

Literary Persons and Medieval Fiction in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*

OSCULETUR ME OSCULO ORIS SUI. “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.”¹ In the first words of the Song of Songs, a voice announces itself, and with it, a corporeal figure comes flickeringly into existence. A voice speaks from the page and summons a body around it. The utterance implies a literary person not merely in the sense in which Quintilian explains the trope of prosopopoeia or *fictio personarum*, remarking, “We cannot of course imagine a speech except as the speech of a person.”² No, with its first-person object, “Let him kiss *me*,” the textual voice refers to its own body, a body that can be kissed, with a mouth that is an organ not just of speech but of sensation and erotic action. The *o* of this open mouth—of the speaker’s mouth but also of any reader who reads the words aloud—is echoed visually on the written page: *Osculetur . . . osculo oris*. In a medieval manuscript, the initial capital would likely be written on a larger scale, emphasizing the graphic dimensions of the letter, and in an illuminated Bible it might even be filled with the image of a man and a woman kissing. In the likeness shared between the *o* of the speaker’s mouth as she seeks a kiss, the *o* of a reader’s mouth pronouncing the verse, and the *o* of the letters on the manuscript page, the mixed ontology of literary persons shimmers into view. Is this utterance, *Osculetur me osculo oris sui*, something that I perceive or something I do? Where is the body that speaks? Suspended between a scene to watch and a script to follow, it seems to belong at once to mimesis and performance, fiction and rhetoric.

ABSTRACT Like many exegetes before him, the twelfth-century Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux regarded the lovers in the Song of Songs as allegorical fictions. Yet these prosopopoeial figures remained of profound commentarial interest to him. Bernard’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs* returns again and again to the literal level of meaning, where text becomes voice and voice becomes fleshly persona. This essay argues that Bernard pursued a distinctive poetics of fictional persons modeled on the dramatic exegesis of Origen of Alexandria as well as on the Song itself. Ultimately, the essay suggests, Bernard’s *Sermons* form an overlooked episode in the literary history of fiction. REPRESENTATIONS 153. 2021 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 29–50. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2021.153.3.29>.

This verse's associative movement from text to corporealization was a point of fascination for readers and writers in the Middle Ages. Its sudden drama, its intimate but peculiar phrasing, and the crosshatched invitations both to watch a spectacle of desire unfolding and to make this speaker's voice one's own helped render the Song of Songs the most frequently interpreted biblical book in medieval Christianity.³ The present essay considers an especially sophisticated and influential instance of that exegesis, the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (*Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*, hereafter *SCC* or *Sermons*) by Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), an undertaking that occupied the final eighteen years of the Cistercian abbot's life and that survives in more than a hundred manuscripts.⁴

In the first of the eighty-six sermons in the collection, Bernard launches his consideration of the language of the Song by imploring, "Tell us, I beg you, by whom, about whom and to whom it is said: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.'" ⁵ Bernard's words, we might notice, are at once a breathless plea for language to explain the personae it proliferates and, too, a canny enactment of that proliferation, conjuring an *I*, a *you*, and a *we* of its own. Grammatical persons multiply, and Bernard presses the urgency of their reference. In effect, he plunges his audience into a fundamental problem of understanding the Song. Because the Song consists entirely of direct speech, a series of unattributed lyric utterances, even the most rudimentary sense-making requires figuring out who is talking to whom. As Bernard begins to describe these speakers, his exegesis shows itself quiveringly alert to the operations of pronominal reference, deixis, and other indices of address. But it is not only the correct identification of speakers that interests him. These speakers become, I suggest, rhetorical resources for the *SCC*. Bernard's preacherly style pursues a distinctive poetics of fictional persons, modeled in part on the Song of Songs itself. In its twelfth-century context, the *SCC* articulated new explanations for the Song's carnal rhetoric of fictional bodies and, at the same time, operationalized that rhetoric in a distinctive program of literary experience.

What does it mean to discuss the Song of Songs in terms of fiction? From the point of its incorporation into the Hebrew Bible, the Song raised questions about the interpretive status of its central figures, a feminine and a masculine speaker who are accompanied intermittently by a chorus of companions.⁶ Nowhere are God or his chosen people mentioned. Jewish and early Christian exegetes concurred that the Song's extraordinarily frank erotic images—"your breasts better than wine," "his left arm under my head and his right hand will embrace me," "your lips drip honeycomb"—were not to be interpreted straightforwardly, referring to actual individuals' erotic love. Rabbis in the second and third centuries taught that the Song was a figuration of the love between God and the people of Israel, and the

early Christian commentary of Hippolytus of Rome (d. c. 236) followed suit with an ecclesiological interpretation. The foundation for the Song's exegesis in the Latin West was undoubtedly Origen of Alexandria (d. c. 253), whose *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (*Commentarium in Cantica Cantorum*), brought together the allegory of the church with that of the individual soul: the book is sung "after the fashion of a bride to her bridegroom, who is the word of God, burning with heavenly love. And deeply indeed did she love him, whether we take her as the soul made in his image or as the church."⁷ The ecclesiological interpretation prevailed in subsequent centuries, shaping influential commentaries by Pope Gregory I (d. 604) and the Venerable Bede (d. 735), until the twelfth century, when tropological interpretation, focused on the individual soul, became a prominent framework as well, thanks especially to Bernard's influential sermons.

For most medieval readers, then, the bodies conjured by the Song of Songs were rhetorical specters, effects of a divinely inspired discourse.⁸ Bernard fits squarely within this tradition of regarding the Bride and Bridegroom as allegorical fictions—but he does so with a crucial difference. The fictive bodies of the Song remained of profound commentarial interest to him. Unlike other medieval exegetes, who largely ignored the literal level of meaning in their expositions, Bernard returned again and again to the mimetic operations of the Song's language, in which text becomes voice and voice becomes fleshly, fictional persona. He not only engaged in the well-established practice of prosopological interpretation (or the effort to resolve scriptural ambiguity by identifying the personae of speakers and addressees) but also pursued those explanations into new prosopopoeial invention. In mixing interpretation and literary person-making, Bernard had several models at his disposal. These included the devotional recitation of the Psalms in the Divine Office, the schoolroom exercise of *adlocutio* or prosopopoeia, and, finally, the "dramatic" analysis offered in the *Commentary* by Origen. Although Bernard has long been recognized as having revived Origen's focus on the individual, tropological significance of the Song, I suggest that the Alexandrian's tendency to amplify the Song's fictive scenes in a self-consciously theatrical mode was also an important influence on the *SCC*. Both Origen's *Commentary* and Bernard's *Sermons* consolidate the Song's fleetingly evoked personae into durable referents that sustain the extended exercise of imagination.

It is true that Bernard does not refer to the Song of Songs as a fiction (*fictio* or *res ficta*), nor does he draw on closely related terms like *fabula* and *poetria*—terms colored by their association with the works of pagan authors. The abbot shows little interest in such idioms of medieval literary theory.⁹ Instead, it is at the level of rhetorical design that his sermons testify to a fascination with what might be called the cognitive realities of fiction, or

how language induces mental images that provoke sensory and emotional responses in an audience. In the case of the eroticized bodies of the Song, however, those images were possessed of a crucial *unreality* as well. If exegetical tradition had colored the Song's celebration of heterosexual love with a certain tincture of disbelief—looking past carnal passion to spiritual union—Bernard invited his audience into the willing suspension of that disbelief, as it were. Ultimately, I suggest, the *Sermons* form an overlooked episode in the history of literary fiction. Though the twelfth-century secular genres of courtly romance and Ovidian love poetry have loomed large in fiction's historiography, devotional literature likewise contributed to the changing semantics of imaginative writing in the period.

In what follows, I concentrate my analysis on the figure of the Bride in the first nine sermons of the *SCC* to show how the sermons both comment on and incorporate the Song's carnal rhetoric of fictional bodies. I then compare this prosopopoeial poetics to the Psalms performed in the Divine Office, grammar-school exercises in prosopopoeia, and, most extensively, to Origen's *Commentary* on the Song. I suggest in closing that the mode of fictionality pursued in the *SCC*, one uniquely alert to the dynamics of reception and the mixed ontology of literary persons, sheds new light on twelfth-century developments in fiction.

Written between 1135 and 1153, Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* is a sprawling text, ranging across varied theological topics and exegetical modes. In histories of the Middle Ages, it is often invoked for its passionate account of mystical desire and its personalistic spirituality, focused on the union of the individual soul with God. The organization of the *SCC* is digressive and unsystematic. Sermons cluster in loose groups, with echoes and tensions humming through the collection. Its formal unity is borrowed from the biblical text and from the scene of address to which it persistently refers, namely, Bernard preaching in the chapterhouse of Clairvaux day by day. Those who have studied Bernard's prose style agree it is rooted in the writings of the Latin Church Fathers; it is characterized by parataxis, antithesis, word play, pervasiveness of biblical quotation, and use of rhythm and rhyme to achieve lyric effects.¹⁰ The early fourteenth-century *Form of Preaching* by Robert of Basevorn praises Bernard's sermons for "using every rhetorical color so that the whole work shines with a double glow, earthly and heavenly."¹¹ Their style is "vivid, nervous, and, on occasion, grippingly energetic."¹² Jean Leclercq observes that the *SCC* "brings us to the frontiers of poetry."¹³ This profoundly rhetorical, even poetic character of the *SCC* means that the text's thinking is contained not merely in what it argues but in its own figurative mechanics.

The opening nine sermons of Bernard's *SCC* share a common text, the first half verse of the Song, *Osculetur me osculo oris sui*. (In addition, the first sermon also treats the book's title, *Cantica Canticorum Salomonis*, and the ninth sermon pivots, at last, to the second half of the first verse, *quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino*, "for your breasts are better than wine.") While all nine sermons ruminate over the implications of this opening phrase, they treat it in different ways. For instance, sermon 2 glosses the kiss as the incarnation and places it within sacred history; sermon 8 provides a trinitarian allegory. The scale and intensity of commentarial dilation suggest why in eighty-six sermons Bernard reached only the beginning of the Song's third book. Though the opening suite of sermons cannot encapsulate all the topics and literary modes that follow it, it does function as a self-conscious beginning to the *SCC* as a whole. My attention here will be on those passages where Bernard grapples most closely with the biblical text *ad litteram* because it is there that the fictive persons to which the text gives rise are most vividly and directly discussed.

The *SCC* opens within a scene of monastic preaching: "The instructions that I address to you, my brothers, will differ from those I should deliver to people in the world."¹⁴ The sermon's first undertaking is thus to map out the axis of its own address, the rhetorical ground opened between the elite monastic audience and the abbot-preacher's persona, authoritative but humble ("For I myself am one of the seekers"). From there, Bernard introduces an additional dimension, the vertical address of prayer. Within these establishing coordinates—monastic auditors, preacher, and God—the sermon takes a sudden plunge into the text of the Song:

Tell us, I beg you, by whom, about whom and to whom it is said: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth." How shall I explain so abrupt a beginning, this sudden irruption as from a speech in mid-course? For the words spring upon us as if indicating one speaker to whom another is replying as she demands a kiss—whoever she may be.¹⁵

The precipitate start of textual exegesis mimics the opening of the Song of Songs itself: urgent, desirous, unexpected. Abruptness is taken to connote speech (*de medio sermonis exordium*), an abruptness that Bernard here borrows to enliven his own discourse. Notice how he adopts a posture of naive confusion, as though he approaches the text without prior exegetical knowledge: *who could this speaker possibly be?* In Bernard's playfully innocent reading, this phrase, this handful of *verba*, immediately rushes forward (*prorumpit*) to evoke a peopled scene of speech. The ligatures of deictic reference (*a quo, de quo, ad quemve dicitur*) begin to concretize into a world, a web of relations in which one person says to another that she wants a kiss from a third. The only piece of commentarial learning that manages to

infiltrate Bernard's ingenuous exposition is the speaker's sex ("whoever *she* may be," *quaecumque est ipsa*). Without some prior knowledge, the speaker's gender is indiscernible from the opening words. But seeing *her*, seeing a woman speak, emerges here as a necessary element in the act of imagination that Bernard invites his audience to perform. In the midst of the monastic scene, the specter of a feminine speaker glints into "our" apprehension, "whoever she may be."

Bernard continues his account by setting the verse's phrasing in contrast with regular usage, to insist on attention to the minute particularities of the speaker's discourse:

But if she asks for or demands a kiss from somebody, why does she distinctly and expressly say *with the mouth*, and even with *his own* mouth, as if lovers should kiss by means other than the mouth, or with mouths other than their own? But yet she does not say: "Let him kiss me *with his mouth*"; what she says is still more intimate: "with the kiss of his mouth."¹⁶

Here Bernard foregrounds his own performance of the Bride's words, quoting her first wrongly and then correctly. The repetitions of *os* and *osculo* emphasize the materiality of language, its shaping in the mouth (the preacher's mouth as well as the Bride's mouth) and its coming unstuck from easy or transparent signification. The oral intimacies shared between speaking and kissing also have the effect of corporealizing the grammatical personae evoked. In the following sermon Bernard will offer an incarnational allegory of this mouth: "The mouth that kisses signifies the Word who assumes human nature."¹⁷ Here, however, he simply opens the question on the literal or grammatical level: *why does she utter such a peculiar phrase?* The inquiry provides him with the opportunity to stage and restage the Bride's request, which hovers between a pictured scene of feminine desire and a script that Bernard haltingly performs.

Instead of explicating the Bride's words at this point, the sermon shifts instead to a more reflective stance, abandoning the urgency of the phrase's literal meaning. The next sentences offer an appreciation of the rhetorical effects that the previous sentences have registered rather naively:

How delightful a ploy of speech (*iucundum eloquium*) this, prompted into life by the kiss, with Scripture's own engaging countenance (*blanda ipsa quaedam Scripturae facies*) inspiring the reader and enticing him on, that he may find pleasure even in the laborious pursuit of what lies hidden, with a fascinating theme to sweeten the fatigue of research. Surely this mode of beginning that is not a beginning (*principium sine principio*), this novelty of diction in a book so old (*novitas in veteri libro locutionis*), cannot but increase the reader's attention. It must follow too that this work was composed, not by any human skill but by the artistry of the Spirit (*non humano ingenio, sed Spiritus arte*), difficult to understand indeed but yet enticing to investigate.¹⁸

If the first half of this textual exposition leapt from scripture to voice to embodied speakers, the latter half refolds the imagined utterance back into the biblical text. Bernard uncouples his voice from the Bride's to remind his monastic audience of the figural operations at work. The ancient book has seemed to speak, thanks to the remarkable eloquence of its language. But now the voice of the desiring woman is transformed again into the enthralling face of scripture, and the laboring reader, avatar of Bernard and his monks, replaces the Bride as the subject of desire. The pair of feminine figures, Bride and book, are revealed to be products of *ars Spiritus*, the Holy Spirit's literary artistry. This opening exegesis thus associates the untutored experience of the Song of Songs with what is feminine, aural, and fictive. Though Bernard here assures his audience that these qualities are so many epiphenomena of divine art, he also shows himself willing to fall under, or even to cast, their spell.

From here, sermon 1 turns sharply to another topic, the title of the book, and readers are left to wonder about the Bride. Although sermon 2 returns to the Song's opening words, reimagining them as a plea from the patriarchs before Christ's incarnation (after the fashion of Origen, Gregory, and Bede), it is not until sermon 7 that Bernard circles back to the persona of the Bride herself. There he again quotes the Song's initial words and muses: "'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth,' she said. Now who is this 'she'? The bride. But why bride?"¹⁹ From here, he goes on carefully to unravel the motivations that can be discerned in the utterance:

Now one who asks for a kiss is in love. It is not for liberty that she asks, nor for an award, not for an inheritance nor even knowledge, but for a kiss. It is obviously the request of a bride who is chaste, who breathes forth a love that is holy, a love whose ardor she cannot entirely disguise. For note how abruptly she bursts into speech. About to ask a great favor from a great personage, she does not resort, as others do, to the arts of seduction, she makes no devious or fawning solicitations for the prize that she covets.²⁰

In this passage, Bernard tacks back and forth between stylistic features and the character they must entail: the suddenness of her speech indicates ardor, its artlessness signals sincerity. He assumes a principle of rhetorical decorum governing the reciprocity between speech and persona. Counterpossibilities are listed—other favors she might have asked for, other ways she might have articulated her wish—as though to insist on the agency of the particular speaker who decides among the options. This mode of characterization continues. A bit later in sermon 7, Bernard tempers his account of the Bride's zeal by pointing out "a certain modesty in the fact that she directs that utterance of hers not to the Bridegroom himself but to others, as if he were absent."²¹ He also draws on details from

subsequent verses (Song 1:3, 2:4) to explain the circumstances of her speech, exclaiming, “Can she be possibly drunk? Absolutely drunk! And the reason? It seems most probable that when she uttered those passionate words she had just come out from the cellar of wine; afterwards she boasts of having been there.”²²

These rationales for the Bride’s discourse all cohere on the literal level of interpretation. They testify to a scene of mimetic action, but one that is only fitfully apprehensible in the lyric pronouncements of the Song itself. This narrative milieu has been solidified by Bernard’s account. In doing so, the *SCC* differs sharply from a commentary like Bede’s, which seeks to disrupt rather than cultivate the mimetic and narrative coherence of the Song’s literal level. For instance, Bede remarks about the latter half of Song 1:1 (“for your breasts are better than wine,” *quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino*), “And justly does she refer to the ‘breasts’ of the Bridegroom, which is a part of the female body, in order that at the very beginning of the Song she might clearly show that she is speaking figuratively.”²³ Reading Bede’s commentary does not allow for the imagination of simple human characters or a coherent narrative milieu.

By contrast, when Bernard writes about the same words, he elaborates three detailed, literal contexts for their utterance—since “I can see reasons for attributing them either to the Bride, or the Bridegroom or to the latter’s companions.” While these three speakers represent prosopological alternatives, Bernard’s recounting all three possibilities one after the other has a cumulative effect, building up a readily imaginable virtual realm. Here, for instance, is the version with the Bride speaking:

Let us say that while she and those companions are conversing together, the Bridegroom on whom this conversation centers, suddenly appears, for he loves to draw near to those who speak about him. . . . The bride therefore, becoming conscious of the Bridegroom’s presence, grew suddenly silent. She is ashamed to think that he is aware of her presumption, for a certain modesty had prompted her to use intermediaries in achieving her purpose. So in her endeavor to excuse her temerity, she turns to him and says: “For your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments.”²⁴

Equally vivid accounts are given to justify the Bridegroom saying the words, and the same for the companions. Of course, Bernard does not expect this characterological exposition to stand on its own. Such narrative amplifications are interwoven with biblical quotations and allegories of Christ and the soul. Sermon 7, for its part, shifts from its discussion of the Bride’s rhetorical choices to a detailed analogy between her companions and the heavenly angels. Bernard intends the Song’s literal level to be recognized as a fiction, dissolving into the truths it helps to manifest. Nonetheless, the literary care

he takes in elaborating this self-consistent realm of persons and action hints at its indispensability for the project of the *SCC*.

Sermon 9 concludes the dedicated exposition of the Bride's first utterance and effects a kind of climax in these sermons' run of prosopopoeial invention. The sermon opens with a call "to return to the book and attempt an explanation of the words of the bride." "For," Bernard remarks of her words, "there they are, swinging precipitously out of nowhere, suspended before us." This jagged utterance, *praerupta verba*, licenses explanatory invention:

But we must see if there is something antecedent to them to which we may suitably connect them up. Let us suppose [*Ponamus*] therefore that those whom we have called the friends of the Bridegroom now again approach the bride as they did yesterday and the day before. They find her in a state of weariness, bemoaning her condition; and wondering what the cause may be they begin to question her: "What has happened? Why this unusual sadness? Why do you murmur in this strange fashion?"²⁵

The friends, here, play the part of exegetes inquiring about the literal sense of the text. They ask the kind of questions that Bernard too has been asking—*why does she say what she says? why does she speak in this fashion?* But they ask these questions of the Bride directly, in the suppositional world that has spread out from her utterance and that extends back in time, prior to the pronouncement of the scriptural words themselves. Bernard continues at some length, ventriloquizing the imagined dialogue between the Bride and these companions, with only brief speech tags to punctuate the play of voices:

"So what is it then?" they continued. "Is it that you grieve because some of those gifts you received have been taken away again?" "No," she replied, "nothing of the kind." "Do you fear then that you will be condemned anew for the sins of your past life, that you presumed were forgiven?" "No," was her answer. "But please," they said, "do tell us what it is, then we can supply what you need." "I cannot rest," she said, "unless he kisses me with the kiss of his mouth."²⁶

In this imagined interchange (of which I've only quoted a portion), Bernard in effect answers the riddle he posed in his first sermon: "Tell us, I beg you, by whom, about whom, and to whom it is said: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.'" It is the Bride speaking to some companions about the Bridegroom, for whom she languishes. But there is an additional level of complexity. Bernard submerges this dramatic dialogue into his own preacherly discourse: their fictive voices introduce differentiation, *personae*, into his own voice.

It is at the instigation of this imagined dialogue that Bernard launches a long, passionate speech in the Bride's own voice. He speaks at length in her character. I quote only part of it:

“The favors I have received are far above what I deserve, but they are less than what I long for. It is desire that drives me on, not reason. Please do not accuse me of presumption if I yield to this impulse of love. My shame indeed rebukes me, but love is stronger than all. I am well aware that he is a king who loves justice; but headlong love does not wait for judgment, is not chastened by advice, not shackled by shame nor subdued by reason. I ask, I crave, I implore; let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.”²⁷

This is a bravura performance of love-speech, a whole oration unspooling from the Song’s initial five words. Certainly it testifies to the centrality of desire in Bernard’s theology, but it has more than doctrinal significance. It also foregrounds the prosopopoeial stagecraft of the *SCC*. The speech’s depth of meaning comes from the multiple senses of the bridal “I.” Bernard has already given his audience the resources needed to imagine the Bride, to picture her languishing and speaking to her companions, to be moved by her yearning, and to sympathize with the tension between her modesty and zealous desire. But even as the Bride pours out her impassioned words, it is Bernard’s voice that is audible as well. His virtuosic powers of invention produce the speech’s rhetoric, and his desire as a devotional subject makes the words resonate with both personal and communal significance—“For I myself am one of the seekers,” as he has remarked in sermon 1.

One model for such a protean, multiform “I” can be found in the daily monastic recitation of the Psalms as part of the Divine Office. The Psalms were the basic texts of prayer in Christian monasticism, and Cistercians followed the *Rule of Benedict* in performing them communally according to a regular pattern of hours in the day, days of the week, and feasts in the liturgical year.²⁸ Like the Song of Songs, the Psalms are entirely in the mode of direct speech. John Cassian (d. c. 435), whose *Collationes* were a major influence on the *Rule of Benedict* and served as an authority for medieval monastic life, explains that the properly disposed monk will treat the Psalms “not as if they were composed by the prophet but as if they were his own utterances and his own prayer. . . . When we have the same disposition in our heart with which each psalm was sung or written down, then we shall become like its author.”²⁹ As Monika Otter observes, the psalmody promises “us a prefabricated first person to step into and adopt as our own speaking voice, to create a kind of layered speech act in which our ‘I’ is and is not meant literally, as it were.”³⁰ Bernard’s sharing in the Bride’s voice necessarily draws on the imaginative resources of the porous devotional “I” of the Divine Office—its simultaneously personal and communal aspects, its sources in an external text and in an uttering self. Yet we might also notice the way Bernard’s Bride departs from this model. The abbot invents the speech he delivers, in an act of prosopopoeial amplification that departs from any faithful recitation of the biblical text. And the persona of the Bride

is more tenuous, more theatrical, and more fictive a locus of identification than that of the psalmist. The masculine persona at the root of the Psalms was a figure of authorship and spiritual authority.³¹ By contrast, identification with the Bride's feminine desire was decidedly provisional, or, as Line Cecilie Engh puts it, "a monastic artifice, a literary fiction—and the male cloister provides the perfect framework for constructing just such a fiction."³²

Another available model for the Bride's oration would have been the schoolroom exercise known by a variety of names—*ethopoeia*, *adlocutio*, *ficta oratio*, or *prosopopoeia*. The assignment typically asked students to compose a speech for a character from a literary work, most often a woman in a state of severe emotional agitation.³³ Priscian, for instance, describes *adlocutio* as "the imitation of speech accommodated to imaginary situations and persons; for example one might compose a speech such as Andromache would have spoken over the dead Hector."³⁴ Although we know little for certain about Bernard's education—except, as Leclercq writes, that "the results indicate that it was excellent"—Bernard and his Cistercian audience (who generally became monks as adults rather than as oblates) would likely have learned their Latin through a curriculum that paid special attention to comprehending, declaiming, and inventing emotional speeches in women's voices.³⁵ Formative experiences of literary sympathy and composition were thus bound up with the women of classical literature, whose "severe emotional agitation" demanded a rhetoric of "intense repetition, variation, and figuration"—an idiom, in other words, much like Bernard's Bride.³⁶ But the Bride, like her counterparts in classical literature, invited identification only to the degree that her gender, her passion, and her ultimate fictiveness allowed it. Bernard studiously avoids classicizing allusions in the *SCC*, and it is only as a background resonance that one might discern the echoes of a grammar-school Dido in the mingled voices of Bernard and the Bride.

There is one final model for Bernard's commentarial person-making that seems to me important and largely overlooked, namely, the dramatic exegesis of Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (hereafter *CCC* or *Commentary*).³⁷ As mentioned earlier, Origen of Alexandria stands at the foundation of Latin Christendom's commentary on the Song of Songs. The spiritualizing interpretation in his *CCC* identified the Bridegroom with Christ and the Bride alternately with the Church and the Christian soul. Indeed, his allegorical interpretation seems to have been so firmly established that it more or less inoculated medieval readers against any sense of danger concerning the verses' lush eroticism (although commentators did repeat his warnings that the Song was not childish milk but rather the meat of scripture). Bernard is well known for having revived the Origenist allegory of love between the soul and God.³⁸ Although scholars are uncertain

about how closely Bernard knew Origen's text, the evidence is suggestive. The *CCC* is extant in about thirty Western medieval manuscripts and would have been available to Bernard in contemporary libraries.³⁹ Bernard's text and Origen's share a number of close parallels—to the degree that Bernard's contemporary, Peter Berengarius, even accuses the abbot of plagiarizing the *CCC*.⁴⁰ Bernard mentions Origen only once in the *Sermons*, but his reticence seems to have had more to do with Origen's posthumous condemnation for heresy than with the actual importance of his *Commentary*. The similarities between the *SCC* and the *CCC* are most arresting at the level of broad, bold strokes—not only in the focus on the loving soul but (as I suggest here) in the elaboration of a mimetic, fictive scene of utterance that ultimately implicates the exegetical audience in its imaginative spectacle.

For Origen, the Song's imperative to literary person-making is encapsulated in his apparently original claim that the Song of Songs is a theatrical drama.⁴¹ The prologue to the *CCC* begins: "It seems to me that this little book is an epithalamium, that is to say, a marriage-song, which Solomon wrote in the form of a drama [*dramatis in modum*]." ⁴² "For we call a thing a drama [*Drama enim dicitur*]," Origen explains, "such as the enaction of a story [*fabula*] on the stage [*in scaenis*], when different characters [*personae*] are introduced and the whole structure of the narrative consists of their comings and goings among themselves."⁴³ Joseph R. Jones has documented the influence of this dramatic classification in medieval texts before the thirteenth century, although he does not mention Bernard.⁴⁴ For instance, in *De arte metrica* Bede lists the Song of Songs as an example of the dramatic genre, "in which the speakers are introduced without comment by the poet, as happens in tragedies and *fabuluae*."⁴⁵ However, it is important to note how Bede's definition differs from Origen's. Bede refers to the relation between the poet's narration and the characters' dialogue, a common scheme of literary kinds that can be traced back to Servius's commentary on Virgil's *Eclogues* and ultimately to Plato's *Republic*. By contrast, Origen's understanding of drama is more material and performative—a spectacle on a stage punctuated by the diverse movements of *personae*. This sense of theater as performed narrative is connected to an important aspect of Origen's *Commentary*. As Lorenzo Perrone observes, across the *CCC*'s four books, Origen "provides additional instructions concerning the *ordo dramatis*," which are "meant to bring out the essential 'plot,'" including the setting, mood, and characters' motivations.⁴⁶ Bernard, I think, seizes on this scene-setting vividness of Origen's speculative stagecraft, or "the spiritual activity of an 'inner theater,' a sort of mental performance the reader is called on to enact."⁴⁷

Thus, for my argument, more important than Origen's designation of the Song as a drama (a designation that Bernard does not repeat) is what it

leads Origen to do for almost every verse treated in his commentary—to provide an imagined theatrical account of the gestures, actions, intentions, or circumstances that accompany the utterances making up the biblical text. In his exegesis of the first verse, for instance, he writes:

Reading it as a simple story [*per historiae speciem*], then, a certain bride is now introduced, having received for her betrothal and by way of dowry most fitting gifts from a most noble bridegroom; but, because the bridegroom delays his coming for so long, she, grieved with longing for his love, is lying at home and doing all she can to bring herself at last to see her spouse, and to enjoy his kisses.⁴⁸

Like Bernard, Origen imagines the moments before the Bride's utterance. She lies supine in her home (*iacentem domi suae*), yearning for her beloved. Origen urges his readers to consider her, "adorned with the worthiest of ornaments, such as befit a noble bride, and aflame with longing for her Spouse, vexed by the inward wound of love." "This," he summarizes, "is the content of the actual story, presented in dramatic form."⁴⁹

The pattern of dramatic commentary preceding spiritual allegory continues. Origen's discussion of the next verse begins, "Understand first that, as in a story being acted out [*quasi in historiae dramate*], the Bride has poured out her petition with hands uplifted."⁵⁰ Two verses later he notes that the same literal interpretation (*Historica . . . expositio*) pertains "until some change occurs between characters; the dramatic sequence [*ordo dramatis*], which we accepted in this interpretation, in fact requires this."⁵¹ In book 2, Origen identifies the Bride "acting—to use dramatic phraseology—as a sort of chorus-leader [*ut se dramatis huius species habet, quasi mesochorus*]."⁵² Later in the same chapter, he unfolds various instances of passionate speech he has invented in the Bride's voice; for instance, "'But I,' says she, 'who would be seen by none save you alone, desire to know by what road I may come to you, that it may be secret, that none may come between us, and that no vagrant, strange onlooker may fall in with us.'"⁵³ As these brief examples suggest, the framework of fictive dramaturgy gives Origen license to dilate on the Song's literal sense. As part of his exegetical method, he treats the Song as an imagined spectacle, played out in a mental theater from which he reports details. The emphasis is on setting, gesture, characters' psychology, theatrical technique, and the narrative tissue of before and after, linking up utterances into a continuous scene. These mimetic visualizations occasionally give rise to prosopopoeial invention. While the *SCC* abandons the vocabulary of drama, Bernard seems to have absorbed the *Commentary's* powers of mimetic evocation and its interest in the fiction of these voices' embodied, envired presence.

In her study of Origen's hermeneutical procedure, Karen Jo Torjesen usefully identifies the five exegetical steps Origen follows for each verse of

the Song: first, quotation of the verse; second, “Origen seeks to identify the speaker and reconstruct the dramatic situation in which the words were spoken”; third, reinterpretation in terms of the church; fourth, reinterpretation in terms of the progress of the soul; and, finally, “Origen speaks in the ‘we’ voice and sets his reader into the same dramatic situation as has been applied to the soul.”⁵⁴ This sequence produces “an integrated movement of interpretation from the words of the text to the reader of the commentary who is set within the same dramatic situation as the one given in the text.”⁵⁵ In concluding his exegesis of the Song’s first verse, for instance, Origen tells his readers, “Then let us make this prayer our own and beg from God the visitation of His Word, saying: ‘Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.’”⁵⁶ Readers are pulled into devotional participation. Bernard, for his part, is far less consistent and systematic in his commentarial procedure than Origen, and his sermons follow no set order of exegesis. But his depictions of the Bride frequently travel a similar path, from dramatic spectacle to the audience’s own implication.

Here is one example. In concluding sermon 9’s prosopopoeial speech of love-longing in the voice of the Bride, Bernard switches suddenly back into the persona of the abbot addressing his monks: “‘If therefore he is to find my sacrifice acceptable, let him kiss me, I entreat, with the kiss of his mouth.’ Many of you [*Plurimique vestrum*] too, as I recall, are accustomed to complain to me in our private conversations [*in privatis confessionibus*] about a similar languor and dryness of soul.”⁵⁷ The change in persona is jarring. A great deal of rhetorical energy has gone into building up the Bride’s captivating scene of speech, a performance whose double voicing, as we have seen, plays in complex ways on such touchstones as the psalmody and the schoolroom. By puncturing the illusion and reminding “you” of “your” similar languor, Bernard, like Origen, highlights his audience’s entanglement in the Bride’s literary person, in the spiritual state that this audience shares with her as well as their imaginative participation in her animation. This is what Bernard finds fiction particularly good for, for setting up imagined scenes that dissolve into present performance, and, reciprocally, for introducing difference—other bodies, other voices, other realities—into familiar scenes of address.

Again and again, then, Bernard stages small vignettes of monastic life at the edges of his sermons. For example, in sermon 3, the mundane business of the monastery interrupts an oration of nearly ecstatic desire, in which Bernard’s prayerful voice mingles with that of the Bride:

And now what remains, O good Jesus, except that suffused as I am with the fullness of your light, and while my spirit is fervent, you would graciously bestow on me the kiss of your mouth, and give me unbounded joy in your presence. Serenely lovable above all others, tell me where will you lead your flock to graze, where will you rest it

at noon? Dear brothers, surely it is wonderful for us to be here, but the burden of the day calls us elsewhere. These guests, whose arrival has just now been announced to us, compel me to break off rather than to conclude a talk that I enjoy so much. So I go to meet the guests.⁵⁸

Here we can see Bernard's "I" constrict in a flash, from the mystical and fictively feminine speech of the Bride to his institutional role of abbot. As Bernard's querying iteration of Song 1:6 hangs in the air ("Show me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture, where you lie at noonday"), awaiting an answer, the reply comes not from the "tu" addressed—*o suavissime, o serenissime*—but rather from the monastic guests who require attendance. Bernard's own voice mediates the commotion at the doorway, as he shifts from bridal love-speech to abbatial *Fratres*. The interruption can be read for doctrinal significance, for instance, reflecting Bernard's convictions that mystical encounter could only ever be fleeting and partial in this life and that charitable service is as necessary as mystical contemplation.⁵⁹ But this shift also enacts a rhetoric of desire, of fictions stretching toward their realization and then collapsing back into the circumstances of their utterance.

It is characteristic of Bernard's writings to dwell in literary figures rather than resolving them. As Bernard McGinn observes, "The Cistercian's writings manifest a rhetorical complexity that only reluctantly and after much prayerful reading (*lectio divina*) reveal an inner message all too easily perverted if one attempts to portray it in any simple linear or discursive mode."⁶⁰ It is in this sense Bernard's writings are "literary" from a modern point of view: their meaning is indissociable from the experience of their discursive form.⁶¹ Although the *SCC*'s experiential form would set a paradigm for subsequent spiritual writers, it was unique in its own time. Three contemporary treatments of the Song of Songs provide a fruitful contrast. The first is the *Glossa Ordinaria*, compiled in the circle of Anselm of Laon (d. 1117), which gathers brief marginal and interlinear glosses around the Song, providing allegorical interpretations, biblical cross-referencing, and clarifying grammatical commentary. As Mary Dove summarizes, it provides "a very mixed bag of meanings," and readers are required to approach "each gloss with a fresh act of attention, since there can be no expectation of continuity" among them.⁶² The *Glossa Ordinaria*'s emphasis on pragmatic access to information, and the resulting atomization of its text, produces effects sharply different from the literary immersion cultivated by Bernard. Second, Honorius Augustodunensis (d. 1154), in the latter of his two commentaries on the Song of Songs, offers a pyrotechnically allegorical reading of the Bride as the church, assigning her four different historical identities keyed to the church's four ages—the daughter of the Pharaoh, the daughter

of the King of Babylon, the Sunamita, and the Mandrake.⁶³ Far from generating a coherent persona, the Bride's role is stylized, didactic, and multi-licitous; she acts as a switch-point for modulations among the four senses of scripture. Valerie I. J. Flint observes that for Honorius, "the institution, not the individual, is the important thing, and prose is a safer vehicle for its defense than poetry."⁶⁴ Finally, Bernard's approach may seem closest to the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century trend for reading "the Song as a coherent narrative or drama."⁶⁵ Yet this set of commentaries, identified by Rachel Fulton, uniformly reads the Bride as the Virgin and the Bridegroom as Jesus—something Bernard conspicuously does not do.⁶⁶ Not only that, but they treat this Marian interpretation as literal and historical: "The bride was an actual human woman who had lived and died within human history, and, therefore, the Marian sense of the Song *was* its 'historical' sense, the sense grounded in the actual events and conversations of the past."⁶⁷ The vogue for Mariological commentaries ultimately contributed to a developing memorial devotion, focused on the witnessing and recollection of the Passion—very different from the theatrical, fictive status of the Bride and the scene of her speech in the *SCC*.

Bernard's discourse of literary person-making may nonetheless be fit within another historical context. The twelfth century has long been understood to have a special relationship to fictionality. Laura Ashe, who identifies fiction with the genre of romance, writes that "Fiction was invented in England in the 12th century; we might pinpoint a few years around the 1150s as the crucial moment."⁶⁸ Wim Verbaal looks to the growing influence of Ovidian love poetry to argue that "around 1100 fictional texts start to become a reality for contemporaneous readers."⁶⁹ As I have argued elsewhere, accounts like Ashe's and Verbaal's tend to draw a link between the birth of fiction and the processes of secularization—in this case, the new accessibility and authorship of secular poetry.⁷⁰ According to such accounts, having the cultural infrastructure for fiction's willing suspension of disbelief becomes the mark of a certain secular modernity. But one downside of this *grand récit* of fictionality is that it tends to ignore a whole range of narrative and imaginative practices that do not fit its trajectory, including the myriad coproductions of religious belief and fiction. Though Bernard steers clear of the terminology of *fabula*, *res ficta*, and *poetria*, the *SCC* nonetheless manifests a considered awareness of the impact of prosopopeial inventions on the experience of literature. The *SCC* adopts not only as its interpretive object but also as its literary model a set of biblical utterances, bodies, and scenes that belong not to sacred history but to imaginative spectacle, designed by the Holy Spirit to move devotional subjects. Vincent Gillespie has argued that, beginning around 1150, "increasing numbers of commentators showed a heightened interest in the *effects* of reading poetry on its

audience,” particularly “in the impact that poetic effects had on the affections, imagination, and moral understanding of readers and listeners.”⁷¹ Bernard’s entwined commentary on and participation in fiction making fit Gillespie’s characterization of literary theory in the period. The *SCC* might also be added to the examples Dyan Elliott adduces in her recent argument for a “counterfactual twelfth century,” where she contends that “counterfactual reality was a hallmark of twelfth-century thought,” in religious contexts as much as secular ones.⁷²

The history of literary fiction brings me to a final similarity between Bernard the preacher and the Bride about whom and as whom he speaks. Bernard too is a kind of textual fiction. The voice that we encounter and “hear” through the *SCC*’s highly wrought Latin prose is shaped to evoke oral performance. Yet, as Leclercq first argued in 1955—and as Verbaal has more recently confirmed, on the basis of different evidence—Bernard’s eighty-six sermons are not simply transcriptions of oral delivery, nor are they pragmatic scripts for specific occasions of preaching.⁷³ Revised over two decades, surviving in three recensions, solicited and praised by Bernard’s contemporaries over years of correspondence, the *SCC* was designed for textual circulation.⁷⁴ Though the sermons very likely had occasions of actual preaching at their root, their written form does not simply reproduce contingencies of delivery. Instead, the *SCC* constructs an icon of orality, one exquisitely aware of the representation of Bernard’s speaking persona.⁷⁵ For readers of the text, then, Bernard’s presence is as much a prosopopoeial specter as the Bride’s. A voice speaks from the page and summons an embodied speaker around it. Bernard’s book of sermons, like the Song itself, is a kind of closet drama, unfolding with constant alertness to the fictionalization of speech in writing and to the ceaseless tropic motions of voice, figure, and persona. Devotional readers of the *SCC* find themselves slipped, misfittingly and enthrallingly, into identification not only with the Bride but also with the abbot preacher and the concretized scene at Clairvaux. In the mingled personae of Bernard and the Bride, the *SCC* fashions anew a figure suspended between a scene to watch and a script to follow, a figure who anticipates yet someone else, someone still to come—a reader, us.

Notes

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1. Song of Songs 1:1. The Song is cited throughout from the edition and translation provided in E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1990), xvi–xxxiii (with my addition of punctuation and capitalization).

2. “Nam certe sermo fingi non potest ut non personae sermo fingatur”; Quintilian, *Instituto Oratoria*, 9.2.32, in *The Orator’s Education, Books 9–10*, trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA, 2001).
3. Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 6.
4. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs (Sermones super Cantica Cantorum*, hereafter *SCC*). For a list of manuscripts in which this work appears, see Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi Opera* (henceforth *SBOp*), ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais, 8 vols. (Rome, 1957), 1: xxvi–xxxii.
5. Dic, quaeso, nobis, a quo, de quo, ad quemve dicitur: Osculetur me osculo oris sui? Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* (henceforth *SS*), 1.3.5, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, 1971). *SBOp*, 1:5. In the interest of economy, over the course of the essay I have not always quoted the original Latin in its entirety but have sought to do so when my argument depends on specifics of phrasing. Bibliographic reference to the Latin text is always provided.
6. The Song of Songs is already included as part of the Septuagint, translated c. 200 BCE. On early rabbinic interpretations, see Jonathan Kaplan, *My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs* (New York, 2015).
7. Cited from Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 28 (for Latin, 44n26). Except for fragments of the Greek, Origen’s texts on the Song of Songs survive only in Latin translations, the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* translated by Jerome (d. 420) and the *Commentary* by Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 411), complete only up to verse 2:15. On Origen’s influence in the Latin West, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol. 1, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), 142–224, and vol. 2, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), passim; Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1964), 6–14: “To write a history of Origenist influence on the west would be tantamount to writing a history of western exegesis,” (14); and Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 36–41.
8. The “medieval agreement that the text had no literal or historical sense” meant that the Song’s Bride and Bridegroom were unlike the other typological *figurae* generated in Christian interpretations of the Hebrew Bible; Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 52. In general, typological figures were considered actual historical persons who prophesied other actual historical persons. The Song did not work this way. Thus, Haimo of Auxerre (d. c. 865) remarks, in a commentary on the Song that was to be among the most widely available of the Middle Ages, “The book is in this way most obscure, since no person is commemorated there [*quia nullae ibi personae commemorantur*]”; cited from Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 37 (for Latin, 47n59). Almost five hundred years later, Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349), a staunch champion of the Bible’s literal and historical sense, admits, “This whole book is in the form of a parable [*parabolice*], yet it is not clear to whom the points of the parable should be applied in order to arrive at the literal sense”; for Latin and English translation, *The Postilla of Nicholas of Lyra on the Song of Songs*, ed. and trans. James George Kiecker (Milwaukee, 1998), 28–29, translation modified. For a collection of other exegetical statements about the Song’s nonliteral nature, see Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:57–58. Rachel Fulton argues that the new Marian exegesis of the twelfth century reinstates a version of the Song’s historical sense; see Rachel Fulton, “Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs,” *Viator* 27 (1997): 85–116.
9. He shows little interest except, perhaps, to attack fictions as vanities, as in his famous *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, which condemns religious art in monasteries, and his *Liber ad milites templi* (chap. 4), which criticizes secular knights and

- praises the Templars, who, among other virtues, “reject and abominate actors, magicians, storytellers, lewd songs and plays as being vanities and pure madness” (chap. 4).
10. M. B. Pranger, “Bernard the Writer,” in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Leiden, 2011), 222–23. On Bernard’s literary style, also see Jean Leclercq, *Recueil d’études sur Saint Bernard et ses écrits*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1969), 3:13–210, and Christine Mohrmann, “Observations sur la langue et style de Saint Bernard,” in *Etudes sur le Latin des Chrétiens* (Rome, 1961), 2:354–67.
 11. Robert of Basevorn, “The Form of Preaching,” trans. Leopold Krul, in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy (Tempe, AZ, 1971), 131.
 12. Mohrmann, “La langue et le style,” ix. Translation cited from Pranger, “Bernard the Writer,” 224.
 13. Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York, 1961), 5.
 14. SS, 1.1.1. For Latin, *SBOp* 1:3.
 15. SS, 1.3.5. Dic, quaeso, nobis, a quo, de quo, ad quemve dicitur: Osculetur me osculo oris sui? Aut quale est istud ita subitaneum et factum repente de medio sermonis exordium? Sic quippe in verba prorumpit, quasi quempiam loquentem praemiserit, cui consequenter respondentem et hanc introducat personam, quaecumque est ipsa quae osculum flagitat; *SBOp* 1:5.
 16. Ibid. Deinde si se osculari a nescio quo vel petit vel praecipit, cur signanter et nominatim ore, et ore suo illius, quasi aliud quam os, aut alienum, et non potius suum, exhibere sibi soleant osculantes? Quamquam ne hoc quidem dicit: Osculetur me ore suo, sed aliquid profecto insinuatius: Osculo, inquit, oris sui. Bernard repeats this same line of analysis at the start of sermon 4.
 17. SS, 2.2.3.
 18. SS, 1.3.5. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:5.
 19. SS, 7.2.2. Osculetur, inquit, me osculo oris sui. Quis dicit? Sponsa. Quenam ipsa?: *SBOp*, 1:31.
 20. SS, 7.2.2. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:32.
 21. SS, 7.3.4. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:32.
 22. SS, 7.3.3. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:32.
 23. Venerable Bede, *On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Arthur Holder (New York, 2011), 39.
 24. SS, 9.3.4. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:44–45.
 25. SS, 9.1.1. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:42.
 26. SS, 9.1.1–9.2.2. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:43.
 27. SS, 9.2.2. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:43.
 28. See Margot E. Fassler, “Hildegard and the Dawn Song of Lauds: An Introduction to Benedictine Psalmody,” in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler (Atlanta, 2003), 217–18, and Amy Hollywood, “Song, Experience, and the Book in Benedictine Monasticism,” in *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge, 2012), 59–79.
 29. John Cassian, *Conferences*, 10.11, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York, 1997). For a rich discussion of this passage, see Hollywood, “Song, Experience, and the Book,” 66.

30. Monika Otter, "Entrances and Exits: Performing the Psalms in Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*," *Speculum* 80 (2008): 293.
31. On twelfth-century attitudes toward the author of the Psalms, see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1984), 43–48.
32. Line Cecilie Engh, *Gendered Identities in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Turnhout, 2014), 78–79 and 319–24.
33. Marjorie Curry Woods, "Weeping for Dido: Epilogue on a Premodern Rhetorical Exercise in the Postmodern Classroom," in *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice*, ed. C. D. Lanham (London, 2002), 284–94.
34. Priscian, "Fundamentals Adapted from Hermogenes," trans. Joseph M. Miller, in *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. Joseph M. Miller, Michael H. Prosser, and Thomas W. Benson (Bloomington, IN, 1973), 64.
35. Jean Leclercq, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercian Spirit*, trans. Claire Lavoie (Kalamazoo, 1976), 14. Bernard's longtime friend William of Saint-Thierry reports that the young Bernard was educated in his youth by "the renowned teachers in the church of Châtillon," a cathedral school where he "progressed in his studies above his age and beyond his peers"; William of Saint-Thierry, *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Hilary Costello (Kalamazoo, 2015), 5–6. More generally, see Marjorie Curry Woods, *Weeping for Dido: The Classics in the Medieval Classroom* (Princeton, 2019).
36. Woods, "Weeping for Dido," 284. For a fascinating discussion of how the Benedictine monk Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (d. after 1106) connects the psalmody to a school text known as the *Ilias Latina*, specifically to a speech by Achilles's mother Thetis, see Otter, "Entrances and Exits: Performing the Psalms," 296–99.
37. Origen's *Homilies on the Song of Songs* are more schematic and do not include the detailed literal exposition that is of interest to me here.
38. On Bernard's relation to Origen, see Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 94–95; Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 2:158–62; Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 39; Luc Brésard, *Bernard et Origène commentent le Cantique* (Forges, Belgium, 1983), and "Bernard et Origène: Le symbolisme nuptial dans leurs oeuvres sur le Cantique," *Cîteaux* 36 (1985): 129–51; and Jean Daniélou, "Saint Bernard et les pères grecs," in *Saint Bernard théologien: actes du Congrès de Dijon, 15–19 septembre 1953* (Rome, 1953), 46–51. For the patristic sources of the SCC as well as the general "problem of 'sources,'" see Jean Leclercq, "Aux sources des sermons sur les Cantiques," in *Recueil d'études sur Saint Bernard*, 1:275–98.
39. Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 35. G. R. Evans calls Origen's *Commentarium in Cantica Canticorum* "the most read of the early commentaries on the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages"; G. R. Evans, *The Mind of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford, 1983), 112.
40. On the accusation of plagiarism, see Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 95. For textual parallels, see Helmut Riedlinger, *Die Makellosigkeit der Kirche in den lateinischen Hoheliedkommentaren des Mittelalters* (Münster, 1958), 156n7, and Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 39.
41. "Origen's approach to the text of the *Song* as a 'play' is, as far as we know, his own creative invention. As a matter of fact, in the history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation of this book we cannot find any direct premise for it"; see Lorenzo Perrone, "'The Bride at the Crossroads': Origen's Dramatic Interpretation of the *Song of Songs*," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 82 (2006): 81.

42. Origen, *Commentary*, Prol. 1, in *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R. P. Lawson (New York, 1957). For Latin, *Origenes Werke* (henceforth *OW*), ed. Wilhelm Adolf Baehrens (Leipzig, 1925), 8:61.
43. Origen, *Commentary*, Prol. 1. For Latin, *OW*, 8:61.
44. Joseph R. Jones, "The *Song of Songs* as a Drama in the Commentators from Origen to the Twelfth Century," *Comparative Drama* 17, no. 1 (2020): 17–39.
45. Bede, *De Arte Metrica*, xxv, in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford, 2009), 266.
46. Perrone, "The Bride at the Crossroads," 90.
47. *Ibid.*, 83–84.
48. Origen, *Commentary*, 1.1, 58–59, translation modified. For Latin, *OW*, 8:89.
49. Origen, *Commentary*, 1.1, 59. For Latin, *OW*, 8:89.
50. Origen, *Commentary*, 1.2, 62–63, translation modified. For Latin, *OW*, 8:92.
51. Origen, *Commentary*, 1.4, 74. For Latin, *OW*, 8:101.
52. Origen, *Commentary*, 2.4, 119. For Latin, *OW*, 8:134.
53. Origen, *Commentary*, 2.4, 121, translation modified. For Latin, *OW*, 8:136.
54. Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis* (Berlin, 1986), 55.
55. *Ibid.*, 56.
56. Origen, *Commentary*, 1.1, 62. For Latin, *OW*, 8:92.
57. *SS*, 9.2.2–3, translation modified. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:43.
58. *SS*, 3.3.6. For Latin, *SBOp*, 1:17.
59. For these ideas, see Bernard McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism* (New York, 1994), 209 and 221–23.
60. *Ibid.*, 197–98.
61. On the importance of "experience" (*experiri*, *experientia*, or *experimentum*) in the *SCC*, a mode of knowing that is not solely intellectual but sensory and affective as well, see Brian Stock, "Experience, Praxis, Work, and Planning in Bernard of Clairvaux: Observations on the *Sermones in Cantica*," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla (Dordrecht, 1975), 219–98. *SCC* 3.1.1 seems to be the first usage of the phrase *liber experientiae*, which tropes on the *liber naturae* and *liber scripturae*, to suggest another fundamental source for knowledge of God; see McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism*, 186.
62. Mary Dove, introduction to *The Glossa Ordinaria on the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, 2004), xxiv and xxv. Also see Suzanne LaVere, *Out of the Cloister: Scholastic Exegesis of the Song of Songs, 1100–1250* (Leiden, 2016), 51–71.
63. Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, 63; more generally, see 58–76.
64. "The Commentaries of Honorius Augustodunensis on the *Song of Songs*," *Revue Bénédictine* 84 (1974): 204–9.
65. Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York, 2002), 290; more generally, see chaps. 5 and 6.
66. For this point, see *ibid.*, 303–6.
67. Fulton, "Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis," 87 and *passim*.
68. Laura Ashe, "1155 and the Beginnings of Fiction," *History Today* 65, no. 1 (2015): 41.
69. Wim Verbaal, "How the West Was Won by Fiction: The Appearance of Fictional Narrative and Leisurely Reading in Western Literature (11th and 12th Century)," in *True Lies Worldwide*, ed. Anders Cullhed and Lena Rydholm (Berlin, 2013), 193–94.

70. Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," *New Literary History* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 145–70.
71. Vincent Gillespie, "The Study of Classical Authors, from the Twelfth Century to c. 1450," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge, 2005), 2:147, emphasis original.
72. Dyan Elliott, "The Counterfactual Twelfth Century," in *Christianity and Culture in the Middle Ages: Essays to Honor John Van Engen*, ed. David C. Mengel and Lisa Wolverson (Notre Dame, 2014), 202.
73. Jean Leclercq, "Les Sermons sur le Cantiques ont-ils été prononcés?," *Revue Bénédictine* 65 (1955): 71–89, trans. into English as "Were the Sermons on the Song of Songs Delivered in Chapter?," in *SS*, 2:vii–xxx; Wim Verbaal, "Réalités quotidiennes et fiction littéraire dans les "Sermons sur le Cantique" de Bernard de Clairvaux," *Cîteaux* 51 (2000): 201–17. Christopher Holdsworth, who criticizes Leclercq's claims but has been criticized by Verbaal in turn, is another important part of the conversation; see Christopher Holdsworth, "Were the Sermons of St. Bernard on the Song of Songs Ever Preached?," in *Medieval Monastic Preaching*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden, 1998), 295–318.
74. On the reconstructed history of the writing of the *SCC*, see *SBOp*, 1:xv–lx.
75. On Bernard as "the champion of twisting the *persona* so as to coincide with himself, both as author and believer," see Pranger, "Bernard the Writer," 226 and *passim*.