TRAGEDY, COMEDY, MASKS, AND PUPPETS:
GERALD ODONIS ON THEATRICS
AS AN ARISTOTELIAN ART

Glending Olson

HISTORIANS of medieval theatre can rely on a number of well-known texts to explore the period's thinking about performance and performers. I want to present and discuss a short medieval assessment that, as far as I know, has escaped the notice of modern scholars.[1] It appears in a commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* by Gerald Odonis, the French theologian, philosopher and (from 1329 to 1342) Minister General of the Franciscan order.[2] His description of *theatrica* occurs in a philosophical context that is provocatively different from

---

[1] At least it is not mentioned in any of the following: E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage,* 2 vols. (London, 1903; rpt. 1967); Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (London, 1931; rpt. New York, 1963); William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1978); Jody Enders, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca, 1992); Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993); Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca, 1999); Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, 2001); William Tydeman, ed., *The Medieval European Stage, 500–1550* (Cambridge, 2001); Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theater in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 2004); Carol Symes, "The Tragedy of the Middle Ages," in *Beyond the Fifth Century: Interactions with Greek Tragedy from the Fourth Century BCE to the Middle Ages,* ed. Ingo Gildenhard and Martin Revermann (Berlin, 2010), 335–69; or in any other scholarship cited in this study.

[2] For biography and a substantial bibliography on Gerald, see William Duba and Chris Schabel, "Introduction," 147 [1]–63 [17], in *Vivarium* 47.2–3 (2009), the issue devoted to a variety of Gerald's writings—including works on logic, natural philosophy, economics, and theology—and published separately as *Gerald Odonis, Doctor Moralis and Franciscan Minister General: Studies in Honour of L. M. de Rijk,* ed. William Duba and Chris Schabel (Leiden, 2009).

most medieval observations on theatre: Aristotle's treatment of art as an intellectual virtue concerned with making. This study offers a preliminary look into both his philosophic approach to theatre and his more particular details about theatrical activity, perhaps most surprisingly his reference to puppetry.

Gerald's commentary includes chapter-by-chapter *lectiones* or expositions of Aristotle, each usually followed by one or more questions on the passage under analysis.[3] Unlike the *Ethics* commentary by Thomas Aquinas, closely focused on the text, Gerald's investigation is expansive and allusive. For example, in *Ethics* 4.6 Aristotle discusses a virtue of pleasantness in social interactions, noting that it does not have a standard name but that it can be called friendliness (*affabilitas*) because it is like the behavior of friends toward each other. Whereas Thomas briefly restates this point, Gerald takes Aristotle's comment on nomenclature as an occasion to mention various terms that have been given to the virtue and to put forward the one he favors, *facetia,* citing its use in Augustine, pseudo-Boethius, and the Ovidian poem *Facetus*.[4] He is not averse to showing how well-read he is, and his similarly allusive discussion of theatrics is based on material imported from Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*. To understand his observations we should start with an earlier

[3] *Sententia et expositio cum questionibus Geraldi Odonis super libros Ethicorum Aristotelis* (Venice, 1500), available online at <gallica.bnf.fr>. I will cite folio references parenthetically, using brackets whenever the edition omits a number. Punctuation and translations are mine. I thank an anonymous reviewer for editorial help and corrections. Whenever I refer to Aristotle or any of his writings, I almost always mean the standard medieval Latin version of his work. For the *Ethics* that is a revision of Robert Grosseteste's mid-thirteenth century translation, chapters of which are printed in the *Sententia et expositio* ahead of each of Gerald's expositions. On the manuscripts of the commentary—eighteen in all, of which thirteen are complete—see Camarin Porter, "Gerald Odonis's Commentary on the *Ethics:* A Discussion of the Manuscripts and General Survey," *Vivarium* 47, *Gerald Odonis,* 241 [95]–294 [148]. Porter also surveys its influence, notably on John Buridan's questions on the *Ethics*. The only full-length study of the work is by Bonnie Dorrick Kent, "Aristotle and the Franciscans: Gerald Odonis' Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*" (Diss., Columbia University, 1984).

[4] Glending Olson, "A Franciscan Reads the *Facetus,*" in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H. A. Kelly*, ed. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinkle (Frankfurt am Main, 2003), 143–55.

reference to this work that helps establish a philosophical distinction crucial to the later discussion of theatrics.

The *Sentencia et expositio* begins with four prefatory questions; one is whether the science of ethics is the only practical science. Gerald lists six arguments that it is not, each naming an area of knowledge that appears practical (in the sense of useful) yet not ethical: logic, rhetoric, grammar, law, medicine, and the arts of making things by hand ("artes manufactive"). On the other hand, authorities including Hugh assert that "practica" should refer only to the moral sciences (ethics, economics, politics) and that moral science ("scientia moralis*") and practical science ("scientia practica") are the same thing. Gerald agrees, on the grounds that only moral science works to perfect the practical mind in conformity with an upright appetite—that is, to make us good. Referring to what book 6 later elaborates, he says that knowledge perfects either the speculative intellect, the practical intellect in regard to (moral) action, or the practical intellect in regard to making. Logic, rhetoric, grammar, and law are thus not practical sciences because they are not centrally concerned with willing and doing what is right. As for medicine and the "manufactive" arts, Gerald says they belong to the seven mechanical arts discussed in the *Didascalicon:* fabric making, armament (a metonomy for anything that helps protect or cover: weapons, walls, buildings, tools), commerce, agriculture, hunting, medicine, and theatrics, "the art of entertainment and of the methods of playing that took place principally in theatres" ("ars de ludis et modo ludendi quod principaliter fiebat in theatris"). These mechanical arts, concerned with making things rather than with moral action, should be thought of as productive rather than practical.[5]

Book 6 of the *Ethics* explores this distinction between doing and making (*actio, factio*) more extensively, as part of Aristotle's discussion of five intellectual virtues: knowledge or science (*scientia*), art (*ars*), pru-

---

[5] *Sentencia et expositio,* prol. 3, fols. 1v–2r; quotation at 2rb. See Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts,* trans. Jerome Taylor (New York, 1961, 1968), 62 and 74 on the practical sciences, 74–79 on the mechanical arts. Hugh's view of theatrics and its influence is discussed by Glending Olson, "The Medieval Fortunes of *Theatrica,*" *Traditio* 42 (1986): 265–86, and "Interpretations," in *Cultural History of Theatre, Vol. II: The Middle Ages,* ed. Jody Enders (London, 2017), 130–36; Dox, *Idea of the Theater,* 85–87; and Marcia L. Colish, *Faith, Fiction & Force in Medieval Baptismal Debates* (Washington, D.C., 2014), 148–50.

dence (*prudentia*), intellectual understanding (*intellectus*), and wisdom (*sapientia*). Scientific knowledge is of necessary things, like mathematical truths. Artistic and prudential knowledge concern contingent things: art is a productive habit using reason (*habitus cum ratione factivus*) and prudence an active habit using reason (*habitus cum ratione activus*). These are packed and not easily translated definitions. Both virtues involve the creative use of one's reason—as Aristotle indicates and Gerald explains later, the phrase "cum ratione" implies more independence and originality than "secundum rationem," which could refer merely to the servile following of someone else's orders (fol. 137v). Both virtues are habits in that they are practiced refinements of intellectual dispositions and capacities and thus more firmly fixed in the mind. Prudence, however, is concerned with how one behaves. It looks inward to motivation and intentionality, whereas art, alone among the intellectual virtues, looks outward to what one makes, to exterior works.[6] Prudence entails choice (*electio*), as Aristotle explains in book 3 of the *Ethics:* every morally good act is the product of a good deliberative choice. In contrast, says Gerald,

> not everything made well has been chosen well—in fact, something made in the very best way may have been chosen for the worst reasons. For example, if someone were to make an idol for the purpose of idolatry following the sculptor's art, the idol could be fashioned superbly according to the principles of that art yet nevertheless chosen most wrongly in that it is against the principles of prudence and conscience . . . . [Art] entails no consideration of the rectitude of the person who makes it nor of the rectitude of one's appetite, but only of the correctness of the work and the process of making it.

[6] This understanding of art is vividly illustrated in a manuscript of Nicole Oresme's French translation of the *Ethics,* written about half a century after Gerald's commentary. An image depicts "art" and "sapience" side by side. Representing art is a smith looking down at his anvil as he hammers hot iron; representing wisdom is a man with a book looking upward toward God and angels. V. A. Kolve prints and discusses the illumination in *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, 1984), 79–81. As we will see, some arts (like archery and playing the harp) appear to have actions rather than the making of objects as their goal, but such disciplined activities are nevertheless productive, ordered to external ends (for music, pleasing an audience; for archery, gaining a victory) rather than to the doer's own goodness or understanding.

(non tamen omne bene factum est bene electum; immo aliquid optime factum potest esse pessime preelectum, puta si aliquis fecerit unum idolum ad idolatriam secundum artem statuificam, illud quidem idolum potest esse optime factum secundum precepta artis statuifice et tamen est pessime electum quia contra precepta prudentie et conscientie. . . . nihil dicit de rectitudine facientis, nihil de rectitudine appetitus, sed solum de rectitudine operis et operationis).[7]

Gerald follows this exposition of Aristotle's chapter on art (*NE* 6.4) with a question: is it true that every art is a productive habit using reason? He begins with four arguments that it is true and then notes two in opposition. The commentator Eustratius (whose work Grosseteste had also translated) points out that some arts, such as the art of military training, involve actions rather than products. Also, dialectic cannot be called a productive habit since it treats necessary rather than contingent things, yet it is called a liberal "art." To answer the question and to deal with these objections Gerald distinguishes three possible meanings of the term *ars:* (1) it can be used in opposition to *scientia,* as Aristotle uses it in book 6; (2) it can mean *scientia,* as it does when Hugh of St. Victor and others talk about logic; (3) it can be used with or without reference to *scientia,* as Cicero uses it when he calls art a collection of precepts. Only in the first of these cases does art mean "a productive habit using reason." In elaborating on these semantic differences Gerald returns to Hugh's conception of the mechanical arts and their purposes, again including them within Aristotle's category of art: "Every mechanical or productive art has as its goal the management of a human necessity" ("Omnis ars mechanica vel factiva habet pro fine administrationem humane necessitatis" [fol. 125rb]). He identifies the needs these arts minister to: they arise either from natural conditions or from accidental occurrences "that follow on the two kinds of human vulnerabilities . . . those of the body and those of the soul" ("secundum duo genera passionum hominis . . . passiones corporis et anime" [fol. 125va]). His resulting inventory can be summarized as follows:

---

[7] *Sententia et expositio,* lib. 6, lect. 5 (fol. 124vb). The beautiful idol made for sinful reasons is Gerald's favorite example of the difference between the exclusively productive concerns of art and the moral concerns of virtue and prudence (see fols. 83vb–84ra, 122vb, 152ra).

Source	Need	Remedial art
Natural conditions	clothing	fabric making
	housing	armament
	transport	commerce
	food	agriculture, hunting
Accidental occasions	aid for the body's passions	medicine
	aid for the soul's passions	theatrics

Gerald devotes a few sentences to each of the first six arts, chiefly giving examples: commerce includes transportation on ships and on animals that can be ridden, such as horses, camels, and elephants; agriculture includes both garden plants and field crops like olive and nut trees (with a reference to Virgil's *Georgics* for further information). His lengthiest explanation concerns theatrics:

> The passions of the soul are relieved by theatrics, the art of playing, including every art of entertainment and every art of visual and auditory spectacles. Such are the songs called comedies and tragedies, which in ancient times were recited in the theatre by comedians and tragedians, and concerning this art that delights and relaxes the soul Aristotle wrote a book, *Poetics,* on the art of such songs. Masks also belong to this art, artificial faces used to represent other people; and this art is practiced by those who entertain using puppets, who through words and images represent others' actions imitatively; and from this art the sculptor's art of making idols took its origin. Augustine condemns these things in book 2 of *The City of God* and elsewhere in many places.

> (Contra vero passiones anime subvenit theatria [*sic*], que ars ludorum est comprehendens omnem artem ioculatoriam et omnem artem spectaculorum visibilium et audibilium. Qualia sunt carmina que dicuntur comedie et tragedie, que apud antiquos recitabantur in theatro per comedos et tragedos, et de hac arte ad delectationem et remissionem anime composuit Aristoteles librum qui dicitur poetria de arte istorum carminum. Ad hanc artem etiam pertinent larvus, i.e. facies ficte quibus representantur aliene persone; et de ista arte serviunt illi qui ludunt in barastellis, qui verbis et imaginibus aliena gesta simulatorie representant; et ab hac arte habuit originem ars statuifica faciens idola. Hos damnat Augustinus .2. de civitate dei et alibi in pluribus locis).[8]

---

[8] Ibid., lib. 6, lect. 5, q. 8 (fol. 125va). Checked against the Brescia, 1482, edition, sig. A4v. For "barastellis" MS Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek,

Having completed his survey of the mechanical arts, Gerald repeats that each is a productive habit using reason:

> Every one is a bodily activity that can be a subject of virtue and that is designed to have its proper correctness independent of the rectitude of the person doing the work, for the nature of art has nothing to do with the rectitude of the person making it but only of the work. A builder with the worst intentions can build the most suitable house, the best of its kind.

> (Est omnis operatio corporalis virtuti subiicibilis que nata est habere propriam rectitudinem sine rectitudine operantis, quia ratio artis nihil dicit de rectitudine operantis sed solum de rectitudine operis. Edificator enim cum intentione pessima potest edificare domum aptissimam et optimam in genere domus [fol. 125va]).

He concludes the question by responding to the two objections. The second, he says, is easily handled—to call logic an "art" is simply to give *ars* a different meaning than Aristotle does in book 6 of the *Ethics*. As for Eustratius's point, Gerald asserts that military training is a productive, mechanical art, falling within Hugh's broad category of armament. To create an effective battle formation is to make something that protects. (This example looks back to the opening chapter of the *Ethics*, where Aristotle mentions the ordering of arts and sciences to different ends; the ultimate goal of military strategy, which includes many subordinate arts, is victory.) Military training is not concerned with issues other than victory, such as whether a battle is part of a just or an unjust war (fol. 125va). A few pages later, in a question on whether prudence is distinct "from every art," Gerald lists a dozen ways in which the two intellectual virtues differ, with little mention of specific arts but once again stressing the distinction between the nature of prudence ("ratio prudentie"), which directs the correct operation of the will, and the nature of art ("ratio artis"), which does not (fol. 127v). And of course prudential action, the goal of ethics, is more important to human well-being than any art, whose goals are by definition exclusively productive.[9]

Palatinus 2383, fol. 84vb, reads "barestellis." I thank Bonnie Kent for lending me her photocopy of this manuscript.

[9] Gerald's Franciscan voluntarist approach to ethics and theology leads him to value *prudentia* over the other Aristotelian intellectual virtues. See Kent, "Aristotle and the Franciscans," 464–65, 566–82. Commenting on book 2 he says that pru-

Given this philosophical framework we can look more closely at what Gerald has to say about theatre. Hugh included "every" form of ancient public play and entertainment within *theatrica*. Gerald claims equal breadth but omits any reference to all the games, sports, and entertainments, as well as their venues, that Hugh had enumerated, implicitly narrowing theatrics to what was performed in theatres. Hugh's discussion was almost entirely in the past tense, whereas Gerald's is largely in the present tense and refers to theatrics as an art of *joculatores,* a familiar medieval term for actors/entertainers that Hugh did not use. Hugh identified four features of performance: "epics were presented either by recitals or by acting out dramatic roles or using masks or puppets" ("in theatro gesta recitabantur vel carminibus, vel personis, vel larvis, vel oscillis").[10] Most of Gerald's paragraph follows and expands on this sentence indicating how plots and characters were and still are represented on the stage.

His first addition is to identify two kinds of songs, comedy and tragedy, both well known as ancient theatrical genres through such works as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies,* which was Hugh's principal source for his discussion of *theatrica*. Hugh mentions comedy and tragedy later in the *Didascalicon* as examples of "songs of the poets," calling such works "appendages to the arts" rather than arts themselves because of their more tangential relation to philosophy (3.4; trans. Taylor, 88). Gerald would have had comedy and tragedy in mind because the *Nicomachean Ethics* mentions both genres earlier. In book 1 Aristotle notes the differ-

Mediaeval Studies 83

---

dence stems from moral virtue, which is superior to every intellectual virtue because it makes a person good as a human being ("simpliciter") rather than good in a limited respect ("secundum quid"), such as being good at medicine, geometry or metaphysics (qq. 18–19, fol. 34r).

[10] *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Didascalicon de studio legendi,* ed. C. H. Buttimer (Washington, D.C., 1959), 44, trans. Taylor, *Didascalicon,* 79. A newer translation by Franklin T. Harkins reads "In the theaters plays were put on with music and singing, with characters and masks, or with puppets" (*Interpretation of Scripture: Theory,* ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Frans van Liere [Turnhout, 2012], 113). Taylor's translation of "gesta" as "epics" suggests a genre rather than simply actions or deeds, the story a performance enacts; but the rest of his translation seems closer than Harkins's to Hugh's identification of four features of theatrical staging: recited/intoned narration, actors/mimes impersonating other people, the use of masks, and the use of puppets.

ence in emotional effect "in tragediis" between evils that have occurred before a play begins and those that occur onstage as part of its action (*NE* 1.11 [1101a31–34]; fol. 19rb). Explicating this point, Gerald quotes the eleventh-century dictionary of Papias on various aspects of ancient comedies and tragedies, including their etymological meanings (fol. 20rb–va). In book 4 Aristotle discusses the virtue of eutrapelia, the morally correct way to indulge in playful and entertaining social interaction, and comments on the difference "between old and new comedy" ("ex comediis veterum et modernorum," *NE* 4.8 [1128a22–24]; [fol. 90va]) in regard to the more vulgar language of the earlier kind. Gerald's gloss on this passage includes further material on *comedia,* probably all from Papias: the nature and parts of comedy (prologue, protasis, epitasis, catastrophe), new comedy's critique of bad behavior, and the more respectable audiences of and venues for its performance.[11] In repeating Hugh's "recitabantur" to describe ancient plays and in specifying the reciters as comedians or tragedians, Gerald repeats a common medieval concept of classical drama most clearly illustrated by the famous illumination in the *Terence des ducs* manuscript, which depicts a person reading aloud a comedy by Terence while mimes in masks (identified as "ioculatores") act it out. He associates the genres with ancient practice but does not rule out the possibility of similar works in his time.[12]

---

[11] *Sententia et expositio,* lib. 4, lect. 22 (90va): "Est enim sciendum quod comedia est carmen villanum describens gesta levium et vilium personarum, habens prologum ad captandum audientiam et processum ad inducendum admirationem, epytasim ad procurandum turbationem ad horam et catastrophem ad concludendum finaliter risum et exhilarationem. Hic autem fuit modus apud veteres, cum comedie recitabantur post comessationem. Postea vero, forsan tempore Aristotelis, comedie fiebant de gestis gravium personarum et corripiebant mores hominum et recitabantur in locis honestis, puta in cenis nobilium personarum." For the entries on comedy and tragedy in Papias's dictionary, the *Elementarium doctrinae rudimentum,* and for his sources, including Isidore and Donatus, see Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante,* University of California Publications in Modern Philology 121 (Berkeley, 1989), 7–8, and *Ideas and Forms,* 64–67; also Kateřina Kvízová, "Classical Latin Theatrical Terms in Medieval Latin of Bohemia," *Listy filologiké / Folia philologica* 128.3–4 (2005): 241–66, at 255–62.

[12] The illustration is printed and discussed in Tydeman, *Theatre,* 48–50; Nicoll, *Masks,* 153–54; and Olson, "Interpretations," 126–27. For more on conceptions of classical performance, see Sandra Pietrini, "Medieval Ideas of the Ancient Actor

Gerald's second addition is much less common: Aristotle wrote a book on the "art" of comedy and tragedy called the *Poetics*. Given the limited and off-center fortunes of that treatise in the Latin Middle Ages, clerical comments on theatrical shows rarely if ever mention it. One wonders if Gerald knew it directly, and if so, in what version and to what extent. William of Moerbeke's translation of the Greek text survives in only two manuscripts, and there is little evidence that other writers were interested in it. Herman the German's translation of Averroes's *Middle Commentary* on the *Poetics* had wider circulation and was cited more often, but not much of Aristotle's analysis emerges clearly in this text, which regularly uses Arabic poetry rather than Greek drama for its examples.[13] Gerald's reference is too brief to allow anything more than speculation about his source. Since Aristotle mentions comedy in a number of places in the *Poetics,* he is not exactly wrong to associate the treatise with both genres, and he is certainly right that the *Poetics* is concerned with the pleasure (*delectatio*) that plays give to their audiences.

But what sort of pleasure does he think is involved? William translates Aristotle's reference to catharsis as a *purificatio* of the emotions of pity and fear generated by a tragedy. He renders clearly Aristotle's articulation of a pleasure proper to the genre—"one should not look for every

and Roman Theater," in *The Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages,* ed. Clifford Davidson (New York, 2005), 275–96. For the range of medieval opinion on tragedy's relevance to "contemporary performance practices," see Symes, "Tragedy of the Middle Ages," esp. 358–65 (quotation at 358).

[13] Both Latin translations are available in *De arte poetica,* ed. L. Minio-Paluello, Aristoteles Latinus 33 (Brussels and Paris, 1968). A complete English translation of Herman's text is in *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations,* ed. Alex Preminger, O. B. Hardison, Jr., and Kevin Kerrane (New York, 1974), 349–82. For more on these translations, see Hardison's introduction, 341–48; H. A. Kelly, "Aristotle-Averroes-Alemannus on Tragedy: The Influence of the *Poetics* on the Latin Middle Ages," *Viator* 10 (1979): 161–209, much of which is distilled in *Ideas and Forms,* 117–25; Dox, *Idea of the Theater,* 95–115. Some knowledge of the *Poetics* could come from intermediary sources. The popular anthology of excerpts from Aristotle and other authorities, first known as the *Parvi flores* and later as the *Auctoritates Aristotelis,* lists a number of propositions supposedly from the *Poetics,* drawn from the Latin translation of the Averroes commentary. See Jacqueline Hamesse, *Les "Auctoritates Aristotelis": un florilège médiéval; étude historique et édition critique* (Louvain, 1974), 268–70.

pleasure from tragedy but rather an appropriate one"—and notes that works with double endings (good fortune for some characters, misfortune for others) provide comic rather than tragic pleasure.[14] Clearly Gerald is not thinking at that level of Aristotelian detail. Earlier in the *Poetics* Aristotle discusses more generally the pleasure human beings take both in imitation and in rhythm (chapter 4; 1448b5–24), and his observation on rhythm is one of the "flowers" of the *Poetics* excerpted in the *Parvi flores*.[15] While Gerald may well be thinking of Aristotle when he mentions the pleasurable function of theatrics, his claim is no less close to Hugh's generalization that theatrics provides a delight or happiness that benefits the soul.[16] Moreover, in defining that benefit specifically as relaxation, he uses a term, *remissio,* that appears neither in William's or Herman's translation of the sixth chapter of the *Poetics* nor in Hugh's paragraph.

[14] Aristotle, *De arte poetica,* ed. Minio-Paluello, 8, l. 31 (1449b26–28): "per misericordiam et timorem concludens talium mathematum purificationem"; 17, ll. 14–15 (1453b11): "non enim omnem oportet querere delectationem a tragodia, sed convenientem"; 17, ll. 3–4 (1453a36): "Est autem non hec a tragodia delectatio, sed magis komodie propria." The now-famous Aristotelian idea of catharsis attracted little attention in the Middle Ages, according to Kelly, *Ideas and Forms,* 2–3; he cites Herman's interpretation on 120. Cora Dietl directly compares William's and Herman's treatments of the emotional effects of tragedy; "Early Modern Dramaturgy of 'Horror,'" in *(Re-)Contextualizing Literary and Cultural History: The Representation of the Past in Literary and Material Culture,* ed. Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre, Beate Schirrmacher, and Claudia Egerer, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis 77 (Stockholm, 2013), 65–80, at 67; available online at <su.diva-portal.org>. Dietl emends Willliam's mystifying translation of Aristotle on the catharsis of pity and fear ("talium mathematum purificationem") to "talium pathematum purificationem." Some time ago E. N. Tigerstedt showed that the problem lies not with William's translation but with a reading in some of the Greek manuscripts: "Observations on the Reception of the Aristotelian *Poetics* in the Latin West," *Studies in the Renaissance* 15 (1968): 7–24, at 16 n. 53. Jody Enders reminds us that medieval drama inherited not only the *Poetics*' idea of catharsis but also appeals to pity and fear in rhetorical tradition; see *Rhetoric and the Origins,* esp. 126–28.

[15] Hamesse, *Les "Auctoritates Aristotelis,"* 268 (5): "Homo naturaliter delectatur in metro et symphonia."

[16] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 2.27 (ed. Buttimer, 44): "laetitia animus reparatur"; *NE* 7.7 (1150b16–18).

Rather than articulating the views of the *Poetics, remissio* suggests the attitude toward play and entertainment in the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself. When exercised appropriately, a certain kind of jesting, convivial behavior constitutes the moral virtue of eutrapelia, providing through play (*ludus*) the restorative mental pleasure that human beings need when their minds have become tired or anxious. However, it is all too easy to play excessively, and this is a vice (*NE* 4.8). Later, in book 7, using different language to address the same moral issue, Aristotle says that the person who is "lusivus"—a term Gerald defines as "ludo deditus," devoted or addicted to play—may seem intemperate but should rather be judged soft, weak ("mollis"), because play is a relaxation, a slackening, of life.[17] Gerald refers to this passage in a question following his explication of eutrapelia in book 4. Can play be virtuous? The first negative argument is that no vice can be a virtue; thus, since book 7 says that play is intemperate and generally an act of weakness, it cannot be virtuous.[18] Gerald refutes it on the grounds that play in itself is not excessive, although it can become so when pursued self-indulgently, as opposed to the rationally controlled and recreationally motivated playing of a eutrapelic person. But the ease with which play becomes excessive and thus immoral remains an important point, one consistent with Aristotle's final discussion of play (*NE* 10.6), which asserts that true happiness does not lie in the ludic. So there is probably some ethical qualification implicit in Gerald's use of *remissio* to characterize the psychological effect of *theatrica* and to imply that the *Poetics* describes comic and tragic pleasure similarly. He associates Aristotle with the pleasure theatre gives, but in a way that remains faithful to Hugh's perspective on its function: psychological relief from accidental disturbances to the soul.

[17] *Sentencia et expositio,* lib. 7, lect. 9. Aristotle: "lusus enim remissio est" (fol. 147rb); Gerald: "Dicit ergo primo quod homo lusivus, ludo deditus, videtur esse intemperatus tamen verius est mollis. Lusus enim vel ludus est quedam remissio vite" (fol. 148ra).

[18] Aristotle, *NE* 4, q. 43: "Sed ludus est opus intemperantie et universaliter opus mollitiei, ut in libro 7 capitulo 11, ubi dicitur quod intemperatus est lusivus, mollis enim lusus remissio vite; quare ludus vel lusus non potest esse opus virtutis" (fol. 90vb).

The use of masks in both ancient and medieval theatre is well estab-lished.[19] Gerald makes explicit here, as he does in regard to puppetry, what Hugh only implied: masks are a means of representing other people ("representantur aliene persone"), a clear separation of the actor from the role enacted. As a theologian he would have known Boethius's famous theatrical allusion to help explain the three persons of the Trinity: that the word *persona* etymologically means "sounding through" (*per + sonando*), as when masks covering actors' faces change the quality of their voices. Some medieval commentators stress the mimetic implica-tions of theatrical masks, whether at a level of social type or individual character, although Twycross and Carpenter say there is not much evi-dence that this academic interest carried over into medieval performance principles.[20] Gerald's return to the present tense to describe the use of masks can only be suggestive as to medieval practice, but he is clear that theatrics is an imitative art and masks are instruments of imitation.

There is more distinct contemporary resonance in Gerald's reference to puppetry. Hugh used an old term, *oscillum* (little face, little mask), which in both classical Latin and modern art history primarily designates various artifacts frequently suspended on trees, including images of faces, chiefly from the first century CE.[21] Isidore does not mention pup-petry in his exploration of theatre in book 18 of the *Etymologies,* but elsewhere he says that etymologically *oscillum* means a moving mouth, and in a theatrical context "puppet" is a reasonable extension of that meaning.[22] Hugh's use of *oscillum,* however, seems not to have caught

---

[19] See Nicoll, *Masks;* and Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, Hants., 2002). Their rich documentation extends well beyond what the title implies.

[20] Mary Hatch Marshall, "Boethius' Definition of Persona and Mediaeval Un-derstanding of the Roman Theater," *Speculum* 25 (1950): 471–82; Twycross and Carpenter, *Masks and Masking,* 282–95.

[21] Rabun Taylor, "Roman Oscilla: An Assessment," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 48 (Autumn 2005): 83–105.

[22] *The "Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville,* trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (Cambridge, 2006), 235: "a 'small mask' (*os-cillum*) is so called, because 'a face swings' (*os . . . cillatur*), that is, is moved" (*Etym*. 11.1.65); see also 405 (*Etym*. 20.14.11). Earlier Servius put forward the same etymology when commenting on Virgil's use of the word in *Georgics* 2.389; see Taylor, *Didascalicon,* 101.

on in spite of the wide circulation of the *Didascalicon*'s discussion of the mechanical arts. While some writers who mention theatrics repeat portions of his terminology, none that I have seen uses *oscillum*. Gerald likewise echoes Hugh's theatrical language in places (*theatrum, recitare, carmen, larva*), but to designate puppetry he substitutes an apparently more contemporary word, "barastellis," a rare Latin term that needs some attention.

I know of only one other appearance of it, in a passage by the thirteenth-century legal scholar Odofredo Denari (†1265) discussing a Roman civil law that identifies kinds of people who deserve infamy. Listed along with military deserters, perjurers and prostitutes are those who play on stage ("in scenam"). Various medieval commentators on the *corpus juris civilis* offer explanations of the word *scena*. Odofredo's contemporary Accursius, whose legal glosses became much better known than his own more discursive commentary, defines it as "a shaded area of curtains or cloths put up in a public or private place; and it is called 'scena' from *schenon,* which means 'rope,' because entertainers make horses move by ropes, and similar things" ("obumbratio cortinarum sive pannorum que posita sunt in publico vel privato loco; et dicitur 'scena' a *schenon,* quod est 'chorda,' quia joculatores faciunt ire caballos per chordam, et similia").[23] Odofredo offers virtually the same definition, etymology, and example, but he gives a name to and a more detailed description of the particular entertainment Accursius mentions:

> *Scena* is the Latin for a Greek term. It refers to a shaded area of curtains or cloths put up in some public or private place for the purpose of presenting an entertaining performance, and it is called *scena* from *scenon,* which means "rope." We see this illustrated in performances of *balastelli* that occur in some courtyard when entertainers assemble and put up curtains in a certain area, and they have wooden horses. They stand behind the

---

[23] Cited from Accursius, *Glossa ordinaria in Corpus juris civilis* (Lyon, 1550), in Kelly, *Ideas and Forms,* 108 n. 203. On actors and infamy ("a legally inflicted state of ill-repute with real-world consequences") in Roman culture, see Hartmut Leppin, "Between Marginality and Celebrity: Entertainers and Entertainments in Roman Society," *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World,* ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford and New York, 2011), 660–78; quotation at 671. For other medieval definitions of *scena*—and there were many—see Kelly, *Ideas and Forms,* passim; and Kvízová, "Classical Latin Theatrical Terms," 251–54.

curtains and use ropes to make the wooden horses move. That's how they create a horse-puppet show.

(. . . scena est nomen grecum latine; est scena obumbratio cortinarum sive pannorum posita in aliquo loco publico vel privato causa artis ludrice [*sic*] exercende, et dicitur "scena" a *scenon* quod est "chorda." Unde exemplificamus nos in ludis di balastelli qui fiunt quando fit aliqua curia, nam veniunt ioculatores et ponunt cortinas in aliquo loco et habent equos ligneos. Stant intus cortinas et faciunt ire caballos ligneos per chordam; et sic faciunt ludum di balastelli . . .).[24]

I assume Gerald's "barastellis" is Odofredo's "balastelli." The more general meaning of "puppets" rather than "horse-puppets" seems reasonable in light of the following clause, which speaks of using voices as well as images to represent the actions of others, indicating that at least some of the time entertainers create shows in which puppets represent human beings. That is also the semantic range of related terms in the vernacular. Philippe Ménard has written a comprehensive and careful study of these, including Occitan *bavastelz* (also *bagastels*), Old French *baasteaus* (less frequently, *arbalesteaus*), Catalan *bavastell,* and Italian *bagattella*.[25] He notes the frequent variation in the second consonant of these words, replicated in the different spellings of Gerald and Odofredo. He concludes that the Occitan and Catalan forms most likely always refer to puppets and puppetry, and that the words in other areas of Europe may refer to puppetry but usually refer to entertainments that involve some form of juggling or prestidigitation. He surveys a number of arguments concerning the etymology of the terms and finds none of them convincing. He notes that two Latin words in Du Cange, *bagattare* and *bastaxius,* have

---

[24] Odofredus, *Lectura super digesto veteri,* vol. 1 (Lyon, 1550; rpt. Bologna, 1967), fol. 100v. Available online at <gallica.bnf.fr>. Cited in part by Dino Bigongiari, "Were There Theatres in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries?" *Romanic Review* 37 (1946): 201–24, at 208, who relied on Nino Tamassia, *Odofredo: Studio Storico-Giuridico* (Bologna, 1894), 175 n. 4.

[25] Philippe Ménard, "Un terme de jonglerie médiévale: ancien français 'baastel', ancien provençal 'bavastel,'" *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Aurelio Roncaglia* (Modena, 1989), 831–51. He does not cite either Odofredo or Gerald. See also the discussion in Francesc Massip, "Joglaria i activitat dramàtica," *Medievalia* 15 (2012): 317–48, at 330–31.

theatrical meanings but provide no firm etymological help.[26] For our purposes Ménard's analysis of Occitan *bavastelz,* where the term in some cases appears as part of an inventory of various *jongleur* skills, links Odofredo's "balastelli" and Gerald's "barastellis" with a southern French word for puppets. Gerald would have been acquainted with *bavastelz.* He was born and raised in southwest France near Figeac, where he entered the Franciscan order. In 1316 he began teaching at the Franciscan *studium* in Toulouse, where he remained until moving on to Paris and his master's in theology in 1326 or 1327. The commentary on the *Ethics* likely dates from his latter years in Toulouse.[27] Whether from his reading or from his own experience, or both, when Gerald explains *theatrica* he thinks one clear and significant instance of it is contemporary puppet theatre.

We know from other, though quite limited, evidence that puppetry was an established medieval theatrical form.[28] Particularly relevant to the

[26] Du Cange's entry *bastaxius* is based on a single reference from a provincial church council held in Tarragona in 1317, one decree of which warns clerics against involvement with "bastaxii, mimi, histriones" and other unsuitable people. *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis,* ed. Léopold Favre (Niort, 1883), s.v. Of course by itself this reference is too general to establish "bastaxii" as puppeteers. Favre's edition adds related French terminology. The council's decrees are printed in *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historicorum dogmaticorum moralium Amplissima Collectio,* vol. 7, ed. E. Martene and U. Durand (Paris, 1733), cols. 305–7.

[27] For biography, see n. 2 above, and on the dating of the commentary, Porter, "Gerald Odonis's Commentary," 246 [100]–247 [101]. As part of a wider survey Sylvain Piron discusses the Toulouse *studium* and Gerald's work there in "Les *studia* franciscains de Provence et d'Aquitaine (1275–1335)," in *Philosophy and Theology in the "Studia" of the Religious Orders and at the Papal and Royal Courts,* ed. Kent Emery, Jr., William J. Courtenay, and Stephen M. Metzger (Turnhout, 2012), 303–58.

[28] Histories of puppetry with material on the Middle Ages include George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre,* 2d ed. (Carbondale, Ill., 1990), 27–35; and Henryk Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppetry from Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century* (Lewiston/Queenston, 1996), 52–87. There is not much unequivocal written evidence, and terminology that at times could refer to puppetry (Latin *pupa,* French *poupee,* Middle English *popet*) seems usually to refer to dolls or even to children. Of course a child playing with a doll often turns it into a puppet. A generous view of medieval puppetry would include not only dolls, hand puppets and marionettes but also some theatrical props, constructions

horse-puppets mentioned by Accursius and Odofredo is a nineteenth-century drawing of a now-destroyed twelfth-century manuscript illustration of two men pulling ropes attached to two puppet-warriors to make them fight each other. The combatants are outfitted with swords and shields. This drawing has occasioned some cautionary commentary among theatre historians in part because it shows people at play rather than puppeteers in performance, and because what is written near the image most likely indicates allegorical intentions. Neither consideration diminishes its value as evidence of the mechanics of medieval puppet manipulation, even if the operators are not hidden behind curtains.[29] Whatever sort of puppetry Gerald envisaged, his mention of it along with masks, comedies, and tragedies and his insistence on it as a means of imitation give it relatively more prominence as a theatrical phenomenon than is usual in medieval references to the stage. Perhaps he sensed what Michel Rousse has argued: that medieval puppet theatre was more than just a cute ancillary form. The construction of a puppet stage embodies the essence of the *scena:* the creation of a privileged theatrical space, with both a visible performance area and curtains concealing behind-the-scenes activities that help to create the on-stage spectacle. It is powerfully emblematic of theatre generally and influential in the shaping of subsequent stage spaces.[30]

for religious or royal processions, and late-medieval automata like those at Salisbury and Boxley. On the automata, see Nicholas J. Rogers, "Mechanical Images at Salisbury," in *Dramatic Tradition,* ed. Davidson, 46–47; and Leanne Groeneveld, "A Theatrical Miracle: The Boxley Rood of Grace as Puppet," *Early Theatre* 10.2 (2007): 11–50. For a more recent survey of the subject, alert to theatrical productions that *might* have been played with puppets while aware of how minimal the hard evidence is, see Alain Guillemin, "Jeux chamaniques, jeux marionnettiques: Aux sources d'une culture théâtrale" (Diss., Université Charles de Gaule - Lille III, 2012, 207–72, available online at https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00863950).

[29] See Nicoll, *Masks,* 166–67 and 168 fig. 120 for the illustration, which is also printed in Ménard, "Un terme," 848; Massip, "Joglaria," fig. 23; and Guillemin, "Jeux chamaniques," 265; discussion in Jurkowski, *History,* 55–57. Massip has very good reproductions of the limited visual evidence for medieval puppetry, including two marginal illustrations (figs. 25–26) in a fourteenth-century manuscript of an Alexander romance that depict the traditional curtained puppet stage (French *castelet*); these are also in Guillemin, "Jeux chamaniques," 266, 270.

[30] Rousse, *La scène et les tréteaux: le théâtre de la farce au Moyen Âge,* Medievalia 50 (Orléans, 2004), 29–50.

Gerald's cursory inventory of elements of *theatrica* thus includes ancient comedies and tragedies and present-tense stage performances that use masks and puppets to represent characters' speech and actions. Ancient performances involved someone reciting the words, but actors and puppets may also speak when they imitate a character. A theatrical work of art ministers to the *passiones animi,* the passions of the soul, one of the standard medieval ways of describing emotional and psychological states. *Passio* implies both the reception of an external stimulus (passivity) and the resultant spiritual and bodily effects that follow upon such passions as fear, love, anger or joy. The specific purpose or usefulness of theatre is "the delight and relaxation of the soul," pleasure that counteracts whatever unhappiness, tedium or anxiety is weighing on members of an audience. Yet while Gerald asserts this remedial function, citing Aristotle as authority, he also points out that Augustine condemned ancient theatrical performances and states that the art led to the sin of idol-making, his favorite instance of the difference between artistic and prudential activity. These observations do not invalidate theatre's therapeutic value, apparently, but they are certainly a reminder of its limitations and dangers. I am not aware of a source for Gerald's claim that the art of theatre *led* to the art of sculpture, but the *Didascalicon* at least associates the two, drawing on a passage from Isidore's *Etymologies* that derives the word *ludi* from the people of *Lydi* (Lydia), who instituted playing and games "amidst all the rites entailed by their many superstitions." Isidore had concluded that "the origin of the thing itself [i.e., *ludus*] is idolatry" and that no Christian should "consider as good what took its origin from evil."[31] Gerald may have inferred cause and effect from this association of ancient theatrical play with pagan religious ritual; in any case, the weight of Augustine explicitly and Isidore implicitly provides historical and theological counterbalance to *theatrica*'s status as an Aristotelian art serving a restorative function.

The result is an unusual and ambivalent summary. Incorporating Hugh's mechanical arts into Aristotle's art as intellectual virtue and productive habit may have contributed to the attention Gerald gives to masks and puppets as mechanisms of dramatic representation: they are just the

---

[31] *Didascalicon* 3.2, trans. Taylor, 85; *Etymologies* 18.16.2–3, in *"Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville,* 365–66. Enders, *Medieval Theater of Cruelty,* 48–50, discusses the story of the Lydians in Isidore and Tertullian.

sorts of tangible theatrical objects that a practitioner of an Aristotelian productive art would *make*. The juxtaposition of Hugh, Aristotle's *Poetics,* and Augustine is more provocative at a theoretical level. Most strikingly, in contrast to the usual scholastic thinking about the *Poetics* in relation to rhetoric and logic,[32] Gerald indicates clearly that the book's subject is not poetry but theatre, comedies and tragedies performed in a *theatrum* by actors representing other people, with dialogue spoken either by a reader or by the actors themselves. He affirms that intellectual design lies behind the production of a theatrical work and thus allows, implicitly, qualitative judgments about it. Any comedy or tragedy or puppet-play is the result of reason enlisted to create something that has its own kind of correctness. Performances are products as well as actions, and if a sculpture can be beautifully carved, or a battle formation suitably trained and positioned, so can a theatrical production attain similar "artistic" excellence in, say, bodily movement, enunciation, stagecraft, or plot construction. Yet such achievements would be part of an enterprise that is in principle amoral, an act of craftsmanship, like the sculpture that can promote either idolatry or Christian devotion.[33] According to Ger-

[32] See Vincent Gillespie, "The Study of Classical Authors from the Twelfth Century to *c.* 1450," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 2: The Middle Ages,* ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge, 2005), 167–78; and Dox, *Idea of the Theater,* 99–115.

[33] Gerald, in effect, anticipates the more extended exploration of art as making rather than doing that is part of Wesley Trimpi's argument in *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and its Continuity* (Princeton, 1983), esp. 7, 328–44, 382–90, although his examples are literary (the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus, the *Decameron*) rather than theatrical. Of course other medieval forms of discourse, especially lyric poetry in the troubadour tradition, were also perceived as products made and then performed by their makers, so Gerald's approach to theatrics is not culturally unprecedented. On troubadour views of poetic composition as a kind of craftsmanship, see Simon Gaunt and John Marshall, "Occitan Grammars and the Art of Troubadour Poetry," in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 2,* ed. Minnis and Johnson, 472–95, esp. 476. During Gerald's time in Toulouse the *Consistori del Gai Saber* was established (1323); it organized an annual poetry competition and reasserted the city's role in the troubadour tradition. Gerald might have known of the troubadour Raimon de Cornet, author of a *Doctrinal de trobar* (1324) and of both secular and religious verse, who says in one poem that he was a Franciscan for a short time. He addressed a not easily interpreted letter to Gerald when he was Minister General. See Gaunt and Marshall,

ald's rehearsal of Papias (see n. 11), ancient comedy was just such an artistic construct, one that could serve different ends: old comedy, presented after riotous feasting, promoted hilarity, whereas the new comedy of Aristotle's time, presented at dinners of the nobility and featuring more respectable characters, aimed at improving behavior.

Such considerations of place, subject matter, and intention are just what a careful ethical analysis of performance would entail, as Aristotle's discussion of circumstances in *Ethics* 2.9 makes clear. These concerns lie behind and beyond the purely productive aims of the mechanical arts as Gerald understands them, which generate works that meet merely the physical and psychological needs of fallen human beings. As he says elsewhere, elaborating on a later passage in the *Didascalicon,* we cannot live if we do not fulfill such needs, but we would be happier if we could live without them:

> At the end of the *Didascalicon* Hugh says, "A necessity is that without which we cannot live, although we would live more happily. . . ." For we cannot live without spitting, without sleeping, and without other hidden natural activities; but if it were possible that we could live without these things, we would live more happily, since it is obvious that such things are not required in order to gain felicity but only in order to sustain life

> (Hugo in fine libri Didascalicon ait quod "necessitas est sine qua vivere non possumus sed felicius viveremus. . . ." Sicut vivere non possumus sine spuere, sine dormire et sine aliis secretis nature; si tamen esset possibile quod sine hiis viveremus, felicius viveremus, quare manifestum est quod talia non sunt requirenda ad felicitatem sed ad solam sustentationem vite [fol. 17rb]).[34]

"Occitan Grammars," 482–87; Catherine Léglu, "Vernacular Poetry and the Spiritual Franciscans of the Languedoc: The Poems of Raimon de Cornet," in *Heresy and the Making of European Culture: Medieval and Modern Perspectives,* ed. Andrew P. Roach and James R. Simpson (Farnham, Surrey, 2013), 165–84, available online at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/26072/>. On earlier troubadour culture in Toulouse, see John Hines Mundy, "Urban Society and Culture: Toulouse and Its Region," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century,* ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable with Carol D. Lanham (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 229–47, at 233–38 and 244–47.

[34] Gerald cites *Didascalicon* 6.14 (ed. Buttimer, 130). Taylor translates Hugh's elliptical sentence as "A need is something without which we cannot live, but [with

Gerald does not damn theatre along with Augustine, but he invokes him to remind readers that this craft could well have evil intentions or outcomes beyond restorative pleasure and relaxation, and that this kind of delight is a human necessity more akin to spitting or pissing than to spiritual contemplation. Theatre is an "art" in a particularly limited sense, and a full moral assessment of it in practice would need to consider factors beyond the quality of the production itself.

Gerald does not take this distinctive approach to theatre any further. He is not trying to offer a full-scale theory of performance or an analysis of the entertainment profession. Nor am I certain that he has worked out a philosophy of the performing arts that would accommodate both what he says about *theatrica* and all of the more incidental references throughout his commentary to *joculatores, histriones* and musicians. In places he makes remarks about entertainers that could be taken simply as routine clerical antitheatricalism. For example, in discussing the virtue of eutrapelia he moves Aristotle's ethical distinction between liberal and servile playing into the realm of medieval patronage:

> Noble people play and provide solace freely, not for the sake of reward, and thus are only concerned with acting properly. Entertainers play in a servile way, for the sake of reward, and thus attend only to giving pleasure. Hence there is a great difference between the play of the former and that of the latter.

which, i.e. when supplied] we would live more happily" (*Didascalicon,* 152; his brackets). Harkins translates similarly as "A necessity is something without which we cannot live, but with which we would live more happily" (*Interpretation of Scripture,* 178–79). I believe that Gerald's understanding of Hugh's meaning is correct and that both modern translations got it wrong. Certainly his interpretation is the standard medieval one: see two other expansions of Hugh's sentence in L. M. de Rijk, "Some Notes on the Twelfth Century Topic of the Three (Four) Human Evils and of Science, Virtue, and Techniques as Their Remedies," *Vivarium* 5 (1967): 8–15, at 11–12. Further, a *Compendium philosophiae,* after borrowing much of Hugh's material on the mechanical arts and explaining how *theatrica* serves human needs by acting "contra infirmitatem," ends with this: "Necessitas vel commodum est id sine quo vivere non possumus: set felicius viveremus, si sine eo vivere possemus." Text in *Un brano inedito della "Philosophia" di Guglielmo di Conches,* ed. Carmelo Ottaviano (Naples, 1935), 34–35. The attribution of the treatise to William of Conches has been questioned; on authorship, see Tullio Gregory, *Anima Mundi* (Florence, 1955), 28–40.

(Nobiles enim viri ludunt et solacium ducunt liberaliter, non mercedis causa, et ideo attendunt solum ad decere. Histriones vero ludunt serviliter, mercedis gratia, et ideo non attendunt nisi ad placere; quare inter istorum et illorum ludum magna est differentia [fol. 89va]).[35]

Given Gerald's discussion of *theatrica* we can see a reasoned approach behind this criticism of *histriones:* an entertaining performance may provide necessary pleasure, but the performer may present it for better or worse motives, and those who perform only in order to make money are not playing in the virtuous way that Aristotle in *Ethics* 4.8 says they should. Fair enough, but wouldn't ethical principles require impartial attention to, not just stereotypical assumptions about, the intentions of both patron and performer? While Gerald reveals limited respect for the imitative activities that once occurred "in theatro" and that also take place in his day, it is not clear that he treats the profession of acting as thoughtfully or sympathetically. Still, his brief exploration of theatre past and present is intriguing and sophisticated. It is a long way from the "rhetoric of abuse" that Lawrence Clopper says medieval churchmen normally hurled at anything associated with the ancient *theatrum*.[36]

A thorough investigation of Gerald's understanding would need to take into account all his incidental references to performance and performers as well as his paragraph on *theatrica*. That is beyond the scope of this article. A fuller treatment would also need to inquire about how his views were shaped by his Franciscanism, insofar as Francis was said to want his followers to be *joculatores Domini,* singing for others' spiritual joy and benefit, not their own earthly remuneration.[37] And it would

Mediaeval Studies 83

[35] Gerald is not alone in finding Aristotle's ethical analysis in *NE* 4.8 relevant to medieval performance and performers, though not all commentators are as critical of actors' motives as he is. See Glending Olson, "Plays as Play: A Medieval Ethical Theory of Performance and the Intellectual Context of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge,*" *Viator* 26 (1995): 195–221.

[36] Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game,* 25–62. It is certainly easier to generalize about medieval contempt for *ludi theatrales* if you ignore what Hugh of St. Victor and the writers who followed him had to say about *theatrica*. Dox, *Idea of the Theater,* provides a more complex view of medieval responses, as do Symes, "Tragedy of the Middle Ages," and Colish in *Faith, Fiction & Force,* 146–52.

[37] Peter Loewen, "Francis the Musician and the Mission of the *Joculatores Domini* in the Medieval German Lands," *Franciscan Studies* 60 (2002): 251–90 at 258–59.

consider other writers, notably Gerald's predecessor Saint Bonaventure and his contemporary John of San Gimignano, a Dominican, both of whom discuss Hugh's idea of *theatrica* and affirm the therapeutic value of entertainments both past and present. In fact John, writing a decade or so before Gerald, also connects Hugh's mechanical arts to Aristotle's treatment of art as an intellectual virtue, though with much less philosophical analysis.[38] Neither Bonaventure nor John emphasizes the inherent amorality of the mechanical arts as much as Gerald does, but neither is working within the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Collectively all three friars reveal a strain of clerical thinking that finds aspects of ancient theatre compatible with contemporary entertainment, acknowledges the skill entailed in performance, and gives limited legitimacy to the pleasure such playing generates.

Only Gerald, however, lets book 6 of the *Ethics* drive the analysis of Hugh's *theatrica,* and only Gerald mentions Aristotle's *Poetics* as a treatise about theatre. His discussion offers additional evidence for the claim by Donnalee Dox that "[e]arly fourteenth-century thought suggests some of the sensitivities to theatrical mimesis" that would come to dominate dramatic criticism two centuries later.[39] It also testifies to Gerald's independent and well-stocked mind, as recent scholarship has been demonstrating, and reminds us that some medieval clerical responses to theatre entail more than simple hostility.

Cleveland State University.

Mediaeval Studies 83

---

[38] Olson, "Interpretations," 133–36. For the dating of John's *Liber de exemplis* see Antoine Dondaine, "La vie et les oeuvres de Jean de San Gimignano," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 9 (1939): 164.

[39] Dox, *Idea of the Theater,* 127. Her argument, based largely on Bartholomew of Bruges's 1307 commentary on material in Averroes' *Middle Commentary* on the *Poetics,* is presented on 116–24. Gerald's insistence that theatrics entails imitation works against Pietrini's assertion that "Late medieval culture seems almost completely to have lost the concept of stage character" ("Medieval Ideas," 282). Her claim seems to be based on the wide range of meanings of *joculator* and *histrio* in various texts. But, to follow the logic of Gerald's analysis of the term *ars,* the fact that a word in some cases has a general meaning does not prohibit it from having a more specific one in others.