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***Performing Medieval Text*. Ed. by ARDIS BUTTERFIELD, HENRY HOPE and PAULINE SOULEAU. Cambridge: Legenda. 2017. xii + 217 pp. £75. ISBN 978-1-910887-13-4.**

Performing Medieval Text is an ambitious and wide-ranging exploration of performance in medieval European culture. Recognising the 'complex terminological web' spun round the terms *performance* and *performativity*, the volume acknowledges and accepts performance as a 'contested concept' (p.1). It also, importantly, recognises the historical contingency of performance as an idea and therefore seeks to 'capture rather than categorize' individual performance events as a way of working towards 'the theorization of medieval notions of performance' (pp. 3-4). In doing so, the contributing essays illustrate both the ubiquity of performance in medieval culture and the very different ways it manifests in and through text, itself broadly conceived as manuscript, image, written word and musical note. It is, then, also an expressly and self-consciously interdisciplinary volume, a virtue much emphasised by two of the editors, Henry Hope and Pauline Souleau, in their introduction.

While each contribution adds to our understanding of medieval performance culture, of particular note are the essays that engage directly with performance as a category, a theory and a methodology. In the opening chapter, for example, Elizabeth Eva Leach challenges us to understand 'the manuscript as itself a performance' in which 'the scribe-notators and decorators are actors, and the performance is identical with the visible, material product of the manuscript' (p.11). Annemari Ferreira helpfully distinguishes between two different meanings of *performance* – as a 'general action' and as a 'representational action' – which 'do not necessarily preclude each other' (p. 55), as her detailed, phenomenological exploration of narrative time in the skaldic stanza illustrates. Both Catherine Léglu and Henry Hope helpfully highlight the limitations of modern scholarly frames and paradigms for understanding and analysing medieval performance, while Jennifer Rushworth concludes her chapter on Dante's *Purgatorio* by advocating live performance as a methodology for understanding the reading of psalms as 'a practice which effects the transformation of the sinner through performative liturgical recitation' (p. 85).

However, not all of the essays engage so thoroughly or so explicitly with the aims of the volume. It is not always clear, for example, how some essays speak to the collection's main theoretical questions, what is really at stake beyond the immediate disciplinary interests or how they might contribute to the broader issues. The essays also seem very short (between eight and nineteen pages, including notes, images, tables, etc.) and often the conclusion arrives just as it seems the argument is really getting going. There is, moreover, a lacuna at the heart of this collection that is neither acknowledged nor explained. It seems strange that, in a volume devoted to the concept of performance, medieval drama and medieval drama and performance scholarship are markedly absent. The work of Martin Stevens is referenced (pp. 109-10), and two chapters by Moritz Kelber and Matthew P. Thomson do briefly discuss plays; however, there is no dedicated chapter on drama and no discussion of or reference to the research that has long pushed at the boundaries of how we think about, analyse, and identify 'performance' in a medieval context. The collection's editors seek to avoid 'rigid understandings of

performance' (p.8), and that is to be welcomed; yet, the exclusion of medieval performance researchers like Carol Symes, Jody Enders, Sarah Carpenter, Gordon Kipling, Seeta Chaganti, Pamela King, and others, who are already theorizing medieval performance and addressing the same issues as *Performing Medieval Text* (e.g. the multiplicity of performance modes in the period; how 'performance' is understood and identified; the vexed and complicated relationship between performance and text; text as performance) presents a missed opportunity for both further interdisciplinary conversation and a fuller theorization of medieval notions of performance.

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