; *REED: Devon*, ed. Wasson, 328–29; *REED: Lancashire*, ed. George, 114–44; *REED: Sussex*, ed. Louis, 182–87, 252–57; *REED: Shropshire*, ed. Somerset, 127, 144, 171–75, 363–64; *REED: Dorset/Cornwall*, ed. Conklin Hays and McGee / Joyce and Newlyn, 247–48, 320–21; *REED: Canterbury*, ed. Gibson, lxvi–lxvii, 69–70, 834, 909–10, 1242; *REED: Herefordshire/Worcestershire*, ed. Klausner, 306–8; *REED: Somerset*, ed. Stokes, 804–6; *REED: Staffordshire*, ed. Somerset; *REED: Lincolnshire*, ed. Stokes, 350–51, 525, 723. See also Dillon, *Language and Stage*, 32–33; Beadle, "Plays and Playing at Thetford Priory," 4–11.

his admonishment was the need to prevent the canonesses from seeing the *publicis & mundanis spectaculis* (the common and worldly shows)—possibly drama—that they were apparently attending.[15] The sisters of the Augustinian Convent of Limebrook/Lymbrook were similarly reprimanded in 1437, according to the register of Bishop Thomas Spofford.[16]

This register, however, contains an additional prohibition for the nuns: "Wee [says Bishop Spofford] forbede alle maner of mynstrelseys enterludes dawnsyng or reuelyng with in your sayde holy place." This implies that religious women did receive entertainers and that some even hosted festive games either in their nunnery or in their church. The prioress of the Cistercian Priory of Nun Cotham too was asked in 1531 by Bishop John Longland that she "suffer nomore herafter eny lorde of misrule to be within your house, nouther to suffer hereafter eny such disgysinges as in tymes past haue bene used in your monastery in nunnes apparel ne otherwise."[17] This injunction suggests that revels were organized over the Christmas period with an apparently external Lord of Misrule presiding over them. The phrasing of Bishop Longland may indicate that the nuns participated in "disgysinges" dressed either in their own habits or in other clothes, but it may also mean that people entered the nunnery along with the Lord of Misrule and performed dressed as nuns.[18] The nuns of Barking Abbey seem to have hosted various forms of entertainment as well. In 1308, they were reprimanded by Bishop Baldock for allowing "tumultuous assemblies" (including dancing and wrestling) to take place in the Barking parish and abbey churches around the time of the feasts of St Ethelburga and St Margaret.[19] The 1461–1490 accounts from the Benedictine Priory of St Mary de Pré in St Albans also show expenses for May games and payments to harpers and players for New Year and Twelfth Night. Harper Robert Abbot seems to have entered the precinct of St Michael's Priory in Lincolnshire, as he apparently fled with nun Agnes Butler in 1440.[20] In 1441, the male priory of St Swithun in Winchester may have paid "the boys of the almonry, together with the

15 Young, "Theatre-Going Nuns," 26. English translation by Young.

16 *REED: Herefordshire and Worcestershire*, ed. Klausner, 187–88.

17 *REED: Herefordshire and Worcestershire*, ed. Klausner, 188; *REED: Lincolnshire,* ed. Stokes, 1:348–49, 2:429, 455–56, 524.

18 On the Lord of Misrule, see Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking*, 44–46, 162–64. They also discuss the meaning of the term "disguising" 128–49.

19 "Houses of Benedictine Nuns: Abbey of Barking," ed. Page and Round.

20 See *Visitations of Religious Houses*, ed. Thompson, 348; Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*, 360.

boys of the chapel of St Elisabeth, dressed up after the manner of girls, dancing, singing and performing plays before the Abbess and Nuns of St Mary's Abbey in their hall on the Feast of the Innocents."[21]

Festive celebrations on the Feast of the Innocents were thus conducted in convents, as was also the case in male religious houses. There, one of the most frequently mentioned traditions was that of the Boy Bishop, which was connected to the festivities of Innocents' Day and St Nicholas' Day.[22] In cathedral and monastic churches, the Boy Bishop was elected on the eve of the feast of St Nicholas and performed many of the services conducted on Innocents' Day in place of the bishop. His rule could at times continue for a fortnight and was accompanied by festivities, plays, processions, and dances.[23] The inventories of the women's Benedictine priories of St Mary's Cheshunt in Hertfordshire and of Sts Mary and Sexburga in Sheppey—compiled during the Dissolution of the Monasteries—contain references to costumes for child bishops. In 1487–1488, the Priory of St Mary de Pré recorded the admittance of "seint Nicholas clerks" on Holy Innocents' Day.[24] As for the Benedictine Abbeys of Barking, Godstow, and Carrow: they all had girls step into the shoes of their abbess on that same day.[25]

Conventual houses further appear to have been involved in, or at least associated with, external performative events. The parish church of All Hallows in London, which belonged to Barking Abbey, rented its pageants to the male Augustinian house of Holy Trinity for Easter 1513–1514, to the Skinners' company in 1519, and to John Scott, who may have been one of King Henry VIII's players, at the beginning of the sixteenth century.[26] In 1509,

21 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 309–13; Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, 1:361n5. The recent edition of *REED Hampshire* (2020) has however cast substantial doubt as to whether this information is true. The medieval accounts containing it, which were first mentioned by Thomas Warton, cannot be traced. Warton moreover seems to have engaged in fabricating medieval sources on other occasions. See *REED Hampshire*, ed. Greenfield and Cowling.

22 See for instance: *REED: Devon*, ed. Wasson, 8–9, 12, 287; *REED: Hampshire*, ed. Greenfield and Cowling.

23 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 311–13; *REED: Ecclesiastical London*, ed. Erler, xxv–xxvi.

24 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 313; Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*, 360.

25 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 312–13n978. In the 1404 Barking Ordinal, this ceremony does not seem to include the laity anymore. *Ordinale and Customary*, ed. Tolhurst, 1:33–35.

26 *REED: Ecclesiastical London*, ed. Erler, xliv, lxxiv, xxxii–xxxiii, 27, 40, 47, 48; Sturman, "Barking Abbey," 132.

Bishop Fitzjames sent an injunction to the nuns of Wix not to permit "any public spectacles of seculars, javelin play, dances or trading in the streets or open places."[27]

Nuns even participated in performances themselves. Public dancing occurred at the Benedictine Priory of St Helen's Bishopsgate in 1439, according to Dean Reginald Kentwood. He advised the nuns to dance only at Christmas "and other honest tymys of recreacyon among ȝowre selfe vsid in absence of seculers."[28] In 1379, the Bishop of Salisbury forbade the nuns of Wilton to entertain themselves with plays or games.[29] In 1442, one of the sisters of the Cistercian Priory of Catesby was accused of spending the night in the company of "Austin friars at Northampton and [she] did dance and play the lute with them in the same place until midnight, and on the night following she passed the night with the friars preachers at Northampton, luting and dancing in like manner."[30] The most substantial type of evidence for performances by women in a conventual setting comes from the Benedictine Abbeys of Barking and Wilton. According to the early fifteenth-century Barking Ordinal and Customary and to a fifteenth-century Wilton processional, both houses staged dramatic liturgical ceremonies (commonly called *Depositio* (laying down/burial), *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio sepulchri*) in their abbey church on Holy Week.[31] As stated above, these depicted the story of Christ's Resurrection (for the *Elevatio*), and of the visit of the three Marys to his sepulchre (for the *Visitatio*). The *Depositio* took place on Good Friday and showed the burial of Jesus. Such ceremonies were usually sung in Latin plainchant, as was most of liturgy.[32] Their content borrowed from all four gospels and from existing liturgical chants, but it also featured chants found only in such ceremonies, as well as original material. While men and women religious performed them, lay people were occasionally in attendance.[33]

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27 Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 385; "Houses of Benedictine Nuns: Priory of Wix," ed. Page and Round.

28 *REED: Ecclesiastical London*, ed. Erler, xliv, lxxiv, 24–25.

29 "Houses of Benedictine Nuns: The Abbey of Wilton," ed. Pugh and Crittall.

30 *Visitations of Religious Houses*, ed. Thompson, 50. Translation by Thompson.

31 The terms *Visitatio sepulchri*, *Ad visitandum sepulchrum* or *ad visitationem sepulchri* were at times used in medieval texts (twelfth to fifteenth centuries) already. See for instance *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern*, ed. Lipphardt, 2:306, 3:773, 991, 1074.

32 Salisbury defines plainchant as "music with a single melodic line and no rhythmic information given in the notation." Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 78.

33 Campbell, "Liturgical Drama and Community Discourse," 565. There is evidence

Depositiones, *Elevationes*, and *Visitationes* were not produced in women's religious houses only. On the contrary, most of them seem to have originated in male monasteries and collegiate churches. In England, extant *Visitatio* ceremonies can be connected not only to Barking and Wilton, but also Winchester (tenth, early eleventh century), Canterbury (eleventh-century copy of the tenth century *Regularis Concordia*), and Norwich (partial ceremony from the thirteenth or fourteenth century). Furthermore, two mentions of *representacio resurreccionis* (representations of the Resurrection) may reference to *Visitatio* ceremonies taking place at the cathedral of Lichfield (twelfth century) and the abbey of Eynsham (thirteenth century).[34] Extant *Depositio* ceremonies have been attached to Canterbury (eleventh century), Durham (fourteenth century), Exeter (fourteenth century), Hereford (fourteenth century), Norwich (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), Oxford (fourteenth century), Salisbury (twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries), and York (early sixteenth century); extant *Elevatio* ceremonies to Canterbury (eleventh century), Exeter (early sixteenth century), Hereford (fourteenth century), Norwich (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries), Salisbury (thirteenth century), and York (early sixteenth century).[35]

Such ceremonies were popular not only in England but also all over Europe. Evidence from the Continent shows how beloved they were in men's and women's monasteries. It further reveals a broad variety of performative activities taking place in nunneries. Evidence of such activities has been discovered in France: Poitiers Sainte-Croix (thirteenth century), Troyes (thirteenth century), and Origny (fourteenth century); in the Low Countries (Huy, fifteenth century): in German-speaking regions including Essen

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in ceremonies from German-speaking territories of a more direct participation from the laity (Nuremberg, Essen, Diessen, for example). Meredith, "Latin Liturgical Drama," 94.

34 Dolan, *Le drame liturgique*, 173–75; Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, 2:377; *REED: Staffordshire*, ed. Somerset.

35 *REED: Canterbury*, ed. Gibson, lxv–lxvi, 910–11; *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern*, ed. Lipphardt, 2:538–78 (Lipphardt also edits a sixteenth-century account of a *Depositio* and *Elevatio* from Durham, 549.); Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:136–37, 561, 563, 133, 145–46, 561, 155, 167, 238, 138–39, 134, 555, 146–47, 254. Sepulchres existed in many other places in England, which may indicate that *Elevatio*, *Depositio*, and even *Visitatio* ceremonies took place in those churches. Sheingorn, *Easter Sepulchre*; Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2:512–13. Dublin and Edinburgh also hosted similar Easter ceremonies (*Depositio*, *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio* for Dublin, *Depositio* for Edinburgh). *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern*, ed. Lipphardt, 2:550–51, 5: 1464–72.

(fourteenth century), Andernach (fourteenth century), Asbeck (sixteenth century), Brescia (1438), Gandersheim (tenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries), Gernrode (ca. 1500), Havelberg (fifteenth century), Lichtenthal bei Baden-Baden (thirteenth century), Marienberg bei Helmstedt (thirteenth century), Medinberg bei Lüneburg (ca. 1320), Münster (ca. 1600), Nottuln (fifteenth century), Regensburg-Obermünster (sixteenth century), Salzburg (fifteenth century), Wienhausen (fourteenth century), Wöltingerrode (thirteenth century), Rupertsberg (Hildegard von Bingen, twelfth century); in convents from Prague (twelfth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries); and from Italian and Spanish regions.[36] These were not all *Depositiones*, *Elevationes*, and *Visitationes*: at times, these activities resembled the drama performed by the laity (and defined by the contemporary critical framework as "drama"). A manuscript from the Carmelite convent of Huy, for example, features five plays written in the vernacular, some of them allegorical and some presenting the events surrounding the birth of Christ.[37] They may have been designed for private performances—by nuns for nuns—as is still the case in some Carmelite communities today.[38] Similar circumstances perhaps surrounded the performance of the plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim and Hildegard of Bingen, although these were written in Latin. Hrotsvit was a tenth-century canoness of the royal and imperial foundation of Gandersheim. She composed plays resembling those of Terence but presenting Christian ideas and promoting the virtues associated with a religious life.[39] As for Hildegard of Bingen, her *Ordo virtutum* (Order of the Virtues) was a moral allegory. The *Ordo* was not meant to be spoken but sung and was accompanied in its manuscript by musical notation.[40]

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36 See Ogden, *The Staging of Drama*, 143–44; Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 54–56. For information on Italian convent drama, see Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy*. For more on Spanish convents, see Arenal, Schlau, and Powell, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns*.

37 On Huy, see Robinson, "Feminizing the Liturgy"; Robinson, "Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 617"; Muir, "Women on the Medieval Stage"; Cohen, *Mystères et moralités*.

38 The Carmelite sisters of Le Pâquier, interview by Olivia Robinson and Aurélie Blanc, January 2018, Fribourg, Switzerland.

39 Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, 72–73; Davidson, "Women and the Medieval Stage," 99–113.

40 The question of whether the plays of Hrotsvit and Hildegard were meant to be performed has been debated. Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy*, 49; Simon, "Preface," xiii; Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, 55, 63. On the Ordo, see Alstatt, "The *Ordo virtutum* and Benedictine Monasticism"; Fassler, *Cosmos, Liturgy, and the Arts*.

There is then a vast diversity in the performative activities associated with convents: in addition to nuns taking an interest in performances and at times leaving their enclosure to see them, sisters also welcomed entertainers within their walls, and they even performed themselves in a variety of events. The term "convent drama"—commonly used in scholarly literature to refer to the performance of women religious—thus encompasses a multitude of public and private events.[41] In England, these include dancing, playing the lute, and performing Holy Week ceremonies such as those of Barking and Wilton. What unites them is a similar context of production and performance. They were produced—in part at least—by women in monastic houses: they were generally sponsored by women, may have been composed by them, and they were performed and witnessed by them.

The evidence presented so far shows that when one examines a wide range of performative activities, women's participation in the culture of performance no longer seems rare. Building on the work conducted by Muir, Williams, Findlay, Hodgson-Wright, and Stokes, this book continues to explore such performance in medieval England. Keeping in mind the apparent prohibitions imposed by medieval ideas about women's bodies and speech in the Middle Ages, I nevertheless hope to further contribute to the study of female performance.[42] My focus will be the convent drama at Barking Abbey—in particular, the house's *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* ceremonies. These two ceremonies feature the performance of women prominently and they can almost be considered the same performative event, since they took place consecutively. I chose to concentrate on one convent due to the relative independence of Benedictine houses in the medieval period. Neither liturgy nor customs were identical in different houses. They each had their own church, they did not deal with the same parishioners, nor did they benefit from the same patrons. Following the recommendations made in Matthew Cheung Salisbury and C. Clifford Flanigan's work on the study of liturgical material, I address these specificities rather than offering a more general analysis of convent drama in England.[43] The number of studies already con-

41 See Matthews, "Textual Spaces / Playing Spaces"; Matthews, "The Bride of Christ"; Robinson, "Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 617"; Robinson, "Feminizing the Liturgy." Weaver uses the term "convent theatre" in *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy*. Because of the diversity of events performed in women's monasteries, I would however avoid presenting convent drama as a literary genre.

42 See for example Minnis, "Religious Roles," 49–50, 57; Elliott, "Flesh and Spirit," 13–31; McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls," 216–17, 235–36.

43 Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 86; Salisbury, "Rethinking the Use of

ducted on this house by historians and archaeologists, and the association of Barking with a wide range of extant documents and performative activities, confirmed this decision.

"Liturgical Drama"

Barking Abbey has been tied, as mentioned above, with dancing, wrestling, and girl-abbess ceremonies. The house's main dramatic activities, however, appear to have been its *Depositio*, *Elevatio*, and *Visitatio sepulchri*. These types of ceremonies—the more theatrical *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* in particular—have often been categorized and edited as "liturgical drama."[44] Karl Young and Walther Lipphardt have produced authoritative editions of extant ceremonies.[45] Other editions include those of Susan Rankin (who transcribes the texts and music of French and English liturgical drama), Diane Dolan (who focuses on French and English Easter liturgical drama), Anne Bagnall Yardley (who edits and translates the Wilton and Barking ceremonies), J. B. L. Tolhurst (who edits the Barking Ordinal), and Pamela Sheingorn (Barking).[46] One of the main difficulties encountered by these editors comes from the ceremonies' embeddedness in the liturgy, from which they are inevitably separated once edited.[47]

Indeed, much of the scholarly discussion around these ceremonies has focused on their apparent—and confusing—blend of drama and liturgy. They do possess theatrical features: the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio*, for example, clearly imply a conscious representation of someone other than oneself; they tell a narrative story with the help of dialogue and movement, and indicate that the nuns, priests, and clerics who performed them were meant to behave like the scriptural figures that they were portraying (emotions included). For instance, the nuns portraying the three Marys are

Sarum," 122; Flanigan, "*Visitatio sepulchri* as Paradigm," 17.

44 Lange, *Die lateinischen Osterfeiern*; *Drames liturgiques du Moyen Âge*, ed. de Coussemaker; Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*; *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern,* ed. Lipphardt.

45 Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*; *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern*, ed. Lipphardt.

46 Rankin, "A New English Source"; *The Music of the Medieval Liturgical Drama*, ed. Rankin; Dolan, *Le drame liturgique*; Yardley, *Performing, Piety*, 243–54; "The Liturgical Dramas for Holy Week," ed. Yardley and Mann; *Ordinale and Customary*, ed. Tolhurst; Sheingorn, *Easter Sepulchre*.

47 Flanigan, "The Fleury Playbook," 350.

described in the Barking manuscript as "illa que speciem / pretendit marie magdalene" (the one showing the outward appearance of Mary Magdalen); "secunda que mariam iacobi prefigurat" (the second one, who represents Mary [Mother] of James); and "Tercia maria vi/cem optinens salomee" (the third Mary taking on the role of Salome). The Marys are also instructed to show emotions: they should sing *flebili uoce et sub/missa* (in an afflicted and humble voice) as they lament the death of Christ. The ceremonies moreover make reference to dressing in ways that would evoke these scriptural figures.[48] The first angel is said to be wearing a white stole (*alba stola*) as are the angels at the grave according to Scriptures.[49] Yet, *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* ceremonies differ from most medieval drama because of their liturgical context, their prevalent use of Latin as the language of performance, their musical characteristics, and their non-lay performers. How should they therefore be classified and studied?[50]

The use of the fraught term "liturgical drama" already illustrates this issue of classification.[51] Peter Meredith defines liturgical drama as "the theatrical action growing out of and to an extent remaining within the annually recurring services of the Christian Church, the liturgy."[52] Yet identifying what is and is not drama and what is and is not liturgy is a challenge. The term "liturgical drama" has been used to classify a wide range of texts from "brief musical and verbal texts" generally found in liturgical books—including *Depositio*, *Elevatio*, and some *Visitatio* ceremonies—to a "small number of highly developed literary and musical forms, mostly of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which are readily recognized as drama."[53] Definitions are only made fuzzier by the use of various other terms to designate "liturgical plays" ("church drama," "medieval Latin drama," *Feier* (ceremony/feast),

48 For more on the use of costume in *Visitatio* ceremonies, see Ogden, "Costumes and Vestments."

49 See Mark 16:5; Matthew 28:3; John 20:12.

50 On the classification of a text affecting its study by modern scholars, see Gittos, "Researching the History of Rites," 31; Symes, "Early Vernacular Plays," 795.

51 Discussions of this term include Accarie, *Le théâtre sacré*; Norton, *Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater*; *The Music of the Medieval Liturgical Drama*, ed. Rankin, 1, 5; Palazzo, "Performing the Liturgy," 488; Petersen, "Liturgical Drama: New Approaches," 636.

52 Meredith, "Latin Liturgical Drama," 55.

53 Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 22; Campbell, "Liturgical Drama and Community Discourse," 575–87.

and *Spiel* (game/play)), all outlining different limitations for the genre.[54] This confusion about the definition of liturgical drama, and what the genre should or should not include, stems from the difficulty of defining drama, liturgy, and the difference between the two. When does a performance stop being drama and become liturgy? Or the reverse? Is it even possible for drama to be "liturgical"?

The question of the boundary between drama and liturgy has been a central preoccupation of the research on liturgical drama since its beginning. Scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Lange, collected and edited examples of liturgical plays. They thus had to decide what they considered dramatic enough to feature in their editions. Much like his predecessors, E. K. Chambers believed that the task of scholarship was to accumulate facts. He argued that a "genuine ludic impulse existed among the half-pagan ordinary people of the Middle Ages" and was interested in liturgical drama because he saw it as a means for these people to break free from the bonds of ecclesiastical control.[55] Although Chambers' pioneering study and his factual collection proved highly influential, his view of drama as freeing itself from liturgy did not endure in later scholarship. Yet, the interest of scholars in tracing the limit between drama and liturgy has remained at the heart of the research on liturgical drama.

Chambers' work was followed by that of two scholars central to this field: Gustave Cohen with *Le théâtre en France au Moyen-Âge, vol 1. Le théâtre religieux* (1928) and Karl Young with *The Dramatic Associations of the Easter Sepulchre* (1920) and *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933). Cohen asserts that all religions have the potential to generate drama because cults spontaneously take a theatrical aspect. Liturgical drama is an integral part of the Divine Office that evolved towards the "profane" thanks to an increasing dramatic instinct and the addition of more realistic elements.[56] Young, for his part, begins by defining drama and ritual before establishing the limit between them. Drama is impersonation and Mass is a "genuine renewal" of past events where Christ is present in the consecrated elements.[57] Therefore, while liturgy is theatrical and can be conducive to drama—dialogues

54 The terms *Feier* and *Spiel* mostly come from the German scholarly tradition. While English-speaking scholars acknowledge and at times discuss their use, they tend not to adopt them in their own research. See Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:412; Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 32–37.

55 Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 23–24; see Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage.*

56 Cohen, *Le théâtre en France*, 5–6, 10–16.

57 Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:80, 85.

are sung, at times by different people, and it features various movements and postures—the lack of impersonation prevents it from being genuine drama. Although the controversial Amalarius of Metz (eight to ninth centuries) and Honorius of Autun (twelfth century) claimed that Mass was drama, this remains an impossibility according to Young.[58] Ceremonies of the Holy Week, such as the *Depositio* and the *Elevatio*, do not contain impersonation either, nor do the Feast of Fools and the Boy Bishop ceremonies.[59] Like Cohen, Young believes that the older, simpler dramatic ceremonies are liturgical while later ones—from the *Visitatio sepulchri* onwards—come closer to drama.[60] These conclusions were overwhelmingly accepted by scholars for the next three decades.[61]

This relative stagnation in scholarship ended with O. B. Hardison Jr.'s pivotal *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (1965). Hardison's work is mostly notable for his widely accepted attack on Young's evolutionary development, but it also claims that the bias of earlier scholars against religion made them underplay the religious elements in liturgical plays. Drawing on Amalarius of Metz and Honorius of Autun, Hardison affirms that Mass was consciously interpreted as drama at the time liturgical plays first appeared: "religious ritual was the drama of the early Middle Ages."[62] While he acknowledges differences between the sacred drama of the Mass and twelfth and thirteenth century liturgical drama which displays "a search for representational modes which preserves a vital relation to ritual," both remain drama. Hardison adds that the criterion of impersonation used by Young to define drama proves problematic.[63] It is a nineteenth-century concept ill fitted to the Middle Ages, a time when the "line between art and reality was much less definite."[64] While Hardison's view of the Mass has not been widely accepted by scholars, his methodology—viewing the liturgy as the main context in which these plays should be understood—has left a last-

58 Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:80, 83–84.

59 Young, *Dramatic Associations*, 72; Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:90–100, 109–14.

60 Young, *Dramatic Associations*, 128; Cohen, *Le théâtre en France,* 5, 6.

61 Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, 2–4. See Craig, *English Religious Drama*, for one of the influential followers of Young.

62 Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, viii, 35–79.

63 Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, 252.

64 Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, 32.

ing impact.[65] His work created a division in the field of studies on liturgical drama between scholars who agree with his arguments, even his perception that Mass is drama, and those who follow Young, yet must now acknowledge the shortcomings of his work.

Followers of Young, whether explicitly or not, include Rosemary Woolf in *The English Mystery Plays* (1972), although she defines impersonation in more detailed terms than he did. According to her, mimetic action is rare in the liturgy, but verbal impersonation happens often. For instance, the choir singing the *Magnificat* impersonates the Virgin. These two types of liturgical impersonation—verbal impersonation and mimetic action—are brought together in dramatic impersonation.[66] Woolf recognizes the problem, underlined by Hardison, of defining drama according to modern criteria and tries to determine whether liturgical drama was perceived as drama in the Middle Ages. She acknowledges that genre is determined not only by the text's intrinsic qualities but also by its audience. Woolf sees the twelfth century as a turning point when liturgical plays started to develop away from the liturgy into genuine drama, and to be perceived as such.[67] William Tydeman (1978) follows in Woolf's footsteps with *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*. The *Visitatio* in the *Regularis Concordia* contains the mention of the Marys looking around "as if" searching for something: Tydeman argues that this element of mimesis gives the *Visitatio* a "degree of representation missing from the Mass," but he refrains from asserting whether the ceremony is drama.[68]

Taylor and Nelson (1972) also contest Hardison's arguments. If ritual is drama but there is also, as Hardison says, a shift towards "representational modes," how is the shift possible if there was no difference to begin with?[69] Diane Dolan (1978), Drumbl (1981), and Maurice Accarie (1979) all follow Young's view of the Mass as well.[70] Dolan opposes Hardison and his follower Sticca. The latter, while acknowledging that a medieval audience would not have perceived liturgy as drama, asserts that the vestments, the roles during the service, the dialogue, and the action are all proofs of the dramatic nature of Mass. Dolan disagrees. Vestments are symbols, neither signs of impersonation, nor a disguise. Accarie agrees with Young that liturgical drama differs

65 Petersen, "Liturgical Drama: New Approaches," 626.

66 Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, 6, 21.

67 Woolf, *English Mystery Plays,* 25, 28, 35, 40, 77.

68 Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Age*, 32, 38.

69 Taylor and Nelson, "Introduction," 1–3, 8–10.

70 Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 21.

from the liturgy but opposes him when it comes to impersonation. Accarie's essential contribution to the field is to draw attention to the importance of looking at each local text before drawing general conclusions.[71]

Accarie's methodology is part of a new trend in scholarship, visible in de Boor (1967), Ogden (2002), Rankin (1989), Dolan (1978), Lipphardt, and Campbell (1981).[72] However, Campbell differs from Accarie and agrees with Hardison about the importance of liturgy in defining liturgical drama, as do Fletcher Collins and Flanigan.[73] Flanigan rejects Young's reliance on impersonation to delimit drama from liturgy and defines both according to their relation to their audience. Liturgical ritual is a communal experience where imitation makes present in the community an event of the past. Drama is only imitation and draws a clear line between audience and actors. Flanigan adds, leaning on Woolf and de Boor, that the genre of a work can be changed by the reviser of a text or by the audience. While early *Visitationes* were meant to be "dramatic rituals," a fifteenth-century audience would have understood them as drama. Since ritual and drama rely so thoroughly on audience reception for their definition, the shift from one to the other cannot be clearly defined and depends on their spectators.[74]

Helmut de Boor follows Hardison in contesting Young's evolutionary and impersonation theories. He does not believe, however, that the "plays" are drama but instead that they are liturgical ceremonies.[75] In *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern* (1967), he produces a textual history of dramatic liturgical ceremonies with the aim of discovering the building of traditions and networks of influence between them.[76] De Boor and his German colleagues Hans Jürgen Diller and Theo Stemmler work with the distinction between *Feier* and *Spiel*, established since Lange, rather than with the terms "ritual" and "drama."[77] The ceremonies he treats in this book are

71 Accarie, *Le théâtre sacré*, 22–24, 32.

72 See de Boor, *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern*; Ogden, *The Staging of Drama*; *The Music of the Medieval Liturgical Drama*, ed. Rankin; Dolan, *Le drame liturgique*; *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern,* ed. Lipphardt; Campbell, "Liturgy and Drama."

73 Campbell, "Liturgy and Drama," 294; Flanigan, "The Fleury Playbook," 351; Fletcher Collins, *Production of Medieval Church Music-Drama*, 24.

74 Flanigan, "The Fleury Playbook," 351, 361–64, 369; Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 29, 33.

75 de Boor, *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern*, 4, 15.

76 de Boor, *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern*, 1–20.

77 Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 33.

Feiern: texts used in a liturgical ceremonial and found in liturgical books. De Boor does not believe any characterization is present in these ceremonies; participants merely symbolize the figures that they represent. The *Spiel*, on the other hand, does not belong to the liturgical sphere. It can be in Latin or in the vernacular, performed in a church or not, it can pick its sources and modify them.[78] The significant contributions of German and French (most notably Gustave Cohen) scholars to the study of liturgical drama show the pan-European scope of this field of research. The ceremonies studied share strong similarities and come from many regions of Europe. Research on liturgical drama therefore tends not to confine itself to one country but to respond to and use the work of scholars from various European countries.

The importance given by Hardison to liturgy remained central to studies in this field in the 1990s. Yet scholars also continued to refute some of Hardison's arguments. Lynette Muir, for example, refuses in her work to see Mass as drama (1995), and John Wesley Harris (1992) contests Hardison's use of Amalarius, who, for him, did not make a play out of Mass. He instead showed how every detail of the service could be "interpreted as an image of one of the events of Jesus' last days." The priest would at times identify with Jesus and the deacons with the disciples, but the identification remained too fluctuating to be comparable to that of a play. Amalarius' ideas, though popular, were moreover seen as heretical by the Council of Quiercy. Harris understands the early *Visitationes* as "imaginative recreation(s)" approaching drama through the use of "as if."[79] Tydeman, in *A Documentary History: The Medieval European Stage 500–1550* (2001), similarly challenges Hardison's use of Amalarius. Tydeman believes an element of mimesis connected to the *Regularis Concordia*'s "as if" makes these ceremonies more than liturgy, even if they do not fall into characterization or impersonation.[80] In the same book, Peter Meredith argues that Amalarius and Honorius were writing about the "theatre of the imagination rather than actualized theatre." He refuses to enter the debate over ritual/drama. Since the intention of writers and the reception of audiences are difficult to determine, whether these ceremonies are defined as drama or not is often based on the personal

78 de Boor, *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern*, 2–3, 5, 8–9.

79 Muir, *Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 46; Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context*, 23–26, 31.

80 Tydeman, "General Introduction," 4–5.

response of critics. What is true is that "theatrical actions exist to varying extents within or on the edges of the liturgy."[81]

Scholars then come almost universally to acknowledge the embeddedness of "liturgical drama" in liturgy, but also increasingly refuse to establish a firm line between drama and liturgy.[82] Dillon (2006) adds that distinguishing one from the other would be a "false binary."[83] The use of the *Regularis Visitatio*'s "as if" as evidence that these ceremonies contain an element of drama, also spreads among scholars. David Bevington argues that the "as if" indicates moments of drama within these ceremonies without preventing them from moving back and forth between drama and liturgy.[84]

Having surveyed the scholarly field of "liturgical drama," I would like to present my own position on this question of drama and liturgy. I agree with the current consensus emphasizing the importance of liturgy in the study of *Elevationes* and *Visitationes*: no longer are they defined as "para-liturgical" or separate from liturgy as had been argued previously.[85] This change in perception advocated by the field of liturgical drama is supported by recent scholarly redefinitions of medieval liturgy. While the term "liturgy" today tends to refer, as exemplified by the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, to "all the prescribed services of the Church, as contrasted with private devotion," it was not understood to have this meaning in the Middle Ages.[86] Its anachronistic use when discussing medieval worship practices is

81 Meredith, "Latin Liturgical Drama," 55, 58.

82 See Bourgeault, "Liturgical Dramaturgy," 126–28; Davidson, *Illustrations of the Stage and Acting*, xvi; Beckwith "Ritual, Church, and Theatre," 65, 80; Ogden, *The Staging of Drama*, 17. Beckwith does not focus on women's drama or on liturgical drama but instead on the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. She offers insights in the debate on the delimitation between ritual and liturgy.

83 Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, 25–26, 88–95.

84 Bevington, "Staging Liturgy in the Croxton Play," 243. See also Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context*, 31; Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, 142; Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Ages*, 38; Tydeman, "General Introduction," 5.

85 Scholarship which separates "liturgical drama" from liturgy include Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:114; Flanigan, "Medieval Latin Music-Dramas," 28–33. Scholarship which acknowledges its inclusion in liturgy includes Ogden, *The Staging of Drama*; Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*; Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context*; Tydeman, "General Introduction," 3–5; Bevington, "Staging Liturgy in the Croxton Play"; Flanigan, "*Visitatio sepulchri* as Paradigm," 14–16; Davidson, *Illustrations of the Stage and Acting*, xvi; Palazzo, "Performing the Liturgy," 488.

86 Flanigan, Ashley, and Sheingorn, "Liturgy as Social Performance," 638.

problematic because the boundary between "official" liturgical practices and "para-liturgical" practices was more ambiguous at the time.[87] The term "liturgy"—for lack of a better one—in a medieval context, therefore refers to: "the ritualized public celebration of the faith of the Church," "the prayers and rituals of the worshipping Church in all its different guises," "the organized and structured worship of God, especially in churches which emphasize order and dignity."[88] Medieval liturgy was not dictated by "fixed 'top-down' directives" only but was instead flexible and incorporated "a wide spectrum of worshipful activities."[89] Recent studies—by Helen Gittos, for instance—insist that more medieval texts than commonly acknowledged are liturgical. Gittos argues that although medieval liturgy may seem to have consisted of ceremonies conducted in churches, sung in Latin, and celebrated by a priest, some liturgical ceremonies—such as the Rogation days' processions—were performed outdoors, others were spoken in the vernacular, and priests were not necessarily present for all liturgical celebrations.[90] Moreover, while the liturgy of the High to Late Middle Ages was to a certain extent standardized, it was far from being fixed: variety was one of its essential components.[91] At Barking Abbey, for instance, feasts celebrated local saints such as St Erkenwald and St Ethelburga, and featured chants composed for the particular occasion.[92]

In this context, it becomes difficult to deny that *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* ceremonies were liturgy. They are mostly found in liturgical manuscripts where they are part of larger liturgical ceremonies—such as the Matins on Easter Day[93]—and are generally not marked as different from the other,

87 It was more common for manuscripts to mention specific types of offices, books, and texts than to contain the umbrella-term of "liturgy." The word only started to be used in this way in the mid-sixteenth century. Gittos and Hamilton, "Introduction," 4; Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," 239–40.

88 Heffernan and Matter, "Introduction to the Liturgy of the Medieval Church," 1; Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 2.

89 Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," 239–40, 260; Palazzo, "Performing the Liturgy," 473–74; Gittos, "Researching the History of Rites," 30–32.

90 Gittos and Hamilton, "Introduction," 6; Flanigan, Ashley, and Sheingorn, "Liturgy as Social Performance," 63–68; Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," 263–65; Rubin, "Sacramental Life," 223.

91 Gittos, "Researching the History of Rites," 13–20; Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 9, 13–42.

92 Yardley, *Performing Piety*, 179, 192, 198.

93 This is the case at Barking Abbey.

"non-dramatic," sections of these ceremonies. Their differences from religious house to religious house, as well as the occasional use of the vernacular in some of the French and German *Elevationes* and *Visitationes*, do not necessarily mark them as distinct from liturgy either.[94]

If they are liturgy then, are they also drama? The two share important features. The definitions of liturgy discussed above describe it as a structured and public event, and so is drama. Drama usually presents "an action (or the mimetic representation of an action) through actors who incarnate or show characters for an audience gathered to receive it at a time and place that may or may not be specified in advance."[95] Like most theatre, liturgy takes into account its "audience" and attempts to optimize the effect that it will have on them: it usually takes place in a church, in a kind of "set," a space designed to supply ideal acoustics, light, and seating for such an event. This is a space in which specific areas are assigned to specific parts of the ceremony, much as a play may use various "locations" to which actors go in different scenes. Participants in the liturgy also follow a structured "script" (generally written down in liturgical books) describing, as a dramatic script would, the words that they should say, the movements and gestures that they should make, the clothes that they should wear, and the objects that they should handle. These objects and clothes can be spectacular: they can be made of or covered with precious metal and gems. The ceremonies incorporating such objects and clothes can themselves be spectacular: they can feature a large number of participants in an impressive space, all moving in a nearly choreographed manner.[96]

While liturgy and drama have similarities, for many of the scholars mentioned above, liturgy cannot simultaneously be drama.[97] Whether a performance qualifies as one or the other can at times be inferred through context and form: medieval drama is often in the vernacular, often performed by the laity in secular spaces while liturgy is generally performed in a church, by religious men and women, and sung in Latin. Yet, Gittos's work proves that medieval liturgy was at times performed outside, could be in the vernacular, and did not always require the presence of religious men and women:

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94 The Origny *Ludus paschalis*, for instance, and the Troyes *Visitatio* include French.

95 Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre*, 388.

96 Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre,* 28–31.

97 Norton, *Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater*; *The Music of the Medieval Liturgical Drama*, ed. Rankin, 5; de Boor, *Die Textgeschichte der lateinischen Osterfeiern*, 2–4, 8–15. They are not included in Records of Early English Drama, nor is any other "liturgical drama." "Series Methodology," REED Online.

the line between drama and liturgy thus cannot be established by these means. Further criteria have been brought forward by scholars to separate drama from liturgy; these seem to coalesce into three main strands. First, drama implies the passive spectatorship of an audience rather than the participation of a congregation, required for liturgy.[98] Second, drama is often defined and contrasted with liturgy because of its use of impersonation.[99] And finally, drama is associated with entertainment while liturgy is a serious event focused on prayer and devotion.

However, I—along with many other scholars—find these criteria lacking, especially when applied to medieval drama.[100] The term "medieval drama" itself has been questioned by scholarship. According to Dillon, the words "drama" and "dramatic" were very rarely used before the seventeenth century; "performance" was not used as it is today until the eighteenth century; "theatre" does not seem to have referred to the art of performance until the seventeenth century; and the medieval terms "play," *ludus* (game/play), and "revels" could mean any kind of game, festivity, or performance.[101] These terms are therefore modern impositions on events and texts the medieval perception of which remains difficult to ascertain. Their use can lead scholars to misunderstand medieval drama by associating it with modern drama. As expressed by Butterworth, assumed equation between the two frequently leads to "inaccuracies in understanding brought about by unconscious, unthinking and misleading analysis."[102] This equation seems to have influenced some of the criteria presented above.

Indeed, witnesses to most medieval plays were not passive onlookers. They often stood at the same level as the players who could walk through the crowd; they were frequently addressed and were not separated from the action by a "fourth wall" or by lighting. Their good will was essential to create a "dramatic illusion" and to ensure the success of the performance.[103]

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98 On the congregation, see Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 43–65.

99 Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 23.

100 See Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, 25, Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, 32; Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Ages*, 38.

101 Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, 141–46.

102 Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, 1, 3, 19, 20, 57, 96, 112–19. On this question, see also Normington, *Medieval English Drama*, 17; Symes, "Early Vernacular Plays," 779, 829–30; Knight, *Aspects of Genre*, vi–vii, 1; Mills, "Approaches to Medieval Drama," 36; Twycross, "Codes and Genres," 454–57.

103 Twycross, "Playing ''The Resurrection,'" 274–76; Twycross, "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays," 54–55; McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, 170.

Drama and liturgy are therefore performative collective experiences which require not only participants but also spectators to acquire meaning.[104]

As for the perception of drama as impersonation, it is true that drama, unlike most liturgy, explicitly requires its participants to take on a role. While, during Mass, the celebrant is meant to represent Christ, he "does not personify Christ," but only stands as his "permanent representative."[105] Impersonation, as defined by Karl Young, is different from representation and based instead on pretence: "in some sort of external and recognizable manner the actor must pretend to be the person whose words he is speaking, and whose actions he is imitating."[106] Impersonation may thus seem like a clear point of limit between drama and liturgy. Yet acting in medieval plays appears to have been an experience far-removed from modern notions of impersonation.[107] Butterworth says: "the importance of this kind of playing was not to stress verisimilitude but to create signs, signals, and action that, by their very nature, could be communicated and detected as such, and not to be confused with real action or real situations."[108] Players stood in place of their "characters," or, as Butterworth prefers to call them, "personages." They were simultaneously distinguishable from these "personages"—often wearing their own clothes and remaining recognizable—and they "represented" them through various signs and symbols.[109] *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* ceremonies come close to medieval theatre scripts in that they include similar—if at times more inconsistent—mentions of "acting" (or "representing"). While these theatre scripts spoke of acting "as if, as though, and ase hit were," the Barking *Elevatio* saw the abbess, the prioress, and the convent follow the priests and clerics *sicut sunt priores* (as if they

104 See Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 22.

105 Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 26.

106 Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:80. Other scholars discussing impersonation as a criterion include Taylor and Nelson, "Introduction," 10; Dunn, "Voice Structure in the Liturgical Drama," 61–62; Craig, *English Religious Drama*, 19. See Woolf, *English Mystery Plays*, 5 for a more nuanced approached to the definition of "impersonation."

107 See also Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama*, 252. Scholars questioning "impersonation" also include Mills, "Approaches to Medieval Drama," 38; Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, 5.

108 Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, 179; Beckwith, *Signifying God*, xv–xvii, 3, 59–62, 139–56.

109 Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, 92–95, 109–21. The term "represent" seems to have meant "stand in place of" according to early sixteenth-century sources.

were the patriarchs).[110] Participants in dramatic liturgical ceremonies, like those in medieval drama, remained recognizable. In the fourteenth-century Rouen *Visitatio*, for example, the clerics representing the Marys continued to wear liturgical vestments, but they chose them carefully to signify their "personages."[111] Taking into account this medieval approach to representation, "impersonation" fails to clearly separate drama from—at least some—liturgy, such as the *Visitatio* and *Elevatio* ceremonies.

Finally, drama was not as distinct from worship in the Middle Ages as it might be today:[112] it had instructional, memorial, civic, and religious functions, and it certainly served, as did liturgy, to appeal to the devotion of its witnesses.[113] It was often performed on religious occasions which also involved liturgical ceremonies; it could be performed in churches, although this remained rare; it may have involved clergy in its composition, sponsorship, and audience; it frequently depicted scriptural narratives similar to those shown at Barking, and it included at times scriptural and liturgical citations (often in translation) as well as liturgical chants.[114]

For example, some of the words pronounced by Christ in the York *Crucifixion* pageant were taken from the York Breviary, where they had been borrowed from the Book of Lamentations (1:12). The York *Pentecost* pageant used Latin quotations from a Lesson contained in the York Missal for Whit Monday, taken from Acts 10:42–48.[115] Sections of the York *Resurrection* and *Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalen* pageants, of the Chester Skinners' Play, of the Towneley *Resurrection* pageant, and of the N-Town *Announcement to the Three Marys* and *Appearance to Mary Magdalen* pageants even

110 Scherb, *Staging Faith*, 47. Butterworth lists examples of vernacular "stage directions" in the Coventry Weavers' Play, in the Chester *Noah* pageant, and in the Chester *Abraham* pageant, and of Latin "stage directions" in the Chester *Moses and the Law* pageant, in the Chester *Slaughter of the Innocents* pageant, and in the Chester *Purification* pageant, 92–95, 102–21.

111 Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:370–72. The three deacons portraying the Marys wore dalmatics and wore their amices on their heads *ad similitudinem mulierum* (in the likeness of women).

112 Recent developments in the field of medieval drama have emphasized connections between religion and medieval plays. See Happé, "A Guide to Criticism," 355–56.

113 Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 9, 83.

114 Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, 3, 24–27, 177; Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, 27. See also *REED: York*, ed. Johnston and Rogerson, 1:358; *REED: Somerset*, ed. Stokes, 1:236, 238.

115 King, *York Mystery Cycle,* 145, 167.

closely resemble—and were probably inspired by—*Visitatio* ceremonies. Both the ceremonies and these pageants articulate scriptural texts and add to them in a similar way to create a narrative. They share non-scriptural scenes, such as the laments of the Marys and the laments of Mary Magdalen.[116] Moreover, while the York, Chester, and Towneley pageants are mostly written in English, they feature a liturgical chant typically used in *Visitatio* and *Elevatio* ceremonies: the *Christus resurgens* (Christ rising).[117]

Two other plays, *Christ's Resurrection* and *Christ's Burial* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS eMuseo 160 (ca. 1520)), which were meant to be performed "on part on Gud Friday afternone, and þe other part opon Ester Day after the Resurrection in the morowe," display—in *Christ's Resurrection* in particular—close ties with *Visitatio* ceremonies and with the Easter liturgy.[118] As the Marys rejoice after the Resurrection, they start to sing the Easter liturgical sequence often present in *Visitatio* ceremonies: *Victime paschali laudes* (to the paschal victim). As in *Visitationes*, the chant is split between different figures—Mary Magdalen, the three Marys, and the disciples. This play, which mostly resembles lay vernacular drama, thus seems to contain part of a *Visitatio* ceremony, as well as other liturgical chants.[119] Another example of significant liturgical citation can be found in The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, which starts like a vernacular drama, but ends with a procession during which the Host is taken into the church and the hymn *O sacrum*

116 The Marys' laments are found in the *Resurrection* pageants of York and Towneley, in the Chester *Resurrection* pageant, and in the N-Town *The Announcement to the Three Marys*. The laments of Mary Magdalen are included in the York *Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalen* pageant, in the Chester Skinners' pageant, in the Towneley *Resurrection* pageant, and in the N-Town *The Appearance to Mary Magdalen* pageant. *The York Plays*, ed. Beadle, 1:366–85; *The N-Town Play*, ed. Spector, 359, 360, 365; *The Towneley Plays*, ed. Stevens and Cawley, 335–55; *Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. Lumiansky and Mills, 339–56. The laments of the Marys are a standard feature of *Visitatio* ceremonies, and the laments of Mary Magdalen appear in the extant English *Visitatio* texts.

117 A later addition at York but deemed "genuine" by Meg Twycross. It is also found in pageants from Towneley and Chester. Twycross, "Playing 'The Resurrection,'" 280–81; King, *York Mystery Cycle*, 163; *The York Plays*, ed. Beadle, 1:371, 362; *Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. Lumiansky and Mills, 345.

118 *Late Medieval Religious Plays*, ed. Baker, Murphy, and Hall Jr., lxxxv. According to this edition of *Christ's Burial* and *Christ's Resurrection*, the two plays in are actually "one religious drama, or acted meditation." lxxv, Lxxxi, lxxxii, lxxxv.

119 *Late Medieval Religious Plays*, ed. Baker, Murphy, and Hall Jr., 190, 192.

convivium (O sacred banquet) is sung. The *Te Deum* (O God, we praise you) closes the performance.[120]

Familiar liturgical patterns and citations may have incited spectators to perceive what they were witnessing as a devotional moment and to participate in it with prayers, as was recommended during liturgy.[121] Prayer was also a feature of some medieval plays, such as the Digby *Killing of the Children* and the *Conversion of St Paul*, which begin with a dedication to the honour of God and frame their narrative action with "more or less formal prayers"—encouraging performers and spectators to engage in worship.[122] Medieval drama was thus tied to devotion; it also frequently made use of the liturgy, referenced it, responded to it, or took place in close connection with it.

The three criteria presented above therefore fail to provide a clear separation between medieval drama and liturgy. The two in fact shared features. Both worked as a commentary: liturgy glossed and commented on Scriptures and on the Christian experience while, according to Beckwith, drama commented on and interacted with liturgy, as well as with Scriptures.[123] Drama also accomplished what Christ had prescribed during the Last Supper and what was a central purpose of liturgy: it was a way of remembering his Passion.[124] Granger even argues in *The N-Town Play* that medieval drama and liturgy were both "forms of ritual performance," "not least through their use of

120 *Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, ed. Sebastian, lines 840–1007. It is not certain that the procession incorporates the audience and enters a real church; possibly the "chirche" mentioned is a scaffold representing a church. See Dutton, "The Croxton Play of the Sacrament."

121 Scherb, "Liturgy and Community," 478; Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 28–30, 95, 140.

122 Scherb, *Staging Faith*, 43. The *Conversion* starts with a prayer in the vernacular using elements of the *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary) and ends with the singing of the chant *Exultet celum laudibus* (Let Heaven exult with praises). The *Killing of the Children* starts with an indication that it takes place on the feast of Saint Anne. It ends with Anna Prophetissa encouraging the virgins to worship Jesus, our Lady, and Saint Anne. The Poeta then explains that this "matere" was shown to the audience "in the worshippe of Oure Lady and hir moder Seynt Anne." *Late Medieval Religious Plays*, ed. Baker, Murphy, and Hall Jr., 1, 23, 96, 115.

123 Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 48; Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 173; Beckwith, *Signifying God*, 135.

124 Luke 22:18–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25: "Do this for a commemoration of me." I have chosen the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible for all English Biblical quotes. This translation is based on the Latin Vulgate, which would have been the version available to the nuns of Barking Abbey. See also Beckwith, *Signifying God*, xvii, 3; Durand, *Rational ou manuel des divins offices*, ed. Barthélemy, 2:308–9.

formalized language, costume, and gesture" which helped the creation and definition of a community by promoting "commonly held values."[125]

Further evidence continues to suggest how enmeshed drama and liturgy could be in the Middle Ages. Mutual influence between them appears to have been significant. It produced texts unconcerned with "maintaining the proprieties we have imposed upon [them]: the lines between drama and liturgy."[126] The *Shrewsbury Fragments*, for example, were copied in an early fifteenth-century liturgical manuscript and contain a player's parts and cues for the roles of the third shepherd, the third Mary, and, it seems, Cleophas. These parts combine spoken English with Latin chants and, the manuscript suggests, were performed on religious feasts—Easter day and Easter Monday. The rest of the manuscript contains mostly processional liturgical ceremonies with musical notation. The *Fragments* therefore join elements associated with lay drama (the use of apparently spoken vernacular, the parts and cues) with features attached to liturgical ceremonies (the inscription in a liturgical manuscript, the use of Latin set to music, the connection with religious feasts). The part of the Mary especially resembles a *Visitatio* and uses some of the chants found in this type of ceremony, while the part of the shepherd bears a strong resemblance to the York pageant on the same subject.[127]

Another example of performance defying a clear definition as either drama or liturgy appears to have taken place in London. According to the Churchwarden's Accounts for 1529–1530, a carpenter was paid at St Dunstan in the West to make a stage for Palm Sunday. Other London parishes rented costumes, wigs, and hangings for that feast.[128] We know from liturgical documents that numerous churches and abbeys performed a somewhat dramatic liturgy on Palm Sunday. It involved a procession where the Host or a bier represented Christ and where the faithful held palm-branches.[129] It could include dialogues and stops at different stations. At Winchester, for example, according to a twelfth or thirteenth-century manuscript, a dialogue was exchanged between two of the groups present for the procession.

125 Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 7–8, 22.

126 Symes, "Early Vernacular Plays," 794, 828.

127 *Non-Cycle Plays*, ed. Davis, xiv–xxii, 1–7, 124–33.

128 *REED: Ecclesiastical London*, ed. Erler, xxvii–xxviii. Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, 32, 116.

129 This was the case at Barking as well. See *Ordinale and Customary*, ed. Tolhurst, 1:85–87.

One of these groups spoke it *quasi discipulis* (as if they were the disciples). At Salisbury, a boy was dressed as a prophet, and at Wilton Abbey a priest represented Caiphas.[130] How different from these were the London performances? Were they intended to be separate from liturgy or were they an even more dramatic version of the liturgical examples mentioned above?

The same question could be asked of various Resurrection or Easter "plays." Many of these were tied to churches and some featured sepulchres, but their costumes and props were often more elaborate than those usually found in *Visitatio* ceremonies. The Wells Cathedral Communar's account rolls, for example, document the acquisition of fabric, wigs, beards, and costumes in 1417–1418, 1418–1419, and 1470–1471 for performances around Easter. The 1470–1471 entry states:

> Et soutum pro ij libris de canabo bro crinalibus fiendis ad iij marias ludentes nocte pasche vj d. Et solutum pro iij quoyfes empties ad dictas iij marias. iij. d. Et solute pro iij quarterijs de ffustike at tincturam dicti crinalium vj. d. Et solutum Christine Handon pro tinctura & facture dictorum Indumentorum iij d.
>
> And paid for two pounds of hemp for making wigs for the three Marys playing on the night of Easter, six d., and paid for three coifs bought for the said three Marys, three d., and paid for three quarts of fustic for the dying of the said wigs, six d., and paid to Christine Handon for the dying and making of the said costumes, twelve d.[131]

Were the Wells' performances *Visitatio* ceremonies using "costumes" that resembled those found in lay drama or were they lay drama?[132]

There are other records of performances whose genre remains unclear. Among these are an *Officium pastorum*—a play/ceremony about the shepherds at the Nativity—apparently performed in Lincoln cathedral in the mid-fifteenth century, and an *Officium pastorum* and a *Peregrinus* (journey to Emmaus) held at Lichfield in the twelfth century. Another *Peregrinus* is

130 Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:90–94; Yardley, *Performing Piety*, 128.

131 *REED: Somerset*, ed. Stokes, 248, 838. See 243, 834 for the other entries.

132 There are many other similar examples recorded between the twelfth and the sixteenth century. See *REED: Berkshire*, ed. Johnston; Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 87, 92; *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern*, ed. Lipphardt, 5: 1615–33; Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, 2:108, 107, 248–50, 339, 376–77, 379–80, 384, 389–90; *REED: Oxford*, ed. Elliott and Nelson, Johnston and Wyatt (City), 1:38, 52, 61, 63; 2:928, 933, 944, 949, 951; *REED: Devon*, ed. Wesson, xii, 209; *REED: Staffordshire*, ed. Somerset; *REED: Lincolnshire*, ed. Stokes, 2:649, 1:106.

recorded in a twelfth-century manuscript from the Priory of Durham.[133] An *Officium stellae* (a Magi "play") was performed at Yarmouth in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century and at York in the thirteenth century. While these Latin "plays" were often part of liturgy, this was not the case for all known *Peregrinus* and *Officium stellae*.[134]

In view of this complex interplay between drama and liturgy, it does not seem that a clear limit between them was established in the Middle Ages, nor do they seem to have been perceived as antithetical. Medieval drama and liturgy could be similar in terms of content, purpose, language, even form, and texts and performances which seem impossible to define (and perhaps did not need to be defined) as either one or the other were created in the Middle Ages. In the context of medieval drama and liturgy, I therefore believe that the *Elevatio* and *Visitatio sepulchri* ceremonies, which were liturgy, may also be considered drama.

However, a few scholars have argued for another—convincing—criterion which separates drama from liturgy: the belief in the effectiveness of the performative event as a ritual. As described by Penny Granger or C. Clifford Flanigan, this difference comes down to the perception that drama and liturgy have distinct consequences: one is a re-enactment and the other a re-living of an event. In a play, the actors and spectators are aware that what they are witnessing is not reality but a representation. In liturgy, on the other hand, "the worship and presence of God in the ceremony are not fictive." Liturgy is a liminal moment creating a "bridge between the human and wholly Other," between past and present and allowing participants to "experience [past] events as present events."[135] Participants believe in the efficacy of the ritual to "assist believers as they prepare to meet with God."[136]

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133 See McKinnell, "A Twelfth-Century Durham Play." This play was staged as part of the REED North-East project, and the performance is described in Ravelhofer, "Regional Performance as Intangible Cultural Heritage."

134 The Durham *Peregrini* play, for example, contains no music or rubrics, and is preserved not in a liturgical manuscript but in a miscellany. Ravelhofer "Regional Performance as Intangible Cultural Heritage," 170. See also Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2:484, 522, 541, 451, 439–43. About Lichfield, see *REED: Staffordshire*, ed. Somerset.

135 Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 19; Flanigan, "*Visitatio sepulchri* as Paradigm," 10–12, 30.

136 Heffernan and Matter, "Introduction to the Liturgy of the Medieval Church," 1–5; King, *York Mystery Cycle*, 161. For more on the purpose of liturgy, see Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 62.

Were they to lose this belief, liturgy would become a show.[137] Liturgy and drama are thus differentiated by the perception of their participants and of their audience/congregation.

Even if we take the criterion of belief as a point of divide between them, spectators and participants may have fluctuated in their perception of the ceremonies, and it remains difficult to use this criterion to determine whether *Elevationes* and *Visitationes* are drama or not. They were part of larger liturgical ceremonies, yet there are signs that they were recognized—at least by some medieval people—as close to drama, or as something that resonated with other dramatic experience that they might have had. This is attested by the Fleury Playbook, a twelfth-century collection compiling liturgical texts (a *Visitatio*, for instance) with other dramatic texts.[138] Dislodging the liturgical texts from their context, the Playbook's composers seem to have perceived an existing similarity between them and the other texts in the collection.[139] The inclusion of part of a *Visitatio* ceremony in the early sixteenth-century MS eMuseo 160 *Christ's Resurrection* play also seems to show that its composers felt a closeness existed between this type of performance and lay vernacular drama.[140] It is also possible, as argued by John Wesley Harris, among others, that the similarities of *Elevationes* and *Visitationes* to drama, stronger in certain parts of the ceremonies, may have resulted in spectators and participants oscillating in their perception of them: at times experiencing them as more of a dramatic "show," before being

137 This was discussed for example during the Reformation—and in pre-protestant texts. Their writers were keenly aware of the duality existing between inward thoughts and outward actions, between words spoken and real faith. They did not believe that religious ceremonies contained truth but thought instead that they were empty of substance and inefficient. Stripped of its essence, liturgy was reduced to a performative "show." Beckwith, *Signifying God*, xv–xvii, 3, 59–62, 139–56.

138 Four miracle "plays" of St Nicholas, an *Officium stellae*, an *Ordo Rachaelis* (play about Rachel and the massacre of the innocents), a *Visitatio*, a *Peregrinus*, a *Conversion of St Paul*, and a *Resuscitation of Lazarus*. *The Conversion of St Paul* and the *Resuscitation of Lazarus* mention various elements of "set" dividing the space, and there is no evidence that they were performed in church. The plays of St Nicholas are all rather extensive; they do not mention who their performers were, nor can they all be clearly attached to liturgy. Flanigan, "The Fleury Playbook," 360; Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:471–76, 690, 393–97, 665–66; 2:84–92, 110–17, 199–211, 219–24, 316–23, 330–34, 343–60.

139 Bevington, "Fleury Playbook"; Flanigan, "The Fleury Playbook," 348–72.

140 *Late Medieval Religious Plays*, ed. Baker, Murphy, and Hall Jr., 190. The *Carmina Burana* manuscript from Benediktbeuern also collected six Latin "liturgical plays" along with a compilation of poems. Meredith, "Latin Liturgical Drama," 132.

reminded of their liturgical nature.[141] As expressed by Flanigan in "Medieval Liturgy and the Arts," "the line is fluid and depends on the audience."[142]

Medieval *Visitationes* and *Elevationes* were therefore, I believe—at times at least—both liturgy and drama. In spite of this belief, in agreement with the work done by Butterworth and Normington among others I will avoid categorizing them as "drama" or referring to them as "liturgical drama" in this book. I will further refrain from using the terms "play," "prop," "set," and "actor" unless I am discussing modern drama. I have decided to be cautious in my choice of words because of the controversy surrounding these terms and of the negative connotations that the word "drama" has acquired among certain scholars. "Drama"—a word never used in relation to the *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* in the Middle Ages—brings with it associations and concepts which may distort the understanding of the ceremonies. I will instead refer to the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio sepulchri* as dramatic liturgical ceremonies.[143] This terminology aims to emphasize their liturgical context while recognizing their performative features—which will be the focus of this study.

Approach and Methodology

This book will explore the Barking Abbey *Visitatio* and *Elevatio*; but, more specifically, it will reflect on the potential effects of these ceremonies and their dramatic features on their spectators and participants. The nunnery of Barking must have valued such features, since it included them in its liturgy, and must have believed in their effectiveness. I define participants as those who sang the lines and physically took part in the ceremonies; and spectators as those who heard and witnessed the ceremonies.

Much like previous scholars working on convent drama, I believe that to understand the impact the ceremonies may have had, it is necessary to reflect on their staging,[144] but also on the lives, liturgical and performative

141 See for example Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context*, 31; Dillon, *Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*, 142; Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Ages*, 38; Bevington, "Staging Liturgy in the Croxton Play," 243.

142 Flanigan, "Medieval Liturgy and the Arts," 30.

143 Following the example of Flanigan, "Medieval Liturgy and the Arts," 31.

144 See for example Tydeman, *Theatre in the Middle Ages*; Meredith, "Latin Liturgical Drama"; Fletcher Collins, *Production of Medieval Church Music-Drama*; Bourgeault, "Liturgical Dramaturgy"; Faulkner, "Harrowing of Hell"; Davidson, *Illustrations of the Stage and Acting*; Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama*.

practices, literacy, spirituality, and relationships of their spectators and participants.[145] Studying the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* in this context will provide a better understanding of the complex interplay between performance and those involved in it. As is increasingly the case in medieval studies, my methodology will be interdisciplinary, incorporating history, history of art, and archaeology, as well as research on drama and performance. I will refer to historical sources—manuscripts related to Barking Abbey and to other Benedictine houses—including manorial records, liturgical documents, devotional texts, and the main source for performative practices at Barking Abbey: its Ordinal and Customary. Performance research, which has been used in recent work on medieval musicology and on medieval and early modern drama, will also form an important part of the methodology adopted in this book.

As argued by Elisabeth Dutton in "A Manifesto for Performance Research," the performing and witnessing of a medieval play is a process similar to academic work: it engages critical thinking and invites us "to observe, interpret, and reflect." Performance research allows a greater focus on the circumstances of performance—a specific place, occasion, or the collaborative work necessary to the staging of a play, for instance—and to the significance that they can bring to that play.[146] Drama is and was generally meant to be performed; it cannot be fully understood if researchers neglect its performance. And neither can liturgy: according to Gittos, interest in performance and in its relationship with text should be "highly relevant to students of medieval liturgy." It illuminates the differences which existed between what was written down and what was performed: music and the sense of space and time, for instance, were essential during the performance of a rite and deeply influenced its effects on the congregation.[147]

Studying performance remains challenging. The ephemeral nature of performative events means that even when reproduced in the same place and by the same performers, they are never identical. Textual witnesses to these performances do not and cannot tell readers exactly how the performances were conducted: Gittos, Symes, Pfaff, and Salisbury warn, when

145 See Pappano, "Sister Acts: Conventual Performance"; "The Liturgical Dramas for Holy Week," ed. Yardley and Mann; Matthews, "Textual Spaces / Playing Spaces"; Robinson, "Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 617"; Brazil, "Performing Female Sanctity"; Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy*.

146 Dutton, "A Manifesto for Performance Research," 249–52.

147 See Gittos, "Researching the History of Rites," 37; Flynn, "Approaches to Early Medieval Music and Rites," 59, 69–71.

discussing written liturgical sources, that their uses, what they record and fail to record, and the agenda behind their creation make them unreliable guides to understanding the performance of medieval liturgy. Such sources may have been written to capture and/or control performance, to establish definitive texts and transmit them, to censure innovation and stop improvisation, to create unity, or to help memory.[148] Moreover, they are unable to fully depict the multisensory experience of medieval liturgy, which involved music, light, fragrances, the use of space, vessels, and vestments, and the presence of multiple participants. Although these uncertainties need to be taken into account when studying the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio*, it remains possible to examine the "performativity" of the ceremonies. This can be done by considering them alongside other sources of information on their apparent use, on local liturgy, and on the reasons behind their composition, and by examining the manuscript for clues about their performance. These clues can be detected in indications of gestures and postures or in the format of the manuscript.[149]

Similar issues affect the study of spectatorship. When testimonies from medieval spectators exist, they can be said neither to represent the opinion of all spectators, nor to recount their perception of every moment and detail of the performance. The question of subjectivity is another—often overlooked—problem. Spectators may have reacted to a performance as a community, by laughing together for example, but they probably all felt somewhat differently towards it. This depended on a large variety of factors such as their rank, status, social networks, gender, view of the stage, awareness of other spectators and of the performers, political views, religious opinions, and position in space. They may have responded in various ways to certain props and sensory stimulations, to "characters," and to prompts from the script towards specific groups. A similar diversity could probably be observed in participants in performative activities. With these limitations in mind, this book will build on the work done on spectatorship by Katie Normington, Sarah Carpenter, Greg Walker, and John J. McGavin, taking into

148 Gittos, "Researching the History of Rites," 20–21, 23; Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," 241; Symes, "The Medieval Archive," 30, 33–36, 51; Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 8–9; Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England*, 3–4; Granger, *The N-Town Play*, 53. Butterworth discusses this issue when speaking of vernacular drama. Butterworth, *Staging Conventions*, 13.

149 Symes, "Liturgical Texts and Performance Practices," 243, 256, 267; Salisbury, *Worship in Medieval England*, 70–71.

account the Barking ceremonies' conditions of performance and pursuing these scholars' interest in the multiplicity of spectatorship.[150]

McGavin and Walker incorporate in their work some of the findings resulting from the "cognitive turn" in drama and performance studies, which focus on the constant adjusting of spectators between emotionally absorbing what they are seeing (and adapting it) and being self-aware. Such adjusting would have been especially prominent when watching medieval drama, which did not attempt to be naturalistic. This discourse on drama is further complicated when one considers liturgical ceremonies because faith and the perception of the efficacy of liturgy were "real" in one sense to their medieval spectators and participants.[151] While I will rely on some of the findings of cognitive theory, it will not be my main approach, nor will I attempt to dissect the adjusting of the Barking spectators and participants during the *Elevatio* and *Visitatio*. Instead, I intend to examine moments in the ceremonies which may have led these spectators and participants to become engrossed in the performance, to reflect on the ceremonies and their content, or to feel self-aware. I am interested in the potential consequences of these moments for the nuns, clergy, and laity of Barking. I will moreover direct my focus towards performers, as well as spectators, and towards a type of performative activities left either little or un-explored, my aim being to bring additional critical attention to such activities and to contribute to the scholarly discourse on women and medieval drama.

In a first chapter, I concentrate on the medieval spectators of and participants in the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio*. After identifying the people involved, I will present the surviving texts of the ceremonies and comment in close detail on the clues that they give about what actually happened during their performances: I consider words, music, gesture, and—to use dramatic terms—"props," "costumes," and "blocking." I examine the effects of the ceremonies on those involved, in the light of the historical context of the house and its surroundings. The performance of the *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* seems to have been a devotional, identity-defining, community-building, and educational experience for the nuns and clergy of the abbey and for the laity witnessing them. In the second chapter, I explain how hypotheses built on the

150 See McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, 4, 18–20, 26, 36–39, 42, 68; Normington, *Medieval English Drama*, 3–16; Carpenter, "New Evidence," 3–12.

151 McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, 18–19, 44–50. See also McGavin, "Medieval Theatricality and Spectatorship," 491–92; Twycross, "Playing 'The Resurrection,'" 276. On audiences and spectatorship, see also Purcell, *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice*.

medieval texts of the ceremonies were tested and refined through a modern performance experiment, staging the Barking Abbey *Visitatio* and *Elevatio* as part of the Medieval Convent Drama project in 2018 (all the research done for this book was conducted in the context of this project, based at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation).[152] This last chapter will explore the challenges and the value of this modern performance of the Barking ceremonies, as well as the response of modern spectators and participants to it. The nuns of a local religious house, along with our lay spectators and performers, illuminated with their responses both specific questions about these particular ceremonies and broader questions about liturgy and drama. I conclude with a mention of other conventual ceremonies before discussing the enduring ties between Barking Abbey and performance.

This book is very much a book of two halves. Its structure follows my own approach to the Barking *Elevatio* and *Visitatio*: I was first confronted with the ceremonies' Latin text, then tried to understand this text by researching its historical context, and finally put my theories in practice by staging a modern performance of the two ceremonies. Readers are invited to join me on this journey of research and performance, beginning with the transcript of the *Elevatio* and *Visitatio* given below. I hope that the transcript will serve as a point of reference and reveal some of the challenges faced when approaching the Barking liturgical dramatic ceremonies. Alternatively, readers are welcome to deconstruct this journey: those with a knowledge of medieval liturgy and monasticism, and/or interested in modern performance, may wish to consult Chapter 2 first.

152 I worked on this project with Prof. Elisabeth Dutton, Dr. Olivia Robinson, and Dr. Matthew Cheung Salisbury. Their collaboration and guidance have been invaluable.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE BARKING *ELEVATIO* AND *VISITATIO SEPULCHRI*

Oxford, University College, MS 169, pp. 119–24[1]

[*Elevatio*] (p. 119) Nota quod secundum / antiquam consuetudinem ecclesiasticam resurexio dominica / celebrate fuit ante matutinas et ante aliquam campane / pulsacionem in die pasche et quoniam populorum concursus tempo/ribus illis videbatur deuocione frigessere. et torpor huma/nus maxime accrescens. venerabilis domina Domina Katerina / de Suttone tunc pastoralis cure gerens vicem. deside/rans dictum torporem penitus exstirpare. et fidelium deuocio/nem ad tam celibem celebracionem magis excitare: / vnanimi consororum consensu instituit. ut statim post tercium. / Responsorium. matutinarum die pasche fieret dicte resurexionis cele/bracio et hoc modo statuetur processio. In primis eat domina / abbatissa cum toto conuentu et quibusdam sacerdotibus et cle/ricis capis indutis quolibet sacerdote et clerico palmam et / candelam extinctam manu deferentem intrent capellam sancte / marie magdalene. ffigurantes animas sanctorum patrum ante / (p. 120) aduentum christi ad inferos descendentes et claudant sibi ostium / dicte capelle. deinde superueniens sacerdos ebdomadarius ad dictam / capellam approprians alba indutus et capa cum duobus / diaconis. vno crucem deferente cum uexillo dominico desuper/ pendente albo cum turribulo manu sua baiulante et alijs / sacerdotibus et clericis cum duobus pueris cereos deferentibus ad / ostium dicte capelle incipiens ter hanc antiphonam Tollite portas / qui quidem sacerdos representabit personam Christi ad inferos / descensuram et portas inferni dirupturam. et predicta antiphona / vnaquaque uice in alciori uoce incipiatur quam clerici to/ciens eandem repetant et ad quamquam incepcionem pul/set cum cruce ad predictum ostium. figurans dirupcionem / portarum inferni. et tercia pulsacione ostium aperiat. Deinde / ingrediatur ille cum ministris suis interim incipiat / quidam sacerdos in capella existente antiphonam A porta inferi / quam subinferat cantrix cum toto conuentu. Erue domine / et cetera. Deinde extrahet sacerdos ebdomadarius omnes essentes / in capella predicta. et interim incipiat sacerdos antiphonam. Domine ab/straxisti. et can-

1 There are many abbreviations in the manuscript. See *Liturgische Osterspiele und Osterfeiern*, ed. Lipphardt, 5:1458–60; Young, ed., *Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1:164–66, 381–85; "The Liturgical Dramas for Holy Week," ed. Yardley and Mann; *Ordinale and Customary*, ed. Tolhurst, 107–10; Sheingorn, *Easter Sepulchre*, for other—slightly different—transcriptions.

trix subsequatur. Ab inferis. Tunc omnes / exeant de capella id est de limbo patrum. et cantent / sacerdotes et clerici antiphonam Cum rex glorie. processionaliter per medium / chori ad sepulcrum portantes singuli palmam et can/delam designantes victoriam de hoste recuperatam / subsequentibus domina abbatissa. priorissa et toto conuentu / sicut sunt priores. et cum ad sepulcrum peruenerint: sacerdos / (p. 121) ebdomadarius sepulcrum thurificet et intret sepulcrum incipi/endo versum Consurgit. deinde subsequatur cantrix. christus tumu/lo versus Quesumus auctor versus Gloria tibi domine. et interim asportabit cor/pus dominicum de sepulcro incipiendo antiphonam. Christus resurgens / coram altari verso uultu ad populum tenendo corpus domini/cum in manibus suis inclusum cristallo. deinde subiun/gat cantrix: ex mortuis. et cum dicta antiphona faciant processio/nem ad altare sancte trinitatis cum solenni apparatu vide/licet cum turribulis et cereis conuentus sequatur cantando predictam / antiphonam cum versu Dicant nunc et versiculo: Dicite in nacionibus Oratio Deus qui / pro nobis filium tuum. et hec processio figuratur per hoc quomodo christus pro/cedit post resurexionem in galileam. Sequentibus disci/pulis.

[*Visitatio*] Quibus peractis: procedant tres sorores a domina abba/tissa preelecte et nigris vestibus in capella beate marie / magdalene exute: nitidissimis superpellicijs induantur / niueis velis a domina abbatissa capitibus earum superpositis. sic / igitur preparate et in manibus ampullas tenentes argenteas / dicant. Confiteor ad abbatissam et ab ea absolute. in loco / statuto cum candelabris consistant. Tunc illa que speciem / pretendit marie magdalene. canat hunc versum. Quondam / dei. quo finito: secunda que mariam iacobi prefigurat. alterum / respondeat versum. Appropinquans ergo sola. Tercia maria vi/cem optinens salomee. tercium canat versum. Licet mihi / vobiscum ire. Post hec chorum incedentes flebili uoce et sub/missa hos pariter canant versus. Heu nobis internas men/ (p. 122) tes. Hijs versibus finitis. magdalena sola dicat hunc versum. Heu / misere. Jacobi respondeat. Heu consolacio nostra. Salome / Heu redempcio israel. Quartum uero uersum omnes simul concinant / scilicet. Iam iam ecce. Tunc marie exeuntes a choro: simul dicant / Eya quis reuoluet. Cum autem uenerint ad sepulcrum. clericus / alba stola indutus. sedeat ante sepulcrum illius angeli gerens / figuram qui ab ostio monumenti lapidem reuoluit. / et super eum sedit. Qui dicat illis. Quem queritis in sepulcro / O cristicole. Respondeant mulieres. Ihesum nazarenum queri/mus. Angelus uero subinferat. Non est hic surrexit. Cumque dixerit / venite et videte: ingrediantur sepulcrum et deosculentur lo/cum ubi positus erat crucifixus. Maria uero magdalene / interim acccipiat sudarium quod fuerat super caput eius:

et secum / deferat. Tunc alius clericus in specie alterius angeli in sepul / cro residens: dicat ad magdalenam. mulier quid ploras / Illa autem subiungat. Quia tulerunt dominum meum. Deinde duo / angeli simul concinentes dicant mulieribus. Quid queri/tis viuentem cum mortuis et cetera. Tunc ille de resurexcione domini / adhuc dubitantes: plangendo dicant ad inuicem. Heu do/lor et cetera. Postea maria magdalene suspirando concinant / Te suspiro et cetera. Tunc in sinistra parte altaris appareat per/sona dicens illi. Mulier quid ploras. quem queris. Illa uero / putans eum esse ortolanum respondeat. Domine si tu sustu/listi eum et cetera. persona subiungat. maria. Tunc illa agnos/cens eum pedibus eius prosternatur dicens Raboni persona / (p. 123) autem se subtrahens: dicat noli me tangere et cetera. Cum perso/na disparuerit: maria gaudium suum consociabus communicet / uoce letabunda: hos concinendo versus. Gratulari et le/tari et cetera. Quibus finitis: persona in dextera parte altaris tribus / simul occurrat mulieribus dicens. Avete nolite timere / et cetera. Tunc ille humi prostrate: teneant pedes eius et de/osculentur. Quo facto: Alternis modulacionibus. hos versus / decantent. maria magdalene incipiente. Ihesus ille na / zarenus et cetera. ffinitis hijs versibus. Tunc marie stantes / super gradus ante altare uertentes se ad populum canant hoc / Responsorium. Alleluia surrexit dominus de sepulcro. Choro eis respondente / ffinitis hijs sacerdotes et clerici in figuram discipulorum / christi procedant dicentes. O gens dira. Tunc vnus illorum / accedat et dicat marie magdalene. Dixit nobis maria et cetera / Illa autem respondeat. Sepulcrum christi. Angelicos testes. digi/to indicet locum vbi angelus sedebat. et sudarium prebeat il/lis ad deosculandum hunc adicientes versum. Surrexit christus / spes nostra. Tunc subiungatur a discipulis et a choro hij ulti/mi versus. Credendum est. et scimus christum. Postea incipi/at magdalena. Christus resurgens. clero et choro pariter suc/cinente Hijs itaque peractis: solenniter decantetur a sacerdote/ incipiente ymnus. Te deum laudamus. et interim predicte sacerdotes in / capellam proprijs vestibus reinduentes cum candelabris per / chorum transeuntes orandi gracia sepulcrum adeant: et ibi brevem / oracionem faciant. tunc redeant in stacionem suam usque abbatissa / (p. 124) eas iubeat exire ad quiescendum.