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Vernacular Authorship in Late Medieval Religious Discourse. The Case of William Flete's *Remedies against Temptations*

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Abstract

Despite the fact that the main topic of William Flete's *Remedies against Temptations* was a pivotal concern of late medieval spiritual literature and the treatise in letter form was widely circulated in both Latin and English, it has remained rather marginal to critical discourse. Neither epistolary space as the site of interaction author/audience nor the role of spiritual authorities in establishing themselves as real authors of religious texts as distinguished from compilers and scribes have been specifically investigated. The paper focuses on the dialogic construction of the authorial voice in William Flete's *Remedies against Temptations* through the analysis of the linguistic and discursive strategies used in the vernacular version of this work of spiritual advice. The most relevant strategy is the choice of the letter format to address a female audience as it allows to transfer authoritative religious discourse into English and to assert the writer's status of author of a text addressed to both religious women and the lay public. In addition, the paper aims at highlighting the relevance of stylistic analysis to delineate the construction of the textual vernacular author in the context of audience recognition. In addressing a non-academic public, the author of one of the English versions of *Remedies against Temptations* engages with Latin learning and asserts himself as the author of a vernacular theology text.

Keywords: Later Middle Ages, Religious Discourse, Stylistic Analysis, Vernacular Authorship.

1. *Introduction*

Medieval theories of authorship, found largely in academic glosses on canonical works, consistently identify authorship with authority, situating both in established traditions. A writer considered an *auctor* in the Middle Ages, such as Augustine or Virgil, possesses *auctoritas* because he composes a text and this text becomes authoritative in that it gains recognition as an exemplar, fashioning rules for language, form, or belief, or offering expertise, which medieval writers generally tried to incorporate rather than surpass (Steiner 2007, 143). Authorial control is thus not only vested in the author since in the manuscript matrix one cannot dictate the conditions of reception, any

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more than one can guarantee uniformity of format. In late medieval England the so-called 'translation of authority' happened, that is, a shift in authoritative discourse and methodology from Latin intellectual culture towards the 'vulgar tongue'; this encompassed popular cultural beliefs and practices which engaged in complex relationships with those authorized by Church and State institutions (Minnis 2009, xi).

Late medieval authorship is not necessarily linked to writing, which is merely the medium of transmission of a text and, indeed, the making of a medieval text began long before a scribe put pen to parchment (on late medieval textuality see Del Lungo Camiciotti 2011). Recent approaches to textuality claim that there is no such thing as an author and that every text is a product of intertextuality, a tissue of allusions to and citations of other texts. This is especially true of medieval vernacular texts which appropriate, dispose, exploit, and indeed challenge learned Latin authority (Minnis 2009, 1). Yet, the question of authorial intention and its reception is pivotal in textual production, especially in religious texts. All in all, late medieval vernacular religious culture participates in the authoritative, and authority-conferring, methodologies of learned discourse, but also less academic textual forms are used as sites of appropriation or legitimization where authority emerges from the ongoing construction of the author/audience relationship.

Minnis (1988) has shown how the influence of Latin commentaries on secular authorities was pervasive and scholastic literary theory influenced vernacular writers of the later Middle Ages, in particular Chaucer and Gower. Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor, and Evans (1999) have highlighted the relevance of prologues as the site of negotiating authority with the audience and included religious texts in their overview. Yet, neither epistolary space as the site of interaction author/audience nor the role of spiritual authorities in establishing themselves as real authors of religious texts as distinguished from compilers and scribes have been specifically investigated. The article will focus on the dialogic construction of the authorial voice in William Flete's *Remedies against Temptations* through the analysis of the linguistic and discursive strategies used by the author of the vernacular version of this work of spiritual advice. In the treatise, written before he left England for Lecceto, near Siena, in 1359, Flete presents a programme of penitential psychology through the medium of a letter. The English version of his treatise is in fact addressed to a sister, who may be a literary fiction or a real recipient. The highly conscious choice of this form is pivotal in that it allows Flete to deploy the religious discourses of his time for lay readers and listeners with personal closeness in a domain – religious discourse – whose style is usually characterized by distance and wherein the speaking subject can assert himself as the author of an inter-text between a range of current vernacular theology. His claim to textual authority is based on exhortations and appeals to the audience which reinforce the bond author/addressee and

truth statements supported by citations from the Bible and other religious authorities, which however are not reported in Latin but summarised in English. The letter provides a fictive locus for the performance of the writer's didactic and pastoral intention as well as for a dialogic textual encounter which situates his claim to authority in the context of audience recognition.

The authorial *persona* of the *Remedies* is mainly produced through the dialogical interaction with the audience: Flete is present in the text as both authoritative advisor and confident linked to the addressee by a bond of friendship and confidentiality. His didactic and counselling intention is responsible for authoritatively illustrating doctrinal aspects in the context of homiletic address rich in affective elements. To assert his authorial *persona* he makes use of specific strategies and linguistic markers which highlight the way he tries to relate to his public. The main communicative intention of the treatise is to instruct and gain authority. Various linguistic devices are therefore deployed to assure the speaking voice's authority to counsel and admonish; from this perspective the addressee is constructed on an asymmetrical plane but the author tries to redress this imbalanced relationship by appealing to her co-operation and benevolence. Stylistic analysis will reveal some of the linguistic and rhetorical devices conductive to establish the author's credentials through the deployment of his pastoral intention and the exposition of his ideas in a friendly dialogue with the recipient of the epistle.

In this article I will make two points which seem relevant to contextualise and interpret the author's *persona* of *Remedies against Temptations* in the context of late medieval religious culture: Firstly, I will delineate the characteristics of the letter form and epistolary discourse in the Middle Ages; secondly, I will focus on some linguistic features which justify my claim that the author of the treatise chose the letter form as particularly apt to instruct a female audience and a lay readership in general and to establish his authorship of a vernacular religious text. I therefore assume that analysing the use of language in terms of the context, the social and institutional practices to which it relates, will enable us to reveal more clearly the textual construction of authorship.

2. *The Letter Form and Epistolary Discourse in the Middle Ages*

The author of *Remedies against Temptations* consciously positions his work in epistolary space. We may here posit an important question: what was a letter in the Middle Ages? A much more versatile document than the modern letter. In addition to real letters, actually sent to recipients to convey information, almost any material could be cast in the form of a letter if the writer chose to do so. Fictional letters comprise treatises in epistolary form which represent an important aspect of devotional literature, especially those addressed to women. I can mention, for instance, the *Ancrene Riwle*, written for three sisters wishing to live the life of recluses, and Aelred de Rieveaux's letter of spiritual counsel to his sister.

While intimacy, spontaneity, and privacy are now considered the essence of the epistolary genre, in the Middle Ages letters were for the most part self-conscious, quasi public literary documents, often written with an eye to future collection and publication (Constable 1976, 11). Besides, letters were often intended to be read by more than one person; they were therefore designed to be correct and elegant rather than original and spontaneous, and they often followed the epistolary conventions of model letters in formularies, the *artes dictaminis*, popular from the twelfth century. Even vernacular letters, both private and business or official letters, were constructed along certain very definite lines which comprise the division in sections and the use of the appropriate style though familiar letters – such as those written by the Cely family (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2010) or by the Paston women (Watt 2004) – may be rather informal and colloquial. Both real, public and private, and fictional letters are extant from the Middle Ages. Vernacular private letters were often written by women, but letters were also remarkably suited to express the public *persona* of women such as, for instance, Catherine of Siena because they were dictated to a secretary and so allowed women to bypass the need for formal education (Cherewatuk and Wiethaus 1993, 1).

In the Middle Ages the letter was linked to orality rather than writing since it was usually dictated to a scribe, read aloud to listeners and, most importantly, because it was regarded as half of a conversation between the sender and the addressee and it involved a quasi-presence and quasi speech between the two. In brief the epistolary situation, which was conceived as *dialogue in absentia*, was particularly suited to bridge the temporal as well as spatial gap between friends and strengthen the friendship or confidence bond between them. Given the importance of dialogue as medium of instruction in the Middle Ages, it was also suited to persuasive texts like sermons or polemical treatises in which the writer sought to appeal directly to the reader and establish his authority as author. Besides, the fact that the letter was intended to be read by a public wider than the intended addressee enabled the writer to extend his influence beyond the private conversation with friends to the network of sympathizers or supporters thus establishing his responsibility as author of the ideas contained in the letter. The authority of the writer was also reinforced, in letters addressed to pious women, by the fact that, in addition to being a means of self-presentation and social identification, corresponding with a female mystic conferred the status of the Written Word to the spiritual director's advice. To sum up, the epistolary form was a suitable medium for works of instruction and advice motivated by spiritual friendship particularly if addressed to a female audience.

The interplay between oral and written discourse considered typical of the letter required sustained attention to the status, identity and authority of the speaking subject and to the implied addressee. In addition, as epistolary discourse was often the only way to maintain or create ties at a distance, let-

ters were not only a token of friendship and confidentiality, but also a mark of honour and favour to the recipient. (A letter was a gift to the recipient, who was considered to own the text.) Epistolary discourse is distinguishable from other types of discourse by certain basic pronominal and predicative traits that taken together constitute what is unique to its language (Gurkin Altman 1982, 117): the *I/you* relationship and the present tense as reference point. According to Gurkin Altman 'Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of epistolary language is the extent to which it is coloured by not one but two persons and by the specific relationship existing between them' (118). The interpersonal bond structures meaning in letters: the *I* becomes defined relative to the *you* whom he/she addresses. In short, the *I/you* relationship that governs epistolary discourse is both a form of self-presentation and of dialogic interaction. The similarities of epistolary communication with real conversation has been often noted. Benveniste highlights the reference of *I/you* to the discursive dimension. As he writes the use of *I/you* refers only to locution, to discourse, never to objects. He writes: 'Je signifie "la personne qui énonce la présente instance de discours contenant je" … Par conséquent, en introduisant la situation d'"allocution", on obtient une définition symétrique pour tu, comme "l'individu allocuté dans la présente instance de discours contenant l'instance linguistique tu"' (1966, 252-253).

The second feature identifying epistolary discourse is temporal relativity. Epistolary discourse is governed by its moment of enunciation. The letter writer is highly conscious of writing in a specific present against which past and future are plotted. Both past and future are always relative to the discursive present of the epistolary communication. Letter narrative depends on reciprocality of writer/addressee and is charged with present-consciousness in both the temporal and the spatial sense. It is a language of gap-closing, of speaking to the addressee as if he/she were present. These features seem particularly suited to assert the independence of the vernacular author by enhancing his/her textual presence. Latin had an immense cultural authority, providing a fundamental intellectual formation for the medieval word. But in the late medieval period many writers confronted the cultural hegemony of Latin by writing in English and highlighting their authorial *personae* as vernacular writers. The construction of authorship is thus linked to translating and producing texts in English. The medieval author was not a clearly identified individual who is the sole creator of a text; medieval writers preferred to refer to a collaborative tradition, but in the late Middle Ages many writers insist on their personal intentions thus contributing to the formation of the authorial *persona*. The title of author was reserved for those who reshaped material in such a way as to take responsibility for it. In this model, authors are considered close to translators and compilers. It is authenticity and conformity with truth that confers authority on texts and authors. The translation of Latin *auctoritas* into English in religious discourse made the formation of

vernacular authority possible together with the many strategies developed by a number of writers to excuse themselves for the selection of an inferior mode of communication. In writing in English, religious authors reached beyond their immediate circle to a potential readership that might ultimately include the entire laity, women included.

The question of why the fictional letter was also a type of document particularly suited to a female audience has not been sufficiently investigated. Medieval writers often knew their intended readers personally and were thus more likely to present their work as an ongoing conversation (Wogan-Browne, Watson, Taylor, and Evans 1999, 13). Cherewatuk and Wiethaus (1993) explore letter writing by women in the Middle Ages; they claim that letters are remarkably suited for self-expression and communication and, unlike learned treatises, letters had long been accessible to women because of the directness with which they convey ideas and emotions and because of the immediate availability of audience. Women could transcend educational barriers as letters were usually dictated to scribes and use them to teach, influence politics, maintain familial ties, explore innermost emotions (1-2). In general, the epistolary form was often used for apostolic works and for works of instruction and propaganda, when face-to-face persuasion was impossible (Constable 1976, 14). Yet some link across the epistolary gap was essential to the writing of letters. It might have been the desire to instruct or to convert, but most frequently it was friendship (15). I think that the choice of this textual type by Flete may also be due to its linguistic and pragmatic characteristics. As the analysis will show, the letter form is very useful to construct the identity of both the textual author and the model pious recipient by establishing a closely involved relationship between spiritual advisor and disciple in need of counsel (on the close relationship between a pious woman and her confessor see Del Lungo Camiciotti 2008). The distance – fictional or real – between correspondents may be bridged by creating an epistolary bond and by addressing directly both recipient and implied readers/listeners of the text. In addition, in an essentially oral culture, the written word conferred great authority to both sender and recipient, as letters were quasi public literary documents; they are thus well suited to investigate the formation of an authorial *persona* in connection with vernacular culture.

3. *William Flete in the Context of Late Medieval Penitential Psychology*

According to Hackett, William Flete 'was the only direct link between those two great, so-called schools of medieval mysticism, the English and the Italian' (1992, 99). While a hermit in Lecceto near Siena, he was advisor to and spiritual friend of the greatest Italian woman saint and mystic writer Catherine of Siena and may have influenced her theological thought. Despite this, among the many late medieval devotional treatises, his *Remedies against Temptations*

has remained rather marginal to critical discourse. Yet, its main topic, the profits of tribulations divinely sent or permitted, was a pivotal concern of late medieval spiritual literature as shown by the fact that this treatise, in common with most other spiritual classics of the fourteenth century, was copied and owned by a variety of pious readers, both secular and religious (Colledge and Chadwick 1968, 204).

William Flete was born about 1325 and was reading for the master of theology at Cambridge when in 1359 he begged his superiors' permission to leave England for Italy and retire to Lecceto or Selva di Lago near Siena, and live a recluse's life. The hermitage of Lecceto was one of the great centres of Augustinian piety at the time and there he entered a network of spiritually minded people. When William Flete arrived in Lecceto, in 1361 or 1362 according to Aubrey Gwynn (1940, 147), he was already an outstanding personality of late medieval English spirituality. In Lecceto he came into contact with Catherine of Siena (as proved by six letters by the great Italian mystic addressed to William Flete that are extant) and her *famiglia* or network of friends and supporters.

William Flete wrote his treatise on spiritual temptations *De Remediis contra Temptaciones* not later than the summer of 1359, when he left England. It became one of the popular spiritual manuals of the later Middle Ages in England as thirty-seven Latin and English manuscripts survive. At least three recensions of the English text have been identified, which indicated a wide circulation of the vernacular version. The analysis developed in this paper is based on the third English version edited by Colledge and Chadwick (1968), which may have been copied by nuns (Colledge and Chadwick 1968, 217).

As mentioned, the treatise is in letter form addressed to a sister, perhaps a fictional sister. Yet, Flete's instructional concern for a female audience is revealed by the real relationship between the hermit of Lecceto and a spiritual daughter such as St. Catherine of Siena. Besides, works of moral instruction and edification had been cast before in the form of a letter about spiritual problems addressed to the stock 'sister' figure (Hackett, Colledge, Chadwick, 1964, 249; on the *topos* of female audience see also Vulič 2008), but in addition to the sister, as the analysis will show, the treatise is addressed to anyone, lay people and solitaries, who despair of their salvation and need a spiritual director to instruct them in the profits of tribulation. This was quite a popular topic at the end of the Middle Ages and its rendering in the vernacular may have helped William Flete to establish his authorial *persona*. The short treatise survives in nine manuscripts comprising vernacular versions of the Latin original whose sections are arranged in slightly different ways; it reflects the spiritual attitude of its time and belongs to a network of vernacular texts stressing various aspects of the devotional life of men and women in the late Middle Ages (similarities have been indicated with contemporary treatises such as Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and the *Chastising of God's Children*).

The treatise does not attempt to teach his readers how to make progress in spiritual life, unlike other devotional texts. It does not exhort his readers to embrace the religious profession: it may have been written for those already professed, perhaps nuns, though it was read and copied widely. The text is concerned with the conduct of the spiritual life of solitaries and spiritually oriented lay people and its author shows himself to be acquainted with the most modern literature of his age dealing with the fear of diabolical possession and temptation. The topic treatment is sober, sympathetic, and grounded on sound theological and psychological principles; this may indicate that the author knew that his main addressees were simple-minded women who should attempt to avoid the excessive manifestations of medieval spirituality and achieve a certain spiritual and emotional stability.

4. *Stylistic Analysis of* Remedies

Though the text does not contain the salutation and conclusion which define the formal letter, the treatise by Flete can be defined as a letter in that it is characterized by the linguistic features of epistolary discourse: the *I/you* relationship and the present of utterance as reference points. The picture that emerges from Flete's treatise is however more complex than the *I/you* epistolary situation in that also third person pronouns and inclusive *we* are used.

The author/addressee relationship is characterised by the higher frequency of second person pronouns (202; 151 *you* and related forms, 51 *thou* and related forms) than first person singular pronouns (76 *I* and related forms). Flete's *Remedies* is in fact a very *you*-oriented text from which the second-person clearly emerges as reciprocal voice in the dialogic construction of the authorial voice. Numbers however do not paint an accurate picture. It is more revealing to investigate the usage of pronouns as suggested by Wales (1996). In late Middle English the distinction between *thou* and *ye/you* forms is not completely lost from a social perspective though *thou* is increasingly restricted as the pronoun of address to God and power relations could be still marked (in the sixteenth century) by the choice of *thou* and *you* on a basis of either a reciprocal relationship or an unequal one (Smith 1999, 187; see also Burnley 2003).

In the *Remedies* both forms *thou* and *ye/you* are still used but the pronoun *thou* and its related forms are restricted to reference to God. The avoidance of *thou*, which expresses an unequal relationship, and the unmarked use of *ye/you* forms to address the recipient of the epistle seem to indicate that the interpersonal relation is established on the basis of a polite intercourse between social equals.

However, the author/addressee relationship is much more complex since the writer has more than one recipient in mind and positions his audience by subtly alternating an individual level, the *sister* mentioned in the text (example 1), with a more general one expressed by indefinite *man* (examples 8, 9), used, as pointed out in the text, for both men and women and in the interplay between singular and plural *you*, and *I*, *ye*, *we*.

1. And þerfore, **suster**, be not douteful ne hevy, for it schal neuere turne **3ou** to perell, but it schal turne **3ou** to gret profyte, for ther by **3e** schal wynne the crowne of worchip and þe palme of victorie, whiche schal ben to **3ou** gret worchip and glorie in the blisse of heuene þou3 þe þank þat **3e** schuln haue of oure lord god for **3oure** with stondynge of such temptacions and for your pacyens if **3e** taken it mekely, and to þe fend it schal turne to schame and confusion. (IV)

Since the letter format implies a dialogue, a prototypical *I/you*, the voices we hear are that of the writer and his correspondent, to whom a wider audience is added. The writer directly intrudes in the text with asides in the first person (example 2) and by the implied *I* of imperatives used to give advice and instruction.

2. As **I** seyde afore (VI), **I** am steryd to telle of oone of hem (IX), And **I** sey 3ou. (X)

The writer also uses inclusive *we* in invocations to God and to highlight participation in the group of associates (examples 3, 4, 5). *We* is used in its inclusive value to include writer, addressee and the wider audience so that the speaker presumes to speak on the addressee's behalf (examples 3, 4).

3. But god schilde, as **I** seyde afore, þat **ony creature** be the more recheles or bold to synne wilfully; but for þe mercy of god is so large, **we** owen to ben the more besy and diligent to loue and plese god, for þat he is so good and so ful of mercy. (IV)

4. treuly, and **we** token good keep of these wordes, **we** wolden be gladdere of his chastysyngis þan of alle the worldes cherysynges; and if **we** deden soo, alle diseses and trybulacions schulden turne to comfort and joye. (IX)

5. Þerfore **lete vs** alwey haue a good wil to wilne weel and to do wel, and god wil kepe **vs** and 3eue **vs** the victorye, and þe fend schal ben confounded. (I)

The author is present in the text with a text organizing function (examples 2, 3), as advisor (example 2) and with an exhortative function (example 5). Yet, on the whole the text is mostly oriented towards the recipient who is individually addressed as the predominance of second person singular pronouns. However, there are at least two forms which are clearly plural, while others can be ambiguously intended (examples 6, 7).

6. But **alle 3e** þat ben taryed þus of the feend with þese þou3tes and sterynges, beleue hem not ne charge hem not, for alle þing þat is treuly groundyd in god, it pleseth god and not displeseth. (VII)

7. **3e childern of holy cherche**, þat haue for saken the world for helthe of youre soules, and principally to plesen god, comfort **3e** in hym whom **3e** haue chosen to loue and serue, for he wole ben to **3ou** ful free and large, as **3e** may see be exaumple of Petir in the gospel. (X)

The reference to a plural audience is also manifested by the use of *they* and related forms when the antecedent is the indefinite or generic pronoun *man* or a specific category indicated by *tho* (examples 8, 9, 10).

8. But þough **a man or woman** haue or feele alle þe vycious sterynges and as many mo as ony herte kan þenke, a3ens **here** owne free wil, and alwey quan reson cometh to **hem, thei** ben myspayed with al, and fleen alwey to goddys mercy, it is to **hem** but preuynge and clensynge of synnes, þou3 **thei** been often in the nyght and in the day now vp, now doun, as wrasteleris ben. (IV)

9. And **suche men þat** þus ben traueiled and taried with scharpe peynful þoughtes and sterynges, **thei** owen to taken the councel and techynge of wys men þat ben goode and discrete, and be no weye þat thei folwe here owne wielde fantasyes, for þat wold vttirly schende hem. (V)

10. And if it so be þat **3e** have consentid and fallen in ony temptacion, beth sory, and crieth god mercy þerof, and beth not discomforted þerfore. Þenke wel on the grete mercy of god, how he forgaf Dauid his grete synnes, and Petir and Maudeleyn, and not only hem but also **alle tho** þat haue be or mow be and schulen ben contrite for here synnes and cryen god mercy. (III)

In sum, the text is not just a dialogue between correspondents since, in addition to the *I/you* of writer and addressee, it includes a *you* which may be several, and may thus be displaced from the canonical speech situation into the wider reading or listening public. Moreover, there are third parties, which may be either widely disseminated as *any creature* or *they/tho* in ever larger contexts of situation or included in *we*, whose value is more than one of the same and implies the collective identity of a group that can speak as one speaker and share beliefs and views.

If we now turn to the second aspect of epistolary discourse, time relativity, we may note that again the text is more complex than a letter conveying information and news. The text is divided into short, easily comprehended sections each dealing with a specific theme. There are pieces of instruction addressed to a sister, but also prayers and some highly charged passages of affective piety: the treatise contains direct appeals to the recipient, passages of doctrinal exposition and invocations. The present locution of advice which is the central reference point of the text merges with the atemporal present of doctrinal exposition. Other linguistic features point to the language of the authoritative instructor, such as the use of imperatives (example 12), and the present of utterance is also charged with a sense of future anticipation since the text is interspersed not only with imperatives but also with the imposition of obligation/recommendation reinforcing the persuasive stance of the text (examples 11, 12).

11. And þough a cristen man were neuere so wikkyd ne so synful, and stood in the same sentens of hardest wordes þat ben wretyn, 3et **he schulde trusten** to goddis

mercy, for if he wolde forsaken his synnes and 3iue hym to good liff, **he schulde haue grace** and for3euenesse, and the scharpe wordes of dampnacion **schulde turne** hym to mercy and sauacion. (IV)

12. Þerfore, sustir, **fle** to hym þat al mercy is jnne, and **aske** mercy, and 3e **shuln haue** mercy and forgeuenesse of alle goure synnes; and make you louly to þe sacramentis of holy cherche, and þanne 3e owen to beleuen trustily þat þei ben forgouen, and ge receyued into grace of god. (III)

The address term *sister* accompanied by the use of the pronoun *3e* and the avoidance of *thou* to refer to the addressee seem to indicate polite form and equal relationship as the use of the V-form is part of a value system which medieval people called *curtesie* (Burnley 2003, 35). The choice of the address terms *sister* and *children* to refer to his direct addressee and a network of sympathizers highlights the writer role of religious instructor linked by a friendship bond with his female addressees while his reference to the universal level represented by *man* and *woman*, *creature* highlights his intention to reach a wider public as author of a specific text. The language of the treatise is oriented towards the addressee's future behaviour influenced by the writer's advice. The writer is bound in a present preoccupied with the future and his intention to influence it persuasively.

To conclude *Remedies against Temptations* is an instructive text in letter form; as such it is also a highly interactive text where the audience and even their expectations are constantly observed by the author. Consequently, the discourse is a blend of religious language which is relevant to establishing the writer as authoritative counsellor through instructive devices pertaining to the need to make the message clear and accessible to a vernacular audience. The text abounds in imperative verb forms and the most frequent modal is *schulen* which suggests obligation but also appropriateness and assertion. The predominantly authoritative form of polite address represented by the use of imperatives and the modality of recommendation is softened by the affective stance of the author towards the recipients of his message addressed as *sister* or *children of God*. The usage of personal pronouns shows that while the voice of the author is clearly heard through pronominal first-person reference, the focus is on the addressee through the use of second-person pronouns and address terms. Flete's *Remedies* is thus a status and authority conferring work and a *you*-oriented text where reception mirrors the act of writing. Epistolary space is defined by the shared world of the writer and addressee underlying their dialogue.

5. *Concluding Observations*

The treatise on the *Remedies against Temptations* for solitaries is a text highlighting the authorial responsibility of the vernacular author vis-à-vis his lay public of readers and listeners. It gives practical and spiritual advice addressed

to a sister, but includes more than a single correspondent. It is composed with a second, larger, more permanent audience in mind. It was apparently written for open circulation or for someone in the network of friends and supporters who sympathized with Flete's ideas and devotional advice. If we now return to the initial question – why the letter form to address a sister in need of counsel? – we can try to propose some observations which are linked to the textual authority of the writer.

The epistolary medium facilitates the circulation of the text and gives centrality to the confidential relationship between religious director and spiritually minded people. In no other genre do recipients of a text figure so prominently within the world shared by the correspondents and in the generation of the text. In giving practical advice and doctrinal information, the spiritual counsellor shifts between a strongly persuasive stance as author responsible for the text content and an empathetic attitude towards the sister recipient of his text. Advice is authoritatively given through imperatives and the imposition of obligation, but this position is softened by the inclusion of both writer and addressee in a collective body sharing the same beliefs and ideas. The subjectivity and authority of the writer is balanced by a recipient-oriented interaction which renders the speech situation less asymmetrical. The presence of women in the text as the original recipients may justify the choice of the letter form as this allows reproduction of the confidential relationship that linked a spiritually minded woman to her confessor and to participate in an established tradition of devotional writing.

In addition, the text is the product of the writer's intention to assert his authorial *persona*; it reaches beyond the addressee, the sister in need of counsel; it moves between at least three inscribed audiences: the specific sister, spiritual friend and disciple the author may have had in mind, the network of his friends and supporters and the wider audience of God's children or *christen men*. As the stylistic analysis suggests epistolary discourse is particularly apt to express both the bond of confidentiality between writer and addressee and the persuasive aim of the author of a specific text whose authority is based on his credentials as vernacular religious author.

The language of the treatise is characterized by both the immediacy of the oral model – the here and now of a confidential present conversation between friends – and the intention to give authority and stability to the recommendations to the sister and to other solitaries by producing a written text. The immediacy of speech is counterbalanced by the status of the text as a written, tangible authoritative document. In brief, the temporal and spatial gap between the textual author and his readership, present and future, is bridged by the model of the letter exchange which combines reciprocity, confidentiality and authoritative status. It is a real act of transferring authoritative religious discourse into English by a writer who asserts his status as author of a text addressed to a vernacular public of both religious women and lay sympathizers.

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