Touch in Late Medieval English Theatre

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Thesis approved for the degree of
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This thesis examines touch in late medieval English theatre, considering tactile encounters on stage and the role of touch in audience experience. Although touch is increasingly attracting attention in medieval studies, theatre has thus far been an exception to this trend. To rectify this, I focus primarily—though not exclusively—on biblical drama, especially the York and N-Town Plays. My methodology is threefold, synthesizing lexical analysis, interdisciplinary comparisons of drama and art, and materially informed readings of medieval theatre.

At the heart of this thesis lies a paradox in medieval understandings of touch that has hitherto gone unnoticed: the sense of touch offered a pathway to the sacred, but it was also a source of uncleanness. Medieval plays—precisely because they involved human bodies—were ideally positioned to interrogate this paradox on stage. Further, some medieval plays put their spectators in a position to experience the touch paradox first hand. However, from the 1530s onwards, the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox was in decline. This development was also reflected on the contemporary stage.

The introduction provides a review of existing scholarship, defines my corpus and terminology, outlines my methodology, and advances my theory of the medieval touch paradox. Here, I also introduce a leitmotif for the thesis as a whole: Doubting Thomas, the apostle who refused to believe in Christ's Resurrection without tangible proof. Chapters one and two explore moments of touch on the medieval stage in relation to the themes of gender and religious difference respectively. The remaining three chapters explore the tactile aspects of audience experience, focusing respectively on the eyes, the hands, and the feet as agents of touch.

The conclusion explores the wider implications of my thesis for medieval studies. In brief, this thesis offers a rich new theory of touch through which to examine not only medieval plays but also other contemporary texts. Secondly, it challenges the prevailing view that medieval theatre appealed to the senses primarily or even exclusively via sight and hearing. Thirdly, it draws attention to an important sensory rupture in sixteenth-century England, one whose influence can be felt on the stage and beyond.

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List of Abbreviations

CCCCL	Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Library
CFM	Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum
CHL	California, Huntington Library
CTCL	Cambridge, Trinity College Library
DMLBS	*Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*
DOST	*A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (up to 1700)*
LBL	London, British Library
LNA	London, National Archives
LWC	London, Wellcome Collection
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
NHBL	New Haven, Beinecke Library
NYML	New York, Morgan Library
OBCL	Oxford, Balliol College Library
OBL	Oxford, Bodleian Library
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
OUCL	Oxford, University College Library
YCA	York, City Archives
YCL	York, City Library

Conventions

As a general rule, this thesis follows the MHRA author-date system. However, for the sake of brevity, quotations from the York Plays, N-Town Plays, Towneley Plays, and Chester Plays are cited simply by play and line number (respectively following the texts in Beadle ed 2009–2011; Spector ed 1991; Epp ed 2018; Lumiansky and Mills eds 1974–1986). If the play in question features in an appendix, then the appendix number (e.g. A-2) appears where the play number would otherwise appear. Quotations from the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* plays are cited by line number, proceeded by *B* or *R* as appropriate (following the text in Baker, Murphy, and Hall eds 1982: 141–93). Stage directions in medieval plays are indicated by s.d. and refer to the previous line. Quotations from Shakespeare's plays are cited by act, scene, and line number (following the text in Taylor et al eds 2016). Quotations from Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* are also cited by act, scene, and line number (following the text in Bevington et al eds 2002). All biblical quotations are from the Douay-Rheims version (following the text in Swift and Kinney eds 2010–2013). All online dictionaries cited in this thesis were accessed on 15 July 2019. All translations and transcriptions are my own unless otherwise stated. This thesis employs the following transcription and editorial conventions:

<u>Text</u>	Expanded abbreviation
Text	Deleted or erased text
<Text>	Damaged or lost text
^Text^	Interlinear scribal addition
[Text]	Editorial intervention

Quotations from other scholarly works have been silently modified so as to cohere with the conventions outlined here.

Introduction

In September 2018, the York Festival Trust put on a partial production of the city's medieval Corpus Christi plays, a series of short pageants spanning biblical history from Creation to Doomsday. The intention was not to reconstruct the York plays exactly as they would have originally been performed. For example, only twelve of the forty-seven extant pageants were staged. The *Crucifixion* and the *Mortification* were combined to make one longer play. Many actors wore modern clothing, and *The Harrowing of Hell* opened with a deliberately anachronistic electric guitar solo. Nevertheless, the 2018 production serves as a striking visual reminder that the original performances would have featured moments of touch on stage. For example, in the *Mortification*, Joseph of Arimathea invites those around him to 'halse' (i.e. 'caress') Christ's wounded body 'with hande' (36.381; *MED* s.v. 'halsen v.2' sense 1.a). Figure 1 shows how this poignant scene was interpreted in 2018.

Productions like this one also encourage us to recognize that being a spectator in medieval York would have been a tactile experience. Historically, the pageants processed around the local streets on wagons, stopping to perform at predetermined stations for standing audiences of local people (Twycross 1978; Twycross 2008: 27–31; White 2000).[1] The recent production retained something of this processional format. For example, spectators gathered as the pageant wagons arrived and performed at the end of Coney Street, the approximate location of station eight in 1399 and 1486 and station nine in 1549 (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, xvi; White 2000: 53, 64). In this confined city space, with just seventeen metres between the surrounding buildings, I inevitably found myself

[1] As a caveat, not all spectators would have stood on the streets to watch the York plays (Lopez 2016: 57–58). It is also worth noting that the viability of processional staging has occasionally come into question, especially by Alan H. Nelson (1970; 1974: 15–37). However, several scholars have refuted Nelson's practical concerns about processional staging at York, thereby defending the feasibility of this performance mode (Dorrell 1972: 77; Stevens, Clopper, and Spector 1976: 403–04). For more recent discussions of the practicalities of performance in medieval York, all of which either explicitly or implicitly accept the viability of processional staging, see Davidson 2013: 87–125; Lerud 2008: 100; Twycross 2008: 29–31.

pressing shoulder to shoulder with other spectators. The effect would only have been magnified during medieval performances, when this part of the route was much narrower—less than eight metres across according to Eileen White (2000: 64).

Touch, both on the stage and off, has never received extensive attention from scholars of medieval English theatre. The present thesis seeks to remedy this, with a focus on biblical drama. In brief, I argue that biblical plays were uniquely positioned to offer commentary and instruction on the role of touch in contemporary society, while simultaneously appealing to the spectators' own sense of touch. The rest of this introduction will put my thesis in its broader scholarly context, while also providing the necessary terminological, methodological, and conceptual foundations for my argument.

The Forgotten Sense

The sensory (or sensual) turn first gained momentum in the humanities in the 1980s (Howes 2003: 29–58). However, the sense of touch has been overlooked until comparatively recently. It was only at the start of the twenty-first century that touch started to receive the same level of sustained attention as seeing and hearing, a development that can be seen in fields as diverse as cultural history, literature, history of art, film studies, and philosophy (Boyle 1998; Classen ed 2005; Harvey ed 2002; Marks 2002). Since then, the intersection between touch and the humanities has become a burgeoning field of enquiry (Classen 2012; Jackson 2015; Paterson 2007).

Theatre scholars, especially those working on early modern English drama, have been quick to recognize the value of studying touch—both moments of touch on stage and touch in audience experience.[2] Particularly notable is Farah Karim-Cooper's *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage: Gesture, Touch, and the Spectacle of Dismemberment*

[2] But see also contemporary theatre studies including Di Benedetto 2010: 69–92; Shearing 2015; Welton 2012: 51–82.

(2016). Tactility, Karim-Cooper argues, is 'a primary medium of human connection' in Shakespeare's plays, and she gives particular attention to *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* (2016: 9, 176–95). Further, Karim-Cooper stresses that early modern theatres 'were viewed by some as dangerous places of touch' not least because of 'the haptic threat of the special effects of performance, the tactile crowding and groping hands of its audiences' (2016: 159). Although Karim-Cooper's monograph currently offers the most extensive examination of touch in early modern English theatre, it was not the first study on the topic. As early as 2002, Carla Mazzio considered the tactile anxieties of early modern anti-theatrical writers and urged scholars to consider touch and not just sight and hearing when exploring early modern audience experience. Further, in 2005, Mazzio wrote about the allegorisation of touch in Thomas Tomkis's play *Lingua*, *or Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority* (1607).

Beyond this, recurrent touch motifs on the early modern stage, notably the poisoned kiss and the 'head-in-lap configuration', have been interrogated and set in their socio-historical context (respectively Karim-Cooper 2015: 222–26; MacConochie 2017). *The Changeling* (1622), a Jacobean tragedy written by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, is now 'known for its investment in tactility' (Dugan and Farina 2012: 376). Patricia Cahill, for example, has considered the 'affective force' of 'tactile encounters' in this play at length (2012: 397). Finally, the sense of touch has provided scholars with a useful framework through which to examine the language, staging, and cultural anxieties of a wide range of Shakespeare's plays, including *The Comedy of Errors* (Lyne 2013: 38–41, 46–47), *Coriolanus* (Stanev 2016: 159–82; Lyne 2013: 41–43, 45), *King Lear* (Cahill 2010), *Timon of Athens* (Stanev 2016: 159–82), *Twelfth Night* (Lewis 2002), and *The Winter's Tale* (Tribble 2010).

This thesis extends a touch-oriented approach to medieval English theatre. In recent decades, medieval theatre scholars have increasingly examined the body on stage, with topics under consideration including bodily subjectivity (Sponsler 1997), the representation of Christ's sacramental body (Beckwith 2001: 59–71), and cross-dressing bodies (Normington 2004: 55–70). Nevertheless, the ways in which bodies touch and are touched has seldom been considered. A notable exception is Pamela Sheingorn's study of the embrace in the N-Town Plays, which has previously attracted some response (Sheingorn 1997; Twycross 1998 for 1996: 99). For context, the biblical plays in the N-Town manuscript were synthesized from at least four different exemplars in the late fifteenth century (Fletcher 2008: 189–91; Meredith 1991: 110–11). The result may best be described as an 'anthology or compilation' of East Anglian theatre (Sugano ed 2007: 1). Sheingorn surveyed embraces in a wide range of plays in the eclectic N-Town manuscript, arguing that contact with the Virgin Mary's body 'provides access to bodily knowledge' (1997: 73). Although Sheingorn's study is valuable, it sheds light on just one category of touch and in one play text. A broader study of touch on the medieval stage has yet to be written.

Important foundations have been laid for such a project. For example, previous scholars have opened up individual medieval theatrical texts in which touch is important, especially the N-Town *Nativity*, *Appearance to Thomas*, *Assumption of Mary* and their analogues elsewhere in medieval English biblical theatre (Bale 2010: 90–117; Cushman 2017; Evans 1997; Scoville 2004: 10–29; Swann 2015). In these plays, a sceptical midwife physically tests Mary's virginity, Doubting Thomas confirms the Resurrection by placing his hand in Christ's wounded body, and an impertinent Jew strikes Mary's funeral bier. However, touch has always been secondary to another concern in studies of these plays, for example the limitations of rhetoric, the nature of medieval epistemology,

the representation of Jews, or the role of midwives in fifteenth-century England. Where tactile encounters on stage are concerned, it is also worth noting that a book chapter will soon be published on the role of touch in medieval English convent theatre (Robinson and Dutton forthcoming). However, Olivia Robinson and Elisabeth Dutton focus on theatrical texts written in Latin, especially the Barking plays, whereas this thesis concerns plays written (at least primarily) in the vernacular. I define my corpus in detail below.

If tactile encounters on the medieval English stage have received limited attention, then the role of touch in contemporary audience experience has received even less. Medieval theatre scholars have previously explored how the senses were engaged during performance, but with a focus on sight. For example, Andrea Louise Young has argued that vision is the guiding principle of *The Castle of Perseverance*, a morality play during which spectators were given 'a practical lesson in *how to see*' (2015: 3; emphasis original). Further, Seth Lerer has discussed the 'spectatorial sensibility' in late medieval theatre, focusing on the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a miracle play about Jewish host desecration (1996: 31). In Lerer's words, Croxton is 'a play about the pleasures and the horrors of the vision of the mutilated *corpus*' (1996: 32). This sensory bias towards sight is also evident in research on the York Plays. Jill Stevenson argues that watching the York Plays could have been a profound manifestation of visual piety, and in the process she draws parallels between medieval optics and modern cognitive theory (2010: 6, 21–27, 115–18).

Where medieval audience experience is concerned, hearing is the only sense that has received a comparable level of attention to sight. Here again, recent research on the York Plays is instructive, inspired not least by references to hearing the play in the city's civic documents (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 356, 406). For example, Mariana Lopez (2015; 2016) has published on the acoustics of street spaces in York. Further,

Claire Wright has argued that Herod's blusterous speeches would have contrasted profoundly with Christ's silences in the York Passion sequence (2011: 101–09; 2012: 18–22). Lopez and Wright are just two of several scholars who have approached the York Plays with the sense of sound in mind (see also Davidson 2013: 127–63; King 2000). More broadly, much has been written about the evidence for music in Early English theatre (Rastall 1996).

Scholars are starting to recognize the need to look beyond sight and hearing in studies of medieval audience experience. For example, Rory G. Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler have recently examined the role of smell in the York Plays, while Claire Sponsler has discussed 'Edible Theater' at the coronation banquet of Henry VI (Critten and Kern-Stähler 2016; Sponsler 2014: 147–66). But what about touch? The current focus on sight and hearing in scholarship on medieval audience experience, which the two aforementioned studies are beginning to challenge, is in keeping with the sensory bias encouraged by the terms 'spectator' and 'audience'. Carla Mazzio has urged early modern theatre scholars to look beyond the dual-sensory framework encouraged by this terminology (2002: 161–62, 178–80). However, an equivalent impetus has yet to gain traction in medieval theatre scholarship. Nevertheless, the field is on the threshold of change. For example, John McGavin and Greg Walker recently made the following observation about medieval performances of the York *Crucifixion*:

> For those closest of all, able to look above the rim of the wagon, and perhaps to lean on the platform-stage itself, their experience of the actor's performance […] might have been tactile as well as aural and visual.
>
> (McGavin and Walker 2016: 12)

They add that some audience members 'might well have wished to touch the Christ actor's body', and moreover that 'being jostled by the other bodies around them, perhaps pressed against the boards of the wagon by the weight of their fellow spectators' could have resulted in 'a distinctly corporeal sense of the performance as an experience of

standing at the foot of the Cross' (McGavin and Walker 2016: 13, 14). These comments suggest that touch in audience experience would be a thought-provoking avenue for extended discussion, but the topic has never received sustained attention.

Although touch in medieval English theatre has been largely overlooked, this is not symptomatic of a wider dearth of research into medieval touch. For example, many medieval literary texts outside the domain of theatre have been approached from a touch-oriented perspective. This includes Vincent Gillespie's recent work on Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love* and Katie Walter's study of Reginald Pecock's *Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* (Gillespie 2016; Gillespie forthcoming; Walter forthcoming). The intersection between touch and literature is also central to many of the contributions in *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (Walter ed 2013). Further, much recent work on the material text has stressed that touch could play a crucial role in the reception of medieval manuscripts (Rudy 2011a; Borland 2013). Similarly, in art history, scholars have explored how medieval users interacted with devotional sculptures on a haptic level (Ashley 2011; Gertsman 2015: 107–09; Jung 2010). Finally, the cultural history of touch in the Middle Ages has received extensive attention (Classen 2012: 1–136; Woolgar 2006: 29–62).

Conspicuously, the majority of the studies cited in the previous paragraph were published in 2010 or later. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, by contrast, sight dominated discussions of the medieval sensorium (Biernoff 2002; Denery 2005; Hamburger 1998; Lentes 2006; Newman 2005). This changing focus parallels the broader sensory shift towards touch in the humanities discussed above. By offering the first extensive study of touch in medieval theatre, my thesis therefore contributes to a wider movement in current scholarship: to get 'in touch' with the Middle Ages.

Defining Touch: A Medieval Perspective

What exactly is touching? The *OED* offers the following definition:

> To place the hand, finger, or (less commonly) another part of the body in contact with (a person or thing); to make deliberate physical contact with (something) using the hand, an instrument, etc.; (of a part of the body or an instrument) to make physical contact with in this way.
>
> (*OED* 3rd edn. s.v. 'touch, v.' sense I.1.a)

This definition has limited usefulness for the present thesis. Anthropologists and cultural historians have stressed that the senses are cultural constructs, rather than perceptual absolutes (Howes and Classen 2014: 1). Thus, a study of touch in medieval theatre must clarify how touch was defined in the *medieval* period. This is no simple task. The more that medieval commentators tried to define and understand touch, the more opaque this sense seemed. Was there one sense of touch or several discrete senses of touch? Where was touch localized in the body? What position did touch occupy in the hierarchy of the senses? None of these questions had clear answers.

Medieval commentators owed a great debt to classical views on the senses, especially Aristotle's *De Anima* (Jütte 2005: 46–52). For Aristotle, touch resisted classification and categorisation; this much has become axiomatic in sensory studies (Heller-Roazen 2009: 27–29; Jütte 2005: 69). The first pressing taxonomical issue was the localization of the sense of touch in the human body. In *De Anima*, Aristotle wrote that it is difficult to determine 'what is the organ of touch' (Barnes ed 1984: 672). Seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling were each clearly guided by a single organ: the eye, the ear, the tongue, and the nose respectively. Touch, by contrast, could not be pinned down to just one body part in classical thought (Farina 2012: 293; Mazzio 2005: 88). Although the flesh might seem like an obvious candidate, Aristotle found this solution unsatisfactory (Heller-Roazen 2009: 28).

The localization of touch in the body continued to plague commentators in the Middle Ages. This can be seen, for example, in John Trevisa's Middle English translation

of Bartholomæus Anglicus's encyclopedic text *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. According to Trevisa's translation, which dates from the turn of the fifteenth century, touch is located 'in alle þe parties of þe body' (Seymour et al eds 1975–1988: I, 118). However, Trevisa concedes that this sense resides 'principalliche in þe palmes of þe hondes and in þe soles of þe feet' (Seymour et al eds 1975–1988: I, 118). For comparison, the author of *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, a Middle English handbook from the fourteenth century, also struggles to localize the sense of touch in the body (Barr 2014: 124n25).

Touch raised another fundamental classification issue for Aristotle and those who followed him: was it more appropriate to speak of the sense of touch or in fact several discrete *senses* of touch? This question arose because touch could perceive many different qualities—unlike the remaining senses. Note especially the following passage from Aristotle's *De Anima*:

> Every sense seems to be concerned with a single pair of contraries, white and black for sight, sharp and flat for hearing, bitter and sweet for taste; but in the field of what is tangible we find several such pairs, hot cold, dry moist, hard soft, &c.
>
> (Barnes ed 1984: 672)

Did each of these contrary pairs, then, constitute its *own* sense of touch? If so, were there in fact more than five senses? This question remained a subject for debate in the medieval period (Salmón 2005: 62–63).

Even when touch was understood as a single, unified sense, it caused yet further taxonomical problems. Specifically, touch threatened the stability of the hierarchy of the senses. In theory, touch belonged at the bottom of the Aristotelian sensory hierarchy after sight, hearing, smell, and taste respectively (Jütte 2005: 61). Thus, the two distal senses, i.e. sight and hearing, were regarded as superior to the three proximal senses: smell, taste, and touch. Touch ranked worst of all because it was the most coarse, most animalistic, and most earthly sense (Salmón 2005: 65; Woolgar 2006: 29). Each of the senses could be tied to one of the four elements, namely fire, air, earth, and water; touch was linked

with earth, the ‘lowest and grossest’ of the four (Vance 2008: 16). For comparison, Trevisa would later single out touch as the ‘most erþeliche and boistous’ of the senses in his aforementioned Middle English translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (Seymour et al eds 1975–1988: I, 119). In this context, the word ‘boistous’ means both ‘crude’ and ‘dominated by the element earth’ (*MED* s.v. ‘boistous, adj.’ sense 5).

However, from the classical period onwards, touch’s position at the bottom of the sensory hierarchy repeatedly came under strain. Aristotle recognized that no animal could survive without touch—this sense was ‘necessary’ for existence (Barnes ed 1984: 692; Salmón 2005: 64). By contrast, animals could survive without sight, hearing, smell, and taste—these senses were ‘necessary […] not for their being, but for their *well*-being’ (Barnes ed 1984: 692, emphasis added; Salmón 2005: 64). In this alternative framework, touch therefore ranked as the primary sense. Frustratingly, then, there was good reason to put touch at both the top *and* the bottom of the sensory scale simultaneously.

Touch could be understood as the primary sense in yet another way: for Aristotle, touch underpinned all other sensory experience, to the extent that ‘without touch it is impossible to have any other sense’ (Barnes ed 1984: 691). In his thirteenth-century Latin translation of *De Anima*, Thomas Aquinas affirmed Aristotle’s idea that touch is the root of the other senses (Pasnau trans 1999: 251, 266; Jütte 2008: 5). However, this idea was not exclusive to Latinate scholastic literature in medieval England. For example, it can also be found in *Ancrene Wisse,* an early Middle English guide for female recluses of ‘quasi-lay’ status, ‘some of high birth’ (Hasenfratz ed 2000: 2). Touch, the anchoresses are told in part two, ‘is in alle þe oþre’ senses (Millett 2005: I, 44).

Touch supported taste in particular, as noted in Trevisa’s translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum*. Touch, Trevisa explains, ‘helpiþ al þe oþir wittis, and specialliche þe taast’ (Seymour et al eds 1975–1988: I, 119). The notion that taste could be

understood as a type of touch was even reflected linguistically in Middle English. The verb ‘tasten’ could mean ‘to exercise the sense of taste’, but it could also mean ‘to examine someone or something by touching’ (*MED* s.v. ‘tasten, v.’ senses 1.a. and 2.a; Woolgar 2006: 6). The reverse was also true: the verb ‘touchen’ could mean to taste (*MED* s.v. ‘touchen, v.’ sense 10; Woolgar 2006: 7).

Thus, in late medieval England, intersensory experience was hardwired into language, the building blocks with which people thought and communicated. Today, by contrast, the cross-sensory semantic nuances of the word ‘taste’ have been lost—the *OED* rightly demarcates the sense ‘To try, examine, or explore by touch’ as obsolete (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. ‘taste, v.’ sense †I.1.a). More broadly, we tend to think of the five senses as discrete perceptual experiences, with some exceptions. Firstly, neuroscience has shown that the condition of synaesthesia makes cross-sensory experience a biological reality for a small proportion of the population (Cytowic and Eagleman 2009). For example, patients with this condition may be able to taste words or hear colours (Cytowic and Eagleman 2009: 37–39). Further, neuroscientists have shown that the same neurons fire in the brain whether humans complete an action themselves or if they witness someone else doing it (Keysers et al 2004). Thus, to see a moment of touch is on some level to experience that moment of touch, an idea that has already been applied to medieval spectatorship (Pfeiffer 2012: 330–33; Stevenson 2010: 137).

Finally, cross-sensory experience is an important principle in phenomenology, especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s enduringly influential *Phenomenology of Perception*. For example, Merleau-Ponty writes: ‘[t]he senses translate each other without the need for an interpreter’ ([1945] 2014: 244). Merleau-Ponty’s notion that the senses ‘translate’ each other harmonizes obviously with medieval thought. As Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen eloquently expresses it, ‘the senses interacted, overlapped, and

combined into a rich and abundant whole' (2015: 37). Touch, as I have demonstrated, was understood to play a fundamental role in this 'rich and abundant whole', underpinning other sensory experience.

Arguably, the interdependent relationship between touch and the other senses is communicated by the Longthorpe Wheel of the Senses (figure 2). This wall painting, probably completed c.1330 (Rouse and Baker 1955: 32), represents the senses in the form of animals at the end of five spokes of a wheel. Touch is represented by a spider, while the remaining senses are represented by a monkey (taste), a boar (hearing), a vulture (smell), and a cockerel (sight). This enigmatic image has attracted considerable attention (Casagrande and Kleinhenz 1985; Nordenfalk 1985: 2, 7; Rouse and Baker 1955: 12–13, 44–47; Woolgar 2006: 25–27; Yun 2007). I find Gino Casagrande and Christopher Kleinhenz's interpretation most compelling: they argue that touch's position at the top of the wheel reflects its status as 'the basic mediating component' in the medieval sensorium (1985: 326). In my view, this argument is only strengthened by the fact that the king's hand steadies the wheel: touch physically holds the other senses in place.

At this stage, it is helpful to take stock of how to define touch in late medieval England. In this thesis, when I refer to touch I am speaking of a sense that was understood to be present everywhere in the body, not just in the hand. Further, it was a sense that could in fact be understood as a conglomeration of different senses, able to detect many attributes including pressure (hard/soft), temperature (hot/cold), and moisture (wet/dry). Finally, I refer to a sense that was understood to underpin other sensory experience and be part of a potent intersensory dialogue. On the subject of terminology, in this thesis I use the terms 'haptic' and 'tactile' as roughly synonymous adjectives that both mean 'relating to the sense of touch' (*OED* 3rd edn. s.v. 'haptic, adj. and n.' sense 1; *OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'tactile, adj. and n.' sense 2.a). Further, I use the noun

'contact' to mean 'The state or condition of touching' (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'contact n.' sense 1.a'). Unlike 'touch', the words 'tactile', 'contact', and 'haptic' are all post-medieval, first attested in 1615, 1626, and 1860 respectively (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'tactile, adj.'; *OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'contact, n.'; *OED* 3rd edn. s.v. 'haptic, adj.').[3] Nevertheless, they provide useful terminology in a study of this length.

The relationship between the words 'touch' and 'gesture' also warrants brief discussion here. The noun 'gesture' can be defined as 'A movement of the body or any part of it', specifically one 'expressive of thought or feeling' (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'gesture, n.' sense 4.a). There is clearly overlap here with the act of touching. Indeed, J. A. Burrow's *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* includes discussions of kisses and handfasting, both of which are tactile acts (2002: 12–17, 32–35).[4] However, 'touch' and 'gesture' are far from synonymous. Gestures can broadly be divided into two categories: the tactile and the non-tactile. The former includes kissing, embracing, shaking hands, and hitting, while the latter includes waving, pointing, and nodding. The contributions in *Gesture in Medieval Drama and Art* (Davidson ed 2001) pay much attention to what I have referred to here as non-tactile gestures. For example, chapters in this essay collection include discussions of the possibilities for miming, pointing, and raising hands on the medieval stage (Enders 2001; Ogden 2001: 26, 33; Schmidt 2001: 161–66). Some tactile gestures including kissing are discussed, for example in Palmer's chapter (2001: 142–43), and in the editor's own contribution to the volume (Davidson 2001: 75–78). However, kissing is not explored *as an act of touch* here, but rather as part of the wider collection of body movements in the medieval actor's repertoire. The word 'gesture' is largely avoided in this thesis precisely because it lacks the specificity of 'touch'.

[3] As a caveat, the first uses in the second edition of the *OED* will probably be antedated when they are revised.
[4] On gesture, see also Bolens 2012.

Late Medieval English Theatre: A Corpus

Having defined my terminology, I will now delineate the literary boundaries of this thesis. Specifically, I will outline the linguistic and chronological parameters of the term *late medieval English theatre*, and consider the play form in this historical context. In brief, all of the texts in my corpus meet the following three criteria—though, for reasons of space, not all texts that meet these three criteria are discussed in my thesis:

1. The text is predominantly in English, though some parts such as stage directions may be in Latin.
2. The text was evidently designed for dramatic performance, as explained in incipits and/or indicated by features such as speaker names and stage directions. However, some such texts may also have suited private reading. For example, the N-Town manuscript (LBL MS Cotton Vespasian D.8) lent itself to both reception contexts. Additions to the manuscript relating to stage management in the first quarter of the sixteenth century strongly suggest that some of the plays were ultimately produced (Cameron and Karl 1965/1966: 64n21; Johnston 2014: 112; Kahrl and Meredith 1977: xxiv; Spector ed 1991: II, 542–43). Conversely, the manuscript contains marginal notes that would have been more appropriate for a meditative reader, notably genealogies (Greg 1914: 143; Fletcher 1981: 117).
3. The original composition of the text can be dated to between approximately 1370 and 1550. However, the process of revision, reconstitution, and performance may extend into the second half of the sixteenth century.

A comment must be made here about chronology. On the one hand, 1550 might seem a late terminus for a discussion of medieval theatre, not least because it includes the first

two decades of the Reformation. Yet 1550 is also not late *enough* to fully account for the complex afterlives of several medieval plays. For example, the last known performance of the York Plays was in 1569, 'though at Whitsun rather than Corpus Christi, the feast having been officially expunged from the calendar in 1548' (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, xxxiv). The Chester plays originally date from the fifteenth century, but the earliest extant copy of the full cycle is from 1591, and the play had already undergone revision by this point (Coletti 2007: 531). The Towneley manuscript also evidently postdates my 1550 terminus, though scholars once mistakenly believed that it was much older—a shift in scholarship that has recently been reviewed by Murray McGillivray (2014: 50–51). In brief, California, Huntington MS HM 1 now seems to represent an 'artificial cycle' compiled at some point between 1553 and 1558 (Palmer 2002: 96, 108). However, 'most of the plays were likely written much earlier' (Epp ed 2018: 1). Peter Happé, for example, suggests that the 'origins' of the Towneley Plays 'appear to lie in the fifteenth century, perhaps in the first half' (2007: 25). In this context, it is relevant that there is evidence of textual borrowing between the York and Towneley Plays, which took place 'not necessarily on one single occasion, or indeed in one direction' (Happé 2007: 25).

Although I refer to the texts in my corpus as '*late medieval* English plays' and demarcate a boundary of 1370–1550, I recognize that many of the texts in my corpus participated in a turbulent and transitional period in English history, politics, and religion—namely where the 'medieval' and the 'early modern' blur and intersect. For comparison, Greg Walker's *Medieval Drama*: *An Anthology* (2000) similarly chooses the 1550s as a terminus. This is done 'both to demonstrate the longevity of medieval dramatic techniques and preoccupations and in order to reflect the transitional nature of drama generally throughout this period' (Walker ed 2000: viii).

Given how challenging it is to draw a line between medieval and early modern theatre, it should hardly be surprising that scholars are increasingly stressing the importance of putting the two theatrical traditions in dialogue (Clopper 2001; Cooper 2010; Happé and Hüsken eds 2016; Zysk 2017). Throughout this thesis, I find it helpful to occasionally pause and look ahead to early modern theatrical culture, making brief but thought-provoking comparisons between touch in medieval drama and what came after. This is emphatically *not* a cross-period study that gives equal weight to both medieval and early modern theatrical traditions; my focus is the former. Nevertheless, remaining alert to areas of rupture and continuity between medieval and early modern culture throws into sharp relief the characteristic features of touch in my corpus.

Thus far, I have defined my understanding of late medieval English theatre with respect to language, form, and date, and justified comparative reference to plays that fall outside these parameters. Finally, genre must be considered. This thesis focuses primarily though not exclusively on biblical plays. The Bible, and the Gospels in particular, are full of touch. Christ restores the sight of a blind man by touching his eyes (Mark 8:22–25). The bleeding woman is healed when she touches Christ's clothes (Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34, Luke 8:43–48). Christ washes the disciples' feet (John 13:5). Judas betrays Christ with a kiss (Matthew 26:48–49; Mark 14:44–45; Luke 22:47–48). A soldier drives a lance into Christ's side (John 19:34). Joseph of Arimathea takes Christ's wounded body from the cross and wraps it in linen cloths (Matthew 27:57–60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:50–54; John 19:38–40). Mary Magdalene wants to touch the resurrected Christ when he appears to her in the garden, but is forbidden to do so (John 20:17). Doubting Thomas inserts his hand into Christ's wounded body in order to confirm the Resurrection (John 20:24–29). Many of these moments of touch were dramatized in medieval England. Consequently, biblical plays offer a particularly rich corpus for study.

In this context, the main texts to be discussed are the York Plays and the N-Town Plays, but the Towneley Plays, the Chester Plays, and the Coventry Plays will also be considered. For the purposes of this thesis, the phrase 'biblical drama' also encompasses the plays in the above collections that are based on apocryphal stories.

Beyond biblical drama, I will consider the Bodley *Burial*, a play probably intended for performance in a church and yet distinct from liturgical theatre. Comparative reference will also be made to the Digby *Mary Magdalene* (a saint's play), the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (the only surviving English miracle play), and John Bale's *Three Laws* (an interlude). In the conclusion, I broaden my scope yet further to consider touch in morality plays, specifically *Everyman*, *Mankind*, and *The Castle of Perseverance*.

Far from homogenizing the diverse plays in my corpus, I remain sensitive to their unique contexts. The plays in this thesis come from a wide range of locations, from Yorkshire to East Anglia. My corpus includes short, freestanding theatrical texts as well as large play collections. I compare plays designed for different times of the liturgical year, from Easter to Corpus Christi. There are plays from different dramatic modes, including processional street theatre, place-and-scaffold production, and performance inside a church. Not all of the plays in my corpus were necessarily intended for the laity. Finally, while some plays in my corpus can be firmly tied to civic records, the performance history of others remains elusive. In spite of these differences, I will show that focusing on touch allows these disparate texts to speak to each other in new ways. But how do we find evidence for touch in medieval theatre, both on and off the stage?

Finding Touch in Late Medieval English Theatre

Much evidence for touch on the medieval stage is encoded in stage directions. Broadly speaking, there are two types of stage direction in medieval English theatre: implicit and

explicit. Philip Butterworth has recently stressed that the line between the two can be blurred, but he offers the following general definitions:

> [An implicit stage direction] may not be distinguishable from the text of the play, for it is embedded in it as content. The explicit stage direction, however, exists outside the imagined world of the text and determines specific practical requirements of players and/or others who present the work in performance.
>
> (Butterworth 2014: 3)

The difference between implicit and explicit stage directions—and the implications for our understanding of touch on stage—is well demonstrated by contrasting the betrayal of Christ in the York and N-Town plays. In the Bible, the betrayal of Christ famously involves a kiss:

> And he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he; hold him fast.' And forthwith coming to Jesus he said, 'Hail, Rabbi.' And he kissed him.
>
> (Matthew 26:48–49)

Although there are no explicit stage directions in the York *Agony in the Garden and the Betrayal*, a kiss is implicit in the following verbal exchange:

> JUDAS: I wolde aske you a kysse, maistir, and youre willes were,
> For all my loue and my likyng is holy vppon ȝou layde.
> JESUS: Full hartely, Judas, haue it even here,
> For with þis kissing is mans sone betrayed.
>
> (28.250–53)

By contrast, the N-Town *Betrayal* play contains an explicit stage direction indicating that Judas should kiss Christ:

> JUDAS: Welcome, Jesu, my maystyr dere,
> I haue þe sowth in many a place.
> I am ful glad I fynd þe here,
> For I wyst nevyr wher þu wace.
>
> *Here Judas kyssyth Jesus; and anoon all the Jewys come abowth hym and ley handys on hym and pullyn hym as þei were wode […]*
>
> (28.101–104s.d.)

In a production of either the York or N-Town *Betrayal* plays, it is reasonable to assume that a kiss took place on stage. However, the timing of the kiss is much clearer in the N-

Town text. The deictic 'Here' in the line 'Here Judas kyssyth Jesus' has a temporal function, indicating that the kiss should occur after Judas has finished speaking (28.104.sd). In the York version, by contrast, the kiss could conceivably occur anywhere during Jesus's speech or immediately after it. Moreover, in the N-Town *Betrayal,* it is much more obvious how the actors playing the soliders—here referred to as 'Jewys'—are supposed to respond with their own sense of touch: they 'ley handys on hym' (28.104.sd). In both the York and N-Town *Betrayal*, however, we do not have the full picture of touch on stage. Many elements could have varied from performance to performance. For example, how long did the kiss last? Did Judas approach from Christ's left, the 'sinister' side? Did Christ and Judas make eye contact? All of these factors would have had an impact on the presentation of the scene.

Exploring the role of touch in audience experience is also necessarily a speculative process, though here again there is thought-provoking evidence to open up discussion. For example, civic records from York provide a useful insight into the press of crowds during Corpus Christi performances, which I discuss in Chapter Five. Of course, as McGavin and Walker have recently stressed, every spectator would have had a unique experience, depending especially on their position in the audience (2016: 15). Thus, I find it prudent to structure discussions of medieval spectatorship around the idea of *potential* experience.

We might be able to hypothesize what spectators could touch, but how far is it possible to determine their responses to such tactile experiences, or indeed their reactions to moments of touch witnessed on stage? As Margaret Rogerson summarizes, medieval theatre scholars have had different approaches to audience response in the last few decades:

> Peter Meredith warned in the mid 1990s that no matter how much scholars think they know about medieval theatre 'we can't know how what was

> being played was perceived by its audience', but […] in 2008, John McKinnell, a very experienced director of medieval plays, was much more positive, claiming that although 'we cannot repeat the performances of past ages … it is a mistake to exaggerate the differences between medieval and modern audiences—human nature' he says, 'does not alter all that much'.
> (Rogerson 2009: 19, citing McKinnell 2008: 321 and Meredith 1996: 109)

In my view, Peter Meredith is excessively sceptical here, whereas John McKinnell is too generous. Some middle ground should thus be found. Human nature may remain fairly stable over time, but it is nevertheless culturally contingent. Consequently, the most productive hypotheses about medieval audience response are those grounded in the socio-cultural context in which the plays would have been received. Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that medieval spectators may have experienced a range of different possible responses depending on factors such as their age, gender, and personality.

For comparison, during a performance of the York *Crucifixion* in September 2018, I found myself standing among an audience whose responses to the material were strongly divergent. A group to my left were laughing at the comic spectacle of the soldiers struggling to nail Christ to the cross—or perhaps they were laughing because the play provoked discomfort that they found hard to process. In any case, a spectator on my right clearly considered their laughter to be an inappropriate response to the material. She turned and tersely asked them, 'do you think this is funny?' The implication in her tone was that quietness and solemnity were demanded by the agonizing moment of touch unfolding before our eyes. Might the York *Crucifixion* have divided medieval audiences in a similar way? We should remain alert to the possibility that the York *Crucifixion* allowed for a spectrum of different responses from its medieval spectators, ranging from laughter at the obvious incompetency of the soldiers to solemnity in the face of the tactile suffering endured by Christ.

For late medieval spectators, the latter response would have been especially resonant with affective piety. This popular mode of devotion, promoted across Europe

between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, can be defined as intense compassion for Christ's life, suffering, and death (Atkinson 1983: 129–56; Levert 1997; McBain 2016; McNamer 2010; Rogerson 2012). In this thesis, affective piety is just one framework through which I contextualize my discussion of medieval audience response to touch both on stage and off. Others will include tactile conventions in medieval gynecology and prevailing medieval stereotypes about Jewish touch, which are relevant to chapters one and two respectively.

Methodology

The various methods for finding touch in medieval theatre, outlined in the previous section, represent only part of the methodology employed in this thesis. There is also the question of how to approach these moments of touch. In this respect, I adopt a threefold methodology. Specifically, I approach touch in medieval theatre through a visual, a material, and a linguistic lens.

Firstly, my thesis attempts to understand moments of touch on stage with comparative reference to medieval art, including stained glass, manuscript illumination, and sculpture. Early attempts to explain the interconnectivity of late medieval drama and art revolved around the idea that representations of biblical history in sculptural reliefs and paintings were modelled on plays. This theory was first articulated over a century ago by Émile Mâle in his study of French art ([1908] 1986: 40–48). It was later applied to English visual culture by M. D. Anderson (1963: 5, 15). However, Mâle and Anderson's ideas have since been re-evaluated by Clifford Davidson, who stresses that parallels can be found because drama and the visual arts were 'in the business of visualizing the same sacred history' (Davidson 1984: 3). This principle has informed much subsequent scholarship. For example, Stevenson likewise abandons any notion of establishing the

direction of influence (2010: 81). Building on this idea, my thesis argues that moments of touch in the Bible found expression through different yet often complementary visual strategies in the art and drama of late medieval England. Where the York Plays are concerned, my discussions are indebted to a valuable list of visual art in York relevant to contemporary plays (Davidson and O'Connor 1978).

Secondly, I adopt a material approach to moments of touch on stage and in audience experience. The material turn developed between the 1980s and 1990s, growing out of the fields of archaeology and social anthropology (Hicks 2010: 28). In its wake, materially informed readings of medieval literature and culture have become increasingly popular (recently, see Adams and Bradbury eds 2017; Hamling and Richardson eds 2010; Perkins ed 2015). The study of medieval theatre is no exception to this trend. Early studies of theatre and material culture concentrated on objects that were physically present on stage, for example pyrotechnics and costumes (Butterworth 1999; Ogden 1999). More recently, there has been a shift towards exploring objects that are alluded to or otherwise implicated in performance, even if not physically present on stage. For example, Jamie Beckett (2017b) has convincingly argued that reading the Towneley and York 'Shepherds' plays in light of *Agnus Dei* discs helps to expose new layers of meaning in the texts. In a similar vein, I will consider how moments of touch on stage implicate objects in material culture more broadly, including books, amulets, and relics. My thesis also extends a material approach to theatre yet further by examining objects encountered by the *spectator* during performance, not just actors. This includes the shoes and the paving stones beneath spectators' feet.

Thirdly, this thesis approaches touch in medieval theatre from a linguistic perspective. In this introduction, I have stressed that the language of touch has a complex history. Accordingly, I use lexical analysis in this thesis to understand touch in the plays

in my corpus, contextualizing the semantic range of tactile (and non-tactile) words in Middle English and medieval Latin with reference to the *MED*, *OED*, and *DMLBS.*

The Medieval Touch Paradox

At the heart of this thesis lies a paradox in medieval attitudes towards touch, one that to my knowledge has never been discussed. On the one hand, the sense of touch was a mechanism through which to connect with the sacred on earth. Nevertheless, the sense of touch also needed to be shut down because it was unclean, threatening to contaminate the purity of the soul, the sacred, and the surroundings. My thesis argues that medieval biblical theatre was perfectly positioned to explore this touch paradox on stage. Several plays also put their spectators in a position to experience this touch paradox first hand.

To open up my discussion of this paradox, I will now introduce a little-known poem on the Passion, *The Hours of the Cross*. This short text is structured around the canonical hours. The first five hours are associated with hearing (Matins), sight (Prime), smell (Terce), touch (Sext), and taste (None). The final two hours, Evensong and Compline, are associated with consent and free will. The *Hours of the Cross* is extant only in one witness: LBL MS 37049, a northern English devotional miscellany dated to c.1460–1470 by Kathleen Scott (1996: II, 193). The poem is squeezed onto one folio (fol. 68v), where the text is wrapped around a set of seven accompanying illustrations (figure 3). Jessica Brantley refers to this kind of image in MS 37049 as an 'imagetext', a term she borrows from W. J. T. Mitchell (Brantley 2007: 5; Mitchell 1994: 87–103).

Marlene Villalobos Hennessy (2004) has edited this poem and started to unpack its implications for our understanding of the complex role of the senses in late medieval England. *The Hours of the Cross*, she argues, invites the reader to 'use their own senses as pathways to the sacred', while also 'stressing mortification of the five senses'

(Hennessy 2004: 228–29). For example, she notes that the section on vision invites readers to 'behald […] & se' Christ's suffering during the Flagellation, endorsing 'a very specific type of visual piety' with respect to either real or imagined images of Christ (Hennessy 2004: 239). Yet sight is not just a means of affectively connecting with Christ's suffering; in the same stanza, '[t]he reader is instructed to keep "ylle" from "þi sight" ' (Hennessy 2004: 240). He or she should 'remain on guard to avoid the sight of tempting or forbidden persons, body parts, or objects' (Hennessy 2004: 240–41).

The idea that the medieval senses were a pathway to the sacred but also required mortification has been reiterated in more recent scholarship (Arnold 2018: 22). But what are the implications of this paradox for touch specifically? This topic requires further investigation. Hennessey is right that *The Hours of the Cross* is 'a very important source for a history of the senses in late medieval England' (2004: 233). However, the full potential of this source has yet to be realized. Extending Hennessy's work, I will now argue that *The Hours of the Cross* is a powerful cultural prism, capable of shedding valuable light on medieval Christian ambivalence towards the sense of touch as both a means of connecting with the holy, yet also a source of physical and spiritual contamination. The relevant passage on touch in *The Hours of the Cross* is as follows:

> At þe howre of sext in hye
> Was Crist crucyfyed with vylany.
> Take hede of his paynes smert
> Þat it pytefully perche þi hert.
>
> Take hede how I was towchyd with paynes smert.
> And with a spere towched was my hert.
> Þerfore fro vnclene towchyng
> Þou kepe þe in al thynge.
> (Hennessy 2004: 251)

Hennessy suggests that the phrase 'vnclene towchyng' is 'implicitly sexual, reminding one of the anxious ending of the *Ancrene Wisse* that exhorts, "hold your hands within your windows" ' (Hennessy 2004: 245). She does not elaborate further. Certainly, the

phrase ‘vnclene towchyng’ carries important sexual connotations. To be a virgin in late medieval England was to be unblemished by sexual sin; any tactile act that threatened sexual purity was unclean. Consider, for example, the language of cleanness and filth in the following passage of *Hali Meithad*, a thirteenth-century prose text praising virginity:

> ha forsoken for Him euch eorthlich mon ant heolden ham *cleane* áá from fleschliche *fulthen* i bodi ant i breoste
>
> they [i.e. virgins] forsook for him [i.e. Christ] every earthly man and kept themselves *clean* forever from fleshly *filth* in the body and in the heart
>
> (Huber and Robertson eds 2016: 202; emphasis and text in square brackets added)

However, the potential implications of the phrase ‘vnclene towchyng’ do not end here. The Middle English adjective ‘unclene’ has many different semantic nuances. Here are some of the definitions offered by the *MED:*

> Soiled, unwashed, dirty; also, habitually or naturally foul; polluted, filthy
> of a sore: infected, suppurating
> Morally blemished, sinful
> morally impure, unchaste; immoral
> of thoughts, desires, etc.: not conducive to spiritual health
> not ritually purified, ceremonially unclean
> Defiled by contact with the sinful
>
> (*MED* s.v. ‘unclene, adj.’ senses 1.a, 1.d, 2.a, 2.b, 2.c, 3.b, 4)

The adjective ‘unclean’, then, encompasses many different states of dirtiness including physical, moral, sexual, and ritual impurity. This semantic richness is deftly explored in the Middle English poem *Cleanness*. Early on in the poem, literal dirtiness is a symbol for moral and spiritual blemishes. This is evident especially in the following lines:

> Forþy hyȝ not to heuen in haterez totorne,
> Ne in þe harlatez hod, and handez vnwaschen.
>
> (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 113, lines 33–34)
>
> Therefore do not hurry to heaven in ragged clothes, nor in the hood of a beggar and with hands unwashed.
>
> (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 29, lines [33–34] of accompanying CD-ROM pdf file)

Later in the poem, the desecration of holy vessels is explored as another source of uncleanness, for which Belshazzar’s feast serves as an appropriate exemplum. Belshazzar furnishes his guests with vessels looted from the First Temple by his father,

Nebuchadnezzar. Conspicuously, the poet explains that these objects were once blessed ‘wyth bischopes hondes’, i.e. a deeply reverent form of touch appropriate to the sacred objects (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 170, line 1445). Belshazzar, by contrast, fails to treat the vessels with the tactile respect they deserve. He allows his guests to drink wine from them: each ‘haled of þe cuppe’ (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 173, line 1520). The editors rightly translate this phrase as ‘drained the cup’ (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 63, line [1520] on accompanying CD-ROM pdf file). However, I wish to draw attention to the fact that the Middle English verb ‘halen’ is an intensely tactile one, literally meaning ‘to drag or pull (sb. or sth)’ (*MED* s.v. ‘halen, v.’ sense 1.a.a). It is an act of touch, then, that desecrates the sacred vessels at Belshazzar’s feast—and it greatly displeased God to see his treasures so ‘fouled’, i.e. defiled (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 172, line 1495).

Of course, the sexual aspects of uncleanness are also a major concern for the *Cleanness*-Poet. Consider the ‘vnclene’ homoerotic behaviour in Sodom:

> Vch male matz his mach a man as hymseluen,
> And fylter folyly in fere on femmalez wyse.
> […]
> Now haf þay skyfted My skyl and scorned natwre,
> And henttez hem in heþyng an vsage *vnclene*.
> Hem to smyte for þat *smod* smartly I þenk,
> Þat wyȝez schal be by hem war, worlde withouten ende.
> (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 141, lines 695–712; emphasis added)

> each male makes his mate a man like himself, and they join together foolishly in the manner of a female. […] Now they have changed my decree and scorned nature, and in contempt take for themselves an *unclean* custom. I intend to smite them severely for that *filth*, so that men will be warned by them, for ever and ever.
> (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 44, lines [695–712] of accompanying CD-ROM pdf file; emphasis added)

Strikingly, the *Cleanness*-poet exempts heterosexual encounters from accusations of ‘smod’ (i.e. ‘filth’), thereby ignoring how ‘everything he has said about the repulsive,

slimy nature of homosexual activity had been said elsewhere—frequently—about heterosexual activity' (Calabrese and Eliason 1995: 268–69).

Given that the word 'unclean' had many different meanings in Middle English, then by implication there were different kinds of 'vnclene towchyng' that should be avoided by the ideal Christian in late medieval England. Significantly, *The Hours of the Cross* advises the reader to avoid unclean touching 'in al thynge' (Hennessy 2004: 251). This suggests that there could be multiple kinds of touch at stake—including, but not limited to, sexual activity. Consider the following examples. Touching and especially wearing dirty clothes was thought to cause leprosy, an affliction of both the body and the soul (Rawcliffe 2006: 226–27). Jews were understood as 'a source of moral contagion', who thus needed to be kept at a distance (Woolgar 2006: 36). Although menstrual blood was not universally coded as impure and contaminating in medieval culture—as I discuss in Chapter Two—there were certainly contexts in which contact with menstruating women was unclean. John Arderne's *Fistula in Ano*, a surgical text composed in the 1370s, advises that 'Þe breþ of a menstruous woman noyeþ vnto woundeȝ if sche neȝen nere', i.e. a menstruating woman's breath will impair the healing of a wound if she comes near the patient (Power ed 1910: 88; Green 2005: 57). Menstruating women, according to Arderne, could contaminate the very air that they touched.

Whether the *Hours of the Cross*-poet had any of these examples in mind is unclear and unknowable. Nevertheless, these acts all belong to the category of 'unclean touch' condemned in medieval England. On reflection, it is hardly surprising that touch became especially associated with uncleanness when we remember that medieval commentators across Europe linked this sense with the element of earth (see pp. 9–10 above). Touch was, quite literally, the dirtiest part of the sensorium.

It is useful to approach the topic of unclean touch with reference to Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*. For Douglas, dirt is a way of structuring experience: '[e]liminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment' ([1966] 2002: 2). More specifically, Douglas argues that 'ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience' ([1966] 2002: 5). In my view, the sense of touch was 'untidy' for medieval Christians because it threatened the soul and the surroundings, yet was *also* potentially highly sacred. It was imperative not to eschew touch completely: this sense offered a vital pathway to God.

It is helpful here to return to the passage on touch in *The Hours of the Cross.* The reader is urged to take heed of Christ's 'paynes smert' (Hennessy 2004: 251). An image of the Crucifixion provides a potent visual stimulus for an empathetic understanding of Christ's suffering, which is flagged by the arrow in figure 3. This imagetext should be understood within the context of affective piety, which, as explained above (pp. 20–21), involved intense compassion for Christ's suffering body. The sense of touch was a crucial means of accessing Christ's suffering body both literally and imaginatively in medieval culture. *Ancrene Wisse*, for example, urges its anchoritic audience to imagine themselves physically climbing into Christ's side wound:

> flih to his wunden. Muchel he luuede us þe lette makien swucche þurles in him forte huden us in. Creop in ham wið þi þoht—ne beoð ha al opene? (Millett ed 2005: I, 111).

> flee to his wounds. He must have loved us very much to let such holes be pierced in him to hide us in. Creep into them with your thought—are they not all open? (Millett trans 2009: 111)

In this passage, which has also been treated elsewhere (McCullogh 2010: 27–28), Christ's side wound serves as a tangible place of refuge in the anchorites' imagination.

Further, texts such as the *Meditaciones vite Christi* urged readers to imagine themselves physically present during the life of Christ:

> Then kiss the feet of the child Jesus [*osculare pedes pueri Iesu*] lying in the manger, and ask our Lady to hand him to you and even allow you to hold him [*accipere*]. Take him and hold him fast in your arms [*inter brachia tua retine*]; gaze on his face. Kiss him with loving reverence [*reuerenter deosculare*] and delight confidently in him.
>
> (Translation after Taney, Miller, and Stallings-Taney eds and trans 2000: 28; Latin after Stallings-Taney ed 1997: 35)

The *Meditaciones vite Christi* is currently dated to c.1300 and attributed to a Franciscan named Jacobus de Sancto Geminiano (Tóth and Falvay 2014: 93). It was translated into Middle English by Nicholas Love c.1410. His version, entitled *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, was hugely popular in late medieval England, to judge from the fact that it survives in over fifty manuscripts and was printed by both Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde on multiple occasions (Sargent ed 1992: lxxii–lxxxv).

The Book of Margery Kempe (c.1430s) clearly espouses the principles of the *Meditations* tradition. In Book 6, for example, Margery imagines herself swaddling the Christ child at the Nativity, making sure to be gentle and not to bind his body too tightly: 'Lord, I schal fare fayr wyth ȝow; I schal not byndyn ȝow soor' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 19). For Margery, touching Christ's body in the mind is just as potent as touching his body in reality, which becomes especially clear in Book 85. Here, Margery holds 'hys toos in hir hand' and 'to hir felyng it weryn as it had ben very flesch & bon' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 208).

The Book of Margery Kempe also serves to demonstrate that imagined tactile encounters with Christ's body could have a distinctly erotic dimension, redolent of the sensual language of the Song of Songs tradition (cf. Salih 2001: 226).

> Þerfore most I nedys be homly wyth þe & lyn in þi bed wyth þe. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, & þu mayst boldly, whan þu art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, & as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be louyd as a sone schuld be louyd wyth þe modyr & wil þat þu loue me, dowtyr, as a good ^wife^ owyth to loue hir husbonde. & Þerfor þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as swetly as thow wylt.
>
> (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 90)

The relationship between Christ and Margery takes on several different forms in this passage: Margery is simultaneously Christ's daughter, mother, and wife. However, it is the third of these roles that is most relevant to me here. When Margery is urged to take Christ in bed 'as for þi weddyd husbond', the physical language of sex is used to convey a sense of profound spiritual union with Christ. The encounter thus belongs to the medieval tradition of 'mystical eroticism', a term I borrow from Karma Lochrie (1997: 182).

Crucially, the sense of touch could offer a physical as well as an imaginative pathway to Christ's body. Most obviously, the doctrine of transubstantiation held that the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist became Christ's flesh and blood. Taking communion, which most lay people did once a year at Easter (Duffy 2005: 93; Rubin 1991: 70), was therefore to touch Christ's body with the tongue. This is consistent with the medieval understanding of taste as a form of touch, discussed above (pp. 10–11). Further, touching something that merely *resembled* Christ could allow people to feel as if they were physically touching his body. For example, Margery Kempe would often take 'childeryn owt of þe moderys armys & a kyssed hem in þe stede of Criste' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 86). The same principle applied for sculptures and images of Christ, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four.

Yet touch did not always offer an uninterrupted pathway to the sacred. Christ's body oscillated between the tangible and the intangible in medieval culture. Here again, the Mass is instructive. Communicants were able to touch Christ's body with their tongue when taking communion, but they were not permitted to do so with the hands:

> Even at less elaborate 'low Masses,' where the consecration would have been performed at an altar 'within arm's reach' of lay participants, lay people were indeed obligated to keep the Host at arm's length: only priests were actually permitted to touch the Host or even the sacred vessels with their bare hands.
>
> (Cushman 2017: 283, quoting Duffy 2005: 112).

In other words, there was a politics of tactile access to Christ's body.

More broadly, Jesus was in many ways out of reach for lay people in medieval England. Medieval saints remained physically present on earth in the form of bodily relics such as fingernails, bones, and hairs. Conversely, as Christ's body ascended to heaven, he left behind almost no bodily relics—with a notable exception being the Sacred Foreskin (Palazzo 2005). Instead, the relics left behind by Christ almost exclusively took the form of contact relics such as the Crown of Thorns, i.e. objects that had touched him during his lifetime. If these relics helped to make Christ's absent body seem present on earth, they did not necessarily make him tangible. As Sarah Blick has noted, '[m]embers of the lower classes' were permitted to look but 'rarely […] to touch beautifully crafted reliquaries containing famous relics' (2014: 110). Compare also the language of Caxton's translation of the *Legenda Aurea*, printed in 1483. He explains that Antwerp's relic of the Sacred Foreskin is *showed* to the congregation annually: 'there I knowe well þat on trynyte sonday they shewe it with grete reuerence' (de Voragine 1483: fol. viiir). Not all relics of Christ's body were off limits, however. In some cases, 'genuine replicas' democratized tactile access (Hamburger 1998: 317). For example, many personal devotional copies were made of the Veronica, a cloth relic housed in Rome that was famously imprinted with Christ's face (Hamburger 1998: 322–28). Thus, Christ's body in late medieval culture constantly oscillated between the tangible and the intangible. The Virgin Mary's body posed a similar issue, as I will discuss in Chapter One.

Notably, physical contact with holy bodies and relics was believed to promote healing in medieval England. For example, the 'water of Canterbury', a diluted form of St Thomas Becket's blood, supposedly cured a myriad of ailments when applied to the skin or even consumed (Barr 2018: 241; Jordan 2009: 483; Koopmans 2016: 536–37). The miraculous liquid was often stored in containers known as *ampullae*, which were easily

carriable and thus enabled people to reap the tangible benfit of Becket's blood relic even beyond Canterbury (Barr 2018: 240, 242; Jordan 2009: 483–84; Koopmans 2016: 556).

Further, from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards, the *foramina* tomb became popular. Such tombs contained several holes allowing pilgrims to climb in, touch, and kiss the slab covering the saint's remains (Barr 2014: 27; Crook 2011: 190–204; Woolgar 2006: 42–43; Jørgensen 2015: 54–61). The stained glass window from Canterbury Cathedral in figure 4 depicts a leprous pilgrim named Richard Sunieve bending down to kiss St Thomas Becket's now-lost *foramina* tomb (Caviness 1981: 194–95; Koopmans 2016: 537–38, 554–55). Much like Becket's relic water—which, in fact, a monk is preparing in this same image—the touch of a *foramina* tomb was invested with healing power. For example, placing the hands in the *foramina* tomb of St Osmund in Salisbury Cathedral was particularly associated with curing madness (Crook 2011: 200). Remarkably, St Osmund's *foramina* tomb is still extant (figures 5–6).

Touch, then, was not just a pathway to the sacred; it was also a pathway to sacred *healing*. There were several precedents for this in the Bible. In the gospels, Christ cures a leper just by touching him (Matthew 8:2–4; Mark 1:40–42; Luke 5:12–13), while a woman with 'an issue of blood' is cured when she touches the hem of Christ's garment (Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–29; Luke 8:43–44). Monarchs, who were believed to be divinely ordained, were likewise thought to have a healing touch in medieval Europe. The Royal Touch, as it is commonly known, was thought to be especially effective against scrofula, i.e. lymphadenopathy of the neck (Bloch 1973 repr. 2015; Thomas 2005).

Thus far, I have used *The Hours of the Cross* as a starting point to build up a nuanced picture of touch in late medieval England. On the one hand, the sense of touch was a source of uncleanness: anything and anyone could potentially be defiled through physical contact. Yet touch was also an important pathway to the sacred, a way of

accessing holy bodies, objects, and cures. Throughout my thesis, I refer to this phenomenon as 'the touch paradox'. Where does medieval biblical theatre sit in relation to this paradox? This question lies at the heart of my thesis. I argue that medieval biblical plays in particular were in a powerful position to expose, to interrogate, and even to resolve the touch paradox on stage, teaching lessons about good and bad touch in the process. This is particularly true of biblical plays that represented or otherwise echoed the Incredulity of Thomas, the apostle who wanted to touch Christ's body in order to believe in the Resurrection. Further, I will argue that some medieval plays created a public space in which audience members could actively participate in both sides of the touch paradox. Putting Christ on stage, whether in the form of an actor or a moving sculpture, had the effect of bringing his suffering body closer than ever before, sometimes even within touching distance. Yet theatre necessarily involves the crowding and intermingling of spectators' bodies, especially in settings where there is standing room only. This created a rife opportunity for illicit behaviour such as unclean sexual touch.

Opening up the Medieval Touch Paradox: The York *Incredulity of Thomas*

I will now offer a study of the York *Incredulity of Thomas* play to open up my argument further. In brief, I suggest that Doubting Thomas's encounter with Christ's wounded body in this play could have offered a profound endorsement of touch as a mechanism for encountering the divine, specifically symbolizing communion. Yet at the same time, the geographical circumstances of performance risked tingeing Thomas's penetration of Christ's body with sexual uncleanness. In medieval York, Doubting Thomas could thus, quite literally, put his finger on the tension between sacred and unclean touch. Not only will my reading of the York *Incredulity* open up the relationship between theatre and the medieval touch paradox, but it will also furnish me with a conceptual prism through

which to guide the rest of my thesis. Each of the five chapters that follow will use Doubting Thomas as a 'touchstone', so to speak, for the medieval touch paradox, a line of argument that I will introduce further in the chapter summary below.

The Scriveners' *Incredulity of Thomas* is the forty-first pageant in the York Corpus Christi Plays. Most of the York Plays are extant only in the Register (LBL MS Additional 35290). This manuscript, compiled c.1476–1477, is evidently an official civic document designed to provide 'a full record of the text of the cycle' (Beadle ed 2009–2011: I, xii, xxi). However, the York *Incredulity* also survives in a second copy: YCA Acc 104/G.1. Also known as the Sykes manuscript, this text was evidently a prompt copy owned by the Scriveners themselves and copied in the early sixteenth century (Badir 2018: 130–31; Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 395; Cawley 1952: 48). Even though these two copies were made several decades apart, the text of the York *Incredulity* remained remarkably stable throughout this period (compare 41.1–198 with A-2.1–196). The play dramatizes the events of John 20:24–29:

> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord [*Vidimus Dominum*].' But he said to them, 'Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my hand into his side [*mittam manum meam in latus eius*], I will not believe.' And after eight days again his disciples were within and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, 'Peace be to you.' Then he saith to Thomas, 'Put in thy finger hither, and see my hands, and bring hither thy hand [*adfer manum tuam*], and put it into my side [*mitte in latus meum*]; and be not faithless but believing.' Thomas answered and said to him, 'My Lord and my God.' Jesus saith to him, 'Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed [*Quia vidisti me, Thoma, credidisti*]; blessed are they that have not seen and have believed.'

The story was popular in medieval biblical theatre, also featuring in the Towneley Plays (play 25), the N-Town Plays (play 38), and the Chester Plays (play 19).

The various medieval English plays about Doubting Thomas have attracted some scholarly attention. For Chester Norman Scoville, the Thomas plays 'demonstrate the limitations of persuasive rhetoric' (2004: 10). Garrett Epp uses the Towneley Thomas

play to explore 'the relationships between faith, authority, and gender in late medieval England' (2007: 165). Specifically, Epp suggests that the prologue of the Towneley Thomas play was 'written to critique institutional and biblical misogyny and antifeminism' (2007: 176). Helen Cushman has foregrounded the N-Town and Chester Doubting Thomas plays, using them to explore the relationship between 'male clerical learning' and 'knowledge derived from the senses' (2017: 281). Patricia Badir has focused the significance of scripture and script in the York *Incredulity*, highlighting that the play is 'deeply invested, as one would expect of a text assigned to scriveners, in writing as a means to confirm truth' (2018: 126). To an extent, all four of these discussions thus use Doubting Thomas plays to consider authority and/or knowledge in late medieval England. Touch, where discussed, is generally subservient to these concerns. My study, however, approaches Doubting Thomas from a different perspective: I use the York *Incredulity* to unpack the paradoxical status of touch in late medieval English culture, simultaneously laying the foundations for the apostle to become a sensory leitmotif in the rest of my thesis.

The plot of the York *Incredulity* can be summarized as follows. Peter, John, and Jacob enter and lament the death of Christ, whose suffering they repeatedly attribute to the Jews. Christ then appears, only to vanish immediately. The apostles ponder this curious sight, but Jacob attributes it to 'vanyté in oure þought' (41.29). Christ returns and repeatedly invites the apostles present to touch him in implicit stage directions:

DEUS: Behalde and se myn handis and feete,
And grathely gropes my woundes wete
(41.50–51)

DEUS: F[e]l[y]s me grathely euerilkone
(41.56)

DEUS: Gropes me nowe
(41.58)

Note here how the sense of touch is privileged over sight: the apostles are not convinced by a fleeting glimpse of Christ's body, but *are* convinced by their tactile encounter with his wounds. This represents a departure from the biblical source, in which the apostles only claim 'We have seen the Lord [*Vidimus Dominum*]'; they did not touch him (John 20:25). The York *Incredulity* was not the only version of the Doubting Thomas story in late medieval English biblical theatre to make this addition. In the Towneley version, Christ similarly invites all the apostles to touch him (25.133).

Returning to the York *Incredulity*, the apostles then eat with Christ. Thomas, who has thus far been absent, enters and laments the death of Christ. The apostles ask where Thomas has been, explaining that Christ appeared and 'lete vs fele his woundes fyue' (41.141). Thomas refuses to believe their story and demands to put his finger 'Riȝt in his syde' (41.162). Christ reappears and invites Thomas to touch him in another series of implicit stage directions:

DEUS: Putte forthe thy fyngir to me nowe.
(41.171)

DEUS: Here in my side putte in þi hande,
And fele my woundis, and vndirstande
Þat þis is I,
[…]
(41.176–78)

The Chester version goes a step further, having an explicit stage direction to this effect:

Tunc emittet manum in latus et vulnera
(19.249s.d.)

Then [Thomas] will send forth his hand into [Christ's] side and wounds

At this stage, it should be noted that the biblical source does not explicitly say that Thomas touched Christ. After Christ invites Thomas to put his hand 'into my side [*in latus meum*]' (John 20:27), the reader is only told that 'Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God" ' (John 20:28). This narrative lacuna has been discussed by Glenn Most (2005: 57–59). Moreover, Christ does not say that Thomas has believed

because he touched; rather, he says 'because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed [*Quia vidisti me, Thoma, credidisti*]' (John 20:29). This curious discrepancy was noted by medieval commentators including Albertus Magnus (d.1280) and Thomas Aquinas (d.1274)—though both men were reluctant to suggest that Thomas might not have touched Christ (Most 2005: 139–41). More broadly, medieval exegetes concluded that Thomas *did* touch Christ (Murray 2006: 39). Further, the Incredulity of Thomas was frequently represented as a cutaneous encounter in medieval visual culture (Murray 2006: 40; Most 2005: 173–77). A conventional example of the iconography can be seen in figure 7, a stained glass window from York that has been dated to c.1370 (Davidson and O'Connor 1978: 99). Thus, the York *Incredulity*, with its implicit stage directions about Thomas's touch, is coherent with a wider visual and exegetical tradition of John 20:27–29. The play ends shortly after Thomas's encounter with Christ's body. Thomas's doubts are allayed by his touch, and the play concludes with Christ imploring the apostles to preach about the Resurrection.

Doubting Thomas's encounter with Christ resisted a consistent interpretation in medieval exegesis, as Alexander Murray has discussed (2006: 27–58). According to one long-standing interpretive tradition that can be traced back to St John Chrysostom (d.407), Thomas was an embarrassment. He relied on 'the grossest and most materialistic of the five senses' and deserved rebuke for his demand to touch Christ (Murray 2006: 29). Conversely, Thomas's tactile encounter with Christ's body also made him a 'model theologian', as he was 'the only apostle with the courage and intuition to declare - and instantly - that Jesus was God' (Murray 2006: 46). In this second tradition, promulgated for example by Hugh of St Cher (d.1263), Thomas's doubts—and the moment of touch dispelling them—enabled deeper understanding of Christ (Murray 2006: 43).

However, there was also a third line of thought: Doubting Thomas could be read as a model for intimate union with Christ within the context of late medieval affective piety. Murray draws particular attention to *Arbor vitae crucifixae* (1305), written by the Franciscan Ubertino da Casale. In this text, Thomas's encounter with Christ's body is a framed as an experience 'less of the mind than of heart' (Murray 2006: 56). This is especially evident in the following extract:

> Why do you think that Thomas was inflamed by such love for Jesus? Because he remembered that, following Jesus's loving invitation, he had put his hand through the doors of the incandescent furnace of Jesus's love [*quod manus in illis fenestris fornacis ardentissimi amoris iesu (...) posuerat*].
>
> (Murray 2006: 56)

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Doubting Thomas increasingly came to be associated with the Eucharist in the later Middle Ages, for example featuring on priest's vestments including the Syon Cope in figures 8–9 (Murray 2006: 51). As Murray explains, Thomas 'enjoyed the privilege of intimate contact with the Lord's body', and so he was a natural 'model for the believer as he received the consecrated Host' (2006: 50). I will now argue that a performance of the York *Incredulity* could have offered precisely such a model to the local people in the audience.

Thomas's encounter with Christ's body could easily have become associated with the Eucharist during the York Plays. As noted above (p. 15), the York plays were performed annually on Corpus Christi day until the feast was abolished in the mid-sixteenth century. Corpus Christi, which has been discussed at most length by Miri Rubin (1991), celebrated the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. The feast of Corpus Christi, then, emphasized Christ's ability to be both body *and* host simultaneously. With this liturgical context in mind, the various actors who embodied Christ in the York plays were ideally placed to evoke the host. For

example, Sarah Beckwith has noted the parallels between the elevation of the cross in the York *Crucifixion* and the elevation of the Host at mass (2001: 65–66).

When Thomas touched Christ on stage, this act could also have had obvious Eucharistic implications—especially in light of the close relationship between touch and taste in medieval thought, discussed above (pp. 10–11). By making contact with Christ's bleeding flesh and blood on Corpus Christi day, Thomas was effectively taking communion. More importantly still, the York *Incredulity* emphasizes that making contact with Christ's body is 'touching' in both a tactile *and* an emotional sense. This is because Christ implores Thomas to '*fele* my woundis' (41.177; emphasis added). The Middle English verb 'felen' means not only 'To experience a tactile or muscular sensation' but also 'To have an emotional experience or reaction' (*MED* s.v. 'felen, v.(1)' senses 1.a. and 4.a). The same is true, of course, for the modern English descendent *to feel* (*OED* 3rd edn. s.v. 'feel, v.' senses I.1.c. and I.7.b.). Doubting Thomas in the York Plays can thus be interpreted as a symbol for an affective engagement with Christ's bleeding body in the form of the Eucharist; or, to borrow Murray's words, 'a model for the believer as he received the consecrated Host' (2006: 50).

With this argument in mind, it is worth considering *where* the York *Incredulity* would have been performed. In total, there were forty-seven parish churches in medieval York (Wilson and Mee 1998: 25). As figure 10 illustrates, the pageant route passed nine of them. At most stations, spectators would have been able to see a parish church—perhaps even their *own* parish church. This would have held true for all of the pageants in the York Plays, not just the *Incredulity of Thomas*. However, the proximity of the performances to parish churches could have been especially resonant during the *Incredulity of Thomas.* This requires some explanation. Local lay people watching the York *Incredulity* would customarily have attended High Mass at their parish church each

Sunday (Cross and Barnwell 2005: 13). During most of the liturgical year, the congregation would have seen the transubstantiated host when it was elevated by the priest, but they would not have touched it (Cross and Barnwell 2005: 13–14). As noted above (p. 30), most lay people received communion only at Easter. On this occasion, congregants would have been able to make physical contact with Christ's body. Just as Doubting Thomas touched Christ's flesh with his hands, so too the congregants could feel Christ's body in their mouths when they received communion at Easter.

Easter was just two months before Corpus Christi, and so a performance of the York *Incredulity* may well have recalled the communion that had taken place in the nearby parish churches. Thomas's tactile encounter with Christ on stage also offered a sensory example for spectators to follow the *next* time they took communion in their local parish church: like Thomas, they too could 'fele' Christ in both the tactile and emotional senses of that word (41.177). In sum, the York *Incredulity* was in a powerful position to endorse the sense of touch as an emotive pathway to Christ's sacred body—even if this pathway was restricted to certain times of year.

Thus far, I have considered the impact of performing the York *Incredulity* in close spatial proximity to the celebration of the Mass, using this geographical context to enrich my reading of Thomas as an exemplum of the positive side of the touch paradox. However, the geographical location of the York *Incredulity* could have simultaneously undermined Thomas's touch, tingeing it with sexual connotations and turning him into a negative exemplum of unclean touch. This requires a closer examination of the map in figure 10. In 1486, the ninth station on the play route was located at the intersection between Stonegate and Petergate, while the tenth station lay approximately 100 metres further along Petergate. Between these two stations, Petergate intersects with a narrow street, highlighted in blue in figure 10. In the fourteenth century, this street was known as

Grapcunt lane / Grapecuntlane.[5] This name leaves little to the imagination concerning the activities that took place here: it was a well-known location to meet prostitutes (Goldberg 1992: 153–54). For context, P. J. P. Goldberg has noted that prostitution in medieval England 'was associated not so much with specific, enclosed locations, namely brothels, but with streetwalking' (1999: 174). From the late fourteenth century onwards, Grapecuntlane became known by a shortened form—Grapelane / Grap-lane—but its function persisted.[6] Indeed, this street's 'infamous reputation' for prostitution 'survived even into the Victorian period' (Finnegan 1979: 23).

There was also a Gropekuntelane in Norwich and a Gropecunte Lane in Oxford, now Opie Street and Magpie Lane respectively (Holt and Baker 2001: 202, 210). Of all the known examples, York's Grapecuntlane was most obviously linked with prostitution in the medieval period (Holt and Baker 2001: 203). Holt and Baker suggest that other streets with similar names may have been locations of 'illicit or casual sexual activity' without 'necessarily [implying] prostitution' (2001: 203). Notably, Norwich's Gropekuntelane 'was also recorded in Latin as *turpis vicus,* the filthy street or alternatively the shameful or infamous street: the name conveys both senses' (Holt and Baker 2001: 202). The translation 'filthy street' is striking; it serves as a reminder that the various Gropecuntlanes were loci of unclean touch, from casual intercourse to prostitution.

Figure 11 shows where Grape Lane intersects with Petergate in York today. On Corpus Christi day in the late medieval period, the *Incredulity of Thomas* would have

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[5] In 1329, 'Grapcunt lane' is mentioned in the Calendar of Close Rolls (see Lyte ed 1896: 525). In 1376, 'Grapecuntlane' is mentioned in the Calendar of Patent Rolls (see Isaacson ed 1916: 266). Respectively, these examples derive from Palliser 1978: 10 and Smith 1937: 289.

[6] In c.1381–1384, 'Grapelane' is listed under the purview of a sergeant named 'Robertus Bridde' (YCL A/Y Memorandum Book, fol. 12v). For an edited version of the text see Sellers and Percy eds 1912–1915: I, 34. D. M. Palliser first pointed out this occurrence of 'Grapelane' (1978: 10). Note, however, that Palliser refers to the manuscript by its old shelfmark, i.e. YCA E20 (1978: 10). Later, in 1485, 'Grap-lane' is mentioned in the inventory of John Carter, a tailor from York (see Raine ed 1864: 302). This example derives from Smith 1937: 289.

been performed approximately fifty metres away from this location in either direction. Station 9 would have been just beyond the crowd of people walking in this photo. When performed here, Christ's invitation for his apostles to 'Gropes me' (41.58)—or to 'Grapis me' as per the Scriveners' version (A-2.56)—could have had the effect of associating the manual penetration of Christ's side wound with the illicit sexual penetration in the nearby street of Graplane. As a caveat, Christ does not specifically use the word 'grope' when inviting *Thomas* to touch his body; rather, Christ asks Thomas to 'Putte forthe thy fyngir to me', 'putte in þi hande', and 'fele my woundis' (41.171–77). Nevertheless, by this point in the play, touching Christ's side wound is well established as an act of groping; the word has already been use three times in this context (i.e. 41.51, 41.58, 41.153). Thus, when Thomas touched the side wound on stage, he too effectively 'groped' Christ and risked association with the sexual acts that took place in nearby Graplane.

This reading of the play may seem blasphemous or otherwise shocking to a modern reader. Nevertheless, it becomes especially compelling when remembering that Christ's side wound was frequently connected with female genitalia in medieval culture. James of Milan makes a conscious pun on *vulva*/*vulnera* in his late-thirteenth-century *Stimulus Amoris* (Riehle 1981: 46). Moreover, Christ's side wound often resembles a vagina in medieval art. The phenomenon is well known in medieval studies (Easton 2006; Lewis 1996: 215; Lochrie 1997: 190–95). A representative example can be seen in CTCL MS O.3.10, fol. 12v (figure 12). The side wound, as is often the case, has been divorced from its bodily context. The elongated wound, enclosed within a red mandorla, is irrefutably vulva-like. Dark red lines cascade from the wound, evoking menstrual blood while also being reminiscent of pubic hair.

It is no coincidence that I have selected this particular example. The manuscript in which it is found is from essentially the same time and place as the York *Incredulity*:

CTCL MS O.3.10 was almost certainly produced in York c.1410, and there is suggestive evidence of 'York ownership later in the century' (Scott 1996: II, 117–18). Moreover, the side wound in figure 12 has already been discussed in connection with Doubting Thomas:

> Such imagery seems to follow Christ's remark to Thomas, 'put out your hand and place it in my side' (John 21:27), where it is clear that the wound is to be understood as hand-sized and hence much larger than the nail holes.
> (Friedman 1995: 164–65)

Interestingly, however, John Friedman does not draw any connection here between the story of Doubting Thomas and the sexual implications of medieval side wound imagery.

This link is worth pursuing. Given that Christ's side wound often resembles a vagina in medieval art, any penetration of this opening by Thomas had the potential to become sexually coded. Consider, for example, the representation of the Incredulity of Thomas in figure 13 (OBL MS Laud Misc 165, fol. 574v). This manuscript, created c.1375–1390, is a heavily illuminated copy of William of Nottingham's *Commentary on the Gospels* (Dennison et al 2001: 75). Note the oval-shaped laceration on Christ's side—it looks as though the disembodied, vaginal wound from figure 12 has been rotated 90 degrees and reincorporated into Christ's body. Thomas's actions in figure 13 begin to appear sexually charged when bearing in mind the links between Christ's side wound and female genitalia in the literary and visual culture of medieval England.

At this stage, it must be stressed that touching Christ's vaginal side wound need not have been a sexually unclean act of touch; indeed, far from it. The concept of 'mystical eroticism' was discussed earlier in this introduction (p. 30), with particular reference to the bedchamber scene in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Yet for Doubting Thomas on the streets of York, groping Christ's feminine, penetrable body near 'Graplane' could have had the effect of aligning him with men who visited prostitutes. Of course, the encounter need not be read exclusively as *hetero*sexual encounter between Thomas's phallic finger and Christ's vulva-like wound: there were two male bodies on

stage, so it could equally be read as homosexual encounter. It is helpful here to draw a comparison with Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas*, painted c.1601–1602 (figure 14). For Glenn Most, the sexual implications of this encounter are unmistakeable, and he reads the painting through a heterosexual lens:

> The contrast between the elegance and delicacy of Jesus's wounded body and Thomas's crude violation of it is concentrated in the vulva-like form of Jesus's wound, the stiffly erect shape of Thomas's probing finger […]. We need not search for hidden psychoanalytic meanings for these unequivocally sexual overtones: it is enough to recognize them as part of the rhetorical strategy of this painting, designed to evoke the reader's emotions of compassion, horror, outrage, and disgust. We seem to be viewing not an inspection, but a rape.
>
> (Most 2005: 164)

Farah Karim-Cooper likewise reads Caravaggio's painting as a disturbing erotic encounter, though she prefers to see it as homoerotic act:

> Thomas's touch appears almost to be a violation; we are disturbed by the forceful contact between Thomas's finger and Christ's skin; the pain is palpable or 'gross', and the somewhat homoerotically-charged image seems designed to unsettle the viewer.
>
> (Karim-Cooper 2016: 244)

Caravaggio's painting belongs to a very different context than the York *Incredulity*: it was painted over a century after the date of the York Register, in a country about a thousand miles away. Nevertheless, it is relevant to the present discussion because it shows how readily the Incredulity of Thomas lends itself to a sexual reading, both hetero- and homoerotic. Moreover, Caravaggio's sexualisation of Thomas's encounter with Christ's wound did not come out of a cultural vacuum. Even in the medieval period, the erotic potential of the story was exploited—and *specifically* via the word 'grope'. In particular, the word 'grope' has an important role to play in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*, a text that will allow me to further explore the relationship between touch, eroticism, and the Incredulity of Thomas in late medieval England.

Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale* tells the story of a friar named John and a sick man named Thomas. After delivering a lengthy sermon to Thomas, John asks for money to

support a cloister. Thomas instructs John to 'grope wel bihynde' for a gift (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 134, line 2141). However, when John reaches into Thomas's 'tuwel' (i.e. his anus), all he receives is a fart (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 134, line 2148). Much has been written about groping in the *Summoner's Tale* (Barr 2014: 91–93; Clark 1976; Cox 1995; Eaton 2004). Roy Peter Clark first noted the striking linguistic parallels with the Incredulity of Thomas in medieval literature. Specifically, he highlighted that the word 'grope' is frequently used in literary representations of the Incredulity of Thomas, including the York Plays but also the *Southern Passion*, *Cursor Mundi*, *Piers Plowman*, and Mirk's *Festial* (Clark 1976: 170–72). Clark argued that John's groping of Thomas's anus is a 'subtle parody' of the Incredulity of Thomas, whereby 'Thomas is the doubter, yet his body is probed (1976: 171). This reading has been extended by Catherine S. Cox. In her words, 'just as the gospel Thomas literally gropes the flesh of the incarnate Word in search of certainty and the security of unequivocal knowing, so too Friar John gropes the man's 'tuwel' in a gesture of inquiry and exploration' (Cox 1995: 162).

In the same article, Cox argues that the Friar's groping of Thomas's anus has obvious homoerotic implications, consistent with the wider 'subversive erotics' of *The Summoner's Tale* (1995: 154–55, 164). Eaton has since cautioned that the Friar's groping does not 'unambiguously' have a homoerotic charge, but agrees that 'erotic and homosexual elements are undoubtedly evident in the Tale' (2004: 615). Taken together, Clark, Cox, and Eaton's readings of *The Summoner's Tale* reveal a text in which a Doubting Thomas figure can be seen to engage in an illicit homoerotic encounter. Notably, his act of 'unclean' sexual touch is associated with a more literal kind of filth: a fart.

Let us return now to the York *Incredulity* play. An audience need not necessarily have associated Christ's invitation to 'grope' his wounds with the perverse erotic

encounters that took place in a nearby street; I am simply suggesting this as one culturally available reading. The verb 'gropen' has many non-sexual connotations that could equally have come to the fore during performance. For example, 'gropen' can mean 'to learn (sth.), know' (*MED* s.v. 'gropen, v.' sense 5.d.). When Thomas and his fellow apostles touch Christ's wounds, they are not only 'groping' Christ in the literal sense (i.e. 'To feel with the hand or fingers'; *MED* s.v. 'gropen, v.' sense 1.a). They are also 'groping' his body in a metaphorical sense: they are learning that he has been Resurrected. In this respect, it is notable that Christ invites Thomas to 'fele my woundis, and *vndirstande* | Þat þis is I' (41.177–78; emphasis added). Here, Thomas's act of touch is associated with the acquisition of empirical knowledge. Though beyond the scope of my present discussion, this alternate reading of 'groping' in the York *Incredulity* would offer a thought-provoking dialogue with Cushman's recent work on Doubting Thomas, the senses, and empirical knowledge in medieval English theatre (2017: 290–92).

The verb 'gropen' can also mean 'To feel one's way in the dark, grope as a blind man' (*MED* s.v. 'gropen, v.' sense 3). Notably, the York *Incredulity* plays into the conventional idea of Christ as a light, as in the following example:

> PETRUS: What was this sight þat we saughe nowe,
> Shynand so bright,
> […] (41.21–22)

This complements the Gospel of John, in which Christ says: 'I am the light of the world; he that followeth me walketh not in darkness but shall have the light of life' (John 8:12). When touching Christ's wounds is described as 'groping' in the York *Incredulity* and medieval literature more broadly, these non-sexual meanings are certainly at play. However, my new reading of the York *Incredulity*, which combines the geography of performance with the geography of prostitution, suggests that 'groping' could *also* have become associated with illicit sexual activity during the Corpus Christi plays.

In sum, this case study has demonstrated just one way in which medieval biblical theatre was uniquely positioned to engage with the meaning and value of touch. Doubting Thomas in the York Plays could quite literally put his finger on the tensions between sacred and unclean contact. On the one hand, Thomas's encounter with the side wound could easily have resonated with the sacrament of the Eucharist, a powerful opportunity to engage with Christ's body, a message that was especially timely given that the pageant was performed on Corpus Christi day. Yet at the same time, Thomas's groping could potentially have become associated with the unclean sexual acts that took place in Grapelane / Grapecuntlane.

In this respect, it is fitting that 'Didymos' ('*Διδυμος*'), the Greek name for Thomas, means 'twin' (Most 2005: 78). In the city of York on Corpus Christi day, there could have been two different Thomases on stage. The potential for collision between these Thomases in centre of medieval York is strikingly suggested by figure 11. In this image, it is possible to see both Grape Lane, the location of illicit sexual assignations, and York Minster, a potent symbol of God's tangible presence on earth. In 1486, Station 9 on the York Play route fell between these two locations—just as Thomas's touch could fall between the sacred and the unclean.

In Karim-Cooper's conclusion to *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage*, she uses Doubting Thomas as a lens through which to reflect back on her previous chapters:

> Despite its singularity, the finger of St Thomas provides an index for the broader concerns under examination in this book: the relationship of the hand to the conceptualization of identity, the acquisition of knowledge and the expression of the self in early modern culture and in Shakespeare's work.
>
> (Karim-Cooper 2016: 242)

Where Karim-Cooper uses Doubting Thomas as an end point and as a summative example in her study of hands on the Shakespearean stage, I instead use this apostle as a starting point and as a prism through which to guide my discussion of touch in medieval English theatre. Specifically, Doubting Thomas will function as a leitmotif throughout

my thesis. I will highlight several biblical plays that echo the story of the Incredulity of Thomas, each in their own way offering commentary on the touch paradox. Further, I will consider how far spectators could—or *should*—'become' Thomas while attending medieval plays.

Chapter Summary

Chapter One focuses on two plays that recall the Incredulity of Thomas story: the N-Town *Nativity* and the York *Assumption of the Virgin.* In the former, a doubting midwife named Salome refuses to believe in the virgin birth until she manually inspects Mary's vagina. Like Doubting Thomas, Salome thus relies on tactile examination to prove a miracle. The similarities between Thomas and Salome's experiences become more striking when remembering the possible sexual implications of Thomas's encounter with Christ's side wound; like Salome, Thomas effectively probes a vagina. The York *Assumption* also has obvious parallels with the Incredulity of Thomas story. In this play, Thomas himself is present at Mary's Assumption to heaven, but fears that his fellow apostles will not believe his story. To forestall such doubts, Mary gives Thomas her girdle as proof of her ascent to heaven. The York *Assumption*, then, inverts the Incredulity of Thomas story: Thomas is the provider rather than the recipient of tangible evidence proving a miracle.

Chapter One argues that both the N-Town *Nativity* and York *Assumption* were in a powerful position to explore the gendered parameters of the medieval touch paradox, in the process offering commentary and instruction on male and female touch. In the N-Town *Nativity*, Salome's hand immediately withers upon touching Mary's vagina. Given that a cross-dressed man would probably have played Salome, I argue that the N-Town *Nativity* was poised to trigger contemporary anxieties about male physicians touching female genitalia: this act was seen as potentially sexually unclean. However, the N-Town

Nativity was not just in a position to offer commentary on unclean male touch. At the same time, the play endorsed female touch as a pathway to the sacred. Salome's withered hand is healed when she touches the hem of Christ's garment in a birthing 'room', recalling and validating the popular practice of women using contact relics in childbirth. The York *Assumption*, I contend, offered a similar lesson. According to my new, materially engaged reading of this play, the Virgin Mary encourages women to wear her girdle during childbirth to secure a safe delivery. Nevertheless, I highlight that the relationship between women, touch, and the sacred promoted by the N-Town *Nativity* and the York *Assumption* was counterintuitive. In order to make use of a contact relic in the birthing room and harness its sacred healing, women must first have had sex. The latter act of touch was potentially unclean even in the marriage bed, as suggested by texts including *The Book of Vices and Virtues* (fourteenth century). The two sides of the medieval touch paradox, then, existed uncomfortably side-by-side for women of childbearing age.

Where Chapter One argues that the tension between sacred and unclean touch could be exposed in medieval theatre via stories that echoed the Incredulity of Thomas, Chapter Two suggests that the touch paradox could also be *resolved* on the late medieval stage via *another* story that echoed the Incredulity of Thomas. The character in question is the Jew who strikes Mary's funeral bier in the N-Town *Assumption*. Like Thomas, this Jew is a figure of doubt, albeit a more extreme one: he refuses to believe in Christ at all, not just Christ's resurrection. Like Thomas, the Jew's doubt motivates touch, albeit a more violent instance: he hits Mary's coffin, rather than probing Christ's wound. Finally, like Thomas, the Jew's tactile encounter with a holy body engenders faith: his encounter with the bier precipitates his conversion to Christianity.

In the version of the Jew's story told by the N-Town *Assumption*, I argue that the fault line between sacred and unclean touch is drawn where Christian and Jewish identities diverge. Jewish touch was frequently represented as a source of uncleanness in medieval European literature and visual culture, and the N-Town *Assumption* is no exception. When the Jew attacks the funeral bier, he threatens not only to contaminate a reliquary but also to sexually violate Mary's virginal body. However, when the Jew converts to Christianity, he becomes a paradigm of sacred touch, harnessing the healing power of contact relics from Mary's shrine. But if the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* represented the epitome of unclean touch—i.e. everything that should be stripped from the Christian self—then this created a problem for the Christian actor forced to represent him on stage. He would have to embody precisely the kinds of unclean touch that the play condemns. Nevertheless, I suggest that when the Jewish character converts at the end of the play, the Christian actor could publicly expel any Jewish body—and thus any unclean touch—from himself.

In brief, chapters one and two argue that Doubting Thomas figures allowed anxieties about unclean touch to the fore, but also to be shut down. But what implications did the touch paradox have for the *audiences* of medieval biblical theatre? Could medieval spectators ever 'become Thomas' and touch Christ's body for themselves, or did His body remain tantalizingly out of reach? On the other hand, what risks were there for audience members to participate in unclean touch during performance? These questions inform the remaining three chapters.

To open up these questions, Chapter Three turns to Mary Magdalene, another figure whose experiences resonate with the Incredulity of Thomas. In John 20:17, the resurrected Christ tells Mary not to touch him ('Noli me tangere'), yet just ten verses later Christ would invite Thomas to do precisely that. The *Noli me tangere* episode features

frequently in medieval theatre, though Chapter Three focuses on its appearance in the York Plays, the N-Town Plays, and the Digby *Mary Magdalene*. On the surface, the sensory experience of attending a medieval play would have resonated obviously with the *Noli me tangere*: like Mary Magdalene, spectators could look at Christ with their eyes but not touch him with their hands. Spectators, then, were much more like Mary Magdalene than Doubting Thomas.

Nevertheless, it would be reductive to claim that Mary and Thomas represent two discrete sensory experiences, namely sight and touch. In medieval optical theory, vision was understood as a projectile, tactile experience, an idea that also finds expression in contemporary literary and visual culture. Following this line of thought, Chapter Three argues that Mary Magdalene and indeed the spectators may have been able to touch Christ's body with the gaze during medieval plays. I suggest that Christ's frequent invitations to 'be*hold*' his body during medieval plays could have taken on a new resonance, fusing the visual and the tactile in a devotional experience. When touch is confined to haptic vision in this way, it is largely stripped of its unclean qualities: instead, it represents a profound pathway to the sacred. By touching with the eyes, then, spectators could become the best of Doubting Thomas; they could have an affective tactile encounter with Christ's sacred flesh, largely free of uncleanness.

But was Christ's body always physically out of reach during performance, touchable only with the gaze? Chapter Four begins to complicate this picture. On the surface, the Bodley *Burial* seems to have been an ideal candidate to inspire tactile longing for Christ's body, resolved only through eye contact. This Easter play, suitable for both meditative reading and dramatic performance, compares Christ to a piece of stretched parchment covered in bloody letters. For a meditative reader, the *mise-en-page* of the manuscript complemented the metaphor of Christ as Book and allowed the user to

become Thomas, handling Christ's wounded body. Yet a performance of this text in holy week could have made Christ seem more like a book in the distance, out of reach.

However, the situation was even more complex than this. As I will explain, a performance of the Bodley *Burial* required a sculpture of Christ with moveable arms. Such an object would inevitably have awakened expectations about texture in the spectators' minds. Consciously or subconsciously, spectators imagined what it *would* feel like to touch that sculpture. Moreover, the sculpture of Christ used in performances of the Bodley *Burial* may have been touchable at other points in the liturgical year. Thus, while touch may not have been directly activated in performances of the Bodley *Burial*, spectators could have already touched the play *indirectly* via their previous interactions with the prop. Theatre—and specifically, Christ's body in theatre—thus had the potential to oscillate in a complex way between the tangible and intangible.

Chapters three and four, then, focus respectively on the spectators' eyes and hands as agents of touch. Chapter Five turns to the spectators' feet, arguing that walking could be a profoundly sacred act of touch during the Passion sequence in the York Plays. The York Plays invited the audience to imagine that they were walking on—and thereby touching—the streets of Jerusalem as well as the streets of York. Consequently, the York Plays enabled spectators to experience a surrogate tactile experience of the landscape of Christ's Passion, walking 'in Christ's footsteps' without ever leaving their own urban environment. To better understand this phenomenon, I consider medieval and modern ideas about virtual experience from virtual pilgrimage to virtual reality gaming. I suggest that medieval spectators could become 'virtual Thomases' during the York Plays, engaging with Christ's sacred body not via the hands but via the feet.

However, Chapter Five does not focus exclusively on the spectators' feet. In the cramped streets of medieval York, spectators would have brushed shoulder to shoulder.

This could have enhanced immersion in biblical events, making people feel like they were present in Jerusalem at the time of the Passion. Nevertheless, this was also the perfect setting for illicit groping. The York Plays, then, created a venue in which it was possible for spectators to experience the entire spectrum of medieval touch, from pathway to the sacred to source of uncleanness. Spectators in York could thus become both the best and the worst versions of Doubting Thomas.

The chapter summary provided thus far outlines only part of the narrative about touch and theatre that my thesis constructs. I have hitherto covered the primary argument pursued in this thesis, which is broadly synchronic: I seek to establish the relevance of the touch paradox to medieval English theatrical culture in its own right, prior to any later developments. Parallel to this, however, runs a secondary argument in my thesis with a diachronic approach. This secondary argument anticipates and addresses the following question: to what extent was the touch paradox identified in this thesis an exclusively *medieval* phenomenon? By reading medieval plays with an eye to early modern theatre, I trace changes but also continuities in ideas about touch in the sixteenth century.

I contend that there was a significant sensory rupture at the end of the late medieval period, specifically from the 1530s onwards. In the wake of the Reformation, the role of touch as a pathway to the sacred came under assault—a development that can be detected in contemporary theatre. For example, birth girdles were no longer officially allowed as pathways to sacred healing: not only did new legislation ban such objects, but girdle relics were also confiscated from many churches and could thus not be loaned out to pregnant women. In Chapter One, I suggest that medieval theatre is a useful litmus test for this development. I foreground the turbulent early modern performance history of the York *Assumption*, arguing that there is striking correlation (if not direct causation) between the suppression of birth girdles and the suppression of a play in which such

objects are implicitly promoted. In Chapter Four, I reiterate the argument that theatre is a useful lens through which to examine the changing relationship between touch and the sacred in the sixteenth century. For medieval parishioners, touch was a crucial mechanism through which to unlock the bodily presence of the sacred bodies represented by devotional sculptures. However, this practice went into decline as a result of both the iconoclasm and the hostility of Reformers to the tactile worship of sculptures. I argue that the final scene of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (c.1609–1611), during which a statue seemingly miraculously comes to life, looks back both critically and nostalgically to a medieval world in which touch could unlock the sacred presence within sculpture.

But if touch and the sacred were under attack from the 1530s onwards, the association between touch and uncleanness had a longer legacy, which English theatrical culture is also well equipped to reveal. In Chapter Two, I highlight that medieval ideas about Jewish touch and contamination survived into the early modern period by tracing a thread of tactile anti-Semitism from the N-Town *Assumption* (fifteenth century) to Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (c.1589–1591) and finally to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (c.1596). In Chapter Five, I note that both medieval and early modern anti-theatrical texts exhibit concerns about sex, touch, and uncleanness, comparing *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* (c.1380–1425) with Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579).

My conclusion will tease out the fate of the medieval touch paradox further. A paradox requires two opposing premises; in our case, touch was both sacred *and* unclean in medieval England. If one premise should start to collapse, then it follows that the paradox itself can no longer exist. Thus, did the medieval touch paradox cease to exist in the 1530s, when touch as a pathway to the sacred came under assault? This theory, though tempting, would oversimplify a complex issue. The decline of touch as a pathway to the sacred in the sixteenth century was a protracted, piecemeal process, not unlike the

Reformation itself. In this context, I draw attention to the enduring popularity of the Royal Touch with reference to *Macbeth* (1606). I go on to suggest avenues for further research on the complex decline of the medieval touch paradox, as my study cannot claim to cover this complex topic exhaustively. One thing, however, is clear. Early English theatre, precisely because it involved human bodies, offers a unique opportunity to examine sacred touch at its pre-1530 peak, but also to witness the start of its decline.

My conclusion will go on to consider the wider implications of my thesis. Firstly, I broaden my literary scope to consider morality plays, demonstrating the relevance of the medieval touch paradox to *Everyman, Mankind*, and *The Castle of Perseverance.* Secondly, I argue that my new theory of touch causes ripples in medieval literary studies more broadly. It is no coincidence that I so often turn to *The Book of Margery Kempe* for comparison in this thesis. Margery is a 'touchstone', so to speak, for medieval attitudes towards the senses. Not unlike Doubting Thomas, her experiences expose both sides of medieval touch paradox. Nevertheless, *The Book of Margery Kempe* also serves to problematize the binary around which this thesis is constructed, revealing that not all touch can be divided into sacred or unclean. *The Book of Margery Kempe* thus serves as a valuable reminder that although the touch paradox is a useful lens through which to medieval sensory experience, it is not universally applicable. I close my thesis by returning to Doubting Thomas in the drama and art of medieval York, using the apostle to review the advantages and limitations of studying touch in medieval theatre.

Chapter One

Probing into Pregnancy: Touch and Gender on the Late Medieval Stage

Childbirth in late medieval England was fraught with danger. During the birth of her first child c.1393, Margery Kempe 'dyspered of hyr lyfe' and even went so far as to call a confessor (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 6). While bringing a child into the world, Margery came close to death. Remarkably, Margery had thirteen more pregnancies before persuading her husband to adopt a mutually celibate lifestyle. This is an astonishing feat given the risks associated with childbirth in late medieval England, as corroborated by the archaeological record. A survey of the cemetery of St Helen-on-the-Walls in York suggests that between 950 and 1550, 56% of women died by the age of 35, compared with just 35.8% of men (Dawes and Magilton 1980: 63). In the words of Jean Dawes and J. R. Magilton, this gives 'some measure of the strains and stresses of childbearing and its associated traumas in the days before restricted family size, supplemented diets and modern medicine' (1980: 63). The risk to the physical and spiritual health of the child was also high, so much so that midwives in late medieval England were authorized to perform emergency baptisms if they believed that the child's life was in danger (Ryan 2003: 436–37).

What could women in labour do to protect their own lives and the lives of their unborn children? Touching a contact relic during childbirth was thought to ensure a quick and safe delivery. The Virgin's girdle was especially prized for this purpose, a phenomenon I will explore at length in this chapter. In brief, parturient women believed they were able to access sacred protection by wrapping relics of the Virgin's girdle around their wombs or by binding their waists with material replicas of this holy belt. Childbirth, then, was a time when medieval English women had to ideally engage their

sense of touch in a specific way, namely by making physical contact between their pregnant wombs and protective girdles.

However, the female reproductive system had implications for men's touch as well as for women's. Broadly speaking, although male physicians could diagnose and treat gynaecological conditions, they were not allowed to touch women's genitalia directly; only female assistants could do this. There were deep-seated anxieties about male hands touching female genitalia; such an encounter could potentially be understood as a sexual act (Green 2008: xi). Thus, women's health was a site where the boundaries between male and female touch and between sacred and unclean touch were at stake. For women in labour, touch was a profound pathway to the sacred: it put them in contact with holy figures including the Virgin Mary, securing spiritual and physical protection. Yet for male physicians, touching a female patient was potentially an unclean act that should be avoided. This chapter argues that two medieval plays, the N-Town *Nativity* and York *Assumption of the Virgin,* were uniquely positioned to publicly reinforce these gendered touch roles but also to trouble them.

In the N-Town *Nativity*, the midwife Salome refuses to believe in the virgin birth without manually examining Mary's vagina, but her hand immediately withers when she does so. Gail McMurray Gibson has hinted that a male actor cross-dressing as Salome would have been adopting a touch role more appropriate to women (1999: 19–20). However, the full implications of this tactile transgression have yet to be recognized. I argue that the severe physical punishment of a cross-dressed midwife for touching female genitalia could have triggered anxieties about unclean male touch in gynaecology and obstetrics.

If the N-Town *Nativity* was poised to mobilize concerns about unclean male touch, it was also in a position to promote touch as a pathway to sacred healing for

women. The fact that Salome's hand is healed when she touches the hem of Christ's garment endorses the use of contact relics for women in the birthing room. Alaya Swann has briefly opened up this particular reading of the play, but I extend it substantially (2015: 22–23). Firstly, I argue that the N-Town *Nativity* was poised to expose a sensory predicament for women in medieval England. Pregnant women who touched sacred contact relics must first have had sex—an intimate tactile act that was potentially unclean even in the marital bed. Only the Virgin Mary could give birth and simultaneously remain undefiled by sexual sin, the exact miracle that inspires Salome's scepticism.

I further extend Swann's research by placing the N-Town *Nativity* in the broader landscape of late medieval theatre, arguing that the York *Assumption* was in a similar position to encourage women to touch contact relics in childbirth. In this play, Thomas the apostle witnesses Mary's ascent to heaven, but fears that his fellow apostles will not believe his story. Mary gives him her girdle as tangible proof. I offer a new, materially engaged reading of the York *Assumption*, arguing that the play encourages women in the audience to use the Virgin's holy belt as a birth girdle. Nevertheless, any women who needed to wear a birth girdle must have previously had sex. Thus, the tactile lesson offered by the York *Assumption* was subject to the same sensory predicament as the N-Town *Nativity*.

Both the N-Town *Nativity* and the York *Assumption* echo the Incredulity of Thomas. Like Thomas, the sceptical midwife in the N-Town *Nativity* dispels her doubts about a miraculous event by placing her hand into a holy body. In the York *Assumption*, Doubting Thomas inverts his own story, providing tangible evidence to sway other sceptical apostles. It is no coincidence that we should find parallels with the Incredulity of Thomas in two medieval plays that offer lessons about touch. As discussed in the introduction, Thomas's experiences offered the perfect medium through which to

examine this sense. There, I argued that Doubting Thomas in the York *Incredulity* could quite literally put his finger on the medieval touch paradox. In Chapter One, I now suggest that two more Thomas stories were well positioned to expose and interrogate the gendered parameters of this paradox. In the process, these plays could teach powerful lessons about how to touch well as Christian man or woman—even if the messages for the latter gender were paradoxical. For women of childbearing age, sacred and unclean touch went hand in hand. This chapter, then, approaches gender in medieval literature through the history of medicine and the cultural history of touch rather than by reading medieval texts alongside gender theorists such as Judith Butler, as other scholars have done (e.g. Moncion 2018).

The N-Town *Nativity*: An Overview

Luke 2:4–16 reports that the Virgin Mary gave birth in a manger and an angel then told the shepherds to visit the holy family. However, according to an apocryphal tradition, there was more to the Nativity story: when Mary went into labour, Joseph called two midwives to assist with the birth. The narrative is summarized in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, a popular collection of hagiographies compiled c.1260–1275:

> [W]hen the hour had come for Mary to be delivered, Joseph called two midwives [*obstetrices*], the one being called Zebel and the other Salome—not that he doubted that the Virgin would bring forth the Son of God, but that he was following the custom of the country. When Zebel, probing and realizing that Mary was a virgin, cried out that a virgin had given birth, Salome did not believe it and tried to find out for herself [*probare similiter*], but her hand instantly withered [*continuo aruit manus ejus*]; then an angel appeared and told her to touch [*tetigit*] the child, and she was cured immediately.
>
> (Translation from Ryan trans 2012: 38;
> Latin from Grässe ed 1846: 41–42)

This story derives from 'the so-called infancy gospels', namely the second-century *Protevangelium of James* and the closely related Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, likely from the seventh century (Swann 2015: 3–4). As Alaya Swann has discussed (2015: 4–5), the

apocryphal tale of the doubting midwife Salome had a significant amount of cultural purchase in late medieval England, featuring in Mirk's *Festial* (1380), the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* (mid-fourteenth century), and Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady* (1420).

Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the Salome story also inspired several early English plays. The story of the doubting midwife was 'very likely' included in an early version of the York *Nativity*, as suggested by a reference to a midwife in the *Ordo Paginarum* of 1415 (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 101–02). The version that survives in the York Register, however, features no midwife. Salome's manual examination of the Virgin does survive in the Chester *Nativity*, but the manuscript tradition of the Chester plays is notoriously problematic (Coletti 2007; Johnston 2012). Our earliest surviving witness of the Chester *Nativity* dates from 1591, i.e. sixteen years *after* the last production of the Chester plays (CHL MS 2, fols. 33r–41r). According to an explicit stage direction in the Chester *Nativity*, Salome's hand withers when she touches the Virgin 'in sexu secreto' (6.539.s.d), i.e. in her 'private genitals' or 'internal genitals' (*DMLBS* s.v. 'secretus' senses 3 and 5). An angel appears and instructs Salome to ask the Christ child for forgiveness, and her hand is promptly healed (6.548–63). However, Salome is not instructed to touch anyone or anything in order to instigate this miracle. For this reason, and indeed because the play does not survive in a medieval witness, the Chester *Nativity* is less useful for my purposes than the third play in which the Salome story appears: the N-Town *Nativity*.

The relevant part of the N-Town *Nativity* can be summarized as follows. Joseph leaves to find midwives to assist with Mary's birth, returning with Zelomy and Salome. However, they discover that Mary has already given birth. Zelomy asks to 'towch and fele' to see if Mary has 'nede of medycyn' (15.218–19). The action is codified in an explicit stage direction:

Hic palpat Zelomye Beatam Virginem dicens:
(15.225.s.d.)

Here Zelomy touches the Blessed Virgin Mary, saying
(Sugano ed 2007: 139n1)

Consequently, Zelomy realizes that the birth is miraculous: 'A fayr chylde of a maydon is born' (15.229). Salome, however, refuses to believe that a woman could give birth and remain a virgin and demands physical proof:

SALOMÉ: I xal nevyr trowe it but I it preve!
With hand towchynge but I assay,
In my conscience it may nevyr cleue
Þat sche hath chylde and is a may.
(15.246–49).

This action is codified in another explicit stage direction:

Hic tangit Salomee Mari[am] et, cum arescerit manus eius, vlulando et quasi flendo dicit:
(15.253.s.d.)

Here Salome touches Mary and when her hand has withered, howling and weeping she says:
(Sugano ed 2007: 140n1)

This stage direction also indicates that Salome's touch causes injury to her hand. Subsequently, an angel enters and instructs Salome to 'Towch þe clothis þer he is layde, | For he xal save all þat is lorn' (15.280–81). Salome does as she is told, as indicated by another explicit stage direction:

Hic Salomee tangit fimbriam Christi dicens:
(15.293.s.d.)

Here Salome touches the hem of Christ's garment, saying
(Sugano ed 2007: 141n1)

Note that Salome touches Christ's clothes, not—as in the *Legenda Aurea*—Christ's infant body. Salome thus handles a contact relic, rather than touching Christ's body directly. This will be integral to my later reading of the play, which maintains that the N-Town *Nativity* offers a lesson about women, touch, and contact relics. When Salome touches the

hem of Christ's garment, her withered hand is immediately healed. She declares her belief in the virgin birth and resolves to spread the word of this 'grett meracle' (15.308).

It is important for my reading of the N-Town *Nativity* to place this play in as precise a chronological context as possible. Linguistic evidence suggests that the N-Town plays were 'not composed before 1425–1450', as the plays include 'a large number of words and meanings that became current' at this time (Spector ed 1991: I, xl–xli). More specifically, '[m]uch or all' of N-Town may 'date from no earlier than the 1440s' (Spector ed 1991: I, xli). Here, it should be remembered that the N-Town anthology draws together plays from at least four different exemplars. The N-Town *Nativity* most likely derives from the cycle of plays represented by the Proclamation (Sugano ed 2007: 10). This material was synthesized with a Mary play, a two-part Passion play, and an independent Assumption play. It is unlikely that all of these texts were composed at exactly the same time, though they must all have been complete before the N-Town manuscript was created. LBL MS Cotton Vespasian D.8 was predominantly written by one scribe using a mid to late fifteenth-century anglicana hand (Kahrl and Meredith 1977: xiii; Spector ed 1991: I, xxii). It is tempting to infer 1468 as the *terminus a quo* for the manuscript, as this year has been added at the end of the *Purification* play (Spector ed 1991: I, xxxviii). However, 1468 may represent only the year when the *Purification* was interpolated into the manuscript, rather than the date for the compilation as a whole (Sugano ed 2007: 7–8). Revisions, notably prompt material added by 'Reviser B', suggest that at least some of the plays in the anthology were used in performance into the first quarter of the sixteenth century (Johnston 2014: 112; Kahrl and Meredith 1997: vii, xxiv). Overall, this creates a likely window of possible performance history spanning from approximately 1440 to 1525.

A performance of the N-Town *Nativity* at any point in history would have posed an obvious practical difficulty. How might the gruesome transformation of the midwife's hand be dramatized? A clue can be found in LBL MS 47682. This manuscript, more commonly known as the Holkham Bible Picture Book, was produced in London at some point between 1325 and 1340 (Brown 2007: 17). Folio 12v features a Nativity scene of interest to medieval theatre scholars, reproduced here in figure 15 (Anderson 1963: 139; Bicks 2003: 67–68; Morgan 1992). On the right-hand side of the image, a midwife swaddles the baby Jesus while the Virgin Mary looks on. A third hand hangs conspicuously from the midwife's wrist (for detail, see figure 16). As Jacqueline A. Morgan explains, this third hand 'must be some kind of glove or artificial hand which the midwife, now holding the infant Christ, has taken off' (1992: 23). At an earlier point in the narrative, represented on the left-hand side of the image (figure 17), the same midwife 'would appear to be wearing the false hand, indicated by a faint line at the wrist and a slight alteration in colour' (Morgan 1992: 23). Morgan argues that the artist probably owed a debt to medieval English plays about the doubting midwife Salome. In her view, the Salome incident 'probably took place on the English stage exactly as he portrays it, with the false hand or glove ready to be slipped from the midwife's wrist' (Morgan 1992: 24).

At this point, readers may recall my introduction, where I stressed that scholars have become increasingly sceptical about inferring staging from the medieval visual tradition (pp. 21–22). In this particular instance, however, there is no reason why an artist would depict a midwife with an artificial hand dangling from the wrist unless he had been influenced by a theatrical tradition. What is there to gain, visually, from depicting a midwife with three hands? Moreover, artificial substitutes for body parts were evidently used in medieval drama more broadly (Butterworth 2005: 140–58). I will remain

sensitive to the possibility that a third, fake hand was used in the N-Town *Nativity*: it physically contains unclean sexual touch, which can literally be discarded at the end of the play.

Beyond staging concerns, previous scholarship on the N-Town and Chester *Nativity* plays has shed light on a variety of topics including the association of doubt with the margins of society, the epistemological tension between clerical learning and knowledge gained via sensory experience, the relationship between gender and knowledge, the representation of childbirth as a female space, the multifaceted role of midwives in medieval England, and the sexualisation of the Virgin's body (respectively Carlson 1999; Cushman 2017; Swann 2015; Gibson 1999; Ryan 2003, Waller 2011: 76–79). Even though the sense of touch is never the exclusive focus, all of these works mention touch in some capacity, most of them also noting the obvious connection to Doubting Thomas (Carlson 1999: 201; Cushman 2017: 280; Gibson 1999: 19; Ryan 2003: 441; Swann 2015: 14–20; Waller 2011: 77–78). Helen Cushman, for example, highlights that there is a 'double standard' with respect to Thomas and Salome, evident especially in Mirk's *Festial* (2017: 280). 'Mirk's homily for Thomas', Cushman explains, 'praises the apostle's doubt, while his homily on the Nativity says nothing to defend Salome's incredulity' (2017: 280). This is in spite of the fact that Thomas and Salome's experiences are remarkably similar: both experience a transition from doubt to faith as a result of a moment of touch. I would add that the parallels between the two characters become even more striking when considering that Thomas, too, can be coded as touching a vagina, as discussed above (pp. 42–43).

Crucially, the fact that Salome is touching a vagina is not an issue in itself. This was 'a culturally legitimized act for a midwife' in late medieval England (Ryan 2003: 441). Specifically, midwives in medieval and indeed early modern England were

permitted to manually examine a woman's genitalia in order to assist with birth and to determine virginity, among other reasons (Bicks 2003: 60–93; Gowing 2003: 42–46; Ryan 2003: 441; Swann 2015: 6, 11). However, when the Salome story was put on stage, it would almost certainly not have been a woman pretending to conduct a vaginal exam, but rather a cross-dressed man (Gibson 1999: 19–20). Indeed, most female roles in medieval theatre were performed by men (Clark and Sponsler 1997: 319; Normington 2004: 35–54). The nuns who performed in the Barking Abbey Plays are an obvious exception (Yardley and Mann eds and trans 2014: 8). However, as Katie Normington points out '[p]rivate performances by nuns were not genuine public displays: they took place in the closed world of the abbey' (2004: 48).

The near certain occurrence of a cross-dressing midwife in performances of the N-Town *Nativity* has important implications for our understanding of the play. Most obviously, it adds irony to Joseph's claim, 'It is not conuenyent a man to be | Þer women gon in travalynge' (15.134–35). Accordingly, Gail McMurray Gibson (1999: 20) has argued that there is 'gender trouble' in the N-Town *Nativity*:

> It is indeed the midwife who has in late medieval culture the right to 'touch and feel' the secrets of the birthing body, but the N-Town Nativity play calls attention to the rules of gender decorum only to ransack those categories.
>
> (Gibson 1999: 19)

However, the full impact of this tactile transgression has yet to be recognized. Gender trouble would have arisen in a performance of the N-Town *Nativity* not just because a cross-dressed male actor was engaging in an act of touch more appropriate to female birthing assistants, but also because he would have been performing a type of manual examination that male physicians were emphatically *not* allowed to do. Broadly speaking, male physicians' hands did not belong inside female patients in late medieval England. This could potentially be seen as a sexual act, as I will now explore. I then offer a new reading of the N-Town *Nativity,* one that places Salome's tactile transgression in this

historical context. When a male actor portraying Salome pretended to place his hands into a vagina on stage, he would have been publicly trespassing the norms of touch traditionally attached to his gender, engaging in a perverse erotic encounter.

Cross-dressing Salome: Triggering Anxieties about Men in Gynaecology

Gynaecology and obstetrics requires manual as well as visual inspection of female genitalia. This posed a significant problem for male physicians in medieval Europe. '[I]n a society that largely assumed heterosexual desire', Monica Green explains, 'any male access to female reproductive/sexual organs could be seen as a sexual encounter' (2008: xi). To reframe this in the terms of my thesis, male eyes—and more importantly—male *hands*, needed to be removed from female genital examination, lest they engage in an unclean act of sexual touch. Accordingly, it became common for male physicians in Europe to employ 'female surgeons, midwives, or untrained assistants to do the needed manual observations and operations' (Green 2008: xi–xii). In an English context, Green notes the lack of physical contact between male physicians and female patients in OBL MS Ashmole 399, specifically in a bifolium of medical images from c.1250–1275 (2008: 108n97).

> The male physicians never touch the woman […] Rather, with his finger lifted in the classic gesture of instruction, the male physician doles out his learning, expecting that either some female attendant or the woman herself will carry out the necessary applications or procedures.
>
> (Green 2008: 109)

For example, the image on the lower half of folio 33r (figure 18) represents a woman suffering from uterine suffocation, but the male physician directs a female attendant to do the necessary fumigation of the genitals (Green trans 2001: 27–30).

However, the relationship between gender, touch, and women's health did not remain constant in medieval Europe:

> By the end of the Middle Ages, the taboo against male sight and touch of the female genitals was no longer absolute, and while midwives were still the normative attendants at uncomplicated births throughout western Europe, emergency obstetrics as well as routine gynaecological care was considered appropriate work for men.
>
> (Green 2008: xii)

Most of Green's evidence for increasing touch of female genitalia by male physicians comes from Italy and France. For example, she points to a French medical text entitled *On the Diseases Which Can Occur in the Generative Organs of Women* (c.1440–1450), in which male physicians are advised to manually rotate a malpresented fetus (Green 2008: 261–62). However, Green's study suggests that gynaecology and obstetrics in late medieval England were moving in the same direction, not least because some new translations of the *Trotula* and other important gynaecological texts were directed at, and probably used by, a male professional audience in the fifteenth century (2008: 163–203). For example, *The Sickness of Women 1*, a Middle English translation of Gilbert the Englishman's *Compendium of Medicine,* opens with a direct address to 'sirs', effectively authorizing male physicians to use the text (Green 2008: 191). In the mid-fifteenth century, one copy was owned by a man named Richard Dod, a barber-surgeon from London (LBL MS Sloane 5; Green 1992: 60; Green 2008: 191; Green and Mooney eds 2006: 476).

Nevertheless, if any male physicians *were* starting to take a more hands-on role in gynaecology and obstetrics in England in the middle of the fifteenth century, this would have been a relatively new (and probably sporadic) development. Indeed, even by the end of the sixteenth century it was not a given that male physicians in England would manually inspect female genitalia during gynaecological consultations (Bicks 2003: 64). Thus, the late fifteenth century was probably a transitional period in England, with cultural anxieties about male touch of female patients' genitalia still very much at play. Crucially, this is exactly the period to which the N-Town *Nativity* belongs. As outlined

above, the play has a window of possible performance history that stretches from approximately 1440 to 1525. In my view, a performance of the N-Town *Nativity* in the second half of the fifteenth century would have been in a powerful position to trigger long-standing anxieties about the right of physicians to touch female genitalia, and/or to offer a damning indictment of any male physicians who were beginning to do so.

Let us consider what Salome says immediately after touching Mary: 'Alas, alas for my lewdnes!' (15.265). The adjective 'leued', from which the noun 'lewdnes' derives, encompasses many different shades of meaning in Middle English including 'ignorant', 'foolish', 'coarse', and 'rough' (*MED* s.v. 'leued, adj.' senses 1.a, 2.a, and 2.c). One possible reading of this line is therefore that Salome is chastising herself for not being gentle enough with Mary's body. For comparison, Swann has suggested Salome's 'rough touch' sets Salome apart from Doubting Thomas in Mirk's *Festial*, helping to explain why she is more heavily reprimanded by Mirk (2015: 20). Another possible reading of Salome's comment depends on the connotations of ignorance in the word 'leued' (*MED* s.v. 'leued, adj.' sense 1.a). With this semantic nuance in mind, Salome is chastising herself for failing to understand Christ's miraculous birth. Salome's tactile encounter with Mary, then, represents 'a process by which "lewed" bodies might become learned bodies' (Cushman 2017: 297). However, there is a third possible reading of Salome's 'lewdnes'. The word 'leued' can also mean 'unchaste' or 'lascivious' (*MED* s.v. 'leued, adj.' sense 2.e). Thus, Salome could be chastising her own (or *his* own) sexual behaviour. This is not the only place in the N-Town manuscript where the word 'lewd' or its derivatives carries a sexual meaning; for example, the woman taken in adultery vows to set aside her 'lewde lyff' (24.283).

Moreover, other speeches made by Salome in the N-Town *Nativity* carry sexual connotations. Cushman (2017: 295–96) has flagged Salome's desire to 'assay' Mary (e.g.

15.247), a word that means both ‘to examine, investigate’ and ‘have intercourse with’, as in the N-Town *Trial of Mary and Joseph* when Joseph declares ‘Of fleschly synne I nevyr asayde’ (14.228; *MED* s.v. ‘assaien, v. senses 4.a and 5). Cushman’s motivation for recuperating the sexual connotations of the encounter between Salome and Mary is her interest in the relationship between bodily experience and knowledge. At the same time, her study participates in a wider movement to recognize the erotic potential of the N-Town *Nativity* (Cushman 2017: 295).

My own reading of the N-Town *Nativity* likewise contributes to this movement. In my view, Salome in this play could have represented a male physician transgressing the touch boundaries of his gender, handling what he should not and thereby creating a sexually unclean encounter. Crucially, ‘his’ usurpation of the conventions of gender, touch, and women’s health is both accentuated and condemned via the horrific hand punishment. His withered hand becomes a metonym for sexually transgressive touch that should be expunged from society. If a prop were used to represent this withered hand, then the need to discard unclean touch from the self would have become overwhelmingly literal. The third hand that falls represents the unclean touch he has quite literally left behind.

The N-Town *Nativity*, then, could easily have mobilized longstanding anxieties about male physicians touching female genitalia. Moreover, if any male doctors *were* starting to take a more hands-on role in gynaecology in fifteenth-century England, then this play could hardly have offered a ringing endorsement of the practice. It should be noted that the first midwife in the N-Town *Nativity*, Zelomy, would also have been cross-dressed. Although Zelomy’s manual examination of the Virgin Mary is not explicitly condemned or punished in the play, her (or rather, ‘his’) actions could also have been alarming for a fifteenth-century audience.

My new reading of the N-Town *Nativity* is complicated by the fact that the Virgin Mary, too, would likely have been portrayed by a cross-dressed male actor. In a performance of this play, then, a cross-dressed man would have effectively demanded to 'towch and fele' (15.218) inside the private parts of another cross-dressed man—i.e. to handle his anus. In certain contexts, namely medical ones, it was culturally acceptable for a man to touch another man rectally. However, as I will now show, the male-male tactile encounter mimed in a performance of the N-Town *Nativity* certainly did not fall into this category. Instead, it could have appeared distinctly homoerotic.

In late medieval England, a male physician could touch a male patient's anus for diagnostic and treatment purposes. This is well demonstrated by LBL MS Sloane 2002, fol. 24 (figure 19). The image in question derives from a fifteenth-century copy of John Arderne's *Fistula in Ano*, a text originally written in the 1370s (Jones 1987: 107; Jones 2002: 222–25). There is no doubt as to the gender of the patient because his testicles are visible. The physician is also male; in fact, it is John Arderne himself. In this procedure, Arderne uses his 'schewyng fynger' (i.e. 'index finger') to assess a fistula (*OED* 3rd edn s.v. 'showing, adj.' sense 2; Power ed 1910: 22; Wallis 2014: 150–52).

Yet when a cross-dressed man demanded to 'towch and fele' (15.218) the private parts of another cross-dressed man during a performance of the N-Town *Nativity*, this could hardly have been seen as a conventional medical encounter. The 'male patient' (i.e. the cross-dressed Virgin Mary) has just given birth—a biological impossibility. In this scenario, the penetration of one man by another is not medically sound. The mimed encounter may, on the other hand, have had sexual overtones. Indeed, there could be yet another layer of meaning in Salome's reference to 'lewdnes' (15.265); specifically, this word might function as a critical comment on the homoerotic encounter that has just been feigned on stage. We must remember, here, that homosexual encounters were framed as

especially unclean in late medieval England, as seen in the introduction to this thesis (pp. 26–27).

In a performance of the N-Town *Nativity*, then, Salome's touch would have been provocative in an open-ended way. On a narrative level, Salome is overstepping the bounds of her profession. Although midwives were permitted to examine female genitalia, this is no ordinary pregnancy—and Salome fails to handle Mary's miraculous body with due reverence and delicacy. On a practical level, Salome would have been embodied by a male actor. 'His' prying hands could easily have mobilized existing fears about manual examination of female genitalia by male physicians. Thirdly, as the male actor portraying Salome would in fact have been feigning to penetrate another male actor, the scene has a shadow of transgressive homosexual touch.

How might medieval spectators have reacted to this multivalent tactile encounter? Could they perhaps have held all three of the above interpretations in mind, consciously or subconsciously, without ever fully resolving them? If so, might the inappropriate and indeed bewildering nature of Salome's touch have provoked laughter? For comparison, another Middle English Nativity play, the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play*, is notorious for its comedic and farcical dimension: Mak steals a sheep from his neighbour but is forced to pretend that it is the baby to which his wife has just given birth (see e.g. Bowers 2002). Alternatively, it is possible that spectators watching the N-Town *Nativity* were able to suspend disbelief, understanding both Mary and Salome as performatively female even though the actors were biologically male. In this case, the haptic actions of the cross-dressed Salome would not call to mind the role of men in gynaecology, for example.

It is unlikely that any two spectators responded to the N-Town *Nativity* in the same way. Ultimately, the play was open to different readings and responses depending

on the varying levels of awareness among the audience concerning the kinds of gender representation and cultural taboo at stake in this episode. However, in my view, the play's potential to mobilize anxieties about male hands inspecting female genitalia would have been particularly resonant during the period in which the play was performed.

There is a parallel here with my earlier reading of the York *Incredulity of Thomas*. In the introduction (pp. 40–46), I argued that the geographical circumstances of performance—namely in the vicinity of Grapecuntlane—could have aligned Thomas's penetration of Christ's wound with the unclean sexual act of prostitution. In the N-Town *Nativity*, I have suggested that the bodily circumstances of performance, namely cross-dressing actors, could have tinged another Doubting Thomas story with the offence of sexually unclean touch. In both cases, the Doubting Thomas story (or an echo thereof), when combined with the various *practical* aspects of performance, was ideally positioned to offer social commentary on touch.

Endorsing Salome's Touch: Women, Contact Relics, and Childbirth

Thus far, I have offered a new reading of the N-Town *Nativity*, one that suggests the Thomas figure in this play could mobilize anxieties about different kinds of unclean, erotic touch—especially for male physicians. I will now explore another side to the sensory commentary offered by the N-Town *Nativity.* The play was equally well positioned to promote touch as a pathway to the sacred, especially for women in the birthing room. It is helpful as a point of departure to consider Alaya Swann's recent work on the play.

Swann convincingly suggests that Nativity plays featuring the doubting midwife episode had the potential to shape women's beliefs about touch. She points in particular

to the following passage from *Piers the Ploughman's Crede* (c.1393–1401), a poem influenced by Lollard views:

> And miracles of mydwyves, and maken wymmen to wenen
> That the lace of oure Ladie smok lighteth hem of children.
> Thei ne prechen nought of Powel, ne penaunce for synne,
> But all of mercy and mensk that Marie may helpen.
> (Dean ed 1991: 10, lines 78–81)

As an editor of *Piers the Ploughman's Crede* explains, '[t]he syntax seems defective or elliptical in these lines, with an understood "they" before "maken wymmen to wenen" ' (Dean ed 1991: 36n77–79). Accordingly, Swann translates the passage as follows:

> And during plays about the miracles of midwives, they make women believe
> That the lace of our Lady's smock will safely deliver them of children.
> They do not preach of Paul, nor of penance for sin,
> But everything about the mercy and grace that Mary may help.
> (Swann 2015: 23)

For Swann, this passage '[identifies] the midwife episode as an attempted demonstration of Mary's ability to help contemporary women in childbirth through scraps of fabric or other material objects' (2015: 23). Thus, plays like the N-Town *Nativity* had the capacity to shape what women thought about the relationship between touch, contact relics, and childbirth. To clarify, in the N-Town *Nativity* Salome touches a contact relic belonging to Christ (i.e. the hem of his garment) in a space where childbirth is taking place (i.e. the manger). Although Salome is not the woman giving birth, her miraculous healing could nevertheless have encouraged women to touch contact relics in the birthing 'room'.

Swann's reading of the N-Town *Nativity* opens up a thought-provoking intersection between theatre, sensory education, and women's health. However, she does not put this lesson in its wider sensory context. In my view, Salome's sensory education is somewhat counterintuitive. In the scenario presented by the N-Town *Nativity*, women could not access sacred touch (i.e. the contact relic) without having first had unclean touch (i.e. sexual intercourse). This argument requires some context about marital sex in medieval England.

Married women were in a double bind. On the one hand, they had a conjugal debt: under this 'doctrine of medieval theology, enforceable under canon law', women were obligated to have sex with their husbands (Reid 2006: 164). This conjugal debt was, of course, mutual—indeed, Alisoun famously emphasizes her husband's conjugal debt when attempting to justify her promiscuity in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue* (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 107, lines 152–57; Delany 1994: 73). Even though marital sex was an obligation, it was nevertheless a moral quandary. There were restrictions on how and when the act could take place, lest it become sinful. For example, a fourteenth-century handbook entitled *The Book of Vices and Virtues* advises married couples to 'spare of þe dedes of wedloke in holy tymes' and to abstain from sex during a woman's menstrual cycle (Francis ed 1942: 248). The text also condemns married people who have sex for the wrong reasons. For example, intercourse is acceptable for procreative purposes but sinful when done 'onliche for delite' (Francis ed 1942: 247). There was a thin line, then, between fulfilling conjugal debts and falling into sin. Because of conjugal debt, married women were also at a significant spiritual disadvantage. A common hierarchy of chastity placed married women below widows and virgins respectively, and the relative reward each woman could expect in heaven depended on her place in this hierarchy (e.g. Francis ed 1942: 259–60).

Most importantly for my purposes, many medieval texts frame marital sex as an unclean act. Margery Kempe, for example, begged her husband to be relieved of their conjugal debt, and explained to him that she would rather 'se ȝow be slayn þan we schuld turne a-ȝen to owyr *vnclennesse*' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 23; emphasis added). Michael Calabrese and Eric Eliason highlight that the Middle English poem *Cleanness* is unusual precisely because it does *not* highlight the 'repulsive, slimy nature' of heterosexual activity, a category that includes marital sex (1995: 268). In addition to the

aforementioned passage from *The Book of Margery Kempe*, they point to the following extract from Pope Innocent III's influential *De miseria humanae conditionis* (twelfth century):

> Who does not know that copulation, even conjugal [*eciam coniugalem*], is never performed entirely without the heat of desire, without the fervor of the flesh, without the stench of lust? Because of this conceived seeds are made filthy, defiled, and spoiled [*fedantur, maculantur, et viciantur*], from which seeds the soul ultimately imparted contracts the blemish of sin, the stain [*maculam*] of guilt, the filth of iniquity, just as an infused liquid is spoiled by a tainted vessel and, touching the polluted item [*pollutum contingens*], is polluted by the contact.
>
> (Translation after Calabrese and Eliason 1995: 269, citing Lewis ed 1978: 98; Latin after Lewis ed 1978: 99)

Note especially the rhetoric of uncleanness in the passage above: 'filthy', 'defiled', 'spoiled', 'stain', and 'polluted'. More importantly still, text includes 'even conjugal' sex in its anxieties about uncleanness.

Similar ideas informed *The Book of Vices and Virtues* in the fourteenth century. According to this text, those who '[k]epen *clenliche* here mariage as it is ordeyned and sette, suche folke ben likyng to God' (Francis ed 1942: 248; emphasis added). The implication is that breaking the rules governing marital sex—even just once—irreparably defiles the body and soul though unclean touch. Yet these rules were a tall order. As Debra Hassig points out, 'if all regulations were obeyed, medieval married couples (taking advantage of all available opportunities) could have had sex only about forty-four times annually' (1999: 75). Marriage, then, was not a *carte blanche* for sin free sexual activity: marital intercourse could easily become an unclean act of touch if done at the wrong time or in the wrong frame of mind. Injudicious marital intercourse was certainly not as defiling or as sinful as other carnal misdeeds, such as bestiality. Sexual intercourse between humans and animals, which I discuss further in Chapter Two, was often ranked as the worst possible sin (Salisbury 1991: 182). Nevertheless, injudicious marital

intercourse still had its place on the spectrum of sexual uncleanness in medieval English culture.

Crucially, the N-Town *Nativity* subscribes to the view that even marital sex is unclean. This is demonstrated by the following passage:

> SALOMEE: In every place I xal telle þis:
> Of a clene mayde þat God is born,
> And in oure lyknes God now clad is,
> Mankend to saue þat was forlorn;
> His modyr a mayde as sche was beforn,
> Natt fowle polutyd as other women be,
> But fayr and fresch as rose on thorn,
> Lely-wyte, clene with pure virginyté.
> (15.298–305)

As Salome knows from her manual examination, Mary's body remained sexually undefiled even after childbirth: she is 'a mayde as sche was beforn' and she is still 'pure', 'clene', and 'Lely-wyte'. This sets Mary fundamentally apart from 'other women', who cannot be both mother and virgin. Such women must have been 'fowle polutyd' by sex before they became mothers. In Salome's view, then, 'other women' cannot be both progenitive *and* sexually clean: this unique honour belongs to the Virgin Mary. Conspicuously, Salome makes no exceptions here for married women. The unwitting testimony is that even if a married woman did everything 'right' when conceiving her child—i.e. she had sex at the appropriate time of the liturgical year and she did not enjoy the experience—her virginity was still compromised and she was thus less 'clene' than Mary.

Thus, Salome in the N-Town *Nativity* shows that both sides of the medieval touch paradox were applicable to women of childbearing age. On the one hand, the miraculous restoration of Salome's hand upon contact with the hem of Christ's garment implicitly endorses contact relics as a pathway to sacred healing for women in the birthing room. Yet Salome also emphasizes that any pregnant woman would necessarily have engaged in an act of unclean touch nine months previously. Arguably, using a contact relic in

childbirth had a remedial function, 'curing' prior unclean touch with present sacred touch. Contact relics, then, had beneficial effects for both a woman's physical *and* her moral health. Nevertheless, if a married woman used a contact relic in childbirth, this would likely be only a temporary remedy for unclean touch. As long as she remained married, she would almost inevitably engage in unclean touch again in future—unless she became a widow, or followed in Margery Kempe's footsteps and begged her husband to forgo the conjugal debt. In a world before birth control, then, medieval women were potentially trapped in tactile cycle, being obligated to engage in unclean sexual touch with their husbands, but able to temporarily remedy this with sacred touch in the birthing room.

In a fallen world tinged by sexual sin, sacred and unclean touch existed uncomfortably side-by-side for women. Plays like the N-Town *Nativity* potentially forced women to reconcile the sacred and unclean in their own lives by endorsing contact relics in childbirth while also stressing that sexual defilement was a precursor to pregnancy for all women except Mary. Of course, it is possible that women watching the play were not willing or able to see this tension: perhaps they never drew a connection between the healing episode in the N-Town *Nativity* and contact relics; perhaps they had never had access to a contact relic in childbirth, so the message simply was not relevant to them; perhaps they *did* have access to a contact relic in labour, but did not recognize how sacred contact counterbalanced prior unclean touch. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the sensory lesson promoted by the N-Town *Nativity* is more complex than it first appears. The play is not a straightforward endorsement of contact relics as a pathway to sacred touch for women in childbirth; it raises difficult questions about gendered tensions between sacred and unclean touch in everyday life.

The rest of this chapter will put the N-Town *Nativity* in its wider theatrical landscape. I will put forward a new theory that the York *Assumption of the Virgin* encouraged women to touch the Virgin's girdle during childbirth. Once again, a Doubting Thomas figure is the vehicle through which gendered sensory instruction is delivered—yet once again, the play had the power to expose how sexually unclean touch existed side-by-side sacred touch for women of childbearing age. In order to unpack this new reading, it is first necessary to introduce the York *Assumption* and contextualize the material culture of late medieval childbirth.

The York *Assumption of the Virgin:* An Overview

The Weavers' *Assumption of the Virgin* is the forty-fifth pageant in the York Plays, and is extant only in the Register. It 'was perhaps regarded locally as something of a showpiece' within the Corpus Christi Plays, to judge from the fact that the pageant was specifically requested for Henry VII's visit to York in 1485 (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 435). However, the York *Assumption* had a dramatic fall from grace during the Reformation, as it was repeatedly suppressed due to its Marian content (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 431–32).

The play opens with a lengthy soliloquy on the Passion by Thomas the apostle. In the midst of his reflections, Thomas is miraculously transported to the Valley of Josephat, Mary's burial place. A group of angels arrive and sing two songs, urging Mary to rise to heaven to be crowned. Thomas expresses uncertainty about what this event signifies, but Mary explains that she is rising to heaven. Mary urges Thomas to tell his fellow apostles the good news, but Thomas doubts they will believe his 'tales' (45.164). To allay these fears, Mary gives Thomas a 'tokyn', namely her 'girdill' (45.169). After Mary and Thomas exchange farewells, the apostles are reunited. John, Peter, and Andrew are

astonished that Thomas has the Virgin's girdle, the garment in which they buried her. Yet it is only when the apostles open her grave and find it empty that they believe Thomas's story. John, Peter, and Andrew apologize for their initial misgivings and praise the girdle. The play closes with Thomas promising to preach to the masses about his experiences.

Much like the N-Town *Nativity*, the York *Assumption* recalls the Incredulity of Thomas. In this case, however, the story is inverted. It is now Thomas who initially delivers miraculous news, while his fellow apostles remain sceptical and demand first-hand evidence. This inversion is foreshadowed early in the play. During his opening soliloquy, Thomas reflects back on his doubts about the Resurrection, recalling how Christ 'frayned' him to 'fele' the wounds (45.84). Later in the play, Thomas claims to have discovered the Virgin 'flesshly' at her Assumption, thereby emphasizing the parallels between his experiences with Christ and the Virgin (45.251). However, where Thomas was able to put his hands inside Christ's flesh, his interactions with the girdle allow him to touch Mary's flesh only at one step removed. By touching Mary's girdle, Thomas is touching a contact relic, just as Salome in the N-Town *Nativity* touched a contact relic (i.e. the hem of Christ's garment) rather than Christ's body itself.

Representations of the girdle story in contemporary art emphasize how Thomas was only able to touch the Virgin indirectly. Consider, for example, an Assumption panel found in a pond at Selby Abbey, Yorkshire, dating from 1430–1470 (figure 20; Palmer 1990: 146). For context, the Assumption and Coronation typically formed the final panel(s) in Joys of the Virgin altarpieces, and the motif of Thomas and the girdle was a popular choice for this element of the altarpiece (Cheetham 2003: 18–19). Such panels would once have been painted (Cheetham 2005: 26–27). The iconography of the Selby panel is typical: the Virgin, situated in a lozenge vesica, is being carried up to heaven by angels on either side, while Thomas at her right (i.e. the viewer's left) catches the girdle

slipping from her waist. Images like this one make explicit to us what was only implicit when contact relics were used by medieval people: such objects mediate a moment of touch between the user and the holy body, creating a physical link between them. A similar phenomenon can be seen in a fourteenth-century window from Beckley, Oxfordshire (figure 21). This image shows Thomas reaching up to touch the girdle while Mary herself casts it down with her hand as she rises to heaven, carried by angels (Marks 1993: 71–72; Mills 2008). Here again, we can see the contact relic in action, physically connecting Thomas and Mary.

The story of Thomas and the virgin's girdle, then, is effectively the origin story of a contact relic. But where did this story come from? The scriptures are conspicuously silent about the later life of the Virgin, and between the fifth and sixth centuries a variety of stories emerged to explain what happened to Mary at her death (Clayton 1999; Shoemaker 2002). This group of interconnected texts is commonly referred to as the *Transitus Mariae* tradition, or alternatively the tradition of Mary's Dormition and Assumption. In the Latin *Transitus* tradition, the girdle story is only found in *Transitus A*, a text attributed to Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea (Najork 2018: 478, 480). The date of Pseudo-Joseph's *Transitus* is not entirely clear, but several scholars favour a date some time around the seventh century (Najork 2018: 480).

It remains unclear how exactly the author of the York *Assumption* encountered this particular apocryphal tradition. Carolyn Wall once suggested that the author of the York *Assumption* may have been familiar with an English literary tradition represented by texts such as the Auchinleck *Assumption* (1970: 177, 187, 191). Yet even fifty years later, the transmission of Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea's *Transitus* in medieval England is not fully understood. Just recently, a Middle English version of the *Transitus A* was edited for the first time (Najork 2018: 494–504). However, this translation is 'not the

direct source' of any of the other extant Middle English Assumption narratives, including the York *Assumption* (Najork 2018: 491).

The apocryphal origins of the York *Assumption* have been one focus of existing scholarship on the play: other topics include the structure of the pageant wagon (McKinnell 1990), the music in the manuscript (Hoffman 1950; Rastall 1996: 246–48, 328–29), and the limitations of language (Scoville 2004: 10–29). Brief gestures have been made to the ways in which the girdle is handled on stage and the response this engenders from the apostles (Evans 1997: 210; Stevenson 2010: 56–57). Nevertheless, the full significance of this prop has hitherto gone unnoticed. In the next section, I show that touching the Virgin's girdle, or replicas thereof, was thought to be beneficial to women in childbirth. The York *Assumption* was in a powerful position to endorse this tactile act.

Childbirth and Girdles in Late Medieval England

The use of belts and girdles in childbirth has a complex anthropological history that stretches back to antiquity (Rowland ed 1981: 32; see also Dilling 1913–1914, though outdated). In the later Middle Ages, one girdle was prized above all others for this purpose: the belt Mary had dropped to Thomas the apostle during her Assumption. Many cities across Europe claimed to be in possession of the Virgin's girdle, most famously Prato in Italy (Breeze 1986; Cassidy 1991: 99n17). In England, abbeys including Westminster, Bruton, Dale, and Bronholm laid a claim to Mary's holy belt (Morse 2013: 193). Such relics were evidently loaned out to aristocratic and royal women in labour. For example, the Westminster relic was loaned to Elizabeth, Countess of Hereford in 1303 and to Elizabeth of York in 1502 (French 2016: 133; Morse 2013: 193).

For women who could not borrow relics of the Virgin's girdle from their church, there was a substitute in the form of birth girdle *rolls.* These textual amulets, which have

been studied at most length by Mary Morse, mimicked relics of the Virgin's girdle both visually and functionally (Gwara and Morse 2012; Morse 1999: 22–27; Morse 2013; Morse 2014). As such, birth girdle rolls had a similar function to the 'genuine replicas' of the Veronica discussed in the introduction to this thesis (p. 31, quoting Hamburger 1998: 317). Specifically, they democratized tactile access to a famous relic. It is helpful here to introduce LWC MS 632, a birth girdle roll that is already well known (Gwara and Morse 2012: 37, 47–49; Hindley Forthcoming; Jones and Olsan 2015: 426; Morse 1999: 22–24; Morse 2013: 199–201; Morse 2014: 209–211, 217–18; Olsan 2015; Skemer 2001: 202n15; Skemer 2006: 259–60; Volf 2008: 262–64, 268).

LWC MS 632 was constructed in the late fifteenth century by stitching together four long and thin pieces of parchment to create a roll measuring 3320 by 100 mm (Edsall 2014: 202, Skemer 2006: 259). The act of unfurling this roll is akin to unfurling a belt or girdle (figure 22). In Kathryn Rudy's words, rolls of this type were 'fabricated' so that they 'resembled the girdle [Mary] purported to have dropped into the hands of the doubting Thomas during her Heavenward journey' (2011b: 99). Not only does this roll physically recall the Virgin's girdle, but a text on the front also promises similar protection in childbirth:

> And yf a woman travell w<yth> chyld lay thys crosse on hyr wombe and she shall be safe delyverd wythowte parell and the childe shall haue cristendome and the mother puryfycacyon[1]
>
> (LWC MS 632, face)

The cross in question that the woman is supposed to 'lay' upon her 'wombe' is a Tau cross, said to be equal Christ's height when multiplied fifteen times (figure 23). For context, the Middle English word 'wombe' can refer both to the uterus specifically and to the abdominal region more generally—though this distinction would make little practical difference to how a woman laid the roll on her body (*MED* s.v. 'wombe, n' senses 2.a.a

[1] In my transcriptions of LWC MS 632 I have corrected some errors in Morse 2013: 199–200.

and 5.a.a). A text inscribed along the dorse of the roll likewise advises that 'yf a woman travell wyth chylde', she should 'gyrde' (i.e. 'wrap') the roll 'abowte hyr wombe and she shall be safe delyverd' (*MED* s.v. 'girden v.(1)' sense 1.a). LWC MS 632 was probably used in the way it describes; it is 'narrow enough' to be wrapped around the waist during childbirth, and its 'battered condition' suggests extensive physical use (Olsan 2015: para. 1 of 10). In addition to LWC MS 632, Morse has identified at least seven other rolls from late medieval England as birth girdles (Gwara and Morse 2012: 33; Morse 2013: 193–206):

LBL Harley 5919, nos. 143–44
LBL MS Additional 88929
LBL MS Harley Charter 43.A.14
LBL MS Harley Roll T.11
NYML MS G. 39
NHBL Takamiya MS 56
NHBL MS 410

Morse has also pointed to a roll in the Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province, Philadelphia with no shelfmark (2013: 206). She suggests that with further research it 'may emerge as a significant forerunner of the English manuscript birth girdle tradition' (Morse 2013: 206).[2]

The rolls listed above date to the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, with the exception of the late-fourteenth century Baltimore roll (Gwara and Morse 2012: 37, 49–50; Morse 2013: 201, 205; Morse 2014: 199; Skemer 2006: 259, 262–64). Almost all of these rolls are manuscripts, having been handwritten on parchment. One, however, is printed on paper and attributed to the press of Wynkyn de Worde c.1533–1534 (Gwara and Morse 2012: 49–50). This fragmentary text is now preserved in an album of printed

[2] Curiously, the childbirth text found in LWC MS 632 also survives in a codex (OBL MS Bodley 177, fol. 61v). Daniel Wakelin rightly notes that this page 'from a bound book would be difficult to lay on a woman in childbirth' as the instructions demand, though he suggests this 'separate page […] might be detached' (2018: 181).

ephemera (LBL Harley 5919, nos. 143–44). No other copies from this print run are known to survive (Gwara and Morse 2012: 33).

In recent years, birth girdle rolls have come under an increasing amount of scrutiny. Morse has done much to open up the field: her research has considered the role of the *mise-en-page* in encouraging affective piety, the references to saints Quiricus and Julitta, and the tradition of linking birth girdles to the height of the Virgin Mary (respectively 1999: 22–27; 2013; 2014). Taking a different focus, Stephanie Volf has argued that birth girdle rolls enabled women to engage in a complex form of *Imitatio Mariae*, assuming Mary's place at the Nativity (2008: 258–300). However, Katherine Hindley (forthcoming) argues that the phrase 'birth girdle' has been applied too liberally, obfuscating the multi-purpose nature of many of the rolls concerned. In her view, there are only two persuasive examples: LWC MS 632 and NHBL Takamiya MS 56 (Hindley, forthcoming).

My interest in birth girdle rolls lies in the hitherto overlooked connection between the material culture of childbirth and medieval biblical theatre. The York *Assumption*—which dramatized the moment when the Virgin dropped her girdle to Thomas—was uniquely placed to promote this object as a birthing amulet. This new reading of the York *Assumption* resonates with my discussion of the N-Town *Nativity* above. In both cases, biblical theatre could teach lessons about gendered touch in the birthing room via stories that echo the Incredulity of Thomas.

Birth Girdles: A Material Context for the York *Assumption*

There are three reasons why the York *Assumption* was in a powerful position to endorse the Virgin's girdle as a birthing amulet. Firstly, the Virgin singles herself out as an intercessor for women in childbirth immediately after giving her girdle to Thomas,

implicitly drawing a connection between her protection and her belt. Secondly, descriptions of the Virgin wearing her girdle in the play offer striking linguistic echoes with the directions on birth girdle texts. Mary on stage thus offers a visual inspiration for *Imitatio Mariae* via the Virgin's girdle. Thirdly, birth girdles evidently had cultural purchase in Yorkshire, where the play would have been performed. I shall now examine each point in detail.

In the York *Assumption*, the Virgin Mary delivers a speech promising to entreat 'my souerayne sone' to help 'womanne in childinge' (45.193). Mary is given space to single out just one other group of people for whom she will intercede, namely 'manne in his mournyng' (45.192). There is no reason to believe that any text from this speech is missing; there is no gap in the metre, no obvious narrative lacuna, and no codicological evidence to suggest a missing folio. This is important. If the list were any longer, the pleas of childbearing women would not be given such prominence. The priority given to pregnant women is particularly notable given that speech comes just twenty-four lines after the Virgin gives her girdle to Thomas (i.e. 45.169). The play thus makes reference to Mary's intercession in labour immediately after displaying a garment of hers that came to be prized during childbirth.

My second argument depends on the parallels between the way in which birth girdles were supposed to be worn by late medieval women and how Mary is directed to wear her girdle in the York *Assumption.* A text inscribed along the dorse of LWC MS 632 specifically invites the parturient woman to 'gyrde' the roll 'abowte hyr wombe'. For comparison, Nicholas Shaxton's *Injunctions for Salisbury Diocese* (1538) forbids 'girdles […] of our Lady, or such other superstitious things, to be occupied *about the woman* while she laboureth' (Frere and Kennedy eds 1910: II, 59; emphasis added). To put this document in context, the Reformation brought with it suspicion about the authenticity of

many relics and scepticism about 'superstitious' practices involving them (Duffy 2005: 384–85).

The practical comments about the usage of birth girdles bear more than a passing resemblance to the text of the York *Assumption*. For example, James celebrates the arrival of the girdle in the following way:

> JACOBUS: Itt is welcome, iwis, fro þat lady so light,
> For hir *wombe* wolde sche *wrappe* with it, and were it with wynne.
> (45.276–77; emphasis added)

Similarly, Peter comments that the girdle 'was wonte for to *wappe* þat worthy virgine', and Andrew observes that 'scho bende it *aboute* hir' (45.275, 45.279; emphasis added). These lines effectively function as retrospective implicit stage directions, strongly suggesting that the actor playing Mary wore the girdle around the waist before giving it to the actor playing Thomas. The Virgin Mary, then, would have worn the girdle on stage just how late medieval women would have worn similar objects in the birthing room. The material similarities do not end here. Thomas describes Mary's girdle as 'Þis tokyn tall' in the York *Assumption* (45.272). Not only does this recall images of the virgin's long girdle in contemporary stained glass and alabaster (figures 20–21), but it also echoes the dimensions of birth girdle rolls like LWC MS 632 (figures 22–23).

These similarities should be seen in light of evidence that birth girdles were used in Yorkshire prior to the Reformation. Firstly, documents from the mid-1530s detail the discovery of birth girdle relics in Yorkshire by Cromwell's commissioners. Doctors Layton and Legh found girdles belonging to the Virgin Mary at Haltemprice Priory, Kirkham Priory, and Fountains abbey; they also note that the Haltemprice and Kirkam girdles are specifically associated with pregnancy (Clay ed 1912: 16–18; Duffy 2005: 384). Layton and Legh also explicitly mention that a girdle at Meaux Abbey belonging to St Bernard was loaned out to women in childbirth (Clay ed 1912: 16). In York itself,

another girdle believed to be useful for pregnant women was found at Holy Trinity (Clay ed 1912: 17; Duffy 2005: 384). The York *Assumption* was still being performed in some form when these relics were discovered in the 1530s, though such objects were likely already in use contemporaneously with earlier performances. Indeed, we saw above (p. 81) that a girdle relic was borrowed from Westminster Abbey as early as 1303.

What about birth girdle rolls? One of the birth girdle rolls identified by Morse has a strong Yorkshire provenance. A short poem at the end of NYML MS G. 39 explains that the roll was made by Canon Perceval of Coverham Abbey (Bühler 1964: 278; Friedman 1995: 167–69; Skemer 2006: 262–63). For context, this monastery in North Yorkshire is approximately 40 miles North-West of York. Given internal references to 'Pape Innocent' and 'Kyng Charls', Morse suggests that the roll was made 'in or after 1484, the year when both Pope Innocent VIII and Charles VIII of France came to power' (2013: 201). This girdle has obvious links with Mary. For example, there is a prayer specifically addressed to her (Legge 1904: 102; Morse 2013: 202). Further, the name 'Maria' is writ large across the Tau cross that the pregnant woman is directed to place across her 'wome' (figure 24). This placement of Mary's name emphasizes her role in enabling the Passion: she gave birth to a Son who died on the cross. Laying this cross against the womb, as the manuscript advises, would therefore bring Mary's unique childbirth into literal contact with an everyday pregnancy. For the pregnant woman, this act was potentially a kind of *Imitatio Mariae*, inviting an imagined embodiment of the Nativity.[3]

Whether NYML MS G. 39 was used in this way remains unclear. For example, the roll is in a much better condition than LWC MS 632, perhaps suggesting that it saw little practical use. NYML MS G. 39 is also over two metres longer than LWC MS 632

[3] For a broader discussion of *Imitatio Mariae* in medieval culture, see Hale 1990; McNamer 132–33.

(Edsall 2014: 206, 209). It would thus have been more cumbersome to use. Further, NYML MS G. 39 is more heavily decorated than LWC MS 632, which might seem at odds with its function as a textual amulet. Finally, some of the prayers on NYML MS G. 39 are 'not gender specific', and so Skemer suggests that the roll 'could have been used devotionally and amuletically for the benefit of family and household' more broadly rather than for pregnant women specifically (Skemer 2006: 263; cf. also Hindley forthcoming).

Even if NYML MS G. 39 was never actually used as a birth girdle, the survival of a roll from Yorkshire that promises protection to women in childbirth is nevertheless suggestive. How many birth girdle rolls might there have once been in Yorkshire, and indeed in England as a whole? Many factors that militate against the survival of birth girdle rolls. These items had a limited lifespan; a long and thin piece of parchment or paper could only be worn so many times before it became too damaged or too dirty. Like the exposed first page of a codex, small rolls were especially susceptible to damage and loss. Further, we have seen that birth girdles were confiscated and suppressed in the sixteenth century. The rolls that survive, then, likely represent a fraction of a much wider material context. Indeed, Joseph J. Gwara and Mary Morse have argued that the survival of a printed birth girdle roll suggest that printers 'satisfied a mass-market demand for textual amulets' in early Tudor England (2012: 35).

The correspondences between the York *Assumption* and birth girdle usage could have gone over the heads of some audience members, most obviously men. A central tenet of my earlier discussion of the N-Town *Nativity* was the fact that the birthing room remained a forbidden space for men at the end of the fifteenth century in England, with a possible exception being male physicians attending to complex births. The average man would likely have known little of the practicalities of labour and birth girdles. Thus, a

male spectator may only have been able to access a basic reading of the girdle prop in the York *Assumption:* it was a garment that had touched the Virgin's body and proved her ascent to heaven.

Conversely, a performance of the York *Assumption* could have had a special resonance for female audience members, especially those of childbearing age. By providing sanction in the words and actions of none other than the Virgin Mary, the York *Assumption* was in a strong position to publicly encourage the use of birth girdles. Earlier in this chapter (p. 73), I drew attention to *Piers the Ploughman's Crede,* specifically the section in which the author condemns nativity plays that 'maken wymmen to wenen | That the lace of oure Ladie smok lighteth hem of children' (Dean ed 1991: 10, lines 78–79). For Swann, this was a thought-provoking lens through which to examine the N-Town *Nativity* (2015: 23). One can only imagine what the *Piers*-poet would have thought of the York *Assumption*: this play was equally poised to encourage women to use a contact relic in childbirth and promote touch as a pathway to sacred healing.

It is helpful to put my argument in the wider context of existing scholarship on the York *Assumption.* Jill Stevenson points to evidence of girdles in late medieval wills from Yorkshire, arguing that lay spectators watching the York *Assumption* would have understood this 'familiar object […] in relation to their own personal experiences with girdles' (2010: 57). Stevenson contends that 'objects presented onstage […] may have validated that spectator's own practices with devotional objects' (2010: 57). This theory of validation is a more useful way of approaching the prop in the York *Assumption* than Stevenson realizes. Stevenson's appraisal focuses on girdles as objects of devotional and memorial significance; she considers the role of props and gesture in the play while also highlighting the mnemonic function of girdles in wills (2010: 54–58, 193n62). However, girdles were a polyvalent signifier in late medieval material culture, having particular

significance during childbirth. The York *Assumption* had the potential to endorse the use of the Virgin's girdle as a birth girdle—or, to reappropriate Stevenson's word, it had the capacity to 'validate' this gendered mode of sacred touch.

Yet the York *Assumption* could have done more than simply 'validate' tactile encounters with birth girdles: it could also have enriched the devotional significance of the act. In this chapter, I have noted that birth girdles allowed women to engage in a powerful *Imitatio Mariae,* embodying Mary's place at the Nativity. The language that Volf uses to describe this *Imitatio Mariae* experience is striking: in her words, a birth girdle allows the expectant mother to 'place herself in a sort of spiritual *drama*' (2008: 293; emphasis added). I would push this metaphor one step further: *Imitatio Maria* in childbirth was a 'performance' in which the expectant mother could use a 'prop' (i.e. the Virgin's girdle) to take on a 'leading role' (i.e. Mary) in the 'drama' of salvation history. Crucially, a play like the York *Assumption* could have given medieval women a powerful visual stimulus for their role in this 'performance'. A production of the York *Assumption* could thus have created a powerful house of mirrors: just as female spectators of childbearing age might wear a birth girdle to imitate Mary, so too the actor on stage is wearing a girdle to imitate Mary.

However, this process of iterative imitation was not without complication. The 'house of mirrors' effect would have been problematized and perhaps even undermined by the fact that a cross-dressed man performed Mary. Further, the idea that women could imitate Mary through their pregnancies and imaginatively embody the Nativity with birth girdles was fraught with paradox. Mary's pregnancy was *not* imitable: it was the product of a sex-free marriage (Rawcliffe 2003: 98). The York Plays repeatedly stress that Mary's body remained untouched by sexual defilement. For example, in *Joseph's Troubles about Mary*, Joseph is emphatic that Mary was 'neuere fylid' (i.e. 'defiled') with him

'flesshely' and he thus struggles to understand how she could have become pregnant (13.106). One of the ladies accompanying the Virgin explains that 'no man' came 'To touche' Mary while Joseph was away (13.121–22). The verb 'touche' here specifically means to 'have sexual intercourse with (sb.)' (*MED* s.v. 'touchen, v.' sense 6). As discussed above (p. 60), the York *Nativity* probably once featured Salome the doubting midwife, whose story serves to stress the miracle of the virgin birth. Finally, the York *Assumption* itself describes Mary as 'precious and pure' (45.140), once again evoking Mary's sexual cleanliness. By contrast, women using birth girdles would necessarily have sacrificed their sexual purity by becoming pregnant in the first place.

In sum, to engage in the sacred touch offered by birth girdles, women first had to engage in sexually unclean touch, fundamentally distinguishing them from Mary and potentially undermining any *Imitatio Mariae* achieved by wearing her girdle. The York *Assumption*, then, was subject to the same sensory predicament as the N-Town *Nativity*: touching contact relics in the birthing room was a pathway to the sacred for women, but they must first have contaminated their bodies and souls via unclean sexual touch.

Gender, Touch, and Time

Setting aside these conceptual complexities, I will now explore the historical contingency of birth girdle usage, arguing that plays like York *Assumption* were participating in a specific sensory moment. The idea that women should touch the Virgin's girdle or other contact relics in the birthing room—and the material and theatrical culture that supported this practice—was largely confined to the late medieval period. Theatre, I suggest, is a powerful litmus test for changing attitudes towards women, touch, and the sacred.

Throughout this chapter, I have indicated that birth girdles came under attack in the 1530s, most obviously in Nicholas Shaxton's *Injunctions* of 1538. It is no accident

that evidence for birth girdle relics in Yorkshire comes from records of their suppression. Of course, it is impossible to determine when exactly birth girdle relics and rolls stopped being used. As late as 1610, 'a girdle of white silke made of St. Mary knottes' was discovered in Gowthwaite Hall, the Yorkshire house of Sir John Yorke (Cassidy 1991: 97, quoting Palmer 1990: 2).[4] Did women in labour perhaps secretly use this object, preserving late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century customs? After all, Gowthwaite Hall was associated with recusancy at that time—not only was an anti-protestant interlude staged there in the Christmas period of 1609–1610, but Yorke was also accused of harbouring priests and participating in the Gunpowder Plot (Keenan 2013: 16–17). We must remain alert to the possibility of clandestine continuity in devotional practice; birth girdles were banned, but they may still have been used. However, my primary concern is the broader policy of suppression of birth girdles, rather than the possibility that it may not have been entirely effective. Given that the York *Assumption* was in a position to promote birth girdles, it is important to examine what happened to this play when birth girdles came under attack. As I will show, the decline of the birth girdle was matched by a parallel decline in the performance of the York *Assumption*.

Ultimately, all of the York Plays ceased to be performed by the 1570s, with the final performance having taken place in 1569 (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, xxxiv). Harold Gardiner (1946) suggested that medieval biblical drama declined because it was actively suppressed from above, but theatre scholars now prefer the view that 'the decline and eventual demise of civic biblical drama came about for a number of reasons, frequently local, rather than through a nation-wide policy of suppression' (Klausner, Ostovich, and Dell 2012: 1; see also Bills 1980). The eventual decline of the York Plays, for example,

[4] Cassidy incorrectly has 'while' for 'white'.

came about for several complex and interlocking factors—some religious, some political, some economic, and some circumstantial (Johnston 2002: 158–60, 163–73).

However, three plays concerning Mary's later life were an early victim in the York cycle's demise, as they were targeted in the mid-sixteenth century on religious grounds. Marian devotion came under attack during the English Reformation for a number of (often interlocking) reasons: Mary detracted attention from Christ, she was invested with undue intercessory power, her body and relics had been 'fetishized', and the story of her Assumption had no scriptural basis (Waller 2011: 6–7, 33, 65). Unsurprisingly, then, three pageants in the York plays that focused on Mary's later life—i.e. the *Death*, *Assumption*, and *Coronation of the Virgin*—experienced a turbulent performance history in the mid-sixteenth century (Beadle ed 2009–2009: II, 416–17, 431, 444; Cross 2002; Duffy 2005: 580).

In 1548, shortly after the accession of Edward VI, civic records indicate that the Corpus Christi plays were to be performed 'Certen pagyauntes excepte', namely 'the deyng of our Lady / assumpcion of our Lady / and Coronacion of our Lady' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 291–92). The same plays were excluded in 1549 (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 293). However, after Mary I—a devout Catholic—ascended to the throne in 1553, the civic authorities quickly restored the Mary Plays at York. In 1554, the House Books record that the pageants excluded 'of late' should be 'played ageyne' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 310). Nevertheless, in 1561, just three years into Elizabeth I's reign, the Corpus Christi plays were once again to be performed without the Death, Assumption, and Coronation of the Virgin (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 331–32).

The suppression of these three plays at York would have been driven primarily by their Marian nature, in addition to anxieties about the apocryphal nature of the source

material. For comparison, the post-Reformation banns for the Chester play reveal concerns about the dramatization of apocryphal stories, as demonstrated by the following comment on the doubting midwife episode:

> Yf the Scriptures a-warrant not of the miydwyfe's reporte
> The authour telleth his authour, then take it in sporte.
> (Walker ed 2000: 203)

Similarly, reformer Christopher Goodman included the midwife episode in his list of 'absurdities' in the Chester Plays in 1572, thereby betraying his anxieties about the dramatization of apocryphal stories (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills eds 2007: I, 147; Kelly 2012: 47; Ryan 2003: 446). But where the suppression of the York *Assumption* was concerned, perhaps the apocryphal nature of the source material was just one of several concerns. In particular, if the York *Assumption* could on some level be seen to validate the use of 'superstitious' birth girdle relics and rolls, this could only have added insult to injury. Regardless of why exactly the play was suppressed, this change resulted in the disappearance of a public mechanism for endorsing female touch of birth girdles.

Thus far, I have argued that late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century performances of the York *Assumption* would have been in a powerful position to validate women's use of contact relics in the birthing room. Nevertheless, as the sixteenth century progressed, this public mechanism for endorsing gendered touch roles was disappearing as a by-product of increasing hostility towards apocryphal stories about Mary's later life. Theatre, then, reflects the changing relationship between women, touch, and the sacred in the sixteenth century.

In order to enrich this argument further, it is helpful to consider John Bale's *Three Laws*, a Protestant interlude. *Three Laws* was first printed in Wesel, Germany in the late 1540s, though there is some debate about whether the year in question was 1547 or 1548 (Atkin 2013b: 244n6). According to the Wesel edition, Bale originally 'Compyled' *Three*

Laws in 1538 (Bale 1548[?]: sig. G4r; see also Atkin 2013b: 245). However, there is no extant version of the play that predates the Wesel print. The following passage from *Three Laws* is most relevant for my purposes:

> INFIDELITAS: What, sumtyme thu wert an he!
> IDOLOLATRIA: Yea, but now ych am a she,
> And a good mydwyfe per De,
> Yonge chyldren can I charme,
> With whysperynges and whysshynges,
> With crossynges and with kyssynges,
> With blasynges and with blessynges,
> That spretes do them no harme.
> (Happé ed 1985–1986: II, 79, lines 425–32)

For context, Idololatria 'represents the worship of images and false gods in both the Mosaic period and Bale's own day' (Walker ed 2000: 493). In the passage above, Idololatria takes on the guise of a midwife, shifting comically quickly from a 'he' to a 'she' in the process. The occurrence of a gender-fluid midwife on stage in Bale's *Three Laws* is striking in itself given my earlier discussion of the cross-dressing birthing attendant in the N-Town *Nativity* (pp. 66–72). Is Bale perhaps making a comedic allusion here to the men who impersonated women in Nativity plays? However, my main interest in this passage lies in the representation of the midwife's role in society—a role that Bale clearly condemns given that it is embodied by one of his vice characters.

Note especially the emphasis on the midwife's touch (she delivers 'kyssynges') and the fact that she is a protective figure who prevents 'yonge chyldren' from coming to 'harme'. Given the connection forged between midwifery, touch, young children, and protection in this extract from *Three Laws*, Idololatria's words may have specifically called to mind birth girdles. Remember, here, that rolls like the one in figure 22 not only offered protection to the parturient mother, but also promised that 'the childe' would 'haue cristendome', i.e. baptism (LWC MS 632, face; *OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'Christendom, n.' sense †4). Moreover, in act four, Bale's *Three Laws* explicitly mentions a piece of clothing to be placed on women's wombs:

HYPOCRISIS: In Parys we have the mantell of Saynt Lewes
Whych women seke moch for helpe of their barennes;
For it be ones layed upon a wommanys bellye,
She go thens with chylde, the myracles are seane there daylye.
(Happé ed 1985–1986: II, 106, lines 1453–56)

Women who engage in such tactile activities are clearly being mocked, as these words are spoken by Hypocrisis (i.e. Hypocrisy). As a caveat, the object described by Hypocrisis not, strictly speaking, a birth girdle—it takes the form of a 'mantell' (i.e. 'tunic') rather than a belt, and it is designed to promote fertility rather than to protect the parturient mother and her unborn child (*MED* s.v. 'mantel, n.' sense 1.a). Nevertheless, the following point can still be made: rather than promoting contact with sacred relics for women of childbearing age like the York *Assumption*, John Bale's *Three Laws* instead mocks these gendered tactile practices.

With this in mind, the original composition date of *Three Laws* becomes conspicuous. Bale 'Compyled' *Three Laws* in 1538, the same year as Nicholas Shaxton's *Injunctions for Salisbury Diocese*, which forbade 'girdles […] of our Lady, or such other superstitious things, to be occupied about the woman while she laboureth' (Bale 1548: sig. G4r; Frere and Kennedy eds 1910: II, 59). James Simpson has also highlighted this chronological correspondence (2012: 115). Simpson further notes that Bale's *Three Laws* is 'almost certainly […] part of a concerted governmental propaganda campaign' and he suggests that Idololatria in particular 'heralded new legislative control of midwifery in Henrician England' (2012: 115). This is a compelling reading of the play. However, Simpson has not put Bale's *Three Laws* in the broader chronological context of touch, gender, and theatre that I have explored here. In brief, Bale's *Three Laws* exposes an important shift in English theatre. Far from promoting birth girdles as a pathway to sacred healing and protection for parturient women, like the York *Assumption* had done in the

Register text (c.1476–1477), Bale's play ridiculed the very idea that women of childbearing age stood to gain anything by handling relics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that the medieval touch paradox had important gendered dimensions in late medieval England. Touching a contact relic in childbirth allowed women to access sacred healing, while manual examination of female genitalia by men posed a risk of sexual uncleanness. Further, I have argued that two contemporary plays, the N-Town *Nativity* and York *Assumption*, helped to reinforce the touch roles appropriate to each gender. A performance of the former play could have mobilized anxieties about male hands in gynaecology, while both plays had the potential to endorse female touch of birthing amulets.

Nevertheless, I have also argued that both the N-Town *Nativity* and York *Assumption* were poised to expose a sensory predicament for medieval women. A parturient woman could touch a contact relic in order to harness sacred protection in the birthing room, and yet to be in that position she must first have had sex—a type of unclean touch that fundamentally distinguished her body from that of the Virgin Mary. Thus, Chapter One has argued that medieval biblical plays, specifically those featuring Doubting Thomas figures, were positioned to expose tensions between sacred and unclean touch in medieval experience. Conversely, in Chapter Two, I will argue that the tensions between sacred and unclean touch could be resolved as well as exposed on the late medieval stage, once again via a Doubting Thomas figure.

Chapter Two will also speak to Chapter One in a second way. In this chapter, I have argued that theatre offers a useful litmus test for changing attitudes towards women, touch, and the sacred in sixteenth-century England. From the 1530s onwards, women's

tactile interactions with sacred relics as a means to help with reproduction came under assault, a development I explored with reference to Bale's *Three Laws* and the York *Assumption*. In essence, the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox suffered a significant blow from the 1530s onwards—a blow whose influence can be felt on the stage. However, in Chapter Two, I will argue that the other side of the medieval touch paradox, namely touch as a source of uncleanness, had a much longer cultural legacy. In this context, theatre will once again prove to be a useful tool through which to conduct a diachronic analysis of English sensory history.

Before moving on, I wish to briefly consider the wider implications of Chapter One. It raises questions about the mechanisms that governed peoples' interactions with material culture in medieval England. If the York *Assumption* and N-Town *Nativity* were in a position to endorse and enrich physical encounters with contact relics in the birthing room, then did other medieval plays have the potential to shape female (or indeed male) encounters with contemporary material culture? More broadly, how might literary and visual culture have sanctioned and/or undermined encounters with material objects, whether everyday or extraordinary, secular or religious, medical or non-medical? Further, Chapter One raises questions about the interpretive prisms through which men and women understood the world around them. I have argued that the York *Assumption* could have had a special resonance for medieval women; this play engaged with the culture of childbirth in a way that men may not have understood or appreciated. What other plays, poems, prose texts, or even images had layers of meaning that were more accessible to one gender in medieval England? The questions raised here are beyond the scope of the present chapter, but would warrant further study.

Chapter Two

A Touch Different: Negotiating Christian Sensory Identity through Contact with Jews

In the previous chapter, I argued that the tension between sacred and unclean touch in medieval culture was exposed in contemporary theatre via two Doubting Thomas figures: the midwife in the N-Town *Nativity* and Thomas himself in the York *Assumption of the Virgin*. Conversely, Chapter Two will argue that the touch paradox could also be *resolved* on the medieval stage via a further doubting Thomas figure: the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption of the Virgin*.

In this play, an irreverent Jewish man strikes Mary's funeral bier only to become physically attached to it as punishment. His body is miraculously released from the coffin when he converts to Christianity. The narrative has obvious echoes of the Incredulity of Thomas, as Anthony Bale has also pointed out (2010: 95). Both stories begin with a lack of faith—though Thomas doubts only Jesus's Resurrection, whereas the Jew refuses to believe in Jesus at all. For both men, this lack of belief motivates a tactile act: Thomas inserts his finger in Christ's side wound, and the Jew strikes Mary's bier. In each case, a tactile encounter leads to faith. A crucial difference is that the Jew's touch is motivated by anger and his subsequent conversion is unintentional, whereas Thomas's touch purposefully aims to provide empirical verification and assuage doubts.

Thus far, my thesis has argued that the Doubting Thomas story and its analogues in medieval theatre offered a unique opportunity publicly to interrogate the sense of touch. The N-Town *Assumption* is no exception, which will become clear when the play is placed in its wider sensory context. In the literary, visual, and medical culture of late

medieval England, Jews were stigmatized as untouchable figures who were capable of contaminating Christian bodies. The N-Town *Assumption* depended upon and reinforced this sensory stereotype. The Jewish protagonist in this play, I will argue, is the epitome of unclean touch: by striking Mary's funeral bier, he threatens not only to contaminate a reliquary but also to sexually defile Mary's virginal body. However, when the Jew converts to Christianity, he becomes instead a paradigm of sacred touch, promoting relics as tactile access points to healing.

Much like the other Doubting Thomas figures discussed previously in this thesis, then, the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* implicates both sacred and unclean touch. What makes this play different, however, is that there is no conflict between the two halves of the medieval touch paradox. In Chapter One, I suggested that the doubting midwife episode in the N-Town *Nativity* exposed a sensory predicament for medieval women: they could use a birth girdle as a pathway to sacred healing, but in order to be in this position they must first have had sex, a tactile act at high risk of being unclean. In the N-Town *Assumption*, by contrast, sacred and unclean touch never clash. They are separate sensory experiences, divided along religious lines. In my view, the Jew in this play therefore represents a form of wish fulfilment for medieval Christians. The contemporary touch paradox could be resolved on stage—in this play, at least—by simply mapping unclean touch onto Jewish bodies and sacred touch onto Christian ones.

Why were fears about unclean touch projected onto Jewish bodies specifically in medieval theatre and beyond? The answer lies in the fact that Jews were not permitted to live in England during the late fifteenth century, when the N-Town *Assumption* was written down. In 1290, Edward I had expelled all Jews from England, his actions marking the culmination of centuries of Jewish stigmatization and even outright persecution in the kingdom (Bale 2003; Stacey 2003). Jews would not be formally permitted to return to the

country until 1656 (Katz 1994: 107–44). The absence of the Jews is exactly what made them such a valuable resource in identity formation. Although the real Jews were expelled in 1290, 'the Jew' remained symbolically present in late medieval English culture as the abject other, the body which is unlike 'us'. This idea is well established in medieval scholarship. Michael Camille writes that '[Jews'] non-presence in English society does not mean that they cannot still be attacked in the realm of the imaginary […] as part of the very definition of a good society—that is, as excluded from it' (1998: 284). To give another example, Sylvia Tomasch has coined the term 'Virtual Jew', which captures how the Jews were literally absent in late medieval England yet remained virtually present in texts and images, where they could easily function as a 'negative exemplum' (2002: 73).

This chapter will nuance the argument that the Jew represented the antithesis of the Christian self in late medieval English culture. In my view, the Jew specifically offered an anti-type of Christian touch, as communicated through texts like the N-Town *Assumption*. In this play, Jews represent a convenient repository for anxieties about unclean contact: '*their* touch is defiling, not *ours*'. The dehumanization of the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* would only have cemented the perceived sordidness of Jewish touch, which should never be imitated by 'pure' Christians. Yet any Christian actor who portrayed a Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* would have been doing just that: imitating a body that should not be imitated. Given that tactile anxieties were projected onto the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption*, any equivalence between Christian and Jewish bodies on stage had the potential to be deeply problematic. By having a Christian actor play a Jew, the N-Town *Assumption* could even have suggested that there was a Jew lingering in all Christian bodies, desperate to break free and cause havoc with the hands. Nevertheless, I suggest that these fears would have been allayed at the end of the play when the Jewish

character converts, at which point the Christian actor could powerfully and publicly expel the Jew from himself.

Although the focus of this chapter is the N-Town *Assumption*, I close with brief comparative reference to other early English plays—both medieval and early modern—in which Jewish touch is stigmatized: the York *Fergus* (fifteenth century), the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (c.1461), Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (1589–1590), and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (c.1596). These comparisons will highlight that the N-Town *Assumption* is an extreme example of a broader phenomenon: the stigmatization of Jewish touch as unclean on the early English stage.

The N-Town *Assumption of the Virgin*: An Overview

The play under scrutiny in this chapter survives in just one textual witness: it is the penultimate text in the N-Town anthology (LBL MS Cotton Vespasian D.8 fols. 214r–222v). The *Assumption* was clearly interpolated into this manuscript: '[i]t is not mentioned in the Proclamation, is written by a different hand on different paper from that found elsewhere in the codex, and is prosodically, stylistically, and orthographically distinct from the other plays' (Spector ed 1991: II, 527). The *Assumption*, which is written in a hand contemporary with the main scribe of the N-Town manuscript, probably circulated independently before joining this eclectic collection of East Anglian theatre. This can be inferred because folio 213r, the first page of the codicological unit in which the *Assumption* is found, has a stain that was 'no doubt incurred when this leaf was an outside one' (Kahrl and Meredith 1977: xvi).

Even though the *Assumption* did not originally belong to the N-Town manuscript, this new setting potentially shaped how the text was received. This is because the N-Town manuscript seems to have been designed for meditative reading as much as for

theatrical performance (see p. 14 above). Accordingly, this chapter will devote some space to the implications of encountering the N-Town *Assumption* on the page rather than on the stage. Nevertheless, the inherent theatricality of the N-Town *Assumption* is evident from the opening lines of the text. The Doctor's opening speech silences the audience before the performance begins: 'How sche was assumpte, here men schul be pleyand, | Preyng you of audience; now ses and tak hede' (41.25–26). In this chapter, I therefore primarily consider the N-Town *Assumption* as a text intended for performance.

A brief synopsis of the N-Town *Assumption* is useful here. After the Doctor's introduction, a group of Jews conspire to burn Mary's body. Angels then explain to Mary that a 'sete ryall' awaits her in heaven, and she should prepare herself to die in accordance with her Son's will (41.139). Mary obeys, but asks that the apostles might see her before she passes on. When Mary meets the apostles, she gives them a palm branch to carry 'aforn my bere' (41.222). During the funerary procession the apostles sing Alleluia, but the sound is abhorrent to the Jews. The leader of the Jews urges that Mary's body should be brought to him and dashed with stones. The dramatic highpoint of the play comes when one of the Jews strikes Mary's bier, but becomes 'fastened sore' to it with both hands (41.424). The Jew, at Peter's advice, proclaims 'I beleue in Jesu, mannys saluacyon', causing his hands to be released (41.436). This converted Jew is instructed to take Mary's holy palm to his own nation and 'towche' the sick with it to heal them (41.442). After this brief but significant interruption to the funeral, Peter and his apostles put Mary in her grave. Finally, God descends and brings Mary to heaven while organs play. Thus, although the penultimate play in the N-Town manuscript is ostensibly about Mary's Assumption, the events surrounding her death are a convenient pretext for a story about the conversion of Jewish bodies and the power of touch to heal both spiritual and physical ailments.

In Chapter One, I explained that the story of Mary's Assumption derives from the apocryphal *Transitus Mariae* tradition (see p. 80). I clarified that the story of Thomas and the girdle dramatized in the York *Assumption* play originates specifically from the Latin *Transitus A* attributed to Joseph of Arimathea, which likely dates to the seventh century. For the ultimate source of the N-Town *Assumption*, however, we must turn to the Latin *Transitus* attributed to pseudo-Melito (Nichols 1991: 32–33). Often referred to as *Transitus B*, the pseudo-Melito text is dated 'almost universally to the fifth century' (Shoemaker 2002: 35). The author of the N-Town *Assumption* accessed this particular apocryphal tradition via Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, compiled c.1260–1275 (Ryan 1950: 483; Spector ed 1991: II, 527).

The source material for the N-Town *Assumption* has important implications for the representation of touch in the play. This is because the *Legenda Aurea* is in fact a composite text: it offers the reader two different versions of the story of the Jew at Mary's funeral, a testament to the sheer complexity of the apocryphal tradition. Overall these two versions are similar, but the stories diverge significantly where the touch of the Jew is concerned. In the first version presented by the *Legenda Aurea*, the Jew's hands 'suddenly […] withered and stuck to the bier, so that he was hanging by his hands [*ad lectulum manibus penderet*]' (Grässe ed 1846: 508; Ryan trans 2012: 467). This is the Pseudo-Melito *Transitus B* tradition.[1] In the second version, the Jew's punishment is rather different: 'one hand fell off as dry as a stick, and it was a sight to see the man standing there with his useless stump [*truncum inutilem*]' (Grässe ed 1846: 524; Ryan trans 2012: 481). Here, the *Legenda Aurea* seems to be following the Greek *Transitus* tradition, which is attributed to St John the Theologian.[2]

[1] For the relevant Latin text of *Transitus B*, see von Tischendorf ed 1866: 132. For a corresponding modern English translation, see Walker trans 1870: 527–28.
[2] I am grateful to Daniel Najork for discussing this with me. For a modern English translation of the relevant part of the Greek text, see Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe eds 1886 repr 2007: 591.

The author of the N-Town *Assumption* uses the first version of the story (i.e. the Pseudo-Melito tradition), in which the Jew's entire body becomes stuck to the bier. This appears to have been the more popular version of the story in medieval England. For example, it also features in *Cursor Mundi* (c.1300), the Auchinleck *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* (c.1330), and *The Metrical Life of Christ* (fifteenth century), as demonstrated respectively by the following extracts:

> Þere was a prest was to bolde
> As hit is in þe story tolde
> On hir bere leide his honde
> Vnhele þere soone he fonde
> His hond claf to þe bere so fast
> Mercy he cried at þe last
> (Morris ed 1874–1893: IV, 1187, lines 20741–46)

> A Jw laide hond vpon þe bare,
> And al fast he cleuede þare
> Þourgh vertu of Godes miȝt.
> (Burnley and Wiggins eds 2003: no page, line 442–44)

> As þat prince, þat grete sire,
> Had gripte þe bere wiþ grete ire,
> His hondes cleued to þe bere,
> […]
> (Sauer ed 1977: 94, lines 5362–64)

The first version of the story, in which the Jew's entire body becomes stuck to the bier, can also be found in several medieval English manuscript illuminations and stained glass windows (figures 25–28).[3]

Byzantine art, by contrast, generally preferred the Greek version in which the Jew's hands were cut off (Revel-Neher 2009: 81–82). However, this East-West iconographic trend was not without exception. For example, Mirk's *Festial* gives the following account: 'But he þat leyde furst hande on þe bere, anone boþe hys handys weron pullud of be þe elbowe and hengud so stylle on þe bere, and wyth hys stompus stode crying' (Powell ed 2009: II, 202). Intriguingly, Philip Butterworth draws attention

[3] As a caveat to figure 27, Davidson and O'Connor (1978: 103) note that 'later his hands remain stuck & severed while he has fallen to ground', which would cohere with the Greek version.

to a 1536 play about Mary's funeral from Bourges in which the Jew's hands 'must be detached and joined back onto his arms' (2005: 142). These examples show that western writers, including playwrights, were not opposed to narrating the Greek version of events in which the Jew's hands become detached from the bier.

If, as I suggest in this chapter, the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* is to be understood as an antitype of Christian touch and the epitome of uncleanness, then it is fitting that the author used the story in which the Jew's entire body becomes attached to Mary's coffin.[4] In this scenario, the Jew is incapable of avoiding his tactile failings or detaching himself from them either literally or mentally. Hanging painfully from the bier, he becomes a conspicuous symbol on the stage, the physical embodiment of unclean touch. This new reading of the N-Town *Assumption* will significantly extend existing scholarship on the play, in which the full signifying potential of the Jew's touch has yet to be realized.[5] In fact, three of the five existing studies of the play barely mention touch (Chaganti 2008: 73–94; Kinservik 1996, Raftery 2005). The remaining two studies on the N-Town *Assumption* have considered touch to an extent. For Ann Eljenholm Nichols, the encounter between the Jew and Mary's funeral bier is an example of 'hierosphthitic punishment', a medieval topos which can be defined as follows: 'A sacred object […] is touched for unholy reasons. Straightaway […] a blow is struck by divine force' (1991: 30). However, Nichols' primary concern is the way in which the hierosphthitic topos finds expression in medieval literature more broadly, rather than the exact nature of the Jew's unholy, punishable touch.

Anthony Bale (2010: 90–117) has paid more attention to touch in the N-Town *Assumption* than Nichols, but this is not the driving force behind his study either. His

[4] As a caveat, this was not necessarily a calculated choice on the part of the author. He may have chosen the version in which the Jew's entire body becomes attached simply because it was more popular.
[5] My survey of secondary literature excludes scholarship in which the N-Town *Assumption* is just one of many plays under discussion, e.g. Coletti 1977.

chapter on the N-Town *Assumption* focuses on the relationship between Jewish hands, memory images, and narrative interruption, as part of a wider monograph exploring images of Jewish violence against Christians in the medieval imagination. To support this reading of the N-Town *Assumption*, however, Bale stresses that the moment when the Jew touches the Virgin's bier perverts several Christian ideals of touch:

> to touch with a hand could be to make a deal, to make a friend, to demonstrate intimacy but, most pertinently, relics were touched with the right hand and sacred books were touched by hand in order to make an oath at once formal, binding, public, ceremonial and pious. Thus the episode of the Jew touching the Virgin's bier vividly represents a fundamentally transgressive and violent gesture […].
>
> (Bale 2010: 116–17)

Bale also hints that the Jew's touch defines him as antithetical to the devotional practices of medieval Christianity: 'The Jew's hand acts as a kind of opposite to the medieval culture of relics, touching what it should not touch and treating the relic of Mary's body with violence, not veneration' (2010: 95).

The argument that the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* represents transgressive touch needs to be explored further for three reasons. Firstly, the Jew's attack on the bier has never been placed in its broader cultural context, namely the stigmatization of Jewish touch as unclean in medieval culture. Secondly, the full ramifications of the Jew's bad touch have yet to be realized. Not only are his actions a violent affront to relic culture, but he also poses a hitherto unrecognized sexual threat to Mary's body. Finally, previous studies of the play have yet to fully appreciate how Jewish and Christian touch are juxtaposed in this play. When the Jew eventually converts to Christianity, he immediately becomes a paradigm of holy touch, promoting contact relics as a pathway to sacred healing. The N-Town *Assumption*, then, offers a seamless transition from unclean touch to sacred touch, from a Jewish body to a Christian body, and from a negative sensory exemplum to a positive sensory exemplum.

Only when the N-Town *Assumption* is read in this way is it possible to appreciate how the text engages with contemporary anxieties about touch. The play offers an expedient and shockingly anti-Semitic compartmentalization of the medieval touch paradox. Unclean touch is limited to Jewish bodies, whose hands pose a threat of tactile contamination that can and should be suppressed. Only Christian hands are clean and pure and thus worthy of contact with the sacred. In order to unpack my new reading of the N-Town *Assumption*, it is necessary first to contextualize the relationship between Jews, touch, and dirt in late medieval culture.

Jews, Touch, and Contamination in Medieval English Culture

Dirt, according to Mary Douglas, is a social construction that represents any matter 'out of place' ([1966] 2002: 44). The margins of the body are perhaps the most obvious location where matter can become out of place. Emissions like faeces and urine are seen as dirty because they cross the boundary of the body:

> Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body.
>
> (Douglas [1966] 2002: 150)

Not all bodily fluids were regarded negatively in medieval culture, especially when they were emitted by holy figures. Most obviously, the doctrine of transubstantiation held that the consecrated wine turned into the blood of Christ during the mass. Further, St Bernard was miraculously nourished by the milk of the Virgin Mary (Olson 2016: 19–21; Bynum 1982: 132–33). This encounter was celebrated in late medieval images such as LBL MS Douce 264, fol. 38v (figure 29).

Yet where Jews were concerned, bodily fluids were a cause of revulsion rather than celebration. The link between Jewishness and emissions vindicated the perceived

idea that Jews were a dirty and dangerous group, capable of contaminating the purity of Christianity. For example, the late medieval *arma Christi* text *O Vernicle* draws attention to 'Þe Iew þat spitte in Goddis face' at the Crucifixion (Nichols ed 2014: 374, line 129). In medieval visual culture, this Jew's saliva is sometimes presented as a vulgar extension of the body, capable of touching and polluting Christ's face. This is especially clear in LBL MS Royal 6.E.vi, an illustrated encyclopedia that has been dated to the fourteenth century (Sandler 1986: II, 136). On folio 15r, the Jew's spit creates a repulsive bridge between his own body and the body of Christ in a way that recalls the treacherous kiss of Judas (figure 30). There is a striking visual similarity between figures 29 and 30: in both images, bodily fluids are depicted by thin white lines, and these emissions create a physical link between two bodies. Nevertheless, where the lactation of St Bernard is a miraculous and intimate encounter, the Jew who spits on Christ's face is committing a repulsive act of defilement.

Jews were also associated with touching faeces in the medieval period, a disgusting statement of alterity. For example, in medieval bestiaries the Jew is typically allied with the owl, a bird thought to sit in its own excrement (Miyazaki 1999: 28, 36). The connection between Jews and these supposedly dirty birds is clear in OBL MS Bodley 764, an English bestiary from the mid-thirteenth century:

> The night owl is so called because it flies around at night; it cannot see by day. […] This bird signifies the Jews [*iudeorum*], who, when our Lord came to save them, rejected Him, saying: 'We have no king except Caesar', and preferred the darkness to the light. [… The screech-owl] is known as a loathsome bird because its roost is filthy [*commaculatur*] from its droppings [*fimo*], just as the sinner brings all who dwell with him into disrepute through the example of his dishonourable behaviour.
>
> (Translation from De Hamel and Barber 2008: I, 128–29; Latin transcribed from facsimile images in De Hamel and Barber 2008: II, fols. 73v–74r)

In this manuscript, the link between Jewishness and owls is visually implicit as well as textually explicit. The owl in the accompanying illustration has a hooked nose, which was

seen as a characteristically Jewish feature (figure 31). For comparison, in LNA Issues of the Exchequer of 1233, the devil points out Jewish hooked noses in a disturbing moment of physical intimacy (figure 32). These exaggerated and supposedly Jewish noses were repeatedly given to owls in medieval visual culture (Miyazaki 1999: 27–28).

Drawing a link between owls and Jews was such a severe insult because owls were thought to commit one of the most timeless and universal of touch taboos—they make direct contact with their own excrement, even to the extent that it coats their bodies. This is made nauseatingly clear in *The Owl and the Nightingale,* a twelfth- or thirteenth-century poem in which faeces come 'up to þe chinne' of the offspring in the owl's nest (Cartlidge ed 2003: 4, line 96). Given the central argument of my thesis, it is particularly striking that the Nightingale should chastise the Owl's nest for being 'unclene' (Cartlidge ed 2003: 4, line 91). The Owl's tendency to sit in its own excrement is the epitome of the unclean half of the touch paradox.

As a signifier for Jewishness, the owl thus offered an extremely powerful tool for stigmatization in medieval England. These birds were dirty vehicles of pollution, capable of tainting the world around them; and so too, by implication, were the Jews. A comparison could easily be drawn with the Untouchables of India, a range of low-caste Hindu groups who were and still are stigmatized because they remove human waste by hand for a living (Campbell 2014). For Mary Douglas, India's Untouchables are an example of 'the image of the body' being used in 'the ordering of a social hierarchy' ([1966] 2002: 154). In much the same way, the link between Jews and faeces in medieval England presented Jewish physical pollution as social pollution. For comparison, a connection between Jews, animals, and faeces is also forged in the medieval German iconography of the *Judensau* (figure 33). In this visual tradition, Jews are depicted suckling the teats of a sow and/or touching its anus, sometimes even eating the filthy

excrement. As Birgit Wiedl has explained in her study of the *Judensau*, 'there is but little doubt that Christians were aware of the Jewish ritual regulations that marked the swine as unclean, adding yet another layer of insult to the equation' (2010: 330).

Unsurprisingly, the connection between Jewish touch, dirt, and contamination had implications in medieval medicine. For example, Jews were often associated with lepers, providing 'evidence' that members of this ethnic group could literally be dangerous vehicles of infection. As Irven Resnick explains:

> often […] leprosy represented not only physical infirmity but also, or even principally, an illness that externalized or embodied sin. As such it symbolized all those who stood isolated outside the Church, both heretics and Jews, who remained outside the body of believers and subject to leprosy.
>
> (Resnick 2012: 102)

As a caveat, lepers were not consistently regarded as untouchable figures in late medieval Europe. Indeed, Margery Kempe was deeply upset because 'sche myth not kyssyn þe laȝerys' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 176). To put this in context, kissing lepers was a symbolic act of piety, humility, and charity in medieval English culture (Rawcliffe 2006: 144–46; Orlemanski 2012: 148). Nevertheless, kissing lepers simultaneously posed a dangerous risk of infection: several medieval authorities understood leprosy to be 'a contagious illness that may spread from cohabitation with or frequent contact with lepers' (Resnick 2012: 111). Framing the Jew as leper, then, only bolstered the perceived correlation between Jewish touch and contamination.

The myth of Jewish male menstruation is also relevant here. Many medieval physicians believed that Jews purged themselves of excess blood via haemorrhoids on a monthly basis (McCracken 2003: 102–04; Resnick 2000; Resnick 2012: 181–88). Resnick highlights a late medieval commentary on *De secretis mulierum* that combines 'medical and theological explanations for Jews' bleeding' (2000: 257). Specifically, the commentator frames monthly bleeding from the anus as a divine punishment for Jewish sins and also finds justification for the affliction in medieval humoral theory:

> hemorrhoids are 'found in Jews more than in others, for their natures are more melancholic, although it is said that they have this flow because of a miracle of God, and there is no doubt that this is true.'
>
> (Resnick 2000: 257, citing Lemay ed 1992: 74)

In the same textual tradition, contact with menstrual blood—specifically via sexual intercourse—is framed as infectious:

> It is harmful to have sexual intercourse with [menstruating] women, because children who are conceived tend to have epilepsy and leprosy because menstrual matter is extremely venomous.
>
> (Lemay ed 1992: 129)

As Caroline Walker Bynum rightly cautions, there can be no 'simple equation of female or menstrual blood with impurity' in medieval culture, not least because some theologians stressed 'the origin of Christ's perfect body entirely in the pure menstrual blood of Mary' (2007: 18). We must be careful, then, not to overstress the link between menstruation and unclean touch in medieval culture, nor should we reductively extrapolate from Leviticus, which warns that anyone who 'touchech' a woman with 'her issue of blood' shall be 'unclean until the evening' (Leviticus 15:19–20). Nevertheless, in the passage cited above, contact with menstrual blood is clearly being coded as defiling: sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman risks infecting an unborn child with disease (cf. also Green 2005: 51, 57, 59–60). Accusations of Jewish male menstruation should be seen in this context, given that Jewish touch was framed as contaminating in medieval English culture more broadly.

I am not the first to recognize that the language of contamination is useful when discussing Jewish touch in medieval culture. This approach has already proved useful to scholars examining Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*, a text that tells the story of a child martyred at the hands of the Jews. A dramatic high point comes when the Jews throw their victim into their privy, the location where they 'purgen hire entraille' (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 211, line 573). It makes sense that scholars should turn to the vocabulary of contamination when studying this text. According to Bale, *The Prioress's*

Tale 'is a narrative about the "contaminating touch", about the entry of Jew and Christian into each other's bodies, worlds, rituals and texts' (2006: 57). Susan Signe Morrison dedicates an entire chapter to *The Prioress's Tale* in her study of excrement in the Middle Ages, and she turns to Mary Douglas to contextualize ideas about dirt and pollution (Morrison 2008: 74). Morrison's conclusion is that '[t]he Jews [in *The Prioress's Tale*], polluted by excrement, cannot make the boy/Eucharist/body of Christ filthy even if touched with feces' (2008: 88).

The language of contamination also informs Miramne Ara Krummel's discussion of Jewish ghettos in medieval England prior to the Expulsion (2011: 24–25). The impulse to segregate England's medieval Jews is demonstrated, for example, by Edward I's *Statute of Jewry* (1275): 'no Christian, for this Cause [that is, buying and selling] or any other, shall dwell among them [the English Jews]' (Krummel 2011: 35). For context, there were probably no more than 2,500 Jews living in England a decade prior to the Expulsion (Dobson 1979: 43). For the few Jews who remained, the ghettos were a physical barrier preventing Jewish bodies and ideas from polluting Christian society. In Krummel's words:

> The English ghettos […] perform as safety procedures designed to prevent Jewish alterity from contaminating the sanctity of Sameness that is (imagined as) the Christian community. […] The Jewish touch—the proximity of real Jewish bodies—ultimately threatens to infect Christian bodies who are in the midst of establishing the trueness and realness of their identity as *versus* Israel.
>
> (Krummel 2011: 24–25)

Given the unrelenting link between Jewishness, touch, and pollution in medieval culture, it is fitting that Krummel should choose words like 'contaminating' and 'infect' to describe the fears that gave rise to Jewish ghettos.

Defiling Hands, Polluting Words: The Jew at Mary's Funeral through Time

I will shortly use Jewish tactile contamination as a lens through which to read the N-Town *Assumption*—a new approach to the play. First, however, it is worth noting that the theme of defiling touch is present in versions of the story of the Jew at Mary's funeral that are nearly a thousand years older than the N-Town Plays. The Greek account of Mary's Dormition attributed to St John the Theologian, which was likely composed in the late fifth or early sixth century (Shoemaker 2002: 51), stresses that Mary's pure soul deserves to be touched only by unblemished hands: 'and the Lord stretched forth His undefiled hands, and received her holy and blameless soul' (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe eds 1886 repr 2007: 591). Just two sentences later comes the Jew's contemptuous physical encounter with Mary's bier, and his punishment:

> a certain well-born Hebrew, Jephonias by name, running against the body, put his hands upon the couch; and, behold, an angel of the Lord by invisible power, with a sword of fire, cut off his two hands from his shoulders, and made them hang about the couch, lifted up in the air.
>
> (Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe eds 1886 repr 2007: 591)

There is a clear juxtaposition here between God and the Jew's tactile interactions with Mary. Where God handles Mary's soul with 'undefiled' hands, the Jew's physical transgression against her body is so threatening and defiling that his hands need to be cut off.

As explained above (pp. 104–05), it was the Latin *Transitus B* of Pseudo-Melito, i.e. *not* the Greek account of Mary's Dormition attributed to St John the Theologian, which had the greater impact on the shape of English retellings of the Assumption narrative. Nevertheless, I have cited the latter text here because it shows that the theme of tactile defilement is innate to the story of the Jew who strikes Mary's funeral bier. This underlying theme is perhaps why the curious tale retained cultural currency into the later Middle Ages, a period in which fears about Jewish touch and contamination were ubiquitous.

Unsurprisingly, Jewish characters are associated with dirt from an early stage in the N-Town *Assumption*. Just over eighty lines into the text, a Jew is a mouthpiece for scatological imagery. Specifically, one Jew describes Mary as 'that fise' i.e. 'that fart' (41.83). Through these words, the Jew *attempts* to taint Mary's pure, spotless body with scatological imagery, thereby disrupting the dichotomy between clean, saintly bodies and dirty, excretive Jewish bodies that I discussed above. I use the word *attempting* deliberately here. The Jew's words, in fact, do nothing to disrupt Mary's inherent purity and cleanness. After the Jew compares Mary to a fart, she is repeatedly described as pure and clean, rebuffing any potential correlation between her body and dirt—both literal dirt (i.e. faeces and farts) and moral dirt (i.e. sexual sin):

PRIMUS A[NGELUS]: Heyl, excellent prynces, Mary moste *pure*!
(41.117; emphasis added)

DOMINUS: Now com, my swete soule in *clennesse* most *pure*,
(41.330; emphasis added)

PETRUS: Ye are Goddis *clene* mayde, wythoutyn ony nay.
(41.361; emphasis added)

DOMINUS: For as ye were *clene* in erthe of alle synnys *greyn*,
So schul ye reyne in hefne *clennest* in mend.

greyn: stain

(41.513–14; emphasis added;
gloss after Spector ed 1991: II, 591)

In their attempts to disrupt the boundary between unclean Jewish bodies and clean saintly bodies, the Jews only reinforce it: Mary's body remains virginal and inviolate, while Jewish speeches betray their supposed obsession with excrement. It is a Jewish mouth, after all, that utters the word 'fise' (41.83).

This brief discussion of scatological language in the N-Town *Assumption* helpfully sets the tone for my examination of Jewish touch in the play: in spite of the Jews' best efforts, their attempts to defile Christianity are unsuccessful. Just as their

scatological words are powerless to stain Mary's reputation, so too the Jews pose only a superficial threat of tactile contamination at Mary's bier, one that can easily be quelled. In brief, the N-Town *Assumption* presents a world in which Jewish hands cannot defile holy Christian bodies and objects in any way.

Mary as Sacred Object: Reliquaries, Jewish Bodies, and Tactile Contamination

Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted the following comment made by Anthony Bale about the N-Town *Assumption*: 'The Jew's hand acts as a kind of opposite to the medieval culture of relics, touching what it should not touch and treating the relic of Mary's body with violence, not veneration' (2010: 95). But more specifically, the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* is mishandling a *reliquary*. The Jew never comes into direct contact with Mary's sacred bodily remains; rather, he attacks the container that encloses them (i.e. the bier). Chaganti has explored Mary's parallels to a reliquary in the N-Town *Assumption* at length, arguing that the play 'creates for its audience an idealized Marian reliquary where none exists' (2008: 73). Such a reliquary is impossible precisely because Mary was assumed to heaven; she thus left no bodily relics behind on earth that could have been put into a casket or other such container (Chaganti 2008: 77). Mary did, of course, leave behind secondary relics; an obvious example is her girdle, an object I discussed at length in Chapter One (cf. also Chaganti 2008: 77).

Chaganti (2008: 81) briefly notes that the Jews seek to 'desecrate' the impossible Marian reliquary in front of them, though she does not frame their acts of violence as tactile encounters specifically, nor does she explore why Jewish hands represent an especially potent threat to sacred matter. The *OED* defines the verb 'to desecrate' in the following way: 'To take away its consecrated or sacred character from (anything); to treat as not sacred or hallowed; to profane' (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'desecrate, v.' sense a). This is certainly an appropriate term with which to describe the Jew's behaviour when he attacks

Mary's funeral bier: he is effectively desecrating the holy reliquary it represents. However, I find it helpful to reframe the Jew's tactile transgression as an act of *contamination.* This terminology puts the Jew's encounter with the reliquary far more obviously in its immediate cultural context of Jewish tactile uncleanness, outlined above.

In late medieval England, sacred matter needed to be protected from contamination by the unclean. Consider, for example, the extensive precautions that were taken to safeguard the purity of the consecrated elements of the host:

> Great care was taken with consecrated elements, especially the bread and wine of the Eucharist, as the sacred qualities could be *contaminated by touch* (it was for this reason that vestry equipment contained fans for driving away flies) […]. If this happened, whatever the sacrament had fallen on had to be taken up and disposed of carefully: wood, carpet, scrapings from the earth were to be disposed of in the piscina, as was the water from the washing of the chalices and corporals (the cloths on which the consecrated elements rested).
>
> (Woolgar 2006: 42–43; emphasis added).

Unsurprisingly, contact with reliquaries was also strictly controlled. 'Members of the lower classes were rarely allowed to touch or examine such opulent objects closely', Sarah Blick explains (2014: 110). Rather, they would have '*seen* them as the reliquaries were paraded past in procession or were perched on top of lofty shrine bases, fenced off by iron gates and guarded by clerics' (Blick 2014: 110; emphasis added).

The Jews in the N-Town *Assumption* have no regard for the invisible tactile boundary that protects the purity and sanctity of the Marian reliquary and the relic enclosed within. For example, the leader of the Jews urges his followers to 'Go stent me yone body wyth youre stonys!' (41.408). This line can be translated as 'go stop that body with your stones!', i.e. 'go stone that body!' (*MED* s.v. 'stinten, v' sense 3.c).[6] Stones, precisely because they are found on the ground, are intrinsically associated with earth and dirt, and thus threaten to contaminate the reliquary. However, before the Jews in the N-

[6] The verb 'stent' here could be an error for 'stene' (i.e. *MED* s.v. 'stenen, v.' sense 1.a 'to cast stones at'). Regarding this possibility, see Greg ed 1915: 71; Spector ed 1991: II, 534n41/408; *MED* 'stinten, v.' sense 3.c. If 'stent' should in fact be 'stene', this would make no difference to the meaning of the line. It would, of course, be tautological (i.e. 'go stone that body with your stones').

Town *Assumption* are able to throw stones, they are suddenly struck with madness. One, for example, exclaims: 'mad is my þowth!' (41.413). This mode of punishment is revealing. The Jews' desire to contaminate Mary's reliquary with dirty stones is coded as literally insane: it falls outside the boundaries of 'normal' human behaviour. Moreover, this punishment renders most of the Jews passive and inert, and as such they are incapable of executing their plan to stone (and thus contaminate) the reliquary.

Not all of the Jews are subdued, however: one of them announces a more ambitious plan. Instead of attacking the reliquary with stones, he escalates the threat of contamination by turning *his own body* into the violent projectile. Note especially how the Jew describes this attack on the reliquary: 'I schal sterte therto manly' (41.421). The adverb 'manly' here could equally mean 'in the human way' or 'boldly' (*MED* s.v. 'manli, adv.' senses 1.a and 2). The former semantic nuance is especially thought provoking: the Jew specifically emphasizes that he wants to hit the bier/reliquary with his *body*, a haptic threat that would likely have seemed especially alarming to a contemporary audience given the pervasive idea of Jewish bodily contamination in late medieval English culture.

More striking still is how the Jew refers to his body once he is attached to the bier/reliquary:

> Allas, my body is ful of peyne!
> I am fastened sore to this bere!
> Myn handys are ser bothe tweyne.
> O, Peter, now prey thy God for me to here.
> In Cayfas halle when thou were seyne
> And of the, Peter, a mayde acusid there,
> I halpe the tho; now helpe me ageyne,
> That I were hol, outh of this fere–
> Sum medycyn me lere.
> (41.423–31)

The adjective 'hol' in the penultimate line means 'healthy, cured, healed, free from disease or defect' (*MED* s.v. 'hol(e), adj.(2)' sense 1.a.a). The word is conspicuous here

because it appears ubiquitously in medieval medical recipes. Hannah Bower (2018a, 2018b) has explored the literary dimensions of medieval recipes at length, noting that texts in this genre 'often conclude with promises such as […] "he schal be hole within iij tymys drynkyng" ' (2018a: 220).

On the surface, when the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* expresses a desire to be 'hol', he means that he wants his hands to be released from the bier/reliquary. In its present state, his body is immobile and thus defective. However, the Jew's request to be 'hol' has yet further implications. Jews, as discussed above, were coded as diseased and even infectious in medieval English culture: Jewish men were believed to menstruate via haemorrhoids, and Jewish bodies more generally were associated with leprosy. For a late medieval audience, the prevalent nexus of ideas about Jewish bodies, illness, and contagion may well have come to mind when the Jew expressed a desire to be 'hol' (41.430).

Rather than being contaminated through contact with a sick and infectious Jewish body, however, the reliquary instead heals him. To put this in context, reliquaries were effectively extensions of the relics they contained and could thus serve as an important conduit to sacred healing (Chaganti 2008: 82; Hahn 1997: 22). Far from polluting the sacred container, then, the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* only proves the object's power to instigate healing miracles. A comparison could easily be drawn to Morrison's aforementioned argument that '[t]he Jews [in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*], polluted by excrement, cannot make the boy/Eucharist/body of Christ filthy even if touched with feces' (2008: 88).

Later in this chapter, I will return to the relationship between Jewish bodies, sickness, and conversion in order to consider a question that plagued medieval commentators: how far could a Jewish body truly transform into a Christian body and

leave behind its distinctive features? Was a full transformation between a Jewish body and a Christian body even possible—and if not, how might this have problematized the tidy conversion narrative presented in the N-Town *Assumption*? First, however, I wish to foreground another dimension of the Jew's assault on the bier, one that has hitherto unnoticed. The Jew in this play does not merely launch an attack on a sacred object; he also intends to sexually defile Mary's corpse.

Violating Mary's Virginal Body: Jews, Animals, and Sexual Uncleanness

Thus far, I have approached the Jew's tactile transgressions as if Mary and her bier represent a relic and a reliquary respectively. The Jews in the N-Town *Assumption*, however, do not identify Mary as an object. Instead, they repeatedly refer to her as a body, as other scholars have noted (Nichols 1991: 37; Chaganti 2008: 81). Here are just a few examples:

> EPISCOPUS: And brynge me that bychyd body, I red! (41.396)
>
> PRIMUS PRINCEPS: We schal don schame to that body and to tho prechours. (41.398)
>
> EPISCOPUS: And br[y]nge me that bygyd body evyn tofore these touris! (41.404)
>
> PRIMUS PRINCEPS: Are ye ferd of a ded body? (41.420)

In my view, the second of these examples is striking. Primus Princeps (i.e. the Jew who will strike Mary's bier) expresses a desire to 'don schame' to Mary's 'body'. Broadly speaking, the noun 'shame' in Middle English means 'The state of being in disgrace; ignominy, humiliation' (*MED* s.v. 'shame, n.' sense 3.a). However, the noun also carries specific sexual connotations. For example, to 'haven a shame' could mean to lose one's

virginity (*MED* s.v. ‘shame, n.’ sense 4.b.c). Sexual connotations are also possible when the preposition ‘do’ or a variant thereof appears before the noun ‘shame’:

> In verb phrases: (a) don ~, to act disgracefully, behave basely; commit disgraceful acts against someone; don (muchel) ~, disgrace (sb., a land, etc.); do harm (to sb.), injure (sb.); annoy (sb.), harass; *violate (a woman);* also, betray (a lord); -- also refl.; don ~ to, bring dishonor on (sb.), do harm to (a body)
>
> (*MED* s.v. ‘shame, n.’ sense 4.b.a; emphasis added)

> *spec.* Violation of a woman’s honour, loss of chastity. †to do (a) shame, to offer violence (to). child, son of shame, a child born out of wedlock.
>
> (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. ‘shame, n.’ sense 3.c)

An excellent example, though not one supplied by either of these dictionaries, can be found in Thomas Hoccleve’s *Letter of Cupid* (1402). This poem, adapted from Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre au dieu d’Amours*, devotes much space to condemning dishonest suitors. The following two stanzas deplore men who take advantage of women and then recount their sexual escapades to a friend:

> And for þat euery fals man/ hath a make
> As vn to euery wight/ is light to knowe
> Whan this Traitour the womman hath forsake
> He faste him speedith/ vn to his felowe
> Til he be there/ his herte is on a lowe
> His fals deceit/ ne may him nat souffyse
> But of his treson, tellith al the wyse
>
> Is this a fair auant/ is this honour
> A man him self to accuse and diffame
> Now is it good confesse him a traitour
> And brynge a womman to a sclaunderous name
> And telle how he/ hir body hath *doon shame*
> No worsship may he thus/ to him conquere
> But ful greet repreef vn to him and here
>
> (Fenster and Carpenter Erler eds 1990: 178 lines 57–70; emphasis added)

The sexual connotations of the phrase ‘doon shame’ in line 68 are unmistakeable: ‘shame’ is something a man does specifically to a woman’s ‘body’, a carnal act he can then boast about to a friend.

This linguistic context has important implications for the N-Town *Assumption*, a play in which a Jew expresses his intention to ‘don schame’ to Mary’s ‘body’ just 24 lines before violently attacking her (41.398). With the sexual connotations of the verb

'schame' in mind, the Jew's physical assault on the Virgin gains a new layer of meaning. By launching himself violently at Mary, the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* arguably intends to rape a virgin and sexually violate a corpse. Of course, he is not just attempting to sexually assault any virgin here; this is *The* Virgin. Mary's preeminent sexual purity makes the Jew's tactile intensions all the more deplorable: he wants to commit the ultimate act of sexual contamination.

This reading is resonant with the representation of Jewish touch elsewhere in medieval English culture. For example, in medieval bestiaries, Jews were often identified with Hyenas, a species associated with bestiality and necrophilia (Hassig 1999: 74–75). Specifically, hyenas were thought to dig up graves and feed on corpses, an act which takes on sexual overtones in LBL MS Harley 4751, fol. 10r, a page from a bestiary that has been dated to c.1230–1240 (Morgan 1982–1988: I, 124). In this image, the hyena's corpse desecration clearly recalls cunnilingus (figure 34). Debra Hassig points out that 'sex between a Christian and a Jew was tantamount to bestiality and punishable by death' in medieval law (1999: 74). She goes on to suggest that this judicial context offers an important lens through which to read LBL MS Harley 4751:

> the fact that the corpse is female likely alludes to the Christian-Jewish sexual taboo. It should also be remembered that the primary reason for the sumptuary laws forced upon medieval Jews—the wearing of the 'Jew Badge' and the *pileum cornutum* (pointed hat)—was to prevent sexual relations between Christians and Jews, indicating that bestiality (at worst) and miscegenation (at best) were central issues in the history of Christian-Jewish relations.
>
> (Hassig 1999: 75)

The image in Harley 4751 offers intriguing parallels with the N-Town *Assumption*, a play in which I have suggested that a Jew threatens to violate Mary's virginal, pure corpse. The association between Jewish touch and bestiality in the medieval imagination only bolsters my argument that there are sexual undertones to the encounter at Mary's coffin.

These parallels between the Jew who attacks Mary's corpse and the illicit sex acts of the Hyena become all the more compelling when noting that the Jews in the N-Town *Assumption* are specifically compared to animals. The following explicit stage direction dehumanizes the Jews in the play:

> *Hic discendunt principes cum suis ministris ut feroci percucientes petras cum eorum capitibus.*
>
> (41.409.s.d)
>
> *Here the rulers with their attendants descend like wild beasts dashing their heads against rocks*
>
> (Sugano ed 2007: 326n1)

The dehumanizing implications of this stage direction would have been particularly obvious to a meditative reader of the N-Town manuscript (assuming that they understood Latin), but it is easy to imagine how actors could have interpreted this stage direction as a cue to make the Jews seem sub-human on stage—for example, through snarls or hunched posture.

The notion that the Jews at Mary's funeral were animalistic had wider cultural currency in late medieval England, as can be seen in the stained glass of York Minster. A mid-fourteenth century window reproduced here in figure 27 shows the Jew, hanging from Mary's bier, 'with somewhat simian features' (Hardwick 1999: 80). The implication is that the Jew's sub-human and violent actions distinguish him from the Christians around him, all of whom have more human facial features. A different stained glass window in York Minster depicts a monkey's funeral procession, featuring one of the monkeys hanging from the bier (figure 28). This puzzling window, produced c.1320, also seems to represent the story of the Jews at Mary's funeral (Davidson and O'Connor 1978: 103, Hardwick 1999: 80–84; Hardwick 2007). It is worth noting here that monkeys—not unlike hyenas—were associated with unrestrained desire and illicit sexual acts in late medieval England. Specifically, the lascivious ape is a recurring motif in medieval marginalia and beyond (Camille 1992: 30; Hassig 1999: 73; Miyazaki 1999: 36).

Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted connections between Jews and nest-fouling owls in medieval English culture, an association that only bolstered the stereotype of Jewish touch as literally dirty. However, when Jews were compared to other animals, especially hyenas but also apes, it was instead the *moral* uncleanness of their touch that came to the fore. Jews, with their unrestrained feral desires, were a dangerous source of sexual contamination. With this cultural context in mind, not to mention the aforementioned sexual connotations of 'don schame' (41.398), the idea that the Jew intends to rape Mary's corpse becomes all the more compelling. Of course, not all audience members were necessarily alert to possible the sexual implications of the text. I am simply suggesting this as one possible culturally available reading of the play—a reading that is consistent with the contemporary stereotype of Jewish touch as both literally and morally unclean.

But if the Jew's assault on Mary is motivated by such degrading sexual desires, why then does he become *stuck* to the bier? On the surface, this would seem to be an ill-advised punishment, giving the Jew precisely what he was looking for: close physical proximity to Mary. To understand what is going on here, it is helpful to draw a comparison to Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (1303). At one point in this text, a man and wife have sexual intercourse in a 'chambre [...] fast by þe cherche', which greatly displeased God as he did not want such deeds to be committed 'So nygh þe cherche' (Sullens ed 1983: 224 lines 8947–48, 8954). The couple are punished for their unholy actions when they become stuck together, and monks pray that 'þey myghte be vndoun' (Sullens ed 1983: 224 line 8966). According to Mannyng, the moral is that man should have 'drede | Yn holy place to do þat dede' (Sullens ed 1983: 224 lines 8979–80).

Mannynge's tale has some striking correspondences to the N-Town *Assumption*. Both the couple in the church and the Jew at the funeral commit a sexually charged act of

touch near something holy, and become physically stuck to something—or somebody—as punishment. Touch is thus both the agent of sexual sin and the disciplinary mechanism by which that sin is made manifest for all to see. One might assume that fastening the Jew to the coffin or attaching the lusty couple to one another would only serve to prolong the sexually motivated touch that was so problematic in the first place. However, in both cases, the more important effect is simply to extend the duration of the negative exemplum of touch. In the N-Town *Assumption*, the Jew who hangs from the bier cannot run away from his tactile failings, either physically or metaphorically, as he might have done if the author had used the version of the *Transitus* story in which the Jew's errant hands are severed from his body.

Touch, Cleanliness, and the Sacred

Thus far, it has become clear that the Jews in the N-Town *Assumption* embody the unclean half of the touch paradox. Their hands represent a dangerous source of contamination and defilement, entirely in keeping with the depiction of Jewish bodies in medieval English culture more broadly. Conversely, Christians in the play embody the other side of the sensory paradox, namely touch as a pathway to the sacred. Consider, for example, how the apostles handle Mary's body:

> PETRUS: Now, holy brether, this body let vs take,
> And wyth alle the worschepe we may, ley it in the graue,
> Kyssyng it alle atonys for here sonys sake.
> Now insence ye, and we schal put here in this cave.
> (41.449–52)

The apostles' touch is deeply reverent and delicate, in stark contrast to that of the Jew earlier in the play. Rather than violently striking Mary's body, they kiss it. Further, Peter speaks about their collective touch in a superlative sense, exhorting the apostles to 'take' i.e. 'pick up' her body with 'alle the worschepe we may' (*MED* s.v. 'taken, v.' sense 1.b.a). He implicitly recognizes his skin as an important meeting place between his body

and the sacred—a meeting place that needs to be treated with respect, humility, and care. In short, the apostles' touch represents the antithesis of the Jew's assault on Mary's funeral bier earlier in the play.

Note also the emphasis that Peter places on the apostles washing their bodies and being clean:

> PETRUS: And bisyli let vs *wachyn* in this virgyne sythis,
> […]
> And yn *clennesse* alle loke ye be redy.
> (41.305–09; emphasis added)

Peter utters these words just over a hundred lines before the apostles place Mary's body 'in this cave' (41.452). The audience are left in no doubt, then, that the apostles are clean—both literally and morally—and thus entirely worthy of touching Mary's body, unlike the Jews. Compare also the Virgins who wash Mary before burial:

> PRIMA VIRGO: Now, suster, I beseke you, let vs do oure attendaunce
> And wasche this gloryous body that here in oure sith is,
> […]
>
> SECUNDA VIRGO: I am redy, suster, wyth all myn hol affyaunce,
> To wesche and worschepe this body that so brith is.
> […]
>
> *Et osculabunt corpus Marie.*
> *[And they kiss Mary's body]*
>
> (41.348–355s.d.; translation in square brackets after Sugano ed 2007: 324)

Bale describes this moment as 'an image of correct relic veneration' (2010: 105), but more specifically it offers an image of *clean* relic veneration—the antithesis of the Jew's contaminating hands. Note especially the sexual purity of the two women concerned. Only a meditative reader of the play would have been able to see the speaker names 'prima virgo' and 'secunda virgo', which explicitly demarcate their bodies as being unsoiled by sexual sin. In performance, however, their virginal status was probably implicit: the two virgins likely wore white clothing, which was associated with sexual purity. For comparison, Mary Magdalene dons a 'mentyll of whyte' in the Digby *Mary*

Magdalene, a visual symbol of her newfound spiritual virginity (Coletti ed 2018: 75, line 1604; Coletti 2004: 181–82). In any case, the sexual virtue of the virgins in the N-Town *Assumption* complements the actions they perform with their hands: they are washing Mary's body, worshipping her sacred flesh in a way intrinsically associated with cleanness. Christians, then, touch sacred matter in this play with pure hands and pure hearts—the opposite of the Jews' tactile interactions.

I am not the first to recognize that the N-Town *Assumption* juxtaposes different kinds of touch in this play. Nichols, for example, has pointed to a 'distinction between holy touch, which is permitted the maidens preparing Mary's body for burial and the apostles who lower it into the grave, and the profanation of the attacking Jew' (1991: 34). Nichols here comes close to identifying the medieval touch paradox that I have proposed in this thesis, but without acknowledging that bad touch is condemned specifically because it is unclean. Further, Nichols does not point out the most significant tactile distinction in the play, namely the difference between the Jew's behaviour before and after his conversion. Up until his conversion, the Jew is a supreme model of unclean touch, threatening to contaminate a reliquary and sexually violate Mary's virginal corpse. After his conversion, however, the Jew instead becomes a tactile role model. At Peter's instruction, the Jew promotes contact relics as a tactile access point to sacred healing and Christian purity. It is worth quoting from this section of the play at length:

PETRUS: Than take yone holy palme and go to þi nacyon,
And bid hem beleve in God yif they wyl be pure.
And towche hem therwyth, both hed, hand, and facyon,
And of her sekenesse they schal haue cure–
And ellis in here peynys indure.

PRIMUS PRINCEPS: Gromercy, holy fader Peter.
I schal do as ye me teche her,
[…]

Hic vadit princeps ad Judeos cum palma.
[Here the ruler will go to the Jews with the palm]

PRIMUS PRINCEPS: Ye Jewys that langour in this gret infyrmyté,
Belevyth in Crist Jesu and ye schal haue helthe.
Throw vertu of this holy palme that com fro the Trinyté,
Yowur sekenesse schal aswage and restore you to welthe.
SECUNDUS PRINCEPS: I beleve in Crist Jesu, Goddis sone in vnyté,
And forsake my mavmentryes, fals in here felthe.

Hic tangat credentes cum palma et sanati sunt.
[Here he touches the believers with the palm, and they are healed]

A, I thanke the, gracyous Lord, and thy moder of peté.
Now are we hol of oure seknesse and of oure foul belthe.

(41.440–71; Translations in square brackets added after Sugano ed 2007: 327n4; 328n1)

Note here the repeated emphasis on Jews as a group of people who collectively suffer from a 'sekenesse' or 'infyrmyté' that requires a 'cure' (41.443, 464, 467, 471). Jewish bodies are thus once again framed as a source of disease, a malady that needs to be purged from society. Only once they convert to Christianity can they truly 'be pure' (41.441). By describing the Jews as people from 'þi nacyon' (41.440), Peter implies that dangerous Jewish bodies are normally contained in a distant land, where they are incapable of contaminating Christian society.

Most striking of all is *how* the newly converted Jew should purify the other people from his 'nacyon' (41.440). Physical and spiritual ailments are cured through cutaneous interaction with a contact relic from Mary's tomb. Specifically, their 'sekenesse' will be assuaged 'Throw vertu of this holy palme' (41.466–67). An explicit stage direction confirms the healing role of touch:

Hic tangat credentes cum palma et sanati sunt.
(41.469.s.d)

Here he touches the believers with the palm, and they are healed
(Sugano ed 2007: 328n1).

Only *after* this stage direction are the Jews 'hol of oure seknesse' (41.471). Having embraced Christianity and its tactile practices, the Jews can now enjoy both physical and spiritual health. In the process, the Jews move beyond their defiling nature, abandoning

their *filthy* idols and *foul* evils ('my mavmentryes, fals in here felthe', 41.469; 'foul belthe', 41.471).[7]

In sum, the recently converted Jew has become a messenger, bringing the Christian faith and its ideas about touch to a much wider audience beyond the borders of England. The palm, which functions as a contact relic of Mary's tomb, is invested with the power to cure the sick both spiritually and physically in the hands of the newly converted Christian. Most importantly, the Jew says to Peter: 'I schal do as ye me teche her' (41.446). In the *Legenda Aurea*, the Jew is conspicuously silent after his conversion and Peter's subsequent instructions; the narrative moves swiftly on to the apostles' assembly at the sepulchre (Ryan trans 2012: 467). In the N-Town *Assumption*, by contrast, the Jew stresses that he is being taught how to touch correctly as a Christian. Specifically, he is learning that contact relics can be used as a pathway to sacred healing. It is a lesson that is simultaneously being given to the entire audience.

In this respect, there is an obvious parallel between the N-Town *Assumption* and the two plays upon which I focused in the previous chapter, namely the York *Assumption* and N-Town *Navitity*. As I have shown, all of these plays had the capacity to teach lessons about how to touch contact relics correctly in order to harness sacred healing. In the conclusion to this chapter, I will reflect further upon the similarities and indeed the differences between the N-Town *Assumption*, N-Town *Nativity*, and York *Assumption*. At present, however, I wish to highlight an important implication of the sensory lesson offered by the N-Town *Assumption*. It is revealing that the Jew's transition from unclean to sacred touch coincides with the exact moment when he converts from Judaism to Christianity. This cements the wider sensory message of the play: Jewish touch is unclean, whereas Christian touch is pure and sacred. Moreover, the N-Town *Assumption*

[7] It is not entirely clear what the word 'belthe' means here, but 'misfortune' and 'evil' are the commonly accepted translations (*MED* s.v. 'belthe, n.' sense 1; Spector ed 1991: II, 562). This is the only instance of the word recorded in the *MED*; it would appear to be a hapax legomenon.

suggests that unclean touch—here encapsulated in the figure of the Jew—can and should be excised from English society by effecting conversion to Christianity.[8] This reductive schema is, of course, disturbingly anti-Semitic to a modern audience. It also created a distinct problem for Christian actors who represented Jews on stage, to which I now turn.

Inhabiting an Other's Touch: Playing a Jew on the Medieval Stage

Thus far, I have argued that Jewish bodies in the N-Town *Assumption* are repeatedly demarcated as a source of tactile contamination, but this threat is contained when the Jew becomes stuck to the bier and converts to Christianity. Simply put, the Jew cannot contaminate Christian society if he now *belongs* to that society, both body and soul. However, the process of portraying a Jew on the medieval stage could potentially introduce contamination of the most sinister kind: the Jew *within* the Christian.

The Christian actor tasked with portraying the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* would have had to commit all the negative acts of touch which had come to define 'the Jew', perhaps most alarmingly the attempted sexual violation of Mary's virginal corpse. This was more problematic than pretending to be Satan or Herod, as these two roles involved delivering speeches full of bluster rather than becoming a supremely negative sensory exemplum. Pretending to be the Jew who strikes Mary's funeral bier would, of course, have belonged to the realm of imitation and play. Nevertheless, in this kind of performance, the Jew may have seemed—quite literally—too close for comfort.

Stephen Spector has argued that medieval theatre 'portrayed the Jew as despicable in order to compel the auditor to expel the Jew from himself' (1979: 13). This argument becomes particularly intriguing when considering the act of embodying a Jew's touch on

[8] As a caveat, one could argue that the Jews are not *completely* excised from English society in the N-Town *Assumption* because a few refuse to convert during the holy palm scene (see 41.472). Nevertheless, the fact that these remaining Jews so frequently invoke the devil (e.g. 41.477; 480; 484; 489) suggests that they are now safely 'contained' in hell. Moreover, their threats (e.g. 41.483) are just empty words, having no impact on the remaining narrative.

stage. By having a Christian embody a Jew, the N-Town *Assumption* likely raised the troubling possibility that there was, in fact, a Jew lurking within all Christian bodies, desperate to break free and cause chaos, especially through their touch. This reading of the play has never been considered. To borrow terminology from Steven F. Kruger, Jewish bodies may have appeared 'spectral' in these plays, forever haunting the Christian self (2006: xvii). Kruger has argued at length that Christianity in medieval England was deeply troubled by its relationship with Judaism: 'Like any ancestor, Judaism provides Christianity with an inheritance, which is always […] spectral (not of the present, but influencing, appearing in, the present, demanding some present response)' (2006: 11). One of the defining features of the spectral is that it is both present and absent: it is dead, but it will not *stay* dead. Consequently, it continues to besiege the present:

> Spectral or apparitional figures—at one and the same time corporeally threatening and decorporealized—crystallize a dynamic in which the attempt to rid oneself of a presence perceived as dangerous is haunted by the impossibility of doing just that.
>
> (Kruger 2006: xxvii)

It is helpful to apply this terminology to the N-Town *Assumption*. On the one hand, Judaism in this play is 'corporeally threatening' in so far as Jewish bodies repeatedly endanger the purity of Christian ones. A Jewish character attempts to strike Mary's funeral bier, and a Christian body has to temporarily become a Jewish one for this story to work. Yet at the same time, the Jew is also 'decorporealized' in this play: Judaism is a threat that never shows its true face, but hides behind the bodies of actors who pretend to be Jewish. If the Jew who strikes Mary's funeral bier haunted Christian bodies on stage, then this threat needed to be managed. This gives an entirely new meaning to the Jew's conversion in the N-Town *Assumption*: the Christian body is expelling all aspects of Judaism from its interior.

However, Jewish conversion was a troubling notion in the later Middle Ages. Given that Jews were thought to be so different from Christians—a conviction enshrined in medieval physiognomy—then how could they ever *truly* convert and leave their old beliefs and bodies behind? Jews allegedly had distinctive noses and idiosyncractic blood that needed expelling via male menstruation. It was debatable whether conversion could truly eradicate such physically permanent traces of Jewishness (Resnick 2012: 279, 283, 286, 320–23). Of course, given that the Christian actor in the N-Town *Assumption* was never really a Jew in the first place, it was entirely possible for him to expel 'the Jew' from his body and distance himself from the spectral presence of Judaism. By the end of the play, Jewish bodies and their malevolent hands can, quite simply, disappear—making way for their 'superior' Christian descendants.

The N-Town *Assumption* had another tool at its disposal to dispel fears about the effectiveness of Jewish conversion, and therefore to suggest that the new Christian at the end of the play truly has left his Jewish body behind. Earlier in this chapter (pp. 104–06), I stressed that there were two versions of the story about the Jew who attacks Mary at her funeral: one in which his entire body becomes attached to the coffin, and one in which only his disembodied hands hang from the bier. One effect of using the version in which the Jew's whole body becomes stuck to the bier is to emphasize the somatic aspects of conversion. For the Jew on stage, believing in Mary and Jesus is a profoundly transformative experience, releasing his entire body from the bier. This moment of spiritual epiphany does not just result in the reattachment of the Jew's hands: it alters his whole body. Thus, the N-Town *Assumption* underscores how spiritual changes in the mind have implications from head to toe. It is useful to compare this with the Chester *Slaughter of the Innocents*, in which Herod's arms and legs start to rot as a result of his ordering the massacre, the first step in his impending death:

HERODES: I wott I must dye soone.
Booteles is me to make mone,
for dampned I must bee.
My legges roten and my armes;
that nowe I see of feindes swarmes—
I have donne so many harmes—
from hell comminge after mee.
(10.419–25)

Herod's sins have physical repercussions and change his entire body, just as the Jew's conversion in the N-Town *Assumption* alters his whole exterior appearance, releasing him from the bier and stripping away all traces of Jewishness. In sum, conversion in the N-Town *Assumption* is a metamorphic process. The body released from the bier has left behind all traces of Jewishness, internally and externally. He has become the exemplary Christian, both internally and externally, and so he is now a suitable sensory role model for the audience. Specifically, he is qualified to promote contact relics for sacred healing.

However, a fifteenth-century audience may not have approached the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* with a readiness to learn a lesson about Christianity and the senses. In fact, a contemporary audience may have focused on the surface humiliation of the Jew. This line of thought becomes especially compelling when considering the reception of the York *Funeral of the Virgin*, a missing play that dramatized the same story as the N-Town *Assumption*. This can be inferred from the York *Ordo Paginarum* (1415), a civic document that describes a play featuring:

> Quatuor Apostoli <…> Marie et fergus pendens super feretrum <…> is Iudeis cum vno Angelo
> (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 23)

> Four apostles <carrying the bier of Mary,> and Fergus hanging upon the bier <with two oth>er Jews and one angel
> (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: II, 709)

Crucially, between 1432–1433, the Masons wanted to relinquish responsibility for this play.[9] They had several grievances with the pageant, one of which being that it 'used to produce more noise and laughter than devotion [*magis risum & clamorem causabat quam deuocionem*]' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 48; II, 732). The Masons' enigmatic complaint has attracted much attention (Beckett 2017a: 103–04; Butterworth 2005: 142–44; Carpenter 2009: 9; Evans 1997: 199–204; Hardwick 1999: 79; Hardwick 2007: 81–82; Mill 1950: 868–69; Sullivan 2005: 150–51). It will probably never be fully understood. For the present purposes, what interests me is the fact that spectators seem to have been more inclined to laugh at the Jew than to learn anything from him.

It is worth pausing here to consider that the Masons specifically complained about people laughing at the play 'in which Fergus was beaten [*vbi ffergus fflagellatus erat*]' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 47; II, 732). It is not difficult to imagine that a slapstick attack on a Jewish character would engender laughter in later medieval England.[10] However, this becomes all the more troubling when remembering the fate of the Jewish population in this city. In late medieval York, the cultural memory of the Jews would have encompassed the catastrophic massacre and mass-suicide of 1190. This event, which likely involved the deaths of at least 150 Jewish men and women from York, 'has become, in many ways deservedly, the single most famous incident in the history of the medieval English Jewry' (Dobson 1974: 17–18). Even though there were no Jews in York by the fifteenth century, they had undoubtedly left tangible traces in the city, most obviously in the street names 'Jubbergate' and 'Jewbury' (Dobson 1974: 46–47). Jews thus remained 'present' in York on a linguistic level and in the cultural memory of an extremely violent massacre and mass suicide. This historical context invites further

[9] Johnston and Rogerson incorrectly state that the document in which the Mason's complaint is found dates from 1431–1432 (1979: I, 47; II, 732). It actually dates to 'between February 1432 and February 1433' (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 425).

[10] For evidence that medieval audiences could react raucously to theatrical representations of Jews, see an early sixteenth-century account by J. L. Vives, which has been discussed at length in Carpenter 2009.

consideration about a Christian audience finding comedy in a play featuring a Jew being beaten. The physical abuse of a Jew on stage in York could well have recalled the violent pogrom of 1190. This, in turn, makes the audience response of laughter even more disturbing to us today. Touch on the medieval stage may have had parallels with the tragic fate of a local minority in years gone by, and it could even have helped to celebrate and commemorate it.

Thus, in late medieval York, citizens were apparently more likely to view a play about the Jew at Mary's funeral as an occasion for laughter and celebration rather than as a prompt for serious contemplation—and this laughter may have had very sinister implications. In the same century, audiences watching the N-Town *Assumption* might have responded to the Jew at Mary's funeral in a comparable way, laughing at the Jew's shortcomings without seriously contemplating his subsequent lesson about the value of contact relics as a pathway to the sacred. One could argue that laughter would have in fact *helped* the Christian audience to reject the idea of unclean/Jewish touch from their own identities. Nevertheless, it is also easy to see how actors could have played the N-Town *Assumption* for laughs, focusing on the comedic effect of the material at the expense of its sensory education.

One has to wonder what the authors of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* would have made of the N-Town *Assumption*, and indeed my reading of it. The *Tretise* (composed c.1380–1425) attacks the playing of 'miraclis', a word that 'seems to cover a fairly broad range of dramatic representation and related activity' (Davidson ed 1993: 1). In particular, the *Tretise* identifies 'religious drama—especially the playing of the Passion—[…] as utterly reprehensible' (Davidson ed 1993: 1). The *Tretise* rejects six arguments in favour of 'miraclis', one of which being that such performances help men to visualize the devil's handiwork and thus commit themselves to 'gode livinge' (Davidson ed 1993: 97).

Presumably, the writers of the *Tretise* would thus have been unsympathetic or even hostile to my argument that audience members could have taken away any useful message about sacred and unclean touch from the N-Town *Assumption*.

Notably, the *Tretise* argues that those who dramatize the works of God are just as bad as the Jews who scorned Christ:

> sithen thes miraclis pleyeris taken in bourde the ernestful werkis of God, no doute that ne they scornen God as diden the Jewis that bobbiden Crist, for they lowen at his passioun as these lowyn and japen of the miraclis of God.
>
> (Davidson ed 1993: 97)

This passage maintains that contemporary plays took God's work 'in bourde', i.e. it was an occasion for amusement and levity—a far cry from an educational experience (*MED* s.v. 'bourde, n.' senses 2.a and 3). It is striking that the *Tretise* should specifically compare the actors performing in medieval plays to 'the Jewis that bobbiden Crist' (Davidson ed 1993: 97). The 'bobbid game' (also known as Hot cockles) involves striking a blindfolded person (Davidson ed 1993: 130–31; *MED* s.v. 'bobben, v.(1)', sense 1.a). In Chapter Two, I have highlighted that Jewish touch was framed as demonic, defiling, and sub-human in medieval English culture. Accordingly, any medieval Christian who imitated Jewish tactile behaviour was morally deplorable. It is therefore unsurprising that the best way for the *Tretise* to condemn actors is to compare them to the Jews who hit Christ. Ironically, then, in the process of condemning religious theatre, the *Tretise* relies on the very principle that was integral to the play discussed in this chapter: the Jew as a negative tactile exemplum.

Jewish Tactile Contamination in Other Early English Plays

Although I have focused here on the N-Town *Assumption*, the relationship between Jews, touch, and uncleanness has broader implications for the study of early English theatre. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* most obviously demands attention. It was probably

written ‘shortly after 1461’, and dramatizes the story of a group of Jews who conspire to steal a consecrated host (Sebastian ed 2012: 29n118). When the Jews stab this host, they are shocked to find that it bleeds. One of the Jews, Jonathas, throws the host into oil, but it sticks to his hand. The other Jews attempt to pull Jonathas and the host apart, but only succeed in detaching Jonathas’s hand from his body. The Jews then throw the host into an oven, out of which an image of Christ suddenly appears. Jonathas is instructed to insert his hand in a cauldron of Christ’s blood, which leads to his conversion and healing.

There is a vast amount of existing scholarship on the Croxton *Play*, and the representation of Jews in this text has already received much attention (Beckwith 1992: 72–75; Chemers 2007; Depres 1998; Lampert 2001; Lawton 2003; Rubin 2004: 170). However, in light of the theme of Jewish tactile contamination discussed in this chapter, some aspects of the play take on new resonance. Consider, for example, the following lines spoken by Christ when he miraculously appears from the oven:

> JESUS: Why fare ye thus fule with yowre frende?
> Why peyne yow me and straytly me pynde,
> And I yowr love so derely have bowght?
> (Sebastian ed 2012: 55, lines 722–24)

Christ takes particular issue with the fact that the Jews stabbed him: the second line can be translated as ‘why do you torture me and severely stab me’ (*MED* s.v. ‘peinen, v.’, sense 1.d; s.v. pinden, v.’ sense 1.f).[11] Note especially how the Jews’ conduct was described just one line earlier: Christ asked them why they behave so ‘fule’ i.e ‘in a dirty manner, filthily’ (*MED* s.v. ‘foule, adv.’ sense 1.a). Taken together, these two lines effectively align the Jews’ tactile behaviour with dirt and filth: their touch is unclean.

[11] The *MED* lists this instance of ‘pynde’ (from ‘pinden, v.’) in the Croxton *Play* under sense 1.b, ‘to imprison (sb.); confine’, but I think that sense 1.f, ‘stab (sb.)’, is equally if not more appropriate given how the Jews tortured the host earlier in the play.

Much like the Jew in the N-Town *Assumption*, Jonathas becomes stuck to the sacred object he attempts to contaminate.[12] However, where the Jew's body remains physically intact in the N-Town *Assumption*, Jonathas's hand is violently detached from his body in the Croxton *Play*. Consequently, the Croxton *Play* delivers a less extreme message about the somatic aspects of conversion than the N-Town *Assumption*. In the Croxton *Play*, conversion only alters a Jew's hand: the process does not transform his entire body and wholly replace Jewish skin with Christian skin. When Jonathas inserts his hand into the cauldron of Christ's blood, a stage direction indicates that '*hys hand […] shal be hole agayn*' (Sebastian ed 2012: 57, line 777s.d.). But how far has the *rest* of Jonathas' body become 'hole', Christian, and healthy? The play gives no clear answer.

Another aspect of Jonathas' conversion is worthy of comment here. Note especially the emphasis on washing (i.e. cleanness) when Jonathas is instructed to insert his hand into a cauldron of Christ's blood, an act that will heal his body and soul:

> Thow wasshest thyn hart with grete contrycion.
> Go to the cawdron — thi care shal be the lesse —
> And towche thyn hand to thy salvacion.
> (Sebastian ed 2012: 57, lines 775–77)

Like the N-Town *Assumption*, then, the Croxton *Play* neatly compartmentalizes the touch paradox: Jewish touch is dirty, whereas Christian touch is clean, curative, and salvific. But the tactile resonances between the Croxton *Play* and the N-Town *Assumption* do not end here. Earlier in this chapter, I explained that the N-Town *Assumption* echoes the Incredulity of Thomas. The Croxton *Play* also has parallels with this biblical story. Like Thomas, Jonathas is a figure of doubt. Like Thomas, Jonathas penetrates Christ's body—though by stabbing the host, not by inserting a finger in the side wound. Like Thomas, this tactile encounter with Christ leads to faith. In this chapter, I have suggested above that Thomas's 'twin' in the N-Town *Assumption* teaches a lesson about the role of

[12] For an extensive discussion of the host as object/prop in the Croxton *Play*, see Sofer 2003: 31–60.

contact relics in accessing sacred healing. Thomas's 'twin' in the Croxton *Play*, however, offers a lesson about Christ's real presence in the mass: to touch the host is literally to make contact with Christ's flesh. Even though Jonathas *tries* to contaminate the host with his unclean hands, all he succeeds in doing is highlighting Christ's tangible presence in the Eucharist.

At this stage, it is important to stress that the stigmatization of Jewish touch as unclean was not exclusive to the medieval period. The sensory stereotype had an important cultural legacy in the early modern period, where it continued to find expression on the English stage. For example, in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (1589–1590), Barabas claims 'Sometimes I go about and poison wells' (2.3.180). As Jonathan Gil Harris has explained, this line owes a debt to the prevailing idea of 'the Jewish well-poisoner', a figure feared in both medieval and early modern England due to his ability to spread plague 'by contaminating the public drinking-water' (1998: 82). In order to convey the foulness of the practice to which Barabas alludes, it is helpful to consider figure 35. This woodcut image is from a copy of *Certaine secrete wonders of Nature* (Fenton 1569: fol. 26v), an English translation of a hugely popular French book on monsters and fantastical creatures. It depicts a Jewish man standing next to a well, a bag of poison in his hand looming above the water. The well features a statue of Satan urinating, his trickling body serving as a repulsive fountain. The Jew's pointing finger visually echoes Satan's penis, effectively aligning the bag of poison in his hand with a bladder. The implication here is, by now, a familiar one: Jewish hands are capable of contaminating Christian society, and Jewish bodies more generally make repulsive contact with bodily fluids.

In the same vein, the medieval myth of Jewish male menstruation continued into the early modern period (Katz 1999: 448–55; Resnick 2000: 262; Shapiro 1996: 37–38 108). Consider Shylock's famous speech from *The Merchant of Venice* (c.1596).

> SHYLOCK: I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.
>
> (3.1.44–50)

On the surface, Shylock's speech challenges the idea that Jewish bodies are in any way different from Christian bodies—and he appeals to the sense of touch in order to do so. Shylock stresses that Jewish and Christian bodies respond in the same way to tactile stimuli on the skin such as tickling and pricking, which should undermine the idea of Jewish otherness. In this passage, ideology starts to fall apart and racism ceases to make sense because of the shared experience of touch.

Nevertheless, there is an important subtext to Shylock's words. As David Katz has noted, the *Merchant of Venice* was written at a time when 'dense punning with the word "prick" ' as a euphemism for the male genitalia became 'quite commonplace' (1999: 460). Katz also highlights a variation on the myth of Jewish male menstruation, according to which the menses were expelled via the penis during urination rather than via haemorrhoids (1999: 454–5). Thus, when an actor portraying Shylock uttered the line 'if you prick us do we not bleed' (3.1.48), his eight words would have succinctly drawn together the male sexual organ ('prick'), Jewish bodies ('us') and blood ('bleed'), a combination that could easily have called to mind Jewish male menstruation in the minds of a contemporary audience. According to Katz,

> It is more than likely that an actor interpreting the role of Shylock could have pointed to his own genitals when reciting that most famous line, playing with

> the myth of Jewish male menstruation, turning Shylock's heartfelt plea into a moment of high comedy.
>
> (Katz 1999: 461)

To reframe Katz's argument in the terms of my thesis, Shylock's appeal to the sense of touch effectively backfires: rather than emphasizing the universality of tactile experience among Christians and Jews, he instead underscores the status of Jewish men as untouchable pariahs. Shylock and other Jewish men expelled unclean fluids on a monthly basis; like women, their bodies were a potential source of defilement.

This brief discussion of *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice* has exposed a significant fact: medieval ideas about Jewishness, touch, and contamination had a cultural legacy into the early modern period in England, an area of continuity that can be detected in theatre. Of course, neither of these early modern plays is anywhere near as extreme as the N-Town *Assumption*, in which I have shown that unclean Jewish touch and pure Christian touch are shockingly and systematically juxtaposed.

Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I have argued that the medieval touch paradox was resolved in the N-Town *Assumption* by projecting fears about unclean touch onto Jewish bodies and reserving sacred touch for Christian bodies. The play thus represents a powerful (and, from a modern perspective, alarmingly anti-Semitic) form of wish fulfilment, 'conveniently' separating sacred and unclean touch along religious lines. In this regard, the N-Town *Assumption* differs substantially from the plays discussed in the previous chapter. Far from neatly compartmentalizing the medieval touch paradox, plays like the York *Assumption* and N-Town *Nativity* were ideally positioned to expose troublesome tensions between sacred and unclean touch for women of childbearing age. The N-Town *Assumption*, by contrast, does not concede that unclean and sacred touch have to coexist

uncomfortably in a fallen world. Instead, the play advocates that the positive and negative aspects of the medieval touch paradox squarely align with Jewish and Christian identity. Consequently, unclean touch can be excised from Christian society by simply converting the Jews.

Yet from a different point of view, the N-Town *Assumption* is in fact strikingly similar to the York *Assumption* and N-Town *Nativity*. As I have shown, all three plays were in a position to offer sensory education on how to touch well as a Christian, with each text implicitly promoting contact relics as a tactile access point to sacred healing. There are, of course, some important differences in the tactile lessons provided by these plays, the first of which being the type of contact relic concerned. The newly converted Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* uses a palm from Mary's tomb as an agent of healing, whereas both Salome in the N-Town *Nativity* and the Virgin in the York *Assumption* promote girdles and other items of Mary's clothing. Secondly the contact relics promoted by the N-Town *Nativity* and York *Assumption* are relevant specifically to women in childbirth, whereas the palm used by the converted Jew in the N-Town *Assumption* seems to have no such gender restrictions.

However, the lessons about contact relics in the N-Town *Assumption*, N-Town *Nativity*, and York *Assumption* are not wholly different. All three plays deliver commentary on the sense of touch through a similar narrative vehicle, each echoing the Incredulity of Thomas story in some way. To recap, the N-Town *Nativity* replaces doubting Thomas with a doubting midwife who probes Mary's body; the York *Assumption* inverts the Doubting Thomas story by making Thomas present at the Assumption; and the N-Town *Assumption* takes Thomas's transition from doubt to faith via touch to new extremes. Thus, not only do all three plays endorse contact relics as a pathway to sacred healing, but to deliver this lesson they all specifically use a story that

recalls the doubting apostle. This is not surprising: the Thomas narrative puts touch to the test, both literally and metaphorically, and so it was ideally suited for sensory education. Chapter Three will reaffirm that medieval plays echoing the Incredulity of Thomas were ideally suited to offered sensory education. Just moments before Thomas's encounter with Christ, Mary Magdalene was forbidden to touch Christ. I suggest that when Mary Magdalene's experiences were dramatized on the medieval stage, especially in the York and N-Town Plays, she taught spectators how to touch with the gaze instead of the hands.

Before moving on, however, I wish to reflect further on the dialogue between chapters one and two. In the previous chapter, I highlighted that the medieval relationship between touch and the sacred was changing abruptly from the 1530s onwards with respect to the decline of birth girdles as an access point to Marian healing. I suggested that the early modern afterlife of a medieval play, the York *Assumption*, was a useful litmus test for this development. Chapter Two has likewise turned to early modern theatre to place medieval ideas about the sense of touch in their broader chronological context. However, rather than exposing a *change* in ideas about tactility, the diachronic approach to the senses and theatre in Chapter Two has instead exposed *continuity* where Jewish touch is concerned. I have highlighted that medieval ideas about Jews, touch, and contamination had an important cultural legacy in early modern England, finding expression in Barabas's reference to well poisoning in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and Shylock's allusion to Jewish male menstruation in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. It is starting to emerge, then, that the two halves of the medieval touch paradox met different fates in the sixteenth century. Moreover, theatre is uniquely positioned to expose these contrary developments.

Chapter Three

Touching with the Gaze: Be*hold*ing Christ's Body during the *Noli me tangere*

In the last two chapters, I have argued that Doubting Thomas figures on the late medieval stage were in a powerful position to expose, to interrogate, and even to resolve tensions between sacred and unclean touch. But what about medieval spectators—how did *their* experiences square with the touch paradox? Touch may have been a crucial pathway to the sacred when receiving the Eucharist or handling relics, but how far was this true for the experience of attending a religious play, a medium that has conventionally been understood as visual and auditory? This question governs the remaining three chapters of my thesis.

One obvious reason why touch was privileged as a pathway to the sacred in late medieval England was the doctrine of the Incarnation. To borrow Clarence Classen's words, '[t]he physical nature of Jesus' body brought God firmly into the realm of human experience and *tangibility*' (2012: 29; emphasis added). Medieval religious theatre effectively enacted a double Incarnation: an actor gave flesh to Christ, who in turn was God made flesh. Yet this double incarnation did not necessarily make Christ more tangible to the audience. In fact, for spectators standing at the back of a crowd especially, the effect may have been to make Christ seem distinctly *in*tangible, embodied in an actor on a distant pageant wagon or platform. Was it impossible, then, for spectators to 'become Thomas', to reach out and touch Christ? Could spectators only see—and never touch—the doubly incarnate body of Christ before their eyes?

To open up this question, Chapter Three turns to the *Noli me tangere* episode, also referred to as the *hortulanus* sequence. The *Noli me tangere* has well-established links to the Incredulity of Thomas, and the two episodes are often discussed in parallel (e.g. Benay and Rafanelli 2015). In John 20:15–18, the resurrected Christ approaches Mary Magdalene while she is weeping outside the empty tomb. Initially, Mary mistakes Christ for a gardener. When Mary realizes his true identity, Christ immediately says: 'Do not touch me', or 'Noli me tangere' in the Vulgate Latin (John 20:17). Finally, Christ instructs Mary to deliver the news of the Resurrection to the disciples, making her the *apostola apostolorum*, i.e. 'the apostle to the apostles' (Carter 2009; Coletti 2004: 139). The contrast between the *Noli me tangere* in John 20:17 and the Incredulity of Thomas in John 20:27 is obvious: Mary is forbidden to touch Christ's resurrected body, whereas Thomas is encouraged to feel the wounds just a few verses later.

The *Noli me tangere* has a rich history in medieval European theatre. From the twelfth century onwards, the episode formed the basis of the Stage III (or Type III) *Visitatio Sepulchri* in liturgical drama across Europe.[1] An example of a Stage III *Visitatio Sepulchri* from England can be found in the Holy Week dramas from Barking Abbey, which are preserved in a manuscript from 1404, namely OUCL MS 169 (Yardley and Mann eds and trans 2014: 2, 26–29; Young 1933: I, 381–85). The *Noli me tangere* episode also features in the Bodley Plays (*R*.602–28). The Bodley Plays, which were probably intended for performance in a church but were not strictly connected to the liturgy, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. Further, the *Noli me tangere* episode can be found in the York Plays (play 39), the N-Town Plays (play 37), the Towneley Plays (23.580–659), the Chester Plays (A-ID.1–23), and the Digby *Mary*

[1] The Stage III (or Type III) *Visitatio Sepulchri* classification referred to here derives originally from Young 1933: I, 369–410. Young's monograph represents an important milestone in the study of medieval liturgical drama and his classification system for the *Visitatio Sepulchri* continues to be widely used. Nevertheless, Young's theories have also been criticized. For responses to Young, see Coletti 2004: 284n2.

Magdalene (Coletti ed 2018: 58, lines 1061–79). Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene also seems to have been the subject of a lost pageant from Coventry (King and Davidson eds 2000: 40; Lewis 2002: 54). Though beyond the linguistic scope of this thesis, the *Noli me tangere* also features in the Cornish *Resurrexione* (Norris ed and trans 1859: II, 68–71).

Medieval theatrical representations of the *Noli me tangere* have previously attracted some attention. For Rosemary Woolf, the 'serenity' of the York *Appearance to Mary Magdalene* 'is reminiscent of Fra Angelico's painting of the same subject' (1972: 280). Theresa Coletti has argued that many Middle English *Noli me tangere* scenes 'recognize Mary Magdalene's intimacy with Jesus, especially her physical attachment to his body' (2004: 206). Katie Normington (2007) has used the *Noli me tangere* as a prism through which to survey several recent approaches to medieval English theatre, including feminist readings and the relationship between drama and art. My interest in English dramatizations of the *Noli me tangere* scene lies elsewhere, namely in the complex relationship between the senses of sight and touch. In particular, I wish to interrogate Mary Magdalene as a paradigm for audience experience.

On the surface, the spectators' experiences align more closely with Mary Magdalene than Doubting Thomas. Mary Magdalene longs to touch Christ but is only able to gaze upon his wounded body, a tension I detect especially in the N-Town *Appearance to Mary Magdalene*, one of the main foci of this chapter. In much the same way, medieval spectators are conventionally assumed to have watched rather than touched medieval religious plays (see p. 5 above). Nevertheless, the analogy between the medieval spectator and Mary Magdalene is complicated by the fact that sight was itself understood as a type of touch in the Middle Ages. The optical theories of intromission and extramission both frame vision as a moment of contact between viewer and object.

The idea that vision has a tactile force also finds expression in medieval medical texts, the courtly romance genre, devotional imagery, and Passion lyrics. With this context in mind, I will argue that Mary—and by analogy the spectators—could 'become Thomas' by reaching out and touching Christ's body with the gaze. My reading will be supported especially by close analysis of the dual-sensory implications of the word 'be*hold*' in the York *Appearance to Mary Magdalene* and beyond.

Chapter Three starts to complicate the traditional scholarly narrative that medieval theatre was a dual-sensory experience, appealing only to the senses of sight and hearing. A close examination of *Noli me tangere* plays in light of medieval optical theory suggests that touch played a part in the rich multi-sensory experience of medieval theatre, albeit mediated by sight. Touching with the gaze, or haptic vision as I shall also refer to it, lends itself obviously to the positive side of the touch paradox: it offers another tangible pathway to Christ's sacred body. Yet at the same time, haptic vision—especially when it emanated from the bodies of women—was a dangerous source of poison and sexual ensnarement.

Noli me tangere: An Overview

The *Noli me tangere* episode is notoriously enigmatic. These three words have inspired entire monographs by theologians and philosophers, perhaps most famously Jean-Luc Nancy (2008). Barbara Baert, Reimund Bieringer, Karlijn Demasure, and Sabine Van Den Eynde have dedicated an interdisciplinary research programme wholly to this biblical episode (Baert et al 2006: vii). It would be impossible to do justice to the intricacies of existing research on the *Noli me tangere* in the space available here. Instead, this section will briefly place the *Noli me tangere* in its biblical, exegetic, and

interpretive context, thereby laying necessary foundations for this chapter. It is helpful to start by quoting the relevant biblical passage in its entirety:

> Jesus saith to her, 'Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?' She, thinking it was the gardener, saith to him, 'Sir, if thou hast taken him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus saith to her, 'Mary.' She turning saith to him, 'Rabbouni' (which is to say, 'Master'). Jesus saith to her, 'Do not touch me [*Noli me tangere*], for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren, and say to them, "I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalen cometh and telleth the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord, and these things he said to me.'
>
> John 20:15–18

The phrase 'Do not touch me' from the Vulgate Latin 'Noli me tangere' has been a bone of contention for millennia. The crux of debate has been the following question: why does Christ forbid Mary to touch Him in John 20:17, especially when he invites Doubting Thomas to touch Him just a few verses later in John 20:27? Feminist scholars in particular have found this tension both problematic and intriguing (Attridge 2003). As Reimund Bieringer (2013: 80) has summarized, many scholars have tried to '[turn] the apparent prohibition into a command to touch or [limit] its scope to understand it as a prohibition forbidding only a certain length or a certain type of touch (e.g., holding fast, clinging or sexual desire)'. Bieringer's own solution, however, is to question whether touch is even at stake in Christ's famous prohibition. Bieringer does so by reassessing the original Greek phrase that inspired the vulgate Latin translation 'Noli me tangere', namely 'μή μου ἅπτου' ('mē mou haptou').

As Bieringer explains, '[t]he usual translations of ἅπτου in the prohibition μή μου ἅπτου are "touch," "hold," "hold on to," "hold back" and "cling" ' (2013: 62). However, Bieringer contends that 'the focus is likely not to be on touching as such, but on approaching someone to be close to that person and possibly to go with someone to stay in that person's presence' (2013: 80). This would offer a satisfying resolution to the problem posed by John 20: Thomas and Mary are treated differently because they want

different things. Thomas needs to touch Christ's wounded body in order to verify the Resurrection, whereas Mary wants to remain in close physical proximity to Christ—and this would prevent Christ from moving on with his role in salvation history. According to this line of thought, 'μή μου ἅπτου' has important semantic nuances that have been lost in both the Vulgate Latin translation 'Noli me tangere' and the modern English translation 'Do not touch me'. The thorny problem of Christ's conflicting demands of Mary and Thomas dissolves once these semantic nuances are recognized.

But how did medieval commentators explain the ban on Mary's touch? Some theologians chose to focus on Mary's gender. For example, Peter Comestor (d. c.1178) saw the *Noli me tangere* episode as evidence that women should be barred from the priesthood (Jansen 2000: 54; Robertson 2013: 41). As Elizabeth Robertson clarifies, 'because Mary is not allowed to touch Christ's body', then by analogy 'women should not be allowed to touch Christ's body in the form of the host in the Mass' (2013: 41). In this context, note especially the following passage from Gratian's *Decretum* (c.1140), a fundamental canon law text in the medieval West:

> It has been brought to the attention of the apostolic see that women consecrated to God, or nuns, touch [*contingere*] the sacred vessels or blessed palls, that is in the presence of your company, and carry incence around the altar. That all this is blameworthy conduct to be fully censured can be rightly doubted by no wise person. Because of this, by the authority of this Holy See, lest this disease [*pestis*] spread more widely, we order all provinces to most swiftly drive it out.
>
> (*Decreti prima pars, distinctio*. XXIII, c. XXV;
> Translation from Raming 2004: 6;
> Latin from Friedberg ed 1879–1881: I, 86)

Here, the practice of women handling sacred vessels is likened to a 'disease' ('pestis'), the implication being that female touch is a threat to the spiritual health and purity of the church (*DMLBS* s.v. 'pestis' senses 1 and 2). In this context, it is easy to see why the *Noli me tangere* episode was so attractive to those seeking to justify women's exclusion from the priesthood.

Rather than trying to rationalize Christ's prohibition on touch with reference to Mary's gender, other medieval commentators tackled its potential unfairness head on. Juliette Vuille (2013: 218–22) has highlighted that several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English texts express deep 'uneasiness' with Christ's prohibition on touch. Margery Kempe, for example, takes obvious exception with the *Noli me tangere*: not only does she imagine Mary Magdalene responding to the prohibition with 'heuy cher', but whenever Margery herself heard the words 'Towche me not' in 'any sermown' she 'wept, sorwyd, & cryid as sche xulde a deyd for lofe & desir þat sche had to ben wyth owr Lord' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 197). Remarkably, John Mirk's *Festial* takes this 'uneasiness' with Christ's prohibition a step further, directly contradicting the *Noli me tangere* episode and rewriting scripture such that Mary Magdalene *is* allowed to touch: 'whan he rosse from deth to lyfe, he aperud to hur bodyly furste of alle othyr and suffred hur to touche hym an cussyn hys fette' (Powell ed 2009: I, 185). Similarly, Nicholas Love expresses confusion about the *Noli me tangere* in his *Mirror*:

> And forþermore þouh oure lorde so straungely as it semeþ answerede hir at þe byginnyng biddyng hir þat she sulde not touch him neuereles I may not trowe, bot þat afterwarde he suffrede hir to touch him, & to kysse boþe handes & feete, or þei departeden.
>
> (Sargent ed 1992: 200)

Vuille observes that Love's treatment of the *Noli me tangere* 'closely follows his source, the *Meditaciones vite Christi* written in the second half of the fourteenth century by Johannes de Caulibus' (Vuille 2013: 220). It should be noted, however, that the *Meditaciones vite Christi* has since been reascribed to Jacobus de Sancto Geminiano, c.1300 (Tóth and Falvay 2014: 93).

Vuille convincingly argues that the 'resistant readings' of the *Noli me tangere* found in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Mirk's *Festial,* and Love's *Mirror* are 'symptomatic of a late medieval affective piety centred on an emotional and participative meditation on the life of Christ' (2013: 214). To reframe Vuille's argument in the terms

of my own thesis, these three writers struggle to reconcile Christ's prohibition on touch with the importance of touch as a pathway to Christ's body in medieval devotional culture.

From this brief overview, it has become clear that the *Noli me tangere* had the potential to awaken both sides of the medieval touch paradox. On the one hand, Christ's prohibition on Mary's touch offered some medieval theologians a formidable biblical precedent for the ban on women touching the sacraments—a ban that can be understood in the broader context of fears about women, touch, and uncleanness (compare pp. 111–12 above). On the other hand, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries especially, Mary's desire to feel Christ's body resonated strikingly with the role of touch in medieval affective piety. Her hands, like those of medieval Christians, were potentially powerful vehicles through which to connect with Christ's body on earth. This made Christ's prohibition on touch all the more perplexing and frustrating.

The next section will explore how the problematic *Noli me tangere* episode was handled in late medieval English theatre, especially the N-Town Plays. Extending Vuille's concept of 'resistant readings' to the stage, I argue that the N-Town *Appearance* cultivates a deep sense of frustration with Mary's inability to touch Christ. This reading will lay the necessary groundwork for me to consider Mary Magdalene's experience as a sensory model for medieval spectators.

Noli me tangere on the Late Medieval Stage

Although the *Noli me tangere* episode features frequently in the extant corpus of medieval English theatre, the N-Town *Appearance* will form the backbone of my discussion here. As noted earlier in this thesis (p. 14), the N-Town manuscript appears to have been compiled for meditative reading as much as for theatrical performance. I will

return to the manuscript's readers later in this chapter, but at present I approach the N-Town *Appearance* as a play to be embodied by human actors. For context, the *Appearance* derives from the Proclamation exemplar, a group of plays that were probably once 'performed as a long "cycle" […] possibly occupying two days or more' (Sugano ed 2007: 13). The Proclamation plays require only 'small casts' and 'little in terms of props or staging', and were likely performed 'in an open area' with 'various loci' including heaven and hell 'defined or built' (Sugano ed 2007: 13). My interest in the N-Town *Appearance* lies in its dramatization of a 'resistant reading' of the *Noli me tangere* episode. Not unlike Love's *Mirror*, it opens up the possibility that Mary touched Christ at some point *after* their initial encounter.

Before exploring this reading in more detail, I wish to stress that N-Town's 'resistant reading' of the *Noli me tangere* episode is not as extreme as that which can be found elsewhere in medieval European drama. Notably, *La Résurrection,* a fifteenth-century Provençal play, features an explicit stage direction indicating that Christ should touch Mary's forehead:

> *Ara la Magdalena lo vuelha toquar he JHESUS la rebote an la ma he li done sus lo fron en disen:*
>
> Maria, vos no me toquaretz,
> […]
>
> (Jeanroy and Teulié eds 1893: 114)
>
> *Now the Magdalene should wish to touch him, and Jesus should push her back with his hand and make the sign of the cross (?) on her forehead, saying:*
>
> Maria, do not touch me,
> […][2]

Paradoxically, Christ tells Mary not to touch him while he is in fact touching her. Even though Mary does not have the agency to *instigate* a tactile encounter with Christ, she

[2] It is not entirely clear what 'li done sus lo fron' means in this context, but making the sign of the cross is likely. I am grateful to Huw Grange for helping me to translate this stage direction, and to Olivia Robinson, James Sargan, and J. R. Mattison for discussing it with me.

nevertheless makes cutaneous contact with him, radically tempering the severity of *Noli me tangere.*

Barbara Baert has placed this stage direction in the context of a French relic cult that flourished between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries:

> When Charles II of Anjou rediscovered the relics of Mary Magdalene in Saint-Maximin in 1279, they also included the famous skull, to which a small piece of forehead skin still adhered […]. The occasion of this *inventio* gave rise to the tradition that this piece of skin had been touched by Christ. Paradoxically enough, this relic became the so-called *Noli me tangere* relic, that attracted many pilgrims.
>
> (Baert 2007: 31)

This legend, she explains, precipitated a French visual and theatrical tradition in which Christ touched Mary's forehead during the *Noli me tangere*, exemplified by Hans Memling's *Seven Joys of the Virgin* (1480) in figure 36 and the aforementioned stage direction in *La Résurrection* (Baert 2007: 31–33).

This tradition does not seem to have permeated contemporary English culture. I know of no equivalent images or plays from late medieval England that depict Christ touching Mary's forehead during the *Noli me tangere*. Nevertheless, the N-Town *Appearance* offers a more subtle 'resistant reading' of the scene. Even though Mary must be satisfied with gazing upon Christ during the play itself, the N-Town *Assumption* leaves open the *possibility* of future touch between them. Note especially how Christ's tactile prohibition is treated in the following lines:

> MARIA MAGDALEN: Graunt me, Lord, and þu vowchesave,
> Thyn holy fete þat I may kys.
>
> JESUS: Towche me not *as ȝett*, Mary,
> For to my fadyr I haue not ascende.
> (37.40–43; emphasis added)

According to the *MED*, the collocation 'as yet' can mean 'still at this or that time, even now', suggesting some kind of continuity with the past (*MED* s.v. 'yet, adv.' sense 3.a.a.). However, *do not touch me even now* would make little sense in the present

context because Mary had never been prevented from touching Christ before. Far from it; from the sixth century onwards, Mary Magdalene was conflated with 'the mysterious sinner of Luke 7 who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair' (Coletti 2004: 1). In this passage, the collocation 'as yet' is thus far more likely to mean 'just yet' (*MED* s.v. 'yet, adv.' sense 3.a.b.). By saying *Do not touch me just yet*, Christ effectively qualifies his ban on touch, the unwitting testimony being that touch could happen at a future point.

As such, the passage is strikingly similar to the 'resistant reading' of the *Noli me tangere* found in the Love's *Mirror*. As discussed above (p. 150), Love suggests that Christ 'suffrede hir to touch him […] or þei departeden', resolving the illogicality of the *Noli me tangere* by suggesting it was only a short-term prohibition on touch (Sargent ed 1992: 200). In a similar way, the 'not as ȝett' comment in the N-Town *Appearance* (37.42) tones down the harshness of Christ's tactile prohibition by making it seem only temporary. It might be tempting to assume that the N-Town *Appearance* was directly influenced by Love here. Indeed, scholars have long recognized that parts of the N-Town compilation are heavily indebted to Love's *Mirror*, notably the Mary Play (Beadle 1997: 1). One editor has provided a helpful list of the plays in the N-Town anthology in which Love's influence has traditionally been detected (Sargent ed 1992: lxix). However, the *Appearance* is not on this list. In fact, the parallel I have noted here could be entirely coincidental, with Love and the author of the N-Town *Appearance* independently arriving at the idea that a postponement of Mary's touch—rather than an outright prohibition—softened the potential severity of the episode.

No matter its origins, the 'not as ȝett' line in the N-Town *Appearance* (37.42) has an undeniably tantalizing quality. It can productively be compared to the *Noli me tangere* image in LBL MS Kings 5, fol. 23r (figure 37). Although this devotional manuscript was

made in the Low Countries c.1405, it was certainly in England by the sixteenth century, and perhaps even as early as the second quarter of the fifteenth century (Backhouse, Marrow, and Schmidt 1994: 10–12). Note the look of longing in Mary's face, the way Mary's hand comes tantalizingly close to the fabric of Christ's clothing, and how Christ's prohibiting hand is almost close enough to caress Mary's cheek. Indeed, Christ meets Mary's gaze with an almost mournful expression, as if He too laments the fact that touch that cannot take place. The portrayal of Christ and Mary's 'almost touch' in this image tantalizes the viewer, and the body language given to both Mary and Christ conveys a distinct sense of tactile longing. In this way, MS Kings 5 visually echoes the tantalizing 'not as ȝett' line from the N-Town *Appearance* (37.42), where touch is likewise intensely desired, but never actualized. Although this can only be speculation, perhaps actors representing Christ and Mary in the N-Town *Appearance* adopted body language similar to that in MS Kings 5, thereby visually echoing the tactile longing in the text.

It is helpful to further contextualize Mary's tactile longing in the N-Town *Appearance* through comparison with a later play, namely Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (c.1601). When Viola and Sebastian are reunited in act 5, scene 1, Viola urges her twin not to touch her until she takes off her masculine disguise:

> VIOLA: If nothing lets to make us happy both
> But this my masculine usurped attire,
> *Do not embrace me* till each circumstance
> Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump
> That I am Viola […]
> (5.1.236–40; emphasis added)

This scene's obvious parallels with the *Noli me tangere* have come under scrutiny in recent decades (Ko 1997; Lewis 1988; Lewis 2002). Scholars have focused especially on the relationship between medieval and early modern theatrical representations of the motif. For Cynthia Lewis, there is a clear continuum between medieval and early modern theatrical engagements with the *Noli me tangere*. In her view, *Twelfth Night* is 'richly

informed by its medieval dramatic history', especially in its emphasis on disguise and costume (Lewis 2002: 54). Conversely, Yu Jin Ko has argued that Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* marks a significant departure from medieval representations of the *Noli me tangere*. For Ko, Shakespeare manages to subtly combine the 'joy of reunion' with 'the painful longing in deferred completion' (1997: 395). In medieval *Noli me tangere* plays, by contrast, 'the recognition of this pain' is 'largely missing'—instead, the 'overriding' emotion is joy (Ko 1997: 394–95). Of course, Ko adds the necessary caveat that it remains unclear how familiar Shakespeare was with any individual medieval *Noli me tangere* play (1997: 395n15).

Ko's argument cultivates a reductive scholarly narrative, namely that early modern dramatists were capable of producing far more emotionally complex plays than their medieval predecessors. Note especially Ko's comment that 'Shakespeare revises the *noli-me-tangere* moment in medieval drama to unearth the painful longing' in the scene (1997: 395). The implication here is that although the biblical motif had rich potential, medieval dramatists could not harness or 'unearth' it, where Shakespeare later would. Certainly, some medieval *noli me tangere* plays focus heavily on Mary's joy at reunion, especially when she recounts her experiences to the apostles. For example, Ko rightly points to the following passage in the Towneley *Resurrection*, in which Mary's words 'speak of complete joy at witnessing regeneration' (1997: 393):

> MARY MAGDALENE: Mi blys is commen, my care is gone,
> That lufly have I mett alone;
> I am as blyth in bloode and bone
> As ever was wight.
> Now is he resyn that ere was slone,
> Mi hart is light.
> (23.642–47)

Nevertheless, I have thus far argued that 'painful longing' can indeed be found in medieval theatrical representations of the *Noli me tangere*, notably the N-Town *Appearance*—a text Ko does not discuss. In this respect, I would argue that *Twelfth Night*

displays distinct continuity with, rather than divergence from, the medieval theatrical tradition. Note especially Shakespeare's use of a temporal qualifier in the ban on touch in *Twelfth Night*: 'Do not embrace me *till* […] I am Viola' (5.1.238–40; emphasis added). This recalls the 'not as ȝett' of the N-Town *Appearance* (37.42). Once again, the sense is that there will be an embrace, but it will not occur right now. Wittingly or unwittingly, Shakespeare is thus participating in a much longer theatrical tradition of rewriting the *Noli me tangere* such that touch is only postponed, not prohibited.

It is this delay of touch, which can be found in both medieval and early modern theatrical representations of the *Noli me tangere* motif, which creates the distinct possibility for pain and longing in the scene. The only logical reason to explicitly postpone touch is if there is an intense desire for touch to take place *now*. Mary's intense desire to touch Christ is made obvious elsewhere in the N-Town *Appearance*, notably when she describes her encounter to the apostles:

> MARIA MADALY[N]: I saw oure Lord Cryst, lyste wel to me,
> Of flesch and bon quyk levynge man.
> Beth glad and joyful as for-than,
> For, trost me trewly, it is ryght thus:
> Mowth to mowth, þis [is] sertayn,
> I spak ryght now with Cryst Jesus.
> (37.88–93)

The phrase 'Mowth to mowth' here is striking, especially given that it is not demanded alliteratively. On a literal level, Mary is referring to a face-to-face conversation that she had with Christ. Compare, for example, the following passage from Thomas Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* (1477), in which Norton describes a letter he received from his alchemical mentor:

> Wherfore it is nede that with-in shorte space
> We speke to-gedire, & see *face to face*;
> If y shuld write I shulde my foialte breke,
> Therfore *mowthe to mowthe* I most nedis speke.
> (Reidy ed 1975: 29, lines 849–52; emphasis added)

Norton's mentor has agreed to teach Norton the secrets of alchemy, but with the caveat that it must be done in person. The information cannot be committed to paper; it can only be shared 'face to face', or 'mowthe to mowthe'. Likewise, when Mary Magdalene explains that she spoke to Jesus 'Mowth to mowth' in the N-Town *Appearance* (37.92), she indicates that she had a face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ. However, there is more to Mary's speech than its literal meaning. The osculatory connotations of the phrase 'Mowth to mowth' are unmistakable. Indeed, Theresa Coletti has argued that Mary '[characterizes] her encounter with Jesus in language that hints at the intimacy of a forbidden kiss' (2004: 208). I wish to extend this argument further, arguing that it evokes the mystical union of the bride and bridegroom from the Song of Songs. This requires some additional context.

As early as the third century, theologians drew comparisons between Mary Magdalene and the bride in the Song of Songs (Baert 2013: 135; Coletti 2004: 101, 261n3; Kane 1985: 678–79). In medieval exegesis, the bride and bridegroom in the Song of Songs were often interpreted to represent the individual soul and Christ allegorically (Rudy 2002: 50). Identifying Mary Magdalene with the bride thus allowed her to become 'a type of the mystical lover of Christ' (Coletti 2004: 101). This had important implications for the presentation and reception of the *Noli me tangere* episode in late medieval Europe. In the *Biblia Pauperum* tradition, for example, images of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Christ in the garden were juxtaposed with images of the Bride embracing her beloved, an 'intertextual link' that Barbara Baert has explored with reference to xylographic block book versions of the *Biblia Pauperum* (2013: 135–37). However, I wish to draw attention to a manuscript version of the *Biblia Pauperum*, namely LBL MS Kings 5.

Earlier in this chapter (p. 155), I considered the *Noli me tangere* image in this manuscript in isolation, arguing that it cultivates a sense of tactile longing (figure 37). Now, however, I wish to put this same image in the broader context of the folding, tripartite page on which it is found (figure 38). Gerhard Schmidt provides a helpful summary of page layout and function in the *Biblia Pauperum* tradition:

> The medieval manuscripts and early incunabula which are referred to today as pauper's bibles use images and texts to underscore the *typological* relationship between the Old and the New Testament. […] Each unit […] has several components […]: in the middle is a scene from the New Testament, the so-called *antitype*, which, in most cases, depicts an episode from the life of Christ. It is flanked by two scenes from the Old Testament, the *types*, which are considered to be prefigurations of the antitype.
>
> (Backhouse, Marrow, and Schmidt 1994: 23–24; italics original)

In our example, the *Noli me tangere* is the antitype. The type on the left depicts Daniel's miraculous survival in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6:16–23), a prefiguration of Christ's resurrection. The type on the right is an image of the bride from the Song of Songs embracing her bridegroom. The effect of the type on the right is to associate Mary Magdalene's tactile longing for Christ's body with the bride's yearning for—and her eventual union with—the bridegroom in the Song of Songs:

> I will take hold of thee and bring thee into my mother's house. There thou shalt teach me, and I will give thee a cup of spiced wine and new wine of my pomegranates. His left hand under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me.
>
> (Song of Songs 8:2–3)

Juxtaposing the *Noli me tangere* with the spouse and her beloved also has the effect of associating Mary's tactile desire with the ultimate mystical union between the soul and Christ that the bride and the bridegroom's embrace was thought to symbolize.

Mary Magdalene's status as Christ's mystical lover, the bride in the Song of Songs, is at stake in several medieval English plays about the *Noli me tangere*. For example, Mary Magdalene describes herself as 'hys lover' (Coletti ed 2018: 58, line 1068) shortly before Christ's prohibition on touch in the Digby *Mary Magdalene.* However, it is the N-Town *Appearance* that interests me most here, specifically Mary's

decision to describe the *Noli me tangere* as a 'Mowth to mowth' encounter (37.92). With the intertextual tradition of the *Noli me tangere* in mind, this osculatory language takes on additional resonance. It cannot help but recall the kiss that begins the Song of Songs: 'Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth! [*Osculetur me osculo oris sui*!]' (Song of Songs 1:1). Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) famously interpreted the kiss on the mouth in the Song of Songs 1:1 as the ultimate moment of 'oneness with divine spirit' (Rudy 2002: 60; Walsh trans 1971: 19–20). Yet as much as Mary Magdalene in the N-Town *Appearance* wants this kiss—a kiss that would both literally bring her body into contact with Christ and also mystically bind her soul to his—she cannot have it. Consequently, the 'Mowth to mowth' line (37.92) further cultivates a sense of tactile longing in the N-Town *Appearance*, complementing the tantalizing 'Towche me not as ȝett' line discussed above (37.42). Mary is fated to linger on the threshold of touch, never quite making contact with Christ.

In sum, the N-Town *Appearance* capitalizes on the emotional depth and sensory frustration inherent in the *Noli me tangere* episode. By suggesting a postponement to Mary's touch, the play evokes her intense yearning to hold Christ but does not fulfil this desire in the present moment on stage. Awareness of the intertextual relationship between the *Noli me tangere* and the Song of Songs tradition would only enhance this sense of tactile longing, giving added pathos to Mary's 'Mowth to mowth' line (37.92). However, spectators need not have been familiar with the Song of Songs intertext in order to appreciate the sensory tension in this play. At its heart, the N-Town *Appearance* is about wanting to hold Christ, yet only being able to gaze upon him. This struggle between sight and touch is exactly why the *Noli me tangere* provides such a thought-provoking lens through which to examine medieval spectatorship and the senses.

Mary's Tactile Longing and Frustration: A Paradigm for Audience Experience?

Scholars of medieval theatre have previously recognized Mary Magdalene as a paradigmatic figure, standing in for all medieval Christians in the audience. This view is especially prominent in scholarship on the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, the most extensive theatrical treatment of the Magdalene's life. For example, Bob Godfrey has argued that Mary 'stands in both for that original female sinner, Eve, and for all those other sinners who repent and are to be redeemed' (2015: 117). Likewise, Matthew Evan Davis has argued that the Digby *Mary Magdalene* presents the audience with 'an Everywoman figure' (2016: 84).

Extending this idea, I will now consider how Mary Magdalene can be seen as a model for medieval spectators where the senses of touch is concerned. My point of departure is a comment made by David Damrosch in his discussion of Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs. According to Damrosch, 'as individuals we are in Mary Magdalen's position, denied direct contact with Christ's body' (1991: 191). I would argue that this equivalence would have been nowhere more obvious than during medieval biblical theatre. Here, spectators were presented with a bodily representation of Christ but were unlikely to be able to touch him, even if they longed to. Following this line of thought, the spectators' visual experience of Christ—much like that of Mary Magdalene—was a far cry from the corporeal experience that Doubting Thomas had.

It is helpful to clarify my argument through a comparison to recent research on vision and the York Plays. Jill Stevenson has argued that the York Plays were in a powerful position to cultivate 'visual anticipation' among medieval spectators (2010: 117). More specifically, she argues that 'carefully controlling Christ's absence and presence on stage' could have heightened spectators' eagerness to finally see Christ's body, fostering in them 'an anticipatory devotional gaze' (Stevenson 2010: 118). In this

context, Stevenson points especially to Zaché in *The Entry into Jerusalem,* a man who climbs a tree in order to see Jesus walk by (2010: 118).

If plays like *The Entry into Jerusalem* could have made medieval spectators eager to *see* Christ, then I would argue that plays depicting the *Noli me tangere* episode could equally have made spectators eager to *touch* Christ. For example, when Mary expresses an intense desire to anoint and kiss Christ in the Digby *Mary Magdalene* play, this could equally have made the spectators long to physically interact with Christ's body:

> MARY MAUDLEYN: Lett me anoynt yow wyth this bamys sote.
> Lord, long hast thou hyd thee from my spece,
> Butt now wyll I kesse thou for my hartys bote!
> (Coletti ed 2018: 58, lines 1071–73)

Where Stevenson (2010: 117) coins the phrase 'visual anticipation' to describe the potential effects of watching the York Plays, the phrase *tactile longing* might be a useful parallel descriptor for describing a possible audience response to witnessing *Noli me tangere* on stage. Alternatively, perhaps *tactile frustration* is a more apt phrase: just as Mary Magdalene's desire to touch is frustrated, so too Christ was probably out of reach for audiences of the Digby *Mary Magdalene*.

This comment requires brief justification with reference to the staging of the Digby *Mary Magdalene*. Scholars broadly agree that the play requires place-and-scaffold staging, a mode that can be summarized as follows:

> the acting area consists of an open space (the *place*) surrounded by individual stages (the *scaffolds*), each localised as a structure (house, palace, temple, Hellmouth) or natural feature (a mountain).
> (Twycross 2008: 45)

The Digby *Mary Magdalene* clearly demands many different locations, with Matthew Evan Davis counting a staggering thirty-seven (2016: 74). However, the exact configuration of these locations is subject to debate, with two recent scholars offering divergent plans (Davis 2016: 101; Godfrey 2015: 107). It also remains unclear how audience members would have interacted with these various structures. For example, Bob

Godfrey speculates that standing spectators 'must move to avoid contact with the Ship' during the pivotal storm scene (2015: 114). Spectators, then, may have had some opportunity to engage with the Digby *Mary Magdalene* on a tactile level.

However, I would argue that the actor playing Christ is unlikely to have been part of the tangible remit of performance—not least because the *Noli me tangere* may have taken place on a raised platform, out of reach of any spectators' hands. We cannot be certain of this, but such a staging would have had obvious dramaturgical advantages. The *Noli me tangere* is a dramatic highpoint of the play and an overwhelmingly visual scene; the spectators needed to witness Mary *not* touching Christ. If the encounter were staged at ground level, then spectators sitting or standing at the back of the audience would likely have had a restricted view. Thus, staging the *Noli me tangere* on a platform makes practical sense. For comparison, Bob Godfrey also believes that the *Noli me tangere* would have taken place on a raised platform. In his view, 'the three *loci* of the Rock, the Tomb, and the Cell' would have been located 'in the centre of the place', either as 'three separate *loci* abutting each other or one, cleverly enough designed to accommodate all of the necessary scenes to be portrayed' (Godfrey 2015: 117). One such scene was Mary Magdalene's 'most intense communication with the risen Christ' (Godfrey 2015: 117). Godfrey's stage plan leaves no doubt that he conceives of the Rock/Tomb/Cell and thus the site of the *Noli me tangere* as some kind of raised structure (2015: 107). Conversely, Davis locates Christ's tomb and thus presumably the *Noli me tangere* scene in front of rather than on top of a raised platform (2016: 91, 93, 101).

If the *Noli me tangere* episode was performed on a raised platform, Christ would probably have been out of any individual spectators' reach. Yet even if Christ and Mary were *not* performing on a platform and were instead within an arm's length of the closest spectators, it is difficult to imagine that any audience member would have felt it

appropriate to reach out and touch Christ during performance. Not only would this expressly challenge Christ's prohibition on touch, but it would also have effectively inserted a third character into the *Noli me tangere*, a scene that is conventionally represented as an intimate encounter between Christ and Mary.

Although the processional staging of the York Plays represents a different performance mode to the place-and-scaffold staging of the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, it is helpful here to draw a comparison to John McGavin and Greg Walker's discussion of how spectators may have felt while watching the York *Crucifixion*:

> spectators might well have *wished* to touch the Christ actor's body, even to offer him physical comfort as he performed—thereby gaining a particularly pointed relationship with Christ through vicarious contemplation of his suffering flesh.
>
> (McGavin and Walker 2016: 13; emphasis added)

They later add:

> The desire to offer physical comfort might, of course, have been present in many spectators throughout the crowd, […] but the tension of *not being able to* and of *not breaking the 'play' by doing so*, would have been more physically felt by those close to the action […].
>
> (McGavin and Walker 2016: 13n30; emphasis added)

McGavin and Walker's phrasing in both of these quotations suggests that the spectators' desires to touch the Christ actor's body were unlikely to have been fulfilled. To do so would be to violate the conventions of being a spectator at a play, and to undermine the suspension of disbelief of the entire audience. In my view, such a tension between wanting to touch but not being able to would have been at its peak during the *Noli me tangere* episodes in the N-Town *Appearance* and Digby *Mary Magdalene*. During these plays, any tactile frustration on the part of the spectator would have found an obvious echo in the experiences of Mary Magdalene, who expresses an intense desire to touch Christ but is forbidden to do so. This mirroring effect would potentially have been most profound for spectators nearest the action, for whom Christ's body was tantalizingly close

yet off limits. Indeed, such spectators were ideally positioned to mirror and embody the tactile longing depicted in figure 37.

Thus far, a picture is emerging of Christ's body as an object to be gazed upon but not touched by the spectators of medieval religious plays. Consequently, the sense of touch could not fulfil its potential as a pathway to the sacred as it could elsewhere in medieval devotional culture, for example when people took Communion. However, it is important to recognize that vision was itself understood as a tactile experience in late medieval England. The argument that Christ actors were to be looked at but not touched is complicated by the fact that to look *was* to touch.

Touching with the Gaze in Late Medieval England

In the introduction to this thesis (pp. 10–12), I highlighted that touch was understood to be present in all the other senses in the medieval sensorium. Building on this, I will now explore the ways in which sight was conceptualized as a type of touch in late medieval England. According to the two dominant and indeed rival medieval optical theories, namely intromission and extramission, sight involved contact between viewer and object via visual rays. However, the concept of haptic vision was not confined to optical theory. Sight was framed as a form of contact in a wide range of medieval texts and images, including courtly romance, devotional imagery, medical treatises, and middle English lyrics. Eyes that could reach out and touch even informed some medieval apotropaic practices. I will argue that this context has important implications not only for how we approach Mary Magdalene's gaze during medieval *Noli me tangere* scenes, but also for how we understand medieval spectatorship. Following medieval optical theory, it stands to reason that Mary Magdalene could 'become Thomas' by reaching out and touching Christ's wounds with her eyes—and so too, I suggest, could spectators.

Medieval optical theory, especially contemporary debates about intromission versus extramission, have attracted a considerable amount of attention in medieval studies (Biernoff 2002; Camille 2000; Lindberg 1976; Newman 2005). Barbara Newman helpfully summarizes the crux of the matter:

> Learned opinion was divided between theories of 'intromission' and 'extramission,' which differed on the question of how the eye makes contact with the objects of vision. Following Aristotle, Avicenna, and Averroes, intromissionists believed that all objects emitted rays or particles of some kind, which reached the eye through a medium, such as air, and thus communicated their images to the beholder. Extramissionists, following Plato, Euclid, Galen, and Augustine, believed that the eye itself played an active role in perception, emitting visual rays that sought out their objects and so enabled them to be seen. The thirteenth-century English scientists Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon worked out complicated theories that attempted to synthesize these rival views, allowing for both visual rays from the eye and emanations from the object.
>
> (Newman 2005: 19–20)

For the present purposes, it is crucial that all three lines of thought framed sight as a type of touch. This can be explained as follows:

1. The object emits rays that touch the viewer's eye (i.e. the intromissive gaze)
2. The viewer's eye emits rays that touch the object (i.e. the extramissive gaze)
3. Both 1 and 2 occur simultaneously (i.e. Grosseteste and Bacon's hybrid gaze)

Other scholars have similarly recognized that medieval optical theory conceptualizes sight as a type of touch (Stevenson 2010: 21; Young 2015: 15–17).

More importantly still, the notion that viewers' eyes reached out to touch objects and bodies (i.e. the extramissive gaze) had a significant amount of cultural purchase in late medieval England. For example, as Marguerite Tassi explains, '[t]he courtly love tradition […] supported the notion that a beautiful woman's eyes could bind the soul of a man; by extromission, her visual rays wounded her victim through his eyes' (2005: 17). In fact, this trope was so common in medieval England that Chaucer could playfully subvert it in *Troilus and Criseyde* (c.1380s):

> And upon cas bifel that thorugh a route
> His eye percede and so depe it wente,
> Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente.
> (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 477, lines 271–73)

As Sarah Stanbury notes, 'Chaucer takes up the familiar trope of the lover's gaze that pierces the eye to wound the heart but reverses it to exploit the illusion that Troilus's gaze has agency over its object, piercing Criseyde rather than himself' (2008: 108). I would add that Chaucer's use of 'smot' here is especially revealing. The Middle English verb 'smiten' means 'To deal a blow, strike, beat' (*MED* s.v. 'smiten, v.' sense 1.a.a). Its appearance here only serves to emphasize the haptic output of vision assumed by extramission theory.

Beyond the romance genre, touching with the gaze is most evocatively captured in the Rothschild Canticles (NHBL MS 404). This devotional miscellany, produced c.1300, was probably intended for an enclosed woman (Hamburger 1990: 2–3). The section of the manuscript most germane to my discussion is a double page illumination on folios 18v–19r (figure 39). The recto depicts Christ pointing to his side-wound. The bottom half of the verso depicts the Bride of Christ holding a spear in one hand and motioning towards her eyes with the other. The latter gesture is significant, turning the image into an obvious 're-enactment of Song 4.9: "You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have wounded my heart with one glance of your eyes" ' (Biernoff 2002: 159). In my view, the fact that the Bride's gaze can inflict physical damage across the manuscript gutter only serves to emphasize the tactile potential of the eyes.

Paradoxically, although the Bride of Christ is inflicting a lethal wound with her eyes, the encounter in the Rothschild Canticles represents a tender moment of mystical union. In this evocative image, touching with the gaze is thus worthy of celebration—it is a prompt for meditation and prayer. In other contexts, however, eyes that could inflict tangible damage were something to be feared, avoided, and stigmatized. This is well

demonstrated by belief in the evil eye, which can be defined as 'the transmission of disease or malignancy by the gaze or the meeting of the eyes' (Stearns 2011: 92). The 'evil eye' was a logical component of a medieval belief system that understood sight as a type of touch. The compatibility of medieval optical theory and the concept of the evil eye is well demonstrated by the following comments made by a medical practitioner in Montpellier (fl.1349):

> But the greater strength of this epidemic and, as it were, instantaneous death is when the aërial spirit going out of the eyes of the sick strikes [*spiritus aerius egrediens ab oculis ægroti repercusserit*] the eyes of the well person standing near and looking at the sick, especially when they are in agony; for then the poisonous nature [*natura venenosa*] of that member passes from one to the other, killing the other.
>
> (Translation from Stearns 2011: 95, who follows Campbell 1966: 61; Latin from Michon ed 1860: 72–73)

As Stearns has noted, this author is clearly familiar with medieval optical theory (2011: 96). Note especially how the transmission of illness is attributed to 'aërial spirit going out of the eyes', which is an extramissive gaze. For my purposes, it is significant that the author stresses the tactile output of the victim's eyes through the word 'strikes' ('repercussert', *DMLBS* s.v. 'repercutere' senses 1–3). Further, the author conceptualizes the victim's gaze as source of infection via the phrase 'poisonous nature'. Thus, the author invests the evil eye with a poisonous touch.

Crucially, belief in the evil eye was not limited to the scholastic elite familiar with extramission theory. In his extensive study of medieval English church graffiti, Matthew Champion has persuasively argued that geometric designs known as hexfoils were designed to defend against the evil eye by 'trapping' the offending gaze in an endless knot (2015: 28). A sample diagram of a hexfoil has been provided in figure 40. Such graffiti, in Champion's view, allows us to hear the 'lost voices' of ordinary members of local congregations (2015: xii).

As a caveat, fear of the evil eye is far from unique to the medieval period. The concept has ancient origins (Moss and Cappannari 1976: 2–3), and its influence can be traced into the early modern period and beyond. Notably, the evil eye is explicitly mentioned in one of Shakespeare's plays: the Queen in *Cymbeline* falsely promises not to be 'Evil-eyed unto you [i.e. Innogen]' (1.1.73), and Innogen ruefully tells Posthumus she will have to suffer 'the hourly shot | Of angry eyes' (1.1.90–91). As Bruce Smith has discussed, these lines give emphasis to the tactile dimensions of the evil eye (2010: 57).

Early modern English writers inherited from their medieval predecessors a tendency to feminize the evil eye. For example, in the *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Reginald Scot associates the noxious evil eye with 'Old women' who can no longer '[purge] their naturall monethlie humors' (Summers ed 1990: 282). This belief can be traced back to Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' *De secretis mulierum*, a popular treatise on natural philosophy and medicine composed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (Lemay ed 1992: 129). Consider especially the following extract from a commentary included in an edition of *De Secretis Mulierum* printed in Venice, 1508:

> Note that old women ought not to be permitted to play with children […] because they poison them to such a degree that sometimes they die. The reason for this is that in these women the natural heat is so deficient that the menses collected in them cannot be expelled. Since these menses are venomous, they are continually borne to the eyes. Because of the porosity of the eyes, they infect the air, which reaches the child, for he is easily infected because of his tenderness.
>
> (Lemay ed 1992: 131)

However, the evil eye was not just associated with menopausal women; the gaze of menstruating women was also thought to inflict tangible damage. According to the aforementioned 1508 commentary on *De secretis mulierum*, menstruating women can stain mirrors just by looking at them: 'Another sign that a woman has her menstrual period is if she looks at a new mirror a red mark like a vein will appear in it' (Lemay ed 1992: 131). Once again, this idea has a long history: the origins of the motif lie in

Aristotle's *De somniis*, and by the mid-sixteenth century a Spanish physician named López de Corella claimed to have seen the effect first-hand (Salmón and Cabré 1998: 63). Given the feminization of the evil eye in *De secretis mulierum* tradition and beyond, it is unsurprising that women came to be associated with the basilisk, a mythical creature with the power to kill with just a glance (Biernoff 2002: 51–52).

Thus far, I have largely focused on the ways in which the haptic gaze was thought to inflict damage medieval Europe, from the wounds inflicted by the Sponsa in the Rothschild Canticles to the basilisk-like eyes of menstruating and menopausal women in *De secretis mulierum*. However, rays emitted by the eyes did not have to cause injury and/or spread poison. In fact, quite the opposite was true where the sacrament of the Eucharist was concerned. Medieval communicants could touch the elevated host with their gaze, a form of haptic vision that offered a pathway to Christ's sacred flesh.

This topic has come under a considerable amount of scrutiny in recent years. For example, Suzannah Biernoff has coined the helpful term 'ocular communion' to describe how '*[s]eeing* the miraculously transformed bread and wine became a substitute for "tasting" Christ' (2002: 141; emphasis original). To look upon the Eucharist was to consume it with the gaze—and, as I discussed in the introduction to this thesis (pp. 10–11), medieval commentators understood taste as a type of touch. Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen has given attention to the tactile elements of ocular communion:

> The transparent cylinder of the monstrance acted as a sort of sacred looking glass – a 'hagioscope' – proposing an intense and consuming mode of visual inspection, a devouring *ocular consumption* of the edible wafer with oral and *tactile undertones*.
>
> (Jørgensen 2015: 50; emphasis added)

Notably, the concept of ocular communion was not limited to scholastic, elite circles. Sarah Stanbury has explored how several Middle English passion lyrics are 'underwritten by scientific beliefs that vision operates as touch' (2005: 236). She points

especially to *Man and wyman, loketh to me*, which 'seems to enact the workings of species through ocular communion' (Stanbury 2005: 236):

> Man and wyman, loketh to me,
> Hu michel pine ich tholede for the;
> Loke up-one mi rig, hu sore ich was i-biten;
> Loke to mi side, what blode ich have i-leten.
> Mine vet an mine honden nailed beth to the rode;
> Of the thornes prikung min hived urnth a blode.
> Fram side to side, fro hived to the fot
> Turn mi bodi abuten, overal thu findest blod.
> Man, thin hurte, thin hurte thu turne to me,
> For the vif wndes the ich tholede for the.
>
> *rig*: back
> *urnth a*: runs with (Text and selected glosses after Stanbury 2005: 232)

In this lyric, Christ first 'demands that men and women stop and gaze on his body' but 'then shifts to demand we turn and touch his body' (Stanbury 2005: 236).[3] By moving seamlessly from one sense to the other, this lyric effectively 'dramatized' ocular communion: to look *is* to touch (Stanbury 2005: 236).

In sum, medieval commentators remained deeply ambivalent about the relationship between sight and touch. On the one hand, the haptic gaze had important implications for the sacrament of the Eucharist: to gaze upon the host was to tangibly connect with Christ's body. Yet eyes—especially women's eyes—were also capable thought to be capable of infectious kinds of touch. As such, the haptic gaze dovetails seamlessly with the touch paradox at the heart of this thesis: the tactile rays emitted by the eyes represented a dangerous source of contamination, yet also offered a profound pathway to the sacred.

In my view, the latter side of this paradox has particularly important implications for how we approach medieval representations of the *Noli me tangere.* Mary Magdalene may not have been able to touch Christ's body with the hands, like Doubting Thomas, but she *could* touch Christ in another way: with her gaze. Barbara Baert has made a similar

[3] Stanbury (2005: 236) is clearly referring back to her previous discussion of *Man and wyman, loketh to me* on page 232, but mistakenly refers to it by a title of another lyric.

point, though surprisingly without any explicit connection to medieval extramission theory and widespread ideas about the haptic gaze in medieval culture. In her words, '[Mary Magdalene's] gaze interacts with the near-touch or deictic void between the hands. "Do not touch me" echoes, becoming "Touch me with your eyes" ' (Baert 2006: 46). When viewed in this light, Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas were not that different after all: they merely touched Christ in different ways.

This has important implications for medieval spectatorship. If Mary Magdalene could touch Christ with her gaze, then could the spectators not do the same? In the rest of this chapter, I suggest that Mary Magdalene's experiences could have offered a profound model for spectators engaging with Christ's body in medieval religious theatre, synthesizing sight and touch in a way entirely in keeping with medieval attitudes towards the senses. The wide cultural dissemination of the idea of haptic vision will prove integral to my argument; it increases the likelihood that any medieval spectator would have associated vision with touch, either consciously or subconsciously.

The Haptic Gaze: Implications for Early English Theatre

The theories of intromission and extramission have already proven useful tools for medieval theatre scholars including Jill Stevenson (2010) and Andrea Louise Young (2015), as well as early modern theatre scholars including Philip Armstrong (2000), Bruce Smith (2010), and Marguerite Tassi (2005). Curiously, this methodological dialogue between medieval and early modern theatre scholarship has never been noted until now. Although my argument owes a debt to all of these scholars, what sets it apart is *how* I apply optical theory to the study of early English theatre. In this final section, I propose that optical theory offers a powerful new way of approaching medieval

spectatorship, one that is sympathetic to the way in which spectators could reach out and touch the Christ-actor's body with their eyes.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis (p. 5), Jill Stevenson's 2010 monograph on sensual piety in the York Plays focuses predominantly on sight, and consequently our research projects have different sensory emphases. However, medieval optical theory, which frames sight *as* touch, creates an obvious point of intersection between Stevenson's research on sight and my own research on touch. This can be seen especially in Stevenson's discussion of Longinus in the York *Mortificatio Christi.* It will be helpful to contextualize Longinus's story before examining Stevenson's argument.

The Gospels give no name to the soldier who pierced Jesus's side with the Holy Lance during the Crucifixion, but he is identified as Longinus in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, written in the fourth century (Peebles 1911: 7–8). By the time that Jacobus de Voragine was compiling the *Legenda Aurea* in the thirteenth century, a well-established tradition held that Longinus was miraculously healed after he pierced Christ's side. De Voragine reports that 'age and infirmity' had rendered Longinus 'almost blind', but 'the blood that ran down the shaft of the spear touched his eyes [*oculos suos tetigit*] and at once he saw clearly' (Ryan trans 2012: 184; Grässe ed 1846: 202). Other medieval texts clarify the practicalities of this apocryphal episode, explaining that Longinus stroked his eyes with fingers stained with Christ's blood. For example, there is an explicit stage direction to this effect in the N-Town Plays: '*Here Longeys showyth þe spere warly; and þe blood comyth rennyng to his hand, and he auantorysly xal wype his eyn*' (34.100.s.d.). Although there is no equivalent stage direction in the York *Mortificatio Christi*, the actor playing Longinus probably wiped his eyes with a bloody hand during a typical performance. This action would likely have occurred after Pilate implores Longinus to

'Schoffe' the spear in Christ's side (36.297), but before Longinus praises Jesus for 'sodenly' giving him his 'sight', specifically commending 'Thi bloode' (36.302; 307).

Unsurprisingly, the dramatization of Longinus's experiences in the York Plays offers Stevenson a thought-provoking opportunity to explore the relationship between sight and touch:

> When Pilate orders Longinus to pierce Christ's side with his sword, the water and blood that spills out from Christ's body gives Longinus his sight. Through this fluid, Christ's body literally extends out *to touch* the soldier, thereby enabling him to gaze upon the Crucifixion image. […] [This moment actualizes] both the physical power of Christ's body and the sacred *contact* this body makes with devout viewers when they gaze upon it, the very *contact* assumed by medieval visual theory.
>
> (Stevenson 2010: 124; emphasis added)

Here, Stevenson argues that Longinus's experiences exemplify the reciprocal touch imagined by medieval optical theory. I would add that Christ's blood literally becomes the intromissive rays that stream out from the object viewed, while Longinus's blood-stained hands become the physical embodiment of the extramissive gaze reaching out to touch the object seen. For Stevenson, Longinus's visual encounter with Christ's body represents a moment of 'sacred contact' (2010: 124). I would take this one step further, arguing that Longinus's experiences specifically recall another moment of sacred touch: the Incredulity of Thomas. For both Thomas and Longinus, a tactile encounter with Christ's side wound is a pathway to sacred healing: both men are cured of their spiritual blindness and doubts, while Longinus is additionally cured of his literal blindness.

Even though Stevenson does not make this comparison to Doubting Thomas, she clearly understands Longinus's haptic vision as a positive phenomenon. Optical theory, for Stevenson, is a way of contextualizing the transformative nature of gaze on the medieval stage. Conversely, scholars of early modern theatre have concentrated largely on the negative effects of the extramissive gaze on stage. We have already encountered Bruce Smith's discussion of the Queen's 'evil eye' in *Cymbeline* (see p. 169 above). In

addition, Philip Armstrong has found references to characters' projectile, harmful gazes in other Shakespearean plays including *Henry V* and *Macbeth* (2000: 176–77; 182).

If medieval and early modern theatre scholars have taken different approaches to the extramissive gazes exchanged between actors on stage, then they are more closely aligned with respect to the implications of optical theory for the actor-audience relationship. In both fields, scholars have used the theories of intromission and extramission to explore the dangers inherent in the act of watching a play. For example, Marguerite Tassi (2005: 17–18) has explored how optical theory informed the concerns of early modern antitheatrical writers including Stephen Gosson (d.1624) and Anthony Munday (d.1633). Munday, in particular, 'followed the visual theory of intromission: evil images enter through the eyes and lay siege to the soul' (Tassi 2005: 18). As evidence, Tassi points to *A second and third blast of retrait from the plaies and Theaters* (1580), in which Munday argues that much evil enters the body at the eyes: 'by these two open windowes death breaketh into the soule' (Munday 1580: 96; Tassi 2005: 18). Compare this to Philip Armstrong's comments on *Macbeth*: in his view, 'each of the apparitions in *Macbeth* sends out its own visual emanation upon the spectator, giving the play a basilisk stare with dire effects of its own' (2000: 185).

There are striking parallels here with Young's recent discussion of vice figures in *The Castle of Perseverance*, a fifteenth-century morality play. Young convincingly argues that Mundus, the principal vice character, emits damaging, penetrative tactile rays to bring unwary spectators under his sway. She highlights the influence that Mundus exerts over 'stytelerys' (i.e. 'stewards'), whose role it is to '[usher] the mobile audience members' (Young 2015: 46). In her view, these stewards '[act] as the dramatic representation of [Mundus'] extramissory rays of vision, perhaps raising questions about the danger of spectatorship itself' (Young 2015: 46). Young argues that 'the play truly

tries to illustrate the power of extramission, as audience members are literally brought under [Mundus'] gaze and may even be "touched" by it as stewards usher them to see the action' (2015: 46).

Both medieval and early modern theatre scholars, then, have considered how spectators were literally and figuratively 'touched' by the plays they saw, using extramission theory as a lens through which to examine the dangers inherent in early English spectatorship. However, what sets Young apart from early modern scholars is the fact that she simultaneously uses optical theory to consider the positive implications of spectatorship. In her view, the *Castle of Perseverance* 'pits the extramissory gaze […] of the vices and the Bad Angel against the intromissory, reciprocal gaze of Christ and the viewer' (Young 2015: 61). She continues: 'if the audience looks at the image of Christ, which itself emits multiple species, these species will be able to enter their eyes and work on their souls through intromission' (Young 2015: 67). In this way, '[i]ntromission could lead to true contact with Christ' (Young 2015: 61).

It is this positive type of haptic vision, and its implications for medieval theatre, that primarily concern me. This approach has much to offer our understanding of *Noli me tangere* plays, in which the tangibility of Christ's body was already a key theme. On the surface, Christ prohibits Mary's touch. Nevertheless, according to medieval optical theory, Christ's body emits visual rays that touch Mary via intromission. Moreover, Mary can touch back with her own extramissive gaze. The tactile implications of the word 'behold' are especially relevant in this context. The interrelationship between sight and touch suggested by this word has already been highlighted in previous scholarship, notably in Vincent Gillespie's recent conference paper on Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love*:

> lurking close to the etymological surface of the word 'beholding' is the suggestion that this mode of seeing is also a touching or holding onto the object seen: an extromission of intention that matches the intromission of divine grace.
>
> (Gillespie 2016: no page numbers; Gillespie forthcoming, page tbc)

The tactile implications of the word 'behold' have also come under scrutiny elsewhere (Mitchell 2012: xvii; McNamer 2010: 135–37; Stanbury 2008: 188; Varnam 2018: 169–70; Young 2015: 53). For comparison, Maggie Ross has approached the word 'behold' in a different way; she argues that 'beholding' represents 'the threshold of contemplation', a theory that she explores with particular reference to late medieval English mystical literature (2013: 29). Nevertheless, a tactile approach to the word is more pertinent to my discussion here. In my view, the word 'behold' could have taken on a special resonance during medieval religious theatre. For example, consider the following line from the York *Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene*:

> JESUS: Marie, of mournyng amende thy moode,
> And beholde my woundes wyde.
> (39.62–63)

Here, Christ's instruction to 'be*hold*e my woundes' can be interpreted to mean 'touch my wounds with your gaze' (39.63; emphasis added). Following this line of argument to its natural conclusion, the encounter between Mary and Christ in the York *Appearance* is a form of ocular communion; a moment of sacred contact mediated by vision. Like Doubting Thomas, Mary reaches out and feels Christ's wounds—albeit with her gaze, not her hands.

Crucially, Christ's invitation for Mary to 'be*hold*e' his wounds could have implicated the spectators too, promoting a type of visual experience that I shall refer to as *haptic spectatorship*. Earlier in this chapter (p. 161), I introduced the idea that Mary Magdalene can be understood a paradigm for the medieval Christian, or more specifically for the medieval spectator. I now wish to refine this argument further. Although Mary Magdalene cannot touch Christ with her hand, she nevertheless gives medieval

Christians—especially medieval Christian *spectators*—a model for how to touch Christ with the gaze. In other words, Mary Magdalene could teach people how to be*hold*.

The word 'behold' in medieval English theatre has already attracted some attention. In particular, David Mills has drawn attention to 'the "Behold and see" type of speech', which serves to 'point a verbal finger at the visual scene' (1985: 5). Such speeches are 'directed out to the audience, being intended secondarily if at all for figures within the dramatic action' (1985: 5). He cites, for example, the moment when Noah in the Towneley Plays invites his wife and by extension the audience to 'Behald' the devastation caused by the flood (3.772; Mills 1985: 10). In addition to creating a visual focus on stage, such speeches may have helped spectators with an obstructed view to follow the narrative. Indeed, Meg Twycross notes that the 'Behold and see' convention in medieval theatre perhaps 'evolved by necessity in performance circumstances where the audience could not always be certain of seeing exactly what was going on' (2007: 463).

I am certainly not suggesting that the word 'behold' carries tactile connotations everywhere it occurs in medieval English theatre. In the Towneley *Noah* and indeed elsewhere, the word 'behold' serves pragmatic, demonstrative functions instead. What I *am* suggesting is that the tactile dimension of the word 'behold' could easily have come to the surface during plays in which the sense of touch was already at stake, most obviously theatrical representations of the *Noli me tangere*. To give another example, my analysis of the word 'behold' has important implications for the York *Crucifixion*, inviting a reassessment of the following passage:

> Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
> And fully feele nowe, or ȝe fyne,
> Yf any mournyng may be meete,
> Or myscheue mesured vnto myne.
> (35.255–58)

Traditionally, medieval theatre scholars have understood these lines as an appeal for the spectators to use Christ's wounds as a visual stimulus for affective piety. For example,

James McBain argues that '[f]rom the raised Cross […] Christ invites his audience to engage affectively with his wounds and unprecedented physical suffering' (2016: 319). This is certainly one valid interpretation, but what happens when we remain alert to the tactile implications of the word 'be*hold*'? Now, Christ's famous speech functions as an appeal for haptic spectatorship: Be*hold* (i.e. touch) my head, my hands, and my feet *with your gaze*.

This argument has implications for the following line, in which Christ invites the spectators to 'fully feele nowe' (35.256). As noted in the introduction to this thesis (p. 39), the Middle English verb 'felen' means both 'To experience a tactile or muscular sensation' and 'To have an emotional experience or reaction' (*MED* s.v. 'felen, v.1' senses 1.a and 4.a). With this in mind, it is possible to understand Christ's speech from the cross as an appeal for the spectators to feel his wounds on a tactile level by be*hold*ing them with an extramissive gaze. Crucially, this new reading of Christ's speech from the cross in the York *Crucifixion* is not at odds with McBain's reading—in fact, the two interpretations of the passage are complementary. Christ's speech is an appeal for affective piety *par excellence*: looking with the eyes leads to touching with the gaze, and feeling in a tactile sense leads to feeling in an emotional sense. How better to understand and emphasize with Christ's physical suffering than to become Thomas, reaching out and *feeling* the bloody wounds in both senses of that word?

At this stage, it should be noted that some scholars have expressed scepticism about using optical theory as a lens through which to explore the devotional experiences of the medieval laity. It is worth quoting John H. Arnold's cautions and reservations at length:

> For historians wishing to avoid the sin of projecting modern categories back into the medieval past, the existence of explicit discussion of, for example, extromission/intromission theories of sight can be a welcome aid to avoiding anachronism; but that is not a tremendously secure methodology if one's project is to understand, for example, the experience of an ordinary member of the laity viewing the Eucharist at weekly mass, who may not have heard much about post-Aristotelian optical theory.
>
> (Arnold 2018: 21)

I do not entirely agree with this. On the one hand, Arnold is correct that ordinary members of the laity were unlikely to have been familiar with post-Aristotelian optical theory, and it is therefore slightly problematic to use this material as a lens through which to approach their devotional experiences. However, what Arnold overlooks here is how profoundly optical theory and ideas about intromission and extramission filtered down into other aspects of medieval culture, as I have discussed at length in this chapter. Consequently, I would argue that the idea of vision being a type of touch was certainly one culturally available way of engaging with devotional culture—even if people encountered it not via learned treatises but instead in an oblique form, including via prevailing superstitions about the evil eye, via the wounding gaze in courtly romance and devotional imagery, or via the interweaving of touch and sight in lyric poetry. Indeed, people could even have encountered the idea of haptic vision via medieval theatre itself, not least through the experiences of Longinus, discussed above.

Reading Medieval Plays

Chapter Three has constructed an argument about touch and medieval spectatorship by moving from the N-Town *Appearance* to the Digby *Mary Magdalene* and finally to the York *Appearance*. Crucially, I am not suggesting that these three plays have a unified aesthetic, but rather that they can be brought together in a meaningful dialogue that raises thought-provoking questions about medieval spectatorship and the senses. Indeed, the relationship between vision and touch in the *Noli me tangere* has surfaced differently in

each text. My reading of the N-Town *Appearance* explored Mary's use of osculatory language to describe her visual encounter with Christ, and I suggested that the play as a whole had the capacity to generate tactile longing. My discussion of the Digby *Mary Magdalene* then introduced the idea of tactile frustration, arguing that Mary's inability to touch Christ could have found an echo in the audience's sensory experience. Finally, my study of the York Plays foregrounded the tactile implications of the word 'behold' and explored its implications for haptic spectatorship.

However, the various plays discussed in this chapter are distinguished by more than just their content. Notably, the motivations behind the compilation of the York and N-Town manuscripts differ greatly. The N-Town anthology was designed for meditative reading as much as for performance, as discussed earlier in this thesis (p. 14), whereas the York Register represents an official record of the city's Corpus Christi plays that was periodically checked against annual performances by the Common Clerk or his deputy (Beadle ed 2009–2011: I, xix–xxii; Meredith 1981). How might the diverse possible reception contexts of the N-Town plays complicate my arguments about vision, touch, the audience, and the *Noli me tangere*? For example, would Mary's tactile longing in the N-Town *Appearance* have had a different impact on a meditative reader than an audience? Earlier in this chapter, I suggested Mary's intense desire to touch Christ and her inability to do so could easily have found an echo in the experiences of the spectators themselves, who could likewise only look and not touch. Conversely, Mary's sensory experiences would likely have been less immediately relevant to a reader, for whom no Christ actor would have been within sight or indeed reach. Reading a play in a manuscript and *seeing* that play in performance are clearly two different sensory experiences, a topic I will explore further in the following chapter with reference to the

Bodley *Burial*. Before moving on, however, it is important to reflect back on the implications of Chapter Three as a whole.

Conclusion

Chapter Three has offered a new way of approaching the experience of seeing a play in the medieval period, namely haptic spectatorship. My argument that medieval spectators could touch theatre with their gaze has been rooted in contemporary ideas about vision as a type of contact expressed in medieval optical theory and beyond. Moreover, I have identified a paradigm of haptic vision in medieval theatre itself: spectators could learn from Mary Magdalene as she touched or indeed be*held* Christ with her gaze on stage. *Noli me tangere* plays offered the ideal setting for spectators to emulate Mary's experiences. Of course, haptic spectatorship has much wider implications for the study of medieval religious theatre, not least the York *Crucifixion* play.

In this chapter, my discussion of the sense of touch has largely been restricted to its role *within* the sense of sight. Yet even when touch is confined to this hybrid form, the touch paradox is still relevant. On the one hand, many medieval commentators understood haptic vision as a form of poisonous, unclean touch—a fear that had a long cultural legacy. As I have shown, scholars working in both medieval and early modern theatre studies have explored the risk to spectators of being touched by the extramissive gaze of the play. This previously unexplored sensory dialogue between medieval and early modern theatre studies demonstrates the longevity of fears about unclean touch, and the related phenomenon of unclean sight.

Yet at the same time, Chapter Three has focused extensively on the positive implications of haptic vision. In late medieval England, the eyes offered a powerful mechanism through which to touch Christ's body—a way of becoming Doubting Thomas

not with the hands, but with the gaze. However, the human senses represented an insufficient pathway to the sacred in late medieval theatre. Christ's body never truly appeared on stage, but rather an imitation thereof. Only in the heavenly Jerusalem would it be possible for the medieval Christian to truly 'see' Christ: 'We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12). Nevertheless, medieval biblical theatre offered the best possible opportunity to see and indeed be*hold* Christ in the mortal world. This is well demonstrated by the defence of images in Reginald Pecock's *Repressor* (c.1449). For Pecock, a crucifix is the closest representation of Christ 'except whanne a quyk man is sett in a pley to be hangid nakid on a cros and to be in semyng woundid and scourgid' (Babington ed 1860: I, 221). Pecock's *Repressor* anticipates an idea at the heart of this chapter: even though actors could only offer an imitation of Christ, they nevertheless shared a striking resemblance with the saviour and helped to make his absent body seem present on stage.

In the introduction to this thesis (pp. 30–31), I argued that Christ's body oscillated between the tangible and the intangible in medieval religious culture. This has only been reinforced through a consideration of medieval spectatorship. *Noli me tangere* plays in particular were in a powerful position to generate both frustration and opportunity to touch Christ's body. On the one hand, Christ's body was probably out of the spectators' physical reach, and moreover spectators were not presented with Christ's *actual* body but rather an actor's. Nevertheless, this actor offered a realistic substitute for Christ's body, one that could be touched with the eyes in the form of a profoundly transformative haptic gaze. Yet was this as far as sacred touch in medieval theatre could go? Were spectators only able to touch the Christ actor with their eyes? Chapter Four will complicate this picture.

Chapter Four

'This is my body': Touch, Material Objects, and Sacred Flesh in Performance

> And ȝit ferther into more loue and good affeccioun to be gendrid, thei kessiden the feet of the ymage; not as that the feet of the ymage weren al that thei there kissiden, but that ther with thei kessiden the feet of Crist whom thei ymagineden to be there in bodili maner present.
>
> (Babington ed 1860: I, 270)

Creeping to the cross, described here by Reginald Pecock in his *Repressor* (c.1449), was an important part of Good Friday in late medieval England. Clergy and parishioners approached the foot of the cross in bare feet and on their knees, ultimately kissing it (Duffy 2005: 29). Pecock's description of the practice serves to emphasize an important function of touch in late medieval English devotional culture: kissing or stroking a material object that resembled Christ allowed people to feel as if they were touching his actual flesh.[1] In the hands of the devout viewer, images of Christ could effectively undergo transubstantiation.

This principle applied not only to sculpted and non-sculpted images, but also to other material objects including books. The classic example is LBL MS Egerton 1821, a devotional manuscript produced in England c.1480–1490 (Hennessy 2013; Thebaut 2009). Near the beginning of the book, five consecutive pages are covered with red ink and speckled with dripping wounds (i.e. fols. 6r–8r). A representative example can be seen in figure 41. The manuscript appears to be haemorrhaging. MS Egerton 1821 thus gives a tangible, material reality to a popular motif in late medieval devotional culture, namely Christ as book. This metaphor, to be explored at length in this chapter, typically involves comparing Christ's wounds to letters and his skin to a writing surface. In MS

[1] On Pecock, touch, and sculpture, see also Walter forthcoming.

Egerton 1821, the metaphor is implicit. To move beyond the page depicted in figure 41, a medieval reader would have had to touch not only Christ's blood, represented by the red ink, but also Christ's flesh, represented by the parchment—a writing surface itself created from skin. Indeed, Sarah Kay reminds us that medieval parchment '*feels* like skin' (2011: 14; emphasis original). As such, MS Egerton 1821 offered its original reader(s) the opportunity to 'become' Doubting Thomas and make contact with Christ's wounded flesh—albeit via a richly decorated material substitute.

At the heart of this chapter lies the interdependent relationship between touch, materiality, and sacred bodies in late medieval English devotional culture. Specifically, I interrogate how far this relationship was undercut when objects like books and sculptures were present or called to mind in medieval plays—a setting in which, as I suggested in Chapter Three, spectators might touch with the gaze but not the hands. To explore this question, Chapter Four focuses on the Bodley *Burial* (c.1520), the first half of a two-part Easter play. In this text, Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea explicitly describe Christ as a piece of stretched 'parchment' covered in 'bludy letters' (*B*.272–74).

On the surface, a public performance of this text would likely have make Christ seem *in*tangible—the book in the distance, to be seen but not touched. This would support the conclusions reached in Chapter Three, namely that medieval theatre inspired tactile longing that could only be satisfied via haptic spectatorship. Moreover, the fact that the Bodley *Burial* has obvious Eucharistic implications complements my earlier argument that religious theatre effectively enabled ocular communion, allowing spectators to tangibly 'consume' Christ not with their mouths but with their eyes.

However, I will go on to complicate this picture through a materially engaged reading of the Bodley *Burial.* This under-studied text and its counterpart, the Bodley *Resurrection*, are fluid and versatile in genre, suiting not only public performance in a

church but also private, meditative reading. I will argue that the sense of touch had much to contribute to the second of these reception modes, which can also be described as 'closet drama', i.e. 'play scripts, privately read' (Brantley 2007: 270). Previous scholars have overlooked how the *mise-en-page* of the only surviving copy of the Bodley *Burial* visually complements the text's metaphor of Christ as Book. Handling this script was an opportunity for readers to become tangibly involved in medieval theatre, touching Christ's book-like body and thereby inserting themselves into the drama of the Passion.

Yet even when the Bodley *Burial* is approached as a play in the more conventional sense, i.e. a text suited for live performance with actors, props, and spectators, the text encourages a more nuanced understanding of the role of touch in the reception of medieval theatre. Though Christ was compared to a book in the text of the Bodley *Burial*, we shall see that he would have been represented by another material object in performance: a figure with moving arms. I argue that such an object, precisely because it was three-dimensional, would have conjured tactile expectations about texture and form in the spectators' minds, whether consciously or subconsciously. Moreover, audience members may even have had the opportunity to touch this figure at other times of the liturgical year, when it was likely a cult object in the church. The Bodley *Burial* thus forces us to recognize that the role of touch in medieval religious theatre extended beyond merely haptic vision. Spectators may have brought imagined or even remembered tactile encounters to bear on their visual experience of medieval plays.

The first half of Chapter Four thus builds on the questions posed in Chapter Three by examining the role of touch in medieval audience experience. The second half, however, returns to a premise first introduced in Chapter One. Specifically, I reaffirm my earlier argument that early English theatre is a useful lens through which to examine the changing status of touch before and after the Reformation. In Chapter One, I contrasted

plays from fifteenth and sixteenth century England in order to explore the decline of relics as tactile access points to sacred healing. In Chapter Four, I once again take a diachronic approach to early English theatre, here to explore the devaluation of material objects as tactile access points to the sacred bodies they represented.

This involves a new reading of the final scene of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (c.1609–1611). In act 5, scene 3, King Leontes and his daughter Perdita encounter a remarkably lifelike sculpture of the deceased queen Hermione, an object they both express a desire to kiss. However, they are forbidden do so by Paulina, whose speeches I suggest recall bans on the tactile veneration of sculptures introduced during the Reformation. Moreover, Perdita herself concedes that her desire to kiss Hermione's sculpture seems superstitious. Perdita thus implies that the tactile worship of sculptures is idolatrous: she knows that she should not handle material objects as if they have a bodily presence. And yet, by the end of the scene, the statue *does* have a bodily presence. Hermione's sculpture comes to life, and the formerly deceased queen thereby experiences a Christ-like resurrection. Crucially, Leontes uses his sense of touch to confirm that Hermione is alive; he feels that her skin is warm. I suggest that Leontes employs his senses in a distinctly medieval way here, relying on touch to unlock the bodily presence of a material object. As such, *The Winter's Tale* is not as hostile to the tactile veneration of sculpture as it first appears. In fact, the play's climax has the potential to evoke nostalgia for pre-Reformation England, a time when sculptures of sacred bodies came to life in the hands of the believers.

The Winter's Tale, then, harks back to the interdependent relationship between touch, materiality, and the sacred that I detect in the Bodley *Burial*. During a performance of the latter, Christ could shift seamlessly between body, book, and sculptural object in the hands of the actors on stage. Likewise, for readers encountering the Bodley *Burial* in

manuscript form, the material object at hand was a fluid entity, oscillating between inky page and wounded flesh. Nevertheless, when the Bodley Burial was written down c.1520, the cultural norms that allowed these flexible tactile encounters with the sacred were on the cusp of change. At the close of this chapter, comparing the Bodley *Burial* and *The Winter's Tale* will therefore throw into sharp relief a distinctive aspect of tactile experience in medieval English culture: the ability of touch to effectively turn books and sculptures into flesh and blood.

The Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection*: An Overview

The Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* survive in one textual witness: OBL MS E Museo 160. There is no external evidence that might shed further light on the text, in contrast to the many civic documents that bolster our understanding of the York Register. The manuscript of the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* therefore assumes singular importance. Its contents can be summarized as follows:

1r–108r	Chronicle beginning with Adam and ending in 1518.
108v–115v	A continuation to the chronicle, covering events from the year 1520 such as the Field of Cloth of Gold. Interspersed with short romance fragments.
116r–136r	English translation of meditations usually attached to Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*
136v–139r	*Fifteen Articles of the Passion*
140r–156v	Bodley *Burial*
156v–172r	Bodley *Resurrection*

(Summary informed by Baker and Murphy 1976: xiv–xv; Baker, Murphy, and Hall eds 1982: lxxvi–lxxxi; Rowntree 1990: 8–10; Ward 1995: 71–72)

Donald C. Baker and J. L. Murphy have stressed that the manuscript is 'clearly a homogeneous book' given that it is largely written by one scribe and much of the paper is from one stock (1976: xiv). This allows us to establish approximately when the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* were copied:

> A date of not far from 1520 for the plays is obviously called for, because the chronicle which occupies two-thirds of the manuscript is dated 1518, and its brief continuation concerns events of 1520.
>
> (Baker and Murphy 1976: xv)

Linguistic evidence suggests that the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* were composed in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, i.e. that they are roughly contemporary with the manuscript (Meredith 1997: 144–45; Rowntree 1990: 12n3). Internal evidence suggests that the scribe was a Carthusian monk working in a charterhouse in or near Yorkshire, most likely Kingston-upon-Hull, Mount Grace, or Axholme (Baker, Murphy, and Hall eds 1982: lxxxii; Baker and Murphy 1976: xv; Davidson 2007: 171–77; Rowntree 1990: 13, 23, 29; Meredith 1997: 140).

The manuscript of the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* poses an interpretative problem for medieval scholars: do these texts represent plays for public performance or poems for private reading? A close examination of folio 144v (figure 42) will provide a useful point of departure. At first blush, folio 144v looks like a page from a late medieval English play. Folio 181v from the York Register, which is a page from the York *Crucifixion* play, will serve as a useful point of reference (figure 43). In the York text, note how speakers' names have been indicated in the margins, and lines serve to separate the speeches. These features are common in fifteenth-century theatrical manuscripts (Brantley 2007: 280, 387n34). Compare this to the Bodley *Burial* in figure 42. The *ordinatio* is similar. Like the York *Crucifixion*, speakers' names are indicated in red in the margins, namely 'ij^{o} Maries', '[M]avdlen', and '[Jo]sephe' (see arrows A, B, and C). The only difference is that the *Crucifixion*-scribe always places his speaker names in the right-hand margin, whereas the Bodley scribe is less consistent in this regard. On this folio, for example, he places names in both margins: the reference to 'ij^{o} Maries' occurs in the right-hand margin (see arrow A), whereas '[M]avdlen' and '[Jo]sephe' occur in the left-hand margin (see arrows B and C). Consequently, only Joseph and Mary

Magdalene's names were truncated at the front when a later binder trimmed the manuscript. Elsewhere in the Bodley *Burial*, however, the scribe places speaker names exclusively in the right-hand margin (e.g. fol. 142r), or exclusively in the left-hand margin (e.g. fol. 145v).

There is another (partial) visual similarity between the manuscripts of the Bodley *Burial* and the York *Crucifixion*, namely the use of red lines to reinforce speech divisions. Arrows D and E in figure 42 indicate where thin red lines sit above the start of Mary Magdalene and Joseph's speeches on folio 144v of the Bodley *Burial*. Undoubtedly, the *Crucifixion*-scribe's choice of thicker lines is more effective for this purpose. The Bodley scribe's speech division lines can easily be confused with his cancellations in red (see arrows F, G, and H), to which we shall return shortly. Moreover, the Bodley-scribe has not consistently applied speaker division lines throughout the *Burial* and *Resurrection*. For example, there are no lines to divide the speeches of Joseph and Nicodemus on folio 147r. We might therefore conclude that although the Bodley scribe is not as proficient as the scribe of the York *Crucifixion*, he knows what a medieval play *should* look like and has tried to apply these visual cues to the Bodley texts.

Beyond folio 144v, there are further indications that the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* were conceived as plays. For example, the text contains practical stage directions, such as 'Exeunt' (*B*.832.s.d.). Moreover, at the bottom of the second page, the scribe explicitly identifies the text as a play and explains the performance context:

> This is a play to be played, on part on Gud Friday afternone, and þe other part opon Ester Day after the resurrection in the morowe, […]
>
> (after line *B*.55)

However, the scribe immediately added a caveat: 'at [the] begynnynge ar certen lynes which [shuld] not be said if it be plaied' (after line *B*.55). Certainly, the opening lines of the text are inconsistent with dramatic performance:

A soule that list to singe of loue
Of Crist that com tille vs so lawe,
Rede this treyte, it may hym moue,
And may hym teche lightly with-awe
Off the sorow of Mary sumwhat to knawe,
Opon Gud Friday afternone;
(*B*.1–6)

These words are not attributed to a speaker, and the passage instructs people to 'Rede this treyte' (*B*.3), rather than to watch or listen.

Perhaps, then, the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* may (also) be understood as poems to be read, rather than plays to be staged. This is suggested especially by the rubrication at the top of the first page of the Bodley *Burial*, which identifies the text as a 'treyte or meditation off the buryalle of Criste and the mowrnyng þerat' (before line *B*.1). A closer look at folio 144v is also revealing. Several words and passages been cancelled by the scribe, as indicated by the text in bold below and arrows F, G, and H in figure 42.

Ose Mawdleyn thus sore did wepe
The othere two Maryes tuk gude kepe
And saide righte soberlye
TWO MARIES: Gud Mawdleyn, mesure youre distillinge teres!
[M]AVDLEN: O, sisters, **saide sho**, who may hold theire cheres?
Thes are the swete fete I wipet with heris,
And kissid so deuowtlye.
And now to see tham thyrlite with a nayle,
How shulde my sorowfulle harte bot fayle,
And mowrn contynually?
Cum hithere, Joseph, beholde and looke,
How many bludy letters beyn written in þis buke—
Smalle margente her is!
Than said Josephe, a nobille man of prise
[JO]SEPHE: Ye, this parchment is stritchit owt of syse!
O, derest Lorde, in how paynfulle wise
Haue ye tholit thus![2]

The deleted words 'saide sho' and 'Than said Josephe […]' serve the same function as the speaker names '[Jo]sephe' and '[M]avdlen' in the margins, namely to identify the speaker. They are redundant for performance. Indeed, the deleted 'narrative links' in the

[2] Baker, Murphy, and Hall relegate the deleted text of the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* to the footnotes of their edition, but I have re-edited this particular section in order to show the deleted text in situ. Compare the text in Baker, Murphy, and Hall eds 1982: 149.

Bodley *Burial*, as Peter Meredith describes them, are more appropriate for a poem to be read than a text to be spoken by actors (1997: 135).

We are left with the following question: is the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* a meditative 'treyte' for private reading, or a two-part 'play' for public performance?[3] MS E Museo 160 is certainly not the only medieval manuscript that resists such categorization. For comparison, some fifteenth-century manuscripts of John Lydgate's works similarly blur the line between poetry and theatre (Sponsler 2014: 5–12, 17–34). Further, Carol Symes's study of early vernacular theatre has shown that many dramatic texts 'do not look very much like plays' (2002: 778). Symes focuses mainly on pre-1300 material, but she briefly looks ahead to the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection*, noting that '[e]ven at this late date […] some plays do not look distinctive enough to suit modern paradigms' (2002: 790).

The question of how to explain the inconsistent signposts in MS E Museo 160 has dominated the limited body of scholarship on the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection*. The topic is so vexed that Rosemary Woolf changed her standpoint in the course of her career. In the late 1960s, she argued that the Bodley *Burial* 'is not properly a play, but rather a meditation to be read' (Woolf 1968: 263). A few years later, she felt it 'more plausible' that 'the works were written for performance in church, but that their meditative character […] made them highly suitable for devotional reading and that they were subsequently copied for this purpose' (Woolf 1972: 422).

Many other scholars have likewise come to the conclusion that the manuscript of the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* captures a moment when these texts were shifting between the genres of theatre and meditation. Nevertheless, opinions differ as to the

[3] The use of rhyme brackets is inconclusive, as this feature is used elsewhere for both poems and plays. Although rhyme brackets are not used for the York *Crucifixion* in the Register (figure 43), they *are* used, for example, in the York *Abraham and Isaac* play earlier in the same manuscript (LBL MS 35290, fols. 31r–36v). For a discussion of rhyme brackets in both poetic and theatrical manuscripts, see Brantley 2013.

direction of this change. In the early 1980s, the editors of the Early English Text Society edition of the text put forward the opposite view to Woolf: '[i]t seems clear that the plays began as an extended meditation' which were turned 'into plays' (Baker, Murphy, and Hall eds 1982: lxxxviii; see also Baker 1989: 36–37). Since 1990, scholars have broadly favoured the opposing view, namely that the text was a play first (Davidson 2007: 169; Hogg 1990: 266–68; Meredith 1997). Nevertheless, this view is still not universal. Daniel Wakelin has recently argued 'the scribe began copying a poem but then went back over the first thirteen pages and adapted it into a play' (2018: 152).

To a certain extent, however, it does not matter whether the text was a play or a poem first. Rather, what matters is that the text as it currently stands is a hybrid: the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* could have functioned *both* as a play script and as a reading text. As such, the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* are much like the plays in the N-Town manuscript. As discussed on p. 14 above, LBL MS Cotton Vespasian D.8 contains some practical annotations suggesting that the plays were ultimately used in performance, yet it also features marginalia more appropriate for meditative reading.

The best evidence to support the argument that the Bodley plays suited both live enactment and individual meditation is the marginal caveat made by the scribe himself: 'at [the] begynnynge ar certen lynes which [shuld] not be said *if* it be plaied' (after line *B*.55; emphasis added). The word 'if' implies that the text is fluid enough to work in either capacity. Jessica Brantley likewise notes that the scribe 'preserves both options', observing that the confusing nature of the Bodley text 'reveals the generic fluidity evident between a drama to be performed at particular liturgical times […] and a meditation to be privately read' (2007: 298). Indeed, in her view, the two contexts cannot be wholly separated: 'the text's meditative qualities infuse its performance on the stage, and […] the theatrical nature of the text remains important even to the private reading of it' (Brantley

2007: 298). This is why 'closet drama' is such a helpful phrase to describe a meditative reading of the Bodley *Burial*. The term encourages sensitivity to the fact that the text would have had a performative quality, even when read in private.

But what can be said about the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection* as plays in a more conventional sense, i.e. as texts to be performed with actors and an audience? Although the Bodley plays seem to have been intended for presentation in a church at Easter, recent scholars have stressed that these are not liturgical plays—nor indeed do they belong to the genre of vernacular religious theatre (Davidson 2007: 170; Kopania 2010: 81). In Davidson's words, the Bodley plays 'indicate that an opaque wall of separation did not exist between the two acting traditions' (2007: 170). The audience of the Bodley plays is similarly nebulous. Some scholars believe that these texts would have been performed for a monastic community. For Woolf, '[i]t is reasonable […] to suppose that, when the plays were performed, it was in the church of a convent, and that some of the nuns themselves acted' (1972: 335). Kopania also favours a monastic audience, albeit a male one—specifically Carthusian monks (2010: 160–61). Meredith, however, has rightly stressed that we cannot rule out a lay audience:

> We know next to nothing about performances of plays in religious houses and almost as little about the performance of religious plays in private houses. What was the nature of the performance allowed for, c. 1524–7, in the 5th Earl of Northumberland's castle at Wressle in the East Riding of Yorkshire of the 'Play of the Resurrection' in the chapel on Easter morning? Is it possible that after all lay piety is what lies behind the Bodley *Burial and Resurrection?*
>
> (Meredith 1997: 150)

In fact, we cannot be entirely certain that the final two texts in MS E Museo 160 were ever staged *at all* (Baker 1989: 37; Davidson 2007: 169), let alone who their precise audience was. Nevertheless, given the evidence in the manuscript that these two texts were potentially intended for live performance, I find it both justifiable and thought-provoking to discuss them in this chapter as if they were indeed produced.

How, then, might the Bodley *Burial* have been staged? Three scholars have independently argued that a performance of the play would have required a sculpture of Christ (Davidson 2007: 171; Kopania 2010: 81–82; Woolf 1972: 332). Meredith has also suggested this as a staging possibility, though he is more tentative about the prospect (1997: 150). How might such a sculpture have looked? Davidson and Kopania are confident that the Bodley *Burial* specifically demands an *animated* sculpture of Christ—i.e. one with moving parts, especially arms (Davidson 2007: 171; Kopania 2010: 81–82).[4] According to this line of thought, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus detach a sculpture of the crucified Christ from the cross, but the actors can then lower the conveniently hinged arms so that Christ's body is in a suitable configuration for burial. The evidence for this scenario is highly convincing, as I explore in more detail below.

In sum, the Bodley *Burial* could have been performed in two different material contexts: it suited private reading with a book in hand, but also public staging in a church with a moving figure. In the rest of this chapter, I interrogate the tactile implications of both these reception contexts. This process will not only enrich our understanding of the complex relationship between touch, sacred bodies, and materiality in theatre, but will also shed light on the versatility of this understudied text. To open up this topic, it is necessary to have a closer look at the comparison between Christ and a book in the play.

Christ as Book in the Bodley *Burial* and beyond

[M]AVDLEN: Cum hithere, Joseph, beholde and looke,
How many bludy letters beyn writen in þis buke—
Smalle margente her is!
[JO]SEPHE: Ye, this parchment is stritchit owt of syse!
O, derest Lorde, in how paynfulle wise
Haue ye tholit this!
(*B*.271–76)

[4] I follow Kopania in referring to such objects as 'animated' in light of his extensive discussion of nomenclature issues (2010: 27–36).

In this short yet evocative speech, the playwright frames Mary Magdalene and Joseph as readers of Christ's book-like body. Some critics have briefly noted the explicit use of the Christ as book metaphor in the Bodley *Burial* (Baker, Murphy, and Hall eds 1982: xciv; Davidson 2007: 178; Noonan 2010: 208–10; Ward 1995: 80–81). Nevertheless, most research on the Christ as book metaphor has focused on other Middle English examples, especially the *Short Charter of Christ*. This text imagines Jesus's skin as a legally binding document that safeguards mankind's salvation, sealed with the blood of 'þe wounde in my side' (Spalding ed 1914: 8). Scribes working with the *Short Charter* often took advantage of the material text in order to make Christ's body seem tangible, a phenomenon that is well known (Brantley 2007: 189–91; Hennessy 2013: 32; Steiner 2003: 85–87). Consider Hennessy's description of the *Short Charter of Christ* in LBL MS 37049, fol. 23r (figure 44):

> Word becomes flesh here in a very literal way: it looks as if the charter, which contains a copy of the text of the poem, is grafted onto Christ's body, as it covers the entire lower portion of his body. Christ's wounded heart is the seal, which appears attached to the bottom of the charter on a thong or parchment strip, replicating the precise disposition of an actual legal charter […].
>
> (Hennessy 2013: 32)

MS Additional 37049 effectively puts a charter—and thus Christ's body—into the reader's hands.

Nevertheless, the text of the *Short Charter* did not always have tactile appeal. Sarah Noonan has highlighted a musical rendition of the *Short Charter* from c.1500, a format in which the Christ as Book metaphor appeals to the ears rather than the hands:

> Rather than emphasizing the importance of the work's *tangibility*, of its textual, visual and *tactile* representation of the charter […] Christ's charter and body are de-textualized from their manuscript setting and transformed into heard objects as the work is put to music. The burden of the carol repeatedly emphasizes Christ's suffering during his crucifixion, and the performance of Christ's voice by the singers moves the locus of Christ's pain from the manuscript's surface to their own bodies and to the bodies of the audience members.
>
> (Noonan 2014: 347; emphasis added)

Building on Noonan's work, I wish to explore the tactile implications of comparing Christ to a book during another kind of performance, namely theatre. When the Christ as Book motif was encountered in material form, like the manuscript of the *Short Charter of Christ* in figure 44, readers could effectively become Thomas and feel Christ's wounded skin. But when Christ was explicitly compared to a 'buke' covered with 'bludy letters' (*B*.272) during a performance of the Bodley *Burial*, could spectators only become Mary Magdalene and touch Christ's book-like body with the gaze? Noonan suggests that the sensory appeal of Christ's body shifted away from touch when the Christ as Book metaphor was expressed in music, but was this also true during theatrical performance?

I need not have used the Bodley *Burial* to explore this topic, because the Christ as book metaphor also appears elsewhere in medieval English theatre. As Isabel Davis has pointed out, the York *Crucifixion* 'implicitly incorporates the familiar motif of Christ as parchment through the use of the pinners' trade vocabulary' (2013: 104). The play 'advertises the pinners' "nayles large and lange," which were used, among other things, to nail skin onto parchment frames', and moreover the play 'is replete with synonyms for pulling', including 'tugge' and '[l]ugge' (Davis 2013: 104). Nevertheless, the metaphor is more explicit in the Bodley *Burial*. Moreover, the fact that the Bodley *Burial* suited meditative reading as well as public performance has important implications for the tangibility of the Christ as book metaphor, to which I shall return. For the moment, however, I will set aside the possibility that the Bodley *Burial* could have functioned as a meditation for private reading and instead focus on it as a text for live performance.

Touching Books

In order to explore how spectators may have responded to the comparison between Christ and a book in a live performance of the Bodley *Burial*, it is first necessary to establish

some material context. How were medieval books experienced on a tactile level? How likely were audience members to have touched books in their lifetime? Would books have been familiar, tangible objects to spectators?

In many ways, reading books was an intensely tactile experience in medieval England. Readers needed to turn the pages of a codex in order to progress through a text, bringing them into physical contact with parchment or paper. Small manuscripts such as OBCL MS 451 likely required almost continuous physical handling (figure 45). This Book of Hours dates from the 1480s, and at just 103 x 73 mm in size it demands to be cradled by the reader.[5] Many medieval readers have left tangible traces of their physical interactions with books. For example, a formerly black folio complete with red droplets of blood in MS Egerton 1821—the same manuscript in which the 'haemhorraging' pages discussed above can be found—seems to have been repeatedly rubbed and/or kissed out of devotion (figure 46). In recent years, scholars have paid attention to the ways in which late medieval readers could create meaning by touching their books, not only by kissing devotional images but also by sewing in insertions and defacing images of evil figures (Borland 2013; Rudy 2011a; Stevenson 2006: 216–24).

Particularly notable is Kathryn Rudy's work on dirt in medieval manuscripts, which is based on the premise that the dirtiest pages in a book were touched the most. She has shown that it is possible to use a densitometer, 'an apparatus that measures the darkness of a reflecting surface', to 'objectively measure' the 'wear' in a manuscript, and thereby 'reveal how a given reader handled his book' (Rudy 2010: para. 2 of 64). The inherent dirtiness of touch has left behind invaluable material evidence through which we can reconstruct patterns of use today. However, in the fourteenth century, the relationship

[5] As a caveat, the manuscript was rebound in the nineteenth century. For this reason, it likely felt slightly different in the hands of a medieval reader. However, even if the book originally had a stiffer or more flexible binding, the argument about cradling still stands. For a description of the manuscript, see Rogers 1988.

between touch, dirt, and books was a major source of anxiety for Richard de Bury, who has been described as 'medieval Europe's greatest book collector' (Camille 1997: 34). Consider especially the following passage from de Bury's treatise on book collecting, entitled the *Philobiblon* (1345):

> holy books deserve to be rightly treated by the clergy, to which great injury is done so often as they are touched by unclean hands [*attingere manus foeda*]. […] You may happen to see some headstrong youth lazily lounging over his studies […] His nails are stuffed with fetid filth [*fimo fetente refertum*] as black as jet, with which he marks any passage that pleases him.
>
> (Thomas ed and trans 1960: 155–57)

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that books like MS Egerton 1821 (figure 41) enabled readers to connect with Christ's sacred flesh—at least via a convincing material substitute. Yet Richard de Bury's comments serve as a reminder that handling books could implicate the unclean as well as the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox.

Of course, it was possible to engage with texts in medieval books without ever touching the object, for example by listening to a sermon or experiencing a dramatic reading of a literary text. As Joyce Coleman has shown, public reading remained popular throughout the late medieval period and was viewed by '[m]edieval writers […] not as a by-product of technological deficiencies but as an emotionally and intellectually engaging, multisensory, sociable, satisfying, and productive focus of human interaction' (1996: 108). Public reading was popular for its own sake, not merely because it offered a convenient solution to the relative scarcity of books.

But just how scarce *were* books in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the period concerned in this chapter? It would be wrong to assume that only the aristocracy owned or otherwise had the opportunity to handle books. From the mid-fourteenth century onwards, 'the working "middle class" were able to afford books—and they did so, in increasing numbers' (Amtower 2000: 29). Several factors contributed to this development, including cheaper book production techniques (Meale 1989: 201). It is

helpful here to consider P. J. P. Goldberg's conclusions about book ownership in late medieval York, based on a survey of wills that mostly fall between 1389 and 1500:

> While wills undoubtedly under-represent the true level of book ownership even among the will-making population, testamentary evidence demonstrates that book ownership was not confined to the aristocracy and the clergy, but encompassed also the upper echelons of urban society, notably merchants, their wives and widows, and to a lesser degree substantial artisans. […] Nevertheless, the actual level of book ownership, even allowing for these caveats, was probably low and consisted primarily of devotional material […]. It may well be that for persons below the level of the aristocracy or mercantile élite these were indeed the only books owned, but not necessarily the only books read since others probably circulated among citizens or between clergy and citizens.
>
> (Goldberg 1994: 189)

Most people in late medieval York, then, would have handled books in their lifetime—and the greater a person's social standing, the more likely they were to have had books of their own. Moreover, it was not just men who owned books. John B. Friedman's study of book ownership in northern England has revealed a substantial number of female owners (1995: 21). Goldberg and Friedman's studies are particularly suggestive for my purposes given that both scholars focus on the north of England. As discussed above, the Bodley plays were probably copied by a Carthusian monk in Yorkshire and were perhaps performed in a private house or maybe even for the monk's own monastic community.

Given the second possible performance context, it is important for my purposes to contextualize levels of book ownership and use not only among the laity, but also in monastic communities, especially Carthusian houses. As Brantley notes, 'Carthusian bibliographic culture was especially rich' (2007: 47). In the twelfth century, Guigo I wrote that all Carthusian monks should have access to two library books in their cells, in addition to the supplies necessary to create further books (Brantley 2007: 48). Strikingly, Guigo's justification for the latter activity stresses the sense of touch: 'because we cannot preach the word of God by our mouths, we may do so with our *hands*' (Brantley 2007: 48; emphasis added). Booklists and other documentary evidence confirms that English

Carthusian Charterhouses housed rich collections of books in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, with an emphasis on liturgical, hagiographical, and vernacular devotional texts (Brantley 2007: 51–53).

Overall, then, it is safe to assume that books would have been relatively familiar tangible objects for spectators watching the Bodley *Burial*—especially so if the play had a monastic audience or an upper class lay audience, though the performance context of the play remains unclear. This material context has an important bearing on the impact of the Christ as book metaphor in performance.

Beholding the Book: Haptic Vision in the Bodley *Burial*

It is distinctly ironic that the Christ as book metaphor finds expression in the Bodley *Burial*, a text potentially intended for public performance. The comparison aligns Christ with a familiar material object, inserting him into the tangible world of medieval Christians—yet this particular 'book' would *not* have been tangible to the audience

In the script of the Bodley *Burial*, only the actors are tasked with handling Christ's book-like body. Joseph asks Nicodemus to help him 'tak down this body' from the cross (*B*.435). Mary Magdalene entreats Joseph to 'handille hym tenderlye!' (*B*.441). Joseph tells Nicodemus to 'Stonde ner' and 'resaue hym softlye' (*B*.442). The Virgin Mary holds Christ 'in my lappe' (*B*.623) and, shortly after, an implicit stage direction indicates that she kisses him: 'Son, suffer me your woundes to kisse' (*B*.640). Note especially the use of adverbs like 'softlye' and 'tenderlye' in these speeches. These compassionate tactile actions are appropriate for the treatment of bodies, but they also recall interactions with images in late medieval English devotional books, discussed above. Indeed, given that Christ is so explicitly compared to a book earlier in the play, Joseph and the two Mary's actions cannot help but recall the way users stroked and

kissed devotional manuscripts like MS Egerton 1821, endowing the page with Christ's bodily presence (figure 46).

As such, when the Virgin Mary delivers the following lines, she effectively offers a lesson in how to touch devotional books:

> MARIE VIRGYN: O, my swete child, now suffer yee
> Me, your moder, to kisse yow here!
> Who can not wepe, com lern at me!
>
> To kisse, and swetly yow imbrace;
> Imbrace, and in myn armes hold;
> To hold, and luke on your blessit face;
> […]
> (*B*.691–96)

The concatenation in these lines serves to draw attention to Mary's tactile actions, namely embracing and holding. *This* is the appropriate way to touch devotional books, Mary thus implies. She effectively teaches the play's audience a sensory lesson: in the hands of the devout user, devotional books represented not an impersonal 'it' but rather a specific and human 'you': Christ.[6] The phrase 'com lern at me' makes it clear that Mary's 'reading practice' should be imitated.[7] Literally, of course, the line 'Who can not wepe, com lern at me!' should be translated as follows: '(He/she) who is unable to weep should learn (to weep) from me (i.e. from my example)'. Crucially, though, Mary's weeping is inspired specifically by her tactile encounters with Christ's body—a body already aligned with a book by this point in the play. Mary, then, teaches the audience not only how to weep but also how to 'read' Christ's suffering skin with their lips and hands.

And yet, spectators would not have been able to put the Virgin Mary's lesson in tactile reading into immediate practice. There is nothing in the Bodley *Burial* to suggest that spectators were ever invited or otherwise permitted to kiss or stroke Christ's book-

[6] As a caveat, this lesson would have been much more appropriate (one might even say *only* appropriate) for devotional manuscripts that featured images of Christ's body and wounds or ones that implicitly represent his body, such as LBL MS Egerton 1821 (see figures 41, 46).
[7] Laura Varnam (2015: 220–21) has commented upon the didactic potential of the 'Who Cannot Weep' pietà scene elsewhere in Middle English literature.

like body during performance. We can reasonably assume that any such tactile participation would have served to break the play, as with the *Noli me tangere* plays discussed in Chapter Three (p. 164). As such, a performance of the Bodley *Burial* would have effectively stripped the Christ as book metaphor of its tangible dimension, namely the material object in the reader's hand. In other words, a performance of the Bodley *Burial* would have undercut the relationship between touch, material object, and sacred body exploited by literary imagetexts like the *Short Charter of Christ* in which the Christ as book motif appears. In this play, Christ is not the book in hand but rather the book in the distance, to be seen but not touched.

It is, of course, possible that spectators could touch Christ's book-like body *with the gaze* during performance, in line with the concept of 'haptic spectatorship' I proposed in Chapter Three (p. 177). Notably, Mary Magdalane invites Joseph to '*beholde* and looke, | How many bludy letters beyn writen in þis buke' (*B*.271–72; emphasis added). In Chapter Three (pp. 176–79), I argued that the Middle English verb 'biholden' could carry important tactile implications in a theatrical setting, emphasizing possibilities for haptic spectatorship. Thus, spectators who attended the Bodley *Burial* may not have been able to put the Virgin Mary's lesson on tactile devotional reading into immediate practice with their hands, but they could be*hold* Christ's book-like body with their eyes.

We can be more specific about the type of haptic spectatorship permitted by the Bodley *Burial* here. A Eucharistic reading of the play is easily accessible, and so ocular communion offers an appropriate model for spectatorship. Perhaps most obviously, the play was intended for performance at Easter—the central occasion for the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. p. 30 above). Moreover, near the beginning of the play, Mary Magdalene describes Christ as 'The welle of mercy' (*B*.83). As Davidson has noted, this line recalls the Fountain of Life, an iconographic tradition with obvious Eucharistic

implications: it 'involved a representation of a fountain that might bring the saving blood of Christ to the people of God' (2007: 177). Christ, then, does not merely call to mind a book in the Bodley *Burial*; he also calls to mind the host. For comparison, there are other Middle English texts in which the Christ as Book metaphor takes on Eucharistic resonances (Noonan 2010: 12n22; Rubin 1991: 306–08). In a theatrical setting, the alignment of Christ with the host has important sensory implications. A performance of the Bodley *Burial* made a specific form of be*hold*ing and haptic spectatorship possible: ocular communion.

Thus far, the Bodley *Burial* complements the conclusions reached in Chapter Three. Medieval religious theatre potentially inspired tactile longing for Christ's body, to be satisfied only through haptic vision. Nevertheless, the role of touch in the reception of the Bodley *Burial* was more complex than this reading allows. It is important to remember that this play may have been encountered in a different way, namely via meditative reading. In this setting, the relationship between touch, the material text, and Christ's bodily presence would not have been undercut. In fact, touching the page could have played a crucial role during this kind of imaginative 'performance', providing an intimate pathway to Christ's body.

Touch, Closet Drama, and the *Mise-en-page* of the Bodley *Burial*

It is tempting to define medieval closet drama in terms of what it is not: these are medieval plays that were not dramatized by actors for an audience. However, this approach is reductive, suggesting that medieval closet drama was a deficient experience in comparison with staged plays.[8] Yet where the sense of touch is concerned, this could not be further from the truth. The sense of touch had the capacity to heighten a meditative

[8] Marta Straznicky makes a similar argument with respect to scholarship on early modern closet drama (2002: 416).

reading of the Bodley *Burial*, enabling a level of tactile participation with the play that a staged performance simply could not offer. By holding MS E Museo 160 in their hands, an object that materially echoed the Christ as book metaphor, readers could imagine themselves touching Christ's body, thereby taking on the role of one of the Marys or Joseph in their own personal drama of salvation.

Earlier in this chapter, folio 144v (figure 42) formed the basis of my discussion of the genre of the Bodley *Burial* and *Resurrection.* I now wish to approach this folio from a different perspective, namely by exploring the symbiotic relationship between the content and form of the page. Martha Rust has drawn attention to the ways in which medieval scribes took advantage of the 'metaphorical potentials of ink', thereby encouraging users 'to visualize inscriptions written in either blood or tears' (2013: 392). The Bodley *Burial* in MS E Museo 160 is a perfect example of a text that benefits from what Rust calls a 'liquid model' (2013: 392). The text was copied out in black ink, but the first letter of each line has been accented in red. Faced with the question 'How many bludy letters beyn writen in þis buke' (*B*.272), the *mise-en-page* of MS E Museo 160 allows and encourages the reader to answer this question in two ways. On a narrative level, Christ's body is covered in wounds, conceptualized here as 'letters' in keeping with the popular Christ as book metaphor. Yet the description of these bloody letters is encountered by the reader within a book that is itself covered in red letters, a striking material fulfilment of the metaphor. Accenting letters in red is not unusual in late medieval English page design (Hennessy 2013: 20–21). It was certainly not limited to (closet) drama—indeed, elsewhere in the same manuscript, the effect is used to adorn a chronicle (OBL MS E Museo 160, fols. 1r–115r). Nevertheless, given its narrative context, the *mise-en-page* of folio 144v had the potential to take on extra meaning in the eyes and hands of the reader.

Just as Christ's body in the Bodley *Burial* could be understood as book, so too the book in which this text features could be understood as Christ's body.

Mary Magdalene's reference to the 'Smalle margente' (*B*.273) of Christ's body could also have found an echo in the materiality of the page. The presence of truncated marginal notes in MS E Museo 160 indicates that the manuscript was trimmed at some point (cf. pp. 189–90 above). Given how little of the text has been lost, the margins were probably no more than a few centimetres wide originally. These 'Smalle margente' (*B*.273) could have functioned as another textual cue to reinforce the manuscript's status as a material embodiment of the Christ as book metaphor.[9] The effect would likely have been more potent had the manuscript been made of parchment rather than paper, given that Joseph refers to 'this parchment […] stritchit owt of syse' (*B*.274). Nevertheless, the *mise-en-page* alone would have been enough to enable a reader to forge a connection between the red letters on the page and the wounds on Christ's skin. Regardless of whether the material echoes of the text discussed here were a coincidence or a conscious choice, the end result is the same: the material text tangibly complemented the dialogue between Joseph and Mary Magdalene, putting Christ's body into the reader's hands.

Precisely because the Bodley *Burial* has a theatrical dimension, the Christ as book metaphor would have had important performative potential even when this text was read in private. As Brantley argues, '[t]hinking about the stage while reading in private added a layer of performative meaning to the experience of the text' (2007: 299). In the case of the Bodley *Burial*, readers could have imagined themselves as actors in the drama of the deposition of Christ. Notably, the play effectively provides 'roles' for both genders. Female readers could imagine themselves as Mary Magdalene or the Virgin Mary

[9] As a caveat, these margins are not as narrow as those of some other late medieval manuscripts. For comparison, there is effectively no margin at all in OBL MS Ashmole 1378, which contains a selection of medical recipes. Nevertheless, for a devout and engaged reader, the margins of MS E Museo 160 would likely have been narrow enough to recall Christ's 'Smalle margente' (*B*.273).

holding Christ's book-like body, whereas male readers could imagine themselves as Joseph performing the same act. Touching the page is what helps to synthesize the two acts of reading a book and being an actor in a play. It is especially important to remember here that MS E Museo 160 has probable links to the Carthusians (see p. 189 above). As Brantley has argued at length, Carthusian monasteries were the perfect breeding ground for performative reading texts that blended public pageantry and private meditation (2007: 1–25; 269–300).

During a live performance of the Bodley *Burial*, there would have been a physical gap between the theatrical action and the audience, and thus between the skin of the spectators and the skin of Christ. Yet when the Bodley *Burial* was received as closet drama, this gap disappeared. Actor and audience were united in one body: the reader. This reader was in a position to make contact with Christ's skin in his or her own personal 'performance' of the play. The Bodley *Burial*, when received in closet drama form, thus maintained the intimate relationship between touch, material objects, and sacred bodies so central to late medieval English devotional culture.

Imagined and Remembered Touch during Live Performance

The previous section demonstrated that the sense of touch could be integral to the reception of closet drama. With the script of the Bodley *Burial* in hand, it was possible to become tangibly immersed in the play and connect with Christ's flesh. But during a live performance of the same text, could audience members only touch Christ's body with the gaze? In other words, was haptic spectatorship the only outlet for touch when the Bodley *Burial* was performed in a more conventional sense—i.e. with actors and an audience?

To answer this question, it is necessary to approach the materiality of the Bodley *Burial* from a different angle. Instead of examining the manuscript and its impact on

meditative readers, I will now consider the physicality of the prop evidently required for live performance. As noted above (p. 195), both Davidson (2007: 171) and Kopania (2010: 81–82) claim that a production of the Bodley *Burial* would have demanded an animated figure of Christ. The argument is compelling, as I will shortly explain. This performance context has important tactile implications. Consciously or subconsciously, spectators watching the Bodley *Burial* would have had haptic expectations concerning how this prop would feel in their hands, inspired by the imagination or perhaps even by remembered tactile encounters with the object. Spectators, then, could do more than simply touch Christ's body with their eyes; they could also touch it in their minds.

There are several reasons to believe that an animated figure of Christ would have been used in a performance of the Bodley *Burial*. Firstly, there are obvious practical advantages to having a figure represent Christ in this play, rather than a human. It would have been both tedious and exhausting for a living actor to portray Christ in the Bodley *Burial*. This is not a short play; if we assume that the 548 lines of the York *Christ before Pilate I* would have taken 33 minutes to perform (Dorrell 1972: 105), then by analogy a performance of the 862-line Bodley *Burial* would have taken the best part of an hour. And yet, during this hour, the actor playing Christ would have had no speeches whatsoever—unlike his counterpart in the *Resurrection* play, a role that clearly *did* need to be embodied by a living actor. Moreover, during the Bodley *Burial*, an actor representing Christ would have needed to remain completely motionless so as to appear dead. Further, the actor would have had to spend a portion of the play balanced uncomfortably on Mary's lap in the Pietà configuration (Kopania 2010: 82n152). The typical iconography of the Pietà can be seen in figure 47. Moreover, there are internal cues in the text to suggest the use of a sculpture of Christ. When Mary holds Christ in her lap, she implores the audience to keep 'this crucifixe stille in your mynd' (*B*.717). The

word ‘crucifixe’ is suggestive here; it is commonly applied to images (*MED* s.v. ‘cruficix, n.’ senses 1 and 2; Kopania 2010: 82n151).

Why would the play have demanded a sculpture with moving arms specifically? Early in the Bodley *Burial*, Christ must be spread out on the cross, as indicated by the fact that ‘Altera Maria’ wants to ‘finde some gude waye | This *crucified* body down to take’ (*B*.375–76; emphasis added). Later in the Bodley *Burial*, however, Christ’s arms must rest by his side when he lies in Mary’s ‘lappe’ in the Pietà position (*B*.623). More broadly, it is well known that animated sculptures of Christ with moving arms were employed in medieval English theatre. Specifically, such sculptures were sometimes used in theatricalized liturgical ceremonies. For example, the liturgical Barking Abbey plays (c.1404) evidently demanded an animated sculpture of Christ that could be detached from the cross for the *Deposito crucis* (Kopania 2010: 15, 284; Sheingorn 1987: 26–27).

The Boxley Rood of Grace also warrants brief discussion here. This particular English animated sculpture of Christ was not used in plays but was instead a devotional object, housed in the Cistercian abbey to which it owes its name. It evidently required an operator to produce its infamously lifelike movements (Butterworth 2005: 125). In 1538, the object was branded as idolatrous and deceptive and it was thus publicly destroyed, an act of iconoclasm that has received much scholarly attention (Aston 1989: 56–57; Davidson 1989: 95–97; Marshall 1995; Marshall 2003; Reilly 2011: 19–23; White 1993: 36–37). The Boxley Rood’s precise range of motion remains unclear; indeed, its movements were almost certainly exaggerated after its destruction (Groeneveld 2007: 18). It was probably able to move its eyes, mouth, and head (Kopania 2009: 143; Kopania 2010: 284). In sum, the Boxley Rood and the Barking Abbey Plays confirm that animated sculptures of Christ existed in late medieval England.

Although no English animated sculptures of Christ are extant today, Kamil Kopania has identified over one hundred surviving examples from elsewhere in medieval Europe, extending earlier cataloguing efforts (Kopania 2010: 246–82; Taubert and Taubert 1969; Taubert 2015: 38–53). Three such sculptures are depicted in figures 48–50; two from Italy and one from Germany. These photographs have been taken in such a way as to foreground the moveable shoulder joint. Arguably the most remarkable of these sculptures is the Döbeln *Mirakelmann* (figures 50–51), which has a beard made from human hair (Kopania 2010: 254). At this stage, it should be stressed that no two animated sculptures of Christ look the same. Even the sculptures presented here differ in their dimensions and capacity for movement. The Döbeln sculpture is 1900 mm tall and has a wide range of moveable parts including arms, legs, elbows, and head, whereas the Santa Maria Novella sculpture is just 940 mm tall and only has moveable arms (Kopania 2010: 254, 265). Moreover, it is impossible to know how closely a sculpture used in a performance of the Bodley *Burial* would have resembled any of these individual examples—assuming, of course, that the enigmatic play was ever performed.

In sum, a performance of the Bodley *Burial* would almost certainly have required an animated sculpture of Christ, similar in functionality if not in exact appearance to those in figures 48–51. What are the tactile implications of this material context? Although spectators were unlikely to have been able to touch the sculpture during the performance itself, they could imagine how the object *would* feel in their hands. To open up this argument, it is helpful to consider recent research on materiality and modern museums. Sandra H. Dudley argues that the sense of touch is implicated when gazing upon an object:

> Looking at an object in a gallery, one is […] usually prevented from also touching, smelling, hearing or tasting it […]. I can, though, imagine some of these things. That is, I may add other sensory elements to the visual even if they have to be imagined, intuited or remembered. […] In the museum, I

> might involuntarily add some sensory dimensions further to the visual, automatically suffusing my sight experience of an oil painting with an intuited and probably subconscious sense of the roughness of its visually evident three-dimensional surface, for example.
>
> (Dudley 2009: 9)

Although visitors may not be able to touch the object in front of their eyes, they can nonetheless imagine what it would be *like* to touch that object. Consciously or subconsciously, the visitor's tactile knowledge and expectations inform their visual experience of the museum.

In many respects, the sense of touch is culturally conditioned. Today's visitors assume that museums are places of tactile restraint—though museums are increasingly working to disrupt this sensory expectation (Classen 2017: 115–41). By contrast, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, visitors had no such tactile inhibitions and expected to be able to handle exhibits (Classen 2017: 117). In other respects, however, the sense of touch is instinctive, transcending time and space. For example, just as today's museumgoers supplement their visual experience with tactile knowledge, so too sight could be informed by touch in late medieval England. This is suggested by the following passage from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (fourteenth century):

> Then þe gome in þe grene grayþed hym swyþe,
> Gederez vp hys grymme tole, Gawayn to smyte;
> With alle þe bur in his body he ber hit on lofte,
> Munt as maȝtyly as marre hym he wolde.
> Hade hit dryuen adoun as dreȝ as he atled,
> Þer hade ben ded of his dynt þat doȝty watz euer.
> Bot Gawayn on þat giserne glyfte hym bysyde,
> As hit com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende,
> And schranke a lytel wyth þe schulderes for þe scharp yrne.
>
> (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: 289–90, lines 2259–67)

> Then the man in green quickly prepared himself, heaves up his grim weapon, to smite Gawain; with all the strength in his body he lifted it on high, aimed at him as powerfully as if he intended to destroy him. Had it hurtled down as forcibly as he pretended, he who was ever brave [i.e. Gawain] would have died there from his blow. But Gawain glanced sideways at that battle-axe as it came gliding down to destroy him in a flash, and shrank a little with his shoulders on account of the sharp iron.
>
> (Andrew and Waldron eds 2007: enclosed CD-ROM file, page 134)

Sir Gawain flinches ('schranke') in response to glancing ('glyfte') at the Green Knight's sword coming down (*MED* s.v. 'shrinken, v.' sense 4.a; *MED* s.v. 'gliffen, v.' sense 2.a). He can imagine how the sharp blade *would* feel against his skin, and reacts instinctively to the perception of imminent pain. Much like Dudley's museumgoers, Sir Gawain in the fourteenth century infers how an object would feel just by looking at it—albeit in an immediately threatening context. Sir Gawain's visual experience is informed by tactile expectations: the eyes see what the skin already knows. Such tactile knowledge may derive from prior experience, imagination, or a combination of both.

This perceptual phenomenon has to be taken into account when considering the role of touch in medieval spectatorship. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the sculpture in the Bodley *Burial* could have seemed like a book in the distance, to be looked at but not touched.[10] Yet simply by virtue of being a three-dimensional object, the sculpture would have awakened spectators' tactile expectations about texture. To clarify this idea, it is helpful to return to the animated sculptures of Christ discussed above. The toned stomachs of the Italian sculptures in figures 48 and 49 look as if they would feel smooth. The beard of the Döbeln sculpture in figure 51 looks as if it would feel prickly. No matter how exactly the Bodley sculpture looked, it would undoubtedly have awakened some tactile expectations within the spectators—especially those who were closest to it and therefore most able to see its textures and contours.

However, medieval spectators watching the Bodley *Burial* need not have relied solely on their imagination to appreciate how the animated sculpture of Christ before their eyes would have felt. Their visual experience of the object would also have been

[10] Intriguingly, some medieval animated sculptures of Christ also shared material resemblances with books. For example, the Döbeln sculpture was covered with parchment, while the Boxley Rood was evidently constructed from paper. If the sculpture used in the Bodley *Burial* likewise shared material resemblance to books, this may well have enhanced the impression that Christ was a book in the distance during performance. This, of course, can only be conjecture. On the materiality of the Döbeln and Boxley sculptures, see respectively Kopania 2010: 254; Kopania 2009: 144.

informed by any previous tactile encounters with the sculpture. This requires some explanation. Kopania has rightly reprimanded theatre scholars for focusing exclusively on the dramaturgical functions of animated sculptures of Christ, forgetting that 'Christ figures taken down from a cross could be analysed as works of art which functioned inside the church throughout the entire liturgical year' (2010: 28). The sculpture used in the Bodley plays, for example, was 'presumably […] a cult object, permanently exhibited within the interior of the Carthusian church, where the play was staged' (Kopania 2010: 161). I agree, albeit with the caveat that we cannot be certain that the play and thus its sculpture belonged to a monastic house (see p. 194 above).

From a tactile point of view, it is significant that a sculpture used in the Bodley *Burial* would probably have been in the church all year. This is because we know that the sense of touch could play an important role in the use of sculptures in worship in medieval English churches. Indeed, the early fifteenth-century Wycliffite *Tretyse of Ymagis* laments the popularity of tactile worship of statues and sculptures:

> þe puple is foul disceyuyd by veyn trist in þes ymagis. For summe lewid folc wenen […] þat þis ymage of þe crucifix be Crist hymsilf, or þe seynt þat þe ymage is þere sett for lickenesse. And þerfore þei seyn 'þe swete rode of Bromholme', […] 'oure dere Lauedy of Walsyngham', but nouȝt 'oure Lauedy of heuene', ny 'oure lord Iesu Crist of heuene', but cleuen sadly strokande and kyssand þese olde stones and stokkis, layying doun hore grete offryngis, and maken avowis riȝt þere to þes dede ymagis to come þe nexst ȝeer agayn, as ȝif þei weren Crist and oure Lauedy and Ion Baptist and Thomas of Caunterbery and siche oþer.
>
> (Hudson ed 1978: 87)

This passage is well known in the context of fifteenth-century image debates (Gayk 2010: 179; Varnam 2015: 216–17). It anticipates the concerns of sixteenth century reformers to be discussed below, who would likewise stress that images were not equivalent to the sacred body they represented and that tactile worship of sculptures was therefore misguided at best and idolatrous at worst. When the *Tretyse of Ymagis* was written, however, the latter practice was evidently still pervasive. The obvious tactile words here

are ‘strokande’ and ‘kyssand’, but note also the verb ‘cleuen’, which means ‘To stick or adhere to’ (*MED* s.v. ‘cleven, v.1’ sense 1.a).

Of course, it is highly unlikely that all medieval sculptures received equal levels of tactile attention. In this context, it is helpful to consider a passage from *The Book of Margery Kempe* that is already quite well known (Gibson 1989: 15–16; McNamer 2010: 194; Varnam 2015: 210–12). Strikingly, Margery recounts how she ‘desyryd many tymes þat þe Crucifix xuld losyn hys handys fro þe crosse & halsyn hir in tokyn of lofe’ (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 14). In Laura Varnam’s words, this is the moment when Margery ‘*sees* the crucifix in her parish church in King’s Lynn’ (2015: 210; emphasis added). This does indeed seem to have been a visual experience only. Margery *wants* to touch the sculpture and indeed for the sculpture to come alive and touch her back; the word ‘halsyn’ here means ‘to embrace’ (*MED* s.v. ‘halsen, v.2’, sense 1.a.). Nevertheless, the longing tone of this passage suggests that Margery may not have been able to touch the sculpture at all—perhaps it was physically out of her reach.

In the absence of further information, it is impossible to say whether the Bodley sculpture would have experienced tactile veneration during the year. Nevertheless, this possibility cannot be ruled out. Any such tactile experience would have informed the visual experience of watching the Bodley *Burial*, whether the spectator was conscious of this or not. This discussion of touch, sculpture, and vision in the Bodley *Burial* has wider implications for the senses and the staging of medieval plays, suggesting that scholars need to think beyond haptic spectatorship when evaluating the role of touch in audience experience. Not only was it possible for spectators to touch *with* the gaze, but tactile expectations of texture would also have been aroused *by* the gaze. These expectations, stemming from imagination, memory, or a combination of both, would have contributed to the spectator’s richly multisensory experience of the play unfolding before their eyes.

Sensory Ruptures in the Sixteenth Century: Dead Images and Sacred Bodies

Thus far, the Bodley *Burial* has proved a useful tool through which to explore the relationship between touch and audience experience, furthering the questions raised in Chapter Three about how far spectators could engage with medieval plays on a tactile level. Once again, it has become clear that medieval plays enabled their audiences to engage with the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox by engaging with Christ's flesh on a tactile level. However, a wider point also needs to be made here about what makes the medieval touch paradox distinctly *medieval*.

In this chapter, my discussion of medieval theatre has been guided by the premise that touch could unlock the continuous presence of Christ in material objects, including books and sculptures. However, this practice assumed a tangible equivalence between sign and signified—an idea that became especially problematic during the Reformation. It is helpful here to turn to Gary Waller:

> At the core of [early reformers'] attacks was the belief that the sign and the signified should be kept separate, that the material world could not contain divinity, and they rejected and feared any suggestion that human instrumentality, the manipulation of objects and the material world – whether the bread of the Mass or images and relics – could influence or control the supernatural and give material things such as bread and wine 'a life of their own.'
>
> (Waller 2011: 6)

Most obviously, attempts to renegotiate the relationship between sign and signified and between material object and sacred body had implications for the Eucharist. When the priest said 'Hoc est enim corpus meum' (i.e. 'This is my body'), in what way was Christ's body and blood present in the bread and wine? However, it is not my intention here to examine sixteenth-century Eucharistic controversies and indeed their medieval origins, as Jay Zysk has done (2017: 19–52). Rather, my concern is how anxieties about the relationship between sign and signified had implications for religious images, especially sculptures.

Cromwell's 1538 Injunctions to the Clergy claims that if people use 'Images' for anything other than 'remembraunces', then 'they commytte Idolatrye […] to the great daunger of theyr soules' (fol. 1r). Images, then, were not tangibly equivalent to the bodies they represented—they should serve only as a *reminder* of that body. Compare also John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*: '*dead images* are not to be prayed vnto: for they haue neyther eares to here withall, nor tong to speake withal, nor harte to thynke withal' (1563: V, 1311; emphasis added). Such anxieties about the lifelessness of images were not new, having been anticipated by the Lollards in the fifteenth century (see p. 213 above). Nevertheless, opposition to images gained new legislative force in England from the 1530s onwards.[11]

If images were dead, then the tactile veneration of sculptures was idolatrous and required eradication. Notably, the 1538 Injunctions also explicitly condemned 'kyssing or lyckyng' of images, two acts that cultivated 'ydolatrye & superstition' (Cromwell 1538: fol. 1r; see also Duffy 2005: 407). The tactile worship of sculptures in churches was further undermined by waves of iconoclasm, notably in the late 1540s. Much has already been written about the nature and scope of image destruction in Tudor England (Aston 1988; Aston 1989; Duffy 2005: 381, 451–53, 462; Haigh 1993: 169–70; Reilly 2011). My particular interest is the impact of the iconoclasm on the sense of touch: people could not kiss sculptures in churches if those sculptures were no longer present. Iconoclasm was not without precedent in medieval England (Aston 1988: 133–43, Stanbury 2002). Nevertheless, iconoclastic fervor reached new heights during the English Reformation. Ultimately, new injunctions hostile to the tactile veneration of images in churches and iconoclastic zeal combined to undermine the use of touch as a pathway to the holy bodies

[11] For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between Lollard and Reformation anxieties about images, see Aston 1988; O'Connell 2000: 46–50.

represented by church sculptures. In the process, the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox received a significant blow.

The following section will explore how early modern theatre, specifically Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (c.1609–1611), responded to the changing relationship between touch, sculpture, and the sacred. In the final scene, a statue comes to life. I put forward a new reading of the statue scene, arguing that it offered contemporary audiences an ambivalent investigation into touch's changing status. On the one hand, a performance of this play in early seventeenth-century England had the potential to evoke nostalgia for a pre-Reformation mode of touch that was capable of unlocking the bodily presence of a sculpture. Nevertheless, the scene's dialogue raises uncomfortable questions about touch as a gateway to superstition and idolatry.

Before advancing this new reading, it is important to stress that *The Winter's Tale* (c.1609–1611) was not the first English play since the Bodley *Burial* (c.1520) to feature or otherwise recall a humanoid object such as a sculpture, effigy, puppet, etc. I shall now provide a brief overview of relevant plays, progressing chronologically rather than by the type of object concerned. I do not claim to provide a detailed survey here, akin to Sarah Outterson-Murphy's work on early modern statue plays (Outterson-Murphy 2015: 159–216, 228–29). Rather, I seek to briefly situate the Bodley *Burial* and *The Winter's Tale* in their broader theatrical context, recognizing them as just two of many English plays from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in which humanoid objects appeared on stage or were otherwise called to mind. Against this rich theatrical backdrop, I will then explain why I have singled out *The Winter's Tale* for discussion.

The first play of note is Lewis Wager's *Life and Repentaunce of Mary Magdalene*, which was first printed in 1566 and probably written c.1547–1553 (Atkin 2013a: 103–04). Tamara Atkin, building upon the work of Patricia Badir, argues that 'the

play presents the sinful Magdalene as an abused image', such as a statue of a medieval saint bedecked with clothes (Atkin 2013a: 103, 110; Badir 1999: 8). Further, both scholars note that Mary Magdalene is instructed to make her 'eies roll' in her head, echoing the operation of the Boxley Rood of Grace—an animated sculpture I discussed above on p. 209 (Atkin 2013a: 112–15; Badir 1999: 8; White ed 1992: 20, line 616).

Moving on to the 1570s and 1580s, Italian puppet theatre was 'rapidly absorbed by the English theatrical community' (Barasch 2004: 164). Approximately a decade later, Robert Greene would write a play featuring a different kind of humanoid object. In his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (c.1589), Roger Bacon creates a talking brass head, recently described as a 'Clockwork Automaton' by Todd Andrew Borlik (2011: 135). Later still, the final scene of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (c.1591–1593) seems to demand that an actor pretend to be a wooden effigy of the eponymous character (Anderson 2014: 586). In Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* (c.1606–1607), Gloriana's skull effectively becomes a 'horrible puppet' (Gibbons ed 2008: xvii). Vindice is the puppeteer: he dresses Gloriana's skull in clothes and puts poison on the lips so that one kiss will kill the Duke.

Two plays roughly contemporary with Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* also warrant mention. Puppets are central to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), as Kristina E. Caton has recently discussed (2013). The most obvious example, of course, is Littlewit's puppet play in act five. Further, John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (c.1613–1614) is well known for its obsession with funerary monuments (Bergeron 1978; Chalk 2011). Effigies are called to mind early in the play when the Duchess denies that she is a figure 'cut in alabaster' kneeling 'at my husband's tomb' (1.1.455–56). Later, an explicit stage direction calls for '*artificial figures of Antonio and his children, appearing as if*

they were dead' (4.1.55.s.d.). With these figures, 'framed in wax' Ferdinand cruelly hopes convince the Duchess that her loved ones are dead (4.1.114).

Given that humanoid objects appeared frequently in English theatrical culture throughout the sixteenth century and into the early seventeenth century, why have I chosen to foreground *The Winter's Tale*? The answer lies in this play's emphasis on tactile experience. Of all the texts above, *The Winter's Tale* yields the most thought-provoking discussion of the shifting relationship between touch, the sacred, and material objects in England. The way in which Leontes, Perdita, and Paulina talk about touching Hermione's statue harks back to and simultaneously critiques medieval tactile worship of sculptures; their dialogue reinvigorates while also shutting down the medieval conception of touch as a pathway to the sacred body represented by three-dimensional images.

The Statue Scene in *The Winter's Tale*: A Touch of Nostalgia?

It would be reductive to claim that people in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England adhered either to 'traditional faith' or to 'reformed faith'. Rather, the prevailing scholarly view is that 'post-Reformation English religious identity can best be understood as a spectrum', one which accommodated many nuanced positions (Jensen 2004: 281). Church papists, for example, adhered to the new religion only superficially, attending reformed church services but remaining inwardly devoted to the traditional faith (Walsham 1999). Where did Shakespeare fit in this complex religious landscape? What were his personal religious views, and what attitudes towards religion can be found in his works? As John D. Cox (2006) has shown, much scholarly attention has been devoted to these questions. Several scholars have suggested that Shakespeare was religiously conservative, with Clare Asquith going so far as to claim that there is 'dissident language' encoded in his plays (2005: xvi). Others, however, suggest a more nuanced approach.

Jean-Christophe Mayer stresses that Shakespeare 'no doubt' had a '*mixed* upbringing in Stratford, both Catholic (at home and possibly with his schoolmasters) and Protestant, when he went to church, was forced to absorb the language of the Book of Homilies and read the Geneva Bible' (2006: 5; emphasis original). Accordingly, Mayer has argued that 'religion for Shakespeare was not so much a matter of systematic allegiance as one of *constant* debating and questioning', an idea that informs his discussion of the history plays (2006: 5; emphasis original). I shall now approach *The Winter's Tale* through the same lens, remaining sensitive to the ways in which Shakespeare questions but refuses to resolve the relationship between touch, faith, and sculpture.

The plot of *The Winter's Tale* can be summarized as follows. King Leontes fears that his pregnant wife Hermione has been unfaithful and is carrying another man's child. Leontes sends Hermione to prison, where she gives birth. Paulina, Hermione's loyal friend, tells Leontes that Hermione has died. The baby, Perdita, is abandoned in Bohemia. Sixteen years later, Leontes and Perdita are reunited. Paulina shows the pair what she says is a statue of Hermione, which comes to life. Paulina is initially reluctant to let Leontes touch the sculpture, but eventually invites him to place his hand upon it (5.3.107). He exclaims 'O, she's warm!' and the couple embrace (5.3.109).

Previous scholars have already noted that *The Winter's Tale* evokes pre-Reformation faith. According to Phebe Jensen, *The Winter's Tale* has an 'anti-iconoclastic aesthetic agenda, one that aligns the play with a Catholic past and present' (2004: 281). Ruth Vanita has argued that *The Winter's Tale* '[mourns] the loss of […] popular elements of the old religion', and she compares Hermione's 'preservation and revelation as a statue after sixteen years' to the way that parishioners hid away church images in the hope that they could one day be reinstated (2000: 311, 320). Vanita's comments also make clear that there is an obvious link between Hermione's statue and

medieval religious sculpture. Historically, Hermione has been likened to a sculpture of the Virgin (Dunn-Hensley 2010: 194–97; Grantley 1986: 34; Lim 2001: 319–20; McCoy 2015: 215; O'Connor 2003: 377; Waller 2011: 177). This is a valid interpretation, not least because the reference to Hermione's statue as 'Lady' (5.3.44) recalls 'Our Lady of [Location, e.g. Walsingham]', a popular way of referring to medieval sculptures of Mary. Nevertheless, in my view, the statue scene also has links with medieval sculptures of Christ, and, more specifically, the animated sculptures of Christ discussed in this chapter.

Hermione's parallels with Christ are well established (Benkert 2015: 47; Grantley 1986: 31–32; Shell 2015: 204). In brief, Hermione resembles Christ not only because she is an innocent person who is wrongly put on trial, but also because she experiences a resurrection that leads to human redemption. Specifically, it is Leontes who is redeemed when Hermione makes her Christ-like return from the dead; at the end of the play, the king apologises for his 'ill suspicion' (5.3.150). For context, overt theatrical depictions of Christ had become increasingly problematic during the Reformation (O'Connell 2000: 89–115; Walker 1991: 192–94). After the Reformation, Christ still made an appearance in 'semi-private performance in households sympathetic to the old religion'—but Shakespeare's plays, on the other hand, '[make] little or no attempt to stage the sacred' (Shell 2010: 43). However, this did not preclude Shakespeare from *alluding* to divine figures, as he does in *The Winter's Tale* with Hermione's Christ-like resurrection.

Further, the statue scene has strong Eucharistic implications. Alice Dailey has noted that '[t]he way in which Hermione is displayed is similar […] to the consecrated Corpus Christi, which was elevated on an altar and often hidden behind a curtain or screen' (2007: 134). Dailey adds that 'Paulina operates as a priest figure who leads her congregation in a ritual of Holy Communion' (2007: 135). The extent to which the statue scene specifically resembles a *Catholic* mass has been the subject of some debate (Zysk

2017: 317–18). For my purposes, the fact that the scene recalls a mass *at all* makes the resemblances between Hermione and Christ all the more compelling. It is only a small step, then, to link Hermione with *sculptures* of Christ—though surprisingly, this step has never been taken. Logically, animated sculptures should make for a thought-provoking comparison, given that Hermione's sculpture in *The Winter's Tale* moves.

There are four points of similarity between Hermione's statue and medieval animated sculptures of Christ. The first is dramaturgical function. Hermione's statue is central to *The Winter's Tale*, just as animated sculptures of Christ were demanded by the texts of the Bodley *Burial* and the Barking plays. The second point of similarity between Hermione and medieval animated sculptures is their shared Eucharistic implications. We have just seen that the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale* recalls Holy Communion, whereby Hermione is the elevated and, at times, visually obscured host, Paulina is the priest, and Leontes and Perdita are the congregation. For comparison, some medieval animated sculptures of Christ had receptacles for hosts (Kopania 2010: 106). The third point of similarity is the sculptures' capacity for lifelike movement. At Paulina's command, the statue of Hermione 'stirs' (5.3.103), a spectacle so realistic that Leontes is forced to question whether it is 'magic' (5.3.110). Magic is a notoriously loaded concept in the statue scene of *The Winter's Tale*, evoking Catholicism (Dunn-Hensley 2010: 196; Roberts 1999: 134–35). As Gareth Roberts explains, reformist writers saw 'popery […] as idolatrous, *magical*, a religion of false miracles' (1999: 134; emphasis added). Similar fears, of course, motivated the destruction of the animated sculpture of Christ at Boxley Abbey (see p. 209 above).

Fourthly, and most importantly for my purposes, the sense of touch allows both types of sculpture to seem like human bodies rather than material objects. When Leontes places his hand on the statue in front of him and exclaims: 'O, she's warm!' (5.3.109), he

relies on touch to confirm that Hermione is living flesh and not stone (Tribble 2010: 79). More specifically, Leontes depends on the fact that touch can discern temperature in order to verify that Hermione is human. A thought-provoking parallel can be made here with the moment when the Virgin Mary asks to hold Christ's body in the Bodley *Burial*:

> MARYE VIRGYNE: But, gud frendes, here intreyt not ye,
> But be content, and suffere mee
> Ons yit for to hold,
> For to holde here in this place,
> And in myn armys for to embrace,
> This body, which now is cold,
> This bludy body woundit so sore,
> Of my swet son—John, I aske no more!
> (*B*.592–99)

Like Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, the Virgin Mary appeals to the sense of touch, specifically its ability to discern the difference between hold and cold, in order to convey a sense that the object in her hands is in fact a human body—though in this case, a cold, dead one instead of a warm, living one.

Where the Bodley *Burial* is concerned, it is significant that the follow-up performance (i.e. the Bodley *Resurrection*) required a human actor rather than a sculpture to represent Christ. If a medieval spectator watched both plays, they would have effectively witnessed the sculpture in Mary's hands transform into a fleshly body. Jesus's words 'I am resene fro deth' (*R*.670) in the Bodley *Resurrection* could thus have taken on added significance, referring not only Christ's biblical resurrection but also implicating the awakening of the sculpture from the foregoing play. Of course, the human actor in the Bodley *Resurrection* could not claim to be Jesus's *real* body. Nevertheless, during a performance of the Bodley *Resurrection*, the inanimate sculpture touched in the previous Bodley *Burial* play would have effectively come to life, thereby echoing the interdependent relationship between touch, materiality, and the sacred in medieval culture. In a similar way, Hermione's Christ-like sculpture effectively comes to life when Leontes touches her in *The Winter's Tale*.

A caveat must be made here. There is some uncertainty about whether Hermione's statue is, in fact, a statue at all in act 5 scene 3 (Waldron 2012: 211–12; Wojciehowski 2014: 300). It is possible that Hermione is simply *pretending* to be a sculpture. According to this line of thought, Paulina lied about Hermione's death and hid her away for sixteen years before the dramatic reunion. In practical theatrical terms, of course, this makes little difference: the actor must pretend to be a sculpture regardless of whether Hermione is performing the same conceit or is an actual sculpture awaiting miraculous animation. Thus, even if we assume that Hermione is still alive and merely pretending to be an inanimate object at this point in the play, her behavior nevertheless retains dramaturgical similarities with medieval animated sculptures of Christ.

I am certainly not suggesting that Shakespeare specifically had animated sculptures of Christ in mind when writing *The Winter's Tale*, nor am I claiming that contemporary audiences would have drawn such a connection between the two. Moreover, the analogy between the two is far from perfect. As animated sculptures of Christ represented a dead body, they needed to be controlled by operators or actors.[12] By contrast, the statue of Hermione has agency over her own movement—regardless of whether we assume that the queen is *pretending* to be a miraculous moving statue at this point or is *actually* a miraculous moving statue. Nevertheless, in both cases, the sense of touch is an access point to the human body represented by the material object, whether the body in question is living or dead. There is, of course, a certain irony in the fact that a performance of the Bodley *Burial* required a sculpture to represent a human body, whereas *The Winter's Tale* required a human actor to portray a sculpture.

Why are the parallels between Hermione's statue and medieval animated sculptures of Christ important? Approaching *The Winter's Tale* with the medieval

[12] As a caveat, animated sculptures of Christ in early English theatre did not always represent Christ's *dead* body. Such sculptures were evidently useful for staging Resurrection plays too, in which Christ was required to climb out of the sepulchre. See Williamson 2009: 45.

relationship between touch, sculpture, and the sacred in mind allows us to enrich our understanding of Paulina's line: 'It is required | You do awake your faith' (5.3.94–95). As Walter Lim has discussed, 'faith' can have multiple meanings here:

> Faith in what? For Leontes, it is faith in the reality of miracles, the coming back to life of a queen who has been dead sixteen long years. For William Shakespeare's audience, it is faith tied to the willing suspension of disbelief, a readiness to accept that theater is capable of representing just about anything.
>
> (Lim 2001: 317)

I would add that the lines might also be understood as an invitation to resurrect modes of touch associated with pre-Reformation faith, i.e. to return to a time when kissing and stroking a sculpture unlocked its bodily presence.

For context, scholars have noted that Shakespeare's literary works betray nostalgia for the pre-Reformation past—though without necessarily meaning that Shakespeare himself adhered to the traditional religion (Shell 2015: 6, 79–119). The opening of Sonnet 73 has attracted attention in this regard:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
>
> (Taylor et al eds 2016: 2848, lines 1–4)

As Eamon Duffy (2003) has discussed, this passage is obviously sentimental about the material remains of England's monastic buildings, which were destroyed during the Dissolution. To contextualize the nostalgic tone that permeates sonnet 73, Duffy turns to the following comments made by James Pilkington (Bishop of Durham) in 1562, condemning people reluctant to accept religious change:

> 'What shall I do at Church? I may not have my beads; the church is like a waste barn: there is no images nor saints to worship and make curtsey to: little God in the box is gone: there is nothing but a little reading or preaching, that I cannot tell what it means: I had as lief keep me at home:' This is a woeful saying.
>
> (Quoted after Duffy 2003: 45)

What interests me about this passage is the suggestion that modes of touch associated with pre-Reformation faith were triggers for religious nostalgia. 'I may not have my beads' refers to rosary worship, the practice of using beads on a string to count a repeated prayer sequence. These personal devotional objects were intensely tactile. Note how Henry and Johanna Smyth are depicted holding their beads while praying in figure 52, a late fifteenth-century velvet panel embroidered in England. Nevertheless, as many of the prayers associated with the medieval rosary were Marian in nature, rosary worship came under attack during the Reformation (Duffy 2005: 450). Rosary worship was a habitual tactile activity, and so its elimination evidently left some people, including those condemned by Pilkington, feeling sensorially bereft and nostalgic.

Is this the same context in which we should understand the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale*? Was the play evoking nostalgia for another mode of touch associated with the traditional religion? Specifically, was *The Winter's Tale* reminiscing about a time before the Reformation, when touch offered a pathway to the holy bodies represented by sculpture? In fact, the situation is not quite this simple. We have to remember here that *The Winter's Tale* remains ambiguous about whether Hermione is actually a statue or is just pretending to be one. As such, Shakespeare allows for the possibility—yet never fully commits to the idea—that Leontes' touch helps to bring Hermione's Christ-like sculpture to life. Indeed, the scene cannot evoke nostalgia for the medieval relationship between touch, sculpture, and the sacred if one assumes that Hermione was never a sculpture to begin with. By keeping Hermione's ontological status uncertain, then, Shakespeare tempers the nostalgic potential of the scene.

More broadly, the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale* is hardly a straightforward endorsement of modes of touch associated with the traditional faith. This much is clear from fact that Perdita feels the need to defend her desire to kiss Hermione's sculpture:

PERDITA: And give me leave,
And do not say ‘tis superstition, that
I kneel and then implore her blessing. Lady,
Dear Queen, that ended when I but began,
Give me that hand of yours to kiss.
(5.3.42–46)

The word ‘superstition’ in this passage is loaded, aligning Perdita’s touch with Catholicism and idolatry (Dunn-Hensley 2010: 196; Vanita 2000: 321; Tribble 2010: 77–78). Paulina’s curt rejoinder is equally suggestive:

PAULINA: O, patience!
The statue is but newly fixed; the colour’s
Not dry.
(5.3.46–48)

Following as it does immediately after Perdita’s comments about superstition, Paulina’s tactile prohibition recalls the ban on superstitious kissing of icons expressed in Cromwell’s Injunctions of 1538 (see p. 216 above). Paulina similarly thwarts Leontes’ desire to kiss the sculpture:

LEONTES: What fine chisel
Could ever yet cut breath? Let no man mock me,
For I will kiss her.
PAULINA: Good my lord, forbear.
The ruddiness upon her lip is wet.
You’ll mar it if you kiss it, stain your own
With oily painting. Shall I draw the curtain?
(5.3.78–83)

Paulina’s castigations of Perdita and Leontes can be read in three different ways. Firstly, if we assume that Hermione was never really a sculpture to begin with, then Paulina’s tactile prohibitions help her to control when exactly Leontes and Perdita discover the truth about Hermione’s death (or, rather, survival). Secondly, if Hermione *is* to be understood as a sculpture, then it is possible to argue that ‘Paulina is reminding the characters, and the audience, not to treat an object like a person’ (Williamson 2009: 66). If this argument is taken to its natural conclusion, then Paulina is the voice who shuts down a mode of transformative touch associated with the traditional faith, connecting it with idolatry and superstition. Thirdly, Paulina’s comments forge an inescapable link

between touch and defilement. Note especially the words ‘mar’ and ‘stain’ (5.3.82). Paulina’s words can thus be read as a commentary on the necessity of protecting material objects from defiling human contact. This has obvious echoes with Richard de Bury’s fears about the damage posed to books by unclean hands, discussed above (p. 199).

If the second and third of these interpretations are taken together, then *The Winter’s Tale* effectively presents the medieval touch paradox in action: Perdita and Leontes express an intense desire to touch the Christ-like sculpture in order to unlock its sacred bodily presence, but their hands and lips risk defiling the object in front of them. It should hardly be surprising, then, that the statue scene in *The Winter’s Tale* echoes John 20, the passage of scripture to which this thesis has repeatedly returned when exploring the medieval touch paradox. Scholars have noted that the statue scene echoes the *Noli me tangere* (Grantley 1986: 33; Lewis 2002: 67–70). By analogy, when Leontes *does* eventually touch the sculpture, his experiences echo the Incredulity of Thomas. Interestingly, however, Jay Zysk rejects such a comparison to Doubting Thomas:

> When Leontes and Perdita reach out to touch the statue, they do so not like Doubting Thomas, who requires tactile proof to shore up his faith, but as confirmed believers who already know that Hermione is living flesh.
>
> (Zysk 2017: 221)

Leontes may not actively seek out tactile proof of Hermione’s resurrection, but the feel of her skin nevertheless provides evidence that she is alive: ‘O, she’s warm!’ (5.3.109). Moreover, as I stressed in the introduction to this thesis (p. 38), Thomas’s touch served functions beyond the acquisition of evidence. In the context of late medieval affective piety, Doubting Thomas represented a model for intimate union with Christ. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes recalls precisely this Thomas: the man who has an emotional and corporeal union with a person he thought to be lost, but now finds resurrected.

In sum, *The Winter’s Tale* presents two conflicting viewpoints on touch, sculpture, and the sacred. On the one hand, the tactile worship of sculptures is coded as a

form of 'superstition' (5.3.43). However, the play simultaneously permits nostalgia for a medieval world in which sculptures effectively came to life in the hands of the believers—a time when material objects offered a profoundly affective and tangible union with the sacred. We can see this sensory world at its pre-Reformation peak in the Bodley *Burial* (c.1520). As discussed above, Mary implicitly delivers a tactile lesson to the audience, encouraging them to touch devotional books as if such material objects were in fact Christ's real flesh. Further, the sculpture of Christ in the Bodley *Burial*, devoutly touched by Mary and others, would have effectively come to life during the subsequent Bodley *Resurrection* play. The Bodley Plays, then, can be situated in a specific sensory moment. They assume and promulgate an interdependent relationship between touch, the sacred, and material objects—a relationship that would struggle to survive after the Reformation.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has contributed to our understanding of the touch paradox in medieval theatre in two ways. Firstly, by comparing and contrasting the relationship between touch, sculpture, and sacred bodies in the Bodley *Burial* and *The Winter's Tale*, I have confirmed that theatre provides a unique insight into the collapse of the sacred side of the medieval touch paradox. The Bodley *Burial* (c.1520) invested the sense of touch with the power to unlock the presence of Christ within material objects that resemble him. Yet in *The Winter's Tale* (c.1609–1611), Shakespeare would approach the medieval practice of unlocking the bodily presence of a sculpture through touch with both nostalgia and scepticism, refusing to take a firm stance on whether this outmoded form of touch should be resurrected.

Chapter Four has also begun to complicate the idea that the role of touch in medieval spectatorship was limited to haptic vision. I have stressed that medieval

religious theatre included closet drama, and that touch could have played a crucial role when plays were received in this way. Handling the pages of the Bodley *Burial* could have helped the Christ as book metaphor come alive in the reader's personal 'performance' of the Passion. During live performances, too, spectators were in a position to do more than simply touch with the gaze. Consciously or subconsciously, watching a play evoked tactile expectations, whether these stemmed from the imagination or perhaps even from prior experiences with a prop.

Where live performance is concerned, my discussion of the role of touch in audience experience has thus once again revolved around the spectator's gaze; imagined or remembered tactile experiences had to be prompted by visual stimuli. The next chapter, however, will consider how a spectator's sense of touch could have been mediated by parts of the body other than the eyes during live performances. I will argue that playgoers could touch sacred space with their feet during the York Corpus Christi plays. Chapter Five will also consider the effects of crowding, as documentary evidence reveals that spectators watched the plays while standing shoulder to shoulder in the narrow streets of York.

Most obviously, Chapter Five will respond to Chapter Four by extending its discussion of touch and audience experience. Chapter Five will also build on Chapter Four in a second way, namely by paying further attention to the early modern afterlife of the medieval touch paradox with specific reference to theatrical culture. However, instead of examining the decline of the sacred half of the touch paradox, I will consider the longevity of its unclean counterpart. Specifically, I will draw parallels between medieval and early modern antitheatrical texts that express fears about sexual gratification when many bodies were gathered in one place to watch plays.

Chapter Five

Walking in Christ's Footsteps: Touching Jerusalem during the York Plays

> 'Going to the Feelies this evening, Henry?' enquired the Assistant Predestinator. 'I hear the new one at the Alhambra is first-rate. There's a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it's marvellous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects.'
>
> (Huxley [1932] 2007: 29)

In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley imagined a kind of cinema in which film has the power to physically touch its spectators.[1] In this fantasy realm, placing one's hands on 'metal knobs on the arms of your chair' unlocks a potent range of 'feely effects', including a titillating sensation on the lips (Huxley [1932] 2007: 146). It might seem surprising that a chapter on medieval theatre should open with a reference to Huxley's 'Feelies'. After all, *Brave New World* was written in the early 1930s, centuries after the plays in my corpus. Further, the 'Feelies' represent not a type of theatre, but instead a type of cinema. Moreover, the 'Feelies' were a product of Huxley's imagination, whereas medieval plays were a reality. Nevertheless, the 'Feelies' are a helpful way to set the tone for the final chapter of this thesis. In *Brave New World*, Huxley took an audio-visual medium and reimagined it as a tactile experience. In a comparable way, Chapter Five invites scholars to think beyond visual and auditory stimuli when discussing medieval spectatorship and to explore the role of immediate tactile stimuli for the skin. For the purposes of this chapter, the word *immediate* refers to sensory stimuli that occur during the course of a performance, rather than before or after that performance. A *tactile stimulus for the skin* affects body parts including the hands, the feet, and the shoulders,

[1] For a more detailed discussion of Huxley's 'Feelies', see Frost 2006.

bringing them into physical contact with an object or a human being. Of course, such stimuli could have been softened by clothing and shoes.

Chapter Five thus approaches the relationship between touch and audience experience in a different way than either of the two preceding chapters. Chapter Three focused on the sense of touch as mediated by the eyes rather than the skin, arguing that haptic spectatorship could have been especially resonant during *Noli me tangere* scenes. While Chapter Four did explore tactile stimuli for the skin, these stimuli would not have been *immediately* activated by a performance of the Bodley *Burial*. Rather, I suggested that spectators of this play might have been able to draw on previous physical encounters with the main prop. Chapter Five, by contrast, asks how medieval religious theatre appealed to the spectator's skin during the performance itself.

To answer this question, it is helpful to return to the York Plays, which offer more evidence about the practicalities of performance and spectatorship than any of the other texts in my corpus. It is commonly accepted that audience members could have experienced the York Plays from one of three different viewing positions (Lopez 2016: 57–58). Some spectators, like Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York (d.1500), were able to watch from the windows of buildings located on the play route (Meredith 1996: 109–11). Other spectators may have been able to make use of viewing scaffolds that had been specially erected near certain playing stations, though perhaps only in 1417 (Lopez 2016: 57–58; Meredith 2000: 35). Thirdly, many people watched the plays simply by standing on the streets of York, with Eileen White suggesting that there could have been about one hundred standing spectators per station (1987: 56). It is this final group of people that concern me in this chapter.

Consciously or subconsciously, standing spectators made a physical connection with the city of York through their feet. In my view, this simple act was potentially

loaded with devotional significance. Scholars have long recognized that the Corpus Christi plays effectively 'converted […] York into Jerusalem' (Stevens 1987: 66). Building on this idea, Chapter Five argues that standing in the streets of York during the Corpus Christi plays enabled spectators to have a surrogate experience of touching Jerusalem. Places in Jerusalem that had been touched by Christ's feet were invested with special significance in medieval culture and became important sites of pilgrimage, but the York Plays allowed spectators to engage with this landscape on a haptic level without ever leaving England. Indeed, walking around York effectively allowed audience members to walk in Christ's footsteps.

It therefore follows that the York Plays can be reconceptualized as a kind of virtual pilgrimage, a medieval phenomenon allowing people to travel to Jerusalem imaginatively rather than physically. In my view, touching the ground during the York Plays allowed medieval spectators to feel as if they were tangibly present in Jerusalem, without leaving their local streets. In this respect, the York Plays are also in a striking dialogue with modern virtual reality technology. I pay particular attention to the parallels between the York Plays and the recent film *Jesus VR: The Life of Christ* (2016), which allows its users to feel tangibly immersed in the Passion at Jerusalem without setting foot beyond their living room. Although parallels between the York Plays, virtual pilgrimage, and virtual reality are far from perfect, situating the York Plays in this context reminds us that medieval spectatorship could have been a dynamic, kinetic, and multisensory experience, appealing not only to the eyes and the ears but also the feet.

However, a discussion of immediate tactile stimuli for the skin during the York Plays cannot confine itself to the feet alone. The whole body potentially enabled spectators to forge a haptic pathway to a sacred time and place during the York Plays. Standing in a tight group of people in the narrow city streets, brushing shoulder to

shoulder with other spectators, could easily have complemented the sense that audience members were in fact the crowd witnessing the original biblical events. Nevertheless, being pressed in a tight crowd simultaneously risked opening up various sensory gateways for unclean touch. Civic records from York reveal medical concerns with crowding in times of plague, as bodies in close quarters were capable of spreading infection. Such close proximity to other flesh potentially posed a risk of moral as well as bodily contamination. Crowds, after all, can easily be used as a shield for sexual advances. Moreover, an association between theatre and sexual immorality can be traced from the classical period to the medieval period and even beyond.

Chapter Five, then, argues that the spectators who attended the York Corpus Christi plays could potentially experience both sides of the medieval touch paradox. On the one hand, spectators' feet effectively forged a surrogate connection with Jerusalem, a landscape filled with tangible traces of Christ's sacred body. At the same time, spectators crowded in the streets of late medieval York were in danger of experiencing unclean touch, including sexual defilement. This double bind harmonizes obviously with my earlier case study of the York *Incredulity of Thomas*. In the introduction to this thesis (pp. 33–48), I suggested that the doubting apostle in the York Plays could quite literally put his finger on the medieval touch paradox. By groping Christ's side wound, Thomas unlocked a sensory pathway to Christ's sacred flesh but also potentially evoked the illicit sexual acts that took place in nearby Grapecuntlane. In this final chapter, I suggest that spectators in medieval York were in a position to become both the best and the worst versions of this apostle. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that every spectator would have been touched—literally *and* emotionally—in a unique way by the plays in medieval York. I close this chapter by emphasizing factors that would have influenced

the individual's haptic experience of the York Plays, especially relative position in the crowd, attention span, and sobriety.

Chapter Five is a self-consciously exploratory piece. I suggest a horizon of possible sensory experiences and emotional reactions rather than making definitive claims about what any given spectator felt in their body or mind. In this respect, Chapter Five resonates with Clare Wright's recent work on audience experience during the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, which she describes as 'a thought experiment, an imaginative exercise' (2014: 161).

The Feet As Agents of Touch

Throughout this study, I have stressed that the sense of touch was understood to be present throughout the human body in the Middle Ages, and so it is imperative to acknowledge agents of touch beyond the hand. The most obvious examples have been the lips and genitalia, but the eyes too have warranted extensive discussion. However, I have yet to consider the feet. In this context, readers may remember John Trevisa's claim that the sense of touch resided 'principalliche in þe palmes of þe hondes and in þe soles of þe feet' (Seymour et al eds 1975–1988: I, 118; see pp. 8–9 above). The idea that the feet are important agents of touch can be found not only in medieval scholastic encyclopaedias, but also in literary culture. Consider John Audelay's *Five Wits*, a fifteenth-century carol urging sensory mortification. To protect the sense of hearing, the reader should 'turne away thyne ere | Fro ydil wordis, untrew talkyng' (Fein ed 2009: 178 lines 2–3). In the equivalent stanza on the sense of touch, where we might expect to find an admonition about the hand, Audelay urges the reader to 'Goveren thi fete in thi walkyng' (Fein ed 2009: 179 line 17).

Such connections between feet and touch find a striking echo in recent work in sensory studies. Cultural historian Tim Ingold has argued: 'it is surely through our feet, in contact with the ground (albeit mediated by footwear), that we are most fundamentally and continually "in touch" with our surroundings' (2004: 330). Hannah Macpherson (2009) discovered that blind and visually impaired people highlighted their feet when talking about the sense of touch and their ability to navigate the world. Finally, Tiffany Field reports that giving women foot massages when they were twenty weeks pregnant stimulated fetal movement, but this did not happen when the women received equivalent hand massages (2014: 126). Thus, in disciplines as varied as cultural history, disability studies, and medicine, scholars are increasingly recognizing that there is an important relationship between the feet and touch, an idea that resonates strongly with medieval texts like Trevisa's translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum.* Consequently, the act of walking around York during the Corpus Christi plays and thereby physically connecting with the civic landscape of theatre is a justifiable avenue for discussion.

What was it like to walk around late medieval York? First and foremost, the shoes that people wore were very thin. In the medieval period 'the foot rested on a single thickness of leather so that, in comparison with modern footwear, the sole was more prone to wear and damage, and probably wore out relatively rapidly' (Mould, Carlisle, and Cameron 2003: 3346).[2] Figure 53 depicts a fifteenth- or sixteenth- century shoe discovered at the archaeological dig at Coppergate in York (Mould, Carlisle, and Cameron 2003: 3464–65; object 15498). While wearing shoes like these, people would have been much more physically exposed to the ground beneath their feet than we are today. This could have made it painful to stand for long periods of time. Even now, standing to watch hours of theatre on the streets of York can cause foot and back pain—

[2] On medieval footwear, see also Brazil 2018: 119–46; Davidson 2018.

and today's spectators have the option of wearing modern shoes with arch support, a far cry from the thin leather soles depicted in figure 53. As for the streets themselves, there would have been paving stones on the ground (Palliser 2014: 188, 278).[3] For medieval spectators wearing insubstantial leather shoes, such surfaces probably felt very hard underfoot.

This brief exploration of the materiality of walking in late medieval York suggests that walking around the city during the Corpus Christi plays would have been an intensely tactile act. But what were the implications of this sensory experience? I will now suggest that touching the streets of medieval York during the Corpus Christi plays offered a profound access point to Christ's body. This argument requires that we first consider how Christ's footprints were celebrated in the literary, visual, and material culture of the later Middle Ages.

Touching Sacred Ground: Connecting with Christ's Footprints

In the course of this thesis, it has become clear that Christ's feet were celebrated as important tactile access points to his body in late medieval devotional culture. In the introduction (p. 29), I highlighted a passage in the *Meditaciones vite Christi* urging readers to imagine themselves present at the Nativity, where they could 'kiss the feet of the child Jesus' (Taney, Miller, and Stallings-Taney eds and trans 2000: 28). I related this passage to a vision in *The Book of Margery Kempe* in which Margery 'toke [Christ's] toos in hir hand' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 208). Margery's vision aligns her with Mary Magdalene. As explained in Chapter Three (p. 154), Mary Magdalene was famously equated with the sinner in Luke 7 who used her hair to dry Christ's feet. For

[3] On paving in medieval York, see also Butterworth forthcoming. The version of this article kindly supplied to me in advance by Philip Butterworth has not yet been proofread or edited.

Margery, as for Mary Magdalene, touching Christ's feet was a profound devotional experience.

Just as Christ's feet were given prominence within medieval devotional culture, so too places *touched* by Christ's feet were invested with special significance. The impressions left by Christ's feet, known as the *Vestigia Christi*, were important because they offered a tangible trace of Christ's absent body. Compare the modern English noun 'vestige', which means 'A mark, trace, or visible sign of something, esp. a building or other material structure, *which no longer exists or is present*' (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'vestige, n.' sense I.1; emphasis added). The most visceral of the footprints created by Christ were undoubtedly those left behind by his bleeding body during the Passion. As Ann Eljenholm Nichols (2014) has pointed out, these bloody footprints are given attention in *O Vernicle*, a late medieval English *arma Christi* poem. The *arma Christi*, also known as the Instruments of the Passion, are the material objects associated with Christ's Passion. Most obviously, this includes the objects that touched Christ and caused him pain, such as the cross, the holy lance, and the crown of thorns. The footprints of Christ, an uncommon 'object' to feature within the *arma Christi* repertoire, are described as follows:

> Þin fote steppis suete and gode
> Were sene thorow schedyng of þi blode.
> (Nichols ed 2014: 366, line 81–82)

Footprints are depicted in several manuscript witnesses of this poem, including NYML MS B.54 (Nichols 2014: 113). The image in question, reproduced here in figure 54, emphasizes that Christ's feet not only created an imprint on the ground but also left behind physical residue of his wounds through 'schedyng' of 'blode'. Christ's footprints, then, were both an extension of His body and a tangible material object—just as the cross and the lance were objects. Consider also CFM MS 57, fol. 67v, an image of Christ

bearing the cross from a fifteenth-century Book of Hours (figure 55). Nichols claims that '[t]he ground behind Christ is liberally sprinkled with large blood drops, but there are no footprints' (2014: 128). I am not entirely convinced by this claim. Note especially the elongated shape of the blood spatters closest to Christ, which mirror the direction of his left foot—I think these bloody marks *are* Christ's footprints. Strikingly, Christ's right foot extends into the frame of the miniature, as if he might be about to leave a footprint in the book itself and not just in the image within that book.

Ascension imagery in late medieval English culture also often foregrounds the physical imprints left by Christ's feet. This can be seen, for example, in NYML MS 648, a heavily illuminated copy of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed life of Jesus Christ* produced c.1440 (Driver and Orr 2007: 48). The image of the Ascension conspicuously freezes the action at the moment when Christ's feet have just left a physical imprint behind on earth (figure 56). In fact, it is difficult to determine whether the disciples' gaze is directed at Christ's feet as He ascends to heaven, or whether they are instead marvelling at the footprints that he has left behind. In the following passage, Love leaves the reader in no doubt that Christ's footprints at the Ascension were important because they marked where Christ's body 'laste touchede þe erþe':

> Aftere þat oure lorde Jesus was gone vp to his blisse, & þe angeles hade byden þe disciples to turne aȝeyn in to þe cite as it is seide nexst before, þei with his blessede modere wirchipyng him & kissinge deuoutly þe steppes of his feete, where he laste touchede þe erþe
>
> (Sargent ed 1992: 220)

Confronted with the absence of her son's body, Mary kisses the ground where Christ's holy body was last tangibly present. Reportedly, these footprints did not disappear in the days, weeks, or years after Mary kissed them. Instead, Christ's footprints remained miraculously visible for centuries thereafter. According to Paulinus of Nola (d. c.431),

the footprints Christ left behind at the Ascension resisted all attempts at covering or paving (Kramer 2014: 78).

Christ's miraculously surviving footprints were discussed and celebrated in travel writing and pilgrimage itineraries from late medieval England. *The Book of John Mandeville*, a popular fourteenth-century travel book, highlights that 'the stappes' of Christ's 'lyft foot' can be seen 'in the stoon' in Jerusalem (Kohanski and Benson eds 2007: 44). Two English pilgrims, Richard Guyldforde (d.1506) and William Wey (d.1476), record seeing such footprints personally (respectively Ellis ed 1851: 32–33; Davey ed and trans 2010: 131). Notably, Wey stresses that seeing Christ's footprints allows pilgrims to fulfill Psalm 131:7 and say 'We have worshipped in the place where his feet stood [*Adoravimus in loco ubi steterunt pedes ejus*]' (Bandinel ed 1857: 98; Davey ed and trans 2010: 131). Standing near Christ's footprints in Jerusalem, then, was a tangible way for medieval pilgrims to connect with His body. This idea retains cultural currency today: people still visit the Chapel of the Ascension in Jerusalem to see a stone said to be imprinted with Christ's footprint (figure 57).

At this stage, it is important to stress that medieval (and of course modern) pilgrimage represents both a physical and a spiritual journey. This is epitomized by the structure of William Langland's late fourteenth-century allegorical poem *Piers Plowman.* The A-Text, B-Text, and C-Text are all divided into 'passus', as is immediately obvious from A. V. C. Schmidt's parallel-text edition (2011). The Latin noun 'passus' literally means a 'footprint' but figuratively means a 'section of a poem', a stage in a literary work (*DMLBS* s.v. '2. passus' senses 2.a and 7b; Dolan 1985). This structuring device recalls the *physical* act of pilgrimage, and simultaneously organizes the stages of Will's *spiritual* pilgrimage towards Truth. Likewise, for medieval pilgrims in Jerusalem, walking in

Christ's footsteps was an opportunity to combine physical and spiritual journeys, uniting the progress of the body with the progress of the soul.

However, it was not strictly necessary to travel to Jerusalem in order to connect with the ground made holy by Christ's feet. During the medieval period, the physical imprints of Christ's feet were surprisingly mobile. Contact relics of Christ's footprints proliferated across Europe in the later Middle Ages, much like the relics of the Virgin's girdle discussed in Chapter One. For example, Wey reported seeing Christ's footprint in marble at the church of St Sebastian in Rome (Bandinel ed 1857: 146; Davey 2010: 194). Westminster Cathedral also housed such a contact relic (Nichols 2014: 126n55). In the Middle Ages, then, Christ's footprints could make his absent body seem tangibly present in locations far beyond the Holy Land. I will now argue that Christ's footprints were symbolically relocated to York during the Corpus Christi plays, just as they were physically transported to a new location via contact relics. Although holy footprints are increasingly attracting attention in medieval studies (Donkin 2014; Kramer 2014: 72–106; Nichols 2014), such connections with theatre have yet to be made.

Touching York, Touching Jerusalem

In the early nineteenth century, William Blake famously asked: 'did those feet in ancient time. | Walk upon Englands [*sic*] mountains green'? (Ostriker ed 2004: 514; square brackets added). The answer is, of course, no—Christ's feet touched Jerusalem, not England. However, Christ's feet did in a sense touch the civic landscape of York in the late medieval period. In twenty-two of the Corpus Christi Plays Jesus would have been represented by an adult actor (Plays 21–25, 27–31, 33–42, 44, and 46). In performance, these men would have physically connected with the topography of York with their feet, especially the pageant wagons but also potentially the streets, a possibility I will shortly

discuss. During the Corpus Christi plays, York thus had the capacity to effectively become the site where Christ walked 'in ancient time'. Consequently, when spectators walked around the streets of medieval York they were effectively touching the landscape of Christ's passion, having a surrogate experience of standing near Christ's footprints in the Holy Land.

It has become almost axiomatic to say that York became Jerusalem during the Corpus Christi plays (Haddad 2014: 91; Rogerson 2009: 7; Stevenson 2010: 98). However, scholars have yet to explore the tactile implications of standing in this hybrid landscape as a spectator. Let us reconsider the following oft-cited speech from the York *Crucifixion:*

> JESUS: Al men þat walkis by waye or strete,
> Takes tente ȝe schalle no trauayle tyne.
> Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
> And fully feele nowe, or ȝe fyne,
> Yf any mournyng may be meete,
> Or myscheue mesured vnto myne.
> (35.253–58)

It is well known that this passage encourages the spectators on the streets of York to understand themselves as the crowd at the Crucifixion. Christ's speech effectively collapses the distinction between York and Jerusalem, and between biblical time and medieval time (Stevenson 2011: 95). However, the role of the spectators' feet in facilitating this spatial and temporal shift from late medieval York to biblical Jerusalem has been overlooked. Christ, after all, specifically addresses those who *walk* on the surrounding streets, implicitly acknowledging that spectators make a physical connection with York/Jerusalem via their feet. Crucially, this is a landscape that 'Christ' has touched with his feet each year Corpus Christi day. Throughout the York Plays, much attention is given to Christ's physical act of walking, as in the following examples:

> ANNA: Yha, thurgh his fantome and falshed and fendes-craft,
> He has wroght many wondir *where he walked* full wyde;
> (30.298–99; emphasis added)

PETRUS: Welcome, Thomas, where has þou bene?
Wete þou wele, withouten wene,
Jesu oure lorde þan haue we sene
On grounde her gang.
(41.127–30; emphasis added)

JESUS: Whan I was dede and laide in graue,
Of myne vpryse ȝe were in doute,
And some for myne vprysing straue,
When I was laide als vndir [c]lowte
So depe in erthe. But sithen I haue
Ben walkand fourty daies aboute,
Eten with ȝou, youre trouthe to saue,
Comand emange ȝou inne and oute.
(42.89–96; emphasis added)

In the first quotation, Annas identifies that Christ has worked wonders everywhere he walked. Of course, anybody who had watched the earlier plays of Christ's ministry had previously stood in the midst of these miracles. They too would later stand nearby and watch incredulously as the resurrected Christ walked 'On grounde', as Peter explains in the second quotation. By walking around in York, then, the audience members were in a loose sense walking in Christ's footsteps, connecting in a tangible way with the space that he has inhabited.

Strikingly, in the York *Pentecost*, Mary says that Jesus will offer protection 'Als lange as ȝe his pase pursue', with the word 'pase' here meaning 'footprints' (43.103; *MED* s.v. 'pase, n.(1)' sense 1.c). This line works on multiple levels. Most obviously, Mary is addressing the surrounding apostles, who should metaphorically follow in Christ's footprints by avoiding sin. But Mary's second person address also implicates the spectators, who could more literally follow in Christ's footprints during a performance of the York Plays. This ambulatory mirroring effect would have been particularly obvious if the actors playing Christ ever walked directly on the streets of York, and not just on the pageant wagon. It remains plausible that actors were able to use the streets of York as a form of stage, extending their acting space beyond the wagon. Some scholars have argued strongly in favour of this practice, contending that there would have been insufficient

space on the wagons and moreover that street-acting would have been theatrically effective. For example, Cami Agan (1997) suggests that the 'platea', i.e. the place beyond the wagon, would have been an important liminal space in York. However, other scholars have urged caution in this regard. Although a stage direction from the Coventry Shearmen and Taylors' pageant reads '*Here Erode ragis in þe pagond* and *in the strete also*', Margaret Rogerson cautions that street-level performance was not necessarily universal in medieval England (King and Davidson eds 2000: 105, line 728.s.d.; Rogerson 2000: 121). Rogerson suggests that actors may have varied their procedure at each station, perhaps '[incorporating] more street-level playing' at 'larger playing stations' (2000: 118). Similarly, John McKinnell has suggested that 'medieval producers may have confined the use of street level to scenes which were noisy enough for it not to matter if part of the audience had only a very limited view of them' (2000: 98).

Although Rogerson and McKinnell are right to urge caution, it nevertheless remains likely that actors playing Christ walked on the streets of York at certain points. The York *Entry into Jerusalem* is a particularly strong candidate in this regard. Tamara Haddad suggests the following possible staging for the play:

> Using the ass, Jesus could then ride into the street, very slowly, with Micklegate Bar visible in the background […]. The dialogue indicates that Christ would have to mount the ass just before the procession begins, signalled by his speech to Peter and Philip […]
>
> (Haddad 2014: 92)

Here is passage in question:

> JESUS: Do on þis asse youre cloþis ȝe laye,
> And lifte me vppe with hertis gud,
> Þat I on hir may sitte þis day
> (25.275–77)

Walking on the streets of York after this kind of performance would have been—in a very tangible sense—an experience of walking in Christ's footprints. However, it is not necessary to pursue this argument in such a literal-minded way. Even if the Christ actors never performed on the *platea*, they would still have left their footprints on the civic

landscape of York by walking on the pageant wagons. Spectators invariably connected with this civic landscape, whether consciously or subconsciously, when they stood to watch the plays.

Pilgrims did, and still do, travel long distances to see Christ's footprints preserved in the ground of Jerusalem, and to walk in the places he walked. For example, pilgrims still walk the *Via Dolorosa,* the route that Jesus walked on the way to the Crucifixion in Jerusalem (Haddad 2014: 83). However, I am suggesting that the spectators in medieval York could connect with Christ's footprints just by standing in their local streets. It is the contemporary context of this kind of virtual experience to which I now turn.

The York Plays as Virtual Pilgrimage

> & þe frerys al-wey, as þei went a-bowte, teld hem what owyr Lord sufferyd in euery place. & þe forseyd creatur wept & sobbyd so plentyvowsly as þow sche had seyn owyr Lord wyth hir bodyly ey sufferyng hys Passyon at þat tyme. Befor hir in hyr sowle sche saw hym veryly be comtemplacyon, & þat cawsyd hir to haue compassyon.
>
> (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 68)

When Margery Kempe visits Jerusalem, standing 'in euery place' where Christ suffered during his Passion allows her to feel 'as þow sche had seyn' the events herself 'at þat tyme'. For Margery, pilgrimage is thus a transformative, kinaesthetic experience, one that allows her to engage in a kind of devotional time travel. Physically connecting with the landscape of the Passion in this way breeds 'compassyon'. Margery literally touches Jerusalem with her body, and Jerusalem emotionally touches Margery's mind in return. If there was any doubt that a physical connection with holy landscapes was central to Margery's experiences, one need only turn to her travels in Rome, where we are told that she engaged with Christ's revelation to Saint Bridget through a tactile experience of the city: 'sche knelyd also on þe ston on þe whech owr Lord aperyd to Seynt Brigypte and telde hir what day sche xuld deyn on' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 95).

Pilgrimages to distant places of spiritual significance like Rome and Jerusalem were possible for Margery Kempe, the daughter of an influential burgess. Conversely, a visit to the Holy Land would have been inconceivable for many people living in late medieval York. R. N. Swanson cautions that the number of English pilgrims to the Holy Land in the late medieval period remains uncertain, but he makes the following general observation:

> If the annual number of western pilgrims to the Holy Land in these centuries was only 300–500, very few would have been English; […] there were perhaps some years when no English pilgrims visited the Holy Land at all.
> (Swanson 2007: 240).

We can safely assume, then, that the average person in York would not have gone on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, I have thus far suggested that touching the streets of York during the Corpus Christi Plays potentially allowed spectators to feel *as if* they were present in Jerusalem at the time of the Passion, having an experience not wholly dissimilar from Margery's pilgrimage.

Extending this argument further, I will now suggest that the York plays did not merely resemble pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but could actually become a kind of 'virtual' pilgrimage. Scholars have previously hinted at the ways in which the experience of the York Plays might have offered a surrogate form of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In 1987, Martin Stevens suggested that the York plays could function as a kind of 'vicarious' pilgrimage:

> While I am not aware that the drama ever served officially as a substitute for a real pilgrimage, it certainly had all the necessary ingredients that vicarious pilgrims sought. Audiences could, in any case, experience a vicarious bonding with the Holy Land by retracing the steps of Jesus through the Ministry and especially the Passion and thereby reenliven their faith. In a sense, they walked the pilgrimage of Jesus through their own streets, both in their empathetic relationship with the actors and in their street-side mimesis of the crowds that witnessed and condemned Jesus.
> (Stevens 1987: 66)

Later scholars have occasionally endorsed Stevens' idea. For example, Tamara Haddad briefly notes that the York Corpus Christi plays 'mimicked the act of pilgrimage' (2014: 85). Nevertheless, Stevens' argument that the York Plays functioned as a substitute form of pilgrimage has never been seriously revisited.

When Stevens was writing in 1987, the topic of virtual pilgrimage had attracted little attention. However, in the past twenty years, there has been a burgeoning of interest in this topic. It is now possible to situate the York Plays in terms of a much wider body of virtual pilgrimage literature, something that Stevens was not in a position to do. By comparing and contrasting the York Plays to recently identified virtual pilgrimage texts, I will extend and enhance Stevens' argument that audience members in York could 'experience a vicarious bonding with the Holy Land' (1987: 66). The main question I seek to address is the following: what kind of virtual pilgrimage text might the York Plays most closely represent?

This requires a contextualization of the state of recent virtual pilgrimage studies. An important development came when Daniel Connolly (1999) argued that Matthew Paris's itinerary maps from London to Jerusalem (c.1250) allowed Benedictine monks at the Abbey of St Albans to engage in an interactive form of imaginative pilgrimage. As Connolly explains, the opening pages of Paris's *Chronica majora* in CCCCL MS 26 'make up a kind of medieval road map', visually and textually conveying a route from London to Rome and Jerusalem (1999: 598). The reader's imaginative journey starts on folio ir, where they are confronted with a miniature image of London on the lower left-hand side of the page (figure 58). From here, the reader moves up the page towards the English Channel, the first step on their imaginative journey. By following the route outlined by Matthew Paris and turning the pages of this manuscript, the monks confined

to St Albans could participate in a vicarious journey from London to important centres of pilgrimage.

Since Connolly put forward this argument in 1999, virtual pilgrimage has become a burgeoning research area. Kathryn Rudy made an important contribution with her monograph *Virtual Pilgrimage in the Convent* (2011b). This book focuses on a group of Middle Dutch texts that allowed religious women to experience a vicarious pilgrimage without ever leaving the confines of the convent. Essentially, Rudy's monograph identifies that travelling to Jerusalem, '[w]alking in Christ's footsteps', and physically interacting with the spaces where he suffered was a highly desirable devotional experience; however, mental and physical surrogate experiences were available to religious women in the Low Countries who could not literally undertake such a journey (2011b: 20).

Rudy helpfully divides her Middle Dutch virtual pilgrimage texts into two categories: those that invite interior, stationary pilgrimage devotions and those that encourage exterior, somatic pilgrimage devotions (2011b: 119–170; 171–232). The texts and images in the first category variously encourage a meditative engagement with the landscape of Christ's Passion. The reader may engage their sense of touch on a literal level only in so far as they hold the manuscript and touch images within it. On the other hand, somatic pilgrimage devotions encourage the reader to undertake a more embodied virtual experience—in one way or another, these kinds of texts allow the reader to feel as if they are physically walking in Christ's footprints, touching the ground made holy by him. As Rudy eloquently writes, where stationary pilgrimage devotions involve 'imagining walking through Jerusalem', conversely somatic pilgrimage devotions involve 'walking through an imagined Jerusalem' (2011b: 171).

The differences between these categories become clear when considering some examples. One such text that encourages stationary pilgrimage devotions is the Holy Land text in a manuscript Rudy refers to as 'The Windesheim Virtual Pilgrimage Compilation' (1450–1500). This text offers a panoramic description of Jerusalem, and 'toggles between a third-person description of the places around Jerusalem where the reader, or virtual pilgrim, could earn indulgences, and a first-person (plural) account of having done so' (Rudy 2011b: 147). The text is particularly notable for its 'abundance of visual and tactile language', as it describes at length 'what the reader could see and touch when touring each of the holy sites', as in the following passage (Rudy 2011b: 147).

> At the right-hand side of the altar there is a piece of the column on which Our Lord was flagellated. That is set in a wall, and there is a wooden trellis in front of it that one can stick a hand 'through'
>
> (Rudy 2011b: 147–49)

Texts like these allowed enclosed women to take a mental journey to Jerusalem, imagining what they would be able to see and touch there.

Yet some virtual pilgrimage texts went one step further, allowing nuns to literally engage their bodies as well as their minds in their virtual journeys to the Holy Land. A striking example of such a text encouraging somatic pilgrimage devotions is *Heer Bethlem's Guide to Spiritual Pilgrimage*, printed in Leiden, Antwerp, and Delft from c.1510 onwards. This text cites the distances between the holy sites in Jerusalem, 'so that the reader can imagine taking the same number of footsteps that Christ did' (Rudy 2011b: 196–98). Rudy points out that one sister added notes in Middle Dutch to indicate how she used the convent hospital as the location of her devotional walks:

> The booklet's user could read in the printed text that Christ walked 3500 ells from the dinner table to Gethsemane, and she herself had to follow a circuitous route to get there: 'Begin in the Chapel of St. Anne, then to the silent walkway across from doorway 35 ells from there, until you reach the winding staircase' (*Begint in S anna capel tot inden stommen ganck tegen de noe düren 35 ellen van hier tot ande windel trap.*)
>
> (Rudy 2011b: 212)

For context, ‘an ell is a measure of distance equivalent to approximately fifty-eight centimeters’ (Rudy 2011b: 199). Essentially, this nun was able to touch the Holy Land with her feet without ever leaving her convent. She was able to embody Christ’s sufferings and literally recreate his footsteps by reimagining her feet as Christ’s feet, her convent as Jerusalem.

As this brief overview suggests, much previous research on virtual pilgrimage has focused on the experiences of enclosed men and women, i.e. the people most obviously prohibited from of making the physical journey to Jerusalem. However, as Rudy has observed, ‘[e]xercises designed for virtual pilgrimage, which were largely developed in convents, trickled into practice by the general population’ (2011b: 240). Increasingly, scholars are looking at the virtual pilgrimage dynamics of literary texts that are not explicitly directed to an enclosed audience. This is exemplified by recent research on *arma Christi* rolls, which are long and thin prayer rolls dedicated to the objects associated with Christ’s Passion. We have already encountered an *arma Christi* roll in this chapter: the image of Christ’s footprints in figure 54 is from such a manuscript. Taking another *arma Christi* roll as their focus, Richard Newhauser and Arthur J. Russell have argued that meditating upon the objects associated with Christ’s Passion effectively enabled the reader/viewer to have ‘a guided tour’ of the Passion and thus be imaginatively transported to the Holy Land (2014: 84). Newhauser and Russell stress that this imaginative journey involved the sense of touch as well as sight: *arma Christi* rolls need to be constantly unfurled, requiring the reader/viewer ‘to remain physically attached when engaged with it’ (2014: 83). For context, Rossell Hope Robbins (1939) claimed that *arma Christi* rolls were displayed in public venues, but the scholarly consensus is now that these objects were meant for personal, private devotion (Newhauser and Russell 2014: 83–84). *Arma*

christi rolls thus offer a useful example of Middle English literary texts that extended the practice of virtual pilgrimage to readers beyond the convent walls.

The York Plays likewise brought the experience of virtual pilgrimage to a wider audience than just enclosed men and women. Specifically, the York Plays allowed lay people watching the plays on their local streets to be virtually transported to Jerusalem. However, where *arma Christi* rolls fall closer to Rudy's category of stationary pilgrimage devotions, which allowed the reader to engage with Jerusalem with their mind, the York Plays more closely resemble Rudy's somatic pilgrimage devotions, which used bodily movements to transport the user to the Holy Land.

The spectators at York were able have a surrogate physical experience of Jerusalem rather than just a mental journey through the key sites. Where mental virtual pilgrimage texts like *arma Christi* rolls took readers on an imaginative journey to Jerusalem, the York plays went one step further, enabling spectators to have a hands-on (or, more appropriately, 'feet-on') experience of walking in the Holy Land. Indeed, the York Plays share a remarkable affinity with texts like *Heer Bethlem's Guide to Spiritual Pilgrimage*, which encouraged nuns to reimagine their convent as Jerusalem and invited enclosed women to map their own steps onto the steps that Christ took during his Passion. In a comparable way, the York Plays encouraged spectators to reimagine York as Jerusalem, making it possible for them to literally follow in the footsteps of an actor playing Christ.

In particular, both the York Plays and *Heer Bethlem's Guide to Spiritual Pilgrimage* encourage a performative mode of devotion. During the York Plays, every spectator was interpolated as an actor complicit in the drama. As discussed above (p. 242), the audience members watching the York *Crucifixion* were invited to imagine themselves as part of the crowd in biblical Jerusalem. Likewise, each of the nuns

following the advice of *Heer Bethlem's Guide to Spiritual Pilgrimage* became an actor in her own personal drama—although they became Christ, rather than the crowds at the Crucifixion. Notably, Rudy specifically turns to the lexical field of acting to help explain exterior, somatic pilgrimage devotions:

> the reader becomes an *actor* cast in several *roles*, performing in dialogues, striking theatrical poses, using her convent as a *stage*, and making do with existing *props.* The votary becomes a *method actor*, confronting the emotions by going through the motions.
>
> (Rudy 2011b: 173; emphasis added)

There are, of course, some important distinctions between the York Plays and somatic virtual pilgrimage texts like *Heer Bethlem's Guide to Spiritual Pilgrimage*, and this analogy can only take us so far. Firstly, the York Plays were designed for a large, primarily lay audience of both men and women, rather than for a single enclosed woman. Further, the users of *Heer Bethlem's Guide to Spiritual Pilgrimage* were alert to the ways in which this text could be used to map their own journeys around the convent onto Christ's journey in the Holy Land, which is not an explicit function of the York Plays.

Finally, nuns often earned indulgences from using virtual pilgrimage texts (Rudy 2011b: 119). Conversely, the York Plays did not offer that kind of spiritual reward. In fact, in 1426, Friar Melton said that although the plays were 'most laudable' ('laudabilis') the festivities associated with them could actually distract people from attending divine services on Corpus Christi day, where they *could* earn indulgences (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 43; II, 728). For comparison, though, a proclamation of 1531 records that people received 1,000 days of pardon for watching the Chester plays 'in pecible manner with gode devocion' (Baldwin, Clopper, and Mills 2007: I, 72; see also Rogerson 2012: 100). Returning to the York Plays, the lack of indulgences for spectatorship means that an analogy with virtual pilgrimage is far from perfect. Nevertheless, virtual pilgrimage has proved to be a useful point of departure for thinking about the relationship between touch and imaginative experience in late medieval York.

Both spectators in the city and nuns in the convent could potentially have used their feet to touch a surrogate Jerusalem.

Perhaps part of the reason why virtual pilgrimage has attracted an increasing attention in the past twenty years is that it seems very modern. The blending together of reality and the imagination resonates strongly with contemporary technology, especially Virtual Reality. Virtual Reality, then, offers another useful point of departure for thinking about the relationship between touch, space, and the imagination in late medieval York.

The York Plays: A Virtual Reality?

The term Virtual Reality is a contradiction in terms: the very definition of the word 'virtual' is something that is simulated 'rather than actual or real' (*OED* 3rd edn. s.v. 'virtual, adj. and n.' sense B.*n*.2). Virtual Reality, then, is something that feels like a real experience even though it is not. This section discusses the ways in which VR-technology appeals to the senses, especially touch, to make users think that they are standing in another time and space. VR-technology therefore offers a thought-provoking analogy to the York Plays, which invited spectators to feel as if they were touching the streets of biblical Jerusalem with their feet rather than touching the streets of medieval York. In her discussion of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, Donnalee Dox has noted that '[t]heater integrates bodies, objects, and space to represent an alternate reality in performance' (2000: 167). However, the specific parallels between medieval theatre and virtual reality remain unexplored.

On the surface, the most obvious parallel between the York Plays and Virtual Reality might seem to be with VR headsets, like the one shown in figure 59. When the user wears such a headset, he or she is completely transported to another place and able to see it in 360 degrees. The user may be standing on their living room floor, but *feel* as if

they are walking on the bottom of the ocean, for example. A particularly compelling point of comparison to the York Plays is a 2016 film called *Jesus VR: The Life of Christ* (figure 60). A recent review opens in the following way:

> Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have […] watched at the foot of the cross as [Christ] died for the sin of mankind? You now have the opportunity to do just that […]
>
> (Klett 2017: para 1 of 10)

By wearing this headset, the viewer has the opportunity to imagine themselves touching the same ground as Christ and being tangibly present at the Passion, just as I have been arguing for the York Plays.

However, there is an important difference between the two experiences. When a user puts on a VR headset, they are confronted with an entirely new visual environment, and the level of immersion can in fact be dissociative. By contrast, the York plays imposed a virtual veneer on top of a familiar cityscape, almost a palimpsest effect. A more appropriate parallel is therefore Augmented Reality (AR), a technology closely related to VR. In AR, images from everyday life are supplemented with an overlay of computer-generated visual effects. This technology lies behind the game Pokémon Go, which allows fantastical creatures to appear in real locations (figure 61). Like Pokémon Go, the York Plays allowed their spectators to see a familiar environment in a new way. For example, a spectator watching the York *Crucifixion* at the final station in 1486 would have been standing in a familiar civic space—specifically, they would have been near the church of All Saints, Pavement—but this location would have been visually augmented with a scene from biblical Jerusalem, namely Christ's suffering on the cross.

Part of what makes Pokémon Go so remarkable is the way in which it encourages groups of people to gather together and experience the same augmented reality simultaneously. Users are encouraged to congregate at specially designated 'Pokéstops' in towns and cities, where special in-game items can be found. In a similar way, the York

Plays brought local people together in one space at playing stations so that they could experience the same 'Augmented Reality' together. Again, this is not an unproblematic comparison, especially as I have been discussing the ways in which the York Plays could have been a profound devotional experience, whereas Pokémon Go exists purely for entertainment. Of course, in Chapter Two (pp. 133–35), I noted that people laughed at certain parts of the York Plays, specifically *Fergus*, and indeed the performances were certainly in part a source of entertainment.

Though far from perfect, comparisons between medieval theatre, VR, and AR are useful precisely because they remind us that spectators in medieval York would have been transported to an alternate reality, and were able to have a dynamic experience of another space and time without ever leaving their local city. They could see Jerusalem and hear it—but it was through their feet that they were continuously in contact with it. To crystallize this point, it is worth considering the opening lines of the York *Agony in the Garden and the Betrayal*, which effectively invite the audience to imagine that they are having a multisensory experience of walking in a foreign land:

> [JESUS]: Beholde, my discipulis þat deyne is and dere,
> My flesshe dyderis and daris for doute of my dede.
> Myne enemyes will newly be neghand full nere,
> With all þe myght if þei may to marre my manhede.
> But sen ȝe are forwakid and wanderede in were,
> Loke ȝe sette ȝou doune rathely and reste ȝoue, I reede.
> Beis noȝt heuy in ȝoure hertis, but holde yow even here,
> And bidis me a stounde stille in þis same steede.
> Beeis witty and wyse in youre wandyng,
> So þat ȝe be wakand alway,
> […]
>
> (28.1–10)

Superficially, Christ here is talking to his disciples, urging them to stay alert; the dramatic irony, of course, is that the disciples will inevitably fall asleep (Luke 22: 45–46). However, the second person addresses in this passage could easily have implicated the audience members, not least because Christ is demanding attention. The York Plays, and

indeed medieval plays more broadly, often open with an appeal for the audience's attention, a practical phenomenon that I discuss in more detail below. Notably, Christ specifically asks for attention in 'þis same steede' (i.e. place). The use of the deictic in this line serves to ally the audience geographically and temporally with the apostles. They are not in medieval York: they are in biblical Jerusalem.

Most strikingly of all, this speech has obvious metatheatrical potential, referring to the multi-sensory experiences of the audience. Consider, for example, the fact that Christ says: 'ȝe are forwakid', i.e. 'you are tired with watching' (gloss after Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 488). This could easily apply not only to the apostles, but also to any weary spectators who are tired of observing the plays. Likewise, many audience members may well have been 'wanderede', i.e. 'exhausted with wandering' (gloss after Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 533). This was, after all, the twenty-eighth pageant of the day—assuming that all of the plays in the Register were performed. Spectators did not necessarily attend all of the performances, but any who *had* watched multiple plays would almost certainly be physically exhausted, especially given that they would likely have been wearing unsupportive shoes like the ones in figure 53. The trade off for physical discomfort, however, was an intimate tactile connection with dynamic virtual landscape, where biblical events were constantly unfolding. In this case, Christ's enemies 'will newly be neghand full nere'. In sum, Christ's opening speech in the *Agony and Betrayal in the Garden* could have served to cultivate the spectators' anticipation to see more dramatic action unfold in the 'virtual' landscape underfoot.

Assembling, Crowding, and Pressing in Medieval York

Thus far, my discussion of immediate tactile stimuli for the skin during the York Corpus Christi plays has focused on the spectators' feet. However, the people who stood to watch

the York Plays would likely have experienced other types of touch during performance. In particular, there is much evidence to suggest that spectators crowded together in the narrow streets of York to watch the Corpus Christi pageants, standing shoulder to shoulder with one another. Where my discussion of the spectators' feet focused on touch as a pathway to the sacred, my exploration of audience crowding will implicate both sides of the touch paradox. On the one hand, standing shoulder to shoulder on the streets of medieval York may have helped spectators to feel tangibly present in original crowds of biblical Jerusalem, thereby transporting them to a sacred time and space. Nevertheless, crowding to watch the York Plays also exposed spectators' bodies to infectious disease and potentially even sexual immorality.

To open up this topic, it is helpful to turn to early modern theatre studies. Carla Mazzio has drawn attention to the fact that the term 'assembly' is often used to describe early modern theatregoers, a word that suggests physical union:

> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'Assembly' in the Renaissance could suggest physical, military, and sexual as well as a spatial joining of persons: 'To join together, unite (two things or persons, one thing to or with another)'; 'To couple (sexually)'; 'To come together into one place or company; to gather together, congregate, meet,' and 'To meet in fight; to join battle, make an attack or charge.'
>
> (Mazzio 2002: 180)

For Mazzio, the use of the word 'assembly' to describe early modern playgoers is striking precisely because the term 'implied not only a coming together of persons, but a physical touching of bodies in space' (2002: 162). She points especially to the following passage from Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*, an antitheatrical tract from 1579 that 'speaks to the relevance of "assemblies" as a third term in the "audience" "spectator" sensory triad' (Mazzio 2002: 180).

> In our assemblies at playes in London, you shall see suche heauing, and shoouing, suche ytching and shouldring, too sitte by women; Suche care for their garments, that they bee not trode on; Such eyes to their lappes, that no chippes light in them; Such pillowes to ther backes, that they take no hurte […]
>
> (Gosson 1579: fol. 17v)

In this passage, early modern theatre is conceptualized as an overwhelmingly tactile experience, including 'heauing' and 'shoouing'. At this stage, it should be remembered that the last known performance of the York Plays was in 1569, albeit at Whitsun rather than Corpus Christi (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, xxxiv; Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 355). Thus, the York Plays were still being performed just a decade before the publication of Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*. Further, an attempt was made to stage the York Plays in 1579 (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, xxxiv–xxxv). This was, of course, the very same year in which Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* was published.

Gosson is not describing Northern street theatre. Nevertheless, there is a striking similarity between Gosson's comments about London plays and sixteenth-century civic records describing the York Plays. In particular, the word 'assembly' was used to describe the people who attended the York Plays, just as it was used to describe theatre-goers in Elizabethan England. In 1552, for example, the York plays were not performed because of fears about 'assembles of people' in times of plague, which is 'dangerouse for the sayd sykenes' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 303). In 1551, another plague year, performances were held at a limited number of stations so as to avoid a 'confluence' of people forming (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 298).[4] The word 'confluence', like the word 'assembly', evokes audience members coming together in close physical proximity. Indeed, in the mid-sixeenth century, the term could be used to describe not only a crowd of people but also 'The place where two or more rivers, etc., unite' (*OED* 2nd edn. s.v. 'confluence, n.' senses 2 and 5). In 1558, the York plays were once again

[4] Interestingly, in this year performances were permitted 'agenst mr hartley dor in Stangate' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 298). As I discuss below, Stonegate yielded some of the narrowest playing places, and would presumably have created particularly tight crowds. Perhaps, then, the aim here was to reduce the overall number of crowds, rather than to target particularly tight crowds. Whatever the logic, it is tempting to infer that this strategy was not entirely successful, given that in subsequent plague years the Corpus Christi plays were simply suspended in their entirety.

suspended, ‘the tyme instant beyng […] contagiouse with sykenesse’ (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 327).

In the course of this thesis, I have already demonstrated that the sense of touch was associated with the spread of infection in both medieval and early modern England. For example, in Chapter Three (pp. 169–70), I noted that the haptic gaze or ‘evil eye’ was invested with poisonous potential from *De secretis mulierum* (late thirteenth / early fourteenth century) through to *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). Crowding, however, posed a different tactile threat. As Hristomir A. Stanev explains, crowds were hazardous in times of plague because infected breath was thought to be ‘palpably smiting’ (2016: 163). Stanev points especially to Thomas Paynell’s *Much Profitable Treatise against the Pestilence* (1534):

> from such infected bodies commeth infectious and venomous fumes and vapours, the which do infect and corrupt the air … [and hence] great multitude and congregation of people [should be avoided as] the breath of one infected person may infect a whole.
>
> (Quoted after Stanev 2016: 163)

For comparison, Stanev points to Thomas Phayre’s *Regiment of Life* (1544), which explains that ‘the venomous air itself is not half so vehement to infect as is the conversation or breath of them that are infected already’ (2016: 163). The word ‘conversation’ here has sexual as well as verbal connotations, as Margaret Healy has noted (Healy 2003: 24; *OED* 2nd edn. s.v. ‘conversation, n.’ sense 3). Plague, then, was thought to spread through both ‘smiting’ odours and direct physical contact, explaining why large flocks of people should be avoided in times of sickness. This is the immediate tactile context that explains the precautions for the York Corpus Christi Plays in the

1550s—and, later, the periodic closures of public theatres in London at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.[5]

What factors contributed to intense crowding during the York plays? Most importantly, some of the streets in which spectators, actors, and pageant wagons had to fit were very narrow. Take Stonegate, for example. Civic records indicate that performances took place near Chris Willoughby's, Stonegate in 1569, a location that was approximately 25 feet (7.6 metres) wide according to John McKinnell (2000: 100). The same (approximate) station was also used, for example, in 1399 and 1551 (McKinnell 2000: 100). The layout of Stonegate has not changed significantly over the centuries, and this street easily becomes crowded today, even when there is not a focal point like a pageant wagon to gather around (figure 62). Moreover, photographs from a 1992 production of the *Crucifixion* play on the junction of Stonegate and Little Stonegate show a noticeable crowding effect, with many bodies pushing up against each other in a small space (figure 63).[6] We should therefore remain alert to the possibility that watching the York Corpus Christi plays could have been a very tactile experience, involving brushing shoulder to shoulder with other spectators, pushing to get the best vantage point, or pressing up against wagons—especially when the pageants were staged in the narrower streets.

As a caveat, it remains unclear whether the pageant wagons at York performed 'side-on' (i.e. directing their action *across* the street) or 'front-on' (i.e. directing their action *down* the street, as in figure 63). Medieval theatre scholarship shifted from the 'side-on' theory to the 'front-on' theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the question of wagon orientation will likely never be concretely answered unless new evidence comes to light (McKinnell 1990: 114–16; Twycross 1992; White 2000: 73–74).

[5] Political factors, especially the desire to suppress riots and disorder, also contributed to the closure of theatres in London—indeed, Barbara Freedman (1996) argues that plague was sometimes used as an excuse to cover up the *real* motivation behind theatre closures, namely civil unrest.
[6] Regarding this performance, see also Butterworth 1992; Twycross 1992: 82–83.

The two arrangements would have given rise to different kinds of crowds. 'Front-on' performance would have allowed for larger groups of people to spread down the packed streets, whereas 'side-on' performance could have allowed for an intimate gathering of people pressed together in a tight space. Presumably, both types of crowds would have dispersed quite quickly if the performers were only presenting 'non-verbalized *tableaux vivants*' at a given station—a form that P. J. P. Goldberg thinks the York Plays likely took in the early stages of their evolution (2012: 261). However, if the performers were instead presenting fully-fledged theatrical texts of the kind preserved in the Register, spectators would have been gathered or even pressed together for an extended period of time. Margaret Dorrell, for example, estimates that the plays in the Register would each have taken between five and thirty-three minutes to perform (1972: 102–07).

If actors joined the spectators on the streets, a possibility discussed above (pp. 243–44), then the tactile implications of crowding would only have been exaggerated. If any action took place on the *platea*, spectators would have been even more likely to brush up against each other within the confined space that remained. Indeed, according to David Crouch, '[t]here would seem to have been little scope for free audience movement through the clogged and heavily-policed streets' (1991: 100). Conversely, Peter Meredith contends that audiences would likely have been more 'mobile' than Crouch allows (1996: 106). For comparison, though, John McKinnell reports that St. Michael had to make a significant effort to push his way through the audience during the 1992 performances of the York *Harrowing of Hell*—especially when the pageant was performed in Stonegate (email correspondence, 26 March 2018).

The physical intimacy of spectator experience has often been lost in more recent productions of the York Plays, as the pageants are increasingly being performed in large open spaces, presumably in part due to health and safety concerns. For example, in 2018,

several of the productions took place outside King's Manor, with the audience sitting on raked seating far from the action (figure 64). If the civic authorities in medieval York had wanted to produce the Corpus Christi plays in an open space, then there would have been suitable locales, as both Eileen White and Tamara Haddad have pointed out (White 2000: 51; Haddad 2014: 89–90). However, there is no reason to believe that this possibility was ever entertained.

Watching the York Plays as a standing spectator, quite possibly being pushed up against other people, may have helped audience members to feel tangibly present at the passion. This is suggested by the fact that the texts of the plays metatheatrically align the gathering of spectators' pressing bodies on the streets of York with the crowds of people on the streets of biblical Palestine. For example, this can be seen in the opening of the York *Nativity*:

> JOSEPH: For we haue sought bothe vppe and doune,
> Thurgh diuerse stretis in þis cité.
> So mekill pepull is comen to towne
> Þat we can nowhare herbered be,
> Þere is slike prees;
> (14.8–12)

When Joseph protests that he has 'sought bothe vppe and doune, | Thurgh diuerse stretis in þis cité', this could easily be taken as a metatheatrical and somewhat ironic reference to the wagons that have moved up and down the streets of York. This passage reinforces the fact that the streets of York became the streets of Bethlehem through performance, a city so busy that Joseph and Mary could not find a place to stay. Consequently, the spectators on the streets of York become actors complicit in the Corpus Christi drama: they *are* the 'prees' of people in Bethlehem that Joseph complains about.

The word 'prees' here literally means 'A crowd' (*MED* s.v. 'presse, n.' sense 1.a.a). However, it also carries obvious connotations of pushing and pressure. The *MED* notes that this word can specifically refer to the 'pushing together of a crowd' (s.v.

'presse, n.' sense 2.a.) Further, the *OED* notes that the word 'press' could mean 'A crush in battle' during the fifteenth century (*OED* 3rd edn. s.v. 'press, n.1' sense II.5.b). At a busy performance of the York *Nativity*, it is easy to see how Joseph's speech could have capitalized on the ways in which spectators were pushed together in the streets of York, encouraging them to feel tangibly present in a sacred time and space: biblical Bethlehem.

This effect would not have been limited to the *Nativity* play. In fact, it would likely have been especially profound during the Passion sequence, when the crowds on the streets of York were aligned with the crowds watching the Crucifixion in Jerusalem. Take, for example, the opening speech from the *Road into Calvary*:

PRIMUS MILES: Therfore I comaunde you on euere ilke a side,
Vppon payne of enprisonment, þat no man appere
To suppowle þis traytoure, be tyme ne be tyde,
< …>
Noght one of þis prees;
Nor noght ones so hardy for to enquere,
But helpe me holly, alle þat are here,
Þis kaitiffe care to encrees.

Therfore make rome, and rewle you nowe right,
That we may with þis weried wight
Wightely wende on oure way.
(34.9–18)

A soldier, sent by Pilate, addresses the people 'on euere ilke a side' which could easily have functioned as a metatheatrical reference to the crowds surrounding the pageant wagon in York, transforming them into the people who gathered to watch the Passion unfold in Jerusalem. Notably, the soldier then tells the gathered crowd to 'make rome' so that Christ can be led through Jerusalem, suggesting that Christ may have been escorted from the wagon down onto the platea in performances of this play (Beadle ed 2009–2011: II, 311n16). By encouraging the spectators to 'make rome', the soldier invites the audience members to move their bodies—and possibly even to push themselves against other spectators—in order for the action to continue. In the process, the audience would have quite literally become the 'prees' of people referred to in the soldier's speech.

Perhaps spectators even brushed against Christ himself as he was ushered through the platea, thereby coming close to emulating Doubting Thomas's tactile encounter with Christ's body.

In crowded spaces, however, not all touch is sacred. In the pre-modern period, just like today, anonymity within a horde of people allowed for illicit groping and attendant sexual gratification. Indeed, by the seventeenth century, going to the theatre was so heavily associated with carnal indulgence that it had become a point of satire (Wynne-Davis 2009: 21). One need only look at the following extract from Peacham's *The Art of Living in London* (1642):

> Sitting in a box among some gallants and gallant wenches, and returning when the play was done, returned to her husband, and told him she had lost her purse. […] Quoth her husband, 'Where did you put it?' 'Under my petticoat, between that and my smock.' 'What,' quoth he, 'did you feel nobody's hand there?' 'Yes,' quoth she, 'I felt one's hand there; but I did not think he had come for that.'
>
> (Cerasano and Wynne-Davies eds 1996: 166)

Peacham's comments can be situated in a long tradition of associating theatre with fornication that stretches back to early Christian writers. Tertullian (d. c.240) and Isidore of Seville (d.636) associated theatre with sexuality generally and prostitution specifically (Clopper 2001: 40; Weigert 2015: 13–18). Their views found expression in the medieval period, as is well demonstrated by the woodcut in figure 65, which is from in a late-fifteenth century printed edition of the comedies of Terrence (Afer 1493: sig. a4v). It is worth quoting from Laura Weigert's discussion of this woodcut at length:

> The exterior wall of this building identifies it as a *theatrum*, below which appears the word *fornices*. *Fornices* can mean 'arches' and would in this sense refer to the architectural foundation of the theater's physical structure. However, another meaning of *fornices*, invoked by both Tertullian and Isidore, was 'brothel.' The embracing couples that move around the lower level of the building illustrate the function of *fornices* in this sense.
>
> (Weigert 2015: 15)

The body language of the couple directly below the word *fornices* is particularly striking. The woman drapes her arm around the man's neck and touches his chest, while the man

places his hand around the woman's elbow, as if to draw her in further. Notably, some of the figures in the audience seem to be more interested in looking down at the scandalous sexual spectacle unfolding below the arches than at the theatrical spectacle on the stage in front of them. Thus, the illicit sexual behaviour in this image implicates not only the men and women who are directly involved in it, but also the voyeurs in the audience who cannot help but watch the wrong 'performance'.

This woodcut confirms that classical theatre was still associated with the spectre of sexual immorality in late fifteenth-century France. But what did medieval *English* commentators think about the relationship between sex and theatre, especially with regard to the performances of their own time? To answer this question, it is helpful to return to *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, a medieval antitheatrical text discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 135–36). As Clifford Davidson has noted:

> The early Christian attitude toward theatrical spectacle as associated with sexual immorality is not far beneath the surface of the *Tretise,* which charges that 'miraclis pleyinge is of the lustis of the fleyssh and mirthe of the body.'
>
> (Davidson ed 1993: 7)

Compare also the following passage in the *Tretise*:

> miraclis pleyinge […] withdrawith not onely oon persone but alle the puple fro dedis of charite and of penaunce into dedis of lustis and likingis and of feding of houre wittis.
>
> (Davidson ed 1993*:* 101)

The phrase 'alle the puple' here recalls the communal nature of audience experience, each spectator a body among bodies. The fact that these people are inspired to commit 'dedis of lustis and likingis' is especially striking. Consider some of the other places in the Middle English corpus where the collocation of 'lust' and 'liking' occurs. In *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*, Chaucer uses the phrase to describe Pasiphaë, the Cretan queen who mated with a bull:

> Of Phasipha, that was the queene of Crete,
> For shrewednesse, hym thoughte the tale swete;
> Fy! Spek namoore — it is a grisly thyng —
> Of hire horrible *lust and hir likyng*.
> (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 115, lines 733–36; emphasis added)

The phrase is also used in *The Book of Margery Kempe* when Margery and her husband are accused of failing to remain celibate: 'þe pepil slawndryd hem & seyd þei vsyd her *lust & her likyng* as þei dedyn be-forn her vow makyng' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 179–80; emphasis added). The collocation of 'lust' and 'liking' does not necessarily refer to sexual gratification; it can also indicate 'A feeling or experience of pleasure' more generally (*MED* s.v. 'liking, ger.(1)' senses 1.a and 1.b). Nevertheless, in the *Tretise*, the sexual meaning seems highly pertinent given the longstanding association of theatre and prostitution, and indeed the text's wider concerns with excessive sensory indulgence and the sins of the flesh.

This leaves an important question unresolved, however. Are the *Tretise*-authors worried that plays will inspire spectators to engage lecherous behaviour *during* performances, anticipating Peacham's satirical account of the woman who has her purse stolen? Or are they worried that spectators will be inspired to engage in lustful activities *after* performances? For comparison, Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579: 18r) bemoans prostitutes who 'flock to Theaters' to advertise their services, but he is quick to clarify that the theatre is the place of first acquaintance rather than the site of assignation:

> Not that any filthynesse in deede, is committed within the compasse of that grounde, as was doone in Rome, but that euery wanton and his Paramour […] are there first acquainted & cheapen the Merchandise in that place, which they pay for elsewhere as they can agree.
> (Gosson 1579: 18r)

I shall return to the rhetoric of sexual uncleanness here in due course (i.e. 'filthynesse in deede'). At present, however, my interest in this passage lies in its contrast with the *Tretise*. Unlike Gosson, the *Tretise* remains decidedly ambiguous about the temporal

relationship between medieval theatrical spectacle and lechery, and indeed whether prostitutes were to blame specifically.

In any case, just because antitheatrical writers *feared* that medieval plays would inspire sexually deviant behaviour does not prove that audience members ever succumbed to temptations of the flesh—either during or after performances. Nevertheless, I have already established that religious theatre and prostitution existed cheek by jowl in medieval York (see pp. 40–42 above). Moreover, given the longstanding association between theatre and sexual immorality extending from classical literature through to the seventeenth century, it is important to remain mindful of the possibility that medieval spectators' experience of the York Plays inspired touch that was sexual rather than sacred. Certainly, the performances were condemned for encouraging indecorous behaviour. In 1426, Friar Melton claimed that people 'attend not only to the play on the same feast, but also greatly to feastings, drunkenness, clamours, gossipings, and other wantonness [*alijs insolencijs*]' (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 43; II, 728). In my view, it is entirely possible that this disreputable behaviour extended to include illicit sexual acts.

In sum, my consideration of crowding in the York Plays has once again circled back to the medieval touch paradox. Pressing up against other people in the streets of York tangibly aligned spectators with the crowds in the sacred landscape of Jerusalem. Should a spectator have made contact with a Christ actor performing on the *platea*, they would have had a highly visceral, if artificial, connection with the saviour's sacred flesh. Nevertheless, an assembly of bodies in a small space risked unclean touch, threatening to spread disease and perhaps even sexual immorality.

In this respect, closet drama had an obvious advantage over live performance in late medieval England. A person who read a play in private stood no risk of catching an

infectious disease from a nearby spectator, nor could they have become the victim of—or indeed the perpetrator of—illicit groping. For comparison, William Prynne's *Histrio-Mastix* (1633: 930) claims 'Stage-playes may be privately read over without any danger of infection by ill company, without any publike infamy or scandall, without giving any ill example'. In response to this comment (and others) in the *Histrio-Mastix*, Marta Straznicky notes that 'private playreading' in early modern England was a mechanism through which to 'secure corporeal boundaries' (2002: 419). I would take this argument one step further: closet drama, both medieval and early modern, protected vulnerable bodies from unclean touch generally and sexual defilement in particular.

Unlike Prynne, the authors of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleinge* make no reference to closet drama. One cannot help but wonder whether medieval antitheatrical writers would have been more sympathetic to a private, meditative reading of the Bodley *Burial*, discussed at length in Chapter Four, than the communal experience of assembling to attend the York Corpus Christi Plays, pressed against other bodies in a crowd. This tactile act potentially transported spectators to a sacred space, yet it came at a hefty cost: the exposure of the flesh to sin.

Diversity in Sensory Experience during the York Plays

Thus far, I have suggested that spectators who attended the York Corpus Christi plays could potentially experience both sides of the medieval touch paradox. Of course, it is important to recognize that each individual would have had a unique experience of the York Plays, as John McGavin and Greg Walker have recently stressed:

> where one stands or sits has an effect on one's experience of a play that is variously practical, cultural, and aesthetic, and so needs to be taken into account alongside those other profound variables of gender, class, age, race, belief, or occupation that may have inflected an individual's response to drama such as this.
>
> (McGavin and Walker 2016: 17)

Where touch is concerned, not all spectators would have found themselves pressed tightly in the middle of a group of people: some would have been on the edges of the crowd. At any given point there were probably also some spectators moving between stations, occupying a liminal space. These spectators on the fringes of performance would presumably have been less emotionally invested in any particular pageant. In this chapter, I have argued that the feet were potentially profound access points to the sacred, allowing spectators to become tangibly immersed in the theatrical landscape. Nevertheless, the feet also allowed spectators to move away and to disengage from performance.

This raises the related issue of attention span. It was not necessarily a given that the laity in late medieval England would pay their utmost attention to devout material. This was a source of anxiety for some contemporary writers, as suggested for example by John Audelay's *Virtues of the Mass.* This poem makes use of a popular exemplum concerning women who gossip in church rather than paying attention to the service (see also Varnam 2018: 151–54). Comically, these women are so loquacious that an eavesdropping demon has to 'tug' his 'parchement' with his teeth in order to make an adequate written record of their 'talis' (Fein ed 2009: 88, lines 288, 296, 298). In John Mirk's version of the story in his *Festial*, the women deceitfully claim to have been saying 'hure Paternoster' during the mass, but the demon's document provides damning evidence that they were not, in fact, paying attention (Powell ed 2009: II, 251).

With this in mind, it is striking that so many of the York Plays open with an explicit call to attention and/or encourage the audience to be quiet:

ANGELUS: Alle creatures to me take tent,
[…]
(6.1)

JESUS: To me takis tent and giffis gud hede,
[…]
(25.1)

PILATUS: Sees, seniours, and see what I saie,
Takis tente to my talkyng enteere.
(36.1–2)

PILATUS: Lordingis, listenys nowe vnto me:
[…]
(38.1)

This is not an exhaustive list, nor indeed is the phenomenon limited to the York Plays. Similar lines appear, for example, at the beginning of the N-Town *Marriage of Mary and Joseph* (10.1–2), the Towneley *Caesar Augustus* (7b. 1–6), and *Everyman* (Davidson, Walsh, and Broos eds 2007: 17, lines 1–2). Such lines represent a conventional, formulaic way to open a play, but they simultaneously pay tribute to the practical necessity of drawing the audience's attention, especially at the beginning of a performance. This would have been an especially difficult task if any of the spectators were drunk, a possibility suggested by Friar Melton's aforementioned criticisms of the York Plays in 1426 (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 43; II, 728).

Further, many sensory experiences on the streets of York could have diverted even the sober spectator from the play at hand, including the sound of church bells (Lopez 2016: 65), the sight of sudden movement or vibrant costumes on a nearby pageant wagon, or the uncomfortable feeling of paving underfoot. For comparison, one criticism that *Jesus VR* has faced is that because users can look in any direction, they will not necessarily look at the main action:

> As the wise men presented their gifts to the baby Jesus during the nativity scene, I spin round to be confronted with a large, placidly chewing cow. During the John the Baptist scene, I tuned out to watch some people at the far edge of the water, busily and continuously doing – what? I couldn't quite see.
> (Bradshaw 2016: para. 3 of 7)

This is part of what makes *Jesus VR* such a compelling analogy for the York Plays. Like the users of *Jesus VR*, medieval spectators in York likely experienced sensory overload and consequent distraction. Moreover, no two spectators would have had precisely the same sensory experience of the York Plays. A spectator standing on one side of a crowd

may have been distracted by Herod's blusterous speech emanating from an adjacent pageant wagon, but this sound may have been less audible to a spectator on the other side of the crowd. Where touch is concerned, many spectators probably did *not* engage in illicit groping during performances; this was just one of a number of possibilities in a horizon of available sensory experiences.

Conclusion

Chapter Five has highlighted that the sense of touch played a more immediate role in medieval audience experience than either of the two preceding chapters acknowledged. Medieval spectators watching the York plays would not have been limited to touching with the gaze or to imagining tactile experiences. Rather, people who assembled to watch the Corpus Christi pageants on the streets of York would certainly have made contact with the paving stones beneath their feet, and would probably have brushed shoulder to shoulder in tightly knit crowds. Such tactile encounters would have been cushioned only by thin shoes and clothing.

An exploratory analysis of these types of contact has suggested that the touch paradox at the heart of my thesis was not confined to the medieval stage, but could also have been directly experienced by the audience. On the one hand, medieval spectators in York were in a position to use their feet as a pathway to holy ground. Yet at the same time, the press of bodies in the tight streets of medieval York posed a significant risk of unclean touch, enabling the spread of disease and perhaps even illicit sexual behaviour. In this context, my argument has once again been galvanized by the figure of Doubting Thomas. In the introduction to this thesis, I used the York *Incredulity of Thomas* to open up the medieval touch paradox and expose tensions between sacred and unclean contact in medieval England. Chapter Five has suggested that the people watching this and

indeed other pageants at York could potentially have become the best or the worst part of Thomas. The York Plays made it possible for spectators to become 'Virtual Thomases', connecting with Christ's sacred body not via the hands but via the feet. At the same time, crowding in York opened up possibilities for illicit touch, perhaps finding an echo in Thomas's penetration of Christ's wounds near Grapecuntlane.

What implications does Chapter Five have for the *afterlife* of the medieval touch paradox? In the previous chapter, I suggested that the role of touch as a pathway to the sacred was in decline in early modern England, at least where the tactile worship of sculptures was concerned. Chapter Five, on the other hand, has suggested that the medieval association between touch and uncleanness was still a force to be reckoned with in early modern England. Medieval fears about infectious touch, galvanized in plague treatises of the 1530s and 1540s, had a lasting impact in England. Such anxieties not only hindered several performances of the York Plays in the 1550s, but also contributed to the closure of public theatres in London in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Where unclean touch in early modern England is concerned, it is also striking that *The Schoole of Abuse* (Gosson 1579: 18r) should describe the act of prostitution in terms of 'filthynesse', as highlighted above (p. 266). Throughout this thesis, but especially in the introduction and Chapter One, I stressed that various types of sexual touch were construed as unclean in late medieval England. Gosson's rhetoric of uncleanness suggests that this association had a lasting influence at least where prostitution was concerned. The divergent fates of the unclean and sacred halves of the touch paradox will be considered at more length in my conclusion, a discussion that will allow me to assess how far sensory dichotomy at the heart of this thesis was a distinctly medieval phenomenon.

Before moving on, however, I wish to stress that Chapter Five has broader implications for the study of medieval English theatre. I have focused on the York Plays

in this chapter, not least because many practicalities of performance are well established. But how might immediate tactile stimuli on the skin have shaped medieval spectators' experiences of *other* plays? This would be a productive avenue for further research. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, for example, would offer food for thought. At the end of this play, the bishop invites 'all my pepull' to 'goo bare' on their 'feet' and walk in 'the devoutest wyse' towards an image of Christ (Sebastian ed 2012: 58, lines 808–13). It is not entirely clear to whom the bishop is speaking here, but Clare Wright has convincingly argued that his speech implicates the spectators, inviting them to become actively involved in performance (2014: 172). What would it have meant for the spectators to touch the world underfoot in such an exposed and indeed penitential way? Answering this question is beyond the scope of the present chapter. Nevertheless, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* reaffirms that future scholars working on the senses and audience experience would benefit from paying more attention to what medieval spectators could touch during performance, especially with their feet. Indeed, where the study of touch is concerned, the feet offer something that other body parts such as the hand simply cannot: through these limbs, humans make near continuous contact with the world around them, and can take journeys both physical and spiritual.

Conclusion

In the course of this thesis, I have demonstrated that the sense of touch was integral to both the performance and the reception of medieval English theatre, especially biblical plays. Specifically, I have argued for the existence of a paradox in medieval attitudes towards touch, one that found unique expression in contemporary theatre. Touch, in late medieval England, was a pathway to the sacred yet also a source of uncleanness, a tension that was not only investigated on the medieval stage but could also have been experienced by its audience members.

In the process, I have challenged the traditional scholarly narrative concerning medieval spectatorship. Medieval plays did not appeal exclusively, or even primarily, to the senses of sight and hearing—touch, too, was pivotal. Audience members could engage with theatre on a tactile level in a variety of different ways, including touching actors with the gaze, drawing upon imagined and perhaps even remembered experiences with props, brushing up against other people in the crowd, and touching the ground with the feet. Future scholars working on the senses and medieval spectatorship should therefore recognize the truly multisensory appeal of medieval theatre, thinking beyond merely its visual and auditory dimensions.

My conclusion will pay attention to two questions that have arisen in the course of this thesis: how far was the touch paradox distinctly medieval, and where can areas of sensory continuity and rupture be detected in early English theatre? I will also consider the wider implications of my study, demonstrating the relevance of the touch paradox for genres of medieval literature beyond biblical theatre. This thesis will close by returning to Doubting Thomas. Specifically, I will use this apostle as a tool through which to reflect back upon the challenges and opportunities of exploring touch in medieval theatre.

The Decline of the Medieval Touch Paradox

In the introduction to this thesis, I demarcated 1370–1550 as the chronological limits of late medieval English theatre for the purposes of my study (see pp. 14–15 above). However, I stressed that it is difficult and potentially even reductive to draw a line between medieval and early modern culture and their respective theatrical traditions. My thesis has only reinforced this fact. In particular, Chapter One's discussion of touch, gender, and sacred healing involved a close examination of the text of the York *Assumption* from 1477, but also took into account the turbulent performance history of the play in the 1550s and 1560s, and the eventual demise of the York Plays as a whole in the 1570s. It may not be possible or indeed desirable to pinpoint when exactly medieval theatre ended, but can a date be given for the end of the medieval touch paradox?

To a certain extent, the medieval touch paradox did not end at all. The association between touch and uncleanness survived into the early modern period and even beyond. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that the N-Town *Assumption* depended upon and indeed reinforced the association between Jewish touch and defilement—an idea with a cultural legacy that I detected in both Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c.1589–1590) and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (c.1596). The enduring relationship between the sense of touch and uncleanness also emerged in Chapter Three. Here, I considered haptic vision as a source of contamination in medieval optical theory, medicine, and folklore, and noted parallels in Anthony Munday's antitheatrical text *A second and third blast of retrait from the plaies and Theaters* (1580) and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (c.1611). In Chapter Five, I highlighted that growing anxieties about touch and infection in medieval England had an important legacy in the early modern period, especially with respect to the suspension of theatrical performances in times of plague. In the same chapter, I also flagged the rhetoric of filth in Gosson's discussion of prostitution and the early modern

theatre, which reveals some element of continuity in medieval ideas about sexual touch and uncleanness.

In essence, the medieval association between touch and uncleanness was tied to a social construct of dirt as both physically and morally deplorable—a construction with enduring cultural purchase. Conversely, the status of touch as a pathway to the sacred in late medieval England was not tied to such a stable social construct. Rather, it was tied to the sensory aspects of devotional culture, which were changing drastically in the sixteenth century in the course of the English reformation. For example, in Chapter One, I proposed that theatre offers a powerful litmus test for changing attitudes towards touch and the sacred, especially with regard to the relationship between touch, relics, and sacred healing in the 1530s. Where plays like the York *Assumption* had once encouraged women to wear birth girdles in order to access holy protection, in the wake of the Reformation the relationship between touch, relics, and healing was suppressed or even ridiculed on stage. Chapter Four extended the argument that theatre provides a valuable insight into the changing relationship between touch and the sacred in the sixteenth century. I argued that plays like the Bodley *Burial* reinforced the status of touch as an access point to the sacred body being represented by sculpture—a practice that came under attack in the 1530s and would ultimately be treated with simultaneous scepticism and nostalgia in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale.*

A paradox requires two opposing premises. In our case, touch was both sacred *and* unclean in medieval England. If one premise should start to decline—here, the sacred aspect of touch—then the paradox itself declines. The 1530s, then, which ushered in an assault on the tactile worship of relics and sculpture, would seem to offer a tempting date for the end of the medieval touch paradox. However, there are several problems with this theory. Firstly, culturally reconditioning touch, or indeed any of the senses, is necessarily

a protracted process that involves upsetting generations of ingrained habits and beliefs. The reluctance of certain parishioners to adjust to worship without rosary beads, cited in Chapter Four, is a case in point (pp. 225–26). Moreover, although certain tactile activities may have been forbidden in principle, such as wearing birth girdle relics, it was almost certainly impossible to put such bans into practice—especially where intimate spaces like the birthing room were involved. Traditional faith, as Eamon Duffy (2005) and Christopher Haigh (1993) have stressed, endured even after the Reformation—so why not the tactile practices associated with it? Indeed, Robyn Malo has recently suggested that 'paradoxically, relics were in some ways more accessible in the 1580s than they had been before the dissolution of the monasteries in 1537–38,' not least because 'after the dismantling of shrines, medieval relics often came into the possession of recusant laypeople' (2014: 533). Where there had once been a politics of tactile access to relics in churches, now a new level of 'tactile interaction' with these holy objects was possible in the privacy of the home (Malo 2014: 533).

Finally, and most importantly, the relationship between touch and the sacred was not subject to a comprehensive overhaul in the early modern period, as demonstrated by the enduring popularity of the Royal Touch. As I discussed in the introduction (p. 32), the performance of the Royal Touch was based on the premise that a monarch could heal a scrofulous patient by laying his or her hands upon them. Unsurprisingly, the practice became problematic under the reformed faith; it seemed like a false miracle and an inherently superstitious act (Bloch 1973 repr. 2015: 188). In 1603, James I, who had been brought up in a Calvinist environment in Scotland, was reluctant to perform the Royal Touch for precisely these reasons (Bloch 1973 repr. 2015: 191). Nevertheless, rejecting the practice would have undermined the divine right of kings; the Royal Touch was politically expedient, establishing the legitimacy of the reigning monarch. In the end,

James I reluctantly agreed to continue the practice (Bloch 1973 repr. 2015: 191). As such, the Royal Touch remained an important area of continuity with the medieval past, going some way to preserve the sacred half of the touch paradox.

Once again, theatre proves to be a useful lens through which to examine the development of attitudes towards touch—or, in this context, the *lack* of such a development. In Act 4, Scene 3 of *Macbeth*, Malcolm asks if the king is approaching and receives the following response:

> DOCTOR: Ay, sir. There are a crew of wretched souls
> That stay his cure. Their malady convinces
> The great assay of art; but at his touch,
> Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,
> They presently amend.
> (4.3.142–46)

Note especially the emphasis on the sanctity of the king's hand in this passage; his body is a vessel through which ordinary people can connect with God.

For context, Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1603, three years into James I's reign. Many have argued that the play was written to gratify the new king, whose family were believed to descend from Banquo (Clark and Mason eds 2015: 20–21). However, this argument has lost favour in recent years, with recent editors stressing that 'the play is at the least ambivalent in its handling of topics close to the King's heart' (Clark and Mason eds 2015: 21). With this in mind, does Act 4 Scene 3 implicitly endorse James I's legitimacy as king by stressing the sense of touch as an indicator of royal blood? Or might the reference to the Royal Touch have instead served to criticize James I's initial reluctance to continue the practice? Or was Shakespeare in fact unaware of the contemporary controversy surrounding the act? These questions cannot be answered satisfactorily.

What is clear, however, is that *Macbeth* was written in a period when the Royal Touch maintained its cultural relevance and popular appeal. Although the practice

became controversial under the reformed faith, it was never eradicated; instead, it remained a vestige of the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox. Indeed, James I was just the latest in a series of monarchs who had preserved the Royal Touch after the Reformation, following in the footsteps of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I (Bloch 1973 repr. 2015: 182, 188, 190). Nor was James I the last to perform the Royal Touch. If anything, the practice became *more* popular in England as the seventeenth century progressed. Marc Bloch 'quite confidently' estimates that Charles II touched a staggering 100,000 scrofulous people during his reign from 1660 to 1685 (1973 repr. 2015: 212). One such performance is depicted in figure 66. Note especially the placement of Charles II's hands on the patient's head, and the spectacle that the Royal Touch generates. The Royal touch would remain a feature of the English monarchy until 1714, when Queen Anne performed the act for the last time (Bloch 1973 repr. 2015: 220). As such, the sacred dimension of the medieval touch paradox had not disappeared entirely in early modern England. Although many practices that invested touch with sacred potential were under assault, notably the use of birth girdles and the tactile worship of sculptures, the Royal touch represented an area of continuity with the medieval past, keeping an important tactile pathway to the sacred open.

In sum, although the medieval touch paradox declined in several important respects from the 1530s onwards, it would be wrong to claim that it collapsed outright. Rather, the medieval touch paradox experienced its own 'reformation', so to speak. Throughout my thesis, medieval English theatre has provided a unique insight into this sensory dichotomy both at its peak and in the midst of its inevitable transformation. Crucially, like medieval English theatre itself, the medieval touch paradox did not come to a sudden and conveniently definable end, but evolved incrementally in response to cultural ruptures. Of course, this section of my conclusion has necessarily provided only

an initial foray into a much more open-ended topic. Debates about the Eucharist would offer a thought-provoking point of departure for scholars seeking to explore the decline of the medieval touch paradox further. Zysk (2017) has recently investigated Eucharistic controversy and its intersections with pre- and post-Reformation theatre, and his monograph would provide valuable context for such an endeavour.

A Touch Further

There are clear reasons why I have prioritized biblical drama in this thesis, especially the York and N-Town Plays. The Incredulity of Thomas, which has functioned as a leitmotif throughout my study, is a biblical story. Moreover, the sacred half of the medieval touch paradox revolved to a significant extent around Christ's body, which was of course embodied in biblical plays. Nevertheless, I will now demonstrate that the touch paradox at the heart of this thesis has broader implications for our understanding of medieval English theatre. My focus will be three morality plays, namely *Mankind* (c.1465–70), *The Castle of Perseverance* (c.1400–1425), and *Everyman* (c.1510–1535). For comparison, I will also bring in an English interlude, John Bale's *Three Laws* (c.1538), and a Scottish interlude, Sir David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* (c.1540–1554).

To open up this topic, it is useful to examine the *kiss my arse* motif.[1] The image has obvious scatological implications, and is conventionally associated with diabolical or otherwise morally deplorable characters in medieval theatre. The *kiss my arse* motif, then, appeals to unclean touch in order to demarcate 'the undesirables' on stage. For example, in *The Castle of Perseverance*, Malus Angelus says: 'Therfore, goode boy, cum blow | At my nether ende!' (Klausner ed 2010: 30, lines 813–14). Elsewhere in the play, Malus

[1] To draw attention the vulgarity of this motif, I have chosen to use the English expression rather than the Latin translation, *osculare fundamentum*. In this respect, I diverge from Steenbrugge 2014: 102. For another brief discussion of the phenomenon in theatre, see Davidson 2001: 75–76. Though not about theatre specifically, see Durrant 2005 for a discussion of rectal kissing in medieval and early modern culture.

Angelus lives up to the name of ‘bad angel’ by invoking ‘the Devyl’ (Klausner ed 2010: 71, line 2405). In *Mankind*, the *kiss my arse* motif is associated especially with the vice figure Nowadays, who represents living in the moment and hedonism. Early in the play, Nowadays tries to cajole Nought (i.e. ‘nothingness’) into articulating the kiss my arse motif in Latin:

> NOWADAYS: I prey yow hertyly, worschyppull clerke,
> To have this Englysch mad in Laten:
> ‘I have etun a dyschfull of curdys,
> Ande I have schetun yowr mowth full of turdys.’
> (Ashley and Necastro eds 2010:
> 17, lines 129–32)

However, when Nought responds with an evasive and belligerent answer, Nowadays ends up articulating the idea in Latin himself, in the process mocking Latinate learning:

> NOWADAYS: Who spake to thee, foll? Thou art not wyse!
> Go and do that longyth to thin offyce:
> *Osculare fundamentum!*
> (Ashley and Necastro eds 2010:
> 17, lines 140–42)

It is especially fitting that Nowadays should conjure the image of a ‘mowth full of turdys’ (Ashley and Necastro eds 2010: 17, line 132). On a literal level, Nowdays is an important mouthpiece for faecal language in the play (see also Ashley and Necastro eds 2010: 23–24, lines 338–43). On a metaphorical level, Nowadays’ speeches are morally repugnant, enticing the audience into the bowels of hell. For example, Nowadays explains that spectators watching *Mankind* would have to pay to see the devil: ‘Gyf us rede reyallys yf ye wyll se hys abhomynabull presens’ (Ashley and Necastro eds 2010: 27, line 465). By asking for ‘rede reyallys’ or ‘Ready Royals’, Nowadays is asking for a specific type of currency: ‘Royals were a coin worth 10 shillings, first produced in 1465’ (Walker ed 2000: 269n46). Once again, the *kiss my arse* motif therefore belongs to a character who has strong associations with the devil.

In both the *Castle of Perseverance* and *Mankind*, the *kiss my arse* motif is evocatively called to mind rather than physically realized. Not so in *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, in which implicit and explicit stage directions indicate that two of the actors should perform the shocking tactile gesture:

PARDONER: My will and finall sentence is,
Ilk ane of yow uthers arsse kis.
Slip doun your hois. Me thinkis the carle is glaikit!
Set thou not by, howbeit scho kisse and slaik it.

Heir sall scho kis his arsse with silence.

Lift up [her] clais, kis hir hoill with your hart.

SOWTAR: I pray yow, sir, forbid hir for to fart.

Heir sall the Carle kis hir arse with silence.

hois: stocking
glaikit: foolish
slaik: lick
hoill: gap [here: anus]
Sowtar: Shoemaker

(Text after Walker ed 2000: 583, lines 2177–2182s.d.
Glosses after *DOST* s.v. 'hose, hois, n.' sense 1; 'glaikit, adj.' sense a;
'slaik, v.' only sense; 'hole, hoil(l), n.' sense 1; 'soutar, n.' sense a)

What precipitates this revolting exchange of kisses? Sowtar wants to divorce his wife, citing her tendency to scold him and her sexually licentious behaviour. The desire for divorce is mutual, though Sowtar's wife's dissatisfaction stems from Sowtar's impotence. The mutual exchange of kisses below the belt is the Pardoner's obscene idea of a divorce ceremony.

Note especially the qualification in the explicit stage directions that these kisses should take place '*with silence*'. In this moment, there is nothing for the audience to hear. Instead, their eyes dominate their sensory experience of the play. They can only look on as a sordid spectacle unfolds, one that has obvious coprophagic implications—not unlike the *Judensau* iconography in figure 33. Quite possibly, the actors portraying Sowtar and Sowtar's wife would not have been wearing undergarments (Epp 2004: 67), thus making

their kisses look even more lewd. Moreover, as Garrett Epp has noted, *Ane Satyre* is self-conscious about its use of cross-dressed male actors to portray female roles, and the exchange of kisses between Sowtar and his 'wife' would thus had obvious homoerotic overtones (2004: 69). As discussed earlier in this thesis (pp. 26–27), homoeroticism was heavily stigmatized as an unclean act. Sowtar and his wife, then, are clearly morally deplorable characters in this play. But are they are close kin with devils, like the mouthpieces of the *kiss my arse* motif in both *Mankind* and *The Castle of Perseverance*? In *Ane Satyre*, the *kiss my arse* motif is once again associated with diabolical characters—if only in a tongue-in-cheek way: Sowtar, a cliché of the frustrated husband, complains that his wife is 'Ane quick devill, sir, ane storme of stryfe' (Walker ed 2000: 582, line 2142).

For comparison, the *kiss my arse* motif also features in an English play from the interlude genre, namely John Bale's *Three Laws*. Here, however, the motif is expressed rather than enacted; in this respect, Bale's *Three Laws* is more like the two English morality plays *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Mankind* than the Scottish interlude *Ane Satyre*. Infidelitas says the following to Naturae Lex:

> INFIDELITAS: Your mouth shall kysse my docke,
> Your tonge shall it unlocke –
>
> *docke*: buttocks
>
> (Happé ed 1985–1986: II, 73, lines 216–17;
> gloss supplied by me after *OED* 2nd edn s.v.
> 'dock, n.2' sense †3)

Once again, the *kiss my arse* motif is put in the mouth of a character with connections to the devil, as demonstrated when Naturae Lex retorts that he will 'shurne thy [i.e. Infidelitas'] cumpanye | As I wolde the devyll of hell' (Happé ed 1985–1986: II, 77, lines 371–72).

As a caveat, the *kiss my arse* motif is not exclusive to medieval morality plays and interludes—it also features in biblical theatre. For example, in the Towneley *Killing of Abel*, Cain invites Abel to 'Com kis myne ars!' (2.61). Cain's fratricide, of course, will send him to Hell. The *kiss my arse* motif also finds echoes in non-theatrical medieval English texts, most obviously in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale.* In the following passage, Alison tricks Absolon into kissing her bare bottom through an open window (see also Barr 2014: 12–13):

> Derk was the nyght as pich, or as the cole,
> And at the wyndow out she putte hir hole,
> And Absolon, hym fil no bet ne wers,
> But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers
> Ful savourly, er he were war of this.
> (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 75, lines 3731–35)

The way that Absolon responds to this inadvertent, obscene kiss is striking given the diabolical associations of the *kiss my arse motif* in theatre, outlined above. Specifically, Absolon vows to get revenge and entrusts his soul 'unto Sathanas' (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 75, line 3750). Of course, this is not the first time that we have encountered comical contact with bottoms in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the introduction to this thesis (pp. 44–45), I discussed *The Summoner's Tale*, in which John is instructed to 'grope' Thomas's anus for a gift but receives only a fart (Benson and Robinson eds 2008: 134, line 2141). A crucial difference between these tales, of course, is that John touches Thomas's bottom with his hand whereas Absolon touches Alison's bottom with his lips, and so only the latter encounter evokes the *kiss my arse* motif.

To put the *kiss my arse* motif in its immediate dramaturgical context, there were broader associations between hell, mouths, and faeces in medieval English theatre. Hell was evidently represented by a mouth in some biblical plays, in keeping with a popular iconographic tradition exemplified by LBL MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 142r (figure 67). For example, the York Mercer's Indenture of 1433 calls for a 'helle mouthe' for the

Doomsday pageant (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 55; Sheingorn 1992: 6). Hell was also inextricably linked with excrement on the medieval stage. For example, in the N-Town *Fall of Lucifer*, the eponymous character howls 'For fere of fyre a fart I crake!' (1.81). There is also a comedic moment in the N-Town *Fall of Man* when the Devil's fear leads to such a forceful fart that it rips open his trousers: 'For þis falle I gynne to qweke. | With a fart my brech I breke!' (2.272–73). The *kiss my arse* motif in medieval theatre takes these associations between hell, mouths, and faeces to a truly repulsive extreme, relying on the cultural purchase of the unclean half of the medieval touch paradox to accentuate the abhorrence of its diabolical vice characters.

As these examples show, the unclean side of the medieval touch paradox found expression beyond biblical plays. But what about its sacred counterpart? A thought-provoking example can be found in *Everyman*, a morality play. The following speech emphasizes how priests were able to host Christ's holy body in their hands during the consecration:

> FIVE WITS: With five wordes he may consecrate
> Goddes body in flesshe and bloode to make,
> And handeleth his Maker bytwene his handes.
> (Davidson, Walsh, and Broos eds 2007: 65, lines 737–39)

Conspicuously, these words are uttered by Five Wits, i.e. the Five Senses, an attribution that draws further attention to the sensory aspects of the consecration. For the priest, the sense of touch is a profound pathway to Jesus's sacred body.

Of course, the priest's hands-on experience of Christ's body was far from universal. Elsewhere in this thesis (pp. 30–31), I have drawn attention to the politics of tactile access to Christ's body during the mass, noting that parishioners were only able to touch the host with their tongues and not their hands. This orally mediated mode of contact with Christ's body is inferred when Everyman goes off stage to receive the last rites (Davidson, Walsh, and Broos eds 2007: 65, line 749.s.d). Thus, although *Everyman*

draws attention to the priest's first-hand experience of Christ's holy flesh during the consecration, the representation of the mass in the play also implicitly exposes the restrictions on touch as a pathway to the sacred for ordinary parishioners.

The limitations of the sacred half of the touch paradox also find expression in *Everyman* when the eponymous character experiences total sensory deprivation upon the brink of death. Unlike Good Deeds, who promises to stay with Everyman until the bitter end, Five Wits decides to 'forsake' him (Davidson, Walsh, and Broos eds 2007: 73, line 846). Crucially, it is only after Everyman loses his senses that he is in a position to commend his soul to heaven and meet the Lord. Touch, or indeed any of the senses, is not the ultimate pathway to the sacred. Rather, it is only by leaving embodied experience behind and *losing* the senses that the ultimate union with the Lord becomes possible. *Everyman*'s death scene, then, reminds us of the inevitable inadequacy of the human senses as a pathway to the sacred.

Yet, at the same time, *Everyman*'s death scene cannot help but expose the fundamental importance of human sensory experience. An obvious tension is created by the fact Everyman no longer has a sense of touch, and yet the human actor representing him necessarily still does. Throughout this thesis, I have suggested that the human body was ideally suited to explore the sense of touch in performance, quite simply because touch is an integral part of bodily experience. Nevertheless, for exactly the same reason, human bodies would inevitably fall short when representing death and its resultant sensory loss on stage. It is exceedingly difficult for humans to imagine a world without touch, let alone to convey it theatrically. In this respect, it is notable that Everyman cannot help but turn to tactile language on his deathbed:

> EVERYMAN: Into thy handes, Lord, my soule I commende,
> Receyve it, Lorde, that it be nat lost.
> […]
> *In manus tuas* [Into your hands], of myghtes moost

> Forever, *commendo spiritum meum* [I commend my soul].
> (Text and translation after Davidson, Walsh,
> and Broos eds 2007: 75, lines 880–87)

This speech, of course, owes a debt to the Bible: 'And Jesus crying out with a loud voice said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" ' (Luke 23:46). Its inclusion in *Everyman* is striking, revealing that the sense of touch shapes not only how Everyman engages with the world around him before death, but also how he thinks about the afterlife, a world theoretically devoid of sensory experience. The sense of touch, though an insufficient pathway to the sacred in mortal life, cannot help but dictate how Everyman expresses his ultimate union with God.

Plays like *Mankind*, *The Castle of Perseverance*, and *Everyman* demonstrate that the sacred and the unclean aspects of touch found expression on the medieval English stage far beyond biblical plays. Of course, the survey provided here has necessarily been both brief and selective, and touch in non-biblical medieval plays could easily warrant its own study.

Beyond Theatre: The Touch Paradox and *The Book of Margery Kempe*

The touch paradox identified in this thesis has yet wider implications for scholars of medieval English literature and culture. This is because it is possible to detect the tension between touch as a pathway to the holy and a source of defilement beyond the genre of theatre. In particular, it is no coincidence that Margery Kempe has featured in every single chapter of this thesis. Her *Book* is a rich source of practical examples of touch that implicate both sides of the paradox. Before reflecting back on these examples, a caveat should be made here that Margery Kempe is an extreme figure, whose devotional intensity and constant weeping surprised and indeed irked people even in her own age (Oliver 2011). Margery's experience of the medieval touch paradox, then, can hardly be

taken as unproblematically representative. Her behaviour and feelings, though atypical, are nevertheless highly revealing: her *Book* demonstrates what happened when medieval ideas about touch, the sacred, and dirt were internalized to a superlative degree.

In the introduction to this thesis (p. 30), *The Book of Margery Kempe* exemplified an important principle of touch in medieval England, namely that handling a replica or imitation of a holy body or object could provide just as an effective pathway to the sacred as the original. In Margery's case, taking children 'owt of þe moderys armys' and kissing them 'in þe stede of Criste' was a profoundly meaningful encounter (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 86). Margery's experiences have found an echo on many occasions throughout this thesis, including women wearing replicas of the Virgin Mary's girdle in Chapter One and spectators walking on a virtual Jerusalem in Chapter Five. Conversely, Margery's experiences have also served to contextualize the unclean half of the medieval touch paradox. In Chapter One (p. 74), I highlighted that Margery deploys the rhetoric of uncleanness when justifying her desire to cease sexual relations with her husband. *The Book of Margery Kempe* thus underscores that sexual touch had the potential to pollute the self—even within the marriage bed.

Margery's experiences have also served as a powerful reminder that the line between sacred and unclean touch can be difficult to draw. In Chapter Two (p. 111), her *Book* allowed me to explore the complex relationship between touch and social pariahs in medieval culture. On the surface, lepers were the untouchables within late medieval English society. Like Jews, their touch was associated with contamination and infection. Yet at the same time, kissing a leper was a sign of humility and charity—which is precisely why Margery is upset that she 'myth not kyssyn þe laȝerys' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 176). *The Book of Margery Kempe* therefore reveals that the boundary between self and other in late medieval England required careful tactile negotiation.

In the final three chapters of this thesis, *The Book of Margery Kempe* informed my discussion of the role of touch in medieval spectatorship. In Chapter Three (p. 150), I drew attention to Margery's frustration with the *Noli me tangere*. Margery was evidently greatly distressed that Mary Magdalene was not allowed to embrace Christ; it directly conflicted with the role of touch as a pathway to God in the context of late medieval affective piety. Margery's emotional response to the *Noli me tangere* in turn enabled me to open up a discussion of the ways in which an actor portraying Christ on stage could inspire both tactile longing and frustration.

Margery's intense desire to touch Christ's body resurfaced in Chapter Four (p. 214), specifically in Margery's wish for a sculpture of the crucified Christ to 'losyn hys handys fro þe crosse' and embrace her (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 14). This example served as a reminder that medieval people may have had a strong (and perhaps unfulfilled) desire to touch sculptures of Christ, which in turn informed my discussion of watching the Bodley *Burial*. In Chapter Five (pp. 245–46), Margery's experiences in Jerusalem and Rome helped to contextualize the important role of touch in medieval pilgrimage. This in turn laid the foundations for my reading of the York Plays as a form of virtual pilgrimage, during which spectators could effectively touch Jerusalem with their feet.

Overall, *The Book of Margery Kempe* has furnished me with a valuable tool with which to contextualize my study of touch in medieval English theatre. However, the above summary serves as a reminder that Margery's tactile experiences are thought provoking in their own right, and would warrant further study. Like Doubting Thomas, Margery is a useful 'touchstone', so to speak, for the complex role of touch in late medieval England. Crucially, however, Margery's experiences do not *always* align neatly with the medieval touch paradox. Consider the following extract from book 11:

> It befel up-on a Fryday on Mydsomyr Evyn in rygth hot wedyr, as þis creatur was komyng fro-ȝorke-ward beryng a botel wyth bere in hir hand & hir husbond a cake in hys bosom, he askyd hys wyfe þis qwestyon […]
> (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 23)

Here, Margery is holding a bottle of beer. This is clearly not a sacred act of touch, but neither is it obviously unclean. Carrying and indeed consuming a bottle of alcohol might, of course, *lead* to unclean touch. Alcohol lowers the inhibitions, and so it is hardly surprising that medieval philosophers including Thomas Aquinas were anxious that drinking would lead to dangerous sexual indulgence and defilement of the flesh (Jaboulet-Vercherre 2014: 170). Nevertheless, holding a bottle of beer was not an unclean tactile act *in and of itself*. The *Book of Margery Kempe*, then, serves as a valuable reminder that the touch paradox identified in this thesis is not a comprehensive guide to touch in medieval England. Touch was not necessarily sacred *or* unclean, good *or* bad. Yet even though these binaries do not accommodate every single tactile act in medieval England, the touch paradox has offered a valuable framework through which to better understand the place of touch in medieval England, on the stage and beyond.

The passage above from book 11 of *The Book of Margery Kempe* is notable for a second reason. The 'Fryday on Mydsomyr Evyn' in question seems to have been Friday the 23nd of June 1413, which would make the previous day the feast of Corpus Christi (Meale 2000: 53). It is therefore possible that Margery and her husband saw the York Plays being performed (Meale 2000: 56). Moreover, Carole M. Meale has noted striking similarities between the account of the Crucifixion in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the York *Crucifixion* play, and she suggests that the former may have been inspired by the latter (2000: 53–56).

The York Plays of 1413 predated the *Ordo Paginarum* by just two years, and so this document is a useful point of departure for thinking about what Margery could have seen if she *did* attend the day's performances. It is unclear how closely the pageants

described in the *Ordo* correlate to the play texts preserved in the York Register. For example, the reference in the *Ordo* to a play featuring 'Thomas the apostle touching the wounds of Christ [*Thomas apostolus palpans vulnera Iesu*]' was not necessarily the exact same text of the York *Incredulity of Thomas* discussed in my introduction (Johnston and Rogerson eds 1979: I, 23; II, 708). Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine how emotional Margery would have become upon seeing any theatrical representation of doubting Thomas touching Christ's flesh and blood. Margery evidently found it profoundly moving to see visual representations of Christ's wounded body. Indeed, she wept so much upon seeing an image of the Pietà that a priest was forced to wearily remind her that 'Ihesu is ded long sithyn', to which Margery responds: 'hys deth is as fresch to me as he had deyd þis same day' (Meech and Allen eds 1940: 148). If a static image proved so effective in encouraging Margery to bridge the temporal gap between the biblical past and the medieval present, then how much more emotional might she have become when seeing a living, breathing actor pretend to be Christ, his suffering body probed and verified by a doubting apostle? As noted in Chapter Three (p. 183), Reginald Pecock's *Repressor* (c.1449) argues that an image of a crucifix is surpassed in representative effectiveness only 'whanne a quyk man is sett in a pley to be hangid nakid on a cros and to be in semyng woundid and scourgid' (Babington ed 1860: I, 221).

This discussion of Margery Kempe's emotional responses to art and theatre raises a thought-provoking question. What was the difference between seeing a static representation of touch in visual art, and a moving representation of touch in theatre? What did theatre offer that other types of art could not? To answer this final question, I shall return to the representation of Doubting Thomas in medieval York.

Thomas, Touch, and Theatre: Challenges and Opportunities

Throughout this thesis, Doubting Thomas has functioned as a leitmotif. In the introduction, Thomas's tactile encounter with Christ's body enabled me to open up the medieval touch paradox. In chapters one, two, and three, I explored how the touch paradox was refracted by Thomas's many 'twins' on the medieval stage, including the doubting midwife at the Nativity, Thomas himself at the Assumption, the Jew at Mary's funeral, and Mary Magdalene during the *Noli me tangere*. In chapters three, four, and five, I considered the ways in which spectators could 'become' Doubting Thomas during medieval biblical plays and have a profound tactile encounter with Christ's flesh. At the close of this thesis, I shall now return to the original Doubting Thomas story from John 20:24–28 and its representation in York. In my view, the York *Incredulity of Thomas* was in a position to offer a much more dynamic and visceral representation of the Thomas story than was possible in contemporary visual culture, but this came at the price of theatre's inherent transience.

Consider, for example, a fifteenth-century stained glass window that depicts the Incredulity of Thomas in All Saints, North Street, York (figure 68). The window, which extends practically from the floor to the ceiling, makes a striking visual impression in this small parish church. In the centre light, Christ holds a cross-headed staff in his left hand. His side wound is exposed and visibly dripping (figure 69), and so too are the wounds on his right hand and both of his feet. The left light depicts Doubting Thomas with an arm outstretched to touch Christ. The absence of blood on Thomas's fingers suggests that he is reaching out in anticipation of touching the side wound, rather than recoiling from the moment of contact (figure 70). The right light depicts an archbishop; he might be St Thomas Becket (Gee 1969: 165), mirroring the Thomas on the other side of the window and perhaps unintentionally literalizing the meaning of Thomas as 'twin'.

However, the viewer's gaze is not drawn to this archbishop. Rather, it is drawn to Christ and Doubting Thomas, whose bodies face each other, their gazes meeting. This image of the Incredulity of Thomas, not unlike like *Noli me tangere* image discussed in chapter 3, tantalizes the viewer (figure 37; see p. 155). Thomas reaches out to make contact with Christ, and yet is not close enough to touch him. The tripartite frame structure of the window separates Thomas from Christ, visually reinforcing the impression that skin-to-skin contact is imminent but not yet realized. Thomas is perpetually frozen in a frustrating limbo in this image, never able to perform the intimate tactile act with which he is most famously associated. A similar effect is created by the Incredulity of Thomas window from St Saviour's Church in York, previously discussed in the introduction (figure 7; see p. 37). Although Christ touches Thomas in order to guide his hand, Thomas has not yet touched the side wound.

In the stained glass windows of medieval York, then, Thomas was permanently frozen on the tantalizing threshold of touch. Conversely, on Corpus Christi day on the nearby streets, spectators had the opportunity to see the Incredulity of Thomas in action, and to witness the dramatic moment when Thomas felt Christ's bleeding wounds. Unlike the stained glass windows in nearby churches, in which the dynamic tactile encounter was necessarily depicted in a static way, the York Plays were in a position to represent Thomas's entire narrative, from doubt to faith via a profound moment of touch. The York Plays, then, had the capacity to underscore the viscerality and immediacy of Thomas's encounter. Nevertheless, the obvious artistic trade-off for representing Thomas's whole movement on stage was the ephemerality of drama. Thomas's tactile encounter, however realistic and poignant, would have been over in an instant, not to be seen again until the play was performed at another station or indeed the following year. What stained glass images like the ones in figures 7 and 68 lacked in viscerality, they made up for in

permanence, providing an opportunity for regular engagement and prolonged meditation on touch and the sacred.

This comparison of Doubting Thomas in visual art and theatre is a perfect example with which to close this thesis, as it captures in miniature both the challenges and the benefits of studying touch in medieval plays. On the one hand, medieval theatre was uniquely positioned to represent and explore the sense of touch precisely because it was an embodied art form. Biblical plays in particular were an ideal medium through which to emphasize the viscerality and tangibility of Christ's flesh, complementing a devotional culture obsessed by sensorial engagements with the saviour's suffering body. Nevertheless, the role of human actors inevitably meant that medieval theatre was also a transient experience, not unlike touch itself. This is why the role of touch in performance, and indeed in audience experience, is so easy to overlook. Tactile encounters slipped away in an instant, leaving only traces in the historical record, especially in implicit and explicit stage directions. Ultimately, excavating the tactile dimensions of medieval theatre, both on the stage and off, has proved highly rewarding; it has enabled a more nuanced appreciation of the plays and allowed us to get 'in touch' with late medieval England in the process.

A Note on Figures

In the following captions, I have relied on the source(s) in brackets for information about dating, materials, and/or dimensions: figure 2 (Rouse and Baker 1955: 29, 32); figure 3 (Scott 1996: II, 193); figure 4 (email correspondence with Cathedral Studios, Canterbury, 19 June 2019); figures 5 and 6 (Crook 2011: 202); figure 7 (Davidson and O'Connor 1978: 99); figures 8 and 9 (Browne et al 2016: 165); figure 12 (Scott 1996: II, 117); figure 13 (Dennison et al 2001: 75); figure 14 (Schütze 2009: 263); figures 15–17 (Brown 2007: 17, 25); figure 18 (Green 2008: 108n97); figure 19 (Jones 2002: 222–24); figure 20 (Palmer 1990: 146; The British Museum Collection Online, accessed 11 July 2019 at https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online); figure 21 (Mills 2008: para 1 of 13); figures 22–23 (Edsall 2014: 202; Skemer 2006: 259); figure 24 (Edsall 2014: 209; Morse 2013: 201); figure 25 (Morgan 1982–1988: I, 119); figure 26 (Smith 2017: IV, 1779); figure 27 (Davidson and O'Connor 1978: 103); figure 28 (Davidson and O'Connor 1978: 103; email correspondence with York Glaziers Trust, 29 August 2019); figure 29 ('Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries', accessed 22 July 2019 at https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_4611); figure 30 (Sandler 1986: II, 136); figure 31 (De Hamel and Barber 2008: I, 9–12); figure 32 (email correspondence with National Archives, 25 June 2019); figure 33 (Wiedl 2010: 362); figure 34 (Morgan 1982–1988: I, 124); figure 36 (Michiels 2007: 141); figures 37–38 (Backhouse, Marrow, and Schmidt 1994: 10); figure 39 (Hamburger 1990: 2; Shailor 1987: 290); figures 41 and 51 (Thebaut 2009: 175); figure 42 (Baker and Murphy 1976: xv); figure 43 (Beadle ed 2009–2011: I, xii); figure 44 (Scott 1996: II, 193); figure 45 (Rogers 1988); figure 47 (Cheetham 2005: 197); figure 48 (Kopania 2010: 265); figure 49 (Kopania 2010: 265; Taubert 2015: 39); figures 50–51 (Kopania 2009: 136; Kopania 2010: 254); figure 52 (Victoria and Albert Museum website, accessed 8 July 2019 at

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53. Fifteenth- or sixteenth-century boot found at 16-22 Coppergate, York. Leather, sole dimensions 190 x 73 mm. York Archaeological Trust Item Number SF628. © York Archaeological Trust. 352

54. Christ's Footprints in New York, The Morgan Library, MS B.54 (mid-fifteenth century). Parchment roll, 765 x 202 mm. Credit: The Morgan Library & Museum. MS B.54. Gift; Curt F. Bühler; 1985. 353

55. Christ Bearing the Cross in a Book of Hours. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 57, fol. 67v. Parchment codex, leaf size 248 x 171 mm (c.1450–1460). © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. 354

56. Christ's Footprints at the Ascension in a manuscript of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. New York, The Morgan Library, MS 648, fol. 123v (c.1440). Parchment codex, 290 x 200 mm. Credit: The Morgan Library & Museum. MS M.648, fol. 123v. Purchased by J.P. Morgan (1867-1943) in 1920. 355

57. Christ's Footprint, Chapel of the Ascension, Jerusalem. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Reproduced here under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY-SA 3.0). 356

58. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Library, MS 26, fol. ir (c.1250). Parchment codex, 360 x 230 mm. Image courtesy of the Parker Library. 357

59. The author wearing a VR headset. Photo: Joel Devine. 358

60. A promotional image for *Jesus VR: The Life of Christ* (2016). Source: jesusvr.net. 359

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62. Stonegate, York. Photo: Sian Witherden. 361

63. The York *Crucifixion* play performed at the junction of Stonegate and Little Stonegate, York in June 1992 (directed by Philip Butterworth). Photo: Rosemary Phizackerley. Image courtesy of Meg Twycross. 362

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65. An image of the theatre in Publius Terentius Afer, *Comoediae*, with commentaries of Donatus and Guido Juvenalis, ed. Jodocus Badius Ascensius (1493: sig. a4v), specifically from the following copy: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. Q inf. 1.16. Paper codex, leaf size 227 x 165. Photo: Sian Witherden. Reproduced with permission of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. 364

66. Charles II (d. 1685) performing the King's Touch on a scrofulous patient. Engraving by Robert White (1684). 158 x 102 mm. Photo: Wellcome Collection, licensed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY 4.0). 365

67. Hellmouth, The Taymouth Hours. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 142r (c.1325–35). Parchment codex, 170 x 115 mm. © The British Library Board, Yates Thompson MS 13, fol. 142r. Image cropped with permission. 366

68. The Incredulity of Thomas, All Saint's, North Street, York (c.1429). Stained glass, approx. 2000 x 1500 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden. 367

69. Christ's resurrected body, All Saint's, North Street, York (c.1429). Stained glass, full size approx. 2000 x 1500 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden. 368

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Fig. 1 The York *Mortification* play performed at King's Manor, University of York on 9 September 2018. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 2 The Wheel of the Senses, Longthorpe Tower, Peterborough (c.1330). Wall painting, distemper on plaster, approx. 1000 x 1000 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 3 ‘The Hours of the Cross’, London, British Library, MS Additional 37049, fol. 68v (c.1460–70). Parchment codex, leaf size 270 x 200 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 37049, fol. 68v. The red arrow highlights the Crucifixion image.



Fig. 4 A leper named Richard Sunieve touching St Thomas Becket's *foramina* tomb. Stained glass, c.550 x 550 mm. Canterbury Cathedral, Trinity Chapel nII 57 (c.1185–1220). By kind permission of the Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral.



Fig. 5 The *foramina* tomb of St Oswald, Salisbury Cathedral (late twelfth century). Purbeck marble, 2180 x 900 x 660 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 6 A modern visitor touching the *foramina* tomb of St Oswald, Salisbury Cathedral (late twelfth century). Purbeck marble, 2180 x 900 x 660 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 7 The Incredulity of Thomas (c.1370). Stained glass, approx. 600 x 500 mm. Originally in St Saviour's, York; now in All Saints, Pavement, York. Photo: Sian Witherden.

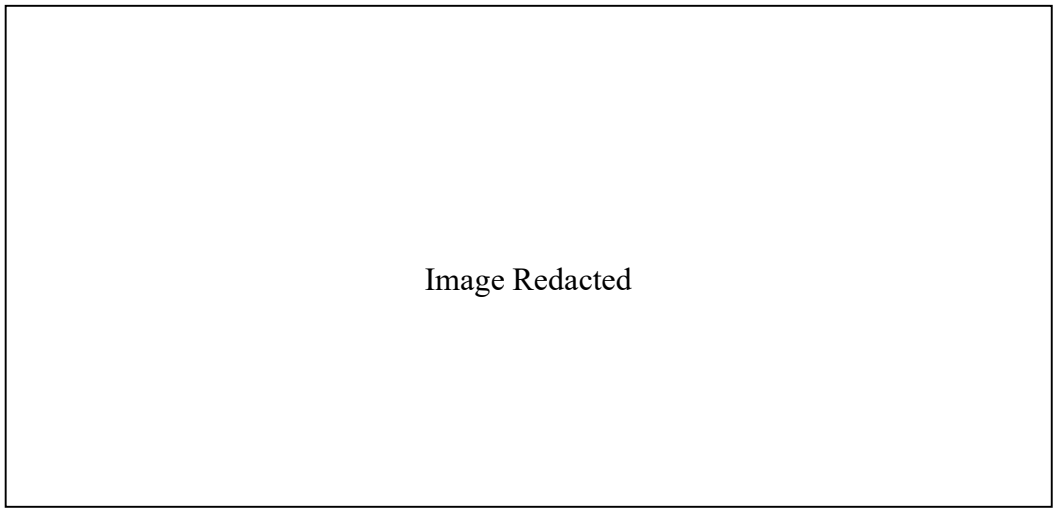


Fig. 8 The Syon Cope (1310–1320). Linen embroidered with silk, 1505 x 3050 mm. Victoria and Albert Museum no. 83-1864 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

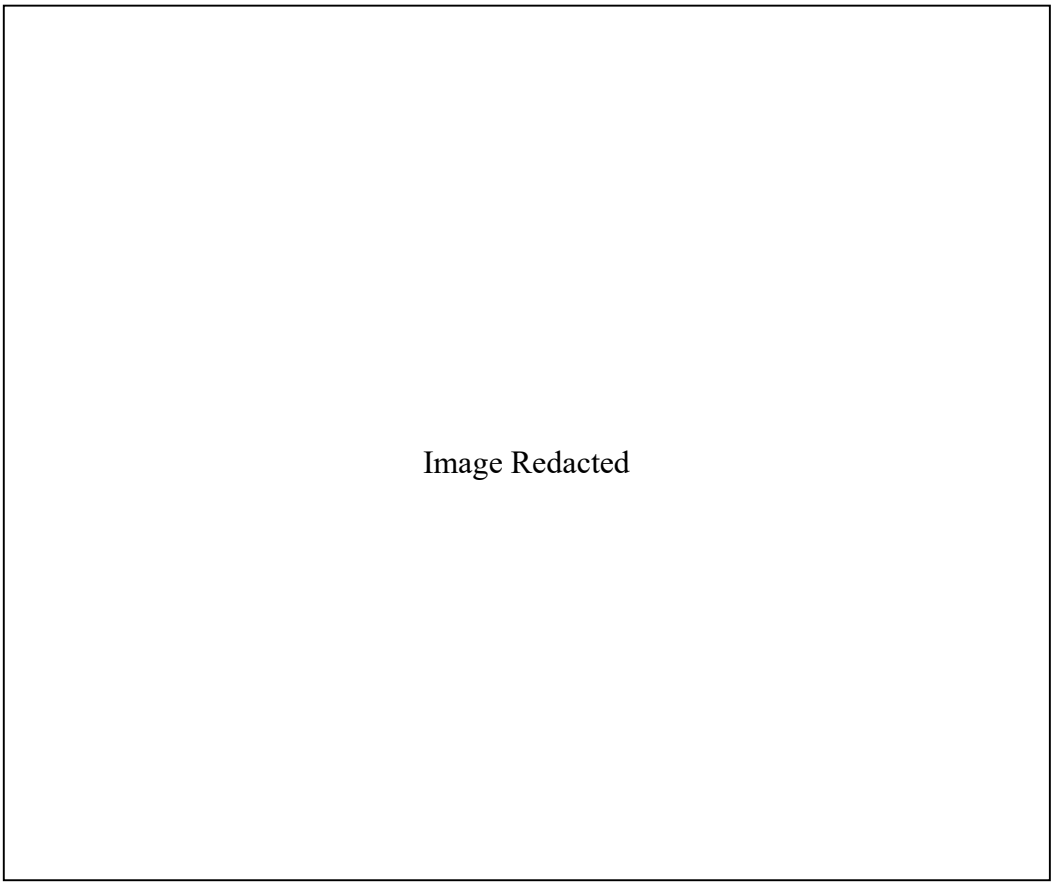


Fig. 9 The Incredulity of Thomas as depicted on the Syon Cope (1310–1320). Linen embroidered with silk, full size 1505 x 3050 mm. Victoria and Albert Museum no. 83-1864 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

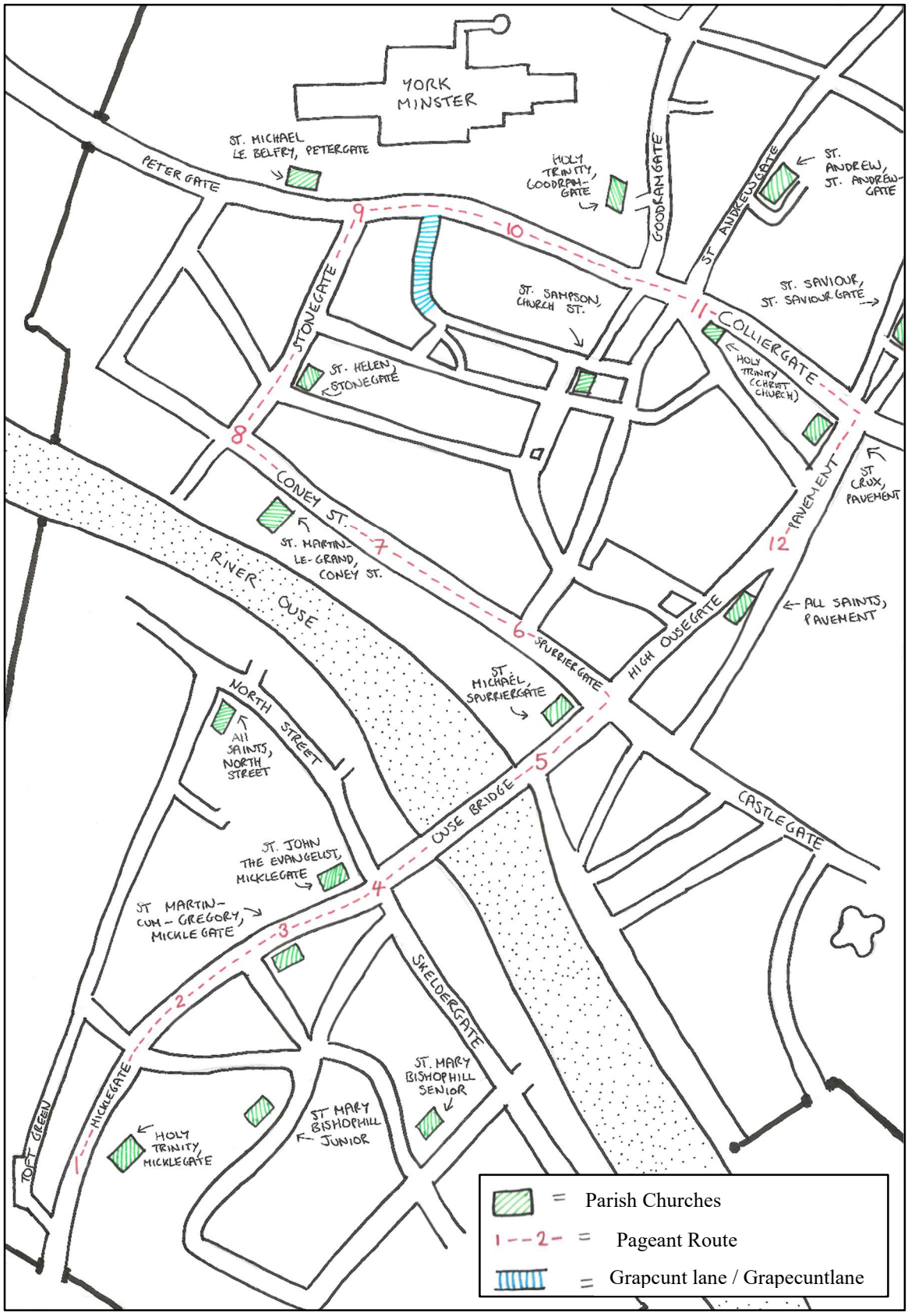


Fig. 10 The York pageant route from the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth century, marked with the stations of 1486. Drawn by Sian Witherden, modelled on the map by Meg Twycross in Beadle ed 2009–2011: I, xvi.



Fig. 11 Grape Lane, York. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 12 Christ's Side Wound in Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS O.3.10, fol. 12v (c.1410). Parchment codex, leaf size 284 x 198 mm (wound width approx. 110 mm). © The Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. Image licensed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC 4.0). Image cropped by the author.



Fig. 13 The Incredulity of Thomas in a copy of William of Nottingham's *Commentary on the Gospels*. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc 165, fol. 574v (c.1375–90). Parchment codex, leaf size 465 x 310 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden. Reproduced with permission of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.



Fig. 14 Caravaggio, *Doubting Thomas* (c.1601–1602). Oil on canvas, 1070 x 1460 mm. Currently located in the Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam, Germany. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the Public Domain {{PD–US}}.



Fig. 15 The Nativity in the Holkham Bible Picture Book. London, British Library, MS 47682, fol. 12v (1325–1340). Parchment codex, leaf size 285 x 210 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 47682, fol. 12v. Image cropped with permission.



Fig. 16 The Midwife's Third Hand, as represented in the Nativity in the Holkham Bible Picture Book. London, British Library, MS Additional 47682, fol. 12v (1325–1340). Parchment codex, leaf size 285 x 210 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 47682, fol. 12v. Image cropped with permission.



Fig. 17 The Midwife Wearing a False Hand, as represented in the Nativity in the Holkham Bible Picture Book. London, British Library, MS Additional 47682, fol. 12v (1325–1340). Parchment codex, leaf size 285 x 210 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 47682, fol. 12v. Image cropped with permission.



Fig. 18 A Treatment for Uterine Suffocation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 399, fol. 33r (c.1250–1275). Parchment codex, 270 x 195 mm. Photo: Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford 2019, digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.



Fig. 19 A male physician manually examining a male patient's anus in an illustrated copy of John Arderne's *Fistula in Ano*. London, British Library, MS Sloane 2002, fol. 24v (fifteenth century). Parchment codex, 185 x 130 mm. © The British Library Board, Sloane MS 2002, fol. 24v.



Fig. 20 Assumption panel from Selby Abbey, Yorkshire (1430–1470). Alabaster, 455 x 250 mm. British Museum Item Number 1823,0426.152. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Reproduced here under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Fig. 21 Doubting Thomas receiving the Virgin's girdle. Stained glass, 560 x 460 mm. The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Beckley, Oxfordshire (1325–1350). Photo: Sian Witherden.

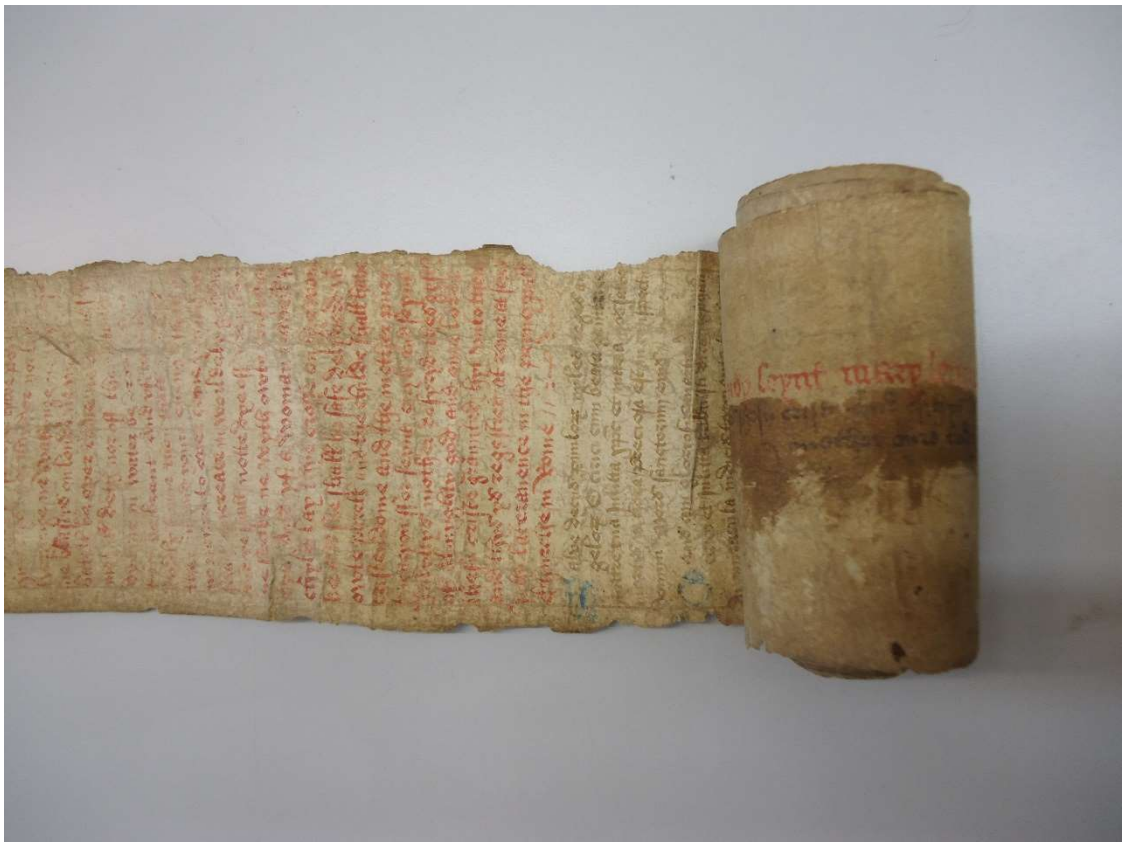


Fig. 22 A birth girdle roll partially unfolded. London, Wellcome Collection, MS 632 (late fifteenth century). Parchment roll, full size 3320 x 100 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden. Reproduced with permission of the Wellcome Library.

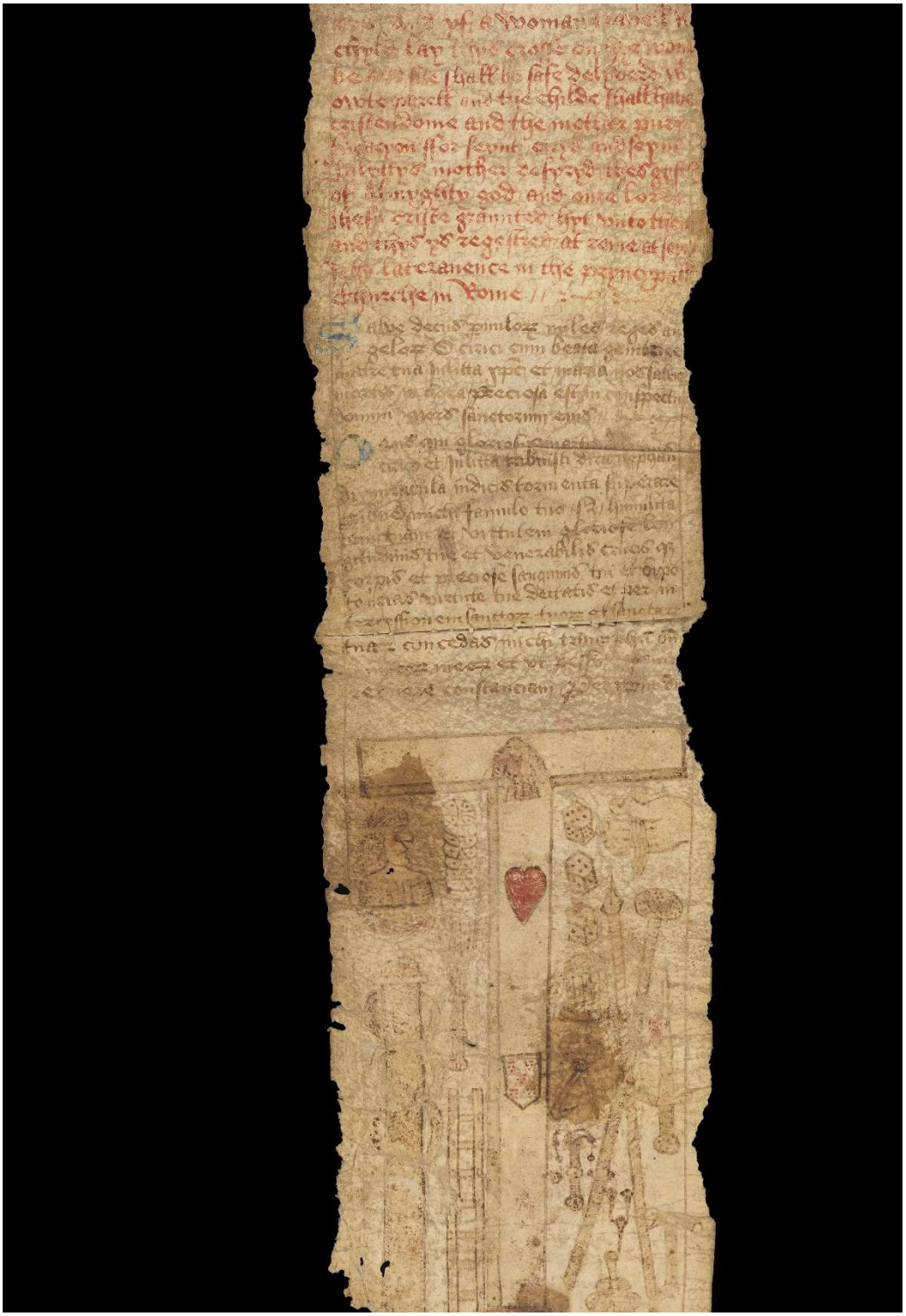


Fig. 23 A section of a birth girdle roll. London, Wellcome Collection, MS 632 (late fifteenth century). Parchment roll, full size 3320 x 100 mm. Credit: Wellcome Images, photo number L0074224. Reproduced here under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY 4.0).



Fig. 24 New York, The Morgan Library, MS G. 39 (created in or after 1484). Parchment roll, full size 5864 x 183 mm. Credit: The Morgan Library & Museum. MS G.39. Gift of the Trustees of the William S. Glazier Collection, 1984.



Fig. 25 The Funeral of the Virgin in London, British Library, MS Additional 49999, fol. 61r (c.1240). Parchment codex, leaf size 150 x 123 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 49999 fol. 61r. Image cropped with permission.



Fig. 26 The Funeral of the Virgin in The Taymouth Hours. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 133v (c.1325–35). Parchment codex, leaf size 170 x 115 mm. © The British Library Board, Yates Thompson MS 13, fol. 133v.



Fig. 27 The Funeral of the Virgin, York Minster S-IV, south choir clerestory aisle (mid-fourteenth century). Stained glass. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 28 The Pilgrimage Window, York Minster N-XXV (light a), north nave aisle (c.1320). The arrow highlights the monkey/Jew hanging from the bier. Stained glass, 7150 x 910 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 29 The Lactation of St Bernard in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 264, fol. 38v (early sixteenth century). Parchment codex, leaf size 197 x 140 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden. Reproduced with permission of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.



Fig. 30 The Spitting Jew in London, British Library, MS Royal 6.E.vi, fol. 15r (c.1360–1380). Parchment codex, leaf size 460 x 312 mm. © The British Library Board, MS 6.E.vi, fol. 15r.



Fig. 31 The Owl in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764, fol. 73v (mid-thirteenth century). Parchment codex, leaf size 294 x 195 mm. Photo: Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford 2019, digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

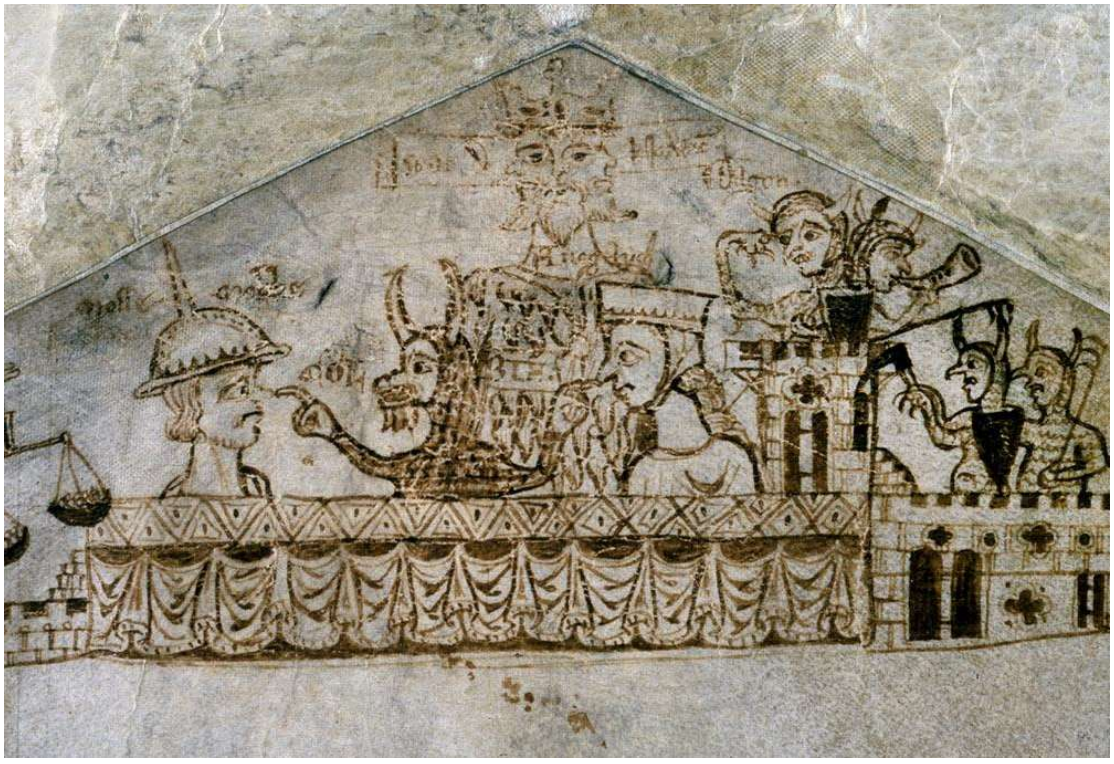


Fig. 32 Caricature of Jews, London, National Archives, Issues of the Exchequer of 1233, E.401/1565, m1. Parchment roll, 450 x 420 x 40 mm. Image courtesy of the National Archives. Image cropped with permission.

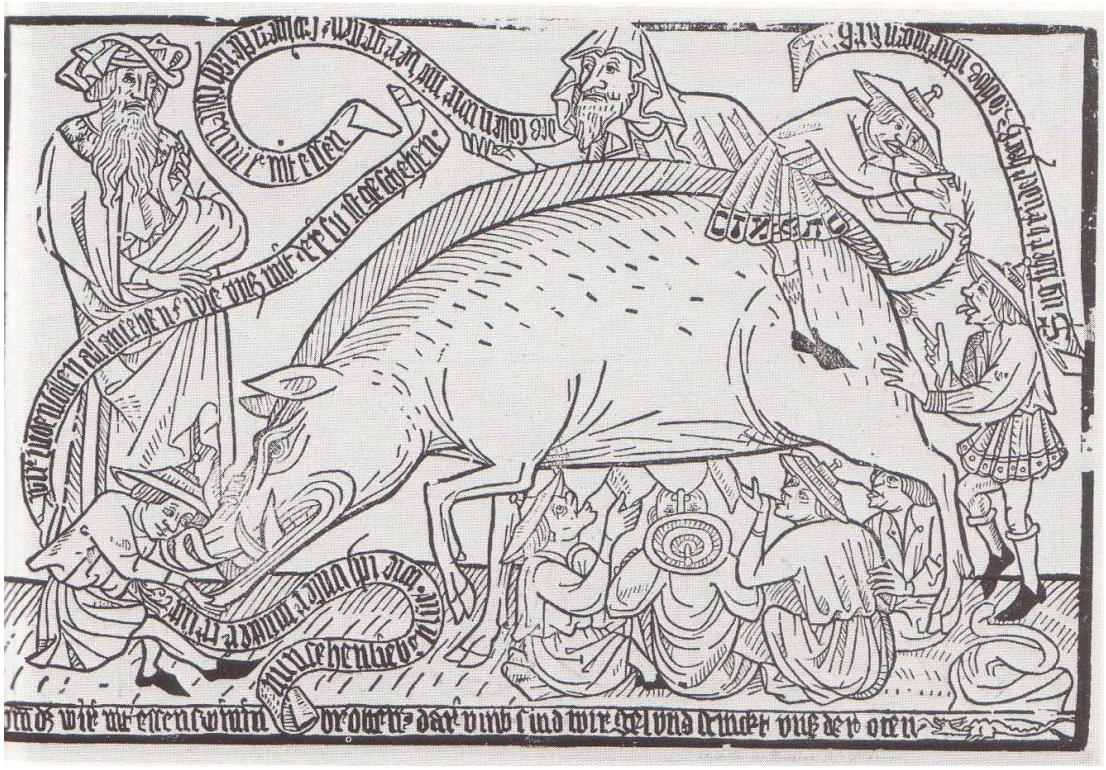


Fig. 33 The *Judensau.* Woodcut print made using a fifteenth-century block (first printed in 1472). Now in the Kupferstichkabinett, Germany. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the Public Domain {{PD–US}}.



Fig. 34 The Hyena in London, British Library, MS Harley 4751, fol. 10r (c.1230–1240). Parchment codex, leaf size 307 x 233 mm. © The British Library Board, Harley MS 4751, fol. 10r.



Fig. 35 A Jew poisoning a well in E. *Fenton's Certaine secrete wonders of nature* (1569: fol. 26v), specifically from the following copy: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner 205. Paper codex, 180 x 130 mm. Reproduced with the permission of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.



Fig. 36 Detail of the *Noli me tangere* episode from Hans Memling's *Seven Joys of the Virgin* (1480). Oil on wood, full size 813 x 1892 mm. Currently in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Image in the Public Domain {{PD–US}}.



Fig. 37 *Noli me tangere* in London, British Library, MS Kings 5, fol. 23r (c.1405). Parchment codex, leaf size 175 x 385 mm © The British Library Board, Kings MS 5, fol. 23r. Image cropped with permission.



Fig. 38 Daniel in the Lion's Den, *Noli me tangere,* and the bride embracing the bridegroom. London, British Library, MS Kings 5, fol. 23r (c. 1405). Parchment codex, leaf size 175 x 385 mm © The British Library Board, Kings MS 5, fol. 23r



Fig. 39 The Wounding Gaze. New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS 404, fol. 18v–19r (c.1300). Parchment codex, leaf size 118 x 84 mm. Rothschild Canticles. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

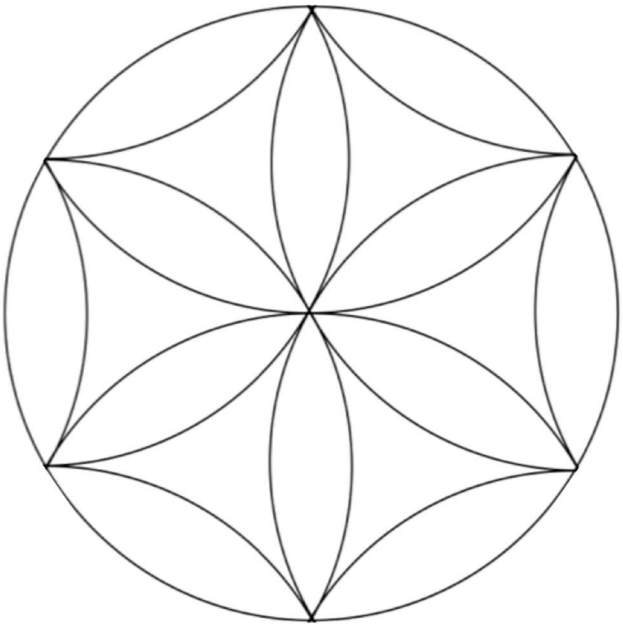


Fig. 40 Sample diagram of Medieval Hexfoil Graffiti (modelled on Champion 2015: 23, 33). Credit: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 41 A ‘haemorrhaging’ page, London, British Library, MS Egerton 1821, fol. 8r (c.1480–1490). Parchment codex, leaf size 180 x 130 mm (reproduced here actual size). © The British Library Board, Egerton MS 1821, fol. 8r.

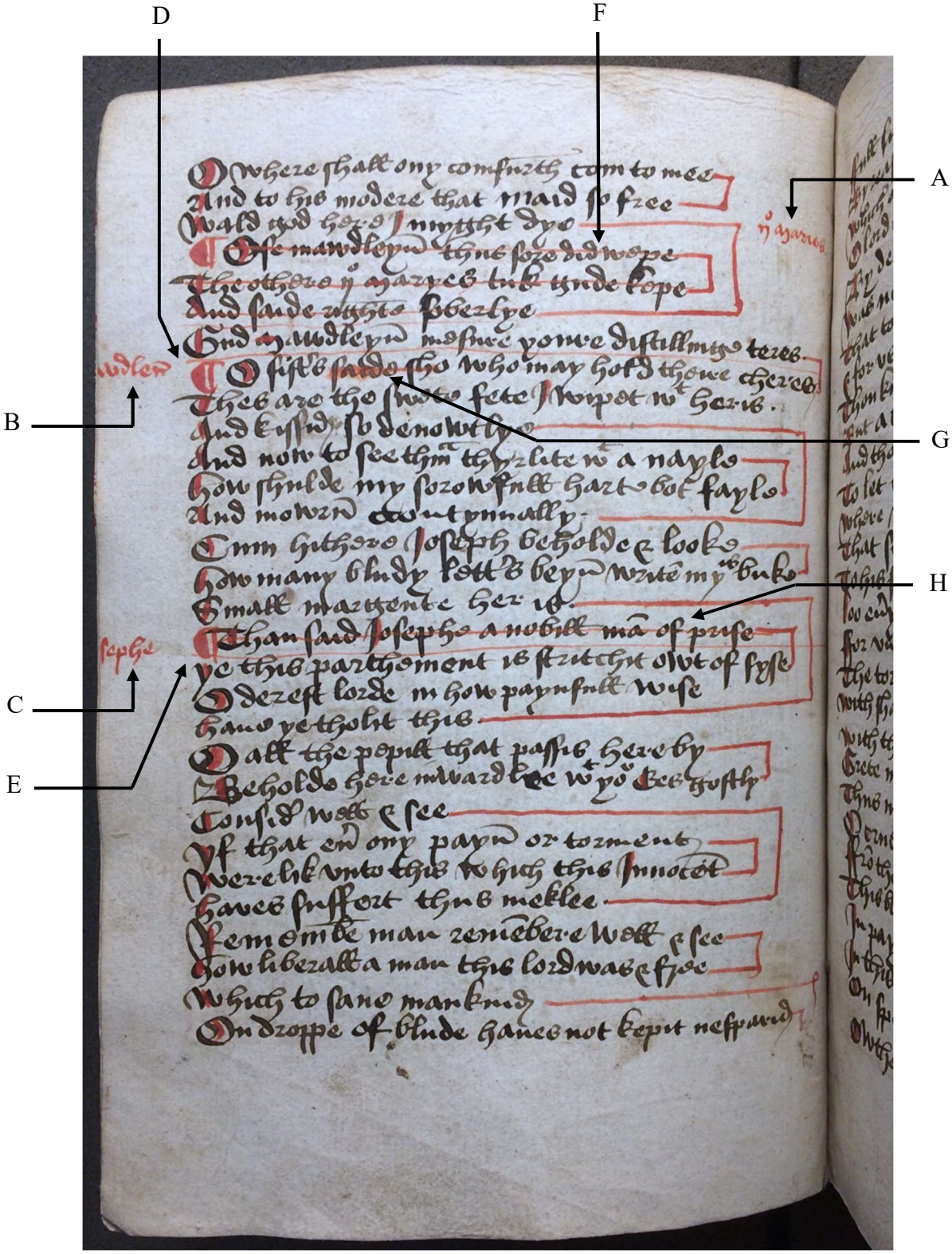


Fig. 42 A page from the Bodley *Burial* play (c.1520). Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS E Museo 160, fol. 144v. Paper codex, leaf size 221 x 155 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden. Reproduced with permission of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

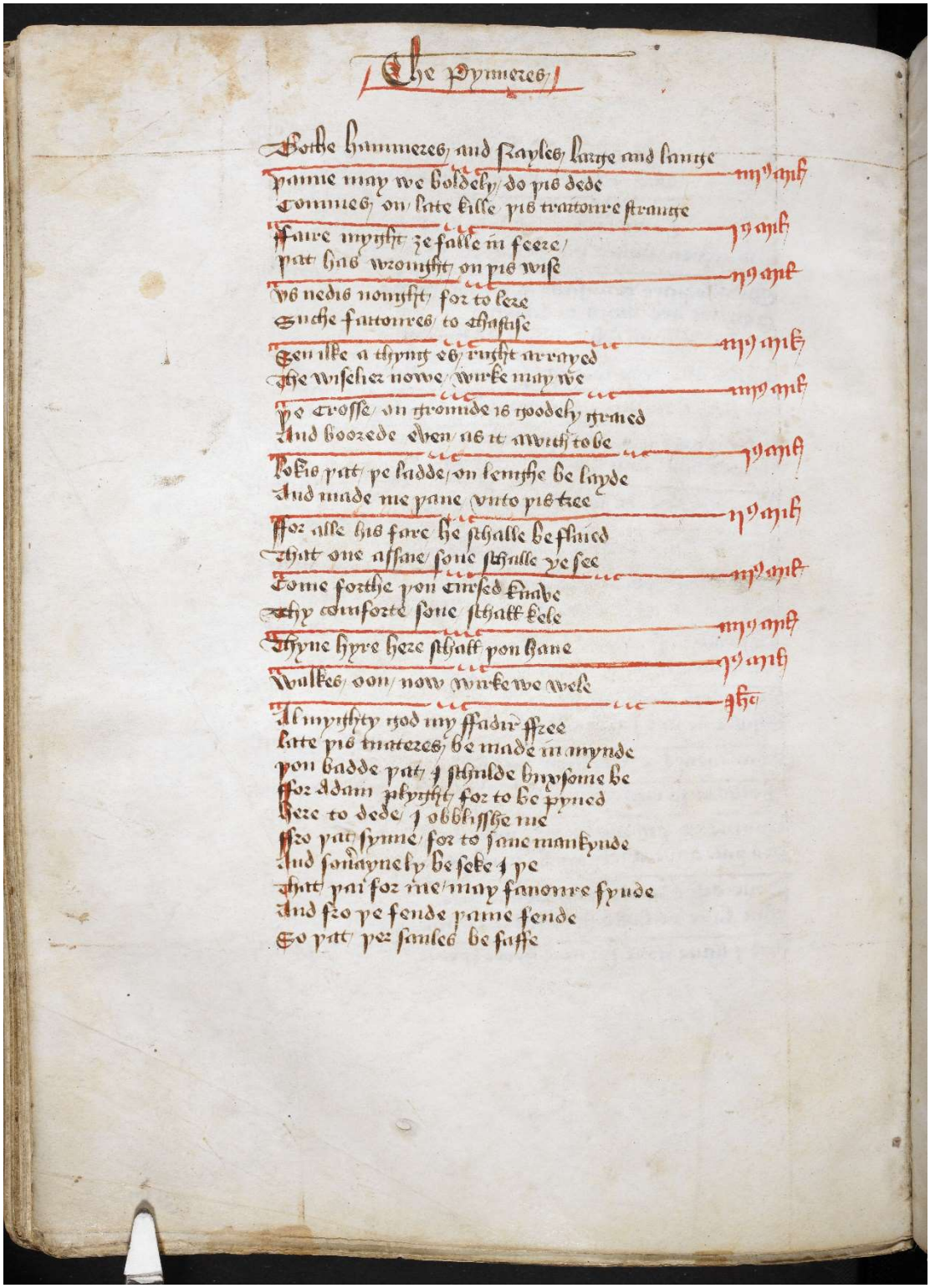


Fig. 43 A page from the York *Crucifixion* play (1476–1477). London, British Library, MS Additional 35290, fol. 181v. Parchment codex, 280 x 205 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 35290, fol. 181v.



Fig. 44 The *Short Charter of Christ* in London, British Library, MS Additional 37049, fol. 23r (c.1460–1470). Paper codex, leaf size 270 x 200 mm. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 37049, fol. 23r.



Fig. 45 Cradling Oxford, Balliol College Library, MS 451, fols. 152v–153r (c.1480s). Parchment codex, leaf size 103 x 73 mm. Photo: Anna Sander. Reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Balliol College.



Fig. 46 Evidence of touch in London, British Library, MS Egerton 1821, fols. 1v–2r (c.1480–1490). Parchment codex, leaf size 180 x 130 mm © The British Library Board, Egerton MS 1821, fols. 1v–2r.

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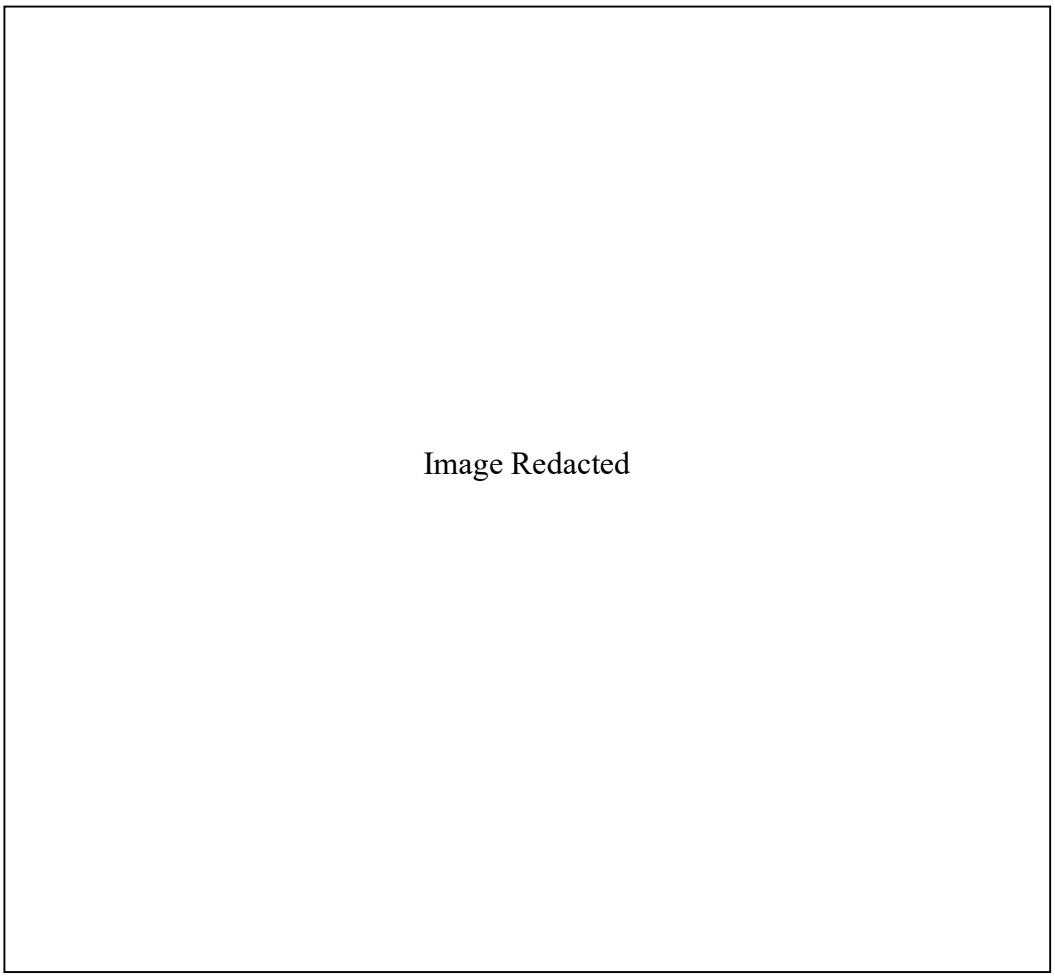


Fig. 47 Panel depicting the Pietà (fifteenth century). Alabaster, 391 x 274 mm. Victoria and Albert Museum no. A197-1946. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 48 Animated sculpture of Christ (c.1502). Wood(?), height 940 mm. Currently located in Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Italy. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 49 Animated sculpture of Christ (c.1490–1500). Wood(?), three-quarter life-size. Currently located in S. Trinità, Florence, Italy. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 50 The shoulder joint of an animated sculpture of Christ (c.1510). Mixed media including limewood and human hair, height 1900 mm. Currently located in St Nicolai, Döbeln, Germany. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 51 The face of an animated sculpture of Christ (c.1510). Mixed media including limewood and human hair, height 1900 mm. Currently located in St Nicolai, Döbeln, Germany. Photo: Sian Witherden.

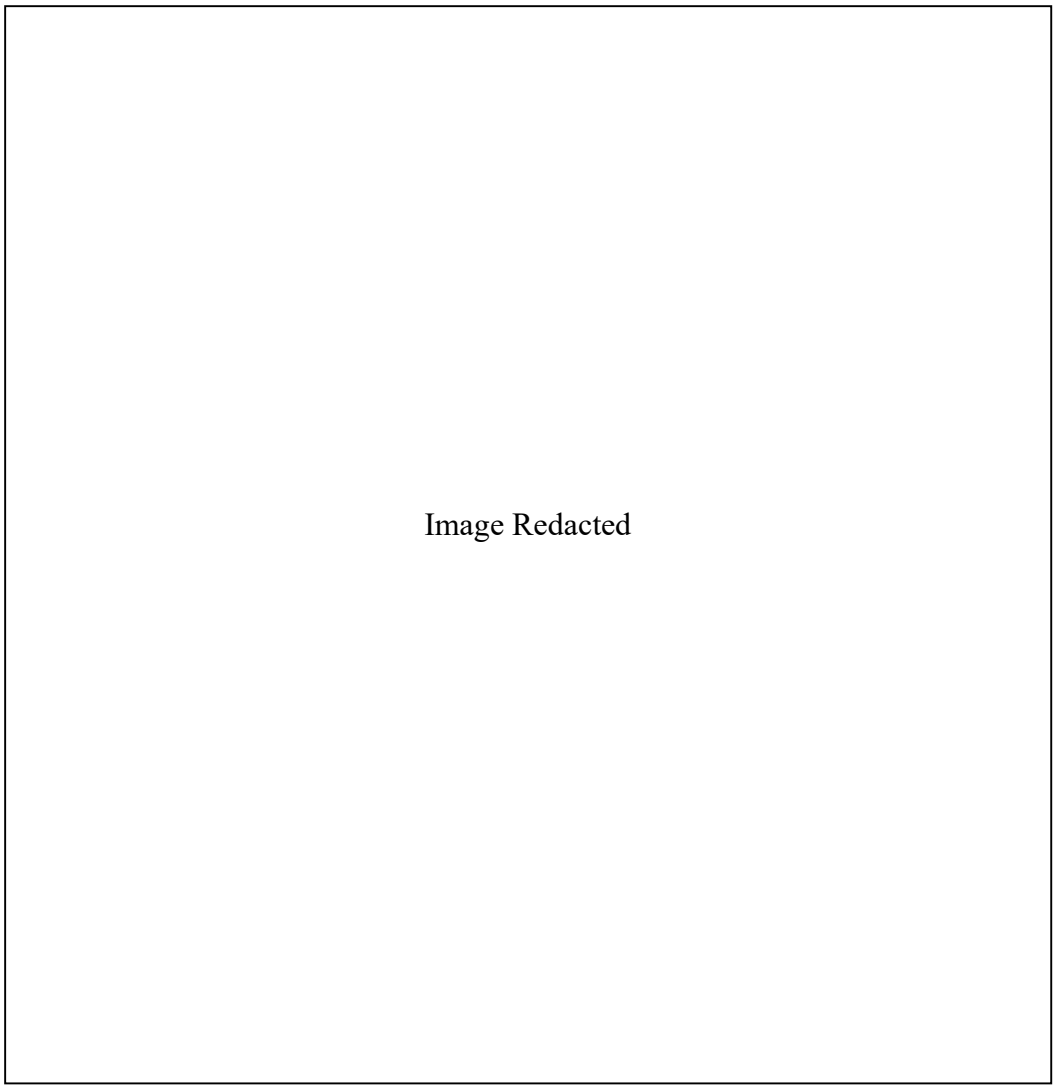


Fig. 52 Henry and Johanna Smyth praying with rosary beads (1470–1500). Embroidered velvet, 700 x 685 mm. Victoria and Albert Museum no. T.194-1911. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 53 Fifteenth- or sixteenth-century boot found at 16-22 Coppergate, York. Leather, sole dimensions 190 x 73 mm. York Archaeological Trust Item Number SF628. © York Archaeological Trust.

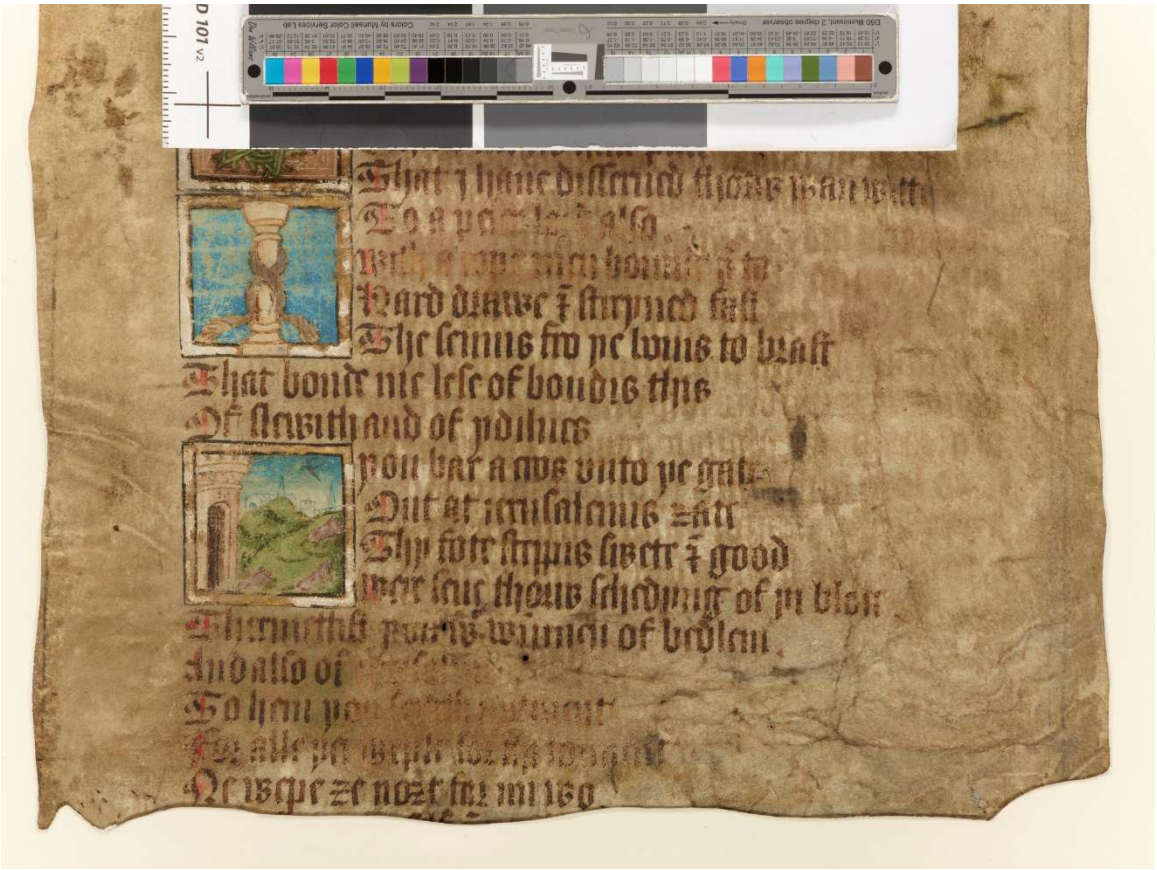


Fig. 54 Christ's Footprints in New York, The Morgan Library, MS B.54 (mid-fifteenth century). Parchment roll, 765 x 202 mm. Credit: The Morgan Library & Museum. MS B.54. Gift; Curt F. Bühler; 1985.



Fig. 55 Christ Bearing the Cross in a Book of Hours. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 57, fol. 67v. Parchment codex, leaf size 248 x 171 mm (c.1450–1460). © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig. 56 Christ's Footprints at the Ascension in a manuscript of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. New York, The Morgan Library, MS 648, fol. 123v (c.1440). Parchment codex, 290 x 200 mm. Credit: The Morgan Library & Museum. MS M.648, fol. 123v. Purchased by J.P. Morgan (1867-1943) in 1920.



Fig. 57 Christ's Footprint, Chapel of the Ascension, Jerusalem. Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Reproduced here under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY-SA 3.0).

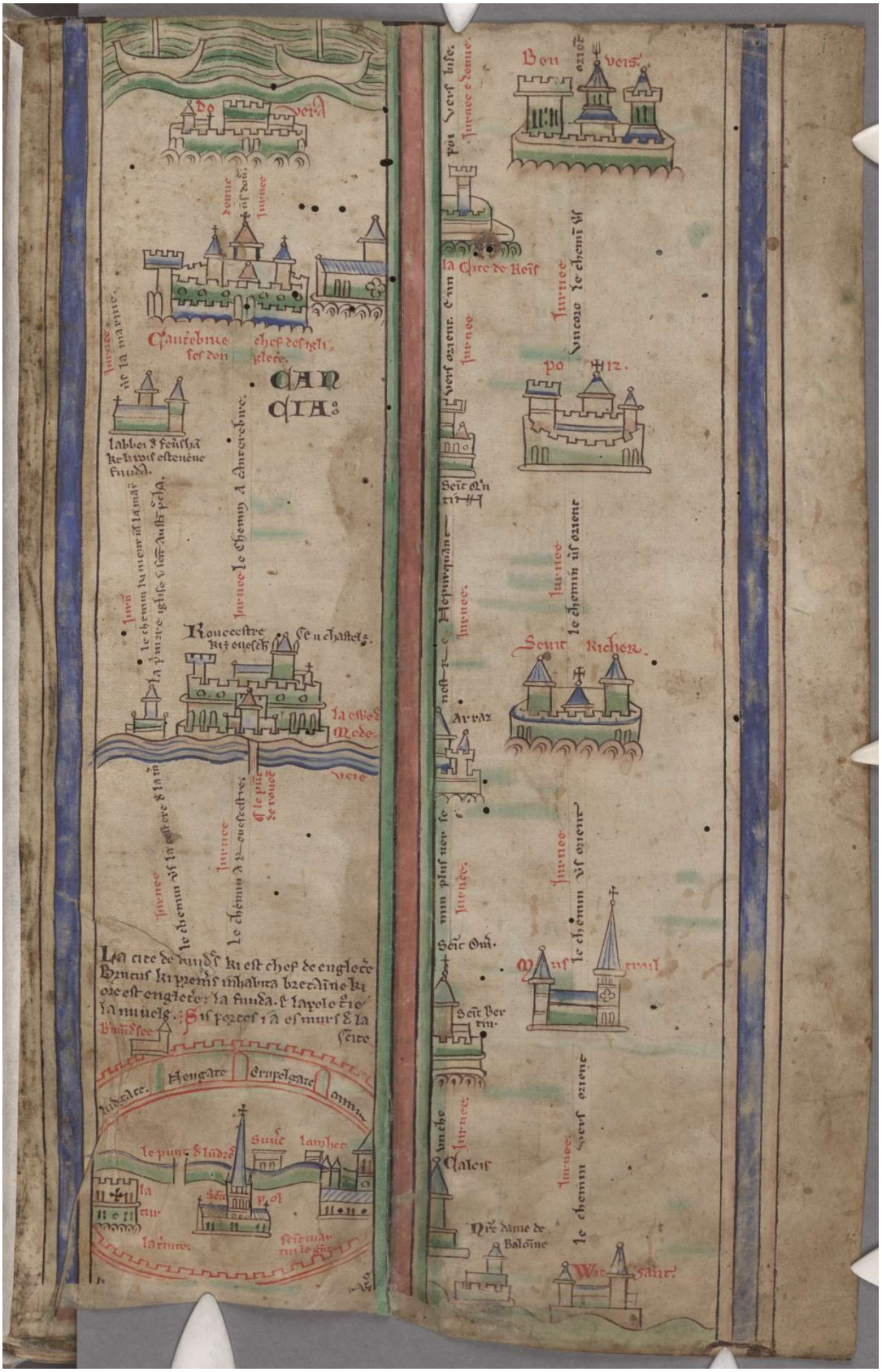


Fig. 58 Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 26, fol. ir (c.1250). Parchment codex, 360 x 230 mm. Image courtesy of the Parker Library.



Fig. 59 The author wearing a VR headset. Photo: Joel Devine.



Fig. 60 A promotional image for *Jesus VR: The Life of Christ* (2016). Source: jesusvr.net.

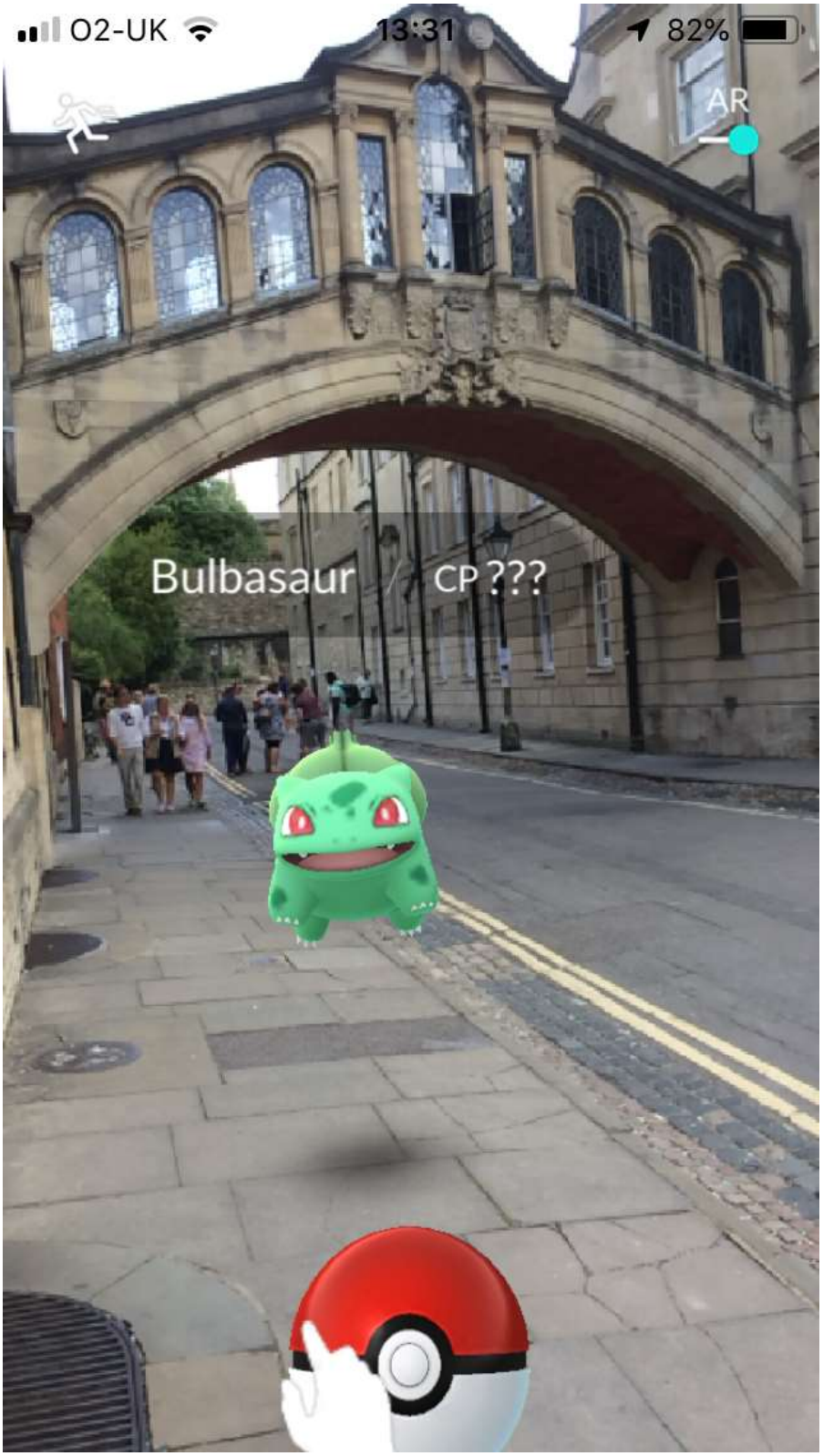


Fig. 61 A phone screenshot taken while using the Pokémon Go app with the Augmented Reality camera setting enabled. Here, a 'Bulbasaur' appears in front of the Bridge of Sighs in Oxford. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 62 Stonegate, York. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 63 The York *Crucifixion* play performed at the junction of Stonegate and Little Stonegate, York in June 1992 (directed by Philip Butterworth). Photo: Rosemary Phizackerley. Image courtesy of Meg Twycross.



Fig. 64 The York *Crucifixion* performed at King's Manor, University of York on 9 September 2018. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 65 An image of the theatre in Publius Terentius Afer, *Comoediae*, with commentaries of Donatus and Guido Juvenalis, ed. Jodocus Badius Ascensius (1493: sig. a4v), specifically from the following copy: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. Q inf. 1.16. Paper codex, leaf size 227 x 165. Photo: Sian Witherden. Reproduced with permission of The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.



Fig. 66 Charles II (d. 1685) performing the King's Touch on a scrofulous patient. Engraving by Robert White (1684), 158 x 102 mm. Photo: Wellcome Collection, licensed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY 4.0).



Fig. 67 Hellmouth, The Taymouth Hours. London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 13, fol. 142r (c.1325–35). Parchment codex, 170 x 115 mm. © The British Library Board, Yates Thompson MS 13, fol. 142r. Image cropped with permission.



Fig. 68 The Incredulity of Thomas, All Saint's, North Street, York (c.1429). Stained glass, approx. 2000 x 1500 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.



Fig. 69 Christ's resurrected body, All Saint's, North Street, York (c.1429). Stained glass, full size approx. 2000 x 1500 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.

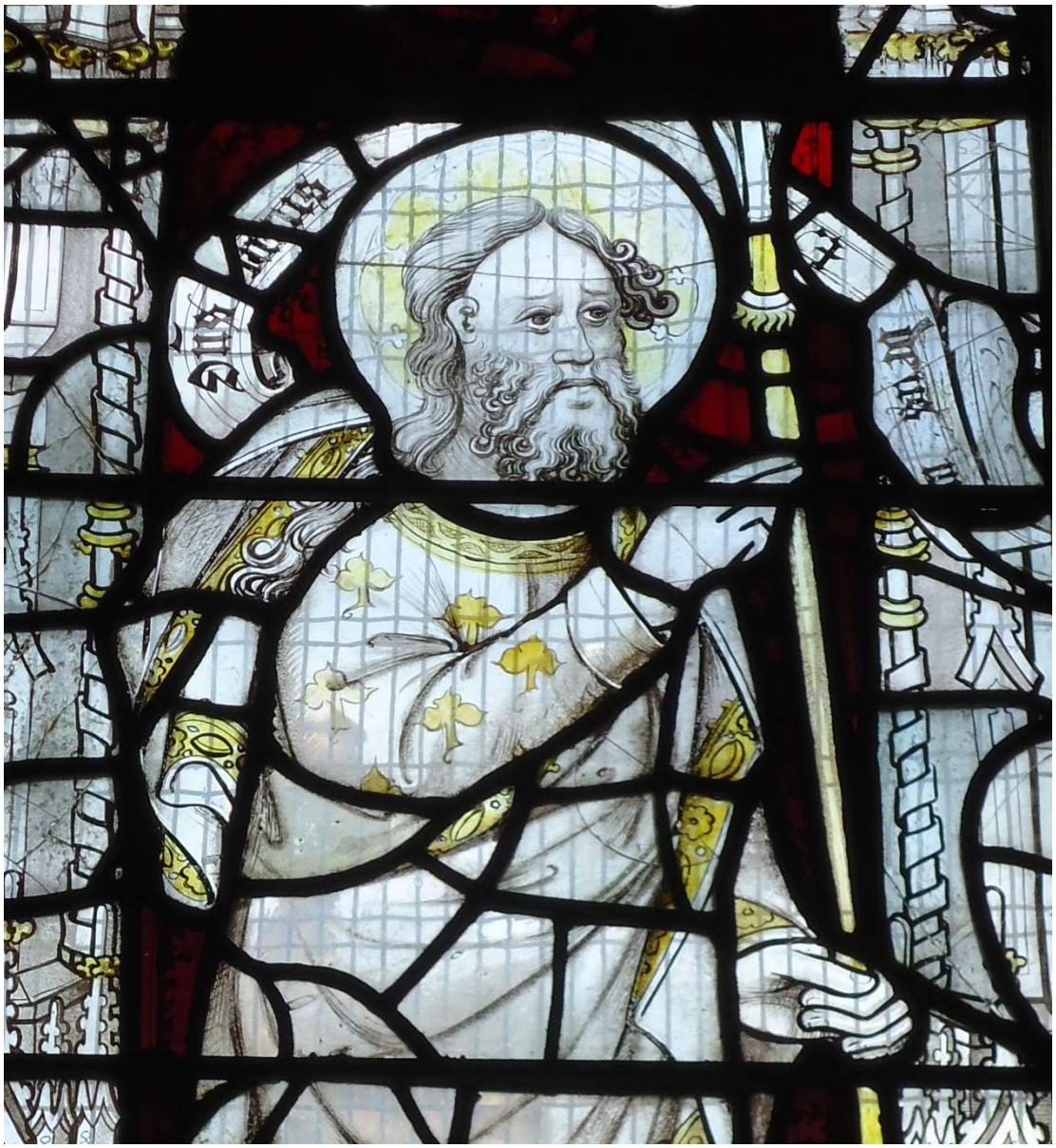


Fig. 70 Thomas's outstretched arm, All Saint's, North Street, York (c.1429). Stained glass, full size approx. 2000 x 1500 mm. Photo: Sian Witherden.

Bibliography

Note: bibliographic entries in sections II–IV are alphabetized by their first capital letter. For example, de Hamel can be found under *H* and von Tischendorf can be found under *T*, but Di Benedetto can be found under *D*. In section III, names that begin with *Mc* are alphabetized as if they began with *Mac*.

I. Manuscripts

These manuscripts were consulted in person unless otherwise stated.

California, Huntington Library, MS 1 [Consulted via printed facsimile[2]]

MS 2 [Consulted via printed facsimile[3]]

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Library, MS 26

Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS O.3.10

Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 57

London, British Library, MS Additional 35290 [Consulted via multiple surrogates[4]]

MS Additional 37049 [Consulted via multiple surrogates[5]]

MS Additional 47682 [Consulted via multiple surrogates[6]]

MS Additional 49999 [Consulted via digital images[7]]

MS Additional 88929

MS Cotton Vespasian D.8

MS Egerton 1821

MS Harley 4751

MS Harley Charter 43.A.14

MS Harley Roll T.11

MS Kings 5 [Consulted via multiple surrogates[8]]

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[2] Cawley and Stevens 1976.

[3] Lumiansky and Mills 1980.

[4] Beadle, Meredith, and Rastall 1983; 'British Library Additional MS 35290', accessed via *British Library Digitized Manuscripts* on 22 August 2019 at http://www.bl.uk/Manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=0&ref=Add_MS_35290.

[5] Hogg 1981; 'British Library Additional MS 37049', accessed via *British Library Digitized Manuscripts* on 22 August 2019 at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=0&ref=Add_MS_37049.

[6] Brown 2007; 'British Library Additional MS 47682', accessed via *British Library Digitized Manuscripts* on 22 August 2019 at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_47682.

[7] 'British Library Additional MS 49999', accessed via *British Library Digitized Manuscripts* on 29 August 2019 at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_49999_f0001r.

MS Sloane 5

MS Sloane 2002

MS Royal 6.E.vi

MS Yates Thompson 13 [Consulted via digital images[9]]

London, National Archives, Issues of the Exchequer of 1233, E. 401/1565

London, Wellcome Collection, MS 632

New Haven, Beinecke Library, Takamiya MS 56

MS 404 [Consulted via digital images[10]]

MS 410

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MS B. 54

MS G. 39

Oxford, Balliol College, MS 451

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 399 [Consulted via digital images[11]]

MS Ashmole 1378

MS Bodley 177

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MS Laud Misc 165

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[consulted via digital images[13]]

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[8] Backhouse, Marrow, and Schmidt 1994; 'British Library Kings MS 5', accessed via *British Library Digitized Manuscripts* on 22 August 2019 at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Kings_MS_5.

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[10] 'Beinecke MS 404', accessed via *Beinecke Digital Collections* on 20 May 2019 at https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3432521.

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