Puppetry and Play: Movable Sculptures of Christ Crucified and Late Medieval English Literature

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Abstract

Movable sculptures of Christ crucified were designed to be removed from the cross and buried in a variety of dramatic situations. Over one hundred and twenty examples survive in Europe. In their most basic form, they have hinges at their shoulders, allowing their arms to fold down. Many, however, were built with additional mechanic features to perform more complex gestures. Although the existence of these objects in England has been noted, and the form and function of individual examples explored, there has been to date no overarching study of the use of these objects in England, and no study of these objects from a specifically literary perspective. My project fills this gap, addressing at length the two texts thought to script a movable sculpture of Christ crucified, while also exploring how such performances shaped literary articulations of violence, death and animation. This is an interdisciplinary project, which uses artefactual and historical evidence from England and Continental Europe.

The temporal scope of this dissertation Is determined by the three pieces of evidence that indicate the use of movable sculptures of Christ crucified in England. The first is a sung Latin drama from Barking Abbey (c.1358-1377), which many scholars believe is the earliest script for such a sculpture in Europe. The second is an English vernacular play known as *Christ's Burial*, which appears paired with a resurrection play in Bodleian MS e Museo 160 (c. 1518). Focussing on English material may seem counterintuitive, as no movable sculpture of Christ crucified has survived in England. The clearest picture we have of an English example are descriptions of the destruction of the

Boxley Rood of Grace (c.1365-1375) by iconoclasts in 1538. I take this challenge as an invitation to imaginative participation and an impetus for interdisciplinary research. While remaining aware of the limits of conjecture, this project leans into the challenge of reconstructing object-based performances in England, in the hopes of indicating pathways for further study.

Abbreviations

BMH	Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy, and Louis Brewer Hall eds., *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS Digby 133 and e Museo 160,* EETS (Oxford University Press, 1982)
CB	*Christ's Burial*
CR	*Christ's Resurrection*
DLL	Wolfgang Achnitz, Franz-Josef Holznagel, and Klaus Vogelgsang eds., *Deutsches Literatur Lexicon: Das Mittelalter*, vol. 4 (De Gruyter, 2014)
DLMBS	Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources
DIMEV	Digital Index of Middle English Verse
EETS	Early English Text Society
ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue
GSZZ	Bernd Neumann ed., *Geistliches Schauspiel im Zeugnis der Zeit* (Artemis Verlag, 1987)
JoB	"The Jew of Bourges," Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. A. 1
Lexer	Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, in Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities
MED	Middle English Dictionary
Museo	Bodleian Library, MS. e Museo 160
PT	The *Prioress' Tale*
TC	"The Chorister," in MS Eng. Poet. A. 1
REED	Records of Early English Drama

Conventions

My translations are my own, unless stated otherwise. When referring frequently to a text, I put line numbers in the body of the text, unless I have translated the lines, in which case line numbers are in the footnotes.

When making codicological points about Museo, I use my own transcriptions. Otherwise, I follow BMH.

My transcription conventions follow Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft*: *English Manuscripts 1375–1510* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), xii–xiii.

For example:

The holy [grace] gost	“grace” has been deleted “gost” has been interlined in red ink
thy folke ^ died in fire brennynge	“died in fire” has been interlined in red ink and the scribe has added a caret
[Thy st<ren>ghe] was ou*er*co*m*men by wome*n*n	The first two words have been deleted. < > indicates an area that is difficult to read. In this case, I have supplied an informed guess. The itallicised “er,” “m,” and “n” are expansions based off the scribal expansion marks.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..... **ii**

Abstract ..... **i**

Abbreviations ..... **iii**

Conventions ..... **iv**

Introduction **1**

1. What is a Movable Sculpture of Christ Crucified? 4

2. Movable Sculptures of Christ Crucified in England 10

3. Puppetry and Play: Conceptual Frameworks 13

4. Puppets in Medieval England 19

5. Thesis Structure 32

Chapter One: The Sources **39**

1.1 Easter at Barking Abbey 39

1.1.a Reconstructing the Barking Christ 46

1.1.b Performance Context of Barking Abbey 56

1.2 *Christ's Burial* 66

1.2.a The Manuscript 68

1.2.b Meditation or Play? 72

1.2.c The Unresolved Question of Authorship 77

1.2.d Scribal Correction 82

1.2.e Performance Contexts 93

Chapter Two: Violence on the European Stage **105**

2.1 Blood in *Christ's Burial* 107

2.2 Blood as Special Effect on the European Stage 114

2.3 Movable Sculptures of Christ Crucified in Vernacular Performance 129

2.3 The Affective Strategies of the Debs Grablegungsspiele 143

2.4 Staged Violence in *Debs XIV* 155

Chapter Three: Feelings **170**

3.1 Suspended Animation: The Metascript of the Puppet 177

3.2 The Humoral Background of the Play 202

3.3 The Dry Christ 214

3.4 The Crucifixi Dolorosi 226

Chapter Four: Animating the Sculpture 242

4.1 The Pietatic Lament 248

4.2 Ventriloquising the Crucifix 267

4.3 The Boxley Rood of Grace 276

Chapter Five: The Puppetry of Martyrdom 298

5.1 Chaucer, Female Piety and a Question of Taste 302

5.2 The *Prioress' Tale* and "The Chorister" 310

5.3 The Affordances of the Boy Martyrs 313

5.4 The Vernon Miniatures 320

Conclusion 331

List of Figures 343

Bibliography 347

Primary Sources 347

Secondary Sources 351

Introduction

"Bawe! bawe! bawe! What menythe thys pryste?" Thus replied William Balowe in 1467, when a priest came to his prison cell and asked him to affirm his faith in the Eucharist. Balowe went on:

> Thys I wotte welle, þat on Goode Fryday ye make many goddys to be putte in the sepukyr, but at Ester day they can not a ryse them selfe, but that ye moste lyfte them uppe and bere them forthe, or ellys they wylle ly stylle yn hyr gravys.[1]

Balowe was burned as a heretic at Tower Hill. This last statement refutes the doctrine of transubstantiation by describing a set of ritual practices that lie at the heart of this dissertation. In Balowe's estimation, or at least in the record of his estimation, priests inter "many goddys" in the "sepukyr" on Good Friday, and then "lyfte them uppe and bere them forthe" on Easter Sunday. His sense of the priests "mak[ing]" these gods indicates that he is referring to the reservation of pre-consecrated hosts. In the Middle Ages, this diverged into a series of representational practices known as the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* rites, which were designed to draw neophytes and the laity into the mysteries of Holy Week.[2] On Good Friday, one or multiple objects – a host, cross, crucifix, or sculpture of the dead Christ – are put in the Easter Sepulchre. On Easter Sunday, these objects are

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[1] "Gregory's Chronicle: 1461–1469," in *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1876), 233–234; John A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards, 1414-1520* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 134.

[2] The earliest description of a *Depositio* appears in the late tenth-century *Regularis Concordia*, which offers guidelines for the English Benedictines. This text describes the *Depositio* as a practice that can strengthen the faith of the unlearned common people and neophytes. *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement, Medieval Classics*, ed. Thomas Symons (Nelson, 1953), 43–44; Michael Lee Norton, *Liturgical Drama and the Reimagining of Medieval Theater* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), 114–115.

removed and raised to view, a practice that had many different permutations across Europe and is still current today. The large number of Easter sepulchres in England suggests that this was common practice, and we have written records of both the *Elevatio* and *Depositio* in Barking Abbey and Durham Priory, each of which involve representations of Christ, as well as a host, the literal body of Christ.[3]

Balowe's statement interprets, or deliberately misinterprets, the multiple objects interred as multiple "goddys," levelling an accusation of idolatry. The inability of these "goddys" to move by themselves is proof of their impotence, a common theme of Protestant polemic.[4] Unable to "ryse them selfe," these "goddys" are lifted up and borne forth, their inert bodies are lent movement so that they appear alive. This designation of these objects put in motion as "dead images," reflects "a fear that images will come to life," an anxiety that betrays precisely the power – rather than the impotence – of images in the medieval imaginary.[5] Where some would see this as mimetic action, using objects to *represent* Christ's death and resurrection, Balowe's statement casts the Easter rites as fraudulent puppetry, which uses performance objects to simulate a disturbing kind of life.

This dissertation focusses on one type of object developed for the rites Balowe describes – movable sculptures of Christ crucified. Focussing on their use in England, it

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[3] Christophe Chaguinian, "The Good Friday Ceremonies of the Burial of Christ: A Survey of European Practices," *European Medieval Drama*, 26 (2022), 41–64, 46.

[4] Amy Knight Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* (Zone Books, 2012), 91–95, 94.

[5] Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 26.

asks what meanings these performances conveyed to those who watched and participated in them. This dissertation proposes that these performances shaped, and were shaped by, the literature of the time, and that literature can offer a unique window into these questions. Although the existence of these objects in England has been noted, and the form and function of individual examples explored, there has been to date no overarching study of the use of these objects in England, and no study of these objects from a specifically literary perspective. My project fills this gap, addressing at length the two texts thought to script a movable sculpture of Christ crucified, while also exploring how such performances shaped literary articulations of violence, death and animation. This is an interdisciplinary project, which uses artefactual and historical evidence from England and Continental Europe. It departs from previous scholarship on this topic in its literary focus and looks to understand the effect of one aspect of material culture on medieval poesis. For movable sculptures of Christ crucified are bound up in texts: their limbs were puppeteered to accompany sung or spoken lyrics, both in Latin and the vernacular. In this sense they can be considered literary objects, whose movements and resonances function in dialogue with medieval texts.

Throughout this thesis, I turn to the practice and theory of puppetry to guide my readings of texts and objects. Puppet theory is essentially a framework through which to assess the relationship between the performer and performance object. Put in motion, these sculptures of Christ concretely reflect the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between devotees and devotional objects, a relationship many scholars have explored.[6]

[6] See, for example, Sarah Blick and Laura Deborah Gelfand, eds., *Push me, Pull You: Physical and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Brill, 2011).

1. What is a Movable Sculpture of Christ Crucified?

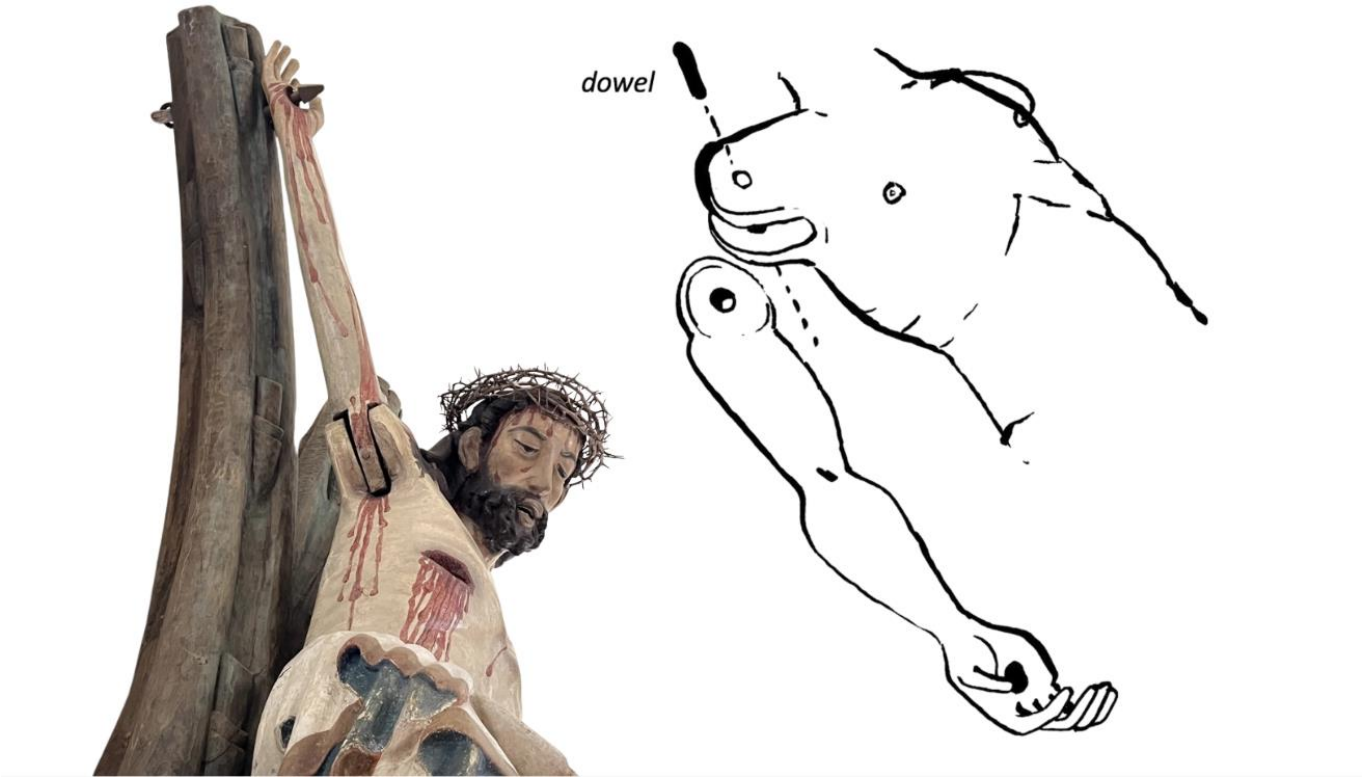


Figure 1. (Left). Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (c. 1350–1360), Stierisch-Laßnitz.

Figure 2. (Right). Diagram of tongue and groove mechanism.

Movable sculptures of Christ crucified were developed for the *Depositio* rite during the fourteenth century, and produced in great numbers across Europe throughout the Middle Ages. The earliest description of a *Depositio* appears in the late tenth-century *Regularis Concordia*, which offers guidelines for the English Benedictines. Here the object buried is a cross.[7] The sepulchre is watched until Easter Sunday, when the cross is raised from the sepulchre and placed on the altar. Then follows the *Visitatio Sepulchri*,

[7] Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia*, 43–45.

in which monastic brothers representing the Maries seek Christ. This set of sung rites formed the basis for Holy Week rituals throughout medieval Europe.

The movable sculpture of Christ crucified increased the verisimilitude of the *Depositio*, reflecting late medieval devotional trends towards mimesis and increased focus on the humanity of Christ. Movable sculptures of Christ crucified have also been interpreted in relation to the many legends in which a sculpted crucifix speaks, or lowers its arms to embrace the viewer.[8] Viewers were primed to anticipate signs of animation in the crucifix, and its ability to be moved plays into this tendency. Yet simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, these objects signified Christ's death and sacrificial kenosis.

In their most basic form, movable sculptures of Christ crucified have hinges in their shoulders, allowing their arms to fold down. Many, however, had additional mechanic features enabling different gestures, such as the movement of the legs, head, eyes or mouth. The most common type of joint is the tongue-and-groove, but there exist a variety of configurations, as shown in figure two.[9] Kamil Kopania's 2010 study *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* remains the most comprehensive treatment of the form and function of these objects.[10] However, as Kopania makes clear, the extensive catalogue his monograph offers is not

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[8] Johannes Tripps, "The Joy of Automata and Cistercian Monasteries: from Boxley in Kent to San Galgano in Tuscany," *Sculpture Journal* 25 (2016): 7–28.

[9] For an analysis of different hinge constructions from the medieval to baroque periods, see Ruth Fernández González, "Sistemas de articulación en Cristos del Descendimiento," (Máster en Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2012).

[10] Kamil Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* (Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010).

the final count. The presence of mechanical joints is often brought to light only when an object undergoes restoration.[11] One of the outputs of this project is an interactive database of extant examples of movable sculptures of Christ crucified in Europe.[12] As my map shows, there are high concentrations in the Alpine regions and Northern Italy, as well as a number on the Iberian peninsula. I have marked where the sculptures currently reside, not where they originate, as this is often unknown. The markers are colour-coded by century, and the metadata records a brief description of the object with relevant publications.[13] This set of extant examples is stylistically diverse, determined by local tastes and traditions. The mobility of the object is not a stylistic feature, rather it aids its performance. Some examples are the size of an infant, some are supernaturally large; most are made entirely of polychromed wood, but other have naturalistic features made of materials such as leather, wool, parchment, horn, organic hair, and even chicken's claws.

[11] Claudio Bernardi and Carla Bino, "Interactive Images: Depositions of Christ in Italy, 1200–1700" in *Good Friday Ceremonies with Articulated Figures in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Chaguinian (Classiques Garnier, 2023), 233–308, 252.

[12] https://www.zeemaps.com/map?group=4635058&location=Europe.

[13] I will maintain and expand this database beyond the dissertation, in conversation with fellow researchers.



Figure 3. Interactive map of movable sculptures of Christ crucified in Kopania's 2010 catalogue. Key: yellow—1200s; green—1300s; blue—1400s; purple—1500s; white—unknown.

There is no universal terminology for these objects.[14] Scholars infer the presence of hinges when the document describes the image being removed from the cross and buried. In recorded *Depositiones*, the removed sculpture is called simply *imago* or *imago crucifixi*.[15] This interpretation, though widely accepted by art historians and literary scholars, remains speculative. Medieval records rarely describe art objects with precision. At the start of this project, I used Kopania's term "animated sculptures" for this class of object. As I progressed in writing about literary themes of liveliness and animation, however, I found the term obfuscating for my purposes. Unlike normative

[14] See summary of terms, Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 27–36.

[15] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures,* 39; Michelle Oing, "Performing Death: A Medieval Puppet of Christ," in *Puppet and Spirit: Ritual, Religion, and Performing Objects*, vol. 1, eds. Claudia Orenstein and Tim Cusack (Routledge, 2024), 197–208, 201.

puppets – which are manipulated to simulate life – these objects were often manipulated to appear more realistically dead. I therefore choose, with Michelle Oing, the term "movable sculpture" to avoid aligning movement with life.[16]

Previous scholars have mostly approached movable sculptures of Christ crucified from an art historical perspective. These objects have been examined alongside other interactive late medieval devotional artworks.[17] They appear in diachronic genealogies of puppets and jointed dolls, and in broad histories of aesthetic response.[18] Since Kopania's 2010 book, which offers a thorough review of preceding scholarship, several scholars have made contributions to the area. For a special issue of *Preternature* (2015), Elina Gertsman reflects upon the phenomenology of the Spanish Burgos Christ, a highly flexible leather-covered example. In the same issue, Kopania offers a reading of several Polish examples, some of which are additional to his 2010 catalogue. He also discusses other movable sculptures of Christ – such as the *Palmesel* – and traces the use of such objects in Poland into the nineteenth century. Johannes Tripps had outlined the role of the Cistercian order in commissioning and disseminating

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[16] Oing's upcoming monograph, *Puppet Potential: Late Medieval Sculpture and the Aesthetics of Play, 1300-1525*, examines "the role of movable sculpture in Northern Europe through the conceptual framework of puppetry." My project diverges from Oing's in that it has a literary focus, as well as a focus on English material.

[17] Tripps, *Das handelnde Bildwerk in der Gotik: Forschungen zu den Bedeutungsschichten und der Funktion des Kirchengebäudes und seiner Ausstattung in der Hoch- und Spätgotik* (Mann, 2000); Tanya A. Jung, "The Phenomenal Lives of Movable Christ Sculptures," (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2006), 53; Antoni Ziemba, *The Agency of Art Objects in Northern Europe, 1380-1520* (Peter Lang, 2021).

[18] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Aura Satz, "Off the Pedestal, on the Stage: Animation and de-Animation in Art and Theatre," (PhD diss., Slade School of Fine Art, 2002); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Powell, *Depositions*; Marcus Rath, *Die Gliederpuppe: Kult – Kunst – Konzept* (De Gruyter, 2016).

"sculptural action figures," as well as the miracle stories in which sculptures come alive. His article discusses sculptured pietàs with movable and removable figures of Christ, and the Boxley Rood, which is of Cistercian origin. In a recent article, Einat Klafter discusses Margery Kempe's thwarted wish for a crucifix to "losyn hys handys fro the crosse and halsyn hir," which is presented in her Book as an illustration of pride.[19] Klafter illustrates the topos of the embracing crucifix with a description of Boxley Rood. In a discussion of the same moment in Kempe, Laura Varnam refers to a movable crucifix at Barking.[20]

Art historians have sketched typologies of form for these objects, which suggest different functional groupings; [21] I draw on Markus Rath's useful identification of a "*pietà* type," which is mostly life-sized, with joints in the shoulders as well as in the legs or head,

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[19] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Peason Education Limited, 2000), 66. Einat Klafter, "Margery Kempe and the Late-Medieval Image Debates in England: The Curious Case of the Non-Animating Crucifix," *Journal of Medieval History* 50, no. 3 (2024): 333–352.

[20] Laura Varnam, "The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 41, no. 2 (2015): 208–237.

[21] Hans Henrik Lohfert Jørgensen, "Skin Christ: On the Animation, Imitation, and Mediation of Living Skin and Touch in Late Medieval Contact Imagery," in *Touching, Devotional Practices, and Visionary Experience in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. David Carrillo-Rangel, Delfi I Nieto-Isabel, and Pablo Acosta-García (Springer International Publishing, 2019); Sara Cavatorti, *Giovanni Teutonico: scultura lignea tedesca nell'Italia del secondo Quattrocento* (Aguaplano, 2016); Carla Bino, "Le statue del Cristo crocifisso e morto nelle azioni drammatiche della Passione (XIV-XV secolo). Linee di ricerca," *Drammaturgia* XIII, 3 (2016): 277–311.
Cavatorti's typologies are:

- Movable tongue and arms.
- Only movable tongue.
- Movable tongue and ability to bleed.

Bino's typologies are:

- Movable arms.
- Talking Crucifixes with fixed limbs but movable tongue.
- Fully articulated statues of Christ and leather-covered polymaterial artefacts, which take the place of human actors in Passion plays.
- Statues of the dead Christ in decorated sepulchres.

to facilitate a pietà arrangement in which a living actor cradles the sculpture.[22] However, the emphasis of the dissertation is not on questions of provenance or style. Rather, I am interested in the way in which these objects interact with the literary imagination.

2. Movable Sculptures of Christ Crucified in England

No movable sculpture of Christ crucified has survived in England. Within such a rich and expanding area of study, therefore, focussing on English material may seem counterintuitive. Yet this lack of physical objects reflects generic methodological difficulties theatre historians face and offers exciting opportunities for interdisciplinary work that finds ways of filling such gaps. As Claire Sponsler reminds us, there is no single methodology for reading records of medieval performance. Rather, theatre historians employ an eclectic methodology, combining different sources and kinds of knowledge with a degree of imaginative interpolation.[23] My project contributes to this growing body of scholarship that imaginatively reconstructs the material conditions of early English drama. I take particular inspiration from scholarship that seeks to uncover non-verbal or improvisational performance practices such as music, dance, puppetry, and clowning.[24]

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[22] Rath's typologies are:
- General deposition type, with movable arms.
- *Pietà* type.
- Miracle type, which is operated remotely.
- Verism type, with natural material elements and occasionally containers for special effect blood.

[23] Claire Sponsler, "From Archive to Repertoire: The Disguising at Hertford and Performing Practices," in *Medieval Theatre Performance: Actors, Dancers, Automata and their Audiences*, eds. Philip Butterworth and Katie Normington (Boydell & Brewer, 2017).

[24] Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Andrew Albin, "Aural Space, Sonorous Presence, and the Performance of Christian Community in the Chester Shepherds Play," *Early Theatre* 16, no. 2 (2013): 33–57; Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); David Klausner, "Living Pictures: Drama without Text, Drama

This dissertation's temporal boundaries are determined by the two English documents that indicate the use of a movable sculpture of Christ crucified. The first is in the ordinal of Barking Abbey and describes the Easter rites practiced there from the late fourteenth century onward. The Barking *Depositio* is widely considered the earliest extant script in Europe to apply to a movable sculpture of Christ crucified.[25] The second document is a vernacular play script known as *Christ's Burial*, which appears with *Christ's Resurrection* in Bodleian Library MS. e Museo 160 (c. 1518); as the rubric states, these were for performance on Good Friday and Easter Sunday respectively. Between these English records a great number of continental accounts of sermons, passion plays and *Depositiones* are equally thought to direct movable sculptures, which I draw off throughout this dissertation.

Ironically, the clearest accounts of the physical form of a movable sculpture of Christ crucified in England emerge out of a public execution; the Rood of Grace was taken from its shrine in Boxley, Kent to St Pauls in London. There it was made to give one final performance during a public sermon in 1538, before the preacher, followed by the crowd, dismembered the object. The Rood had been a popular pilgrim destination

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without Action," in *Medieval Theatre Performance*; Seeta Chaganti, *Strange Footing: Poetic Form and Dance in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 2019); John Marshall, "'Walking in the Air': The Chester Shepherds on Stilts," and "'Her Virgynes, as Many as a Man Wylle': Dance and Provenance in Three Late Medieval Plays; Wisdom/The Killing of the Children/The Conversion of St Paul," in *Early English Performance: Medieval Plays and Robin Hood Games*, eds. John Marshall and Butterworth (Routledge, 2020); Mark Chambers, "'Players in Context: Determining Performance in Medieval Accountancy Records," *Early Theatre* 23, no. 2 (2020): 123–38; Matthew Sergi, *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle in the Chester Plays* (University of Chicago Press, 2021).

[25] Gesine Taubert and Johannes Taubert, "Mittelalterliche Kruzifixe mit schwenkbaren Armen: Ein Beitrag zur Verwendung von Bildwerken in der Liturgie," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 23 (1969): 79–121, 96–98; David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 286; Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 15; Chaguinian, "The Good Friday Ceremonies of the Burial of Christ," 49–51. A number of liturgical studies of this text refrain from speculation as to the form of this performance object, see chapter 1, note 3, 40.

between London and Canterbury, appearing in the financial records of its Cistercian house a little before 1371.[26] It does not seem to have been taken down from the cross for a *Depositio*. Leanne Groeneveld has made the convincing case that the Rood was not, as its later detractors claimed, a fraudulent miracle machine, but rather a form of "theatrical puppet," used to dramatise the last words of Christ on the cross in homiletic performances. Some later sixteenth-century commentators ascribe to the Rood the ability to move its arms and legs and to weep tears.[27]

These three historical artefacts – the Barking Easter rites, *Christ's Burial* and the Boxley Rood – demarcate the temporal and spatial boundaries of the project. My dissertation omits one English text Kopania includes in his overview of written evidence for these objects, the fragmentary Anglo-Norman play *La Seinte Resureccion* (c. 1200). While the text "contains no clear indication of the need" for a movable sculpture of Christ crucified, Kopania argues that a "thorough analysis [...] leaves little doubt as to the necessity of one during the performance."[28] Because this text predates all known movable sculptures of Christ crucified with this ability, I have excluded the play from my

[26] Elizabeth Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance: Boxley 1146–1538, a Lesser Cistercian House in Southern England" (PhD diss., University of Winchester, 2015), 123.

[27] Leanne Groeneveld, "A Theatrical Miracle: The Boxley Rood of Grace as Puppet,' *Early Theatre* 10, no. 2 (2007): 11–50.

[28] Kopania builds on O. B. Hardison's argument for the presence of a movable sculpture in this play; Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 254.

project, whose central methodology consists in marrying artefactual and literary evidence.[29]

3. Puppetry and Play: Conceptual Frameworks

As my title suggests, puppetry and play serve as important conceptual frameworks for the material at hand. As Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has stressed, play, dream and religious rite were fundamentally imbricated in medieval devotional culture, and actions of the devotee were in part informed by the formal characteristics of the objects with which they engaged; "[w]hen we play, there is always an image involved, and if the game is played to the limit, it is the image that ends up manipulating us."[30] This idea chimes with modern puppet theory. Following Elina Gertsman, Michelle Oing, and Leanne Groeneveld, I take puppetry as a lens through which to consider the movable sculpture of Christ crucified as a site of devotional performance.[31] The conceptual framework of puppetry is useful to my purposes in that it emphasises the parity between form and function. The puppet practitioner Basil Jones calls this "the metascript of the puppet," whereby a puppet's physical characteristics dictate, at least in part, how can it be used, and what kinds of meanings it can convey. The sculpture's potentialities – its ability to fold its arms, to lower its gaze, to open its mouth – can be read as a kind of speculative

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[29] I am grateful to Dr. Jane Bliss for her comments on this question at the Oxford Medieval Graduate Research Seminar, 7th November 2023.

[30] Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 329.

[31] Oing, "Performing Death"; "Holy Puppets: The Double Nature of the Medieval Bust Reliquary," *Denkste: Puppe* 3, no. 1.1 (2020): 28–37; "Carnival's Unstable Objects: Masks as Human–Sculpture Hybrids in Nuremberg's Schembartlauf," *The Sculpture Journal* 32, no. 2 (2023): 213–232; Groeneveld, "A Theatrical Miracle"; Elina Gertsman, *Worlds Within: Opening the Medieval Shrine Madonna* (Penn State University Press, 2015), 138–142.

script for movements. The sculpture invites the handler to: "fold my arms; lower my gaze; open my mouth." Such frameworks allows us to sketch the puppetry of performance objects from existing scripts, as well as to draw speculative scripts from extant objects. Scholars have increasingly emphasised the validity of different "ways of knowing" through which we can interpret historical texts and artefacts.[32] My thesis puts forward puppetry – the use of objects in performance as well as the crafting and repairing of such objects – as one such "way of knowing," which can help us access the workings of medieval poesis.

The frameworks of puppetry and play, however, must be approached with a few caveats in mind. The term "puppet" is of uncertain origin, perhaps related to the Latin *pupa*: girl, doll. The term, as we use it today, might be considered an anachronism for most of the period in question, and one that carries with it iconoclastic connotations, as religious reformers frequently played on the similarity between *popery* and *popetry*.[33] The Middle English Dictionary defines a "popet" as:

> (a) a youth, young girl; a babe; also, a small person;
> (b) a doll;
> (c) a wax figure used in necromancy.

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[32] Pamela Smith, *From Lived Experience to the Written Word: Reconstructing Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 2022); Smith and Benjamin Schmidt eds., *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects, and Texts, 1400-1800* (University of Chicago Press, 2007); Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Lisa Cooper, *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Patricia Clare Ingham, *The Medieval New: Ambivalence in an Age of Innovation* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

[33] Joe Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play* (Stanford University Press, 2020), 69–94.

It is not clear when the term began to take on connotations of performance. The MED quotes the N-Town Herod, who targets "[p]opetys and paphawkys," babes and nurselings.[34] It is possible that this word bears a modern sense of puppet, as the audience would have been confronted with small dummies of babies that the soldiers macabrely puppeteer in their "good game."[35] The MED also quotes the prologue to *Sir Thopas*, in which the host describes Geoffrey Chaucer the pilgrim as "a popet in an arm t'enbrace."[36] Anne Haskell has argued that this could also mean doll or puppet, so that 'the line presents Chaucer's ostensible surrogate as a diminutive, manufactured figure for whom thought and action are supplied by a controlling superior.'[37] She explores how the diminutive Sir Thopas is also characterised as a "puppet-hero" in his tale, whose assortment of romance tropes reflects the repertoire of an itinerant puppet player. These reflections show the way in which, even not explicitly named as such, literary puppets and dolls offer metatextual levels of meaning:[38] Chaucer playfully reflects on the nature of the literary avatar, while the soldiers play up the flamboyant artifice of the staged violence in which they are engaged.

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[34] Play 20, *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), line 11, 160.

[35] Sophie Oosterwijk, "Lessons in 'Hopping': The Dance of Death and the Chester Mystery Cycle." *Comparative Drama* 36, no. 3/4 (2002): 249–287.

[36] *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edition (Oxford University Press, 2008), line 701, 213. All quotations from Chaucer will be from this edition.

[37] Ann Haskell, "Sir Thopas: The Puppet's Puppet,'"*The Chaucer Review* 9, no. 3 (1975): 253–261, 253. Frances K. Barasch, "Shakespeare and the Puppet Sphere," *English Literary Renaissance* 34, no. 2 (2004): 157–175, 159.

[38] Alexa Sand, "Puppets, Manuscripts, and Gendered Reading in the *Hortus Deliciarum*," *Gesta* 60, no. 2 (2021): 157–172, 158.

Movable sculptures of Christ crucified are not straightforwardly puppets. Kopania views the terms "puppet" and "puppet image" as "oversimplifications" of these objects.[39] Nevertheless, his approach is grounded in his deep understanding of puppetry as an art form. In Steve Tillis' definition, the puppet differentiates itself from a prop in that it demands a "double-vision," in which it is seen as "perceived object" and "imagined life."[40] The movable sculpture of Christ crucified often does not live up to this: as Markus Rath points out, movable Christs are both living, salvific images of the saviour and replicas of cadavers, crafted and puppeteered to appear as genuine corpses.[41] Their inherent wooden stiffness and bounded joint mobility simulated the onset of rigor mortis.[42] Some, indeed, were so realistic that they were mistaken for mummified people.[43] This material simulation of death through mechanical movement speaks to what Valentin Groebner has described as the "ambiguity and disturbing potential" of the endless replicability of images of the Christ's dead body.[44] This project embraces these ambiguities by discussing the movable sculpture as a figure of both disease and healing. They are mechanical simulations of death, but, as we shall see, they signal vitality in complex ways.

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[39] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 31.

[40] Steve Tillis, *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet: Puppetry as a Theatrical Art* (Greenwood Press, 1992), 7.

[41] Rath, *Gliederpuppe*, 113.

[42] Rath, *Gliederpuppe*, 112-3.

[43] Jørgensen, "Skin Christ," 134.

[44] Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages* (Zone Books, 2004), 122.

Though practitioners and theorists have advanced definitions of the puppet, it is not a stable category of object. Rather, the term indicates a mode of engagement in which an object is implicated. For, as any child or puppeteer knowns, any object can be made into a puppet, just as "[a]ny statue, any holy thing, any artwork is a doll *in potentia*."[45] The Middle Scots poem *Ratis Raving* attests to this flexibility of objects when approached playfully, describing how a child makes "a wicht hors of a wand" and a "cumly lady of a clout."[46] While a puppet's form offers certain "metascripts" dictating how they could be handled, these can be modified, subverted or ignored. It is in this sense that I use the word "play"; I do not intend to trivialise the performances explored in this dissertation, rather I want to emphasise their subjective nature: that they are 'as-if' situations, into which the movable sculpture has been temporarily co-opted. As the puppet historian and practitioner George Speaight puts it:

> A doll [...] is not a puppet, and a girl playing with her doll as if it were a living baby is not giving a puppet show; but if before an audience of her mother and father she makes the doll walk along the top of a table and act the part of a baby, she is then presenting a primitive puppet show.[47]

Speaight shows how the physical moveability of the object enables epistemological flexibility. In private, the doll can be a "baby" to the girl, if that is the fiction she chooses to apply. However, the girl can also choose to make the doll "act the part of a baby" for an audience, and so makes a puppet of her doll. Perhaps its joints are flexible, or perhaps not; she can make it perform "walking" in many ways. Its status as a puppet in that

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[45] Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play*, 52.

[46] Joseph Rawson Lumby, ed., *Ratis Raving and Other Moral and Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*, EETS (London, 1870), line 1132, line 1136, 57–58.

[47] George Speaight, "Puppetry," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (May 31, 2023).

moment is not determined by its physical form, but by the context of the fiction in which it participates.

This may be an obvious point, but it is one that complicates the task of describing historical performance objects. In being open to imaginative handling, these can shift from sculpture to doll to puppet and back again, depending on the fictions of the handler(s). This is what Raine Maria Rilke calls the doll's "terrible, thick forgetfulness," the way in which we are continually frustrated by its adamantine irreducibility.[48] Rilke describes encountering a formerly beloved doll:

> Sie würde uns fast empören durch ihre schrekliche dicke Vergeßlichkeit, der Haß, der, unbewußt, sicher immer einen Teil unserer Beziehungen zu ihr ausmachte, schlüge nach oben, entlarvt läge sie vor uns da, as der grausige Fremdkörper, an den wir unsere lauterste Wärme verschwendet haben; als die oberflächlich bemalte Wasserleich, die sich von den Überschwemmungen unserer Zärtlichkeit heben und tragen ließ, bis wir wieder trocken wurder und sie irgeneinem Gestrüpp vergaßen.[49]

It is a now critical commonplace to acknowledge the "thingness" of objects, that they have their own resistant agency, they "are not static, but rather are always becoming, and are 'withdrawn' or 'hidden,' inaccessible to the human knower, and resistant to epistemological categorization."[50] The figure of the doll, upon which many of us have

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[48] Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play*, 58. David J. Getsy, "Acts of Stillness: Statues, Performativity, and Passive Resistance," *Criticism* 56, no. 1 (2014): 1–20.

[49] Raine Maria Rilke, *Puppen* (Hyperionverlag, 1921), 8. "She would almost upset us by her terrible, thick forgetfulness. The hatred, which unconsciously has always been a part of our relationship with her, would flare up, and she would lie before us, finally without disguise: as that gruesome alien body for which we have wasted our purest warmth; as that superficially painted drowned corpse, lifted and carried by the floods of our tenderness until it dried out and we forgot it somewhere in the bushes." Trans., Eva-Maria Simms, "Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud," *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 663–677, 670.

[50] Anne Schuurman, "Materials of Wonder: Miraculous Objects and Poetic Form in Saint Erkenwald," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017): 275–296, 276. Kellie Robertson, "Medieval Things: Materiality, Historicism, and the Premodern Object," *Literature Compass* 5, no. 6 (2008): 1060–1080. See also: Bill

poured tender fictions, is primed to be read this way. The objects I examine in this dissertation are not straightforwardly puppets or dolls – indeed, most of them are either destroyed or not in use. But I am interested in their "affordances," their "ability to provoke actions."[51]

In mapping the interactions between bodies in performance, the push and pull between the inert and the animate, the exact form of the historic object is secondary to its use. *Christ's Burial*, for example, could be performed using an actor as Christ – though this seems unlikely. Christ does nothing in the play, remaining dead throughout, so that even a human actor in this role would be puppeteered, in the sense that all his movements would be produced by other acting bodies who transfer their energy onto and into him. Balowe's critique with which we began attests to this idea: the object of critique is not the objects themselves: they are merely an array of things. What is important is the way they are handled by the priests.

4. Puppets in Medieval England

In making a case for puppetry as an interpretive lens, it is worth considering for a moment the whole gamut of medieval puppets. In its most basic definition, puppetry is "the human infusion of independent life into lifeless, but not agentless, objects in

Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

[51] Christine Neufeld and Ricarda Wagner, "Introduction," *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment: Inscribed Objects in Medieval European Literature*, eds. Ludger Lieb, Neufeld, and Wagner (De Gruyter, 2019), 6.

performance."[52] The term embraces a range of practices such as hobby horsing, processional puppets, and mechanical marvels as puppetry. Then as now, puppetry was both ubiquitous and invisible, "evident everywhere but rarely named."[53] It was "an integral part of the public culture of later medieval Western Europe," but rarely attested to.[54]

One challenge in uncovering medieval puppetry is that written records often do not relate the mechanisms of movement, or distinguish between an actor in a costume and an externally controlled object.[55] The description of Edward VI's entry into London in 1547, for example, details a pageant at the great conduit in Chepe representing the conception, birth and coronation of the monarch using animals and angels. The father lion approaches the mother phoenix "makeing a semblance of amyty unto the bird, moveing his head sundry times between the whiche familiarity as it seemed there came forth a young Lyon."[56] How this was realised is not clear: "we do not know whether this scene was more like the mechanical *tableaux vivants* associated with monumental clocks, or whether it was instead a kind of puppet theatre with individually controlled

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[52] John Bell, Claudia Orenstein, and Dassia N. Posner, "Introduction," to *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, eds. Posner, Orenstein, Bell (Routledge, 2014), 5.

[53] Oing, "Performing Death," 198.

[54] Sand, "Puppets, Manuscripts, and Gendered Reading,"158.

[55] Laura Weigert, "'Vocamus Personagias': The Enlivened Figures of Ephemeral Stagings," *French Visual Culture and the Making of Medieval Theater* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 26–73; Michael Witmore, "Arrow, Acrobat and Phoenix: On Sense and Motion in English Civic Pageantry," in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Wendy Beth Hyman (Routledge, 2011), 109–126.

[56] Edward VI, *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth,* ed. John Gough Nichols (London, 1857), cclxxxviii.

mechanical characters."[57] Likewise, the description of marriage pageantry in fifteenth-century Italy places simple puppetry in the same marvellous schema as automated figures: elephants presented by the Jewish community were impressive because "the legs of the men inside them were so well covered by those of the elephant that it would be impossible for anyone who had not seen this marvellous device to write of it."[58] The object of wonder was a quadruped puppet of the kind used in pantomime. Some of the objects discussed in this dissertation, like the Rood of Grace, are controlled remotely, while some are moved directly by human actors, like the Barking sculpture. How can we usefully organise such a broad historical record? While the term "automaton" has served useful functions for modern scholars, it tends to mystify objects that modern practitioners would comfortably call puppets.

An important touchstone in this field remains Stephen Kaplin's Puppet Tree paradigm.[59] Before Kaplin, puppets were taxonomised by geographic origin, materials, and construction types.[60] The Puppet Tree offers a different approach, surveying how the performer interacts with the object. This is useful for my study for multiple reasons. Firstly, we often do not know what a historic puppet was made of, or how exactly it operated. Secondly, Kaplin's quantitative approach to performance interaction helps visualise the boundaries of speculation about a given record. Applying it to medieval

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[57] Witmore, "Arrow, Acrobat and Phoenix," 117.

[58] Anthony Grafton, "The Devil as Automaton," in *Automata: Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, ed. Jessica Riskin (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 46–62, 50.

[59] Stephen Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree: A Model for the Field of Puppet Theatre," *The Drama Review* 43, no. 3 (1999): 28–35; Peter Marx, *Early Modern Media Ecology* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 77–82.

[60] Eileen Blumenthal, *Puppetry: A World History* (Abrams, 2005), 37–70.

puppets helps us to compare very different objects, while maintaining a degree of precision for each record. I have thus applied Kaplin's framework to a selection of documented performing objects in England to situate the movable sculpture of Christ crucified.



Figure 4. Stephen Kaplin's Puppet Tree Diagram.

As we can see from figure four, Kaplin numerically approaches the relationship between performer and performance object. The X axis represents the ratio between object and performer. At the centre is a 1:1 ratio, thus "a direct transfer of energy from a

single performer to a single performing object."[61] The number of performing objects increases towards the graph's origin, so that one performer directs energy towards multiple objects. Conversely, away from the origin, the number of performers increase, so that multiple performers operate a single puppet. The Y axis reflects what Kaplin calls "distance," which he defines as "the level of separation and contact between the performer and the object being manipulated beginning at the point of absolute contact (where performer and object are one) and running through psychic, body, remote, and temporal degrees of contact."[62]

The character role of an onstage actor, for example, sits at a certain remove from the person performing it. Effects such as make-up, wigs, prosthetics and masks extend this distance. At some point, the performance object "begins to emerge with a physicality of its own"; as Kaplin states, this "first happens with the mask." When a mask fits the contours of the performer's body it cannot be considered a puppet. However, when it "detache[s] from the actor's body, developing its own center of gravity, its own structure, its own presence," then it crosses a "threshold" into the realm of the puppet.[63] Kaplin's example is the lion masks in the stage adaptation of *The Lion King* (1997), which sit on top of the performer's heads, and offer a halfway point between mask and body puppet. Medieval equivalents include hobby stags and horses.[64] I have added some

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[61] Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree," 32.

[62] Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree," 33.

[63] Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree," 33.

[64] John Clark, "'Playing the Stag' in Medieval Middlesex? A Perforated Antler from South Mimms Castle – Parallels and Possibilities," in *Deer and People*, eds. Karis Baker, Ruth Carden, and Richard Madgwick (Windgather Press, 2015), 208–217. John Hall references hobby horsing in a poem (1529/1530): "And some with hoby nagge / For gayne of gold wold play trim tricks / With turne round kycke and wag." Hall,

continental images of this object type: here, arm extensions allow the performer to walk as a quadruped, and the stag's head sits high above the performer's own. The shaded area represents what is not a puppet according to Kaplin's paradigm, with the hobby stag on the threshold of this. Within the shaded area masked characters, such as the double masks of the York devils can be seen as approaching Kaplin's "threshold" in which the contours of the mask no longer adhere to the contours of the performer's body.[65]

As we progress up Kaplin's Y axis, the distance between performer and performing object increases. In his diagram, he moves from hand puppets, to rod puppets, shadow puppets, and remote controlled figures. What one might call automata thus sit within a spectrum with simpler puppets, as their movements remain controlled by a performer's "energy," albeit at a greater temporal and spatial "distance." Kaplin's graph also addresses physical puppets within the virtual sphere, such as the rig-operated dinosaurs developed for the film Jurassic Park (1993) or Jim Henson's Muppets (1995–present).[66] These examples remind us that even technologically sophisticated productions still choose puppetry to achieve certain aesthetic and emotional effects. As he writes, "physical proximity between performing object and performer is only one dimension of the term 'distance.' There can also be a separation between an object and

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The Courte of Vertu (Thomas Marshe, 1565), 141^{v}, ESTC no. S105963. Butterworth, "Juggling and Staging Tricks in Early Theatre," in *Staging, Playing, Pyrotechnics and Magic: Conventions of Performance in Early English Theatre*, ed. Peter Harrop (Routledge, 2022), 274. See also Natália Pikli, "The Prince and the Hobby-Horse: Shakespeare and the Ambivalence of Early Modern Popular Culture," in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Popular Culture,* eds. Janet Clare and Paola Pugliatti (Firenze University Press, 2013).

[65] York Mercers Inventory, 1433: "vj deuelles faces in iij Vesernes [...] Array / for god bat ys to say a Sirke wounded a diademe with a veserne gilted." Margaret Dorrell and Alexandra F. Johnston, "The York Mercers and their Pageant of Doomsday," *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 11–35, 29.

[66] Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (Rutgers University Press, 2012), 24–37.

its image."[67] European medieval puppetry was, of course, not experienced virtually in this sense. The medieval equivalent, which I explore in this dissertation but have not plotted on the graph due to their epistemological complexity, are descriptions of performing objects in literature, which possess a virtuality that physical puppets and automata do not.[68]

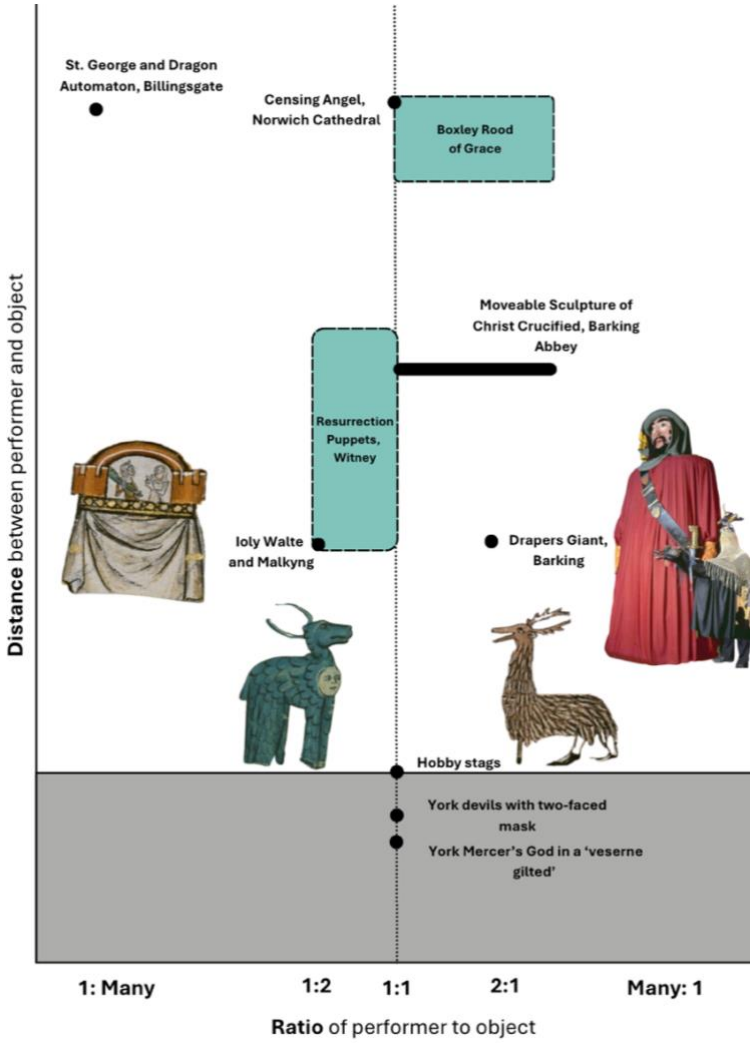


Figure 5. Puppet Tree Diagram of Medieval Puppets.

[67] Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree," 34.

[68] Mary Franklin-Brown, "Fugitive Figures: On the Modes of Existence of Medieval Automata in Old French Narrative," *Romanic Review* 111 (2020), 66–84; E. R. Truitt, "Between Art and Nature: *Natura artifex*, Neoplatonism, and Literary Automata," in *Medieval Robots: Mechanism, Magic, Nature, and Art* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

In the Middle Ages, large puppets were used for processional pageants.[69] In 1535, for example, the Drapers of Barking hired a giant that required two men to bear it. [70] We can assume these performers operated the giant from within, so I have placed this puppet on the same Y axis as a glove puppet. While no medieval English giant survives, the Salisbury Giant is thought to date from at least 1570. I have put its image in the graph, along with Hob-Nob, its hobby horse companion.[71]

We have no recorded secular puppet scripts for this period; the earliest appears in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) as a play within a play.[72] The earliest recorded use of puppets in England appear in the court rolls of Grimsby, Lincolnshire; the record shows a 1431 legal dispute between two men over the late delivery of "*certa instrumenta joci vocata* Ioly Walte and Malkyng," in which the town minstrel acted as the surety and spokesperson in court.[73] The complaint is directed against one man for his late return from a summertime tour with these "instruments of play." Ioly Walte and Malkyng were therefore likely to be secular glove puppets operated by a single performer on a portable stage.[74] Similar situations can be found in continental marginalia illustrations, such as

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[69] See my discussion of processional dragon puppet on page 141.

[70] Davidson, *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Routledge, 2016), 41.

[71] Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, 42; "Giant and Hob-Nob," The Salisbury Museum Collections.

[72] Ben Jonson, *Batholomew Fair*, eds G. R. Hibbard and Alexander Leggatt, 2nd edition (Bloomsbury, 2007), V: v, 180 – 184.

[73] Ian Lancashire, "'Ioly Walte and Malkyng': A Grimsby Puppet Play in 1431," *REED Newsletter* 4, no. 2 (1979): 6–8.

[74] David George, "Anti-Catholic Plays, Puppet Shows, and Horse-Racing in Reformation Lancashire," *Records of Early English Drama* 19, no. 1 (1994): 15–22,19.

those in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264, completed in 1344 in Tournai.[75] The two images in this manuscript images show an audience watching glove puppets perform on a portable stage.[76] Similar puppets feature in a 1519 didactic collection of sentences: "[t]he trogettars behynd a clothe shew forth poppett*is* that chatre/ chyde / iuste and fyghte to gether."[77] These examples reflect the essential and extraordinary violence of puppetry; in the Tournai stage reproduced in my diagram, the male puppet approaches the female with a menacingly large club, like a proto-Punch.[78] In the German-speaking world, portable puppet stages were called *Himmelreiche*, suggesting that they dealt with religious themes.[79] In satirising the audience of a "himelrich," Thomas Murner's *Die Narrenbeschworung* (1512) provides us with glimpses of the scenes depicted by puppets therein, such as a lady trying to kiss a monk or Isengrim stealing a roast and then being shot in the snout.[80]

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[75] These images sit within the context of Bodley's other marginal images, depicting secular entertainment such acrobatics, dancing animals, cockfights and mumming. Mark Cruse, *Illuminating the "Roman d'Alexandre": Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264: The Manuscript as Monument* (Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 95. The earliest image of puppets in Europe is are of "jigging puppets" in the *Hortus deliciarum* (1171–1194). Sand, "Puppets, Manuscripts, and Gendered Reading," 170.

[76] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264, folio 54^{v}; folio 76^{r}.

[77] William Horman, "De exercitamentis et lvdis," *Vulgaria* (London: 1519) folio 282^{v}, ESTC No. S106246. Butterworth, *Magic*, 131.

[78] For violence see Blumenthal, *Puppetry*, 143–61.

[79] Marx, *Early Modern Media Ecology*, 21–22, 78

[80] Thomas Murner, *Die Narrenbeschworung*, ed. Karl Goedeke (Leibzig, 1879), lines 5–19, 176.

In many churches across Europe, the mass was dramatised using mechanical angels that carried incense thuribles or delivered pyxes to the altar.[81] These performing objects would have involved a high degree of physical distance between performer and object. Throughout the fifteenth century, Norwich cathedral boasted a mechanical angel that performed the Holy Trinity feast and Corpus Christi. Operated by a single pulley, the angel would descend from the roof into the nave and cense the rood and the congregation below.[82] Likewise, in 1502, alderman Thomas Goismann endowed Trinity Chapel Hull with a device that made angels descend and ascend to the ceiling during the elevation of the Host, "sicut est apud Lynne in eccL cath."[83] He wished for his own parish church to boast the same performing angels as King's Lynn Cathedral. I put the censing angel at Norwich high on the Y axis, because it is operated by a crank. Distance obscures the line of the control, making the performing object appear to move of its own accord, like a mechanical marvel, which are designed to "create not conviction but cognitive uncertainty."[84] As Phillip Butterworth has shown, the automaton of St George at St Botolph's, Billingsgate (1474) was part of a mechanical assemblage of five figures set in

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[81] Tripps, "The Priest Assisted by Automatons: Medieval Altars and Altarpieces with Mechanical Figures," *Die Macht der Dinge Symbolische Kommunikation und kulturelles Handeln*, eds. Andreas Hartmann et. al (Waxmann, 2011), 339–348.

[82] The pulley guide is still extant and is also in the shape of an angel. Amy Gillette, "Late Medieval Angel Machines," *The Worlds of Villard de Honnecourt: The Portfolio, Medieval Technology, and Gothic Monuments*, eds. George Brooks and Maile Hutterer (Brill, 2022), 309–310. William Lefroy, *Norwich Cathedral* (London, 1897), 46–47.

[83] Reg. Test. Vi 49a. Thomas Goisman of Hull, Will 112, *Testamenta eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York*, vol. 4, ed. James Raine (London, 1869), 209. "[A]s it is done in Lynn Cathedral." Trans., Gillette, "Late Medieval Angel Machines," 307.

[84] Michelle Karnes, *Medieval Marvels and Fictions in the Latin West and Islamic World* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 3.

motion by one person turning a crank.[85] I have therefore put this puppet high on the Y axis and with a performer to object ration of 1:Many.

Further evidence for the use of puppets in churches suggest that they were involved in storytelling, as well as visual display. The Musée de Cluny holds a small, remotely operated puppet of a crucified figure whose eyes can move. It is thought this represents Gestas, the bad thief, and was attached to a pulpit to dramatise a sermon.[86] In August 1576, the Bishop of Lincoln made the rector of Cranoe, Richard Hackney, denounce himself in his Sunday sermon, acknowledging that he had allowed "Poppet plaies" within the church and "is sorie for yt." He was fined and it was determined that he "in no wise hereafter shall suffer any such order eyther by morrys daunce or otherwise to be in his Churche."[87] Hackney's puppet activities seem to have been lumped in with secular entertainments, though what story these "Poppet plaies" performed cannot be known. Perhaps it is unhelpful to try to delineate the secular and the religious elements of such dramas.

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[85] London Metropolitan Archives, P69/BOT3/D/001/MS00059, 46^{v}–47^{r}. Transcribed and discussed in Butterworth, "The Mechanycalle 'Ymage off Seynt Iorge' at St Botolph's, Billingsgate, 1474," in *Medieval Theatre Performance*.

[86] Edmond Haraucourt, *Musée des Thermes et de l'Hôtel de Cluny*: *Catalog des Bois et des Meubles* (Paris 1925) 49; Rath, *Gliederpuppe*, 108; see also Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 169–170; Tripps, "The Joy of Automata," 23–24. Another of these fifteenth-century "preacher's crosses" has been lost, but is described in Alfred Chapuis and Edouard Gélis, *Le Monde des Automates: Étude Historique et Technique* (Paris, 1928).

[87] C. W. Forster ed., *Lincoln Episcopal Records in the Time of Thomas Cooper, S.T.P. Bishop of Lincoln, AD 1571-1584*, vol. 2 (Lincoln, 1912),138. A similar charge was taken in Worcester "contra magistrum Griffinum Glinn detectus for [sufferinge] causinge a puppett playe to be in the Chauncell". 1617, Visitation Act Book, SHR: BA 2760, folio 113. Klausner ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Herefordshire, Worcestershire* (University of Toronto Press, 1990), 383. Butterworth, *Magic*, 130.

The resurrection seems to have been a subject for puppet performance in church. The churchwardens accounts of St. Michael's Spurriergate, York mention an Easter sepulchre fitted with a sculpture of Christ operated by cords, which were lubricated with soap.[88] Similarly, in November 1547, during a push to remove "all images in euerie parish church in London," the Bishop of St David's preached at St Paul's Cross "where he shewed a picture of the resurrection of our Lord made with vices, which putt out his legges of sepulchree and blessed with his hand and turned his heade."[89] Like the Boxley Rood, this puppet was made to perform one last time before it was pulled apart. One performance of this type seems to have involved pyrotechnics; in 1506 Sybel Derling was paid "for Nayles for the sepulcre & for rosyn to the resurreccyon pley" at the Church of St Lawrence, Reading.[90] William Lambarde (1536–1601) describes a pre-Reformation puppet resurrection play in Oxfordshire:

> In the Dayes of ceremonial Religion they used at Wytney to set foorthe yearly in the maner of a Shew, or Enterlude, the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Chryste, partly of Purpose to draw thyther some Concourse of People that might spend their Money in the Towne, but chieflie to allure by pleasant Spectacle the comon Sort to the Likinge of Popishe Maumetrie; for the which Purpose, and the more lyvely thearby to exhibite to the Eye the hole Action of the Resurrection, the Preistes garnished out certein smalle Puppets, representinge the Parsons of Christe, the Watchmen, Marie, and others, amongest the which one bare the Parte of a wakinge Watcheman, who (espiinge Christ to arise) made a continual

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[88] "Item for sope to the parish clark to a noynt the Seynt Pulcur geyr that > the ymgae whent in at the Resurrexcion." St Michael's Spurriergate Churchwardens' Accounts, 1547, f.213v. C. C. Webb, ed. *The Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Michael, Spurriergate*, 2 vols. (Borthwick Institute, University of York, 1977), vol. 1: 7-8, vol. 2: 316. See also Davidson and David Elgar O'Connor, *York Art: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art* (Medieval Institute Publications, 1978), 60.

[89] Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors*: *From A.D. 1485*–1559, 2 vols, ed. William Douglas Hamilton (London, 1857, 1877), vol. 2, 1.

[90] Alexandra F. Johnston ed. "Berkshire Collection: Performance Traditions," REED Online; "St Laurence's Churchwardens Accounts," 1506-1507, REED Online.

> Noyce, like to the Sound that is caused by the Metinge of two Styckes, and was therof comonly called, Jack Snacker of Wytney.[91]

This account does not disclose the form of these puppets, but we can make certain assumptions about the nature of the performance. The performers are "Preistes" in the plural, and, because the puppets are described as "smalle," we can assume a 1:1 or 1:Many ratio. Butterworth suggests that the Witney puppets were glove puppets, but they could also be early marionettes.[92] I have reflected this uncertainty of proximity between performer and performing object by giving a larger range on the Y axis. Given the complexity of the story ("the hole Action of the Resurrection"), it seems likely that these puppets were directly controlled by performers, and was not a mechanised performance like the St George and the Dragon at Billingsgate. Lambarde furthermore refers to the "Parte" of the watchman, indicating that these are separate figures. The individuality of this character, and the strange clacking call he makes, gives him a distinct identify, even, it seems, local celebrity. Speaight imagines Jack Snacker as a "comic local character," implying a degree of connection between performer and performance, which would allow a certain level of clowning that a clockwork object does not.[93]

Throughout this dissertation I refer to Kaplin's concept of "distance" as a way to understand the interactions between performer and performance object. The sculpture of Christ crucified used at Barking was moved through direct contact with the two priests who unfastened it from the cross, washed it in water and wine and buried it in the Easter

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[91] William Lambarde, *Dictionarium Angliæ Topographicum & Historicum* (London, 1730), 459.

[92] Butterworth, *Magic*, 130.

[93] Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (Robert Hale, 1990), 34.

sepulchre. In certain moments it may have been handled by only one of the two priests mentioned in the script, which is why I have plotted a range on the X axis from 1:1 to 2:1. The Boxley Rood, by contrast, appears to have been remotely controlled. Its appeal lay in its automatic-seeming movements. We neither know how many people it took to operate it, nor whether they were visible during its performance. I have thus plotted a range of possibilities for it.

To see puppetry in performance records, we must look beyond traditional taxonomies of puppetry and focus instead on the interactions between performer and performance object. This allows us not only to draw together disparate types of performance, but also to show how individual objects (like the Boxley Rood) are dissimilar from other movable sculptures of Christ crucified. Going forward, this dissertation maintains Kaplin's approach and although I will not plot every performance object encountered here, his central axes of distance and numeric relation between performer and performance object remain fundamental.

5. Thesis Structure

My thesis moves from an analysis of my key sources, towards a more thematic approach. The first two chapters introduce and contextualise *Christ's Burial* and the Barking Easter rites. Chapter three and four offer close readings of *Christ's Burial* in particular, showing how an understanding of the puppetry at work in the play offers fresh perspectives on its affective and mnemonic strategies. My final chapter opens up this connection between object and text, considering texts that allude to, but do not direct, devotional performance. It shows how the puppetry of the movable sculpture of Christ crucified can act as a lens through which to view the semi-animate bodies in two blood libel tales. Each

chapter in this dissertation examines textual material alongside artefacts that have survived on the continent, continuingly working to invite informed conjectures as to the form and function of lost objects closer to the texts.

Chapter one looks closely at the two scripts thought to direct a movable sculpture of Christ crucified in England: the Barking Easter rites and *Christ's Burial*. Although these texts differ greatly – in their relation to the liturgy, their language, their cultural context – they both direct the same basic actions: Christ's removal from the cross and burial. This chapter examines how these movements might have been achieved in the performance of each script, and explores the different contexts in which they are situated. Though the Barking rites are well attested to in critical literature, this survey of the performance possibilities of the objects within them is more extensive than previous treatments. This chapter draws on evidence of the Easter rites from Durham Priory, as well as a number of continental objects that seem to offer similar affordances to the Barking Christ sculpture.

Though there is some debate over how to situate the Barking rites within the history of theatre, the sequence has clear parallels and the words of the chants are drawn from a recognisable liturgical repertoire. This cannot be said for *Christ's Burial*, which is unique in Middle English literature in many ways. Readers have puzzled over this play's affective and dramatic strategies, as well as its relationship to the manuscript in which it is situated and the wider corpus of vernacular lyric which it appears to draw from. With so many unanswered questions, this dissertation is necessarily weighted towards this text. Chapter one offers new codicological evidence to suggest that the play is a copy, and that its performance context likely lay outside the confines of the

Charterhouse in which it was transcribed. The chapter then explores what these contexts might have been, building on the work of Peter Meredith and Leanne Groeneveld.

Chapter two situates *Christ's Burial* within the context of similar vernacular plays, something no extended study of the text has done before. While a full analysis of its European counterparts is beyond the scope of this project, I offer a thematic approach, investigating the status of the movable sculpture of Christ crucified within vernacular settings; should it be seen as a violent stage effect – essentially a puppeteered body double for an actor – or as a devotional object co-opted into a drama? This chapter presents an overview of violence on the medieval stage, paying particular attention to the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. It then moves into close reading of the staging of two German burial plays contemporary to *Christ's Burial* that also appear to direct the actions of a movable sculpture of Christ crucified.

Having positioned *Christ's Burial* within its manuscript context, as well as local and continental performance practices, chapter three looks squarely at the workings of the script itself. Taking guidance from Sarah McNamer's work on literature and the history of emotion, the chapter examines the play's affective strategies. It first maps the interactions between the performing bodies suggested by the script, and how the corpus is manoeuvred through the *ductus* of the play.[94] Whether the corpus is presented by an actor playing dead or a sculpture, the *ductus* of the play is a piece of puppetry. I show

[94] For *ductus*, see Carruthers, "Rhetorical Ductus, or, Moving through a Composition," in *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, eds. Mark Franko and Annette Richards (Wesleyan University Press, 2000); Anthony Bale, *Feeling Persecuted: Christians, Jews and Images of Violence in the Middle Ages* (Reaktion Books, 2010), 96.

how even a reader of the play might trace a virtual image of this corpus in motion and in suspension, that is grounded in the tropes of visual art as well as the essential logic of puppetry. I show how the play is organised into three iconographic poses – the crucifixion, deposition and *pietà* – through which the corpus is manoeuvred. Each pose is extended through dilatory rhetorical devices, such as ekphrasis, enargia, exclamation, amplification, and refrain. The characters grapple with two opposing impulses – the impulse to hold still and lyrically reflect upon the spectacle of the corpus, and the practical need to carry out the work of the burial, that is, to wrest the corpus out of these lyric pauses and into the grave. Other Middle English depositions tend to sadly and briefly conclude the crucifixion event.

Christ's Burial not only uses the push and pull between the performers and performance object to produce feelings, it also talks about feelings, staging debates grounded in the medical and theological discourse of the time. This chapter recovers this important context, showing how the play develops a complex system of somatic response encompassing the corpus, the characters and the audience. This chapter relates this discourse of feeling in *Christ's Burial* to certain iconographic traditions of sculpted crucifixes, such as the *crucifixus dolorosus* and what Markus Rath calls the "verism type" of movable sculptures of Christ crucified, which have organic elements, such as skin and hair.

While chapter three looks at the interactions between the performers and performance object, chapter four examines sites of overlap, in which the corpus becomes a channel for voice and movement, rather than a pitiable object to be handled. Applying the concept of the "assemblage" to the crucifixion and pietà scenes, I examine

the different ways in which the characters can throw their voice and agency into the corpus, so that it is made articulate in death. I compare these ventriloqual tactics at work in *Christ's Burial* to articulations of the Boxley Rood, as well as the functionally related Italian group of sculptures known as the *crocifisso parlanti*, or Talking Crucifixes. I further argue that these moments of overlap between performer and performance object serve as compelling mnemonic icons that the audience can carry forward into their private devotions, and through which they can understand the affordances of other devotional artwork. I conclude by putting forward the idea that the script not only suggests the use of a puppet, but it also consciously reflects upon and negotiates the affordances of the puppet. Seth Lerer has argued that the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* is "as much a play about the pleasures and the horrors of the vision of the mutilated corpus as it is a play that enacts or represents those phenomena."[95] Similarly, I content that *Christ's Burial* not only requires puppetry in its production. It is also a play that lays bare the logic of puppetry: its fundamental tensions are channelled through the handling of the corpus, both its physical *ductus* in performance, the way it is manoeuvred into different iconographical poses, and its animation through the rhetoric of the play.

My final chapter develops this theme of "divine ventriloquism," to use Mary Hayes' term, by turning to the *Prioress' Tale* and its Vernon analogues.[96] This thesis is not chronological; this text predates *Christ's Burial* and concludes the thesis as a case study

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[95] Lerer, "'Representyd now in yower syght': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late-Fifteenth-Century England," in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, eds. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32.

[96] Mary Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism in Medieval English Literature: Power, Anxiety, Subversion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

in how an awareness of the dynamic capabilities of movable sculptures of Christ crucified can enrich readings of a wider range of texts. This chapter returns to the Barking rite, which is contemporary with these three boy-martyr tales, and to my suggestion that the corpus there served a repository function: it was enlivened from within with sacred matter, just as the boys in the tales are supernaturally animated by the lilies, or the "greyn" planted in their bodies.

Without offering a unifying theory as to their function, I suggest that positioning these objects within the literature of their time allows us to access different forms of emotional response towards them. In his broad history of response, the art historian David Freedberg discusses the way in which images appear to act for the viewer alone. He illustrates this with a passage from the preface of Nicholas de Cusa's fifteenth-century *De visione Dei*, in which he describes to his brothers an icon that he is sending them:

> Hanc aliquo in loco, puta in septentionali muro, affigetis circumstabitisque vos frates parum distanter ab ipsa intuebiminique ipsam. Et quisque vestrum experietur, ex quocumque loco eandem inspexerit, se quasi solum per eam videri. Videbiturque fratri qui in oriente positus fuerit, faciem illam orientaliter respicere, et qui in meridie meridionaliter, et qui in occidente occidentaliter. Primum igitur admirabimini quomodo hoc fieri possit, quod omnes et singulos simul respiciat. Nam imaginatio stantis in oriente nequaquam capit visum eiconae ad aliam plagam versum scilicet occasum vel meridiem.[97]

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[97] Nicolas de Cusa, *De visione Dei*, lines 1–9, 3. Edited and translated in Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism: Text, Translation, and Interpretive Study of De visione Dei* (A. J. Banning Press, 1985), 114. "This picture you should put up in some place—say the north wall—and you, brothers should stand around it at equal distances from it. Look at it; and each of you will experience that from whatever side you look, it will seem to look at you alone. To the brother who stands in the east it will seem to look eastward, to him in the south, southward, and to him in the west, westward. Therefore at first you will all be amazed at how it gazes at all and each of you; for the imagination of him who stands in the east cannot at all grasp how the gaze of the icon should be turned in another direction[.]" Trans., David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 52.

As Freedberg points out, this passage is a metaphor for God, who exists at all times, in all places, and is intimate with all souls. But it is also a phenomenological comment on the effect of an image. Each of these brothers, though standing in the same room, in front of the same image "nequaquam capit" how their brother views it. Rather than unifying them, the image has brought to light the idiosyncrasy of each perspective. This dissertation tries to trace what kinds of meanings movable sculptures created within those who saw them, handled them, and performed alongside them.

Chapter One: The Sources

1.1 Easter at Barking Abbey

Several scripts of Holy Week dramas survive from across Europe; the Barking script is the earliest example of one which indicates the use of a movable sculpture of Christ.[1] Art historians include the Barking Abbey script in broad surveys of movable sculptures of Christ crucified.[2] The substantial treatments of this text have refrained from re-imagining the construction of this sculpture; the focus being on *Visitatio*, the unique casting of nuns in male roles and the script's designation of the Maries as "sacerdotes."[3] I am interested instead in how the participants interact with the holy objects in the sequence, and what this tells us about the form and function of these objects.

The Easter sequence at Barking Abbey is described in the Abbey's ordinal, Oxford, University College MS. 169, which was drawn up in 1404 at the request of Abbess Sibilla de Felton (1394–1419) for future abbesses to consult and it outlines how key ceremonies

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[1] See introduction, note 25, 11.

[2] See introduction, notes 17 and 18, 8.

[3] None of these studies argue for the absence of hinges in the object, rather they refrain from making assumptions about its form. Elizabeth Dutton and Olivia Robinson, "Drama, Performance and Touch in the Medieval Convent and Beyond," in *Touching, Devotional Practices, and Visionary Experience*; Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey in the Late Middle Ages," in *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages*, eds. Bugyis, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and John Van Engen (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 319–334; Anne Bagnall Yardley, "Liturgy as the Site of Creative Engagement: Contributions of the Nuns of Barking," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture: Authorship and Authority in a Female Community*, eds. Jennifer N. Brown and Donna Alfano Bussell (York Medieval Press, 2012), 270–271; Aurélie Blanc, *Performance and Spectatorship in a Medieval Nunnery: The "Elevatio" and "Visitatio sepulchri" of Barking Abbey in Practice* (Arc Humanities Press, 2024).

and liturgical services should run.[4] As we shall see, the script for Easter Sunday begins with a preface stating that Catherine of Sutton (abbess from 1358 to 1377) moved the dramas to a later time within Matins. Its list of abbesses ends in 1479, suggesting that the manuscript continued to be consulted until then. We thus might assume that the Easter sequence described there reflected Barking's annual practice at least from the end of the fourteenth century until the late fifteenth, and maybe even until its surrender in 1539.[5]

The Easter rites are entirely in Latin and made up of antiphonal chants. The sequence discussed here, (that is, the sequence formed around the holy sepulchre and used to represent Christ's burial and resurrection) begin after sunset on Good Friday in the Abbey's spacious church.[6] The first rite is generally called the *Depositio*, though the text does not use this title.[7] After the adoration of the cross, two of the priests:

> [...] diferant crucem ad magnum altare . ibique in specie ioseph et nichodemi de ligno deponentes ymaginem uulnera crucifixi uino abluant et aqua. Dum autem hec fiunt 7 concinat conuentus R7. *Ecce quomodo moritur iustus* . sacerdote incipiente et cantrice respondente et conuentu succinente. Post uulnerum ablucionem, cum candelabris et turribulo deferant illam ad sepulcrum, hac canentes antiphonas *In pace in idipsum*, Ant. *Habitabit*, Ant. *Caro mea*. Cumque in predictum locum tapetum pallio auriculari quoque et lintheis nitidissimis

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[4] J. B. L. Tolhurst ed., *The Ordinale and Customary of the Benedictine Nuns of Barking Abbey (University College, Oxford, MS. 169)*, 2 Vols. (London, 1927).

[5] Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 319.

[6] Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the *Ordinale* describes other events, such as reading in the chapterhouse, blessing the font, taking meals, and the naming of the nuns who will play the Maries. *Ordinale*, I, 101–105.

[7] For survey of *Depositiones*, see Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* I (Clarendon Press, 1933), 112–148.

> decenter ornatum, illam cum reuerencia locauerint, claudat sacerdos sepulcrum et incipiat Ry. *Sepulto domino*.[8]

The "crucem" is left on the altar and the "ymagem" is removed from it. Because the priests act "in specie Ioseph et Nichodemi," the action adopts a mimetic dimension. This script does not describe the appearance of the image that is removed from the cross; this would have been self-evident to the participants. We can, however, glean a sense of its form from these actions. The image was detachable from its cross; it therefore neither a fixed crucifix, nor a so-called *Grabchristus,* a permanently supine image of the dead Christ. In the *Depositio* rites described in the *Regularis Concordia* and at Hereford the object handled is a cross.[9] This movement – the removal of the corpus from the cross – may have been the extent of the object's inbuilt mobility. In theory, the corpus could have been buried with its arms stretched out, but, as many scholars have stated, this is unlikely and would detract from the representational logic of the scene:[10] the designation

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[8] Tolhurst, *Ordinale,* 1, 100. "They should carry the cross to the high altar where, [as if] representing Joseph and Nicodemus, they should take the image from the cross [and] wash the wounds of the crucified one with water and wine. While they are doing this, the convent should sing together the responsory *Behold how the just man dies <and no one takes it to heart, [how] the righteous are destroyed and no one pays any attention. The just man is removed from the face of iniquity, and his memory shall be in peace>*. The priest should start; the cantrix should respond; and the convent should then join in. After the washing of the wounds, they should carry the image to the tomb accompanied by candelabra and censer, all the while singing the antiphons *In peace <shall I sleep and rest>*; *He will abide <in your tabernacle and rest in your holy mountain>;* [and] *My flesh <shall rest in hope>*. When they have laid the image reverently in the aforementioned place that has been appropriately adorned with a coverlet of woolen cloth and a pillow and with dazzling linens, the priest should close the tomb and begin to sing the responsory *When the Lord has been buried, <the tomb is sealed: they roll the stone to the tomb's entrance and place guards to watch over it>*" Translations and expansion of responsories in Yardley and Jesse D. Mann, "The Liturgical Dramas for Holy Week at Barking Abbey," *Medieval Feminist Forum* Subsidia Series 3 (2014), 1–39.

[9] William Smith, *The Use of Hereford: The Sources of a Medieval English Diocesan Rite* (Routledge, 2016). Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia,* 43–45.

[10] "In this way the removal from the cross and the entombment by Joseph of Arimathea and Nichodemus could be portrayed realistically. This type of crucifix reflects the growing desire for realistic visualization

of the priests as representations of Joseph and Nicodemus; and the unusual use of water and wine to wash the "uulnera crucifixi."[11] We might imagine that in the candlelight, the wine and water made these wounds dark and shining, as if wet with blood. In 2018, the Medieval Convent Drama, led by Elizabeth Dutton, Olivia Robinson, and Aurélie Blanc, performed a reconstruction of the Barking *Depositio* in which they used a jointed artists' mannequin to stand in for the corpus, which they tied to the cross, indicating the practicality of a jointed object in performance.[12]

We cannot get a firmer sense of the sculpture's size, style or exact construction from the script. When detailing the adoration of the cross, the *Ordinale* adds the detail that the crucifix is "cum filateriis," that is it has a container for sacred objects attached to it in some way.[13] In the Wilton *Visitatio sepulchri*, the Maries carry three "filateria" between them, which scholars have glossed as amulets or "cases enclosing relics."[14] Where these phylacteries fit into the Barking *Depositio* is unclear, nor do we know how the Easter sepulchre was arranged, which seems large enough to enclose multiple

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of the Redemption which is so typical of late mediaeval art." Justin E. A. Kroesen, *Sepulchrum Domini through the Ages, its Form and Function* (Peeters, 2000), 156.

[11] Nancy Cotton, "Katherine of Sutton: The First English Woman Playwright," *Educational Theatre Journal* 30, no. 4 (1978): 475–481, 477.

[12] This information was available online, "Harlaxton Medieval Symposium: Workshopping Barking Abbey's *Depositio*," Medieval Convent Drama, University of Freiburg. The website is currently undergoing maintenance. See also, Harlaxton Medieval Symposium (@harlxatonmedsym), "Brilliant and evocative workshop on the Performance, Ceremony and Display of the Nuns of Barking Abbey," Twitter (now X), July 18, 2018, https://x.com/harlaxtonmedsym/status/1019587225477091328. I have confirmed the use of the mannequin in correspondence with Elizabeth Dutton and Olivia Robinson.

[13] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 98.

[14] Wilton Processional is edited in Yardley, *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) Appendix D, 243–254, for comments on the phylacteries, see 140, 300. Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 326.

participants.[15] Either way, this does not help us size the Christ sculpture. Rath states that the Barking Christ was "life-sized" but provides no evidence for this.[16] That two men were required to take it down could result from representational rather than practical considerations. In fact, the most common size range of extant movable crucifix in Kopania's catalogue is 70 to 100cm.[17] The sculpture might have been larger than life, so the priests had to work hard to manoeuvre it; it may also have been small in stature, looking childlike in the priests' hands.

The rest of the sequence takes place on Sunday morning. It begins with the Descensus in which the abbess, "the entire convent" and "certain priests and clerics" shut themselves into a side chapel to represent the souls of the patriarchs in hell.[18] The officiating priest (representing Christ) releases them; the convent and priests then process to the sepulchre.[19] The *Elevatio* follows:

> et interim asportabit corpus dominicum de sepulcro incipiendo Ant. *Christus resurgens*, coram altari uerso uultu ad populum tenendo corpus dominicum in manibus, suis inclusum cristallo.[20]

As Anne Bagnall Yardley and Jesse D. Mann note, it is unclear whether both mentions of the "corpus dominicum" refer to the host in a glass, or whether the priest also removed

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[15] Three nuns playing the Maries enter the tomb together and there meet a cleric representing an angel during the *Visitatio*. Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 109. For forms of sepulchres, see A. Heales, "Easter Sepulchres: Their Objects, Nature and History," *Archaeologia* 42 (1869): 263–308.

[16] Rath, *Gliederpuppe*, 92.

[17] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 37, 99.

[18] Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 47–52, 18. *Ordinale*, 1, 107.

[19] Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 52–66, 18-20; lines 70–79, 20. *Ordinale*, 1, 107–108.

[20] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 108. "Meanwhile [the priest] shall take the Lord's body from the tomb and begin the antiphon *Christ is risen*, in front of the altar with his face towards the people while holding the Lord's body in a glass in his hands." Trans. Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," 94–97, 22.

the image from the tomb.[21] Johannes and Gesine Taubert, however, argue that it would be inappropriate to raise a dead image from the tomb during this spectacle of resurrection.[22] The action described – exiting the tomb while singing, turning to face the congregation – all draws attention towards the host. We might imagine too that the priest elevated the host for greater visibility and to visually equate this moment with the elevation during Mass, which was the highpoint of popular religious experience in the late Middle Ages.[23] The instruction for the priest to face the "populum" furthers the suggestion that the host was positioned for greatest visibility. Such moments demonstrate how open a liturgical script is to individual performance choices; the priest could add focus on the host – could in a sense animate the object – with gesture and stance. The officiating priest takes the host in procession to the altar of the Holy Trinity. The convent and priests follow the host, a procession that "figuratur per hoc quo christus procedit post resurexionem in galileam; sequentibus discipulis."[24] On Easter Sunday, the convent thus performs two different male roles: the patriarchs in hell and the disciples following Christ. We can imagine that this added to the excitement of the event, offering the sisters fresh ways to conceptualise not only their relationships with each other and the space of their church, but also their spiritual vocation.

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[21] Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," note 3, 23.

[22] Taubert and Taubert, "Mittelalterliche Kruzifixe," 97.

[23] Amy Nelson Burnett, "The Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist," *Past & Present* 211 (2011): 77–119, 84; Suzannah Biernoff, "Ocular Communion," in *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Anton L. Mayer, "Die heilbringende Schau in Sitte und Kult," in *Heilige Überlieferung: Ausschnitte aus der Geschichte des Mönchtums und des heiligens Kultes für Ildefons Herwegen*, ed. Odo Casel (Aschendorf, 1938).

[24] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 108. "symbolizes how Christ proceeded into Galilee after his resurrection, followed by his disciples." Trans. Yardley, Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 109–111, 22.

With such attention on the host, where is the image? It is not mentioned in the *Elevatio* script but the *Depositio* notes: "ymago in nocte pasche post matutinas de sepulero eum cereis et thure et processione resumpta : suo reponatur in loco."[25] It is unclear how this fits into the order of events – the tomb needs to be empty by the time the nuns perform the next drama (the *Visitatio*). The absence of direction underscores the sense of work done behind the scenes, reminding us of William Balowe's critique of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* with which I begin this dissertation. As Pamela Sheingorn has pointed out, removal of the cross from the tomb was originally a secret act, as it was in the *Regularis Concordia*, which "instructs the performance of the one essential task, the removal of the cross so that the 'tomb' might be found empty, but it gives no accompanying ritual."[26]

It is also unclear how and when "the Lord's body in a glass" came to be in the tomb. Is it in the *filatera* mentioned in the *Adoratio*? The *Depositio* script contains no mention of a monstrance, specifying instead how the sepulchre should be dressed: "Cumque in predictum locum tapetum pallio auriculari quoque et lintheis nitidissimis decenter ornatum."[27] The Tauberts suggest that the host was already deposited *inside* the movable sculpture, "and indeed in the side-wound."[28] This is the case with some

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[25] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 100. "[T]he image is returned from the tomb to its own [proper] place in a procession with candles and incense" after Matins on Easter night. Trans. Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 24–26, 16.

[26] Pamela Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre in England* (Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), 28–29.

[27] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 100. "[T]he aforementioned place that has been appropriately adorned with a coverlet of woolen cloth and a pillow and with dazzling linens." Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 17–18, 16.

[28] Taubert and Taubert, "Mittelalterliche Kruzifixe," 97.

similar objects of the period and the practice follows a certain representational logic at work in this period whereby an image can be activated with sacred material secreted within.[29] There was a practical need to reserve pre-consecrated hosts at this moment in the year, that then became associated with the burial of Christ.[30] In this paradigm, the image of the crucified Christ is animated by the living flesh of Christ. The priests manipulate its lifeless limbs, wash its wounds and put it in its cerements. On Easter morning, the priest pulls out this living matter, leaving a truly dead image behind; the signified replaces the sign as the priest trains the participants' eyes on a crystalline display.

1.1.a Reconstructing the Barking Christ

Given the dearth of details in the *Ordinale*, we must look to other sources to build a picture of the possible affordances of Barking *ymago*. The Benedictine Abbey of ffening in Bavaria and Durham Priory in England performed the Easter rites using a similar constellation of objects to Barking's. In Durham, the monks buried a *Grabchristus*, whereas Prüfening appears to have used a movable sculpture of Christ crucified. The Prüfening script dates from 1489; it describes how on Good Friday an image of the crucified Christ is removed from its cross, wrapped in cloth and put in the sepulchre

[29] Cynthia Hahn, *The Reliquary Effect: Enshrining the Sacred Object* (Reaktion Books, 2017); Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (Yale University Press, 2012).

[30] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 123.

along with part of the host.[31] The vacant cross on which the image had been hanging is returned to its place.[32] On Easter night around eleven, the custodian goes to entomb a third object – the *Imago Resurrectionis*;[33] this happens while the rest of the community are asleep. When they gather again, the abbot removes the host and resurrection image from the sepulchre, leaving behind the image of Christ crucified.[34] As Young comments, "the *Imago Crucifixi*, which had been buried on Good Friday is completely ignored, being left for the sacristan to remove privately, along with the sepulchre cloths and curtains, before the opening of Matins."[35] Here we see a sleight of hand similar to that of the Barking *Elevatio*; by putting a dead image in the tomb and taking out a living one, as well as this living flesh, the priests use the sepulchre as a black box, through which to feed mimetic changes.

A similarly complex play of objects took place at Durham Priory.[36] The fourteenth-century Latin *Depositio* script is sparse, describing the antiphonal chants and the placing

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[31] München, Staatsbibliothek, Ms clm 12018, edited in Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* 1, 157–158. See also Petr Uličný, "Christ in Motion: Portable Objects and Scenographic Environments in the Liturgy of Medieval Bohemia," *Theatralia* 14, no. 1 (2011): 24–64, 46–47.

[32] "Crucem vero in qua dicta Ymago pependit custos per ministrum suum ad locum debitum deportari facit." Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 157.

[33] "Igitur in sancta nocte, instant iam hora vndecima aut paulo antea, custos Ymaginem Domonice Resurreccionis ponit in Sepulchro Domini." Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 159.

[34] "Interim Dominus Abbas cum debita reuerencia capsam Sacramenti de sacophago reliquiarum tollit. Et capellanus Ymaginem Resurreccionis accipit, altera Ymagine Crucifixi in altari relicta." Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 159.

[35] Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 161.

[36] Canon Fowler ed., *Rites of Durham: Being a Description of Brief Declaration of all the Ancient Monuments, Rites and Customs Belonging to the Monastical Church of Durham Before the Suppression* (Durham, 1903), 14.

of the "Crux in Sepulchro."[37] There is an Elizabethan description of the service that scholars accept as an accurate fleshing-out of Durham *Depositio*, or at least how it looked "towards the end of the Middle Ages."[38] There, during the *Depositio*, the monks entombed a gold crucifix in a large stand-alone sepulcher. This crucifix usually sat within a Shrine Madonna in the church called Our Lady of Bolton.[39] The monks placed a second image in the tomb, a "picture of our sauiour Christ, in whose breast they did enclose with great reuerence the most holy and blessed sacrament."[40] On Easter Sunday, the priests brought out the second of these, raising the:

> beautifull Image of our sauior representinge the resurrectio*n* [...] in the breast wherof was enclosed in bright Christall the holy sacrament of the altar, throughe the w*hi*ch christall the blessed host was conspicuous to the beholders.[41]

The Durham monks played out the Easter story using two different sculptures of Christ: one living and one crucified. This is reminiscent of the visual scheme at play in Barking, in which the priest exposes and reveals the living flesh on Easter Sunday. Standing, immobile sculptures of the risen Christ with a host displayed in a monstrance on the chest were fairly common; in England, there is evidence of them at Lincoln, Durham, and St Peter-upon-Cornhill in London; because of their strong associations in inventories

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[37] Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 136–37

[38] Tanya Jung calls the text an "anonymous English translation of the Rites of Durham," although the fourteenth-century Latin rites are much shorter than the English description; Jung, "The Phenomenal Lives," 66. Kopania suggests that the description was authored by a "friar from the defunct Benedictine Abbey" but I have found no evidence for this. Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 196. The text details the Abbey's former décor and the minutiae of liturgical choreography that seemingly could only have been contributed by someone familiar with the space.

[39] Gertsman, *Worlds Within*, 101.

[40] Fowler, *Rites*, 12.

[41] Fowler, *Rites*, 12.

with Easter day itself, Pamela Sheingorn suggests that they were "secretly inserted into the Easter Sepulchre so as to be raised from it on Easter morning."[42] Some seem to have functioned as simple puppets, with a "vice" raising them out of the tomb.[43] When encountering images of the dead Christ with a repository function one wonders what kind of liveliness they presented, how the presence and removal of Christ's living flesh altered how they were perceived by medieval viewers and co-performers.

As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, such object-based rites were the focus of much iconoclastic critique; these sources offer a different perspective on dramatic sleights of hand. Burying the host with a sculpture of the dead Christ was criticised in Thomas Naogeorgus' *Popish Kingdome* (1553), translated into English by Barnabe Googe. [44] Although its language is scathing, the poem appears to accurately reflect various late medieval popular and liturgical customs.[45] The poem describes how priests entomb an "other Image" of Christ "like one but newly dead, / With legges strecht out at length and hands vpon his body spreade."[46] This is clearly not a crucifix but either a movable sculpture of Christ crucified or a *Grabchristus*; it is likened specifically to a corpse ("one but newly dead") and its hands are "upon the body spreade," lying on its body, rather than stretched abroad on the cross.

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[42] Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre*, 58.

[43] Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre,* 59.

[44] Thomas Naogeorgus, trans. Barnabe Googe, *The Popish Kingdome* (London, 1570), ESTC no. S109280.

[45] Googe, *The Popish Kingdome*, line 557; Jung, "The Phenomenal Lives," 53. Norton, *Liturgical Drama*, 93–95.

[46] Jung, "The Phenomenal Lives," 111.

Like the Barking Christ, it is "wrapt" in expensive fabric ("lawne, and silkes and sarcenet braue") and the "singing-bread is layde with him."[47] The poem describes how "all the people" then strew "violets and euery kinde of flowres" as well as other "giftes and presentes that they have" around the grave. Barking may have permitted this lay participation, though it is not in the script; it was common in England for the laity to finance the decoration of the sepulchre, such as the fabric hangings.[48] On Easter Sunday, "the Priest with staring eies" takes "[t]he Image and the breade from out the graue" and "[a]n other Image of a Conquerour they forth doe bring, / And on the aultar place."[49] The dead image performs alongside the host and an additional image of the resurrected Christ. The priest performs the complex transformations of the resurrection using a multiplication of objects. There is also a tantalising hint that what is being criticised is not just the choreographing of sculptures, but also a kind of theatricality – a feigned surprise – on the part of the priest. He may have chosen to act amazed at a transformation that had been prearranged; alternatively, the power of the drama itself may have caused him to marvel as he enacted it. The priest appears as the orchestrator and audience of the Easter rites, as well as an actor within it.

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[47] Googe, *The Popish Kingdome*, line 560, line 566.

[48] Sheingorn, *The Easter Sepulchre*, 28, 54–56.

[49] Googe, *The Popish Kingdome*, lines 166–167, lines 173–174.



Figure 6. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (c. 1400), Łowicz.

Several surviving movable sculptures of Christ crucified serve as containers for sacred material. Figure six is a small sculpture dated around 1400, now in the Benedictine nunnery in Łowicz in central Poland. The mechanisms allowing its arms to be folded were destroyed at some point, but it appears to have had joints at both the shoulders and elbows; it features a carved repository in its torso, the delineations of which are "clearly visible."[50] A slightly earlier example (figures seven and eight) belongs to the Benedictine monastery of Göttweig Abbey in Lower Austria; the internal chamber is square and painted crimson and sits behind the side wound. Its lid slots into a rabbet and is fastened in place by a wooden dowel. When the lid is closed, the host is held in

[50] Kopania, "Animating Christ in Late Medieval and Early Modern Poland," *Preternature* 4, no. 1 (2015): 78-109, 85.

place but not fully concealed as “the side wound was big enough that the Host contained in the repository [...] would be seen through the wound.”[51] This privileged insight into the sculpture would have been available to those viewing the body from below: either by standing beneath the crucifix, or by his feet when he is supine.





Figures 7 and 8. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (c. 1380), Göttweig Abbey.

Perhaps the most striking example is the Christ from Chełmno in northern Poland (1350–1373). The sculpture has a hollow head which served as a repository for both the host and relics of the Holy Blood. The two halves of the cranium are joined together with

[51] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 178; Johannes Taubert, *Polychrome Sculpture: Meaning, Form, Conservation*, ed. Michele D. Marincola, trans. Carola Kleinstück-Schulman (Getty Conservation Institute, 2015), 40.

wooden dowels and the mouth opens into this cavity. There is a lid at the top of the head.[52] As we can see from figure nine, the sculpture's lips are parted, so those close to the sculpture could glimpse these objects between the teeth. Thus, for those intimate with the body, "eye contact with Christ was almost literal."[53] This sculpture belonged to a convent of Cistercian nuns with strong ties to southern Germany. Because Chełmno was part of the Monastic State of the Teutonic knights until the second half of the fifteenth century, we can treat "this sculpture as belonging to the culture of German-speaking lands."[54]



Figure 9. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified, (1350–1373), Chełmno.

Although these three sculptures were all built to perform the *Depositio* in their respective communities, their formal characteristics differ greatly. They are differently

[52] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 177.

[53] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 176.

[54] Kopania, "Animating Christ," 84.

sized and sit within different stylistic categories of crucifix. All three sculptures conceal and reveal the objects inside them in different ways. The edges of the chamber in the Łowicz Christ run along the delineation of the figure's abdominal muscles and thus blend into the whole. Looking at the image, though, it is obvious that the stomach is a container. The other two are more subtle; the apertures of the body (the open mouth, the wound) allow the living matter inside to be glimpsed. It is only through proximity to the object that this material truth is revealed. Furthermore, these apertures are dramatic signs that the Christ represented by the image is *post mortem* – that he has been lanced by Longinus, has gasped his last breath. One looks through the ciphers of death to see the truth of the resurrection. The images collapse the time of death and resurrection into one mutual, mutable whole.

Similarly, a free-standing Man of Sorrows sculpture with a repository function seems to have been a beloved member of the female convent of the Order of St Clare in Kraków in southern Poland. He is not exactly an image of the dead Christ; the Man of Sorrows is simultaneously dead as a human and alive as God and appears variously with his eyes open or closed.[55] The figure dates from 1350–1375, has movable arms and a compartment for relics or the Host in its back. Its literal flexibility allowed it to wear many different costumes, and so play out different roles; it acted in Good Friday ceremonies as a dead Christ as well as in Ascension ceremonies as living.[56] Its ability to be dressed would have been key; it does not bear wounds of the crown of thorns, thus when clothed

[55] Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art,* vol. 2 (Lund Humphries, 1972), 198.

[56] Kopania, "Animating Christ," 97.

it would look like an image of the living Christ. Indeed, it is so versatile an object that an eighteenth-century visitor to the convent found it sitting at supper with the nuns, holding a wooden chalice in its hand.[57] When it became a dining companion is unclear, but the point is that its physical capabilities – its flexible body, its portability – made it an active and mutable participant in the life of the convent. As Tanya A. Jung writes, "[m]ovable Christ sculptures were constant companions that lived amongst the people, manifested communal identity, and structured social order."[58] Both profane and sublimely sacred, they were imaginative tools that provided ever-fresh ways to make the divine tangible.

The choreography of death and resurrection performed at Barking Abbey is not unique. As these examples have shown, many religious houses across Western Europe choreographed an effigy of the dead Christ and a host to perform it. The performance's diverse permutations arose from the different forms of the objects at hand as well as the physical structure of the playing space – whether movable curtains could be installed, how large the sepulchre was, etc. Whether the host is discerned through a sculpture's parted lips by those intimate with the object (as in the Chełmno example) or hidden in plain sight within the torso (as in the Kraków and Łowicz sculptures) affects how the sculptures' animation may have been imagined. Variations in form affect how the object might be treated, what kinds of dramatic situations it invites. Was the Barking Christ small like a baby or so large that its unwieldy, disjointed body seemed to overwhelm the

[57] Kopania, "Animating Christ," 97. Jolanta Rzegocka, "Performance and Sculpture: Forms of Religious Display in Early Modern Krakow," *European Medieval Drama* 9 (2005): 177–194, 178–179.

[58] Jung, "The Phenomenal Lives," 43.

performers? If it did have a repository function, was the host fully hidden within or could it be glimpsed through an aperture?

We are occasionally able to glimpse how these objects were treated beyond the Holy Week dramas – the Kraków Man of Sorrows, for example, acted at some point as a dining companion. People in the late Middle Ages were particularly attentive to the ways in which they could use objects at hand to play out devotional scenes. In a particularly striking example, a blind sister of Master Geert's house in Deventer used a washtub to imagine herself kneeling before Christ's cradle.[59] It is impossible for us to retrieve the many private interactions these sculptures had with the people who repaired, dressed and addressed them.

1.1.b Performance Context of Barking Abbey

This authority the Barking nuns displayed at Easter reflects what we know of the house's general ethos. The script evidences the nuns' long-held power to organise their own services and assume roles usually reserved for priests; as Bugyis writes:

> Liturgical dramas especially created the necessary liminal spaces in which the nuns could reclaim past ministries and still deny charges of illicit or improper activity from ecclesiastical authorities. They could always claim that they were only acting *as if*.[60]

The nuns carved out room for performance as an *as-if* space, a creative realm that both symbolised and actualised their self-determination. This creative licence stemmed

[59] Herman Roodenburg, "Imagination over Matter? Tears, Touch, and 'Ornamenta Sacra' Among Women of the Devotio Moderna," in *"Ornamenta Sacra": Late Medieval and Early Modern Liturgical Objects in a European Context*, eds., Ralph Dekoninck, Marie-Christine Claes, and Barbara Baert, vol. 13 (Peeters, 2022), 176–178.

[60] Her emphasis. Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 320.

partly from their economic and political clout – Barking Abbey was one of the most wealthy and influential female houses in England.[61] They had a large number of nuns in their ranks, and held more than a thousand acres of land and manors in several countries.[62] On festival processions, the abbess would carry a staff like a bishop to symbolise her authority.[63]

The *Visitatio* – which follows the *Elevatio* – compounds the sense of female spiritual authority built by these dramas. Few medieval *Visitationes* cast women as the Maries;[64] the script's designation of these figures as "sacerdotes," and the extent to which these are marked out by clerical vestments is unique.[65] The Maries' parts are complex and demanding; the script indicates that the women performed rather than simply recited their lines; various chants should be sung "suspriando," "plangendo," as well as "flebili voce et submissa."[66] Mary Magdalene plays a key role; she removes the sudarium from the tomb, sees Christ the gardener and communicates the news of the resurrection first to the other Maries, then to the audience where she stands before the

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[61] Bussell, "Introduction: Barking's Lives, the Abbey and its Abbesses," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 7; David Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Cistercian Publications, 1995), 10–11.

[62] The charge to the Barking Cellaress (after 1453) "assumes a community of forty-one nuns and the abbess. The statutory number of nuns at Barking was thirty-seven and at the time of the dissolution in 1539 there were thirty nuns and the abbess." Alexandra Barratt, "Keeping body and Soul Together: The Charge to the Barking Cellaress," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 237.

[63] Yardley, "Liturgy as the Site of Creative Engagement," 270.

[64] "Out of the 830 Holy Week dramas dating from the tenth to sixteenth centuries in Western Europe only twenty-three have been linked to female communities. Of those only twenty-one use women to play the Maries and only three other than Barking employed these women in extended sung dialogues." Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 321–322, 324.

[65] Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," 11; Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 324-325.

[66] Tolhurst, *Ordinale,* 1, 108–109. Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," "sighing," line 164, "plaintively," line 160, 26, "in a tearful and subdued voice," lines 125–126, 24.

altar, backed in song by the two Maries. Last, she turns to the men playing the disciples, points to the empty tomb and shows them the sudarium, which they kiss; the priests and choir sing: "Credendum est [magis soli Marie veraci quam Iudeorum turbe fallaci]."[67] Scripted in this way, "Mary Magdalene was not to preach the good news with words alone; she also was to extend an embodied *kerygma* – visible and tangible proof that the one whom they mourned had indeed conquered death."[68] Other medieval *Visitationes* stage this interaction between Magdalene and the disciples, but in all of these she is represented by a priest. The Barking Easter sequence thus shows women in men's parts and creates a female role for a female character, who is portrayed as the vector of Christianity.

The abbey invested in the nuns' literacy, even into the later Middle Ages. The ordinal records an annual event that ensured each nun had new personal reading material at the beginning of Lent: nuns who had finished their books would put them on a carpet and the librarian would reassign them.[69] Barking was only one of three insular nunneries recorded to have a librarian and the house had an unusually high number of known codices associated with it.[70] The Barking nuns had the authority if not to preach then to proclaim the gospel at Matins and Chapter; the ordinal also states that on Holy Saturday a student at the Abbey school, likely a young novice, would proclaim the

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[67] Tolhurst, *Ordinale,* 1, 109. ""More credible is the trustworthy Mary alone than the [entire] deceitful crowd of Jews." Trans and expansion of the responsory in Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 193–194, 28 .

[68] Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 328.

[69] Yardley, *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 180.

[70] Bussell and Brown, "Introduction," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 13.

Passion narrative in Matthew "uoce alta."[71] The word of God, therefore, did not only come from "men of dignitee" but also "by the mouth of children" as Chaucer's Prioress would have it.[72]

Another performative space the nuns created to actualise their authority – indeed over and above their resident priests – was their spectacle at Pentecost.[73] The ordinal records how, in two separate acts, the nuns gathered in the choir, representing the apostles in the upper room. The Spirit's gifts came to them first in the form of a dove lowered from the ceiling with seven candles and then in a shower of blossoms. It is unclear whether this was a live dove or a dummy. [74] The Abbey's priests were excluded from the choir during both these spectacles so that the Pentecostal promise was symbolically reserved for the nuns alone.[75]

The nuns' performances were not only for their own benefit, but for the public's as well. Archbishop Peckham's admonitions to the Barking nuns in 1279 and 1308 intimate how integrated the house was with its environs; among other things, he

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[71] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1*,* 103. "In a loud voice." Trans. Bugyis, *The Care of Nuns: The Ministries of Benedictine Women in England during the Central Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 149.

[72] The *Prioress' Tale,* lines 456–457, 209.

[73] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1*,* 135–136.

[74] Late medieval churches used both puppets and live doves ties with string. William Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages: Western European Stage Conditions, c. 800–1576* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 175. The Benedictine monks of St. Mary's Abbey in York had a very similar Pentecostal ceremony to Barking's and attests to this uncertainty. The Abbey customary (c. 1400) states that a white dove, "whether real or make-believe" is lowered together with clouds and seven candles and flowers were scattered in the choir by church servants. Toby Huitson, *Stairway to Heaven: The Functions of Medieval Upper Space* (Oxbow Books, 2014), 91. For protestant critiques of this practice see Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2, 537–538.

[75] Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 320–321

prohibited the nuns from mingling with the laity during Mass.[76] He also tried to restrain the Holy Innocents Day celebration, in which young novices took on the roles of the abbess and other officials and performed for the laity. His main complaint was that young women and girls performed for the laity unsupervised by their superiors; thus no one could prevent divine praise being turned into "ludibrium."[77] They could choose their delivery, for better or worse. In 1308, the Bishop of London complained of wild games, inappropriate dancing and even wrestling matches taking place in the Abbey church.[78] It is unclear what behaviour is being referred to – whether general rowdiness or more organised festivity – but the censure certainly conveys a sense of colourful use of church space. The medieval church could be a place of gaiety.[79] *The Popish Kingdome* describes Whitsun spectacles in which priests hoisted a Christ sculpture into the ceiling of a church and cast down a dummy of Satan – "[o]ft times with fire burning bright" – which

[76] Bussell and Brown, "Introduction," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 11; Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 320.

[77] "Consequenter autem moniales ipsi officio se non subtrahant, sed exclusis a choro tunc temporis omnibus masculis et mulieribus, etiam quae ad crementi terminum pervenerunt, ipsae defectus suppleant parvularum, ne, quod nefas est, vertatur in ludibrium laus divina." C. T. Martin, ed., *Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham, Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis*, Rolls Series 77, 3 vols. (London, 1882–1886), vol. 1, 82–83. Quoted in Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 333.

[78] The Bishop forbids "luctas, coreas vel lacivia alias" taking place around the feasts of St. Adelburg and St. Margaret. R. C. Fowler ed., *Registrum Radulphi Baldock, Gilberti Segrave, Ricardi Newport, et Stephani Gravesend (1304–1338), Episcoporum Londoneiensium*, vol. 1 (London, 1911), 73. Ann Faulkner, "The Harrowing of Hell at Barking Abbey and in Modern Production," in *The Iconography of Hell,* eds., Davidson and Thomas H. Seiler (Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), 142.

[79] Elissa B. Weaver, *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

was smashed to bits by boys with sticks.[80] Standing in the rafters, the clergy squirted water "on whome they meane to wet" and '[w]ith laughter great all things are done."[81]

This sense of Barking Abbey church as a potentially playful space may not have resulted from the nuns' slack discipline but rather their interest in making their ceremonies engaging. The preface to the *Elevatio* shows the extent to which Abbess Sutton saw the laity as the intended audience of the rites. There would have been a fairly large lay presence at Easter: the Abbey's lay householders – elderly retirees, servants and children of both genders receiving schooling – probably attended.[82] In wealthy abbeys such as Barking, these would have outnumbered the nuns two to one. [83] Members of the abbey's parish church (St Margaret's) were also supposed to celebrate some divine services and special feasts in the abbey church.[84] Sutton ensured – under pain of excommunication – that the members of Barking's parish church (St Margaret's) attended the feast of the dedication of the abbey church and "to listen to the divine service in the Nave and there celebrate as on Easter day."[85] The Easter service was thus the principle point of reference for lay participation. On Maundy Thursday too,

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[80] Googe, *The Popish Kingdome*, lines 672–680, 52. For other ascensions, see Hans Reudi Weber, "Tanzende Engel – Fallende Hostien: die Repraesentatio Ascensio Domini,"*Unsere Kunstdenkmaler: Mitteilungsblatt Für Die Mitglieder Der Gesellschaft Für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte* 42 (1991): 45–55; Hans Joachim Krause, "'Imago ascensionis' und 'Himmelloch,'" in *Skulptur des Mittelalters: Funktion und Gestalt*, eds. Friedrich Mobius and Ernst Schubert (Böhlau Verlag, 1987).

[81] Googe, *The Popish Kingdome*, lines 683, 682, 53.

[82] Faulkner, "The Harrowing of Hell," 142; Barnes, *A Nun's Life*, 16.

[83] Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 206.

[84] Bussell and Brown, "Introduction," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 10; Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 323.

[85] Yardley, "Liturgy as the Site of Creative Engagement," 273.

"pauperes" were brought into the chapter house and had their feet washed by the nuns. The ordinal states that if any of the nuns are infirm, the paupers should be brought to their bedsides and washed there, a detail that not only prompts questions about the direction of mercy, but also attests to a quite porous cloister.[86]

The preface to the script states that "according to ancient custom," the nuns performed the *Descensus* and *Elevatio* before Matins. Since then, however:

> et quam populorum concursus temporibus illis uidebatur deuocione frigessere . et torpor humanus maxime accrescens . uenerabilis domina Domina Katerina de Suttone, tunc pastoralis cure gerens uicem . desiderans dictum torporem penitus exstirpare . et fideium deuocionem ad tam celibem celebracionem magis excitare; unanimi consororum consensu instituit . ut statim post tercium .responsorium matutinarum die pasche fieret dominice resurexionis celebracio, et hoc modo statuetur processio[.][87]

It is unclear whether Sutton changed the way the procession was actually carried out or simply reordered it in respect to the responsories of Matins; she is sometimes referred to as "the first English woman dramatist" and the idea of invigoration and stimulation suggests she may have been responsible for more total directorial decisions.[88] Her intervention clearly targeted the laity, obligated to attend the pre-dawn service. Yardley and Mann translate "torporem" as "sluggishness," which bridges both physical

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[86] "Si autem alique infirme in lecto decubuerint : introducantur pauperes ad illas . et ibi ab eis abluentur." Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1*,* 94. Yardley, *Performing Piety*, 133;

[87] Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 107. "[T]he whole of the people seemed to have grown cold in devotion and human sluggishness was greatly on the rise, as an expression of her pastoral concern, that venerable lady, Lady Catherine of Sutton, sought to eliminate that sluggishness completely and to stimulate more devotion on behalf of the faithful toward that very important celebration. [Thus], with the unanimous consent of the sisters, she decreed that the celebration of the Lord's resurrection should take place immediately after the third responsory of Matins on Easter, and the procession was to be carried out in this way." Trans., Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," lines 36–43, 18.

[88] Cotton, "Katherine of Sutton"; Santha Bhattacharji, "Sutton, Katherine (d. 1376), abbess of Barking and supposed liturgical dramatist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

drowsiness and mental lethargy.[89] The term *populam concursus* refers to a non-participating audience.[90] The nuns are not recipients of these invigorating changes but actively consenting participants. Mary Carruthers has described how monastic communities sought to freshen the mind during extended meditative exercises by developing "deliberately playful and surprising" rhetorical techniques as the

> human mind tires easily, is easily bored, easily distracted. To counteract this, the craft of thinking requires energizing devices to put the mind in gear and to keep it interested and on track, by arousing emotions of fear or delight, anger, wonder, and awe.[91]

She suggests that "the concept of *ductus* nourished not only meditation but also the public rhetoric of the liturgy 'mapped' within the architectural complexes [...] of the monastic church and cloister."[92] Sutton's directorial changes to the Barking script seem to be in this spirit. We can also think of object performance within the space of the church as a kind of *ductus*.

We might think of the movable crucifix itself as a kind of energising device. For the nuns of Barking did not only use words and song to disseminate ideas, but also their choreographed interactions with objects and architectural space. A clear example of this is the Pentecost performance described above in which "the Spirits' gifts" are symbolised by three different physical objects manoeuvred through the air. Paul Binski

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[89] "Torpor: sluggishness, sloth," *DLMBS Online*.

[90] Bugyis, "Women Priests at Barking Abbey," 232; Yardley, *Performing Piety*, 152. Laypeople are often referred to as "populus" more generally in Holy Week scripts. Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 133, note 43.

[91] Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Ductus*," 105.

[92] Carruthers, "Rhetorical *Ductus*," 111.

has suggested that boredom was "a precondition of radical aesthetic change."[93] Innovative forms of crucifixes like the *crucifixi dolorosi*, gruesome, visually arresting examples that emerged in Germany and Italy in the 1300s were thought of as ways to expel ennui. Binksi's prime example is a Y-shaped crucifix (*Gabelkreuz*) produced by a German artist in his native style for a London church around 1305. Its deviation from the normative shape of the cross was what primarily disturbed the ecclesiastical authorities. Yet such concern was compounded by the object's mass appeal; it was inappropriately terrifying, a "crux horribilis" and the devotion it provoked felt unseemly.[94] Some *Gabelkreuze* are movable, though probably not this example; more generally, movable sculptures of Christ crucified share with *Gabelkreuze* "a particularly heightened vivid sense of the immediacy or conviction of an experience."[95] They employ certain innovations of the plastic arts to expressionistically convey the abjection of the corpse. Because Barking's is the earliest existing Holy Week script that appears to have involved a movable sculpture, we might see the house as an innovator, adopting an interactive artwork to vitalise its communal devotions. In medieval rhetorical thought, violence and disfigurement of an image made it more instructive and more memorable.[96]

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[93] Paul Binksi, "The Crucifixion and the Censorship of Art around 1300," in *The Medieval World*, eds., Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (Routledge, 2001), 349.

[94] Binksi, "The Crucifixion," 343. Y-shaped crucifixes are characterised not only by their shape but also by the abjection of the crucified figure. Peter Dent, "A Window for the Pain: Surface, Interiority and Christ's Flagellated Skin in Late Medieval Sculpture," in *Flaying in the Pre-Modern World: Practice and Representation* (D. S. Brewer, 2017), 234.

[95] William Stubbs ed. "Annales Londinienses," in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 136. Quoted in Binski, "The Crucifixion," 349.

[96] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 33. Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Cornell University Press, 2018). Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 168, 171.

It is hard to determine how the Barking nuns viewed their own performances, and what roles their crucifix played outside of Holy Week. Did it appear in their private devotional imagination, like the *Grabeschristus* of Wienhausen?[97] We tend to think of play and sincerity as incompatible modes, but this is not necessarily so. Anthropologists have long recognised the similarities between the categories of play and ritual.[98] As Adam B. Seligman writes:

> Play, like ritual, deals with the subjunctive, with the "as if." It presents us with a mode of assimilating both physical objects and social relations into the experiential world of the individual—and ultimately of society.[99]

The Barking nuns devised virtual worlds within the physical world of their church and the social structure of the abbey. These subjunctive "as-if" spaces enabled them to explore alternative identities as well as to disseminate ideas and information to the outside world. This section has touched on these *as if* spaces without designating them as play spaces to avoid trivialising the nuns' creative effort. However, it is often difficult to distinguish what was ritual and what play among the Barking nuns. The girls at Holy Innocents organised rituals in the Abbey Church, which was seen to teeter dangerously on the brink of farce;[100] there seems to have been dancing and wrestling in the precincts. Representing the events of Easter was a meaningful undertaking; yet the preface to the

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[97] Katherine Guiness Hunt, "The Wienhausen Grabeschristus: Exploring 15th-Century Cloister Worship" (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009).

[98] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Roy Publishers, 1950)

[99] Adam B. Seligman, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 70.

[100] For the difficulty of establishing the tone and meaning of ritual see, Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock Fight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).

script tacitly acknowledges that it was not *ipso facto* taken as such. Solemn rites at such an early hour can be soporific. Rather than ignoring such human frailty, the abbess addressed it by ensuring the performance was stimulating – as well as slightly later in the day. These overlaps between gravity and fun, piety and play find reflection in the body of the movable sculpture itself. As a representation of Christ at his most abject, it is a deeply serious object, designed to evoke powerful feelings of grief. Yet as a hinged object, built for interaction, for the push and pull between human and non-human actor, it also invites imaginative situations, the mood of which we will never know.

1.2 *Christ's Burial*

Between the Barking script and *Christ's Burial*, there is no English script that suggests the use of a movable sculpture of Christ crucified. The Boxley Rood came to its Cistercian house before 1371 and was a popular destination throughout this period, in a sense silently but eloquently bridging the gap between these two pieces of evidence.[101] Movable sculptures of Christ crucified continued to be manufactured throughout the continent during this time, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, a number of continental scripts and written records speak to the use of these objects.

As a piece of evidence for the use of such sculptures in England, *Christ's Burial* presents some difficulties. Despite its unique position as a point of connection between various literary and pictural genres, relatively little has been written about *Christ's Burial* and *Resurrection* since Peter Meredith called for an investigation into "their content,

[101] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 123.

context and dramatic viability."[102] This is partly due to a sense that they are "closet dramas," authored by the Carthusian monk who wrote them down around 1518/1520, and were thus "intended for an enclosed monastic order."[103] Framing these two plays as the products of Carthusian practices has led scholars to suggest that they were not acted but "recited more or less dramatically in a Carthusian church" without any prop-work.[104] As Jessica Brantley writes, "the idea of communal literary entertainment, however pious, conflicts with the premise of solitude fundamental to Carthusian life."[105] It is thus important to address the question of authorship in order to understand how to read the play and the corpus at its heart.

This section will first describe its manuscript context in Museo. It will then summarise the critical discourse on these texts to date to show the need for manuscript evidence that moves the dial on the question of authorship. In response to this, this study compares the kinds of self-correction the scribe makes across a sample of *Christ's Burial* and a sample from another poem in the manuscript, which has also been taken to be a holograph. Scribal self-correction can be an ambiguous indicator of authorship, as authors often make mechanical errors when reproducing their own draft.[106] However,

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[102] Peter Meredith, "'The Bodley Burial and Resurrection': Late English Liturgical Drama?" in *Between Folk and Liturgy*, eds. Alan J. Fletcher and Wim N. M. Hüsken (Brill, 1997), 152.

[103] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 160.

[104] C. B. Rowntree, "A Carthusian World View: Bodleian MS E Museo 160," *Analecta Cartusiana* 35, 9 (1990): 5–72, 14.

[105] Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 291.

[106] Richard Beadle, "English Autograph Writings of the Later Middle Ages: Some Preliminaries," in *Gli Autografi Medievali: Problemi Paleografici e Filologici*, eds. Paolo Chiesa and Lucia Pinelli (Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, 1994), 262.

comparing the kinds of correction across two samples indicates what kind of work went into producing these two witnesses. My study also points to certain kinds of correcting – particularly the unnecessary correction of spelling – that suggests that the scribe worked from a lost exemplar, rather than transcribing his own draft. My final section explores what these performance contexts might have looked like.

1.2.a The Manuscript

Museo was written in the first decades of the sixteenth century in a mixed North / North Midlands dialect. It is mostly in one hand, in a distinctive *secretary currens* on paper; much of which is from the same stock.[107] Museo is a quarto manuscript, roughly measuring 214mm x 152mm, although it has been cut down slightly. Its collation after a seventeenth-century rebinding is: A_8, B_{12}, C_{12}, D_{14}, E_{12}, $F_{12\,(of\,11)}$, G_{12}, H_{12}, I_{12}, J_{10}, K_{12}, L_{12}, M_{12}, N_{12}, $O_{9\,(of\,10)}$. The bulk of the manuscript (1^r-108^r) is taken up by a meditative verse chronicle (hereafter the *Chronicle*), detailing figures and events spanning from Adam to the author's own time, 1518. There is to date no full edition of the *Chronicle*, which is witnessed only in this manuscript.[108] This text has a clear Carthusian outlook, and because it mentions local events such as the collapse of the parish church steeple in Beverley, it has been suggested that it was written in a nearby Charterhouse such as

[107] BMH, xiv.

[108] The fragmentary addendum is transcribed in James Orchard Halliwell and Thomas Wright eds., *Reliquiae antiquae: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts*, vol. 2 (London, 1845), 117–118. Some passages of the *Chronicle* are also printed in Hogg, "A Middle English Carthusian Verse Chronicle on the Foundation and Progress of the Carthusian Order," *Analecta Cartusiana* 116, 2 (1988): 108–118.

Mount Grace or Hull.[109] Mount Grace is also the only Charterhouse mentioned in the manuscript, aside from the Grande Chartreuse, further underscoring this connection.[110]

Overleaf to the end of the *Chronicle* is a damaged verse addendum that notes events up to 1520, such as the Field of the Cloth of Gold. This addendum is in the artificial and disordered "J" gathering, together with out-of-sequence fragments of a verse romance about Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville (109^{r}-113^{v}; 115^{r}).[111] On folio 116^{r} begins a group of 100 meditations from the supplement to Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientia* (116^{r}-136^{r}). Overleaf, a text in a different hand details the "Fifteen Articles of the Passion' (136^{v}-139^{r}). The plays begin on folio 140^{r} (139^{v} is blank) and take up the last three gatherings. *Christ's Burial* ends about two thirds down 156^{v} and the scribe begins *Christ's Resurrection* on the same page with an implicit and a rubricated note in the margins ("pascha").

The *Chronicle* states its primary source to be Werner Rolewinck's abbreviated Latin prose chronicle the *Fasciculus temporum*, but differs from this text in many

[109] Rowntree, "Studies in Carthusian history in Later Medieval England: With Special Reference to the Order's Relations with Secular Society" (PhD diss., University of York, 1981), 242; Laviece Ward, "Two Carthusian Histories, Their Authors and Audiences" in *Die Ausbreitung kartäusischen Lebens und Geistes im Mittelalter*, vol. 2, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg University Press, 1991).

[110] Kaan Vural Gorman, "The Wilderness and the World: Encounters between the Carthusians of Late Medieval England and the Secular World," (MPhil diss., University of Leeds, 2022), 146. Anecdote about unnamed "Vicar of Mownt grace" on folio 99^{v}.

[111] It is unclear whether this belongs to the original plan of the manuscript. M. C. Seymour, "Mandeville and Marco Polo: A Stanzaic Fragment," *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 21 (1964): 39–52.

respects.[112] The Chronicle appears somewhat chaotic. It begins as a series of verse emblems:

> Now in this p*re*sent treyte ar made into ynglishe mete*r* a p*ra*yere to ychon of the Said holy Fade*r*s Patriarke*s* and P*ro*phete*s* ^ w*ith* a pictor of þe sam contenynge a part of theire nobill dede*s and* holy lyves.[113]

These metrical prayers are headed by a large picture box for the "pictor," but only two bear illustrations; most are blank, some filled by later, casual drawings.[114] After folio 26^{r}, this format is abandoned and there are no more images in the rest of the manuscript. From the year 100 AD until its end, the text is organised by centuries, starting with a short prayer then a summary of the century in verse. The author is interested in a variety of noteworthy events, mingling accounts of sectarianism, a noisome flood, winds from the North Pole, a man eaten by mice (and another by lice).[115] As Laviece Ward writes, "[e]verything is grist for his mill."[116] Each century ends with a list of saints, popes and

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[112] This is stated on folios 57^{v}-58^{r} and 92^{r}; For where the text departs from Rolewink, see Ward, "The e Museo 160 Manuscript: Writing and Reading as Remedy," in *The Mystical Tradition and the Carthusians*, vol. 4, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg University Press, 1995), 75–76.

[113] Museo, folio 1^{r}.

[114] Probably a child's hand; Deborah Ellen Thorpe, "Young Hands, Old Books: Drawings by Children in a Fourteenth-Century Manuscript, LJS MS. 361," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2016): [unpaginated].

[115] Myse slow a myghty man *and* gaye
At his mete So for his synne
To the p*ri*nce of Polome this thinge
Happenyt ȝit will we not be wyse
When stronge ^^{man} was werete w*ith* myse
So was an Emp*erour* afor w*ith* lise
That was the mor marvall of ij (77^{v}).

[116] Ward, "Two Carthusian Histories," 135. For an ecocritical study of similar chronicles, see Shannon Gayk, "Part II: Everyday Apocalypse" in *Apocalyptic Ecologies: Form Creation to Doom in Middle English Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 2024).

monarchs, sometimes with brief appraisals such as: "Henricus iiij ^ first a shrew bot after gud " (82^{v}) or short accounts of marvels crammed in.[117]

This picture of the "warld vnstabill" (78^{r}) is frequently juxtaposed with the solidity of the Carthusian order.[118] Given the *Chronicle*'s focus on Carthusian themes and figures, the intended audience was likely the scribe himself or members of his community. The *Chronicle* ends rather anti-climactically with the explicit: "This endit the viijth day afor C*h*ristmeme[s] [...] wher the...matere failes" (108^{r}). This explicitly suggests that the material of the text was determined by the textual materials at the scribe's disposal, as well as his own invention.

[117] For digression to recount marvels, see folios 99^{v}–100^{r}.

[118] Gorman, "The Wilderness and the World," 168; BMH, lxxviii.

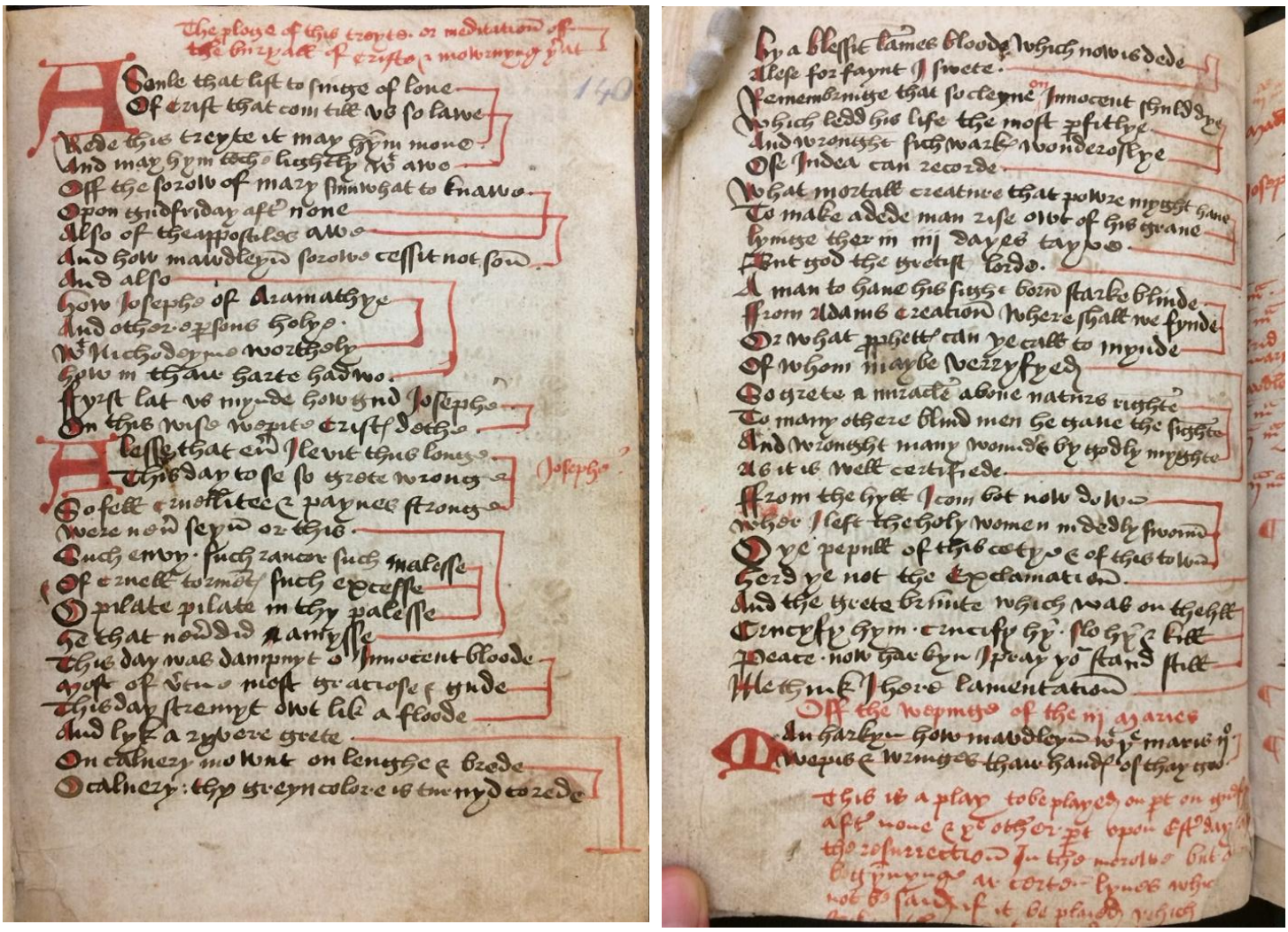


Figure 10. (Left) Opening page of *Christ's Burial*, folio 140[r].

Figure 11. (Right) Second page of *Christ's Burial*, folio 140[v].

1.2.b Meditation or Play?

The most striking feature of *Christ's Burial* is that it can be read as both an extended dramatic poem and as a playscript. Its first fourteen sides were written as the former, with the dramatic speeches tied together with short narrative links. At some point after this initial stint, however, a decision was taken to treat the text purely as a play script. The narrative links, which end on line 419 (147[v]), were deleted, struck through with red

ink, and the speakers' names were instead written in red ink into the margins.[119] The rest of the *Burial* and the whole of the *Resurrection* are formatted clearly as plays, with the speakers' names indented into the body of the text.

Although the scribe cancelled the narrative links, he retains a fifteen line prologue entitled "The p*ro*loge of this treyte or meditation off the buryall of Criste *and* mowrnyng þe*r*at." The prologue itself invites "[a] soule that list to singe of loue" to:

> Rede this treyte, it may hym moue,
> And may hym teche lightly w*it*h awe
> Off the sorow of Mary sumwhat to knawe,
> Opon gud friday afte*r*none;[120]

It goes on to list the characters whose "wo" the text will describe. This prologue frames the text as a meditational treatise designed both to instruct effortlessly ("teche lightly") and affectively stir ("moue") a solitary male reader ("hym"). This prologue does not mention Christ's deposition or burial. Instead, the stated subject matter is "the appostiles awe" (7); "[h]ow in thair harte had wo" (13); how Mary Magdalene's "sorowe cessit not" (8). This prologue thus foregrounds the affective elements of the text over the active, framing *Christ's Burial* as a private devotional exercise. The prologue also does not mention the events of Easter Sunday, and so seemingly does not apply to *Christ's Resurrection*; perhaps a separate prologue had been planned but was abandoned.

Yet *Christ's Burial* also states itself unequivocally to be a play. Overleaf from the prologue, the scribe writes:

> This is a play to be played on p*ar*t on gudfri<day>

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[119] The scribe omitted to strike through 'saide Josephe' (80), apparently an oversight.

[120] Museo, f. 140^{r}. BMH lines 1–5.

> aft*er*none *and* þe other p*ar*t opon Est*er*day aft<er>
> the resurrection In the morowe but at <the>
> beg*yn*nynge ar certen lynes whic<h shuld>
> not be said if it be plaied which [...][121]

The note is unfortunately abrupted by damage to the gutter edge and later trimming; the conjunction at the end suggests there was more detail about the "certen lynes" (presumably the prologue) that should be left unvoiced. However, the meaning is clear: "[t]his is a play," whose action (burial and resurrection) should be divided into two performances corresponding to the liturgical calendar. As we can see from figures ten and eleven, the two prescriptions – "This is a play to be played" and "Rede this treyte" – sit on opposites sides of one folio. This doubled labelling shows not only an incomplete revision, but also an appreciation on the part of the scribe that the meditative feel of the text inflects its dramatic impact, just as its fundamentally theatrical nature infuses the private reading of it. The "soule that list to sing of loue" would be receptive to both. As Jessica Brantley puts it: "The annotator preserves both options so that the text can continue to function in both ways at once."[122] For my purposes, this double lens also represents an opportunity to think about the ways in which movable sculptures are not just artefactual, but also textual phenomena. As I explore in chapter three, the ekphrastic language of the play insists that the reader continually holds mental images of Christ's dead body in various states and positions, drawing off the sculptural and pictural iconography of the period. The mind's eye must follow the silent body of Christ as it is

[121] Museo, folio 140^{v}.

[122] Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*, 298.

unpinned, as it is parcelled out into the hands of Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene and into the grave.

Christ's Burial is not exceptional as a medieval playscript that shows evidence of reshaping into a more literary genre: many surviving witnesses of medieval scripts are divorced from the mechanics of their staging, and show signs that they were adapted for private reading;[123] detailed descriptions of stagecraft, by contrast, are often preserved in ephemeral, "working" documents.[124] Scholars continually assess the degrees of separation between a given play text and an actual performance.[125] Carol Symes, in her discussion of this fraught archive, describes how "fancy dramatic apparatus [are] the first thing abandoned by a copyist."[126] Instead, she argues, transcribed plays take on the "protective colouring" of other kinds of texts, and are thus stabilised into the literary form handed down to us.[127] For example, we only know the rough outlines of the staging of *La Seinte Resurreccion* because one witness incorporates details of the set – including "[l]e

[123] Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*, 282.

[124] One of the most detailed extant descriptions of staging a passion play looks like it was written on someone's lap. Véronique Plesch, "Notes for the Staging of a Late Medieval Passion Play in Material Culture and Medieval Drama," in *Material Culture and Medieval Drama*, ed. Davison (Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

[125] See for example Peter Happé, *The Towneley Cycle: Unity and Diversity* (University of Wales Press, 2007); R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills eds., *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Theresa Coletti and Gibson, "The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama," in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[126] Carol Symes, "The Medieval Archive and the History of Theatre: Assessing the Written and Unwritten Evidence for Premodern Performance," *Theatre Survey* 52, no. 1 (2011): 29–58, 44.

[127] Symes, "The Medieval Archive," 44.

crucifix primerement" – into a rhyming prologue.[128] *Christ's Burial*'s meditative prologue and abortive narrative links could be considered "protective colouring."

Peter Meredith writes that the stage directions in the Museo plays indicate the dramatic origin of this text. But such paratextual information is often an uncertain indicator of performance history; we must always be attuned to "what happens when performance is captured in writing."[129] As Theresa Coletti and Gail McMurray Gibson write, the stage directions of the N-Town manuscript "seem more intent on helping a reader visualize and meditate upon the dramatic scene than on offering practical stagecraft instructions."[130] Similarly, Tamara Atkin's study of printed playbooks shows how paratextual information, such as character lists, are uncertain indicators of performance history, functioning more like "user-guides" that indicate a particular strategy for a reader, rather than detailing a historical performance.[131]

Critical movements towards performativity have also gone in the other direction, however, recovering dramatic aspects of texts deemed unperformable. Matthew Sergi's careful study of the "implicit cues" of the Chester plays demonstrates not only the coherent practicability of these scripts, but also an organising rationale behind the performances, which values prop-work and spectacular feats over literary finesse; Sergi

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[128] Symes, "The Medieval Archive," 44. This appears in both witnesses: Paris, Bibliothèque National, Ms fr. 902, line 6, folio 97[a]; British Library, Additional MS 45103, line 11, folio 214[b]. Both are edited in T. Atkinson Jenkins et al., *La Seinte Resureccion: From the Paris and Canterbury Mss*, Anglo-Norman Text Society (Basil Blackwell, 1943). Kopania, Animated Sculptures, 71–81.

[129] Symes, "The Medieval Archive." 36.

[130] Coletti and Gibson, "The Tudor Origins of Medieval Drama," 236.

[131] Tamara Atkin, *Reading Drama in Tudor England* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 79–80.

convincingly interprets "the texts' redundancies as cues for real action, rather than just scribal errors." [132] For the scripts in my study – *Christ's Burial*, the Debs-Codex burials and the Barking rites – the metascript of the puppet can only be recovered with such an approach.

1.2.c The Unresolved Question of Authorship

The "question of how to explain the inconsistent signposts in MS e Museo 160 has dominated the limited body of scholarship on [*Christ's*] *Burial and Resurrection*."[133] This is linked to the question of authorship – is this a "closet drama" written for use within the cell, or for "semi-staged" recital, or is this a playscript that entered into the Charterhouse from elsewhere, where it was treated to an abortive and incomplete adaptation?

There is an abiding critical sense that *Christ's Burial* and *Resurrection* are holograph copies produced by and for Carthusians.[134] Meredith's brief analysis of the rhyme scheme of *Christ's Burial*'s remains the only textual evidence gathered that suggests the meditative prologue and narrative links are later additions to a playscript exemplar.[135] He shows how the narrative links tend to deform the rhyme scheme, and so

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[132] Sergi, *Practical Cues and Social Spectacle*.

[133] Sian Witherden, "Touch in Late Medieval English Theatre," (DPhil diss., 2019), 192.

[134] Kopania writes that they were "produced by and for the exclusive use of Carthusians." Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 16; Linda Olson, "'Swete Cordyall' of 'Lytterature': Some Middle English Manuscripts from the Cloister," in *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches*, eds. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo, and Linda Olson (Cornell University Press, 2012); Ward, "The e Museo 160 Manuscript," 78.

[135] Meredith, "The Bodley Burial," 139.

look like later additions.[136] This does not solve the question of authorship, however; as Meredith writes,

> the scribe could very well have been the author of the material which turns drama into narrative meditation but whether he was the playwright as well seems to me impossible to be sure. If one goes by the standard of versifying, it looks unlikely.[137]

Meredith delivered his findings as a paper in 1980. The final section of his published essay reviews scholarship on the plays since his original talk, particularly Baker, Murphy and Hall's important edition, which reiterates the opinion Meredith sought to disprove, that this witness is a holograph, and "that the plays were adapted from the meditation," and that "the writer of the manuscript was also in a real sense the author of the plays."[138]

In a later article, Donald Baker reiterates this position, stating that the scribe was "undoubtably" the author of the plays as well as the *Chronicle*, because he produced both using a similar "mode of operation."[139] This monk gleaned material from a wide range of (mostly prose) sources and versified them into new material; both stints of composition also involve "a change in plan."[140] In the *Chronicle*, the illustrations stop,

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[136] The narrative links "add only irregular stanzas (except for one case) and since even where those irregular stanzas are an acceptable variation on the normal form, they increase the number of variants by over a half," Meredith, "The Bodley Burial," 139.

[137] Meredith, "The Bodley Burial," 148; Rowntree maintains, for example, that they were "originally plays which a copyist (or possibly even the author) attempted to convert into a meditation," and states unequivocally that the plays were conceived "within the confines of a Carthusian house." Rowntree, "A Carthusian Worldview," 11; 21–22.

[138] BMH, lxxxv. As Meredith points out, however, they state this "not always with quite the same confidence and with little attempt at proof;" Meredith identifies "one or two minor slantings of the evidence" they produce to support their theory, not to undermine their useful edition, but to show how key questions of the plays, such as their authorship and original performance conditions, remain unresolved.

[139] Baker, "When is a Text a Play?" in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, eds. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (Indiana University Press, 1989), 36–37.

[140] Baker, "When is a Text a Play?" 36.

the prayer format is only inconsistently maintained, and "the meditative element gradually disappears as the writer becomes pre-occupied with the events he is describing."[141] Similarly, in *Christ's Burial,* the scribe's "original purpose, that of composing a verse meditation [...] had changed to that of writing the meditational dramas."[142] As we shall see, I have followed Baker's suggestion here by looking at scribal correction in the *Chronicle* and *Christ's Burial* in order to understand what kinds of work produced both texts and whether the scribe did indeed have the same "mode of operation."

Clifford Davidson also asserts that the plays are holographs. He attends to the material conditions of staging in his chapter on the Museo plays, asserting that the script indicates a need for "an image separated from the cross and with jointed arms and legs," comparing it to a few continental movable sculptures of Christ crucified with jointed arms, as well as to the Barking drama. Assuming that the plays are holographs, Davidson suggests that their "author" may have had a movable sculpture of Christ crucified in his Charterhouse, "which could have been the model for the one used in the drama which he devised."[143] Because the presence of such an object in a Charterhouse is unlikely, however, Davidson suggests that this monk was probably writing for "use at a church not connected with the Carthusian order just as clerical writers seem to have been involved with the preparation of the texts of the plays at York and in the Towneley manuscript."

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[141] Baker, "When is a Text a Play?" 36.

[142] BMH, lxxxiv.

[143] Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, 172.

Davidson nevertheless concludes that "strictest forms of Northern piety provide the context in which the two plays in [Museo] must be seen" and, again, that they were the product of a "Carthusian author."[144] We can see a certain vacillation as to the performance context for this play, which stems from an assumption about its authorship. Brantley's treatment of *Christ's Burial* in her discussion of the medieval "closet drama" ("a dramatic text that exists for the page rather than for the stage") leaves open the question of authorship.[145] She references the Barking *Depositio* as a thematic analogy, but does not consider the practicalities of staging, because she is focussed on the play's private reception within the Charterhouse.

As Leanne Groeneveld has shown, "[f]ew sites would seem less hospitable for the production of theatre than a Carthusian charterhouse."[146] In the final section of this chapter I discuss Groeneveld's useful speculations as to possible performance sites in Hull. Her treatment of the plays investigates neither their authorship, nor the identity of the corpus used in performance. She concludes that it is highly unlikely either play was performed within a Charterhouse, and refers to a Carthusian "transcribe[r]," rather than author. The reasons for this supposition are many. Carthusians spent most of their time in isolated cells and, when they did gather, they worked to maintain an austere atmosphere; the brothers were prohibited from raising their voices, "even during

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[144] Like Brantley, he compares *Christ's Burial* to Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* and the devotional texts in the illustrated Carthusian manuscript BL MS Additional 37049; Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, 184.

[145] Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*, 283.

[146] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial and Christ's Resurrection: Provenance and Performance," *Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 48 (2009): 48–73, 50.

celebration of the liturgy."[147] The fervent lyric laments of the Museo plays seem fundamentally incongruous here. Furthermore, the *Depositio* rite is not part of the Carthusian liturgy, and there is no evidence for the existence of an Easter sepulchre – a devotional structure central to the rite – in an English Charterhouse.[148] It is therefore doubtful that the Charterhouse that produced Museo would have performed it as a play.

It is also unlikely that they had a movable sculpture of Christ crucified at their disposal. The Customs of the Carthusian order prohibited all images except a simple wooden cross at each altar, and a statue of the Virgin in each cell, though, as Davidson points out, these were not always followed.[149] The communal spaces at Mount Grace, for example, were radically simple, in comparison to which, "the individual monks' cells were elaborate."[150] The likely route for prohibited images to enter such a Charterhouse was through gifts "it would be difficult to refuse."[151] Though occasional movable sculptures, like the Boxley Rood, brought profit to the communities that housed them, they tended not to have material value and so are an unlikely bequest.[152]

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[147] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 48.

[148] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 53.

[149] Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, 172. Margaret E. Thompson, *The Carthusian Order in England* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), 106.

[150] Glyn Coppack and Michael Aston, *Christ's Poor Men: The Carthusians in England* (Tempus, 2002), 55.

[151] Coppack and Aston, *Christ's Poor Men*, 82.

[152] Movable sculptures of Christ crucified tend to be "recht unaufwendig konstruiert" ("constructed quite inexpensively"). Andreas Schulze, "Der sogenannte Mirakelmann aus Döbeln in Sachsen, eine bewegliche Christusfigur der Spätgotik," in *Polychrome Skulptur in Europa: Technologie, Konservierung, Restaurierung*, eds. Renate Kühne and Ulrich Schiessl (Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden, 1999), 127.

Most recently, Sian Witherden's DPhil dissertation examines *Christ's Burial*, which addresses its identity as both a meditation and a staged play.[153] She argues that a performance of *Christ's Burial* would have "almost certainly have required" a movable sculpture of Christ crucified, due to the play's length. It would have been "tedious and exhausting for a living actor" to play dead for its duration; the corpus is held on the Virgin's lap for 220 lines of lament.[154] In N-Town, by contrast, the corpus rests in "oure Ladys lappe" for a maximum of sixteen lines.[155] Witherden's aims differ from mine; her focus on touch grants the private reading of the play some primacy and the material conditions of this play represent a small part of her overall project.[156]

1.2.d Scribal Correction

An analysis of scribal self-correction can indicate how a scribe might have been thinking about a text, and what kinds of work went into producing it.[157] One must be cautious, however, because there is no agreed framework through which to ascertain what corrections are "scribal" and what "authorial" in character. The primary codicological evidence behind Baker, Murphy and Hall's assertion that the *Chronicle* is an autograph

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[153] Witherden, "Touch in Late Medieval English Theatre," 188–219.

[154] Witherden, "Touch in Late Medieval English Theatre," 208.

[155] Play 34, *N-Town Plays*, line 121c, lines 122–137, 278.

[156] "The sense of touch had the capacity to heighten a meditative reading of the Bodley *Burial*, enabling a level of tactile participation with the play that a staged performance simply could not offer"; Witherden, "Touch in Late Medieval English Theatre," 205.

[157] Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375-1510* (Cambridge University Press: 2014), 294; Kato Takako, "Corrected Mistakes in Cambridge university Library Ms Gg.4.27," in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, eds. Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (York Medieval Press, 2008); Orietta Da Rold, "The Significance of Scribal Corrections in Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.4.24," *Chaucer Review* 41 (2007): 393–436.

is that the scribe "occasionally leaves part of a page blank, making a note to himself to fill it in when he comes across other saints or events."[158] A survey of these blanks show that they are always placed at the end of a century;[159] they are marked with a rubricated heading, differing slightly in wording each time, but each saying that the space has been left for other saints "whos names are not here" (72^{v}), or "þat ȝit may be knaun" (100^{r}).

These seem, therefore, to be less notes-to-self done in the middle of copying, than an invitation for corrective reading. Rowntree, by contrast, asserts that the *Chronicle* is a copy because it contains "several copyist's errors, such as lines being missed out and inserted at the foot of the page."[160] Yet these layered revisions could as easily be said to be the hallmarks of an authorial drafting; Richard Beadle includes the *Chronicle* in his preliminary list of English holograph writings precisely because of these features.[161] Holographs also contain "commonplace 'scribal errors' indistinguishable from those to which any amanuensis is liable."[162] So just as we sometimes consider scribal variation a kind of authorship, "we can also recognize that authors could create

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[158] BMH, lxxviii.

[159] Folios 48^{r} (the blank paper has been cut) 63^{r} and 63^{v}, 69^{r}, 72^{v}, 80^{v}, 100^{r}; the only blank left in the middle of a century chapter is on folio 62^{v}, where the writing on the reverse has bled through the page. He leaves a small space at the top half of 75^{v} (the beginning of the eleventh century). On 91^{v}, he leaves a small space at the conclusion to the fourteenth century, presumably in order to begin a new century on a fresh page.

[160] Rowntree, "A Carthusian Worldview," 21.

[161] Beadle, "English Autograph Writings," 249–268, 257–259.

[162] Beadle, "English Autograph Writings," 262. See also Matthew Fisher, "When Variants Aren't: Authors as Scribes in Some English Manuscripts," in *Probable Truth: Editing Medieval Texts from Britain in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Vincent Gillespie and Anne Hudson (Brepols, 2013).

variance in the destabilizing manner of scribes."[163] While I might not be able to state absolutely that either text is a holograph, by comparing the visible work of the scribe in each it is possible to ascertain whether they are products of similar "mode of operation."[164]

Dialect is another indicator of authorship. Some words in narrative links – such as "mude" (146^{v}), "prise" (144^{v}), "hard holy" (141^{r}) – are not found in the script, perhaps indicating a different diction. However, these links are too short to produce conclusive findings, and the *Chronicle* appears to be in the same mixed North / North Midland dialect as the playscripts.[165] This project does not have the scope to produce a thorough analysis of dialectical variation in these texts.

There are a variety of ways to organise scribal error. Mary Hamel, in her study of Robert Thornton's *Morte Athure*, organises corrections into both method of correction and then into three simple categories of correction: spelling changes, whole word changes, and confusions involving suspension marks.[166] I have generally followed this approach, though the categories of correction in Museo differ from Hamel's manuscript; unlike Hamel, I did not note whether the corrected word sat in a stressed or unstressed position, or at the beginning or end of a line. This made sense for her study, because the *Morte* is in alliterative longline. It is not always easy to judge where the rhythmic stresses

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[163] Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 298.

[164] Baker, "When is a Text a Play?" 36–37.

[165] Meredith, "The Bodley Burial," 145.

[166] Mary Hamel, "Scribal Self-Corrections in the Thornton *Morte Arthure*," *Studies in Bibliography*, 36 (1983): 119–137, 124.

fall in the *Chronicle* and *Christ's Burial* and the number of syllables per line were often unequal. A metrical analysis of error would be a further avenue of study.

This study takes a sample from the beginning of each text of roughly equal length. The *Chronicle* sample is 50 sides (1^{r}–25^{v}), and the *Christ's Burial* sample is 25 sides (140^{r}–153^{r}), because the *Chronicle* pages were only half filled, each containing a picture-box. I did not include the cancelled narrative links, as Meredith had shown them to be later additions to the core script. Following Hamel, I organised the self-corrections into kinds of correction: insertions, deletions, substitutions, and spelling changes. I also recorded the method of correction. I ignored false starts, because they do not involve re-reading and therefore do not say much about the scribe's relationship to his exemplar.

In transcribing the text, I followed Baker, Murphy and Hall's conventions. The Museo scribe marks *er*, *ir*, *ar* with a subscript stroke, e.g. sp*ir*rete (spirit) (7^{v}); s*er*pent (9^{r}); p*ar*t (140^{v}). The word-final *er* is marked with superscript dagger. The scribe occasionally uses a dotted nasal suspension for "n" and "m"; Baker, Murphy and Hall do not expand these when the word already contains an "n" or "m"; they also treat the bar on the double ll's as otiose. My transcriptions follow suit. The scribe adds a downward stroke to the "c"s at the beginning of words, which Rowntree expands to "C*h*" when it appears at the beginning of Christ, but Baker, Murphy and Hall, and Furnivall leave this as "Crist."[167] I will follow the latter as the scribe adds this downstroke also to words like "Cruellite," and "Crowne" (145^{r}), so it seems to be a capitalisation.

[167] Frederick James Furnivall, *The Digby Mysteries* (London, 1882), 171–200.

The majority of corrections in the samples are minor, consisting of inserting, substituting or deleting single words, or changing spelling. For these single word corrections, the scribe employs four main techniques; he occasionally overwrites letters, he interlines material, he strikes through text he wants to delete, and he puts omitted words into the margin. In my sample there is only one example of deletion text through erasure, but it is not the work of the main scribe.[168]

Figure 12. Proportion of self-corrections in samples performed in different inks in Museo samples.

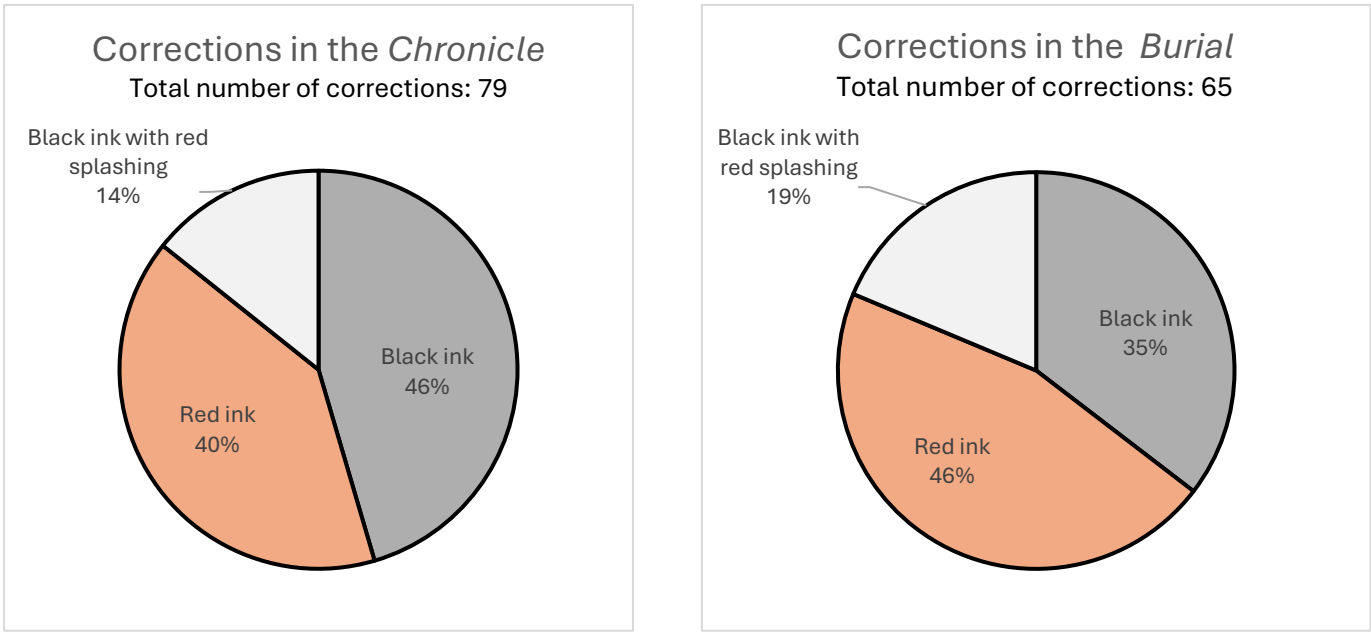


Figure twelve shows the proportion of correction – insertions, deletions, substitutions and spelling changes – carried out in red ink, black ink, or black ink with red splashing. Adding in the cancelled narrative links of *Christ's Burial* would alter this

[168] On folio 141^{v} the three last letters of "he[are]" (hair) have been scraped away and replaced in a later hand.

picture, increasing the percentage of corrections in red ink. The chart shows an even balance across both samples between corrections in black ink and corrections in red. This suggests that the scribe looked over his work at least twice, once when writing and again when rubricating, and each time was conscientious in spotting errors. In under twenty-per-cent of cases, he corrected in black, then embellished that correction with his rubricating ink, often by splashing the caret marks, implying that these corrections were looked at more than once. The similarity between the proportion of correction carried out in different inks in each text, shows that the scribe corrected both texts with a similar method and level of attention.

This sense of carefulness carried over into my survey of all the corrections made in my sample. Like Hamel, I divided the scribe's self-correction into categories. I then further divided the single word insertions and substitutions into those that added information or changed the meaning of the text, and those that were superfluous. For example, the insertion "kinge ^ozias of Israell" (20^{r}) adds a piece of information; similarly, the insertion "thou was ^a child" (18^{v}) is positive because it amends a grammatical error. By contrast, "The victory oft ^tym with thee went" (15^{v}), I classed as a neutral insertion because it does not change the meaning of the clause. Similarly, "all m[e]an^{kind} " is a neutral substitution, because words are approximately synonymous. The boundaries between the categories are necessarily blurred; for instance, I noted "^qweyn Jezabell" (20^{v}) as positive, because it added information, but noted "^ holy Trinitee" as neutral, because the Trinity is obviously holy – that Jezebel was a queen may have been equally obvious.

Type of correction		The Chronicle	Christ's Burial
Single word insertion	Positive	18	11
	Neutral	12	13
	Worse	1	-
	Total:	31	24
Single word transposition		1	1
Phrase insertion		1	1
Lines inserted (total)		7	3 (all small)
Single word substitution	Positive	8	4
	Neutral	4	7
	Worse	1	0
	Total:	13	11
Phrase substitution		5	-
Single word deletion	Dittography	6	8
	Unique word	1	3
	Of a line	2	-
Reordering the text		2	-
Spelling changes		10	14
Total corrections		79	65

Table 1. Scribal self-correction in the *Chronicle* sample (1^{r}–25^{v}) and *Christ's Burial* sample (140^{r}–153^{r}).

The most common type of correction in both samples is single word insertions. In *Christ's Burial*, 54% of these are neutral, and in the *Chronicle* 39% of these are neutral. It is striking that the scribe is so meticulous in slotting additional words into the text that do not add meaning. Some known autograph copies do have such instances of small words added, however this tends to repair the metre.[169] In these texts, the number of syllables per line are often irregular, especially in the *Chronicle*; in both texts the scribe does not seem to cancel words that make the line hypermetrical and he deletes very few unique words (one in the *Chronicle* and three in *Christ's Burial*). These neutral changes thus do not appear metrical in character. Rather, they suggest that the scribe was copying line-by-line rather than word-by-word, and such filler words – for example, "ryght" (4^{r}; 145^{v}); "so" (153^{r}); "grete" (4^{r}) – were forgotten. Furthermore, the substitutions of similar-sounding words like "The holy [grace] ^{gost} " (26^{r}), seems to be a scribal error resulting from the scribe reciting the line aurally in his head. Similarly in *Christ's Burial*, the scribe substitutes "case" for "cease" (151^{r}), "wrake" for "wake" (145^{r}) and "whyle" for "wele" (143^{r}), mistakes that seem to suggest that he held the line aurally in his mind.

If we look solely at these single word changes, the two samples look quite similar: the *Chronicle* contains slightly more of these corrections, and *Christ's Burial* tends to have proportionally more neutral changes. However, the other kinds of correction indicate key differences between the two samples, which suggest that they are products of different kinds of work. *Christ's Burial* contains three inserted lines; in each instance,

[169] Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 293.

the line inserted is noticeably shorter than the rest of the verse, in one case just two words.[170] This suggests that these lines were omitted through mechanical error. In the *Chronicle*, however, the scribe inserts larger sections of verse (three lines on folio 4^{v} and two lines on folio 9^{r}) at the bottom of the page, marked with a *signe de renvoie*, which suggests that he is actively changing the text. He also reorders the text with rubricated headings and twice he deletes complete, unique lines, seemingly because they do not fit the rhyme scheme.[171] He also substitutes unique phrases in four places, as we can see in table two.

Table 2. Phrase substitutions in the *Chronicle* sample (1^{r}–25^{v}).

Folio	**Phrase substitution**
5^{r}	In hete *and* colde [justly I wisse] hirdma*n* I wisse
8^{v}	Thay ar Cast owt [ose thou p*ro*phecyed] on ev*e*ry wise
13^{v}	When [th[y]*at* fyre was] thy folke ^ died in fire brennynge
15^{r}	Yit thou [Thy st<ren>ghe] was ou*er*co*m*men by wome*n*n

None of these substitutions repair the rhyme scheme, nor do they appear to be the result of mechanical error. Each substitution is unique to the text. It looks like the

[170] "That set you furst in ceile" (141^{r}); "I am verray sure" (142^{v}); "And hevynesse" (143^{v}).

[171] He does this outside my sample too (e.g. 49^{r}, 50^{r}, 50^{v}).

scribe was making authorial choices. The most convincing evidence that spoke against scribal authorship of both of these texts are the spelling changes, of which there are twenty four across both samples. These corrections display various shades of nicety. On folio 17^{v}, the scribe draws a thin line between two words ("the dowbil") that he originally wrote as one: "thedowbill sp*ir*rete." This kind of misreading of a slightly confusing word in a complicated detail about Elijah suggests that the scribe did not quite grasp the meaning of what he was copying, or was copying from a faulty exemplar, whose error he transcribed and then corrected. In both samples, he also changes spellings that seem perfectly valid. Why, for example, does he change "mildist" to "myldist" (153^{r}), "dysmayde" to "dysmayede" (141^{v}), "Olofernes" to "Holofernes" (24^{v}), "thrugh" to "thorugh" (17^{v}) "Patriarche" to "Patriarke" (6^{r})? Some of these might have added a syllable, but this is not the case for all. At one point, a spelling change might be construed as "hypercorrection"; when writing "infe[s]ctio*n*n" (149^{v}), he initially writes an "s" instead of a "c," which he corrects immediately.[172] Then, going back over in red, he seems to have decided that his "ion" suspension mark is not satisfactory, and so adds an additional "n." This fussing implies a certain lexical distance between him and his exemplar.

The only kind of spelling change the scribe carries out across both samples is perhaps the most subtle. Thrice in the *Burial* sample he revises the spelling of the word-

[172] "[O]ne man's shibboleth is another's hypercorrection, and what some wince at, others ignore. The changes of spelling and grammar which might be needless, then, test intriguingly the fuzzy border between correcting and rewriting. Yet while we might theoretically recognize that those borders are blurred, if a scribe or reader has used the techniques of correcting, his practice has in some sense implied a difference between wrong and right forms of English." Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 163.

final /ē/;[173] a similar revision occurs once in the *Chronicle* sample.[174] In three cases, the words changed are at the end of a line, and the change enables an eye-rhyme, but for the rest the rationale behind these changes is obscure.[175] Sometimes he corrects "-y" to "-ee" but sometimes corrects an "-e" to a "-ye". The scribe therefore does not appear to be establishing a spelling convention within his own text but rather seems to be ensuring that his copy matches the inconsistent spelling of the exemplar. He might also be grappling with a difference in stress or pronunciation that exists in his exemplar, but not in his own dialect, as the word final -y underwent multiple phonological changes in the sixteenth century.[176]

In his study of scribal correction in the English manuscripts of the Huntington Library, Wakelin calculated that 16% of all single word corrections needlessly altered spelling, while 17% of single word changes represented "necessary corrections to spelling."[177] Across both my samples, 19% (22/117) of all the single word corrections needlessly altered spelling, while only a very small fraction (0.02%) supplied what I judged to be necessary spelling corrections.[178] Thus, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the scribe's spelling corrections appear cosmetic. If the scribe were copying his

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[173] "merc[y]ee" (141^{v}); "inwardl[e]ye" (144^{v}); "bod[y]ee" (146^{v}); "cruelt[y]ee" (147^{v}); he also changes the ending of "betra[y]ye" (149^{v}).

[174] hol[y]ee (19^{r}).

[175] For eye-rhymes see Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, 228–234.

[176] Meredith, "The Bodley Burial and Resurrection," 144–145; Charles Barber, *Early Modern English* (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 133; Marco Condorelli, "The Standardisation of i and y in Early Modern English (1500–1700)," *English Studies* 102, no. 1 (2021): 101–123.

[177] Wakelin, *Scribal Correction*, table 7.1, 158.

[178] 22 out of 117; I judged "de$^{\hat{}s}$peration" (144^{r}) and "the|dowbill" (17^{v}) as necessary.

own draft, he might not be so fussy and might be able to replicate his own spelling comfortably; the spelling changes, therefore, seem to reflect an impulse to match the orthography of an exemplar.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the Museo scribe took a more active role in producing the *Chronicle* than he did in the plays, as the sample from this text contains more substantial corrections, such as the substitutions of unique phrases, the deletion of unique lines and the altering of the *ordinatio*. This therefore counters Baker's claim that the two are the product of similar kinds of work. However, given the correction of needless spellings in the *Chronicle*, and the high incidence of neutral corrections that supply no metrical repair, this text also appears to be (predominantly) a copy.[179] The scribe was probably working to synthesise multiple exemplars to create a history that suited the needs of his house. The plays, however, do not show such signs of authorial revision, apart from the cancelled narrative links, and the kinds of spelling changes made in this text suggest that it was not his work.

1.2.e Performance Contexts

Given that the Northern Charterhouses offered a particularly unsuitable environment for the performance of *Christ's Burial*, the plays likely entered the Charterhouse from elsewhere. This fits with the Carthusian focus on "preaching with the hands," that is, working to produce spiritual writing.[180] Archaeological evidence from Mount Grace, for

[179] Wakelin's sample includes a fifteenth-century prose chronicle, which, like Museo's, shows both signs of "needless changes to spelling" as well asd signs of scribal compilation. Wakelin, *Scribal Corrections*, 178.

[180] "Libros quippe tanquam sempiternum animarum nostrarum cibum cautissime custodiri et studiosissime volumus fieri, ut quia ore non possumus, dei verbum manibus predicemus." Guigo I,

example, suggests that the monks' cells were organised into a kind of assembly line, with different cells focusing on book binding, illumination etc., so that "[p]roduction on an almost industrial scale was quite possible without the individual monks leaving their cells or meeting each other."[181] We might imagine that is how our scribe operated.

Freeing *Christ's Burial* from its Carthusian setting, of course, opens up more questions than it answers. For what purpose was the play originally written, and, if it was performed, what were the material conditions of its staging? In this period and well into the Reformation, the North East had a strong tradition of Catholic drama in monastic and civic settings, as well as in private homes.[182] The accounts of Selby Abbey, a Benedictine house in North Yorkshire, show how frequently the house sponsored travelling players, who also performed in lay spaces, such as in the household of Henry Percy, Duke of Northumberland.[183] In 1500 Selby Abbey made a payment to "diversis hominibus ludentibus in festo cruceficionis domini."[184] This record attests to the frustratingly "bald nature" of the *Records of Early English Drama*; are these men performing a play of the crucifixion or are they simply performing something else during the feast of the

"Consuetudines Cartusiae." *Coutumes de Chartreuse*, ed. anonymous Carthusian (Les Editions du Cerf, 1984), chapter 28, lines 27–30, 224.

[181] Coppack and Aston, *Christ's Poor Men*, 96.

[182] Paul Whitefield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 148–149.

[183] Glyn Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300 to 1660*, vol. 1 (Routledge, 2002), appendix c, 332–337.

[184] "Item given to various men playing at the feast of the Crucifixion of the Lord." Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300 to 1660*, vol. 1 (Routledge, 2002), appendix c, 336–337.

crucifixion?[185] Could this have been our play, which was clearly intended to be performed on Good Friday? And, if so, would a movable sculpture of Christ crucified have been attached to the house and then co-opted into the drama, or did it travel with players, like the "great yallowe coloured Crosse" that toured households of the North Riding with an early seventeenth-century company?[186] Museo was written close to the Reformation, but this does not mean we should consider its performance potential cut short; northern households were strongholds for Catholic drama long beyond the Reformation.

Selby Abbey's payments to professional players to perform at special occasions was not unusual for this time and region.[187] Many religious houses hired professional entertainers for special occasions. This generated some criticism; Gerhoh of Reichersberg, for example, commented in an antitheatrical polemic that the Benedictine monks of Augsburg did not sup in their refectory except on very rare feasts, especially when they would perform the Slaughter of the Innocents.[188] The Benedictines houses of

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[185] Walker stresses, however, that we should continue to speculate over such records "to enable a continuous dialogue between records and analysis to develop." Greg Walker, "A Broken REED?: Early Drama Records, Politics, and the Old Historicism," *Medieval English Theatre* 17 (1995): 42–51, 45, 47.

[186] The National Archives, London, Star Chamber MS 8/19/10 (1611), membrane 18. Quoted in Siobhan Keenan, "The Simpson Players of Jacobean Yorkshire and the Professional Stage," *Theatre Notebook* 67, no. 1 (2013): 16–35, 27. See also White, *Drama and Religion*, 151–152; Richard Wilson, "A Winter's tale: King Lear in the Pennines," in *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion and Resistance* (Manchester University Press, 2004); Phebe Jensen, "Recusancy, Festivity, and Community: The Simpsons at Gowlthwaite Hall," in *Region, Religion, and Patronage: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, eds. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester University Press, 2003); Klausner, "Travelling Players on the North Yorkshire Moors," in *Early Performers and Performance in the Northeast of England*, eds. John McKinnell and Diana Wyatt (Arc Humanities Press, 2021).

[187] Johnston, "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, eds. Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 15.

[188] Gerhoh of Reichersberg, *Commentarium in Psalmos*, PL 194.890–891. Quoted in Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 46.

Northern England appear enthusiastic patrons of the arts. Whitby Abbey seems to have dancers, pipers, and a minstrel called Walton performing at their Corpus Christi, 1394–1395.[189] The Benedictines of Durham Priory regularly hosted mummers, minstrels and players, which amounted to a considerable financial burden.[190] In a quite representative year (1433–1434) gifts were made to players of the king, and of the Earls of Suffolk, Stafford, Warwick and Huntingdon as well as to two more independent "variety acts" and a minstrel (in drag?) called "Modyr Hakett."[191] Indeed, the Priory's enthusiasm for spectacle once resulted in an accident, for which the prior was charged with manslaughter.[192]

The two Museo plays might also have been performed in a household. Its staging implies no wagons, trap doors, or special effects save what the corpus could produce. When discussing possible contexts for the Museo plays, Meredith indicates a coeval resurrection play performed at Wressle, the seat of Henry Algernon Percy, 5th Earl of Northumberland (1478–1527). Percy's book of household regulations records that:

> My Lord usith and acustomedith to gyfe yerely if his Lordship kepe a Chapell and is at home in rewarde to them of his Lordshipe Chapell and other his Lordshipis

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[189] Klausner ed., "North Riding," Whitby Abbey, Bursar's Accounts (1394–1395), REED Online.

[190] Richard Barrie Dobson, *Durham Priory, 1400–1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), 105–106. Chambers, "'Players' in Context," 124–125.

[191] Durham Priory Bursar's Accounts, Dona et Exennia (1433–1434). Quoted in Dobson, *Durham Priory*, 105. It has been suggested that the minstrel is called "Modyr Nakett" (Mother Naked) instead. John Mckinnell, "Rural and Urban Folk Ceremonies in County Durham," in Early Performance and Performance in the Northeast of England, eds. Mckinnell and Wyatt (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 121.

[192] The prior Thomas of Melsonby was charged with manslaughter in 1237, when an acrobat fell to his death after attempting to tightrope walk between the towers of Durham cathedral. Madeliene Hope Dodds, "Northern Minstrels and Folk Drama," *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4, 1 (1925): 121–146, 124.

> Servauntes that playth the Play of Resurrection upon Estur-Day in the Mornnynge in my Lordis Chapell befor his Lordshipe.[193]

This accounts for what the earl was willing to pay, not what he did in fact give out, but the specificity of these regulations suggests that each were not only planned in detail, but also occurred annually for some years.[194] There is no record of a play of burial in the chapel, and it could well be the case that this is an entirely different play. The records of early drama attest to many lost sixteenth-century Easter plays.[195] But, as Meredith points out, the fifth earl's chapel would have been well-equipped to perform *Christ's Resurrection*. The stage directions require a certain musical proficiency. The script states that, if possible, the *Victime pascali* – a liturgical sequence prescribed for Easter – should be sung "in cantifracto vel saltum in pallinodio".[196] *Canctus fractus* was a rhythmised form of plain chant; *pallinodio*, however, is a very rare term of unclear

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[193] Thomas Percy and Henry Algernon Percy, *The Regulations and Establishment of the Household of Henry Algernon Percy, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland, at His Castles of Wresill and Lekinfield in Yorkshire Begun Anno Domini M.D.XII* (London, 1827), 44.

[194] Ian Lancashire, "Orders for Twelfth Day and Night circa 1515 in the Second Northumberland Household Book," *English Literary Renaissance* 10, no. 1 (1980): 7–45, 13.

[195] Ian Lancashire notes the following in Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (University of Toronto Press, 1984); Easter play, Magdalen College Oxford (1495–1521), 244; "Pageant of the passion on Easter Monday," St. Lawrence, Reading (1507–1508), 253; "lusum resurrectionis et processionem in die Dominica in octaua Pasche," Henley, Oxfordshire (1511), 151; "ludo interludii Passionis Domini," (1463–1464) and revival of a passion play to be done "as from olden time," New Romney, Kent (1513 – 1540), 233; resurrection play/s, Thame, Oxfordshire (1516; 1523; 1535), 273; possible resurrection play/s, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey (now Greater London) (1505–1565), 162; puppet resurrection play, Witney, Oxfordshire (before 1558); "De sepultura & resurrectione," a lost English play by John Bale in two "libri," (c.1534-40), no specified place, 64; "Stage play of the Passion of Christ began at the Grey Friars," London (1557), 216; Thomas Ashton's 'first playe upon the Passione of Christ' (1561) and the "greate playe" of the Passion (1569), Shrewsbury, 265.

[196] *CR*, 691b–c.

meaning.[197] Percy's chapel had twenty-eight members, six of whom were boys.[198] As well as this "Play of Resurrection" on Easter and the Play of Nativity at Christmas, they performed songs during the earl's banquets.[199] As Suzanne Westfall has pointed out, a chapel "could create a more extravagant display" than a travelling troupe and the trained boys of a chapel choir ensured that female roles were appropriately covered.[200] The chapel at Wressle was indeed "a remarkable theatre space," that allowed for performance on multiple levels of elevation.

Exploring Wressle as a performance site does not help us pinpoint the provenance of these plays, but it does reveal the exchanges between civic, ecclesiastical and courtly dramatic traditions in the time and region in which these plays were recorded. Percy was "an outstanding patron of drama and the arts."[201] During winter, he employed a four-person troupe of actors for the "Playing of Playe[s] and Interludes."[202] Like his father before him, he also maintained players that moved between Selby Abbey and his household.[203] This troupe clearly moved between secular and monastic

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[197] "I have yet to find another contemporary musical use of 'pallinodio'. It presumably means singing the sections alternately in plainsong or polyphony or simply alternating the sections between the singers." Meredith, "The Bodley Burial," 150–151. David Klausner translates it as in "polyphony or at least in antiphonal style." Klausner, "Music in Drama," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Music*, eds. Mark Everist and Thomas Forest Kelly (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 193.

[198] Suzanne R. Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 15.

[199] Marina Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance* (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 191.

[200] Westfall, *Patrons and Performance*, 16.

[201] Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain*, 11.

[202] Percy and Percy, *The Regulations*, 351. Lancashire, *Two Tudor Interludes: The Interlude of Youth, Hick Scorner* (Manchester University Press, 1980), 27.

[203] Lancashire, "Orders for Twelfth Day and Night," 11–12. Wickham, *Early English Stages*, 1, 332–333.

patronage. Percy also employed an almoner, which the household book stipulates should have a "Servaunt to the intent for Writynge of the Parts," if that Almoner "be a maker of Interludys."[204] As Ian Lancashire points out, "[w]e know the almoner must have been writing plays in about 1511 because a servant for him appears in the household meal schedule that spring." It has been suggested *The Interlude of Youth* was written for the Percy household as part of this office.[205]

In 1519–1520, the town council of Beverley paid a poet William Peeris/Pyers to travel from Wressle to Beverley to alter their Corpus Christi play.[206] Peeris has been identified as the Percy's secretary, who wrote a short chronicle of the Percy family.[207] It seems, then, that Percy bequeathed the services of this professional poet to the town.[208] We can therefore see a direct literary transference between the town and the Great House. Percy's ties with Beverley were strong; he was buried in the minster and, as Lancashire suggests, "would have seen its now-lost cycle."[209] Though the Beverley scripts have been lost, there exists an assignment list of the full cycle dating from around

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[204] Percy and Percy, *The Regulations*, 44.

[205] Lancashire, "Orders for Twelfth Day and Night ," 13; Lancashire, *Two Tudor Interludes*, 27–30.

[206] Beverley: East Riding County Record Office, BC/II/6/17. "Et (computantes petunt allocacionem) de vij s expendis per xcij^{cim} gubernatores existentes cum domino Willelmo pyers poet apud domum Edwardi Metcalff pro condictibus secum faciendis pro transposicione Ludus corporis christi." Quoted in Diane Wyatt, "The Untimely Disappearance of the Beverley Cycle: What the Records Can and Can't Tell Us," *Medieval English Theatre* 30 (2008) 26–38. A. F. Leach, ed., *Report on the Manuscripts of the Corporation of Beverley* (H. M. Stationery Office, 1900): 179. P. J. P. Goldberg, "Performing the Word of God: Corpus Christi Drama in the Northern Province," *Studies in Church History*, *Subsidia* 12 (1999): 145–170, 155.

[207] Wyatt, "The Untimely Disappearance," 31.

[208] P. J. P. Goldberg, "Performing the Word of God: Corpus Christi Drama in the Northern Province," *Studies in Church History*, *Subsidia* 12 (1999): 145–170, 155.

[209] Lancashire, "Orders for Twelfth Day and Night," 16.

the time Museo was written in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.[210] Lawrence Clopper suggests that the brevity of the titles in this document suggest that they were "spectacles rather than drama [...] *tableaux vivantes* with speeches."[211] Diana Wyatt argues instead that the list's terseness reflects "that particular scribe's sense of the theatrical impact, rather than the narrative content, of the pageants."[212] The passion at Beverley was divided into ten component pageants; the "Scorgynge," "Streynynge" and "Stanginge" for example, all belong to separate guilds. The "Streynynge" probably dramatised the stretching of Christ's limbs on the cross, while the "Stanginge," may refer to the Longinus episode.[213] After this, comes "the Takinge of the Crose," (Barkers), the "haryinge of hell" (Cookes) and "the Resurrection" (Wrightes). This deposition performance, the "Takinge of the Crose" thus operated as a discrete dramatic entity. This was the case for other lost pageants: at Hereford, for example, there was a separate *Sepultura Christi*, and Newcastle upon Tyne had a burial of Christ pageant.[214] In the York, Chester, and Towneley collections, by contrast, the deposition is folded into a passion narrative so that a live actor is needed for Christ.[215]

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[210] Great Guild Book, East Riding Archives, BC/II/3, folio 1^{r}. Reproduced, transcribed and discussed in Wyatt, "Play Titles without Play Texts: What Can They Tell Us, and How? An Investigation of the Evidence for the Beverley Corpus Christi Play," *Staging Scripture Biblical Drama, 1350-1600*, eds. Happé and Wim Hüsken (Brill Rodopi, 2016).

[211] Clopper, *Drama, Play and Game*, 153. See also Goldberg, "From Tableaux to Text: The York Corpus Christi Play ca. 1378–1428," *Viator* 43, no. 2 (2012): 247–276.

[212] Wyatt, "Play Titles without Play Texts," 71.

[213] Wyatt, "Play Titles without Play Texts," 74–76.

[214] Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records*, 153, 231.

[215] Play 36, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. Davidson (Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), 302–312; Play XVIa, *Chester Cycle*, 303–324; Play 20, *The Towneley Plays*, ed. Garret P. J. Epp (Medieval Institute

Whether the Beverley "Takinge of the Crose" was a silent tableaux or a spoken drama, a movable sculpture of Christ crucified might have been a useful instrument of performance. As I explore in chapter three, the movable sculpture allows the moment of deposition to be drawn out indefinitely, as it is light and can be comfortably suspended for longer than a human actor. Beverley's division of the passion into "Scorgynge," "Streynynge," and "Stanginge" reveals a particular interest in elaborate displays of violence, which, as we shall see in chapter two, were often accomplished using dummies in medieval drama. The guild book that contains the Beverley pageant list also hints at the presence of such a sculpture in the city: the millers maintained light in front of an image of Christ in the sepulchre.[216] This may or may not have been removable from its sepulchre, but it is clear that guilds were familiar with the iconography of the dead Christ. The Beverley Corpus Christi burial and resurrection, (which Peeris seems to have had a hand in), the Wressle resurrection and the Bodley plays all took place in the same geographic area, around the same time. Though there is nothing to say that direct textual borrowing took place between these performances, *Christ's Burial* was certainly situated in a vibrant nexus of drama production.

Leanne Groeneveld has outlined possible performance contexts for these plays within medieval Hull, taking the Charterhouse there as a speculative birthplace for the manuscript. If we consider a performance within that Charterhouse, she suggests that the most likely scenario is that it was executed by lay brothers for the benefit of townsfolk

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Publications, 2018), 275-293. N-Town has a separate burial play, but the deposition and lament are so short a live actor could comfortably play it. Play 34, *N-Town Plays*, lines 1–137, 275–279;

[216] Baggs et al., "Medieval Beverley."

on an "outside stage, perhaps in the outer court, the most public part of the charterhouse" and "screened from the great cloister."[217] She concludes, however, that this is "at best improbable."[218] Instead, Groeneveld puts forward the Augustinian or Carmelite monasteries, as well as two institutions connected to the Hull charterhouse – St Michael's hospital and the Alcock Chapel of Holy Trinity Church – as possible venues. The Alcock Chapel was endowed with a chaplaincy for the education of local boys, and the chaplain was able to use some of this money to hire the parish clerk as a singing teacher. As Glynne Wickham writes:

> plays which make the fullest use of songs and music are those, as we would expect, which were composed for occasional performance by schoolboys or students where the play-maker could anticipate easy access to trained voices and skilled instrumentalists at no extra cost.[219]

The Hull parish clerk John Huyk (d. 1514) was "an enthusiastic musician" and would have been well-placed to train boys for this performance.[220] We also know that the Alcock singers participated in civic entertainment; they were paid for "syngyng in the shipp" in the lost mariners play of Noah, which featured a wheeled galleon, large enough to hold sixteen people drawn through the city.[221] Between seasons, this ship was hung by ropes in a transept of Holy Trinity Church, a material detail attesting to the imbrication of

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[217] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 54.

[218] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 55.

[219] Wickham, *Plays and Their Makers up to 1576* (Routledge, 2002), 154.

[220] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 61

[221] Hull University Archives, Trinity Guild Accounts, U DX28/10, 1498. Transcribed in Anna J. Mill, "The Hull Noah Play," *The Modern Language Review* 33, no. 4 (1938): 489–505, 499. The "structure could accommodate, in however cramped a fashion, the Noah family of eight plus an eight-strong choir." Wyatt, "Arks, Crafts and Authorities: Textual and Contextual Evidence for North-Eastern English Noah Plays," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 43 (2013): 48–68, 59.

theatrical and church spaces in this period.[222] Parishioners would have celebrated mass beside and beneath this shadowy behemoth and I imagine that it might have functioned as an *ex-voto* in the hearts of some in this sea-faring community.[223]

Groeneveld's exploration of the possible performance sites of the Museo plays allows her to draw out thematic resonances in the texts; for example, she suggests that the themes of childhood and filial duty in *Christ's Burial* might have had special meaning for the Alcock students. The play also "makes frequent reference to the care and healing of the sick, both in its exposition and imagery," which might have taken on special significance within St Michael's hospital.[224] I will expand upon this suggestion in chapter three, exploring how this medical hermeneutic organises the somatic relationship between the characters and the corpus at the heart of the play.

We cannot know who performed these plays, or where. Nevertheless "site-specific" enquiries can offer fruitful readings of early drama. As Groeneveld concludes:

> Free to speculate about performance venues, we should consider not only where the plays could have been performed but also where their performance would have been especially meaningful, to the actors and audience members who presented and enjoyed them, to the Carthusian who transcribed them – and maybe even, though last of all, to us today [...] Personally, I am moved by the idea that actors could have presented these plays as consolation to the old, the poor, and the chronically ill, or that a young boy may have spoken as Mary about the grief she experienced at the loss of her son.'[225]

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[222] From around the mid-sixteenth century it seems it was hung in the Wool House instead. Mill, "The Hull Noah Play," 494.

[223] Hannah Baader, "Vows on Water: Ship Ex-Votos as Things, Metaphors, and Mediators of Communality," in *Ex Voto: Votive Giving Across Cultures*, ed. Ittai Weinryb (Bard Graduate Center, 2016), 223–236.

[224] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 59.

[225] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 68.

Informed speculation, then, can draw out the affective potential of a script. As Clare Wright notes, medieval drama was "by nature site-specific, or at least siteconscious." Her essay on the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* attests not only to the socio-political ramifications of a particular performance site, but also to those we might class as embodied and emotional.[226]

[226]Wright, "Body, Site and Memory in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," in *Performing Environments: Site-Specificity in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama*, eds. Susan Bennett and Mary Polito (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 159.

Chapter Two: Violence on the European Stage

The previous chapter sketched possible local contexts for *Christ's Burial*. One of the challenges to reanimating the performance conditions of this play is that it is so unusual in an Anglophone context. To date, no extensive study of the text has examined this script's continental equivalents. This chapter seeks to redress this gap, broadening our understanding of the material conditions of *Christ's Burial* by looking at it within a European context. As many scholars have demonstrated, in order to understand a script, the theatre historian must create a "thick description" of the historic performance event, drawing together a network of textual, cultural and visual practices.[1]

With insufficient scope for a full comparative analysis of European vernacular burial plays, this chapter focuses on contextualising the movable sculpture within the spectrum of violence on the European stage. Movable sculptures are church objects sometimes adopted by the laity for performance purposes. But they can also be understood as a theatrical effect, with particular aesthetic outcomes. My primary continental texts are the two German burial plays (*Grablegungsspiele*) in the Debs Codex. Both plays date from around the same time as *Christ's Burial* and are also thought to require a movable sculpture of Christ crucified in performance. Surprisingly

[1] Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (University of Michigan Press, 2003), 4. "Thick description" is Geertz's term; "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

little has been written on these plays, and this chapter looks closely at the dynamics of their staging to better understand the affective potential of violence in *Christ's Burial*.

Although neither *Christ's Burial* or *Christ's Resurrection* stages a wounding of the corpus, the scripts present an opportunity for a dynamic staging of fluid blood. This chapter will first outline the role of blood in *Christ's Burial* and *Christ's Resurrection*, placing it within the context of the aesthetic principles of violence on the medieval stage. "Il faut du sang" (there must be blood) continues to serve as "an epigraph for medieval drama."[2] Scholars continually assess the epistemological identity and aesthetic impact of blood and dismemberment onstage.[3] This discussion draws off previous scholarship on the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and the Chester "Innocents"; the staged violence of these plays produces a generative, unresolved dialectic between the content of the play and its onstage presentation.

The chapter then turns to the Debs *Grablegungsspiele*, building a picture of the material conditions of performance, as well as the identities and concerns of the makers and artisans involved in its production. This discussion draws together several threads running through this dissertation, such as the fragility of theatrical records and interrelation between textual production and artisanal craft. As Sofer writes, "by attuning us to the sheer material heft of what occupies the stage, together with its mobility in time

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[2] Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty*, 5; John Spalding Gatton, "'There Must Be Blood': Mutilation and Martyrdom on the Medieval Stage," in *Violence in Drama*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[3] Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (University of Chicago Press, 2002); Michael O'Connell, "Blood Begetting Blood: Shakespeare and the Mysteries," in *Medieval Shakespeare*, eds. Ruth Morse, Helen Cooper, and Peter Holland (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

and space, props invite us to read drama in five dimensions."[4] One of the Debs plays stages Longinus' lancing, offering a clear opportunity for the kind of special effects we can see in the Döbeln *Mirakelmann* (c.1510) – a movable sculpture of Christ crucified that could be made to bleed. In many ways, this object represents a "Höhepunkt" of the craft of producing veristic corpses for performance.[5] Schulze writes that the *Mirakelmann* "ist nicht mehr nur Symbol für das Ostergeschehen, sie ist gleichzeitig auch Stellvertreter des Darstellers des Christus beim Passionsspiel." [6] The distinction he draws is a subtle one, but one I believe cuts to the heart of the difficulty of reading these plays and seeing clearly the occluded object at their heart. If we imagine a continuum between stage dummy and devotional object, it is unclear where the *Mirakelmann* sits.

2.1 Blood in *Christ's Burial*

As we saw in the previous chapter, the scribe of the *Christ's Burial* and *Christ's Resurrection* noted their timings: "This is a play to be played on p*ar*t on gudfri<day> afte*r*none *and* þe other p*ar*t opon Este*r*day aft<er> the resurrection In the morowe" (140^{v}). In his formulation, *Christ's Burial* and *Christ's Resurrection* constitute two parts of the same "play," divided by a long interval. I have treated them as distinct plays because my focus is on the corpus of *Christ's Burial*. To a modern reader at least, they feel distinct. Though certain themes, like the ambivalence of lament, carry over between

[4] Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 6.

[5] Shulze describes it as "den Höhepunkt eines langen Entwicklungweges in Konstruktion, Technologie und Realitätsnähe." Schulze, "Der sogenannte Mirakelmann," 127. "The culmination of a long journey of development in construction, technology and verism."

[6] Shulze, "Der sogenannte Mirakelmann," 128. "It is not merely the symbol for the events of Easter, it is also simultaneously a stand-in for the Christ actor in the Passion play."

the two, they operate as separate plays. In *Christ's Resurrection*, Christ is a living character; otherwise, the only contiguous characters are John and the three Maries (Magdalene, Cleophas and Jacoby). The scripts offer the sudarium as the only material link between the two plays.

As we shall see in chapter three and four, *Christ's Burial* often figures the extrusion and exchange of liquids: blood, tears and milk. Throughout the play, blood functions as exegetical metaphor and material fact. The corpus is referred to deictically as "[t]his bludy body" (495; 542; 656); "[t]his bludy lammes body" (31). The displayed wounds on the corpus are described as "bludy welles" (307) "bludy streymes" (311). We are asked to "[s]e alle abowte the bludy streynes" (622). Blood sometimes threatens to overwhelm his image: "[a]ll is but blude, so bett was hee" (628–629). Reading the play, one gets the impression of a figure awash with blood, of the type seen in devotional images of the period, for example this woodcut from a Latin miscellany of possible Carthusian origin (figure thirteen).[7] As I explore in chapter three, the distorting ex-sangination described throughout the play may have found parity with the appearance of the sculpture used in performance. The characters consistently demand apprehension of this physical detail: "[l]oo this lamme spared not to shedd his blude" (74); "Lo, alle his

[7] Marlene Villalobos Hennessy, "British Library, MS Egerton 1821: Devotional Practice and Book Production at the London Charterhouse," in *The Capital's Charterhouses and the Record of English Carthusianism*, ed. Julian Luxford (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2023); Nancy Thebaut, "Bleeding Pages, Bleeding Bodies: A Gendered Reading of British Library MS Egerton 1821," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 45, no. 2 (2010): 175–200.

body with blude is wete, / So paynfulle was his presse" (262–263); here the "wet" blood takes on Christological significance as a Christ-in-the-winepress image.[8]

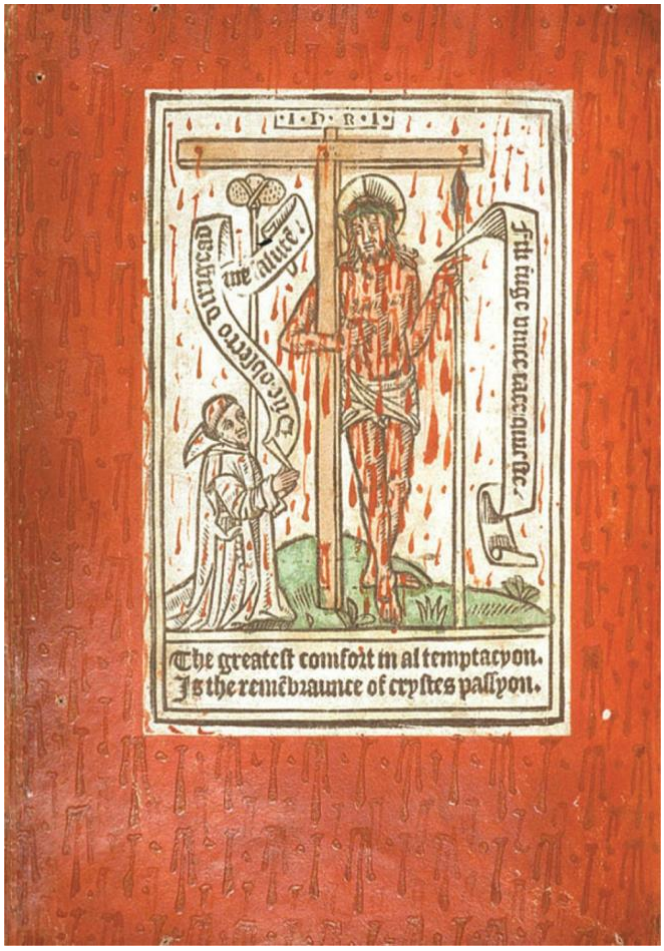


Figure 13. Man of Sorrows with kneeling Carthusian c. 1490, England. British Library, Ms. Egerton 1821, folio 9^{v}.

Christ's Burial foregrounds the corpus – both still and in motion – as its core "spectakille" (101, 322). In consistently describing this semi-static body, the text is fundamentally ekphrastic. As I will show in chapter four, the play also knowingly plays on the ekphrastic foundations of vernacular lyrics. Yet we must proceed with caution. *Christ's Burial* falls short of the modern conception of ekphrasis in two ways: first, the

[8] Elina Gertsman, "Multiple Impressions: Christ in the Winepress and the Semiotics of the Printed Image," *Art History* 36, no. 2 (2013): 310–337.

corpus is not strictly speaking an artwork, but a persona – either an actor or (more likely) a sculpture representing the dead Christ. To move forward, we must broaden our sense of ekphrasis, which in medieval literature was often bound up with personification, so that artworks are described as persona and people are described as artworks.[9] Scholars have emphasised the extent to which ekphrasis in medieval and classical literature was not simply the description of an absent artwork, but an *enargeia*, a vivid description that makes it seem that something is occurring before their very eyes.[10] As Ruth Webb writes, "[t]he most striking aspect of the subjects for ekphrasis for the modern reader is the variety: we find battles, crocodiles, cities, buildings, people and festivals."[11]

Second, unlike other "ekphrastic bod[ies]" in medieval literature, the corpus is patently *present* in performance.[12] In seeking to reconstruct the affordances of the corpus from the words of the play, my argument risks performing "reverse ekphrasis," an exercise that falsely assumes a stable mimetic relationship between ekphrasis and its

[9] Hartley Miller, "Guillaume de Lorris and the Speaking Image Personification, Ekphrasis, and Poetic Creation," in *The Living Image in the Middle Ages and Beyond: Theoretical and Historical Approaches*, eds. Kopania, Henning Laugerud, and Zuzanna Sarnecka (Routledge, 2025).

[10] Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Ashgate, 2009), 61.

[11] Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*, 87–106.

[12] See Claire Barbetti's discussion of Pearl, in Barbetti, *Ekphrastic Medieval Visions: A New Discussion in Interarts Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 39–59.

subject.[13] In fact, the complexity of ekphrastic passages "utterly resists their being translated into visual form."[14]

> Partial in every sense of the word, medieval ekphrasis inevitably distorts its object of description by the superlatives in which it trades. Stating this idea more strongly, ekphrasis can be said to transform its object by virtue of its poetic mediation. It ultimately constitutes the reality of the object whether or not that object exists as historical artifact.[15]

The language of the play is not in service to the manifest corpus onstage, rather the two interact dialectically. The play's rhetoric, abounding in *enargia* and *sapheneia* (clarity) produces *phantasia* (mental images) which, in turn, shape the audience's perception of the corpus.[16] What the play says about the corpus and what the corpus actually was are fundamentally connected but there is not a straightforward transfer of meaning between the two.

Having said this, there are implicit cues that intimate a kind of onstage violence beyond ekphrastic descriptions of a bloodied corpus. Although neither play stages a wounding, the two scripts offer an opportunity to dynamically stage fluid blood. As Sarah Brazil has shown, vernacular drama increasingly emphasised Christ's "bloodied body" even after his resurrection, reflecting the devotional trends of the late Middle Ages, a

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[13] Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), xiv. Valerie Allen, "Ekphrasis and the Object," in *The Art of Vision : Ekphrasis in Medieval Literature and Culture*, eds. Andrew James Johnston, Ethan Knapp, and Margitta Rouse (Ohio State University Press, 2015), 26.

[14] Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, xiv.

[15] Allen, "Ekphrasis and the Object," 27.

[16] Froma I. Zeitlin, "Figure: Ekphrasis," *Greece & Rome* 60, no. 1 (2013): 17–31.

process that "recast how cloth might mediate the event."[17] In the *Visitatio Sepulchri* texts of the *Regularis Concordia*, Barking, and Wilton (1250–1320), the clean cloth is displayed to the congregation as a sign that Christ has risen, an action which reflects its purpose in the Gospels.[18] The folded graveclothes signify absence. This is true of other Middle English treatments; as the angel in the York "Resurrection" puts it: "The place is voide þat he in laye / The sundary here se ye may / Was on hym laide."[19] John expresses a similar comment in the N-Town "Resurrection":

> The same sudary and the same shete
> Here with my syth I se both tweyn.
> Now may I wele knowe and wete
> That he is rysyn to lyve ageyn.[20]

The play does nothing more with the "sudary," leaving it in the grave as a token of absence.

The sudarium serves a different and "dramatically distinctive" function in *Christ's Resurrection*.[21] The angel tells Mary Magdalene:

> Loo! Here is the cloth droppid blud,
> Which was put on hym takyn of þe rud,
> Ose your-self did see.
> For a remembrance, tak it yee,
> And hy yow fast to Galilee –

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[17] Brazil, *The Corporeality of Clothing in Medieval Literature Cognition, Kinesis, and the Sacred* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 68.

[18] John 20: 7; Brazil, *The Corporeality of Clothing*, 63, 69.

[19] Play 38, *York Corpus Christi Plays*, lines 242–244, 329.

[20] Play 36, *N-Town Plays*, lines 135–138, 296.

[21] Brazil, *The Corporeality of Clothing*, 79.

For ther apper shalle hee![22]

The splashed cloth serves as a "remembrance," pointing backwards in narrative time. The angel reminds Mary Magdalene that she saw the cloth put on the body. This statement would have also included the audience. In *Christ's Burial*, the Virgin complains that Christ's face is obscured by this cloth – "Yit Iosephe, agayn the cloth ye vnfold, / That his graciose visage I may ons behold" (*CB*, 817–818). Joseph denies her this, and the corpus is buried. The audience therefore would have seen Christ's face be veiled by the headcloth, a dramatic act that may have reminded them of the whole gamut of Christ's *Acheiropoetoi*, cult images "made without hands," the most important being Veronica's veil, which is also called the sudarium.[23] I would push Brazil's argument further and suggest that if the sudarium was indeed bloodstained in *Christ's Resurrection*, then *Christ's Burial* offers the opportunity to stage a live *acheiropoieton*, in which "wet" blood transfers onto the sudarium when Christ is veiled. Thus, when the angel describes the stained cloth as a "remembrance" of the deposition, the materiality of the prop carries this point; the audience would be reminded of the staged moment in *Christ's Burial*. The *non manufactum* image is artificially reproduced onstage, paradoxically pointing to its own artifice.

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[22] *CR*, 162–167

[23] Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 80–127.

Mary Magdalene's answer to the angel further emphasises both the bloodiness and the mnemonic function of the cloth. She wholly ignores the angel's command to hurry to Galilee where Christ will appear and turns her attention to the sudarium:

> O, what myn harte is hevy and lothe
> When I beholde this piteose clothe,
> Which in my hande is here!
> This cloth with blude þat is so stayned,
> Of a maydens child so sor constraynid,
> On cross when he was done![24]

Again, she reminds the audience that the "blude" that "stayned" the cloth has come from the post-mortem body. She continues in this vein: "O rygore vnright! O crueltee" (177). It is almost as if she cannot look past the blood on the cloth that triggers recollection, and her speech ends in despair: "Mynding the payn my Lord and master felte! / O, in my body my herte now dothe melte! / To dy I were content" (182–185). As we shall see in the next chapter, these limpid feelings hark back to the dangers of lament presented in *Christ's Burial*, so that Mary Magdalene is cast in a regressive cycling of remembering.

2.2 Blood as Special Effect on the European Stage

A great deal has been written on the techniques, aesthetic impact and semiotics of violence on the medieval stage.[25] Though violence may have titillated audiences, it also served an important function within the "incarnational aesthetic" of late medieval

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[24] *CR*, 171-176.

[25] Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), especially chapter six. Davidson, "Sacred Blood and the Late Medieval Stage," *Comparative Drama* 31, no. 3 (1997): 436–458.

culture.[26] For the Dominican Giacomo Bianconi of Bevagna (d.1301), for example, being addressed by a wooden crucifix and squirted with blood was "one of the high points of a life served as a preacher, a prior and an author of religious texts."[27] As Gibson writes, "to see the Word made Flesh in the image of a moving statue or a player's feigned, bloody hands – these are the concrete and incarnational devotions of the fifteenth century."[28] Medieval theories of sight were grounded in a physical transfer between viewer and object, so that seeing was sacramentally charged.[29] Furthermore, within the legal and scientific framework of cruentation, public displays of blood held a special claim to truth.[30]

Production records from the period demonstrate the care and ingenuity with which craftspeople produced technical feats on the stage. As Laura Weigert writes:

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[26] Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 12.

[27] Peter Dent, "To Which the Crucifix Replied: The Phenomenology of the Animate Image," *The Living Image in the Middle Ages and Beyond*, 53.

[28] Gibson, *The Theatre of Devotion*, 18.

[29] Dent, "To Which the Crucifix Replied," 59; Merback, "The Living Image of Pity: Mimetic Violence, Peace-Making and Salvific Spectacle in the Flagellant Processions of the Later Middle Ages," in *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, eds. Debra Higgs Strickland and Gary Dickson (Brill, 2007), 174–175; There is a vast critical literature on medieval optics. Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*; Michael Camille, "Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197–223; Dallas G. Denery, *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology, and Religious Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). For the relevance of this to medieval drama, see Andrea Louise Young, *Vision and Audience in Medieval Drama: A Study of The Castle of Perseverance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[30] Lesel Dawson, "'In Every Wound There is a Bloody Tongue': Cruentation in Early Modern Literature and Psychology," in *Blood Matters: Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400-1700*, eds. Eleanor Decamp and Bonnie Lander Johnson (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). Bettina Bildhauer, "Medieval European Conceptions of Blood: Truth and Human Integrity," in *Blood Will out : Essays on Liquid Transfers and Flows*, ed. Janet Carsten, (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

> The knowledge and skill required to create such effects was jealously guarded and transmitted from person to person. The secrecy around these aspects of a performance was linked to the complexity of their fabrication; they often supported someone's claim to fame.[31]

Documents revealing such trade secrets were therefore relatively rare, produced not for dissemination but for the use of independent communities of craftspeople. As such, they show diverse methods that have evolved convergently to answer a particular ideological or aesthetic need: in this case, bloodshed.

On a purely material level, blood was made out of a variety of substances. Domesticated animals could be harvested for blood and viscera; in the passion play at Mons, for example, Judas' burst stomach was achieved using a bag of pigs' entrails hidden under his costume.[32] Animal blood, however, tends to coagulate so stage blood was often made of pigments like vermillion suspended in water or vinegar. The Vienna Corpus Christi confraternity of Stephan, for example, bought "prisilig zu dem pluot."[33] Brazilwood was commonly used for organic lakes used for manuscript illumination, a material detail that attests to the connections between performance and textual reproduction, what Sofer calls "material heft of what occupies the stage."[34] Painters of the period sometimes showed a forensic interest in capturing the coagulation of blood as a way of marking temporality, "dramatic effects" that turned a still painting into a

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[31] Weigert, *French Visual Culture*, 121.

[32] Lynette Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 132.

[33] "Brazilwood for the blood." Diözesanarchiv Wien, Rechnungen der "Gottsleichnamszeche", Stadtpfarrei, St Stephan, 1506, GSZZ, 2882, page 712. Ellis Amity Light, "Fluxing Fellowship: Bodily Fluids and Forms of Community in Medieval Devotional Literature," (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2023), 77.

[34] Maria João Melo et al., "Organic Dyes in Illuminated Manuscripts: A Unique Cultural and Historic Record," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, Series A, 374, no. 2082 (2016): 1–20. Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 6.

dramatic event.[35] Paintings of the pietà, for example, sometimes show "dried tracks of blood" on the Christ's corpus, that "alert the observer to his former vertical position on the cross."[36] Blood not only jolts the viewer into the shock of the present, it is also registers the past, creating a thick, suspended moment.

Craftspeople employed innumerable techniques with which to apply or disseminate blood onstage. The costume notes of the Lucerne Passion specify that Barrabas and Boos should have "kolben [...] von läder vnd vornen mit bluottschwümmen, den Schahen Arm vnd bein zuo brechen."[37] Malchus (who loses an ear) was equipped with "ein schwumm mitt bluott an das or zegriffen," while Christ's torturers were to carry "ein geschirr mitt bluottfarb, die ruotten vnd geisslen darinn zenetzen."[38] The stage directions for a fifteenth-century passion play in Revello, southern Italy reveal how the Christ actor is made to look like he was sweating blood: "se extenda su el zafaldo sopra la soa faza, et di sotto sya uno chy pinga la faza et le mane di colore virmiglo como sudasse."[39] The so-called *Volume of Secrets of a Provençal Stage*

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[35] Beate Fricke, "A Liquid History: Blood and Animation in Late Medieval Art," *Res* 63/64 (2013): 53–69.

[36] Fricke, "A Liquid History," 54.

[37] Bürgerbibliothek, Lucerne, MS 172 V B, folios 2^{r}–33^{v}. Edited text in M. Blakemore Evans, *The Passion Play of Lucerne: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1975), 176–214, 209."Clubs made of leather, with blood sponges at the front, to break the thieves' arms and legs." Trans., Tydemann, *The Medieval European Stage: 500-1550* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 384.

[38] Evans, *The Passion Play of Lucerne*, 209–210. "[A] sponge with blood to hold up to his ear"; "a pot with blood colouring, to wet the scourges and rods." Trans., Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, 385.

[39] Anna Cornagliotti, ed., *La Passione di Revello*, (Centro Studi Piemontesi, 1976), lines 578b–e, 129. "Then he shall stretch out on the stage (zafaldo) on his face, and underneath there shall be someone who shall paint his face and hands with crimson paint as if he were sweating." Trans. Meredith and John E. Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in Translation*, trans. Raffaella Ferrari et al. (Medieval Institute Publications, 1983), 108. Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, 435; Butterworth, "Juggling and Staging Tricks," 288.

Director's Book, written in Waldensian, details complex and diverse technical apparatus for staging a religious play.[40] Dating to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century, the text appears to have been intended either for personal use or a close group of technicians.[41] It describes many different ways to produce violent effects, including an extremely complex, pressurised hydraulic machine for the crucifixion that allows blood to squirt out different termini.[42] It also reveals how an actor can be made to look as though he is sweating blood for the Agony in the Garden, worth quoting in full. The actor must:

> porte una falsa
> paruca, e que meta
> jostot la paruca,
> qua<n>t la vora me[t-]
> re sus son cap, .ii. ho
> tres spongos ben a-
> sequados totas p[le-]
> nas de vermelo b[en]
> destrempat e que
> se garde de quacha
> la paruca juscos
> que volra susa, que,
> quant se volra
> postra en terra, que
> meta las mos su[s]

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[40] Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale MS X 29. The text is edited in Alessandro Vitale-Brovarone, *Il Quaderno di Segreti d'un Regista Provenzale del Medioevo: Note per la Messa in Scena d'una Passione* (Edizioni dell'Orso, 1984). See also Lynette R. Muir, "Playing God in Medieval Europe," in *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Alan E. Knight (DS Brewer, 1997), 33. Plesch, "Notes for Staging a Late-Medieval Passion Play."

[41] Vitale-Brovarone, *Il quaderno di segreti*, xii.

[42] Vitale-Brovarone, *Il quaderno di segreti*, xvii.

> e quache fort [e]
> las spongos redo[.. ver-]
> melo que auran be[..][43]

The watered-down pigment is held in the sponges until it is squeezed out by the actor when he puts his hands to his head. The audience have thus witnessed blood seeping from Christ's hairline and scalp.

One of the most important woundings in the Passion narrative is performed by Longinus, who opens Christ's side to prove that he has died, a moment which was played out in Passion performances across Europe. The Chester "Judgment," for example, "explicitly requires a hydraulic effect for Jesus to send out blood from his side [...] possibly reaching four performers."[44] Christ says to the souls: "[l]ooke on mee / and see my bloode freshe owt flee" and the stage direction reads, "Tunc emittet sangiunem de latere eius."[45] The account books of St Stephen note, among payments for other properties, "[d]em zingiesser von dem spiess zu machen," which suggests they too used a hydraulic implement lance for Longinus.[46] Similarly, as Richard Beadle writes:

> The property spear used at York must have been a specialised device incorporating a reservoir containing a dark red liquid, which at the moment of the piercing is made to flow down the shaft to stain Longinus' hands. [...] The butchers of York seem to have been particularly devoted to this episode, and especially to

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[43] Turin, MS X 29, folios 12^{v}–13^{r}. I have followed Vitale-Brovarone's transcription conventions; the hand is untidy and the manuscript has been damaged. Vitale-Brovarone, *Il quaderno di segreti*, 26–27. "Jesus must wear a wig and when he puts it on he must put underneath it two or three carefully positioned sponges, full of vermillion well diluted and must be careful not to press on the wig until the moment when he wants to sweat blood so that when he prostrates himself on the ground he must put his hand on his head and press firmly so that the sponges spout forth the vermillion that they have absorbed." Translation in Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, 317.

[44] Sergi, *Practical Cues*, 211, 216.

[45] Play XXIV, *Chester Cycle*, lines 425–426, line 428a, 453.

[46] Diözesanarchiv Wien, Rechnungen der "Gottsleichnamszeche," St Stephan, 1506, folio 31^{r}. GSZZ, 2883, page 713. "To make the tin spout in the spear."

> the spear of the Passion, for some of them bequeathed small silver replicas of it as votive objects to their local church of Holy Trinity, King's Square.[47]

Beadle here implies some connection between the butchers' trade and their stage effects and one wonders whether their replica spears were seen to commemorate the performance or the holy object itself.

Violent deaths could also be achieved through the strategic use of puppets, which were exchanged for actors. We can see this at work in the 1580 Antichrist play in Modane in the French Alps. The town employed two craftsmen, a father and son, who were masters of pyrotechnics and stage devices. They made two puppets designed to look identical to two Jesuits killed in the play; these puppets were stuffed with entrails and blood that burst out when they were cut in half. They also made prosthetics:

> Et trouveront moyen, par engin et industrie, tirer les deux yeux de la teste du catholique avec brochettes poignantes, et à ces fins, feront les yeux et faux visages nécessaires ou autrement, le plus dextrement qu'ils pourront.[48]

This detail again shows the connections between artistic craft and theatrical production in the period; special effects were highly valued skills, to which one must apply "engin et industrie" to get right. We might call the Jesuit puppets the made "dummies," a term that conveys a certain type of handling onstage. A dummy is not made to portray independent

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[47] Beadle, "The Material World of the York Plays," in *York: Art, Architecture and Archaeology*, eds. Sarah Brown, Sarah Rees Jones, and Tim Ayers (Routledge, 2021), 248.

[48] Louis Gros, *Etude sur le Mystère de l'Antéchrist et du Jugement de Dieu* (Imprimeries Réunies, 1962), 29. "They shall paint five or six souls, and they shall find some means by skill and cunning to put out the eyes of the catholics with pointed skewers and to this end they shall make the necessary eyes and false faces or some alternative as skilfully as they can." Trans, Meredith and John E. Tailby, eds., *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in Translation*, trans. Raffaella Ferrari et al. (Medieval Institute Publications, 1983), 104–105. Butterworth, *Magic*, 148; Light, "Fluxing Fellowship," 77–78, n. 54.

movement, but is rather the insentient recipient of action. As William Tydeman writes of the medieval stage:

> [D]ummies were fashioned to be thrown through the air, tossed into the flames of Hell, decapitated, burnt in ovens, torn limb from limb, or carved up. Only thus could St Denis, for example, in the long French saint play be whipped, racked, tormented on a red hot grill, assaulted by wild animals, steeped in a furnace, crucified, and beheaded, his bones broken and his bowels exposed through his slit belly. Only thus could the naked St Barbara be shown bound to a stake, beaten burnt, and deprived of her breasts, rolled in a nail-studded barrel, and dragged over a mountain by the hair before final execution.[49]

Either these were entirely expendable, or required extensive repairs post-production. Sometimes they were stuffed with smaller puppets that emerged when their entrails were spilt, representing the soul leaving the body.[50] The spectators would have thus seen the character onstage not only ripped apart, but also rendered into two constituent parts – body and soul. The term "dummy" undermines the aesthetic and theological complexity of these scenes. As we saw in the Modane Antichrist play, such objects were also the product of careful and refined artistry, acting as an extension of the living body onstage.

Given these exchanges between actor and puppet, it is sometimes unclear whether a given record implies one or the other. It is unclear whether St Thomas Beckett in the pageant performed at Canterbury between 1504 and 1538 was a person with a

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[49] Tydeman, *The Theatre in the Middle Ages: Western European Stage Conditions, c. 800-1576* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 177.

[50] The *Volume of Secrets of a Provençal Stage Director's Book* suggests the use of an "arma contrafacha," a counterfeit soul for Judas, as well as for the thieves and possibly even for Christ. Turin, MS X 29, folios 4^{v}–5^{r}, 8^{v}, 9^{v}. Vitale-Brovarone, *Il quaderno di segreti*, 10–11, 18, 20. Butterworth, *Magic,* 148.

prosthetic or a puppet.[51] A payment for "x ownc*es* of vermylon" and "a new leder bag for y^{e} blode," implies that the production of blood was sudden and generous; Beckett, after all, had the crown of his head removed.[52] Yet, as Davidson writes:

> [i]t is not entirely clear whether Thomas in this pageant was an actor or a puppet (the angel attending the pageant, however, was surely mechanical and operated by a "vyse"), but the records show that his head or mask was frequently repaired and repainted – possibly a sign of damage from swords of the actors who played the knights. He may have been played by a boy actor wearing a protective headpiece to prevent injury in the simulated murder of the saint.[53]

Although the fake flesh on the top of his head is neither a puppet nor a mask, it might have taken on independent significance when sliced off, becoming the simulacrum of a relic. The script of this play has unfortunately been lost, but these fragments point to a key question about holy matter on the medieval stage. When, for example, St Denis picks up his own dismembered head in *Le Geu Saint Denis*, what is the ontological relationship between actor, prosthetic head and the relic head?[54]

It has been suggested that such extravagant puppetry and prop-work was not always intended to offer veristic simulations of death. Matthew Sergi's careful analysis of the Chester "Innocents" shows how the script's "simplified baby-killings" were

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[51] Another example is the Perth Hammermen's pageant. See Anna Jean Mill, "The Perth Hammermen's Play: A Scottish Garden of Eden," *Scottish Historical Review* 49 (1970): 146–153.

[52] Canterbury Pageant Accounts, 1529–1530*, Records of Plays and Players in Kent, 1450–642*, ed. Dawson E. Giles, (Malone Society, 1965), Appendix B, 195.

[53] Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, 141. Davidson, "Violence and the Saint Play," *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 3 (2001): 292–314, 312.

[54] Bernard James Seubert ed., *Le Geu Saint Denis du Manuscrit 1131 de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève de Paris* (Librairie Droz, 1974), lines 1041a-b, 126. Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010,) 60–61.

deliberately unconvincing, and furthered the performance's "antirealistic" effect.[55] Reading the script's implicit cues, Sergi shows how the puppets are mishandled not only by the soldiers but also by the women, drag characters who flail about with weaponised distaffs in one hand, and multiple babies in the other. In a darkly humorous way, the soldiers describe the abject movements of these performance objects through the language of puppetry and play: "hee must of me learne a playe: / hee must hopp, or I goe awaye / upon my speare end."[56] The puppet, signifying a dead baby, is raised aloft and made to dance, which in turn signifies a puppet.

To add to this anti-real effect, the women also treat the sign (the puppet) as itself rather than the thing signified (the baby). This disjuncture is most starkly articulated when a woman, asked about the gender of her charge, presents the baby's genitals: "Hit hath two hooles under the tayle / kysse and thou may assaye."[57] Rather than protect the puppet, she bares its bottom. As Sergi suggests it is unlikely these puppets had genitals; where "two hooles" are indicated, there was probably just a blank space. It appears that the soldiers kill the child anyway, emphasising the sexless nature of the puppet; as Jane Tolmie puts it, by pointing out the puppet's genitals, the actor (himself dressed as a woman) draws attention to the "premises of a transvestite theatre" in which a doll can be turned "from boy to a girl and back again."[58] Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) stages

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[55] Sergi, *Practical Cues*, 60.

[56] Play X, *Chester Cycle*, lines 322–324, 197.

[57] Play X, *Chester Cycle*, lines 367–368, 199.

[58] Jane Tolmie, "Spinning Women and Manly Soldiers: Grief and Game in the English Massacre Plays," in *Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature*, eds. Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (Brepols, 2010), 284.

a similar moment; Puppet Dionysius is confronted with the charge that he, as an actor, engages in transvestitism; "the male among you / putteth on the apparel of / the female, and the female of the male."[59] In response, "*The* Puppet *takes up his garment"* to show his lack of genitals and thus the absurdity of the argument.[60] Henryk Jurkowski takes this moment "the first example of the 'alienation' or 'distancing' effect used in puppet theatre," because it signals the intrusion of puppets' material form into the plot of a play.[61]

The Goldsmiths' deliberately crude puppetry offers its own kind of catharsis, "accommodating the lowest, darkest humor that may find its way into an unconstrained public space and opening up the potential for raw emotional expressions."[62] Sergi compares this aesthetic strategy with the modern notion of "camp," which speaks also to Tydeman's description of St Barbara and St Denis being chopped up and rolled about. It is hard to believe that over the course of these histrionic mutilations, the puppets retained a stable ontological relationship with the saints they represented. Rather, they might have produced an anti-real effect.

Unlike movable sculptures of Christ crucified, it is unlikely that the Goldsmith's baby puppets, or the stuffed Jesuits in Modane had a life outside the space and time of performance. Yet within the performance they operate similarly in that they are moved

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[59] Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, V: v, lines 83–85, 182.

[60] Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, V: v, line 92a, 183.

[61] Henryk Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppetry: From its Origins to the End of the 19th Century*, ed. Penny Francis, vol. 1 (Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 113.

[62] Sergi, *Practical Cues*, 31.

to simulate death and dying and to generate particular aesthetic effects. Within a culture that set great store in relics and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, images of Christ and mutilated effigies of the saints have equivocal claims to truth. What is the role of the anti-real when presenting Christ's body onstage? One way of approaching this question to look at spectacles of the host onstage. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (c. 1491) is known for its "excessive onstage bloodshed" as well as for its equivocal and complex affirmation of eucharistic truth.[63]

The plot is simple; Jonathas, a Syrian Jew, together with his compatriots buy a host from a rich merchant in order to desecrate it and prove that it is merely a "cake."[64] Once they get hold of it, they lay it on a table and pierce it with daggers. The stage directions read "[h]ere the Ost must blede."[65] Affrighted, they attempt to boil it in a cauldron of oil; Jonathas picks it up but when he attempts to drop it in the cauldron, it sticks to his hand and he runs madly about the stage – "he renneth wood with the Ost in hys hond."[66] The Jews attempt to separate hand and host by pinning both to a pillar and pulling on Jonathas, but succeed only in removing Jonathas' hand which "shall hang styll with the Sacrament."[67] At this moment, a fraudulent doctor and his servant arrive, but their help is rejected. Jonathas puts his severed hand and the host in the cauldron, which starts to

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[63] Light, "Fluxing Fellowship," 56.

[64] Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, ed. John T. Sebastian (Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), line 200, 41.

[65] *Play of the Sacrament*, line 480a, 49.

[66] *Play of the Sacrament*, line 503a, 49.

[67] *Play of the Sacrament*, line 515b, 50.

boil, "apperyng to be as blood."[68] Frightened again, they take the host out of the cauldron and cast in in an oven, which then bursts open and bleeds "owt at the cranys / and an image appere owt, with woundys bledyng."[69] Scholars have mostly interpreted this "image" as a child actor in a painted costume.[70] Sponsler argues instead that "Christ was here likely represented by a static effigy, rather than an actor, the latter an option often chosen by modern productions of the play."[71] This "image" rebukes and then forgives the now repentant Jews and restores Jonathas' hand. Jonathas fetches the bishop in whose presence the "image" turns "agayn into brede" and is solemnly returned to the church.[72] The play ends with the baptism of the Jewish characters.

The *Play of the Sacrament* stages many different kinds of bloodshed: the host bleeding on the table; blood pouring from Jonathas' stump; the cauldron's boiling blood; the oven that bleeds out the cracks and bursts open, and finally Christ's stable, painted wounds. In this chaotic spectacle, substances representing Jewish blood are mixed with those representing sacral blood, and over the course of events we imagine that Jonathas becomes increasingly wet and stained. Ellis Amity Light has undertaken a careful production analysis of the *Play of the Sacrament*, focussing particularly on the use of fluid special effects; they argue that "elaborate stage blood shows the real presence of Christ in the eucharist – and, through its theatricality and dramatic flair, stage blood also

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[68] *Play of the Sacrament*, line 672a, 54.

[69] *Play of the Sacrament*, line 712a-b, 55.

[70] Light, "Fluxing Fellowship," 83.

[71] Sponsler, "Body, Site and Memory," 169.

[72] *Play of the Sacrament*, line 825a, 58.

plants a seed of productive uncertainty in the viewer."[73] The host is both the real body of Christ and a stand-in for that body; it both confirms and undermines Eucharistic truth.

The *Play of the Sacrament* has often been compared to the French *Mistere de la Sainte Hostie*, also a host desecration play, staged in Metz in 1513. Like the *Play of the Sacrament*, the *Sainte Hostie* featured complex special effects; as one witness to the play describes, when the host is stabbed, "sortit grand abondance de sang et sailloit en hault parmi la dite hostie, comme se ce fut ung enfant, qui pissait."[74] Jody Enders has grappled with the complexity of violence in this play, which blends the "[r]eal and the unreal, hyperreal and hyperartificial" to concoct feelings of victimhood within the Christian audience.[75] After the host is desecrated, the Christian woman who sold it to the Jewish perpetrator murders her own child. The stage directions specify that she holds "la semblance d'un petit enfant," a baby simulacrum, which she kills, then throws onto a dung heap in an action that mirrors blood libel tropes.[76] As Enders argues, this "blood libel by-proxy" plotline compounds fantasies of Jewish perfidy by collapsing the world of the play into the real world: not long before the *Sainte Hostie* was performed, a woman was publicly immolated after being accused of infanticide. The audience, seeing these anti-real simulations of violence, might have felt a shock of recognition. The play thus

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[73] Light, "Fluxing Fellowship," 75.

[74] Philippe von Vigneulles, *Gedenkbuch des Metzer Bürgers Philippe von Vigneulles aus den Jahren 1471 bis 1522*, ed. Heinrich Michelant (Stuttgart, 1852), 244. "The blood soared up high from the said Host as if it had been a child pissing." Trans., Tydeman, *Medieval European Stage*, 349.

[75] Enders, "Dramatic Rumors and Truthful Appearances: The Medieval Myth of Ritual Murder by Proxy," in *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*, eds. Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Campion-Vincent, and Chip Heath (Aldine Press, 2005), 26.

[76] *Le Mistere de la saincte hostie* (A. Pontier, 1817) unpaginated scan, Bibliothèque national de France.

galvanises the audience against an imaginary enemy by redirecting this shock into a well-worn path of hate.

Though not all stage violence is puppetry, the history of puppetry is rooted in staged violence. As Eileen Blumenthal has stressed, puppetry does not only allow for more extreme displays of torture than human actors do, the use of puppets also fundamentally changes the way this violence is perceived, pushing the boundaries of a performance's affective potential. We might think of puppets as trivialising instruments, but this is not always the case. Anti-real, puppet violence can be more troubling than truly realistic effects:

> Knowing that the performers are not alive, audiences do not activate emotional defences, the mental filters that screen out or distance what would be unbearable to see. Nonetheless, viewers do suspend disbelief and buy into the stage reality. So the full horror that puppets can muster may catch spectators unaware, without the armor they would have donned for similar episodes in live-actor theater.[77]

An audience watching the theatre play *War Horse* (2007), for example, knows that they are not watching live horses – the Handspring Puppet Company performers remain visible. That does not detract from the horror of watching them suffer, but rather brings the experience onto a different level of perception. The audience watching a murderer burned in Metz may have put up more mental defences than they did a few years later, when they saw a puppet baby killed and thrown into a toilet.

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[77] Blumenthal, *Puppetry*, 144.

2.3 Movable Sculptures of Christ Crucified in Vernacular Performance

It might seem anachronistic – even glib – to compare movable sculptures of Christ crucified with stage puppets. Yet we can also perceive a certain "laicization" of the movable sculpture of Christ crucified occurring within vernacular playing traditions. Unmoored as it is from the Latin *Depositiones*, and with an unclear relationship to the clergy, the corpus in *Christ's Burial* seems neither to be an actor, nor solely a cult object.

Such "laicization" of the movable sculpture is attested to in Northern Italy.[78] Two fourteenth-century scripts for Good Friday belonging to the penitential confraternities of San Andrea, Perugia (1374) and San Stefano, Assisi (c. 1381) appear to require the use of a movable sculpture of Christ crucified.[79] Performed on Good Friday, Christ remains dead throughout the proceedings, is unnailed from the cross and placed in the lap of the Virgin for an extended *planctus*.[80] Like *Christ's Burial* and the Debs burial plays, which I address below, these scripts emerge from local vernacular lyric traditions, creating an

[78] Daniele Di Lodovico, "Revising Devotion: The Role of Wooden Sculptures in Affecting Painting and Devotion in the Late Medieval Period in Italy (XII-XV century)" (PhD diss, University of Washington, 2016), 130-144.

[79] "Lauda LXII," Perugia, Biblioteca Augusta, Ms. 955, folio 39^{r}–folio 41^{v}. Edited and translated in Kathleen Cecilia Falvey, "Scriptural Plays From Perugia" (PhD Diss., State University of New York, 1974), 115–150. See also I. Baldelli, "La lauda e i disciplinati," *Il Movimento dei Disciplinati nel Settimo Centenario dal suo inizio* (Deputazione di storia patria per l'Umbria, 1962), 345–345. "Lauda della Scavigliazione," Assisi, Archivio Capitolare di S. Rufino, MS 36/I. Edited in Maurizio Perugi and Gina Scentoni eds., *Il Laudario Assisano 36: dall'Archivio di S. Rufino* (Accademia properziana del Subasio, 2007), 301–313. F. Santucci, "Lauda della Scavigliazione' della Fraternita dei Disciplinati di S. Stefano di Assisi XIV ex." *Atti dell'Accademia Properziana del Subasio* 6 22: 1994: 243–263. Relevant sections also given in Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 44–46. See also Elvio Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri: Crossifissi di Legno in Valle Umbra tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Orfini Numeister, 2000), 118. Claudio Bernardi and Carla Bino, "Interactive Images: Depositions of Christ in Italy, 1200–1700," in *Good Friday Ceremonies with Articulated Figures*.

[80] There are also documents that describe the use of these objects, summarised in Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 44–47, 44–51.

assemblage of poem, artwork, and song to enliven the devotional experience. These scripts were performed and collected by penitential sodalities, known as *disciplinati* or *battuti*, which dedicated themselves to dramatising the Passion through public penance, processions and vernacular hymns (*laude*).[81] It is from these hymns that they developed their dialogic dramas.[82] Of the two, the "well-known and much-studied" Assisian *lauda* is the more complex.[83] As Claudio Bernardi and Carla Bino have argued, performing this text

> certainly implies that [the confraternity] had at their disposal a considerable array of theatrical properties, and above all, a movable statue of Christ endowed perhaps even with a mechanism for making blood flow from his side (necessary for performing the scene of the conversion of Longinus who, in this version, recovers his sight after being splashed by blood from the wound made by his lance.)[84]

This scripted moment suggests for Bino and Bernardi a particular stage effect. One of the concerns of this chapter is whether we can apply what we know about the technologies of violence in medieval European theatre generally, to the implicit cues in extant scripts. I will therefore return to these scholar's inference about the mechanical possibilities of the movable sculpture in San Stefano when discussing the Longinus scene in *Debs XIV*.

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[81] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 238–239; 267–268**;** Mara Nerbano, "Confraternite disciplinate e spazi della devozione,"in *Brotherhood and Boundaries – Fraternità e barriere*, eds. Stefania Pastore, Adriano Prosperi, and Nicholas Terpstra and (Scuola Normale Superiore, 2011); Niklaus Largier, *Lob der Peitsche: eine Kulturgeschichte der Erregung* (C.H. Beck, 2001).

[82] Nerida Newbigin, "*Serio Ludere*: Confraternities and Drama in Central Italy, 1400–1600," in *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Brill, 2019), 345–347.

[83] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 271; Lunghi, *La Passione degli Umbri*, 118.

[84] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 273.

While we do not know the exact nature of the movable sculptures used in the San Stefano and San Andrea Good Friday *laude*, the region still boasts a number of movable sculptures of Christ crucified today. The Church of the Battuti dell'Annunziata, for example, possesses an example made around the time the *laude* were written, which I will discuss at greater length in chapter three.[85] A 1386 inventory of the scenographic equipment and costumes of the *disciplinati* of San Domenico in Perugia evince similar performances, that seem to have included the whole of the Passion. The confraternity kept a skin-coloured leather bodysuit and linen helmet for the scourging. Scholars have suggested that this live actor was then replaced by a movable sculpture of Christ crucified.[86] Exchanging the living actor for the movable sculpture enables the presentation of certain acts of mutilation, so that the movable sculpture functions in this moment as a body-double for an actor, just as the leather suit acts as a second skin.[87]

The redeeming power of blood is an important theme in *Christ's Burial* and the Debs plays, conveyed through the dialogue as well as through the visual display of the corpus. These plays do not, however, share the flagellant context of the Italian burial plays. The Debs plays were collected and performed by professional artisans and play producers, while Museo was transcribed by a Carthusian in a culture lacking such

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[85] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 258.

[86] This original manuscript containing this inventory has been lost but parts are recorded in Ernesto E. Monaci, *Uffizj drammatici dei Disciplinati dell'Umbria*, *Appunti per la Storia del Teatro Italiano*, vol. I (Imola, 1872), 259–260. See also Mara Nerbano, "Le devozioni della Settimana Santa. Dalla formazione del repertorio testuale al teatro materiale," *La Scena Materiale: Oggetti e pratiche della rappresentazione nel teatro medievale* (Edizioni dell'Orso, 2015), 277–278. Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 274.

[87] This staging strategy was employed elsewhere in Perugia, as well as in Rieti and Gubbio in Umbria. Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 274.

groups.[88] As their name suggests, the *battuti* were particularly invested in expressions of blood devotion.[89] The staged violence of their *laude drammatiche* played off other christo-mimetic spectacles of penance. As Mitchell B. Merback has argued:

> the spectacular images of redemptive pain and bloodshed produced by the *disciplinati* in their rites were understood by their audiences within the broad economy of "life-like" and "living" images that characterized late medieval Christian culture. Street spectacles and festival processions, with their brightly painted and adorned devotional tableaux (sometimes including live actors); religious theatre with its staged effects; narrative and cultic imagery of ever-increasing verisimilitude – each of these genres, in its own way, offered images of striking naturalism, and played to what David Freedberg identified as the "felt efficacy [...] of the exactly lifelike."[90]

The *disciplinati* played out Christ's suffering using both their own and manufactured bodies. This raises interesting questions unfortunately beyond the bounds of this study. For example, how did the penitential context of these *laude* affect audience response? To what extent were movable sculptures of Christ crucified the indivisible property of individual confraternities? Or were they, like the textual material of the *laude*, shared between these groups? Bino and Bernardi's important study has broken ground in this area, not least by increasing the census of known extant movable sculptures of Christ crucified in Italy; as they conclude, however, more remains to be done.[91]

The Italian *laude* are comparable to the later *Grablegungsspiele* (also called *Kreuzabnahmspiele*, deposition plays), that appeared in the fifteenth and sixteenth

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[88] Incidentally, the *Chronicle* in Museo mentions the excommunication of the "Crucifl^[a]gellatores vnsownde" in its depiction of the "warld vnstabill" (89[v]).

[89] Marco Piana, "Fonte de Pietade: Blood Devotion and Blood Consumption in the Laudari 'Illuminati' and 'Frondini,'" *Confraternitas* 30, no. 1–2 (2020): 27–43.

[90] Merback, "The Living Image of Pity," 142–143.

[91] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 252, 306.

centuries in German speaking regions. A *Grablegungsspiel*, according to Gesine Taubert's seminal definition, is designed to be performed on Good Friday and deals solely with Christ's deposition and burial.[92] Sometimes performed in churches, sometimes performed outside, these vernacular plays are to be distinguished from Latin *Depositiones* and the larger passion cycles.[93] In the *Grablegungsspiel*, "Christus als redende und handelnde Person überhaupt nicht auftritt, sondern von einer hölzernen Skulptur vertreten wird, einem Kruzifixus mit schwenkbaren Armen."[94] Fragments of *Grablegungsspiele* survive from Wels (Upper Austria), Vienna and Żagań (Silesia).[95] This chapter examines the two *Grablegungsspiele* that have come down to us in a complete

[92] DLL, 1064.

[93] In the German speaking regions, movable sculptures of Christ crucified appear to have been used in at Prüfening (1489), Meissen (1513), and Wittenburg (1517). Wittenburg and Meissen are descriptions of ceremonies. It is possible that the *Imago* in the Salzburg Easter rites was also movable; Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 55–59; Ziemba, *The Agency of Art Objects*, 480–483.

[94] Gesine Taubert, "Spätmittelalterliche Kreuzabnahmespiele in Wels, Wien und Tirol," *Jahrbuch des Oberösterreichischen Musealvereines* 119, 1 (1974): 53–89, 54. "Christ does not appear as an acting, speaking person at all, but is represented by a wooden sculpture, a crucifix with movable arms."

[95] Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 8227, 380–448. The Vienna fragment dates from 1685, but the medieval text can be easily reconstructed from the baroque additions. Edited in Albert Ritter von Camesina, "Das Passionsspiel bei St. Stephan in Wien," *Berichte und Mitteilungen Des Altertums-Vereines zu Wien* 10 (1869): 327–348. The Wels play appears in two fragments from the second half of the fifteenth century. Wels, Stadtarchiv, Historisches Archiv Akten, Sch. Nr. 1227, 1r–4r. Edited in Rudolf Zinnhobler, "Das geistliche Schauspiel in Wels 1: Die Welser Spielfragmente aus der Zeit um 1500," in *Jahresbericht des Bischöflichen Gymnasiums und Diözesanknabenseminars am Kollegium Petrinum in Urfahr-Linz a. d. Donau* (Kollegium Petrinum, 1965), 4–18. Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 61, 60; DLL, 1157–1160; Taubert, "Spätmittelalterliche Kreuzabnahmespiele," 59–80. The Żagan fragment (mid fifteenth century) is a single sheet found in the Wrocław University Library, I Q 440. Edited in Joseph Klapper, "Das mittelalterliche Volksschauspiel in Schlesen," *Mitteilung der schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* 29 (1928): 168–216, 214–216. See also Sandra Désirée Theiß, "Geistliche Spiele im Schlesischen Literaturraum – Eine Neueinordnung," *Germanica Wratislaviensia* 140 (2015): 25–40. I tentatively include the fragment know as *Grundelfingers Grablegung* (1494) (Lucerne, ZHB, Ms.177) within this group as the "*corpus crucifixi*" remains dead throughout the play's long deposition, lamentation, and burial; it is edited in Franz Jospeh Mone, *Schauspiele des Mittelalters*, vol. 2 (Karlsruhe, 1846), 119–131. See also: Adolf Reinle, "Mathias Gundelfingers Zurzacher Osterspiel von 1494 "Luzerner Grablegung": Ein Beitrag zur Abklärung der Frühgeschichte der Luzerner Osterspiele," *Innerschweizerisches Jahrbuch für Heimatkunde* 13/14 (1949/50): 65–96.

form. They are in the Debs Codex, a collection of playscripts dating from the middle to the end of the fifteenth century, which was assembled in Bozen (now Bolzano).[96] Scholars refer to these plays either by their assumed place of performance (*Bozner Grablegungsspiel I* and *II*), or by their position within the codex (*Debs II* and *XIV*).[97] I follow the latter appellation for brevity. Very little has been written about the *Grablegungsspiele* and more work needs to be done to establish the conditions of their textual transmission and performance.

The Debs Codex contains thirteen religious plays and a comic "Rumpoltspiel," about a man sued for breach of promise.[98] Aside from the two *Grablegungsspiele*, the religious plays comprise of three Easter plays, an ascension play, two Emmaus plays (dealing with Christ's appearance before doubting Thomas), one Candlemas play, two Marian laments, one Annunciation play, and a Last Supper play. The three Easter plays vary in scope, though they repeat scenes and individual verses between them;[99] the first, which is incomplete, appears to be almost identical to the last, except that it includes a Harrowing of Hell. For the scribes, compilers, and users of this collection, textual diversity and readerly interest were less important than variety of directorial options. The N-Town manuscript, which "probably served as a regional depository of plays which were lent or rented out as smaller playbooks according to the needs of various play

[96] Sterzing/Vipiteno, Stadtarchiv, Hs. IV. DLL, 1271.

[97] DLL, 1157.

[98] DLL, 1269; 1316–1319.

[99] DLL, 1270.

producers," is comparable.[100] Yet unlike N-Town, the Debs Plays are not organised into a chronological cycle, however artificial that may be. From a directorial perspective, variance between similar plays is useful, as the number of available actors may have differed year to year.

The manuscript's production and survival can be attributed to the collaboration between two laymen – Vigil Raber and Benedict Debs. Debs worked as a Latin teacher, organist and choirmaster in Bozen.[101] Raber adds two notations in the manuscript to explain its provenance: Debs, who is described as "aim sundern liebhaber der spill," bequeathed Raber the manuscript at his death in 1515.[102] Raber's notices serve as obituaries, even providing information on the form and location of Debs' grave.[103] In their lifetimes, the two men collaborated on various theatrical projects, notably orchestrating the largest of the Bozen passion plays – the so-called *Große Bozner Passionspiel* (1514), which lasted seven days and has been described as a "highpoint" of the German passion

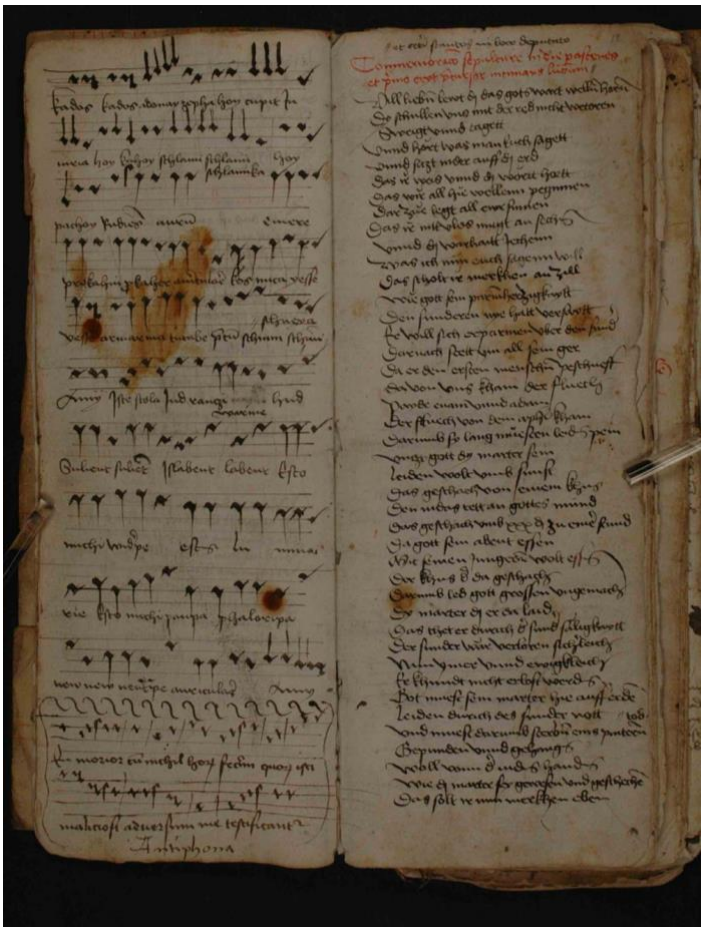
[100] Sugano, "Introduction," *The N-Town Plays*, 2.

[101] The duration of his residence in Bozen is contested. Monika Schulz, *Die Oster- und Emmausspiele und das Himmelfahrtsspiel im Debs-Codex: Zur Ambivalenz Christlicher und Paganer Traditionen* (Kümmerle, 1993), 39–40.

[102] "A special lover of plays" Debs Codex, folio 118^{v}. GSZZ, 348, 349, page 172.

[103] Debs Codex, folio 55^{v}.

play tradition.[104] Aside from organising the whole and sketching a stage plan for it, Raber played Judas and he and Debs shared the role of the "Salvator."[105]



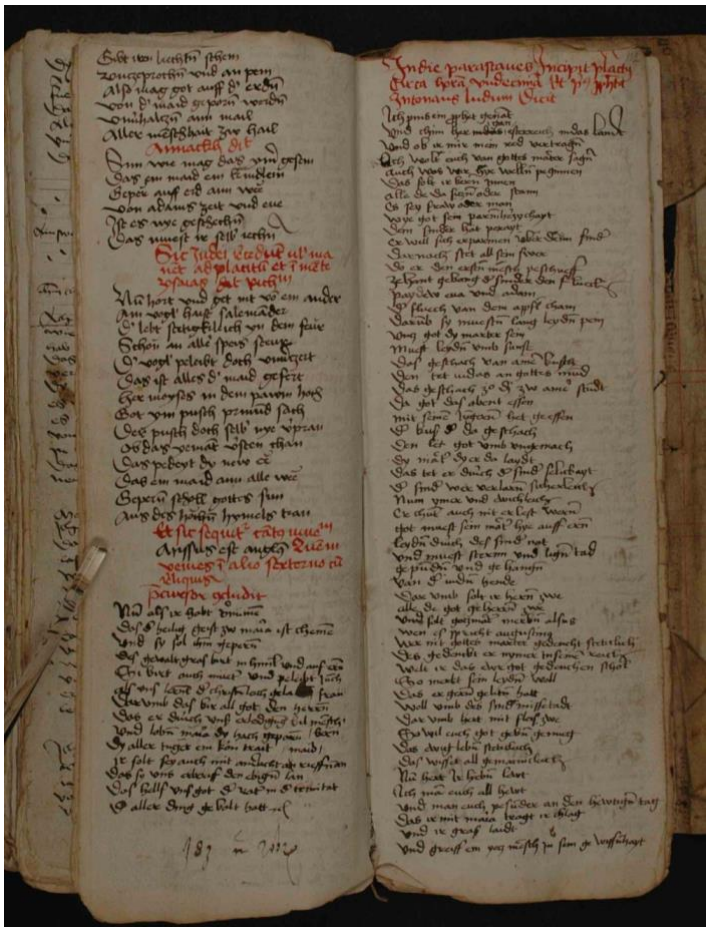


Figure 14. (Left) The beginning of *Debs II*, Sterzing/Vipiteno, Stadtarchiv, Hs. IV, 12r.

Photo: Stadtarchiv Sterzing.

Figure 15. (Right) The beginning of *Debs XIV*, Sterzing/Vipiteno, Stadtarchiv, Hs. IV, 102r.

Photo: Stadtarchiv Sterzing.

[104] Harald Zielske, "Die Bozener Passionsspielaufführung von 1514 und der Bühnenplan des Vigil Raber. Überlegungen zu einer Neuinterpretation," *Daphnis* 23, no. 2 (1994): 287–307, 288. This has multiple witnesses. The texts are edited and collated in Joseph E. Wackernell ed., *Altdeutsche Passionsspiele aus Tirol* (Graz, 1897), 1–255.

[105] Michael, *Das deutsche Drama des Mittelalters*, 162–163.

In chapter one, we situated *Christ's Burial* within a network of play traditions, and followed the playwright William Peeris, as he moved from the Percy household to Beverley to help transpose their Corpus Christi cycle. Such movement of artisans was an important feature of the cultural life of medieval Tyrol. Bozen is situated at the confluence of two historic Alpine crossings, the Brenner pass and the Via Claudia Augusta, that link Italy to Northern Europe. Play producers travelled extensively, copying and collecting playscripts and taking part in local productions.[106] Thus the "whole area, north and south of the Brenner pass, became a single unit in performances of religious dramas."[107] We must therefore view the Debs *Grablegungsspiele* as part of a vibrant and mobile network of performance traditions.

Although the playing spaces of *Debs II* and *XIV* are adjacent to a church – at the end of both plays, the corpus is processed inside – it was almost certainly played by laymen. We do not have actor lists for these two plays but those that do exist, such as that for the 1495 passion play in Bozen, reveal the actors to be men from the professional classes – directors of hospitals and schools, former mayors, members of the municipal council, etc.[108] The nobility and clergy do not appear in these lists of actors for the city. Lay women seem to have taken some minor roles in the *Große Bozner Passionspiel*, but

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[106] Wolfgang F. Michael, *Das deutsche Drama des Mittelalters* (De Gruyter, 2017), 171. Joanne W. Anderson, *Moving with the Magdalen: Late Medieval Art and Devotion in the Alps* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019), 221.

[107] Michael, "Tradition and Originality in the Medieval Drama in Germany," in *The Medieval Drama: Papers of the Third Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*, ed. Sandro Sticca (State University of New York, 1972), 23–37, 29.

[108] Hannes Obermair, "The Social Stages of the City: Vigil Raber and Performance Direction in Bozen/Bolzano (Northern Italy) – a Socio-historical Outline," *Concilium Medii Aevi* vol. 7 (2004): 193–208, 198.

this seems to have been an exceptional case.[109] Participating in these events was a sign of distinction, offering the burghers "an affirmative consensus model [...] that stabilised social relations."[110] The use of religious theatre to affirm these civic identities continued beyond the Reformation in the German-speaking regions.[111] The prestige these performances affirmed was mercantile, arisen not only from capital but also from systems of patronage and guild affiliation. If we think in terms of staging a movable sculpture, this object is thus detached from the church, not only literally in that it is removed from the building and brought into the public sphere, but also symbolically, in that it is co-opted into a symbolic system designed to affirm worldly status as well as civic piety.

To understand better the performance context of these two *Grablegungsspiele*, it is worth dwelling on the figure of Vigil Raber, who straddles the worlds of literary production and artistic craft. Raber was born in the last quarter of the fifteenth century in South Tyrol and died before 1552.[112] The son of a wealthy baker, he was a polychrome artist and a prolific heraldic painter; his *Neustifter Wappenbuch*, which he completed shortly before his death contains over 7000 lively heraldic images gathered from other

[109] Cast lists for 1514 note six female actors playing minor female roles (Canaanite women's daughter; Martha and Mary; a maid; spice merchant's wife and daughter); John Tailby, "Drama and Community in South Tyrol," in *Drama and Community People and Plays in Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan Hindley (Brepols Publishers, 1999), 151–152; Stephen K. Wright, *The Erlau Playbook: Five Medieval German Dramas for Christmas and Easter* (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2017), xxii.

[110] Obermair, "The Social Stages of the City," 204.

[111] Henrike Lähnemann, *"Hystoria Judith": Deutsche Judithdichtungen vom 12. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (De Gruyter, 2012), 403–409.

[112] DLL, 1372–1373.

manuscripts (figure sixteen).[113] Raber was also a professional collector, director and editor of play texts; he would charge players a fee to use his booklets or rent them out to other play directors for copying.[114] In writing down and collecting these playscripts, Debs and Raber appear motivated by practical as well as ethnographic concerns – they used playscripts for their own productions and earned money from directing plays, but they also seemed to want to pass down a stable archive of scripts from their time and region. When Raber died, all the plays he owned – including the Debs Codex – were sold by his

[113]Neustifter Wappenbuch, Neustift / Novacella Abbey Library, Cod. s.n.. Mittelalterliche Handschriften in Österreich Online.

[114] Simon Eckehard, "Manuscript Production in Medieval Theatre: The German Carnival Plays," in *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Bowdell & Brewer, 2014), 151.

widow, also a polychrome artist, to the city of Sterzing, about seventy kilometres from Bozen.[115]



Figure 16. Vigil Raber, *Neustifter Wappenbuch* (1548-1552)

It was in Sterzing that Raber worked on sculptures of Christ intended for performance; in 1543, he was paid "für das pild der urstendt vernuern"), and "für das

[115] For edited sources containing payments to Raber's widow, see Conrad Fischnaler, *Vigil Raber, der Maler und Dichter: Nach urkundlichen Quellen bearbeitet* (Innsbruck, 1894), 42–43. For working women, see Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, Working Women in Renaissance Germany (Rutgers University Press, 1986).

pild, so man ins Grab legt, gepessert."[116] Three years later, we find another payment to Raber for the 26th of April: "so er unseren Herrn, den man in das grab legt, gepessert hat."[117] It is not clear whether this image was a movable sculpture of Christ crucified, or a *Grabchristus*. What is clear, however, is that this image was defined not by its appearance, but how it is moved in performance: it is the image one "den man in das grab legt." We cannot know whether *Debs II* and *XIV* were performed using the very image Raber repaired, but the records of his work draw together object and performance in interesting ways.

The absence of a movable sculpture of Christ crucified from the Bozen records might have more to do with the durability of movable sculptures of Christ crucified; performance objects mostly appear in municipal accounts when damaged, or as temporary structures, such as stages and sepulchres, that need to be set up and taken down. The Bozen town records, for example, show recurrent payments for repairs made to a large dragon puppet, used at the Corpus Christi. It seems that this puppet was manipulated by multiple boys, who would be swallowed by it, and then carry it from within. Large puppets of this type tend to be fragile, as they need to be light.[118] Raber was employed for a week's work on this puppet in 1514.[119] By contrast, we can assume that

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[116] Fischnaler, *Vigil Raber*, 26–27. "For renewing the image of the resurrection"; "for having improved the image that one lays/places in the sepulchre."

[117] Fischnaler, *Vigil Raber*, 27. "So he had improved our Lord, which one lays/places in the grave/sepulchre."

[118] The London Drapers' Company giant needed occasional "olyng" and "newe paynting," and its sword needed "mending." Presumably the oil eased some mechanism of movement within the puppet. Mary C. Erler, *Records of Early English Drama: Ecclesiastical London* (British Library, 2008), 7, 9.

[119] Stadt Archiv Bozen, Kirchpropstrechnungen 1513/1514 (Cod. 667), 84r. GSZZ, 614, 212.

the characters of a *Grablegungsspiel* would have handled the corpus with great care – either because it was regarded as a devotional object in and of itself, or in order to simulate the tender sorrow of characters in the play, or perhaps out of a mixture of impulses. The stage directions betray no ill treatment – except, as we shall see, the lancing of Longinus in *Debs XIV*. This leads me to suspect that the Sterzing "pild, so man ins Grab legt" was "gepessert" twice within a three-year span not because it was broken, but because there was a wish to change something about its form or mechanisms in order to modify its semiotic potential.[120]

The municipal records of Bozen do attest to the presence of other images of Christ designed for performance. We know, for example, that the ascension was performed using an image of Christ hoisted into the rafters, because the stonemasons were given refreshments for doing this.[121] We know the town had a *Palmesel*, a wheeled image of Christ on the donkey, because a cartwright was paid to make new wheels and axels for it in 1488.[122] This sculpture reappears in the records in conjunction with a damaged "Easter image":

> Item lassen pessern unsers herrn pildnus auff dem essl unnd das osterpild, so zerbrochen waß.[123]

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[120] An analogy here would be the *Grabchristus* in Wienhausen, whose side-wound was at some point deepened in order to accommodate sacred matter; June L. Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotion: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, eds. Alison Beach, Constance Berman, Lisa Bitel (Brepols, 2014), 37.

[121] Stadt Archiv Bozen, Kirchpropstrechnungen 1504/1505 (Cod. 660), folio 30^{v}. GSZZ 393, page 176. Tailby, "Drama and Community," 151.

[122] Stadt Archiv Bozen, Kirchpropstrechnungen 1487/1488 (Cod. 651), folio 38^{v}. GSZZ 172, page 139.

[123] Stadt Archiv Bozen, Kirchpropstrechnungen 1515/1514 (Cod. 668), folio 19^{v}. GSZZ 625, page 213. "Item: improve the image of our lord on the donkey and the Easter image that was thus damaged."

What was this "Easter image" and how did it break? The prefix "zer-" suggests significant damage.[124] Was it an old, discarded image that had been given a new role or had it been broken through some mishap? The records provide no answer to these questions. What these laconic payment records do show, however, is a performative context in which images play an important role. Behind the payments for repairing the *Palmesel*, for example, we glimpse a piece of processional puppetry, led by one or more performers. Behind the payments for repairing the "pild, so man ins Grab legt," we see a burial, in which an object stands in for the dead Christ. These accounts also show church objects in the hands of artisans and play producers and offer a colourful glimpse into the skilled craft labour that went into medieval theatre. Their insistent materiality – the enumeration of quires of paper, linen, nails, chalk, gum, and vermillion required to produce a play – disallows a purely literary reading of the scripts. As Wolfgang Michael writes, "the text is only as significant as a libretto is for an opera. Only through the performance did the texts come to life. Here was really a *Gesamtskunstwerk*, where different arts cooperated but all in subservience to the one thing, the performance."[125]

2.3 The Affective Strategies of the Debs *Grablegungsspiele*

Just as the Italian laude were built out of existing lyrics, both *Debs II* and *XIV* contains song lyrics that exist elsewhere so that the plays are enmeshed in the large and

[124] Lexer, Zer-brëchen stv. entzwei brechen, zerbrechen, auseinander fallen, bersten, "to break in two, to shatter, to fall apart, to burst."

[125] Michael, "Tradition and Originality," 36.

multifaceted corpus of German Marian laments.[126] In performance, these popular lyrics are re-faceted into something new. This offers an analogy for the role of the corpus itself, which takes on fresh associations at each performance, while also remaining familiar to the community who used it. Let us consider for a moment the likely scenario that *Debs II* and *XIV* were written in Bozen, and that the play producers had access to both texts for several years. These scripts thus represent two alternative possibilities for the Good Friday performance. Let us imagine too that the town possesses a single movable sculpture of Christ crucified. The play producers can therefore make this puppet perform either script from year to year, giving it a repertoire rather than a strict set of annual actions, almost as if it were an actor.[127] And, while both scripts offer differing dramatic situations, they are punctuated with popular songs. We might see these scripts, then, as recasting familiar material and performing objects into fresh settings and thus enlivening their affective and mnemonic potential.

Debs II and *XIV* are sufficiently different for Taubert to conclude that they are not derived from each other, but probably from a lost ancestor, from which the burial play fragments of Wels and Vienna, as well as the Erlau *Marienklage*, also originated.[128] Tracing the concordances of such texts, in particular in the German speaking realm where the vernacular *Marienklage* enjoyed great popularity and good manuscript

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[126] Ulrich Mehler, *Marienklagen in Spätmittelalterlichen und Frühneuzeitlichen Deutschland: Textversikel und Melodietypen, Darstellungsteil* (Brill, 2023).

[127] Max Harris discusses the performative repertoire of movable sculptures of Christ on a donkey: "the Palmesel—like any good actor—can play the Palm Sunday script in various ways." Harris, "Inanimate Performers: The Animation and Interpretive Versatility of the Palmesel," in *Medieval Theatre Performance*.

[128] Taubert, "Zwei Kreuzabnahmespiele aus dem Debs-Kodex," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 106, no. 1 (1977): 32–72 32. I take my quotations from this edition.

survival, is not within the scope of this project. It is nevertheless important to be aware of these textual echoes and duplications. The clear repetition of songs between the plays may have affected how the audience received the dramas, and the mnemonic and affective strategies they offer.

In total, eighty-nine lines in *Debs II* and *Debs XIV* concord, though not in spelling and not exactly word-for-word. The two plays are similar length: *Debs II* runs to 439 lines and Debs XIV runs to 498 lines. Almost all concordant lines between the two plays belong to three categories: they are part of the prologue; they are songs; or they are spoken verse that immediately follows a song.[129] These prologues are spoken by a *praecursor* in *Debs II* and a nameless prophet in *Debs XIV* and serve to muster the crowd, as was conventional in the German theatrical tradition.[130] They are filled with prosaic instructions to sit down, be silent, and listen closely ("hort mit vleiss zue") (*II*, 57). The prophet of *Debs XIV* alludes also to a standing audience: he calls to "Alle di da sizcen ader stann, / Es sey fraw ader man."[131] Here we get a sense of generic universality: the

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[129] Forty lines concord in the prologue: *Debs II*, 13–40 and *XIV* 9–36; *Debs II*, 45–52 and *XIV*, 39–46; *Debs II*, lines 57–60 and *XIV*, lines 47–50. Within the eight concording songs, there are twenty-five concording lines; it is important to note that *Debs II* tends to miss out the last few lines of the songs that are in *Debs XIV*; there are twenty two lines of concording speech that follows a concording song: *Debs II*, 69–72 and *XIV*, 89–93; *Debs II*, 77–78 and *XIV*, 100–101; *Debs II*, 86–92 and *XIV*, 109–115, and the spoken lines following this song (*Debs II*, 93–96 and *XIV*, 116–119); *Debs II*, 99–100 and *XIV*, 120–121, and the spoken lines following this song (*Debs II*, 101-102 and *XIV*, lines 124-125); *Debs II*, 105–106 and *XIV*, 128–129, and the spoken lines following this song (*Debs II*, 107–110 and *XIV*, 132–135); *Debs II*, 125–127 and *XIV*, 154–156, and the spoken lines following this song (*Debs II*, 128–139 and *XIV*, 158–171). *Debs XIV* has two lines in the middle of this speech that *Debs II* lacks; *Debs II*, 402–404 and *XIV*, 465–467; *Debs II*, 437–439 and XIV, 485–487. Only two concordant lines do not fit these three categories; they belong to Pilate's servant; *Debs II*, 61–62 and *XIV*, 63–64.

[130] Wright, "The Oldest Swedish Play: Sources, Structure, and Staging of the 'De uno peccatore qui promeruit gratiam,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 87, no. 1 (1988): 49–72, 56.

[131] *Debs XIV*, 7–8"Everyone sitting or standing there / Be they woman or man."

performance is addressed to each individual within a mass of people, both "Ir reichen unnd ïr armen."[132] As the prophet says in *Debs XIV*: "Darumb solt ir heren zwe / Alle di got geherren zwe."[133] The pun rests on the connection between hearing ("heren") and belonging ("geherren zwe"). The audience would have been uniformly Christian; by the time these plays were produced, virtually the entire Jewish population of Tyrol had fled or been murdered in the pogroms following the 1475 blood libels.[134]

After this prologue, both plays begin with a short speech from members of Pilate's retinue. In both plays this group moves to a *locus* representing the palace, where they remain until Pilate is fetched back into the action.[135] It was common in medieval German drama for characters to move to a visible but ancillary performance area and perform a mimed activity when not participating in the immediate action, a mode of staging that is termed a *Simultanbühne*, or simultaneous stage.[136] Thus, although the audience are asked to focus on the laments, they were also probably presented with a peripheral group of courtly individuals miming conversation.

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[132] *Debs II*, 86. "You rich and you poor."

[133] *Debs XIV*, 37–38. "You should listen to this / All who belong to God."

[134] Klaus Amann, "Vom Salbenkrämer über die Grabwache bis Andreas von Rinn: Komik und Juden in der tirolischen und österreichischen Spieltradition," *Purimspiel und Fastnachtspiel: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Gattungsinterferenz*, ed. Klaus Wolf (De Gruyter, 2021), 140.

[135] Debs *II*, 275a; *XIV*, 92a; for *locus* and *platea*, see Erika Lin, "Performance Practice and Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of Locus and Platea," *New Theatre Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2006): 283–298; Clare Wright, "Ontologies of Play: Reconstructing the Relationship between Audience and Act in Early English Drama," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 35, no. 2 (2017): 187–206.

[136] DLL, 1063; Andrea Grafetstätter, "Die Tiroler Spieltradition: Musik und Tanz in Geistlichen und Weltlichen Spielen," *Musikleben Des Spätmittelalters in Der Region Österreich* (University of Vienna, 2016).

All eight of the songs in *Debs II* are also present in *Debs XIV*; *Debs XIV* contains five additional songs not found in *Debs II*.[137] *Debs II* tends to miss out the last lines of the concordant songs and it is possible that these songs would be completed in performance, giving the two plays a higher number of concordant lines. My overview here suggests that the two plays were constructed around a general introduction and a series of well-known songs. It is interesting that sections of speech following a song – but never preceding a song – are included in these concording units. Were the lines succeeding a song considered part of the same dramatic entity? And might this indicate some flexibility in when to stop singing?

One manuscript detail in *Debs II* attests to how available these plays are to the addition of pre-existing songs. Both plays stage an interaction between Simeon and the Virgin in which he gives her a sword. The dialogue differs in both plays. In *Debs XIV*, Simeon tell her to take the sword and sink it into her heart; she then sings the lament "Ein swert mir gehaissen wardt."[138] *Debs II* originally lacked this song: Simeon puts the prop sword into the Virgin's hand ("ponit gladium ad manus Marie") and she responds with spoken lyrics: "Maria dicit: Mich ßchneidt hewt das schwertt."[139] A later hand added to the stage directions "Maria dicit / *et canit 'ein schwert.'*"[140] The scene is thus revised to include the song that exists in *Debs XIV*. The song was clearly so well known that it could

[137] The last two couplets of the song "Wainen vill lieben cristenhaitt" differ between the two plays, though the rest of the song concords; *Debs II*, 79–80 and *Debs XIV*, 102–104.

[138] *Debs XIV*, 223. "A sword was promised to me."

[139] *Debs II*, 199a-200. "Maria says: The sword cuts me today."

[140] *Debs II*, 199a-b"Maria says *and sings 'a sword.'*"

be inserted just using its title; its many witnesses include the "Marienklage mit der Propheten" in the Debs Codex.[141] This detail shows not only how easily expandable these dramas are, but also the extent to which the copyists and producers of these dramas were drawing upon a network of well-known vernacular lyrics. It also suggests that this play was indeed performed, as such a note may be more helpful to producers than to a reader.

Lyrics can be easily inserted into drama because they tend to express an emotional condition, rather than describe a sequence of events. Apart from the healing of Longinus in *Debs XIV*, nothing substantive changes over the course of these plays – Christ is dead throughout and needs only to be taken from the cross. The plot is driven by the need to bury the body, and tension can only be built by characters hindering this process. In both *Debs Grablegungsspiele*, for example, Pilate's permission needs to be sought and granted and Joseph and Nicodemus need to find one another. In these plays, as in *Christ's Burial*, the Virgin acts both as the central character and as a hindrance to the central proceeding. As Hans-Jürgen Diller notes, the *planctus* "only verbalizes a state, not an event with its causes and consequences which can develop into a represented action."[142] The *planctus* is action arrested. In the next chapter I will suggest that this generic inertia finds reflection in the silent, hanging corpus in *Christ's Burial*.

[141] The versicle also appears in the *Marienklagen* of Lichtenthal, Munich, and Bohemia; the Eger Passion Play, and the St Gall Fragment. Anton Schönbach, *Über die Marienklagen: Ein Beitrag der Geistlichen Dichtung in Deutschland* (Graz, 1874), 3.

[142] Hans-Jürgen Diller, *The Middle English Mystery Play: A Study in Dramatic Speech and Form*, trans. Frances Wessels (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 47.

Literally and metaphorically suspended between life and death, the puppet absorbs the action of the play.

Without a significant plot line, *Debs II* and *XIV* are primarily concerned with the production of affect. They are dialogic as well as dynamic, continually appealing to the audience to join the characters in their sorrow, and "help" them lament. This is not unusual for drama at that time; audience members were frequently enjoined to aid the characters at a particular task.[143] *Debs II* and *XIV* do not expressly ask the audience to sing along to its popular songs, but this is not unknown in the German-speaking world. At the end of the Innsbruck Easter play, for example, the audience was asked to sing the hymn "Christ ist erstanden," a popular translation of the Latin antiphon *Christus resurgens*, which was often performed at the end of *Visitatio Sepulchri* ceremonies.[144] The constant injunctions to the audience to "help" the actors in their lamentation reminds us that these texts record a negotiation between actor and spectator. As we shall see in the next chapter, *Christ's Burial* shows a deep ambivalence to the work of lamenting, and seeks instead to train the audience's gaze upon Christ's hanging corpse. The Debs plays, by contrast, position the audience in more an active role, and one which aligns specifically and positively with the Virgin. While the Virgin is a disruptive presence in *Christ's Burial*, who generates *compassio* but must be held in check, the Virgin in the

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[143] Wright, *The Erlau Playbook*, xxv.

[144] Innsbruck University Library, Cod. 960, folios 35^{v}–50^{r}, folio 50^{r}. Edited in Eduard Hartl, ed.*, Das Drama des Mittelalters. Mit Einleitungen und Anmerkungen*, vol. 2 (Reclam, 1937), 136–189. See also Walther Lipphardt, "'Christ ist erstanden': Zur Geschichte des Liedes," *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 5 (1960): 96–114; Stefan Engels, "Die Münchner Marienklage D-MBS Cgm 716 Ein Dramatisierter Gesang zur Darstellung Psychischer Gewalt," in *Power and Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Theater*, eds. Cora Dietl, Christoph Schanze, Glenn Ehrstine (V & R Unipress, 2014), 58, 60. *Christus resugens* was also sung at the end of the Middle English resurrection plays; Play 38, *York Corpus Christi Plays*, line 186b, 327; Play 23, *Towneley Plays*, line 229a, 322.

Debs plays is positioned as a prime intermediary. The prologue of *Debs XIV*, for example, reminds the audience of the connection between the present time and the time of the play. It is the Virgin's experience, rather than Christ's death that is foregrounded. The prophet says:

> Ich man euch all hewt,
> Und man euch pesunder an den hewtigen tag
> Das ir mit maria tragt ir chlag
> Und ir graß laidt,
> Und greiff ein yecz mansch in sein gewissenhayt.[145]

In Middle High German, the verb "manen" means "to remind" as well as (in a more urgent sense) "to admonish," "to beseech," "to implore."[146] Greifen means "to grasp" and the preposition "in" indicates a movement into something, either literally or figuratively. In modern German, "greifen in" means to stretch out, to grasp, and the philosophical epitome of this is the "concept", the "Begriff." The audience is being asked to internally grasp the laments before them, to bear the sufferings of the characters onstage. The image here of helping the Virgin to "carry" her lament and her great sorrow resonates with the iconographic image of Christ carrying the cross. Indeed, in the Wakefield cycle, the Virgin literally helps Christ carry his cross. Late medieval passion imagery often explored the Virgin's sympathetic passion, her *compassio* with her son.[147] Some German images

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[145] I remind you all today
And remind you especially on the present day
That you carry with Maria her lament
And her great suffering,
And now every person should consult their conscience. *Debs XIV*, 52–56.

[146] Lexer manen swv.

[147] Otto G. von Simson, "*Compassio* and *Co-Redemptio* in Roger Van Der Weyden's 'Descent from the Cross,'" *The Art Bulletin* 35, no. 1 (1953): 9–16. Dagmar Eichberger, "Visualizing the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Early Woodcuts and Engravings in the Context of Netherlandish Confraternities," in *The Seven*

of the Virgin portray her as weeping tears of blood, such as this *pietà* (1330–1340) in the Archdiocesan Museum, Freiburg am Breisgau in Southern Germany; her mourning is so intense that her eyes become wounds, which equate visually to the wounds of her son.[148]



Figure 17. *Pietà* (1330–1340), Archdiocesan Museum Freiburg am Breisgau

Sorrows Confraternity of Brussels Drama, Ceremony, and Art Patronage (16th-17th Centuries), eds. Emily S. Thelen and Susie Speakman Sutch (Brepols, 2015).

[148] The Christ figure has been lost. Sigrid Weigel, "Tränen im Gesicht: Zur Ikonologie der Tränen in einer Vergleichenden Kulturgeschichte von Trauergebärden," in *Gesichter : Kulturgeschichtliche Szenen aus der Arbeit am Bildnis des Menschen*, eds. Weigel and Tine Kutschabch (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013), 119.

In both Debs burials, the second Mary asks the audience to "help" her lament before breaking into a sung lament.[149] This song– "O liben kind der cristenheit" – has multiple witnesses; it appears in the Treves, Alsfeld, and Erlau *Marienklagen*, the "Marienklagen mit Propheten" in Debs, and the Vienna and Wels *Grablegungsspiele*.[150] The lament is an injunction for the listener – the child of the Church – to help the Virgin lament. Similarly, in *Debs XIV*, the Virgin sings a verse beginning: "Ir frawn, ir klaget den jamer mein."[151] This verse appears in almost all German *Marienklagen*.[152] After the song, the Virgin again asks the "[l]ieben frawen" in the audience to "helfft zechlagen" her "jamerlichen schaden"[153] She implores them to think of their own children, and imagine how they would feel if these were dead. It seems that these lines are delivered directly to the audience, because when Simeon arrives at the end of them, he asks the Virgin to look at him (*XIV*, 209). The effect would probably have been intense, with the women of the audience singled out as having an innate sense of maternal grief.[154] Furthermore, as this

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[149] "Ir cristenn all gemain / Paide gros und auch klain / Helft vns klagen Jhesum Crist" (*II*, 81–83) "You Christians all together / both great and small / Help us lament Jesus Christ"; "Hert ir armen und reich / Und hellff uns zu chlagen all geleich" (*XIV*, 106-107) "Listen you poor and rich / and help us to lament all together."

[150] Taubert, "Zwei Kreuzabnahmspiele," 68, 71; in Erlau it appears alongside its Latin original as well; Neil C. Brooks, "The Lamentations of Mary in the Frankfurt Group of Passion Plays," *The Journal of Germanic Philology* 3, no. 4 (1901): 415–430, 426.

[151] *Debs XIV*, 198. "You women, you lament my misery."

[152] As Schönbach notes, it is in the Munich Marienklage and "sonst überall mit varienten," "everywhere else with variants"; Schönbach, *Über die Marienklagen*, 4.

[153] *Debs XIV*, 203–204. "Dear women, help lament / My pitiable adversity."

[154] This is a common *planctus Mariae* trope across Europe: Sue Niebrzydowski, "Secular Women and Late-Medieval Marian Drama," *The Yearbook of English studies* 43 (2013): 121–139; Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (Routledge, 1972), 266; Katherine Goodland, *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama from the Raising of Lazarus to King Le*ar (Ashgate, 2005), 74; Gary Waller, "Gynotheological Imagination: The Virgin's Body and the Alternate Mariologies of Late Medieval Walsingham," in *Walsingham and the English Imagination* (Ashgate, 2011), 66.

short song could be considered popular, it may be that the audience already knew at least the lyrics by heart. The performance therefore asks not only for emotional engagement; it sparks recognition.

Although most of the words of the plays were not originally written for the puppet who performed alongside them, the text and the object would have constituted an artistic whole in performance. In both plays, for example, the Virgin holds the puppet of Christ on her lap and sings to it the popular Marian lament, "Awe kind, / dein wenglein sind / dir so gar enplichen."[155] Singing the text to a puppet, as was likely the case of the Debs and Wels *Grablegungsspiele*, necessarily changes the impact of the words for the spectators: the Virgin's description of her child's paled cheeks takes on ekphrastic significance and those watching would have experienced a sense of disjuncture: the face of the corpse before them is being described as if it were the face of a child, with "wenglein." The rest of the short song strengthens this sense that, from the perspective of his mother, Christ becomes her helpless infant once again in death; "all dein krafft / und all dein macht / ist dir so gar entwichenn."[156] Yet, when sung to a puppet, these lines take on a certain uncanny turn, as the exhaustion of the corpse is bodied forth as mechanical reality. The puppetry of the deposition and lament ensures that the audience experiences the corpus' helplessness.

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[155] *Debs II*, 402; *XIV*, 465-467"Alas child, / your little cheeks are / paled indeed." The versicle appears in the Lichtenthal, Munich, Trier, Alfeld, Bohemia, *Marienklagen*, the St Gall fragment, and the Eger Passion play, as well as the Wels *Grablegungsspiel*; Schönbach, *Über die Marienklagen*, 3; Taubert, "Spätmittelalterliche Kreuzabnahmspiele," 70.

[156] *Debs XIV*, 468-470"All your power / and all your strength / has indeed disappeared."

In recasting popular lyrics, *Debs II* and *XIV* would have conjured associations in the minds of the audience, while also creating fresh memories. It may have also offered a model for their own private devotional practice in future. The devotional culture of the late Middle Ages prized internal scripts that could be played out as private religious performances and the practice of *compassio Mariae* was particularly popular.[157] Jill Stevenson explores the cognitive impacts of religious drama;

> [...] as cognitive theory reveals, an audience member understands an actor's/character's physical interactions with objects, in part, by the way the sensorimotor system simulates those actions within the spectator's body; even just the object's material form might trigger simulations of the actions that form implies.[158]

Thus the spectator does not passively watch the performance, she internally mirrors it. In Stevenson's formulation then, when the Virgin cradles the movable sculpture of Christ crucified in *Debs II* and *XIV*, this abject choreography finds reflection in the audience's sensorimotor system. Further, simulations of the performed moment within the audience member could be "trigger[ed]" by objects of a similar form. An encounter with any movable sculpture of Christ crucified, or indeed any jointed doll, would be coloured by the choreography she had previously absorbed. In this way we can see how such puppet performances reverberate beyond the historic theatre event. The movable sculpture encodes a lugubrious, enervated choreography into the minds and bodies of spectators that they carry forward into their interactions with other objects. We can perhaps draw an analogy with the material circumstances of these performances. The

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[157] Sigrid Weigel, "Vom Eintritt der Tränen ins Bild. Von der weinenden Maria aus Vesperbildern des 14. Jahrhunderts zu Rogier van der Weyden," in *Was ist ein Bild?: Antworten in Bildern: Gottfried Boehm zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Gottfried Boehm and Sebastian Egenhofer (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010).

[158] Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 57.

citizens of Bozen and Sterzing saw familiar objects brought out annually, decked out with new paint and repaired parts. In a similar way, these familiar lyrics were given new foils as actors added different intonations, and play producers drew off a spectrum of different play texts. The set pieces within *Debs II* and *XIV* might be thought of as familiar textual artefacts, which were annually revamped and re-set.

2.4 Staged Violence in *Debs XIV*

Compared to *Christ's Burial*, the Debs *Grablegungsspiele* contain fewer ekphrastic descriptions of the corpus; Christ's dead body is more often framed in relation to the Virgin's. The longest description of this hanging corpus itself in either play appears in *Debs II*, when one of Pilate's servants says to the Virgin:

> Schau wie er pranget
> Und an dem krewcz hangett!
> Er mag dïr gehelfen noch geraten
> Wan er hangt als sey er praten.[159]

These are the servant's only lines and they elicit no response in the other characters. The tone of this statement is hard to assess – is it mocking or triumphant? The image of the "roasted" Christ appears to be taken from the sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*, which was translated by Martin Luther in his popular hymn "Christ lag in Todesbanden": "Hier ist das rechte Osterlamm / [...] / Das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm / In heißer Lieb

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[159] Look how he flaunts himself
And hangs on the cross!
He can neither help nor council you
Since he hangs as if he were roasted. (*Debs II*, 140–143)

gebraten."[160] Imagining it as a description of a movable sculpture onstage is especially disquieting as the object indeed offers no "help" or "council"; it hangs mute, wounded, and stripped.

Instead of descriptions of the hanging corpus, most references to Christ's body are framed in relation to the Virgin's body, an affective strategy especially apparent in Debs *XIV*. For example, Joseph asks the Virgin if he may "pegrab den leichnam / Der van deinem leib cham."[161] The rhyming of "leichnam" ("corpse") and "leib cham" ("body came") collapses Christ's birth with his internment. Similarly, the Virgin says that, "Mein leib ist lenbentig tad," and that she must surely perish "[v]an des tades angesicht."[162] The "death" facing her is not simply a metaphor: it is the corpus itself, hanging on the cross: through compassion, she is constrained to mirror this dead body, to make herself "living dead." At one point the Virgin begs Christ to look at her, to speak one single word to her: "Siech an dy lieb müeter dein / Und sprich ain ainigs bart zw mir."[163] Although this sentiment is not unique to the play, its effect is heightened if we imagine these words being addressed to a movable sculpture of Christ crucified – a genuinely mute thing. In both plays, the Virgin reflects this muteness; when Joseph of Arimathea arrives and addresses her, John has to speak in her place because her pain is so great she "nit

[160] "Here is the righteous Easter lamb, who, high on the trunk of the cross, is roasted in hot love." Martin Luther, *Dr Martin Luthers Werke: In einer das Bedürfnis der Zeit berücksichtignden Auswahl*, vol. 5 (Hamburg, 1827), 92.

[161] *Debs XIV*, 380–381"Bury the corpse / That came from your body."

[162] *Debs XIV*, 166, 171. "My body is living dead." "In the face of death."

[163] *Debs XIV*, 177–178. "Look at the dear mother of yours / And speak a single word to me."

geantburten mag."[164] For a while, therefore, the Virgin is present on stage but unresponsive, sitting at the bottom of the cross. She only re-enters the action when the corpus is placed into her lap and she can sing directly to it.[165]

The Virgin's body is most explicitly equated with Christ's onstage through the staged stabbing of her heart with Simeon's sword. In *Debs XIV* this scene is followed immediately by Longinus' lancing of Christ's side, so that the somatic connection between the pierced mother and punctured son is further emphasised. In *Debs II*, Simeon puts the sword in Mary's hand (*II*, 187a) and says that she should 'Nun nym hin das swertt, / Das wirt verscheiden das hercz dein."[166] In *Debs XIV*, Simeon articulates this more forcefully:

> Nun enphach hin das swert mein
> Und truches in dein hercz
> Das dir geringert werdt dein smercz.[167]

Rather than describing what the sword will do, this version of Simeon commands the Virgin herself to perform the stabbing. Simeon's sword – as both a physical prop and a dramatic moment – also appears in the Debs play of purification, while descending arrows appear in the Debs annunciation play.[168] In the passage quoted above, Simeon's assertion that the stabbing will lessen the Virgin's pain intensifies the sensuality of the

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[164] *Debs XIV*, 386. "May not answer."

[165] *Debs II*, 331and *XIV*, 385-6.

[166] Debs II, 189–190. "Now receive the sword / That will cut through your heart."

[167] Now receive the sword of mine
And press it into your heart
So that your pain may be lessened. *Debs XIV*, 220–222.

[168] Walther Hans-Gert Roloff Lipphardt, *Die Geistlichen Spiele des Sterzinger Spielarchivs* (Peter Lang, 1980), vol. 1, 335-346.

moment: in the act of penetration there is some kind of slippage between pleasure and pain. We can consider this staged penetration in light of what Gary Waller calls the "gynaetheology" of late medieval culture; this was a culture deeply and scopophilically interested in the feats of the Virgin's body, her ability to be both Virgin and mother; in other words, her "divine vaginality."[169]

The stage directions in neither play tell us where Mary puts the sword, whether she lays it on her breast or mimes a stabbing. However, it is fairly certain that the movable sculpture of Christ crucified is genuinely stabbed in *Debs XIV*. This scene follows immediately after Simeon's; once the Virgin has received the sword, sung her song and repeated Simeon's prophesy, the blind Longinus arrives with a servant and, moved by pity, expresses the wish to shorten Christ's pain by ending his life: "Ich will im chüerczen sein pein."[170] Longinus more often acts out of enmity on the medieval stage but his pity is not without precedent.[171] This stated motive again equates the penetrative act with ease as much as violence – tying it back to the lessening of suffering promised by Simeon's sword. Here the slippage between pleasure and pain is more disquieting as the recipient is a mute puppet, able neither to consent to, nor defend itself from, the penetrative act. Longinus asks his servant to guide his spear to the side of Christ's body:

> Nym den sper vnd merk recht
> Das dw in secz an sein seytten.
> Ich will nit lenger peytten
> Und will ym abstechen sein hercz

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[169] Waller, "Gynotheological Imagination."

[170] *Debs XIV*, 243. "I want to shorten his pain."

[171] Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe*, 137.

Und will im ringeren sein smercz[.][172]

The servant agrees and, having aimed the spear, calls Longinus back to take it: "Herr, das thüe ich zw handt / Nun numbet den sper in di handt."[173] This moment is slightly confusing to read, as it is a complicated negotiation of a prop onstage; instead of passing the spear between them, one character holds it still and the other (blind) character must be guided to this posed and immobile weapon. When both Longinus and the spear are in place, the servant says:

> Nun herr stich tieff und weyt!
> Der sper stet im an seiner seydt
> Dar in im sein leben leyt.
> Her nun stich! es ist zeytt.[174]

The addition of an extra character to handle the lance highlights Longinus' blindness, but this is hardly necessary as he has already said that he is blind in both eyes (*XIV*, 238) and may well have been led onstage by this servant.[175] This wrangling with the spear would have heightened dramatic tension leading up to the moment of penetration. In the N-Town play, the spear is also positioned by a soldier and Longinus trustingly complies ("I

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[172] Take the spear and take care
That you set it to his side
I won't bide any longer
And will pierce through his heart
And will lessen his pain. *Debs XIV*, 246–250.

[173] *Debs XIV*, 253-254. "Lord, that I do immediately / Now take the spear in your hand."

[174] Now lord pierce deep and wide!
The spear stands [/ is positioned] at his side
Wherein his life lies.
Here now stab! It is time. *Debs XIV*, 256–260.

[175] In the "Semur Passion," Longinus arrives with a boy as his guide, Tydeman, *The Medieval European Stage*, 147.

trost ye be my frend").[176] The stage directions show a very particular mode of entrance for the blood: "Here Longeys showyth the spere warly, and the blood comyth rennyng to his hand. And he avantorysly shal wype his eyne."[177] In these moments, the characters move around a long weapon that is being deliberately and carefully held still. Longinus can only pierce Christ once his spear is positioned to the right side of the body, next to the heart "[d]ar in im sein leben leyt." We can imagine the servant standing back, having poised the spear on the side of the movable sculpture of Christ crucified, as he tells his master to push the lance in "tieff und weyt." This would have involved some physical exertion on the part of the servant, to simultaneously hold the spear upright and guide Longinus onto it. The higher the crucifix used, the longer the spear and the more this task becomes, in Sergi's terms, an "athletic spectacle."[178]

Though figurative art offers uncertain evidence for the history of drama, this negotiation between the servant and Longinus appears in many depictions of this moment. Figure eighteen shows a 1491 crucifixion by Hans Memling in which Longinus and his servant appear on horseback, facing each other, so that four hands hold the spear. The servant has to twist uncomfortably in his saddle to see where he is guiding the spear. Though this image cannot be said to represent the theatrical moment described

[176] Play 34, *N-Town Plays*, line 95, 277.

[177] Play 34, *N-Town Plays*, lines 100a–100b, 277.

[178] Sergi, "For the Lewd Standing Here: Chester's Athletic Spectacles and Unruly Fans," *Practical Cues*.

in the Debs script, it does convey the complex negotiation of spear, servant and blind man, and a certain interest in the play of agency between them.



Figure 18. Hans Memling, central panel, Greverade Triptych (1491), St Annen-Museum Lübeck.

Such staged activity in *Debs XIV* heightens the tension leading up to the moment Christ's side is opened. The stage directions read: "Et sic aperit sibi latus."[179] Given the dramatic build-up to this moment, this moment is likely to have involved fake blood.

[179] *Debs XIV*, 260a. "Thus [Longinus] opens his side."

Blood on the medieval stage was not simply a titillating special effect. As Clifford Davidson has argued, bloody spectacles offered an "ocular experience," which was understood to be spiritually beneficial to the viewer; "the mere sight of stage blood in late medieval Europe was understood by many to have curative and/or salvific powers."[180]

Longinus also explicitly refers to himself as having been sprayed with blood:

> Nun hat mich gottes chind
> Meine aügen gemacht guet
> Mit seinem rasen fariben bluet
> Das ist mir gespreiczt dar an.[181]

Longinus' healing is specifically attributed to the physical contact between the eyes and the blood. The passage also details how the blood travelled into the eyes – "[d]as ist mir gespreiczt" – the reflexive ("mir," to me) emphasing the direction of travel. The use of the word "gespreiczt" is also suggestive, in that it suggests a liquid under pressure.

This emphasis on the extrusion of, and contact with blood, is not unusual. The healing of Longinus' eyes is the first salvific act Christ's blood performs and so has important theological valence. We can see in figure nineteen how one artist took pains to show Christ's blood entering Longinus' eyes; where the other streams of blood behave like normal fluids, one deviant branch flows up and out, seeming to penetrate Longinus' eyes just as he penetrates Christ. This reciprocal piercing carries theological meaning in a material metaphor: Longinus revealed the truth of Christ's death by piercing him, and

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[180] Davidson, "Sacred Blood and the Late Medieval Stage," *Comparative Drama* 31 (1997): 436–458, 451; Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 70.

[181] Now God's child
Has repaired my eyes
With his rose-coloured blood
That has been sprayed on them. *Debs XIV*, 266–269

in turn received the truth of everlasting life through blood in his eyes; as William Langland puts it: "[t]he blood sprong doun by the spere and unspered the knyghtes eigen."[182] The blood takes on an active, almost violent role in this transfer of knowledge.

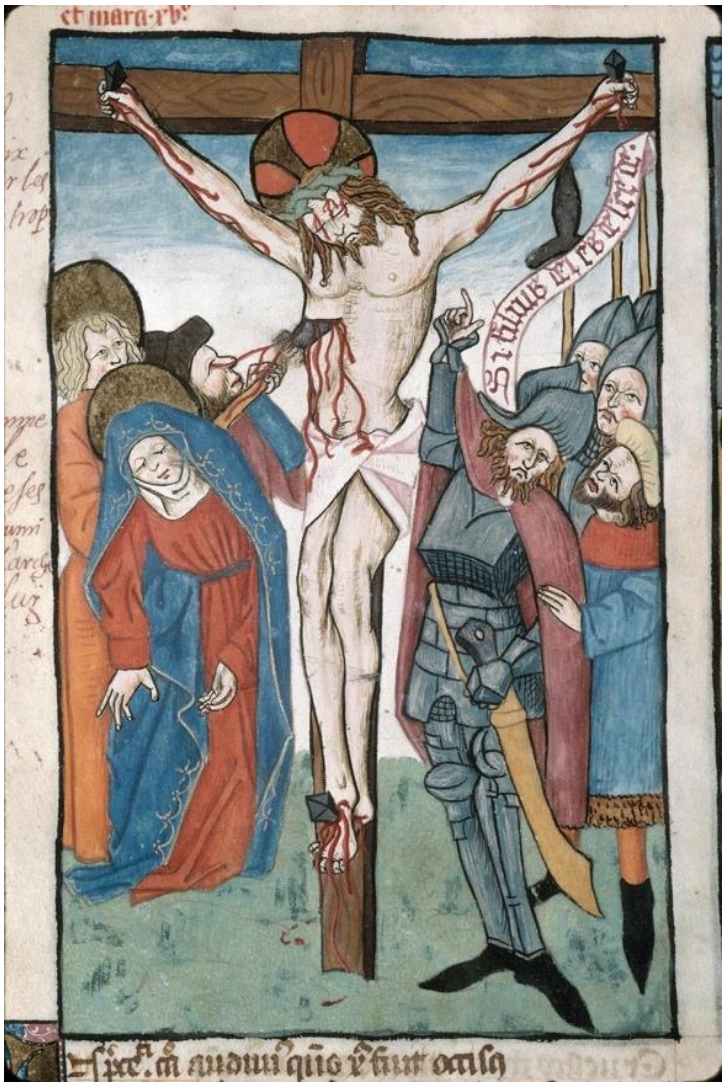


Figure 19. *Speculum humanae salvationis* (1470-1480), France, Marseille, Alcazar Library MS 89, folio 25ᵛ.

[182] William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17,* ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (Everyman, 1995), Passus XVIII, line 86, 310.

As I have explored above, there were many different techniques through which this bloodletting could be achieved. Because the Longinus scene immediately follows the "sword of sorrow" scene, the two stabbings are aligned, and any stage blood here would also in a sense stand in for the Virgin's blood. The bleeding wound might therefore have taken on a vaginal aspect, so that the audience could perceive Christ as a divine mother, birthing the world through his side wound, which was a popular devotional trope at the time.[183] In this play, the servant's association between the side wound and the side where the life (heart) is positioned compliments this image.[184] This part of the body is the physical entrance to the heart but it is also, in a gynaetheological sense, the aperture through which life is given to humanity.

Movable sculptures of Christ crucified differ from the babies of the Chester "Innocents" in that they are not built to bear blows. Rather, they bear the marks of previous damage: the holes in the hands, the wound in the side. Actors playing Christ can be scourged and spat on, but the movable sculpture remains inviolate as it represents the deceased body, reverently handled by the Apostles and the Virgin. They

[183] There is a great deal of writing on the vaginal aspects of Christ's wound; Karma Lochrie, "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies," in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Martha Easton, "The Wound of Christ, the Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages," *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art & Architecture*, eds. Susan L'Engle, and Gerald B Guest (Harvey Miller Publishers, 2006); Vibeke Olson, "Penetrating the Void: Picturing the Wound in Christ's Side as Performative Space," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, eds. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Brill, 2015), 313–339.

[184] *Debs XIV*, 258–259.

do not therefore seem to straightforwardly operate within the world of theatrical violence.

There is, however, one notable exception to this rule. Standing at six foot two, the so-called Döbeln *Mirakelmann* (c.1510) blurs the boundary between stage dummy and cult icon. Although primarily made of wood, the object was built to be flexible. Its hollow, wooden body is encased in oil-dressed leather stuffed with chopped sheep wool to mimic the pliancy of human flesh. It is jointed at its shoulder, elbows, and hips. The hip joints are specially constructed to allow a circular rotational axis of only ten degrees to simulate rigor mortis. Similarly, the neck joint is calibrated to only allow twenty degrees of freedom, so that the head does not flop about in performance.[185] The *Mirakelmann* was also capable of a special effect. It could emit blood when stabbed in the side-wound, implying that it was used for a Longinus scene like that in *Debs XIV*. Andreas Schulze, who caried out extensive restoration on the image, describes how this effect was achieved: a full bladder of stage blood would be put into a hidden compartment in the torso, which is accessible both from the back and the front. The front entrance was then sealed and concealed with flesh-coloured wax. In performance, "[d]ie bewußte Lazenstich durchdrang diesen Verschluß und zerstach die blase."[186] The *Mirakelmann* is

[185] Schulze, "Der sogenannte Mirakelmann," 129.

[186] "The deliberate thrust of the lance penetrated this seal and punctured the bladder." Schulze, "Der sogenannte Mirakelmann," 129.

an apt counterpart to the burial plays of the Debs Codex because it appears to occupy a liminal position between church object and theatrical effect.



Figure 20. The *Mirakelmann* (c. 1510), St Nicolaikirche, Döbeln.

Indeed, some scholars suggest that any sculpted devotional image in the Middle Ages could be said to function as a theatrical object. Robert Maniura, in his discussion of shrine images of saints, proposes that we "should consider the possibility that the shrine image is indeed a prop," in that it functions as part of a performative, representational system. However, he stresses, viewing the saint's image as a tool in devotional performance does not detract from its agency. Drawing off the theories of Alfred Gell, Maniura suggests that the image not only helps the devotee focus in on the saint as "a prosthetic aid to sight," it also functions as:

> a tool of crisis management which, when wielded, feeds back on the user, changing the user's relationship with the world. The devotees interact with the image "as if" with the saint in mutually supportive collective performances of hope, reassurance and consolation.[187]

The image is an agent in a network of actors, which co-create the subjunctive "as if" realm, the realm of serious play. Spectacles of gore on the medieval stage also operate within this subjunctive realm; they are not simply tools in the creation of a stable representational schema; rather, once "wielded," stage blood becomes agential in the co-creation of meaning.

Returning to the *Debs XIV* Longinus scene with this in mind, we can see how the presence of wet stage blood might have changed how the play was perceived. For if the movable sculpture of Christ was wounded onstage, its blood would remain for the rest of the play. Blood might mark the hands of the characters who manipulate this effigy,

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[187] Robert Maniura, "Agency and Miraculous Images," in *The Agency of Things in Medieval and Early Modern Art*, (Routledge, 2018), 69.

might stain their clothing. When the Virgin takes it in her lap, she too might be marked by drips remaining.

This chapter established a contextual framework for *Christ's Burial* that goes beyond the Latin *Depositiones*. I propose that European vernacular burial plays, like the Debs examples, offer a better point of comparison for this highly unusual Anglophone drama. Such a comparison needs to recognise what Bernardi and Bino call the "laicization" of the burial play and of the use of movable sculptures of Christ crucified. Within a vernacular context, these objects can be seen to limn the boundary between a special effect and a devotional object.

This chapter began by briefly considering the presentation of the corpus as bloodied in *Christ's Burial*, and a performance possibility for wet blood to transfer onto the sudarium in this play. This gives the sudarium, which is explicitly said to be "stayned" "with blude" (*CR*, 174), a certain satisfying dramaturgical logic and one which is in line with the aesthetic and theological importance of blood on the late medieval stage. This cloth is in some senses a pre-cursor to Desdemona's napkin, "dyed in mummy, which the skillful / Conserved of maidens' hearts."[188] Rather than standing as a sign of Christ's resurrection, "the cloth droppid blud" (*CR*, 162) becomes a lachrymose reminder of the events of Good Friday, drawing tears from the Magdalene. She seems to dissolve in the face of this mnemonic emblem that she holds in her hand:

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[188] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Edward Pechter, 2nd edition (Norton and Company, 2004), 3:4, lines 72–73. Sofer makes this point for other sudaria, but not for that of the Museo plays; Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 65–72

[Mawdleyn] Welle may the teres ron down your cheke!
Welle may your hertes relent,
Myndinge the payn my Lord and master felt!
O, in my body my herte now dothe melte!
To dy I were content.[189]

This seems an almost perverse response to the angel's injunction to "[b]e joyeous now of mynd" (161), and the "Secunde Mary" takes it as such: "to blame are ye," she says, "With this dedly sorow yourself to marre." (186–187). The sight of the bloodied cloth has caused a dangerous somatic reaction, that runs counter to prophesy and self-preservation. The next chapter develops the theme of stage blood put forward in this chapter by examining how the play both generates and talks about feelings. For Mary Magdalene's reaction to the sudarium, and the subsequent rebuke, is played out again and again in *Christ's Burial*, with both Mary Madgalene but especially the Virgin teering on the brink of somatic collapse. Blood in the play does not merely signal the hurt of the passion, it is also a key component of the play's spiritual and medical economy.

[189] *CR*, 181–185.

Chapter Three: Feelings

[JOSEPH]. To tak down this body, lat vs assaye.
Brother Nichodemus, help, I yow praye.
On arme I wald ye hadd,
To knokk out thes nayles so sturdy and grete.
O Safyoure! They sparid not your body to bete!
Thay aught now to be sadd.

MAWDLEYN. Gude Josephe, handille hym tenderlye!

JOSEPHE. Stonde ner, Nichodemus, resaue hym softlye.
Mawdleyn, hold ye his fete.

MAWDLEYNE. Haste yow gude Josephe, hast yow whiklye!
For Marye, his moder, wille come, fer I.[1]

Although *Christ's Burial* does not have many stage directions, the dialogue quoted above delineates a sequence of actions that can be read as blocking. It is clear that the point of connection between these living bodies is missing, that the characters are circling around a lacuna in the script. The "Sayoure" is both someone to apostrophise to and something to "handille." Joseph orchestrates the actions, telling Nicodemus to "knokk out" the "nayles" pinning one arm to the beam, while he presumably addresses the other. It seems that once the corpus is free, Nicodemus moves down to "resaue hym," and Joseph lowers the body from above. It seems, then, that they are negotiating some degree of vertical distance, as well as a body large enough to be held between three actors.

Joseph's instructions parcel out this body – Nicodemus gets "[o]n arme," while Mary Magdalene takes the "fete." Such systems of fragmentation, as Caroline Walker

[1] *CB*, 435–445.

Bynum describes with reference to the divisions inherent in *arma Christi* images, blur the distinction between body and object and "body becomes object, object becomes body."[2] This moment may have reminded the reader or spectators of a scene such as the York crucifixion, in which the soldiers divide the body between them.[3] This time, these actions are tenderly reversed; the three saints undo what has been done to the body. As they work, they assess their strategy. They tell each other to be gentle, to "handille hym tenderlye" and "softlye," as well as to be quick, for they are concerned that the Virgin will come and interrupt them. Mary Magdalene's directives oppose each other, they must make "[h]aste," while also remaining reverent, gentle, slow. The word "handille" reflects their predicament; the deposition is an act of reverent touching – the characters feel out the hurt their saviour has suffered with their hands. But the deposition is also a manual action, a kind of work – the characters must physically "handille" the body, must manipulate it, shape it, even, with their hands.[4] In performance, the characters might have reflected this tension in the way they carry out this action, so that the corpus is caught in a tense acceleration and deceleration as it is puppeteered down from the cross. It is possible that they used physical aides like ladders or bands of cloth. The practicality of bands in this situation is clear; in order to maximise the visibility of the descending body, those carrying out the deposition are best placed behind the crucifix, which the bands allow; in this configuration the lateral beam of the cross acts as a simple fixed pulley, to regulate the body's descent. Una d'Elia has examined evidence for bands

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[2] Bynum, *Christian Materiality*: *An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Zone Books, 2015), 101.

[3] Play 35, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, 292-301. See for example: "Unto his heede I schall take hede", line 87, 294. "I hope I holde this hande line" 98, 295; "Go we all foure thanne to his feete", line 123, 296.

[4] MED hondlen 1 (a) To touch with the hands, feel; 2 (a) To manipulate (sth.) with the hands

in Renaissance images as well as modern *Depositiones*: "we can imagine how Renaissance sculptures were moved during these ceremonies but also how they were at times held suspended in midair, the narrative paused, before the action resumed and God's body was slowly but inexorably lowered to the ground."[5] Such performances remind us of the etymology of the cadaver, from the Latin *cadere* to fall.[6] I suggest that this sense of suspension, of a narrative paused, is a key thematic and aesthetic principle of *Christ's Burial*.

This chapter closely examines how the characters in *Christ's Burial* use the corpus as a kind of "affect machine" to produce feeling in the audience. As we see from the deposition moment quoted above, the characters offer varying – even contradictory – commands, and they work in tense anticipation of the Virgin's disruptive presence. The male characters – and Joseph in particular – try to curtail Mary Magdalene and the Virgin's laments and wrest the corpus out of their control and into their own hands. This chapter, then, also explores what values, meanings and dangers the characters place on feelings and traces the cultural assumptions underlying this discourse. *Compassio*, as both a devotional and medical principle, establishes a very literal connection between Christ's body, the bodies of the characters and the bodies of the audience. The play's thematic contrasts of sickness and healing, abjection and beauty, can be seen to be reflected in the corpus itself. Mind, body and affect were understood to be inextricably connected in

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[55] Una D'Elia, "The Dead Weight of Christ: Deposition Cloths and the Mechanics of Performance in the Italian Renaissance," *Notes in the History of Art* 44, number 1 (2024): 5-15,12.

[6] Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (Reaktion Books, 2005), 8.

medieval medicine, philosophy and theology.[7] What is striking in this play is the not only repetitive insistence of medical imagery but also the way in which this dis-ease seems to emanate from the onstage corpus.

In order to understand the play's affective strategies, we have to also look at the assumptions the play puts forward about feelings. Sarah McNamer has proposed that literature can offer important paths of enquiry into the history of feelings, and puts forward a road map for such studies:

> First, reconstruct the historical conditions of the performance of a text, through empirical research and informed speculation; next, examine how a text seeks to produce emotion, through careful attention to its affective stylistics; then see how it all adds up, kinetically.[8]

Chapter one and two of this dissertation attempted to reconstruct the 'historical conditions of the performance" of *Christ's Burial*; the present chapter pays close attention to the stylistic effects used to generate feelings, as well as how those feelings are framed within the text. The kinetic factor is the interface of lyric text and physical puppet, an object of study that runs throughout this dissertation. Sarah McNamer prefers the identification of "feelings" rather than "emotions," as the latter word is not only anachronous but also less resonant with medieval thought. The word "feelings"

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[7] Corinne Saunders, "Affective Reading: Chaucer, Women, and Romance," *The Chaucer Review* 51, no. 1 (2016): 11–30, 29; Saunders, "Mind, Body and Affect in Medieval English Arthurian Romance," in *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, eds. Frank Brandsma, Carolyne Larrington, and Saunders (D. S. Brewer, 2015), 31–46.

[8] Sarah McNamer, "Feeling," in *Middle English: Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford University Press, 2009), 247.

"serves as a reminder of the integration of the somatic, affective, and cognitive in a pre-Cartesian universe."[9]

As I have explored in chapter one, many scholars see these plays as closet dramas. On one level, this analysis rests on assumptions of authorship. On another level, these analyses are responding to a fundamental mood of the text. For *Christ's Burial* does convey a sense of profound stasis. It is set in an aftermath; the characters, caught between their saviour's death and resurrection, engage in a fraught push and pull between the cyclical, dilatory work of lamenting and the linear demands of the plot. Furthermore, the internal cues of the play show that the whole course of the actions – constrained, abrupted, limited as they are – revolve around something that hangs, something that is limp. Even when reading the play, one is constantly required to hold the image of Christ's dead body, and to watch in one's mind's eye as it is manoeuvred into various iconographical poses. In this sense, it does not matter if Christ was portrayed by a living actor or a movable sculpture: how he is manoeuvred remains a form of puppetry; he would have to be heaved from one pose into another, while remaining incapable of self-propelled movement.

Scholars have downplayed the visual aspects of the text. Ward has argued that the plays are true closet dramas, not "for sensual display but for developing the spirituality of the audience through reading or listening."[10] In a similar vein, Baker, Murphy and Hall state that *Christ's Burial* "seems deliberately lacking action," and that

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[9] McNamer, "Feeling," 247.

[10] Ward, "The e Museo 160 Manuscript," 81.

the "spectacle of taking down the body from the cross is very spare, and no business at all is actually seen."[11] This is a puzzling statement; it goes without saying that, if read privately, no business would be *seen*. I think what they are imagining is that the deposition would be recited without accompanying action, or without an object or person standing in for Christ. This is the sense of the text that Rosemary Woolf put forward in *The English Mystery Plays* (1972):

> The long monologues and lack of dramatic action show that [*Christ's Burial*] either not written for performance, or, if for performance, not in a situation that demanded that the author should have observed the primary obligation of the dramatist, namely, to write in such a way as to hold the audience's attention.[12]

It is hard to say what held the attention of a medieval audience, but Woolf's analysis here does not account for the possible use of a movable sculpture in performance. She writes that the play "is almost entirely static," and "when something potentially exciting takes place on stage it is performed only in mime."[13] By "mime," it seems that she means without "accompanying dialogue," in the sense that Charlie Chaplin is a mime. But, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the deposition clearly occurs within a scripted conversation. Woolf's use of the word "mime" also implies corporeal mime, which uses the body as a "negative mould" to create the illusion of an object.[14] How does one mime a deposition? Joseph, Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene would have to act upon an absence, miming the knocking of the nails, the reception of the feet, the gentle

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[11] BMH, lxxxvii.

[12] Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays*, 335.

[13] Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* , 332. James Hogg also states that the "deposition is depicted in mime." Hogg, "Carthusian Drama in Bodleian MS E. Museo 160?" in *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval English Religious Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. S. Hussey*, ed. Helen Phillips (D.S. Brewer, 1990), 268.

[14] Etienne Decroux and Patrick Pezin, "The Imaginary Interview (or the Maxims of Etienne Decroux)," *The Decroux Sourcebook*, eds. Thomas Leabhart and Franc Chamberlain (Taylor & Francis: 2008), 130.

manipulation of the arms and head: all the actions they describe in dialogue. This would have required a great deal of precision, and seems improbable, given what we know about late medieval devotional culture, which was highly visual and deeply invested in the corporality of Christ.[15]

Christ's Burial is longer than the sum of its parts, its action is extended through various techniques of emotive dilation and amplification: repetition, refrain, energia, and exclamation. In discussing this play, it is anachronistic to write of "scenes." There are instead shifts in the play, in which the corpus is moved into iconographic poses, and the language, ever reflecting this central body, shifts accordingly. These moments function not as scenes but as "stills" or tableaux, a term that reflects the imbrications between drama, the pictural arts and texts in the late Middle Ages, what Jody Enders calls the "symbiosis between image and performance."[16] Anthony Bale attests to a similar phenomenon in his discussion of the *Dormition*:

> Images of sacramental religion and of affective piety were approached through mnemonic cognition rather than simple recognition: the religious and aesthetic *ductus* of an image or narrative – its composition, flow and movement, its way of *leading* or *conducting* the viewer – would call to mind a larger set of narratives, which the viewer/reader then directs, arranges, combines.[17]

Thinking of the play as a progression through stills, which are subject to being hastened, disrupted or extended, rather than scenes, attests to the dynamics of the corpus itself,

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[15] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); Bynum, *Christian Materiality*; Cristina Maria Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[16] Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty*, 111. Derek Pearsall has discussed this aesthetic effect in Lydgate's poetry, in which each stanza acts as a "still" that conjures a pictoral trope. Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (Routledge, 2020), 180–181.

[17] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 96. His emphasis.

which is set in motion by the characters of the play – both literally through puppeteering, and cognitively through language.

Christ's Burial is also interested in the somatic operations of feeling, as well as its spiritual use. The characters debate the use and origin of feeling, based off a complex Galenic medical discourse interwoven with spiritual exegesis, which runs through both *Christ's Burial* and *Christ's Resurrection*. In *Christ's Burial*, the silent presence of the corpus generates conflicting demands upon the characters. On the one hand, Joseph and Nicodemus must carry out the work of the deposition and burial before the Sabbath.[18] On the other hand, the silent presence of the wounded corpse in the playing space insistently draws out expressions of lament, particularly from the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. This builds a complex dynamic between the characters, who often seek to influence each other's behaviour. From the Virgin's arrival until her forced departure, she must claim her right for the space and time to perform her lament, which is by far the longest speech in the play; it takes up almost forty percent of the whole.[19] We thus get a sense of a text in tension with itself; expressions of lyric lament make up most of the dialogue, yet the characters – particularly the male characters – present a curious ambivalence to them.

3.1 Suspended Animation: The Metascript of the Puppet

The actions of the play primarily consist of manoeuvring the corpus. The script also insistently gestures to and describes "this displaied body" (313) hanging in the

[18] Luke 23: 55; John 19: 42; Mark 15: 42; Matthew 27: 62.

[19] Excluding meditative prologue; 220 out of 848 lines.

performance space. The characters ask the audience and each other to "luk better," to "see" and "behold" (89) "he that hingeth here" (337). We must "[b]ehold hym woundit" (78); "come nere and behold" (85); "Behold these bludy wellese" (362) "Behold how plenteose [his blood is]" (372); "your-self behold and see" (133); "Se his side, hede, handes and fete"; "beholde your lorde" (670); "be-hold hym here þat hange on rude / Se all abowte the bludy streynes" (677–678). As McNamer has shown, the word "behold" had specific meanings in medieval devotional culture, encompassing both sight and emotional embrace.[20] Indeed, beholding comes to seem like a resting state for the characters in the play, and particularly for the Virgin and Mary Magdalene: when not acting upon the corpus, they are "[b]eholding his body thus" (146) and "[b]eholding my master on this peteose tree" (258). One way to frame this centripetal and ocular pull towards a body that is both dead and dynamic, is Robert Mills' concept of "suspended animation" in depictions of torture in the Middle Ages. Mills describes how

> [c]ertain performances of the passion keep Christ's suffering body, and implicitly the subjectivity of the Christian devotee, in a queerly suspended moment – at least, that is, within the representational field. Loss of self in passion depiction is figured not as *no* self, but as multiply gendered, paradoxically proliferating selves. Christ is a figure to be imitated, but he is also desired – desired in the context of his suffering. This delicate balance between suffering and sublimity is achieved, aesthetically, by constructing sites of identification that arrest time indefinitely.[21]

The corpus often functions in the play as a "site of identification that arrest[s] time indefinitely"; it is a physical record of the crucifixion, the literal "buke" of the crucifixion. In this sense, beholding the corpus facilitates a suspension or condensation of time. As

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[20] McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[21] Mills, *Suspended Animation*, 199.

the Virgin says in her pietatic lament: “Ye that can not wepe, com lern at mee, / Kepinge this crucifixe stille in your mynd” (716–717). The word “stille,” as elsewhere in her lament, suggests both temporal suspension – keeping this crucifix ever in your mind – and physical immobility – keeping this crucifix fixed, riveted in your mind. It seems she is referring here to the corpus, rather than the crucifix, as the deposition has already taken place.

The corpus is also an object of suspension in that it is also caught between states of being, between life and death. Imagining the corpus as a movable sculpture means that come Easter Sunday, it will in a sense have ceased to exist, replaced by a living actor in *Christ’s Resurrection*. As Valentin Groebner reminds us, the dead body of Christ is “always an image,” always a temporary situation bridging Christ’s life and resurrection.[22] This sloughing off of the image for the living body of an actor speaks to Mill’s description of the “proliferating selves” in performances of the passion. Furthermore, the very flexibility of the movable sculpture allows it to play different iconographic roles, “proliferating” as a crucifix, as a pietà and as a *Grabchristus* as it is moved through the *ductus* of the play. I will address the queer element of Mills’ reading in the final section of this chapter, when discussing the multiple ways in which the corpus is gendered in the play and the multiple frames of bodily identification which are applied to it.

Moreover, on a basic level, the movable sculpture – like the images of hung, tortured people Mills discusses – is literally suspended, a material fact that *Christ’s Burial* continually emphasises. Prior to the deposition scene, Christ is “Thys highe kinge

[22] Groebner, *Defaced*, 88.

þat hinges befor our face, / Displayede on crosse in this piteous place" (115–116). The play emphasises the *here* ("this piteous place") and the *now* of the face-to-face confrontation, arrests the "[d]isplayede" body in an insistent present.

The corpus is also often described using deictics: "[t]his bludy body" (546); "This body which now is cold / This bludy body woundit so sore" (597–598). The characters draw attention to individual elements of the body – "thes lippes" (688); "Thes are the swete fete" (266); "Thes blessite fete" (98). The play often pairs the deictic "here" with the word "hing," which is a semantic choice, as well as an alliterative one, conveying a stilted temporality; the corpus is literally fixed in face, manifestly "here", but it is also energetically suspended; that which is hanging must fall or be brought down. The characters continually describe "hym that hinges here, / That hinges here so piteouslye" (232–233); "How rewfully he hinges here" (71); "he that hingeth here" (337); the "mekeste lambe, hanginge here on hye" (254). Nicodemus says that is it a "pitefull sight," "[t]o se the prince of euerlastinge blisse/ To hinge here on this tree / To hinge here thus so piteoslye" (397–398). The characters have to negotiate "some gude waye, / This Crucified body down to take, / And bringe it to sepulcre" (376–377); to force the Virgin to "deliuer that blessit body till vs" (799). They call on each other: "lat vs bery this body that is here" (812); "To tak down this body, lat vs assaye" (435). There is a sense that the resistant thing-ness of the corpus disrupts the narrative flow, pulling the characters into lyric expressions of lament which disrupt the work of the burial.

This tension between the need to behold the corpus and the need to bury it is set out as a kind of argument in the exchange between Joseph and Mary Magdalene at the beginning of the play. The play begins with a soliloquy from Joseph, which apostrophises

Pilate (22) and "Caluery Mownt" (28). In his final stanza, Joseph states that he is coming "down" from the "hylle" where he "left the holy women in dedly swoun" (48–50), and he addresses the audience as citizens of Jerusalem:

> O ye pepulle of the cetye and of this town,
> Herd ye not the exclamation
> And the grete brunte which was on the h[i]lle:
> "Crucyfy hym! Crucify hym! Slo hym and kille!"?
> Peace! Now harkyn, I pray you stand stille!
> Me think I here lamentation.[23]

After hushing the audience, he listens in on the Maries' opening remarks of lament, making one aside to the audience. This sets up a notional boundary between different sites of action and cements Joseph's position at the prime mover of the plot as well as the mediator between the audience and the Biblical characters. Mary Magdalene spots him hiding and calls him over, assuming he has come to "keyle" their "cares" (76); that is, to cool their sorrow.[24] Joining them under the crucifix, he tells them to "be of gud chere" (81). However, Mary Magdalene begins to guide him through an extended and highly affective contemplation of the "spectakille" of Christ's body on the cross (101), which takes up about a third of the play. She shows how careful and compassionate "behold[ing]" (78) of the corpus can bring one emotionally closer to the events of the crucifixion even if, like Joseph – and indeed the audience – one did not witness them. Her speeches perform *exergasia*, amplifying emotional impact through the repetition of the same idea with variation; it is worth quoting a whole stanza to show this repetitive rhetoric at work:

> Nay gude Josephe, com nere and behold.

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[23] *CB*, 50–55.

[24] MED kȩlen v. see 1. (a) To cause coldness and 3 (a) To assuage (feeling, spirit, passion, etc.), reduce, quench.

> This bludy lammes body is starke and cold
> O, hadde ye seyn his paynes manyfold,
> Ye wald haue beyne right sory!
> Josephe, luk bettere behold and see,
> In how litille space how many woundes bee!
> Here was no mercee, her was no pitee
> But cruelle delinge paynfully![25]

Her initial "[n]ay," and the repeated use of his name give the speech a tone at once didactic and imploring. The lines repeat the same pattern: first is an imperative to look closely and to affectively "behold" the corpus. Next, Mary Magdalene relates clear, visual information: the body is stiff and cold; the surface of the body is covered with wounds, which would have been apparent to the audience of the play. Lastly, she provides an affective conclusion: the corpus was ill-treated. We can imagine that spoken before a polychrome sculpture, these words would have had a profound impact, combining the visual and the verbal. No matter how complex its construction, the sculpture would indeed look "starke" (stiff) and "cold." The anaphora "[h]ere was no mercee, her was no pitee" not only gives emphasis; it turns the corpse into a location; she shows how the corpus can function as a dense record, a visual map of the events of the crucifixion. Mary Magdalene delivers an object lesson in how to glean a *lectio Domini*, a reading of the book of Christ from a physical crucifix.[26]

Yet Joseph is not easily drawn in. When she asks Joseph whether he saw the crucifixion, his answer shows a curious reticence. Yes, he says, "it changid my chere! / The wounder was so grete I yrkit to com nere / But I was not farre hence" (110–112). Seen

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[25] *CB*, 85–92.

[26] Vincent Gillespie, "Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing," in *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, ed. James Hogg (Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1986).

from a distance, the crucifixion changed Joseph's "chere," his mien as well as his frame of mind.[27] But rather than rushing closer, he remained in a liminal position, neither "nere" nor "farre hence." Mary Magdalene's response seems to pick up this sense that Joseph's experience was insufficient for him to experience true *compassio*. She continues to exhort him to approach Christ's corpse in order to read the details he missed. If he knew everything that happened to "[t]his highe kinge þat hinges befor our face" (116), she argues, his "hart should tendere" (121). His heart would soften and, she continues, "notwithstondinge your many hart / Frome your ees the teres wald starte / To shew your hevynesse" (125–127). Her language here focuses on the physical symptoms of sorrow, which are implicitly gendered. According to humoral theory, the female body was insufficiently hot to digest matter, resulting in a superfluity of moisture.[28] Regular purging, through menstruation or phlebotomy was therefore necessary; tears were a subcategory of blood, and therefore weeping *qua* purgation was associated with the female body. True compassionate beholding of the corpus would enable Joseph to act like the female characters around him.

So Mary Magdalene tries again, asking him to "[c]om hithere Josephe and stande ner this rood" (128) and look at the corpus on it. Again, she describes the corpus as a location, the contours of which can be made to articulate the past: "Her was more rancore shewed than equitee / mich more malace than ony pitee" (131–132). However, she interrupts this train of thought: "I report me – yourself behold and see!" (133). All that

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[27] MED chēre n., 2 (a) The face as expressing emotion, attitude, or character; facial expression, mien and 5 (a) Frame of mind, state of feeling, spirit; mood, humour.

[28] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19.

is required now is an engaged beholding, and the tears should start. Yet Joseph gently demurs: "Gude Mawdleyn, of your mowrnynge cease, / It ekes my doole, dere moder" (136–137). He pulls away from hearing that which will increases his sorrow. The other Maries argue against this position, stressing the naturalness of the sorrowful response: "Wo and sorow must nedes synke / Mor in our hartes than met and drinke" (142–143). The natural processes of digestion have been usurped by sorrow; the image rests on assumptions about matter: sadness, as a heavy feeling, sinks deeper than lighter nourishment. The body can digest "met and drinke" into something more rarefied, but sorrow has a permanence to it.

Joseph replies to this argument with a delicate balance of compliance and refusal: he says: "Alese, women, ye make my hart to relente, / Beholdinge his body thus torne and rente, / That inwardly I wepe" (145–147). The women have succeeded in making him behold the ruined "body," and thus have made his heart "relent." But this does not bring him to the point of physical tears, nor does he enter into their exclamatory, ekphrastic mode of speaking. Instead, he asks Mary Magdalene a series of factual questions – where is the Virgin? (149); did Christ think of his mother when he was on the cross? (185); what did he say to her? (204); when he said he was thirsty, did he mean that literally? (212). Yet, Mary Magdalene's speech turns again and again from an analysis of the past to the spectacle before them. Her sustained beholding eventually becomes a bodily threat:

> A sisters, sisters! What sorow is in me,
> Beholding my master on this peteose tree!
> My hart fayntes, I may no longer dree![29]

[29] MED Drīen 2. (a) To put up with (sb.), tolerate (sth.), bear up under, endure.

> Now lat me pawse a whyle.
> [...]
> Wald God here I myght dye![30]

"Beholding" the corpus on "this" cross, in the here and now, produces a physical reaction, a contraction of the heart that brings Mary Magdalene to the edge of consciousness. She asks for a moment of stasis, a "pawse," but she is curtailed by the other Maries, who tell her to "mesure" her "distillinge teres" (264); Magdalene answers her companions by once again emphasising that no one "may hold theire cheres" (265), no one can maintain equanimity, while Christ's corpse hangs in front of them. She asks, "[h]ow shulde my sorowfulle harte bot fayle?" (269) when she looks at those "swete fete [...] thyrlite with a nayle" (266–268), again emphasising the physicality of her sorrow and the inevitability of her somatic response when faced with the hanging body.

At this moment she appeals to Joseph, comparing the corpus before them to a book, whose surface is so densely marked that there is hardly any "margente" (273) to the page: "Cum hithere, Ioseph, beholde and looke / How many bludy letters beyn writen in þis buke, Small margente her is" (271–273). This is the most well-known passage of the text, and one which is enriched by thinking of it as a sculptural drama, so that the audience are invited to read the physical object before them. Joseph confirms the metaphor by mirroring it – "Ye this parchment is stritchit owt of syse!" (274), the material page has been stretched beyond measure. This exchange is what finally sparks an exclamatory, ekphrastic speech from Joseph. Like Christ in the York crucifixion, he performs a *Vos Omnes* address to "alle the pepille that passis here by" and exhorts them

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[30] *CB*, 257–263.

to "[b]eholde here inwardlye, with your ees gostly" (277–278).[31] Joseph points out various parts of the body, relating them to the details of what is known as the Secret Passion, the extra-scriptural torment that was elaborated and amplified across the late Middle Ages.[32] For example, Joseph describes how the thorns on his crown were so large, they pierced into his brain (306); he was so stretched that one could count all of his bones (302); from the crown of the head to the toes, no part was left whole (310–311); he bled so much, it was as if he were in a winepress (318). These details often served to tie the events of the crucifixion back to what was seen to be its typological foreshadowing in the Old Testament. As James Marrow and Frederick Pickering remind us, the accrued details of the secret passion are not as "naturalistic" as they might appear to a modern reader; passion writers, particularly in the Netherlands, sought to "extract historical incident from prophetic imagery."[33] Within this mode of devotional looking, Christ's body indeed functions as a book, which can be "read" for scriptural details and hidden truths.[34] As Peter Dent writes:

> the accommodation of such textual sources within the visual representation automatically supplies Christ's body with scriptural depth, marking its surface as the fulfilment of a plan already shadowed forth elsewhere. Recognition of these elements, and the corresponding movement that this generates between the image of Christ and the prophetic material, activates the different layers of

[31] Play 35, *The York Corpus Christi Plays*, lines 253–264, 300.

[32] In texts such as Pseudo-Anselm's *Dialogus,* Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Mediationes vitae Christi* and Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*; Frederick P. Pickering, *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1970), 241; James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Van Ghemmert, 1979) 2–6, 95–189; Thomas H. Bestul, "The Passion of Christ and the Institution of Torture," in *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (University of Pennyslvania Press, 1996).

[33] Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, 57.

[34] Peter Dent, "A Window for the Pain: Surface, Interiority and Christ's Flagellated Skin in Late Medieval Sculpture," in *Flaying in the Pre-Modern World: Practice and Representation* ed. Larissa Tracy, (D.S. Brewer, 2017), 233.

> meaning. This leads the viewer to oscillate between contemplation of the image and of the textual material. In a kind of reversal of the scriptural model, the texts become the hidden content of the body.[35]

The extremity of violence in Joseph's description thus produces layers of meaning for the corpus, so that it reflects sacred texts. Joseph has taken Mary Magdalene's lesson on board: in beholding the corpus in its present state, he can pick out the terrible events he missed.

Joseph's reading of the corpus drives Mary Magdalene towards despair. She begins with a rhetorical question "[w]ho euer saw a spektacle more pitevs?" (321), positioning the optical experience of beholding the corpus as the emotional catalyst of the scene. She then enters an exclamatory mode, punctuated with "O"s (330; 331; 333) "A"s (323; 324; 324) and "Alese"s (325; 327). Finally, her "grete inwarde hevynes and cure" [care] (326) becomes so unbearable that she wishes twice for death. In the second instance, she addresses Christ himself: "O, dere Master, be ye not displeasid / Yf I myght dy with yow, my hart were wel easid / O faynt, and faynt it is!" (331–333). Her request that Christ be "not displeasid" reveals a conviction that he would, indeed, be displeased were she to die of grief. But her need to die is framed as a function of her body rather than her will; her failing "hart" would be eased by giving out. Her inversion "O faynt, and faynt it is" at the end of this speech, produces a sense that she is trailing off and unable to continue. The word "faint" appears to sit somewhere between an adjective and a verb; her heart is faint and is fainting. Her reaction can be read as a reflection of the state of

[35] Dent, "A Window for the Pain," 235.

the corpus itself, she wishes to "dy with" her master, so that co-suffering with a corpse is a journey towards death.

For Joseph, this suicidal ideation is a step too far. He issues a reprimand: "What meyn ȝe, women, in Goddis name? / Moder, to mych sorow ȝe mak, ye be to blame!" (334–335); in censuring Mary Magdalene, he first addresses all the 'women', implying that they too have been brought to tears. Her sorrow is "to mych," it is out of proportion. Addressing Mary Magdalene as "Moder," which he does twice, not only associates her with the Virgin Mary, but also with the frailties of her biological sex, as "moder" was the word for womb, whose superfluities could affect the brain. The title is thus both honorific and diagnostic and his argument against immoderate lament combines the medical and the theological. He explains that Christ will rise again "for right so saide hee. / His wordes must nedes be trewe" (338–339). Thus, to "compleyn [...] thus hevylee" (352) constitutes an absence of faith. Joseph here points out a profound problem with Mary Magdalene's insistence on beholding the corpus in the here and now; when she asks to "dy with" her "dere Master," she implies that death is a lasting condition for him. In constantly beholding his present ruination, she has lost sight of future joy.

Mary Magdalene counters Joseph's critique by insisting on her status as a natural being: "[n]edes must I compleyn, and that most bitterlee" (353). For, she reasons, if "[i]nsensibille creaturs" (355) like the sun, earth and stones, experienced a physical disruption at the crucifixion, it is only natural that "resonable creatures" also "be trowblid" (359). Her understanding of her sorrow is urgently physical; it is as futile to stop her complaint as to stop an eclipse or an earthquake. So she returns to exclamation, apostrophe and rhetorical question: "I, a wrechit woman! A wrech! A wreche! / Behold

these bludy welles!" (361–362); "O ye welles of mercy, dyggide so deep! / Who may refrayn? Who may bot wepe / These bludy stremys to beholde?" (364–366). Her imagery here equates the unstoppable flood of Christ's blood, as natural as the outpourings of "welles" in the earth, to her own flowing tears. But yet again she is censured, this time by the "altera Mary" (in this play either Cleophas or Jacoby) who tells Magdalene that her "mowrnynge avaylis nothinge" (372). Instead:

> Lat us speke to Josephe, hym hertely desiringe
> For to finde some gude waye
> This crucified body down to take,
> And bringe it to sepulcre and so lett make
> Ende of this wofulle daye.[36]

She redirects Mary Magdalene towards the set of actions that make up the plot, and she seems to look forward to getting it over with. It is unclear whether the altera Mary is wanting to help Joseph, or merely putting the ongoing action in his hands; either way, the women should stop lamenting the body and allow it to be acted upon, to be drawn out of the moment of lyric lament and into the grave.

In response to the altera Mary's invitation for him to "finde some gude waye / This crucified body down to take," Joseph describes the male network he has called upon to complete the task. He says he has been with Pilate, who put the issue fully into his hands (383–384) and has "spokene with Nichodemus also" (385), who should be on his way now and so "[y]e shalle se hyme [Christ] taken down or ye go" (386). Joseph's speech here focuses on the swift turnover of events; he has been with Pilate "instantlye" (380) and the deposition should take place before the women depart. Indeed, Joseph says that

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[36] *CB*, 374–378.

Nicodemus “taryes so longe I mervelle” (387); he is amazed that Nicodemus would be so slow. Compared to Mary Magdalene’s laments, Joseph’s statement feels brisk, almost cheerful, focusing on the concrete episodes in the past, and the actionable outcomes of the future, one of which comes to fruition as he is still speaking: Joseph sees Nicodemus “now com vpward the hille” (388) and tells the women to be quiet and cheer up: “[c]esse of youre wepinge, I pray you, be stille! / I trust alle shal be welle” (389–390). The time of lamenting is over and the meritorious task of taking down the body can begin.

However, things do not progress as swiftly as Joseph expects. When Nicodemus arrives, the sight of Christ “hing[ing]” (397) on the cross arouses a lament in him, but Joseph interrupts him, asking him to “cesse” his “compleinte” (416), explaining that is “renew[s] agayne gret hevynesse / Now in thes women here” (417). Now that the women are redirected, Joseph does not want to “renewe agayne” their lamenting. Once checked, Nicodemus stresses the future assurance of the resurrection. At this point they begin to take down Christ from the cross, but at this key moment, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, they are caught by the surprise. From this moment until her forced removal from the playing area, the Virgin fights to carve out time and space for her complaint against attempts to moderate her grief, silence her, or remove her altogether from the scene. The fact that the Virgin laments is not unusual: as we shall see in the next chapter, her pietatic lament is clearly drawn from a body of vernacular *planctus Mariae*. What is striking is how little value the other characters place in her laments.

The Virgin’s presence is instantly disruptive. Her first words are exclamatory shouts: “A! A, my dere sone Jhesus! A! A, my dere son Jhesus” (450). John, who is accompanying her, gently asks her to “mourn [...] not thus! / Ye see how standes the

case" (451–452). It is not clear whether "the case" is metaphorical (you understand how things are) or literal (you see that they are in the process of removing your son from the cross). Either way, he is trying to pacify her, to make her quiet. John's comment is followed by an aside from Mary Magdalene to Joseph and Nicodemus: "Allese! Scho commys! A, what remedye?" (453); she has either spied the Virgin or heard her exclamations. The two groups appear to be separate at this moment; the stage directions state that John and the Virgin "com then sayinge," as they make their way up the "hille" of Calvary. The audience thus watches as these two sites of action collide, heightening the dramatic tension.

When the Virgin sees what the company are doing, her first instinct is to ask them to freeze: "[s]tond stille, frendes, hast ye not soo!" (456). They are caught, as it were, red-handed with the corpus suspended somewhere between the cross and the ground and it seems she has spied them hurrying. The Virgin draws on her authority ("[h]aue ye no fere of mee!") and asks them to let her "help to tak [her] dere son down" (56–58). Instead, as the stage direction tells us, she is in no fit state to help and "falles in swown" so that the characters must rush to revive her. In a moment of bathos perhaps, Mary Magdalene says to this, "Lo, I was sure sho walld falle in a swown" (459).[37] The Virgin asks to hold the body some 138 lines after she interrupts the deposition. It is unclear where the body is in the meantime, perhaps propped on the ground, or on a bier, which could have supported the graveclothes in which the body is later wrapped (587). The Virgin thus succeeds in pulling the body out of the linear movement of the plot, and carving out

[37] Diller describes this as "a comment [...], which in its soberness sounds like an involuntary parody." *The English Mystery Plays*, 192.

space and time for her *planctus*. Her first command in the playing space for others to "[s]tond stille" casts her from the beginning as a figure of temporal dilation, mirroring the first words that Mary Magdalene speaks in the play: "O sisters, stand stille vntylle to-morowe! / I trow I may not leue!" (57–58). Lyric lamenting is dilatory work.

The Virgin is not given the space and time to perform her lament easily, hence the delay between the deposition and pietatic lament. The other characters continually try to contain and curtail her expressions of grief. They ask her to stop lamenting: "Wille ye here dy? / Leyf of this hevynesse!" (465–466); "Ye shuld lefe of your paynfulle afflictione" (511). Joseph says to the Virgin:

> Tak comfurthe, Marye; this wailinge helpes nothinge.
> Your dere son we wille to his sepulcre bringe
> Als it is alle oure dewtee.[38]

His words function as a double-entendre: the company "alle" share the "dewtee" of the burial, and the burial is "alle" their duty; they are there to bury the body and "this wailinge" does not help them with this. Fruitless lamenting is juxtaposed with goal-orientated action. And yet, expressions of lyric lament remain the primary purpose of the performance; the mourners continually enjoin the audience to feel *compassio*, to co-suffer with the ruined body of Christ, and they employ poetic language and exhortations to generate such compassion both in each other and in the audience. The onstage corpus is both the source of this dolour and the object that must be manoeuvred to fulfil the requirements of the plot. The Virgin should not only take comfort by calling to mind the glorious resurrection (512), she should also stop speaking.

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[38] *CB*, 475–477.

The medical language of the play frames her swoons as detrimental to her own health as well as that of others. Mary Magdalene warns her to "leve [her] lamentation": "Ye swown stille on pase with dedly suspiration / Ye mare yowrself and vs" (508–510). She is close to "dedly suspiration," that is, the last sighing out of breath. This word – from the classical Latin *suspirare* (to sigh) – is fairly unusual in Middle English, though it is used twice in *Christ's Burial* to mean "sighing."[39] The Middle English Dictionary gives only one example, in an obsolete sense from a middle English translation of Guy de Chauliac's *Grande Chirurgie* meaning to transmute into pus, which is a conflation of the Latin *suspirare* and *suppurare* (to suppurate, to fester beneath the surface).[40] Of course, this engendering of pus is not what is meant in the play, but we might see this unusual, Latinate word as lending a medicinal flavour to this description of the Virgin; her swooning has almost elicited a final exhalation, a kind of death-rattle which "mar[s]" the company. In medieval medical understanding, the breath of a sick person was thought to be a key vector of disease, adding to the sense that the Virgin's mental turmoil might produce a somatic chain reaction in the company.[41] As the Virgin says later: "myn harte is in a mortalle dred! [...] Is ther no remedye" (813–815); it is a killing fear which comes upon her. The word "remedy" here, as elsewhere in the play, carries with it a sense of a medical as well as emotional salve: her heart is always on the verge of giving out.

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[39] "O day off suspiratione" (64); BMH glosses both instances as "sighing, lamentation," 273; DMLBS, from classical Latin *suspirare*: 1) a) to sigh, give a sigh. b? to breathe one's last, expire.

[40] MED suspīrāciǒun n. 1) suppuracioun n. "Tho apostemes..þe whiche haue now passed forþ, it byhoueþ to lede ham to digestioun and to suspiracioun." Margaret. S. Ogden ed., *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac,* EETS (Oxford University Press, 1971), 85, line 7.

[41] Concetta Pennuto, "Contagion and Pandemics: Plague in Early Modern Medical Thought," in *Epidemics and Pandemics: Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Michele Nicoletti and Alessandro Palazzo (Brepols, 2024), 150–156.

The Virgin's own body serves as a disruptive presence even to herself, stymieing the performance of her lament. She asks Joseph for the opportunity to speak, even if her body fails her: "Suffere me my mynd for to breke, / How-be-it fulle scantly may I speke, / For faynte and febille heart" (481–483). Here she separates her "mynd" from her physical body, the "heart" that is making her faint. The natural body stands in opposition to the operations of the will. She begins to apostrophise – "A! A Cosyn John"; "O Gabrielle, Gabrielle!"; "O, old Symeon"; "Ye, Ye, juste Symeon" – and asks four rhetorical questions in quick succession (484-503). But as she begins describing the "sword of sorow" she is interrupted by her own body, her "dedly payn" that grows "more and more" until she falls unconscious, crying out "Help! Help now" (502–507). Thus, the opportunity to "breke" her mind – to disclose her thoughts – has produced a physical and psychological rupture. This foreshadows abruption of the pietatic lament, which ends in the Virgin fainting.

Like Mary Magdalene, the Virgin counters the admonitions of her company by stressing that the corpus is an imperative to mourning. "How suld I refreyn, / This bludy body to behold?" (545-546). Her words function as a double entendre: on the one hand, she is asking, "How should I stop beholding this body?" On the other, hand she is asking, "In beholding this body, how could I hold myself in check?" Joseph's response to this is simple: if you cannot "refreyn" from lamenting, you must leave: "Gud dere Mary, git you hence!" (457). Joseph reiterates the need to bury the body, but it seems the Virgin does obey, because Joseph then turns to John: "Haue hir hence, John, now I desire" (550) and then to the Maries: "On of yow women, ber hir companye" (553). He is calling on others to remove the Virgin from Calvary. John tells the Virgin to "[c]om on, swete lady, I ȝow

reqwire" (551), and one of the Maries picks up the cue: "Go we hence Marye; / Put alle this from your remembrance" (554–555). But she does not leave, begging instead for a delay, for her to be allowed to "[b]ide and sitt hym bye." But Joseph insists: "A, A, Marye! For a gud consent / We wald not haue you here" (563-4). As his sorrowful exclamation shows, Joseph is not being perverse, but he has been entrusted with an important task, and wants to get it done. Unable to make headway with Joseph, the Virgin turns to John, reminding him that he is her kin, her "dere swete cosyn" (580) and that it was into his keeping that Christ entrusted her. He acquiesces, but not without an important caveat: "Lady, if ye wille haue moderation / Of youre most sorowfulle lamentacion / Do as ye list in this case" (600-602). Her *planctus* is permitted as long as it is restrained. There is no sense that her words would in any sense benefit the company, but she is allowed to do as she likes in this case.

The next chapter will investigate the pietatic lament as a site of overlap between the performer and the performance object. As many have noted, the piece feels distinct from the rest of the play: it has refrains, some of which are witnessed in other lyrics, and employs a different rhyme scheme to the rest. I will thus skip over this moment, in order to sketch the arc of the Virgin's resistant, dilatory stage presence. For the duration of the pietatic lament, the corpus seems best placed in the Virgin's lap, although the script does not specify this. In the text, she asks Christ to allow her to hold him there in her "lap" (745; 752; 759), and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the connection between the breastfeeding infant and the bleeding corpse is a key theme of the piece, which suggests such a pose. What is important for the purposes of this chapter is the sense of her as a *tableaux vivant*; she has managed to halt the ploy and to speak from a place of

stasis. When her body fails, she asks Mary Magdalene to "express" a "dolorous ditee" in "dew honour of þis ymage of pitee"; as I discuss in the next chapter, this positions herself and the corpus as a kind of assemblage of human and more-than-human parts. This request goes unmet; Mary Magdalene responds: "To do ȝour biddynge lady, [we] be rightt fayn, / But yit, gud lady, your teres ȝe refreyn!" (797–798).[42] We would be glad to acquiesce so long as you refrain from crying.

The Virgin's request for lyric speech and Mary Magdalene's demurral marks the end of play's laments. Nicodemus and Joseph order the Virgin to "deliuer that blessit body" (799) to them, to which she passionately replies that they should not "[s]o hastely" take him from her. Again, her need for stillness is contrasted with their "haste," which she figures not as urgency, but as cruelty. If they "nedes" entomb him, as they claim, they should "lay the moder in grave with the child" (809). This request is not without precedent; in Pseudo-Anselm's *Dialogus beautae Mariae*, for example, the Virgin begs to be buried alongside her son.[43] However, the wrangling we can sense in the implicit cues of *Christ's Burial* takes this idea further than perhaps would be comfortable to watch. This is the acme of the play's tension. John rebukes the Virgin here with the firmest language of the play: "Ordere yourselfe os reson doth requere!" (811). This is significant, as John was the one who allowed the Virgin to perform her lament. Given his vehemence,

[42] Groeneveld states that Magdalene does perform a song here, but it was cut from the play. However, there is no codicological evidence for this, and Mary Magdalene's response makes sense without the song. It is also unclear why the scribe would remove a song here, but keep those in *Christ's Resurrection*. Her refusal to sing also fits the play's ambivalence towards lament. Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial and Resurrection," 63.

[43] See also: Wilson, "Good to Feel With, Good to Think With"? Troubling the Affective Encounter in Medieval Bernardine and Anselmian Marian Dialogues," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 50, 2 (2024): 184–211, 196. Pseudo-Bernard, *Meditacio Bernardi de lamentacione beate virginis*, translated in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 165–185, 172–173.

one performance possibility is that he is responding not just to the Virgin's suicidal ideation, but also to her clinging to the body, which prompts the question: how much tugging and wrenching can such a devotional performance sustain without shifting into "farce"?[44] We might remember the Dormition tradition, which appears in Jacobus de Voragine (1230–1298), in which one of multiple Jewish detractors try to knock the Virgin's corpse out of her funeral procession; they either lose their hands, or their hands get stuck to the Virgin's bier.[45] As Bale writes, "it was this interruptive moment which Jacobus makes much of, when the Jew's hand sticks, a moment of grotesque farce and physical stasis, which became, literally, the shorthand for the episode." The audience of *Christ's Burial*, situated as it is in the North East, might have seen the infamous Linen-weavers "Fergus" play.[46] Perhaps this altercation at the graveside in Christ's Burial may have reminded the audience of this piece, just as the parcelling out of the body at the deposition may have reminded them of the York crucifixion.

Joseph supports John by pointing the task at hand – "Com on, lat vs bery this body that is here!" (812) and it seems that the body is eventually taken from her and wrapped, because she begins to become intensely distressed and asks Joseph to "agayn the cloth [...] vnfold," so she can see Christ's face. Joseph does not allow this: "Pece, gude Marye! Ye haue had alle your wille" (819). His statement here implies that allowing her the space and time for lament was an indulgence which is not to be granted again. Turning again to John, she asks for him to intercede with Joseph on her behalf, but John tells her to be

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[44] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 109.

[45] Play 41, *N-Town Plays*, line 420, 326.

[46] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 109–111.

content, that it is impossible and she responds in anger;[47] "A! A! Toward me ye be verreye cruelle" (823). She asks to be able to "bid onys [her] own son farwelle" (824), does so briefly, and is lead away by John and the two Maries, leaving Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus and Joseph to lower the corpus "down" into the "grave" (833). Mary Magdalene departs to procure ointments, and Nicodemus and Joseph exit soon after. The Virgin uses the words "unkind," and "cruelle" to describe the Jews;[48] in calling the company "cruelle," and levvying claims of unnaturalness and failure of duty she is not exactly comparing the company to the Jews, but rather colouring her encounters with a wash of persecution that emanates from an idea of Jewish cruelty.[49]

As we can see from this precis, the play presents ambivalent attitudes towards affective speech, even though this makes up most of the content of the play. This sets *Christ's Burial* apart from other English religious drama. Elizabeth Ann Witt has shown how English cycle plays present the Virgin as an inviolable co-redemptrix; her laments are "never allowed to extend to such lengths that they impede the flow of the plot."[50] In French passion plays, by contrast, the Virgin is "pathetically human," inviting the audience to compassion. She swoons "with alarming frequency" and her laments must be curtailed by the male characters around her.[51] Witt suggests this is because the French plays are closer to the lyric tradition of the *planctus Mariae*; "Mary's plaints in the

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[47] "Gud cosyn John, yit speke a word for mee!" (821).

[48] For example: "The gret cruelty and felle vengance / Of the Jues so vnkind" (521–522). Christ was "sleyn with cruelnesse" (488); she addresses Judas as "cruelle hert" (542).

[49] For an account of this cultural dynamic, see Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*.

[50] Elizabeth A. Witt, *Contrary Marys in Medieval English and French Drama* (Peter Lang, 1995), 67.

[51] Witt, *Contrary Marys*, 67, 93.

French plays take the technical *planctus* form and expand it. The English dramatists are clearly aware of this type of poem, but Mary's laments in the cycle dramas are relatively short and unemotional."[52] Witt does not mention *Christ's Burial* or the vernacular burial plays of Northern Italy and the German-speaking regions which I discussed in chapter two, which also appear to be drawn out of the *planctus* tradition. I would therefore modify Witt's proposal, suggesting that the distinction between stagings in which the Virgin concedes to the demands of the plot (in Witt's terms, the English stagings) and stagings in which she hinders those demands are not borne out of regional differences but rather out of literary influence. Plays that bear heavily on the *planctus* tradition, produce highly emotional Virgins whose laments – which have been adapted and extracted from written lyrics – rub up against and impede the action of the play.

Another framework for understanding the ambivalence towards lamenting, and female lamenting in particular in *Christ's Burial*, is offered McNamer, who identifies a "current of resistance to compassion" in Passional lyrics of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[53] She argues that this resistance relates to anxieties around the gendered structure of affective piety in a lay male readership. The lyrics of the affective tradition urge the reader to reciprocate Christ's love and yet:

> what he encounters is an inherited structure of affectivity that insists that the feeling self – "mannes sowle" – is feminine and that compassion for Christ is most fittingly felt in erotic terms.[54]

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[52] Witt, *Contrary Marys*, 129.

[53] Sarah McNamer, "Kyndenesse and Resistance in the Middle English Passion Lyric," in *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 176.

[54] McNamer, "Kyndenesse and Resistance," 186.

McNamer hypothesises that in the later Middle Ages such eroticised compassion no longer fit within straightened norms of homosocial intimacy. In the high Middle Ages, "eroticised, elevating love between men" was understood within a court culture as "ennobling love," which employed the imagery and language of eros, but was not self-evidently libidinous. However, later emphasis on the idea of "*kyndeness*" marked a sea change. The concept of *kynde* love bound together what is moral and what is natural, emphasising the ethical claim of kinship. However, the word was also "structured, shaped, and defined against its purported opposite, *unkyndenesse,*" which was often used to signify intimate relations between men that were deemed unnatural. Thus, when Christ in the late medieval Passional lyric enjoins a male reader to be not *unkynde* towards him, that reader is caught between two mutually opposing directives; natural gratitude enjoins him to be affectively receptive to Christ's pleas "just as a lover – or more pointedly, as an object of Christ's romanticised love – should."[55] And yet, the reader must not be *unkynde* in performing such eroticised feelings. As McNamer comments: "[g]iven these opposing pressures on the male reader, it is no wonder that the dominant impression of the late Passion lyrics is one of stasis and impasse."[56]

Can we read a similar anxiety in *Christ's Burial* to that which McNamer identifies in Tudor passional lyrics? In curbing compassionate sorrow in favour of action and the work of the burial, Joseph displays an alternative form of piety to the women in the play. As Joseph says: "I yrkit to com nere / But I was not farre hence" (110–112). He is a

[55] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 193.

[56] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 195.

curiously liminal figure in the play, towing the line between sorrow and equanimity. Overall, the work of lyricism falls to the women, while the men try to meet the linear demands of the plot. When asked to leave, the Virgin accuses her company of being "vnkinde" by not allowing her to continue her lament over Christ's corpse (557). As we shall see in the next chapter, this pietatic lament asserts a distinctly eroticised devotional programme, in which the boundary between the living maternal and deceased filial bodies are blurred, offering precisely the mode of affective piety McNamer discusses, one that destabilises male and female identities. Such themes might have been particularly meaningful in a setting such as the Percy household, a possible performance context explored in chapter one. Alexandra Gillespie has explored how the earl's use of artistic patronage cemented notions of "courtly service" and the male intimacies of vassalage.[57]

The play shows us different ways of dealing with the onstage corpus, from Joseph's practical handling, to Mary Magdalene's object lesson in devotional beholding, to the Virgin's highly affective pietatic lament. In this sense it is a fairly didactic work, yet holds these "intimate scripts" – to use McNamer's term – in tension with each other. This tension raises meta-theatrical questions. If those onstage find little value in the Virgin's pietatic lament, what value should we, the audience, find in it? If devotional texts offer affective models to "teach" an audience "how to feel," how should we read a text in which this didactic content fails in its purpose, and Joseph, the designated pupil, pulls

[57] Alexandra Gillespie, "'These proverbes yet do last': Lydgate, the Fifth Earl of Northumberland, and Tudor Miscellanies from Print to Manuscript," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 215–232. See also Heather Blatt, "Reading Architecturally: The Wall Texts of a Percy Family Manuscript and the Poulys Daunce of St Paul's Cathedral," *Participatory Reading in Late-Medieval England* (Manchester University Press, 2018).

away from beholding the corpus and refuses to weep? Should we agree with the Virgin, designating this holy company as "verrey cruel," or should we side with John, wishing her to "ordere [herself] os reson does require"? It seems that in this desolate aftermath, all actions are flawed and provisional, and tend to isolate rather than unite. Once the Virgin arrives, Mary Magdalene drops her affective programme, leaving Christ's mother alone with her thoughts. The pietatic lament ends in abruption, which lends a naturalism to the dialogue, while also compounding this sense of a text in tension with itself. The characters of *Christ's Burial* must continually be reminded of the resurrection, yet the awful presence of "[h]e that hingeth here" continually pulls them into passionate grief. The corpus functions as an imperative to lyric speech, so that the characters find themselves suspended between the horror of the present moment – the terrible display before them – and the assurance of future joy. The mourners are indeed cast into a state of "stasis or impasse," and although the act of putting the corpus in the ground ends the play and brings Joseph's promise to fulfilment, it brings no resolution to this these tensions; that is only to be found in the next play: *Christ's Resurrection*.

3.2 The Humoral Background of the Play

Leanne Groeneveld has briefly identified the way in which *Christ's Burial* "makes frequent reference to the care and healing of the sick, both in its exposition and imagery."[58] Medical metaphors abound in the play; Judas' betrayal, for example, is described as a "pesyn and infection" (533), and Mary Magdalene states that the Christ thirsted "[f]or the helth of mannys saulle cheflye" (219). Groenveld suggests that this

[58] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial and Resurrection," 59.

would have taken on a particular resonance within the performance context of a hospital, such as St Michaels in Hull, so that the plays may have been presented "as consolation to the old, the poor, and the chronically ill."[59] Her argument is highly suggestive and worth considering at greater length. For the medical language in *Christ's Burial* is not only highly emotive, it also positions the onstage corpus in a very particular way, which draws on medieval assumptions about gender and the role of compassion in devotion.

As we have seen in the previous section, the characters in the play often describe feelings with reference to the operations of the body, and their failing bodies (the female bodies, that is) both engender and stand in the way of their lamenting. The heart becomes "faynte and febille" (483) and this fainting produces sweat.[60] The characters' hearts turn "cold" and wax as "hevy os lede" (225, 617) when looking at the corpus. Describing the Virgin's swoons during the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene relates her "most dedly chere" (155), her face taking on the colour and appearance of death. These symptoms would have had distinctive connotations to an audience cognisant of Hippocratic humoral theory. By the late Middle Ages, such an audience was increasingly broad due to the spread and vernacularisation of medical texts. A clerical audience in particular, but not exclusively, would be attuned to medical resonances in the text, as the practice of medicine was often their domain and late medieval spiritual writers often drew meaning from medical science and practice.[61] One early sixteenth-century clerical reader of *The*

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[59] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 68.

[60] "For feynt I swete" (31).

[61] Faye Marie Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton University Press, 1998); Claire Jones, "Discourse Communities and Medical Texts," in *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*, eds. Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Julie Orlemanski,

Book of Margery Kempe, for example, picked out the "symptoms of religious crying" shown in the text.[62] Beside a section in which Kempe turns the colour of lead the annotator wrote "no*ta* de colore," followed by the comment "so dyd p*ri*or Nort*on* i*n* hys excesse."[63] The annotator weighed up this textual account of spiritual rapture by comparing the symptoms described to another's, probably a member of his community.[64] Thus, the characters in *Christ's Burial* describing their hearts as lead and the focus on the "deedly chere" of the Virgin may have piqued the audience's diagnostic interest, what Julie Orlemanski terms the "etiological imagination" of the Middle Ages.[65]

The medical resonances of the text were not the focus of Groeneveld's treatment of the play, so it is worth untangling the assumptions that underly them. According to humoral theory, the predominant medical framework, bodily and mental afflictions arose from an imbalance of four qualities of the body – hot, cold, dry and moist – and their humoral counterparts – blood, black bile, phlegm and yellow bile. Black bile sat on the cold and dry end of the spectrum; it was associated with Saturn, with earth and

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Symptomatic Subjects: Bodies, Medicine, and Causation in the Literature of Late Medieval England (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[62] Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, "Professional Readers at Work: Annotators, Editors, and Correctors in Middle English Literary Texts," in *Opening up Middle English Manuscripts: Literary and Visual Approaches*, eds. Kerby-Fulton, Maidie Hilmo, and Linda Olson (Cornell University Press, 2012), 237. Kelly Parsons, "The Red Ink Annotator of the Book of Margery Kempe and His Lay Audience," *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe and Gower*, eds. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (University of Victoria, 2001).

[63] British Library MS Add. 61823, folio 51^{v}; transcribed in Parsons "The Red Ink Annotator," Appendix A, 175.

[65] Orlemanski, *Symptomatic Subjects*, 3.

leaden colours and phantasms of the mind.[66] The onstage presentation of internal bodily coldness, fainting spells, and the two mentions of the heart being "os lede" may have signalled to the audience a predominance of black bile in the body, which was in turn associated with the conditions of melancholy and lovesickness.[67]

Losing fluid is not always positively positioned in the play, and this liquid abundance can also be read in a medical light. After the Virgin faints onstage for the first time, the two Maries council her to "be of gud chere" (471) and John tells the Virgin:

> Wipe awaye that rynnys owte so faste!
> From your remembraunce, rayse owt at þe last
> Of his passione the crueltee.[68]

She must erase from her memory of the passion the very thing that characterises it, as if scraping words out of a text, leaving only the bare facts with none of the concomitant feelings.[69] John metonymically links these feelings within "that," which runs "so faste" out of her. The deictic "that" objectifies the bodily phenomenon of weeping. Having left the Virgin's body, these tears are seen as matter out of place, to borrow Mary Douglas' phrase. While Mary Carruthers has argued that medieval writers saw weeping as a way to moisten dry, cold constitutions, and thus soften them into spiritual compassion,

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[66] Laura Kalas, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine: Suffering, Transformation and the Life-Course* (D. S. Brewer, 2020), 33; Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (Nelson, 1964).

[67] Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 61–68; Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The "Viaticum" and Its Commentaries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 61, 89.

[68] *CB*, 472–474.

[69] MED rāsen v 1. (a) To scrape (sth.) (b) to make erasures; erase (writing, a passage of writing, etc.); scrape (a page, book) clean; emend (a document) by erasure.

Laura Kalas contends that tears were also seen to "*reanimate* the melancholic state by purging moisture" and therefore perpetuating a state of inner dryness.[70]

Indeed, the Virgin points to a dearth of liquid tears in her pietatic lament: "Who shalle gife me water sufficient, / And of distillinge teris habundance" (618–619). Although lack of tears is a conventional trope of lament, the Latinate diction again suggests a medicinal overtone. It is the second time the word "distilling" is used in the play, the other being when two of the Maries try to curb Mary Magdalene's weeping: "Gud Mawdleyn, mesure youre distillinge teres" (264). The sense here is flowing in drops, trickling, as in *Troilus and Criseyde*: "This Troylus in teris gan distille, / As licour out of a lambyc ful faste."[71] The word also had strong medical and alchemical connotations; it comes from the classical Latin *distillare*, which the *DMLBS* defines as: to flow or ooze as a liquid, to discharge moisture and to distil, in alchemical sense.[72] This latter sense was current in Middle English, appearing in recipe books and texts of natural science, and it is the latter sense which is recognised today.[73] When Mary Magdalene is asked to "mesure [her] distillinge teres," the phrasing suggests that the unbridled letting of tears might enact a physical transmutation, a distillation in which the rarefied liquid is removed from the gross matter, leaving the subject heavier and drier than before. This

[70] Kalas, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine*, 94-95; Carruthers, "On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument: Chaucer's Lachrymose Troilus in Context," *Representations* 93, 1 (2006): 1–21, 7.

[71] *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 4, lines 519–520, 545. MED distillen v. 1. (a) To flow or fall in drops; trickle, drop (b) to shed drops (c) *refl.* ~ in teres, to bathe oneself in tears, weep profusely

[72] DMLBS distillare.

[73] MED distillinge ger. 1. (a) Straining, filtering; (b) drippings; (c) distillation; (d) a distillate.

ties into the unusual use of the word "suspiration," for deadly exhalation discussed above.

For, in medieval discourse, emotions were the domain of the body as much as the mind. Thus, emotional agitation could produce a somatic imbalance, while somatic imbalances could, in turn, produce emotional agitation.[74] People could be pre-disposed to melancholy through congenital factors, such as a dark or hirsute complexion, as well as through psychological ones, such as the loss of a child, or an intense yearning for God.[75] This connection between piety and melancholy traces back to antiquity. The important Pseudo-Aristotelian text known as *Problem 30* integrated the humoral notion of melancholia with the Platonic concept of divine fury, thus associating the condition with intellectual inspiration and prophesy.[76] Isḥāq ibn 'Imrān (d. before 907) associated melancholy with longing for God in his treatise on the condition, which Constantine the African translated into Latin.[77] Imran makes the distinction that black bile does not in itself enable a proximity to the divine. However the intense yearning of the devout can make them fall into melancholy as if they were lovers.[78] Lovesickness (or *hereos*) was

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[74] Wendy Turner, "Mind/Brain: Medieval Concepts," in *A Cultural History of Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Iona McCleery (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021) 155–176; Kalas, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine,* 31.

[75] Penny Howell Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene in Northern Art, 1430–1550 : Addressing and Undressing the Sinner-Saint* (Routledge, 2014), 186–187.

[76] Aristotle, *Problems*, vol. 2, trans. W. S. Hett (Harvard University Press, 1937, 154–169. Laurinda S. Dixon, "Privileged Piety: Melancholia and the Herbal Tradition," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 1, no. 2 (2009): [unpaginated]. Winfried Schleiner, *Melancholy, Genius, and Utopia in the Renaissance* (Harrassowitz, 1991), 19–51.

[77] Karl Gabers, ed., *Maqāla fī l-mālīhūliyā (Abhandlung über die Melancholie) / Isḥāq ibn 'Imrān und Constantini Africani libri duo De melancholia* (H. Buske, 1977).

[78] Nr. 805.Cod.or.251 Prunneri 20, folio 94^{r}, 103. Translated into German in Gabers, *Maqāla fī l-mālīhūliyā*, 14.

broadly understood as "a subcategory of melancholia or, according to some, a pre-stage of the malady."[79] In his glosses on Constantine's *Viaticum*, for example, Gerard of Berry likens lovesickness to melancholy: "[e]st enim plurimum similis melancolie, quia tota intentio et cogitatio defixa est in pulchritudine alicuius forme uel figure desiderio coadiuuante."[80] This idea is of a singular focus on the beauty of one "forme uel figure" is reflected in *The Knight's Tale*; Arcite's "loveris maladye" turns to "manye" (mania) when the "humour malencolik" enters the front ventricle of his brain, the "celle fantastik" which, in medieval theory of the mind, retains images of the sensory experience and is responsible for the faculty of imagination.[81] Chaucer describes the knight in identifiable humoral terms: his "hewe falow and pale as asshen colde," he turned "lene" and "drye as is a shaft" (stick). This idea of lovesickness brought on by intense attention to one single "form or figure" lends itself to the essential dramaturgy of *Christ's Burial*, in which the characters continually turn to the silent corpus onstage. This "rewfulle [...] spectakille" draws them into expressions of lament, which in turn produce bodily symptoms, which in turn draws more exclamatory language. It is in this sense that I consider the corpus onstage as a kind of temporal vortex, a locus of "suspended

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[79] Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene*, 190.

[80] Gerard of Berry, *Glosule super viaticum*, lines 2–5, 198. Translated and edited in Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 194–205. "It is indeed very similar to melancholy, because the entire attention and thought, aided by desire, is fixed on the beauty of some form or figure." Trans. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 199. "The fixation on an object of desire to which Gerard points, is both a cause *of* and a reason *for* melancholia, evidencing his understanding of melancholia as simultaneously constitutional and self-fulfilling." Kalas, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine*, 37.

[81] Chaucer, *Knight's Tale*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, lines 1373-1376, 44; Jeremy Tambling, "The Knight Sets Forth: Chaucer, Chrétien and Dürer," *Melancholy and the Work of Allegory: The Late Medieval and Shakespeare* (Brill, 2004).

animation" that sucks the women into cycles of compassion that can end only through interruption.

The medical hermeneutic at work in *Christ's Burial* does not counteract the spiritual resonances of the piece: the women are not less holy for fainting, in fact the spiritual and the medical are tightly interwoven.[82] Over the course of the Middle Ages, spiritual writings were increasingly influenced by medical discourse; meanwhile, writings on love-sickness were "assimilated to religious discourse about passionate love, which powerfully validated the accuracy of the physicians' descriptions," in a self-enforcing cycle of referentiality and authority.[83] Theologians such as William of Auvergne, Hugh of St Cher and Dionysius the Carthusian used medical aetiologies of love-sickness to approach the experience of mystical rapture.[84] An abundance of black bile was injurious to health, but, as with other conditions such as leprosy, its debilitating social effects and physical symptoms could be a way into a state of holiness.[85] The symptoms of melancholy – solitude, passionate weeping, deadly pallor and loss of consciousness – became hallmarks of affective devotion.[86]

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[82] Diller, in his brief discussion of *Christ's Burial* suggests that the Virgin's swooning undermines the artistry of the play, as well as its theological impact; Diller, *English Mystery Plays*, 192–193.

[83] Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 24. For influence of medicine on religious culture, see Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion c. 1300: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Clarendon Press, 1998).

[84] Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 23–24; this is not to say that lovesickness and melancholy were always positively framed: see Hildegard of Bingen's discussion of the disease, trans. Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*, 84.

[85] Elma Brenner, "Alice of Schaerbeek or Alice the Leper," in *Wound and Wound Repair*; Brenner, Elma, and François-Olivier Touati, eds. *Leprosy and Identity in the Middle Ages: From England to the Mediterranean* (Manchester University Press, 2021).

[86] Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 25.

Christ's Burial was also written at a time in which the connections between melancholy and artistic production were being reasserted in secular context. The play is roughly contemporaneous, for example, with Albrecht Dürer's enigmatic engraving *Melencolia I* (1514), whose "assemblage" of figure and artefact is "the most celebrated emblem of melancholy."[87] This marked the beginning of the so-called "Golden Age of Melancholy," in which the condition was associated with secular intellectual, emotional and social superiority.[88] The melancholy portrayed in *Christ's Burial* is not a secular, introspective concept. However, one could argue that the explicit relationship between lovesickness and lament presented in this play and held in contradistinction to the action of the plot forges a connection between poetry and the melancholy frame of mind.

Medieval exegetes saw in the clinical aetiology of lovesickness a powerful framework for analyses of the Song of Songs. As Mary Wack demonstrates, "the vocabulary of love and lovesickness from the Song was a prime resource for the development of medieval love lyric [and so] it too served as a meeting point for sacred secular and medical ideas about love."[89] Indeed, the lovesickness of the Song of Songs is explicitly referenced in *Christ's Resurrection*. Before Christ's climactic appearance in the garden, Mary Magdalene delivers a speech conveying the intensity of her "desir[e]"

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[87] Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (Fordham University Press, 2022), 39; Mitchell B. Merback, *Perfection's Therapy: An Essay on Albrecht Dürer's Melencolia I* (Zone Books, 2017).

[88] Marsilio Ficino's popular *Three Books on Life* (1489) reaffirmed the classical connection between the condition of melancholy and intellectual genius; the condition became recast as a kind of emotional selfhood, or even "self-fashioning"; Jolly, *Picturing the Pregnant Magdalene*, 183, 187. See also: Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy: Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[89] Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, 22.

(573, 577, 578, 582) for him; "When shalle I se that desirid face, / Which was so fulle of bewty and grace?" (573–574). She goes on to quote the Canticle: "*Quia amore langueo*!" (CR, 595–596), which she parses as: "I am dedly seke, / And alle is for his loue" (600–601).[90] From the early fifteenth century, Mary Magdalene in particular was increasingly figured as this melancholic lover. Several hagiographical features illustrate her saturnine character: her eremitical solitude as well as her "excessive weeping and exceptional hairiness."[91] Interest in visual depictions of the melancholic Magdalene images intensified in the early sixteenth century, when *Christ's Burial* was written.[92] Her climax of love-sickness in the garden can be seen as the culmination of the melancholic themes of *Christ's Burial*.

Although the characters are broadly discontinuous, the dialectic between steadfastness, as an ethical imperative, and love-sickness, as a somatic affliction and a sign of *compassio* with Christ, carries over across the two plays. Peter and Mary Magdalene struggle against life-threatening sorrow, "dedly woo" (*CR*, 392), "dedly payn" (*CR*, 416); they "fele owt of mesure" (*CR*, 329). This play continues the humoral imagery of hearts that turn "faynt" (*CR*, 61) under the pressures of "complaynt" (*CR*, 62), or hearts that "dothe melte" inside the speaker's "body" (*CR*, 184) when they are "[m]yndinge the payne my Lord and master felt" (*CR*, 183). Injunctions such as John's to Peter to "[s]tand vp [...] and mesur your hevynese" (*CR*, 405), and "Sister Mawdleyn, in your hart be stabille" (*CR*, 198) remind us of the ambivalence towards expressions of mourning in the

[90] Canticles 5:8.

[91] Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene*, 186.

[92] Jolly, *Picturing the "Pregnant" Magdalene*, 188.

previous play. As in *Christ's Burial*, the Maries upbraid Mary Magdalene for her lamenting when there is work to do: "it is bot in vayn / Thus remedilesse to make compleyn" (*CR*, 256–257). Instead, like the Maries in *Christ's Burial*, they advise action: they must all spread out (*CR*, 259) and "fast hye" to "sek and inquere" (*CR*, 262) into Christ's whereabouts. Again, positive activity is recommended over "remedilesse" lament.

The Virgin is absent in *Christ's Resurrection* and the grieving counterpart to the Magdalene is Peter, who arrives onstage "flens amare" (CR, 266b) (weeping bitterly) and lamenting his "vnstabilnesse" (272).[93] Peter reflects that he has acted in opposition to his nature, acted "vnkindlye" (284), been "vnkinde" (324, 380). Thinking back to McNamer's reading of later medieval Passional lyrics, we can read Peter's "unkyndness" as a lapse from stalwart masculine behaviour. Indeed, he has acted against the trusty name Christ gave him:

> I was callit Symon Bariona, playnly to expresse.
> But he namid me "*Petrus*" – *Petra* was hee!
> *Petra* is a ston, fulle of stabilitee
> Always stedfaste! Alase! Wherfor was I
> Not stabille accordinge to my nam, stedfastlye?[94]

His speech uses many different forms of repetition, which all build a sense of circular thinking. Most obvious is the polyptonic repetition of "stabille" and "steadfaste." The chiasmus, also a figure of repetition, "he namid me 'Petrus' – Petra was hee!" throws the stalwart attributes of the rock back onto Christ. In the manuscript these mirrored clauses

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[93] For brief mention of this moment see: Karen Sawyer Marsalek, "English Resurrection Drama and The Winter's Tale," in *"Bring Furth the Pagants": Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston* eds. Johnston, Klausner, and Marsalek (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 279.

[94] *CR*, 297–299.

are separated by a *virgula suspensiva* rather than an em-dash, but the effect is similar: Peter appears to hone into the gulf between what he is, and what he should have been. We might imagine that in performance the repetition of these plosive sounds intimates a kind of fruitless, desperate passion. He has acted against his nominally-determined nature and is trying and failing to think his way out of this crisis of identity. He bewails that he has acted "vnkindlye" (284). When Christ showed him 'gret kindnese' (306) he responded by being "so vnkind" (313). Like the Virgin in *Christ's Burial*, Peter ends his speech with an aposiopesis "Ales, I may not speke!" (398) and collapses onto the ground, again, weeping bitterly.[95]

The only cure for such lovesickness is the presence of Christ, who, as Peter says, shed "bloody droppes man saule to recure" (*CR*, 335). After Christ appears to Mary Magdalene, she says to her heart: "Now may thou entone a mery songe, / For he, whom thou desirid so longe, / I haue foun now at laste!" (632–634). Once the other Maries are appraised of the resurrection, Magdalene actualises this metaphoric heart-song, asking them to "expresse" a "song of comforte," "[w]ith notes of armonye." The play also ends with a concluding speech from John, in which he asks his "brethere" and "devowt sisters" (753–754) to "[e]nton sum ermonye" (755). The stage directions here do not specify what song should follow, except that it should be a resurrection hymn.[96] These songs might be seen as an answer to the Virgin's unmet request in *Christ's Burial* for Mary Magdalene to "express" "[s]um dolorose ditee" in "honour of þis ymage of pitee" (*CB*, 795–796).

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[95] Et sic cadit in terram, flens amare (*CR*, 398a).

[96] Tunc cantat omnes simul: Scimus Christum, vell aliam sequentiam aut ympum de resurrectione. (*CR*, 755a-b).

We might read the songs of *Christ's Resurrection* as enacting a kind of therapy on the senses. Music was medicine, both physically and spiritually, and was thought to be particularly efficacious in healing disorders such as melancholia and love-sickness.[97] These songs could therefore engender "comforte" as much as they "expresse" it. The dis-ease present in the bodies of the characters of *Christ's Burial* has been brought back into balance. Ending in song thus presents a teleology in which lyric is the product of disease and disorder, which are resolved in "notes of armonye." We might think of Chaucer's Black Knight, an emblem of medieval melancholy, who delivers his lament "[w]ithoute noote, withoute song."[98] In this way, we can frame the corpus onstage as a lyric tool, which prompts ekphrastic poesis, but whose ruined body cannot be strummed into song.

3.3 The Dry Christ

In *Christ's Resurrection*, the living body of Christ is described as the "remedye" through which the characters can return to corporal stability. The dead corpus in *Christ's Burial* offers very different prophylactic affordances. Chapter two discussed the possibilities for bloodshed as a possible special effect in *Christ's Burial* and the Debs burial plays. This concluding section looks how the imagery of Christ's bleeding interacts with the medical framework described above. As we shall see, this set of spiritual metaphors is not unique to the text. What is striking here is how it is consistently utilised to reflect and

[97] Peter Murray Jones, "Music Therapy in the Later Middle Ages: The Case of Hugo van der Goes," and Linda Phyllis Austern, "Musical Treatments for Lovesickness: The Early Modern Heritage," in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Ashgate, 2000).

[98] Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, *Riverside Chaucer*, line 472, 336.

refract a manifested corpus in performance. The N-Town Virgin, for example, describes her son as "medycyn for every sor" (291) but this medical imagery is neither as sustained nor as considered as it is in *Christ's Burial*. The clearest literary parallel is Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Divine Love*.

The script often foregrounds the curative aspects of Christ's blood, relating to classical tradition of *Christus medicus*, Christ the physician, which is invoked at the beginning of the play when Joseph stresses above all Christ's role as a healer of men.[99] Joseph personifies the site of crucifixion in this speech: "O Caluery! Thyn greyn colore is turnyd to rede" (29), an image that relates to the stained garment of Isaiah.[100] Christ's blood, which, as he says is "[m]ost of vertue," (25) – most noble, but also most prophylactically efficacious – transmutes the complexion of the earth from ashen to sanguine.[101] Similarly, Mary Magdalen says to Joseph: "Behold these bludy welles! Her may þou feche / Balme more precious than gold" (361–362). Here she relates the blood to her own attribute: the perfume she applied to Christ's living feet as well as the "preciose balmes" (845), which she will fetch for the corpse. Such ointments were luxury products, valued their smell as well as for their curative properties.[102] She addresses the

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[99] Raising the dead (37); giving sight to a man "born starke blinde" (40) and to "many othere blind men he gaue the sighte" (45); Patrick Outhwaite, *Christ the Physician in Late-Medieval Religious Controversy: England and Central Europe, 1350-1434* (Boydell & Brewer, 2024).

[100] Isaiah 63:1–7. Also Davidson, "Sacred Blood and the Late Medieval Stage," 443.

[101] MED vertū n. 1. (a) physical strength, power; force, energy. and 6. Chiefly *med.*: (a) efficacious quality, medicinal potency.

[102] Katelynn Robinson, "The Anchoress and the Heart's Nose: The Importance of Smell to Medieval Women Religious," *Magistra* 19, no. 2 (2013): 41–64; For ambivalence of stage perfume, see the discussion of the Digby "Mary Magdalene" in Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 36–41.

wounds on the corpus: "O fontains flowinge with water of life, / To wash away corrupcion of wondes infectyfe / By dedly syn" (367–368). Positioning blood as a spiritual antiseptic, *Christ's Burial* echoes the passional imagery of its time. For example, in lyric on the "Five Wounds" (1400–1430), Christ's blood is described as "swetyst soukate to us most sanatyfe" (44), a medicinal lozenge, and the sidewound itself is described as a "lauatorye," a medical lotion or wash.[103]

Yet, within a Galenic context, this outpouring of blood is not straightforwardly positive. I have shown how the humoral language of *Christ's Burial* frames lament as a somatic affliction, concentrated in the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. These symptoms appear as compassionate reflections of the ex-sanguinated corpus onstage. For, if *Christ's Burial* presents the Virgin and Mary Magdalene as afflicted by love-longing, then so too is the object of their desires. The corpus, "starke and cold" (86), the "body which now is cold" (597) influences the bodies around it, cooling them and bringing them to the point of death. Beholding such a body with compassion results in a dangerous melancholy, draining the blood from the face in the form of tears, making the heart "os lead." On stage, these effects would be compounded by the actual presence of a stiff, cold corpus. In the later Middle Ages, compassion was "both a meditative aid and a medical principle";[104] it referred to the way in which the body communicated sickness or pain between its different parts. This entered scholastic discussions of the link between the body and the soul; for, as John Duns Scotus pointed out, simply imagining a painful

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[103] MED, 1 (e) med. lotion, wash; fig. cleansing through the Atonement.

[104] Virginia Langum, "The Wounded Surgeon: Devotion, Compassion and Metaphor in Medieval England," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, 280.

operation such as cauterisation could induce physical pain.[105] This understanding meant that through the practice of compassion one could experience a physical echo of Christ's pain. This could never be like-for-like: Christ's tender flesh was thought to be more receptive to pain than anyone else's – as *Christ's Burial* has it: "[h]is payn passis alle othere" (134). But attempting an *imitatio Christi* position was meritorious; as Julian writes: "for I would that his peynes were my peynes, with compassion."[106]

How, then, are we to tally the imagery of healing and hurt in the play? In the later Middle Ages, the *Christus medicus* topos was adapted to reflect increasing focus on Christs' humanity, as well as the rise of surgery as a medical practice, so that writers began to picture the Passion as a kind of prophylactic phlebotomy, in which Christ gathers our sick blood into his body to purge it.[107] As the *Ancrene Wisse* puts it: "þe hale half ant te cwike dale droh þet uuele blod ut frommard te unhale, ant healde swa þe seke" (the healthy and living part drew out that bad blood from the unhealthy one and so healed the sick part).[108] In this paradigm, Christ functions as both surgeon and patient, a so-called "wounded surgeon" performing an elective phlebotomy.[109] *Christ's Burial*

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[105] John Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones in tertium librum sententiarum*, vol. 14 (Paris, 1894), 568. Cited by Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*: *Pain in Late-Medieval Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 107.

[106] Julian of Norwich, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Denise N. Baker (Norton & Company, 2005), chapter 3, 7.

[107] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Bathing in Blood: The Medicinal Cures of Anchoritic Devotion," in *Medicine, Religion, and Gender in Medieval Culture* ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (D.S. Brewer, 2015), 96.

[108] Bella Millett, ed., *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Edition of the Text in Cambridge Corpus Christi College, MS 402, with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, vol. 2, EETS (Oxford University Press, 2005), part 2, lines 993–994, 45; McAvoy, "Bathing in Blood," 96.

[109] Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion*, 181–183, 186–187.

draws on this topos of the wounded surgeon, describing how Christ "knew ther were no remedy to redeym syn / But a bath of [his] blude to bath mans saule in" (295–296). This idea of a bath of blood is found in the book of Revelations 1:5. By the fifteenth century, however, the metaphor had taken on more precise medical overtones, serving as a meeting point for ideas about maternal sacrifice, postpartum care, and Christ's caring love for humanity. The late fifteenth-century Middle English translation of the French *A Tretyse of Love*, for example, relates the verse to the medical care of a mother for her child.[110] We find the same imagery in the *Ancrene Wisse*:

> Child þet hefde swuch uuel þet him bihofde beað of blod ear hit were ihealet, muchel þe moder luuede hit þe walde þis beað him makien. Þis dude ure Lauerd us þe weren se seke of sunne, ant swa isulet þer-wið, þet na þing ne mahte healen us ne cleansin us bute his blod ane, for swa he hit walde.[111]

These images conflate Christ's elective phlebotomy with the metaphorical birthing of mankind. The idea of a mother producing baths of blood to save her child was not purely metaphorical; the popular gynaecological treatise *De curis mulierum* advises that a patient suffering from post-partum haemorrhaging should be subjected to repeated baths in order to purge her of her own unclean blood; as McAvoy comments, such treatment would have produced "bath after bath of bloodied water in attempts to

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[110] John H. Fisher, ed., *The Tretyse of Loue*, EETS (Oxford University Press, 1951), 34. Quoted in Langnum, "The Wounded Surgeon," 289.

[111] Millet ed., *Ancrene Wisse*, part 7, lines 155–159, 149. "If a child had such an illness that it needed a bath of blood before it could be healed, the mother who was willing to provide this bath for it would love it very much. Our Lord did this for us – who were so infected with sin, and so polluted with it, that nothing could heal or cleanse us except for his blood … His love makes a bath of his blood – because that is what he wished." Trans., McAvoy, "Bathing in Blood," 97

staunch the flow and wash [the patient] clean of her own blood."[112] McAvoy shows how Julian's writing "collapses into one another the figure of *Christus medicus* and that of the postpartum nursing mother freshly emerged from her own blood-bath."[113] Like *Christ's Burial*, Julian's *Revelations* "invokes the conventions of humorism and the 'remedy' genre" of medical spiritual discourse."[114]

Julian's etiological description of Christ's ex-sangination has also been linked to medieval medical descriptions of menstruation; *The Knowing of Woman's Kind*, for example, describes how the menstruating bodies turns a "pale colowre as ledde [...] and dryed." This text also speculates that that menstrual blood could be purged through channels other than the vagina.[115] It was common, for example, for menstruating women to undergo bloodletting; as *The Knowing* puts it: "oþer-while þat blode commyth nowth of þe marys [uterus] but passyth by othyre weyes fro here"; that is, menstrual blood finds its way out the body not necessarily from the vagina. These systems were not always in balance: "pale colour" in a woman is one of the "synges of þe rynnynge of blode of women owt of mesure."[116] This language calls to mind the injunction to Mary Magdalene in *Christ's Burial* to "mesure" her "distillinge teres" (264). The leaking, swooning women

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[112] Monica H. Green, ed., *De Curis Mulierum*, *The Trotula: An English Translation of the Medieval Compedium of Women's Medicine* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 124–5. McAvoy, "Bathing in Blood," 98.

[113] McAvoy, "Bathing in Blood," 101. See also: Alexandra Barratt, "'In the Lowest Part of Our Need': Julian and Medieval Gynecological Writing," in *Julian of Norwich* ed. Sandra J McEntire, 239–256 (Routledge, 1998).

[114] Hannah Lucas, "Passion and Melancholy: Julian of Norwich's Medical Hermeneutic," *The Review of English Studies* 72, no. 303 (2021): 1–18, 8.

[115] Oxford, Bodley MS Douce 37, folio 33^{v}. Quoted in Barratt, "Lowest Part of our Need," 243.

[116] Douce 37, folio 34^{r}. Quoted in Barratt, "Lowest Part of our Need," 243.

onstage reify these tropes and, within the spiritual medical framework of the play as a whole, emphasise the connection between their bodies and the cold corpus before them. Primed by the language of the play, the audience might also have been prompted to reflect on the visual similarities between the painted wounds on the corpus before them and female genitalia, what Karma Lochrie calls "transitivity of wound [*vulnus*] to vulva."[117] Melissa Tu has pointed out how the pietatic lament in *Christ's Burial* associates the "anatomical mechanisms" of the Virgin's body to those of her son.[118] Such imagery does not represent an argument of the text, rather it builds an aesthetic effect that is grounded in the spiritual medical discourse of the time.

In *Christ's Burial,* the corpus is framed as simultaneously a bleeding body and an ex-sanguinated one, dried out from blood loss. Christ's dryness is a surprisingly common theme in late medieval devotional writing, which has multiple reference points, the most obvious being Christ's penultimate saying: *sitio*, "I thirst."[119] It also relates to Luke's account of the Last Supper, in which Christ asks his disciples to take the wine and "share it amongst yourselves, for I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God has come".[120] Exegetes connected this to Psalm 42:1, the hart panting for the water of

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[117] Karma Lochrie, "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies," 190.

[118] Melissa Tu, "'Who Cannot Wepe Come Lerne at Me': Voicing Refrains in Late Medieval Passion Lyric," in *Female-Voice Song and Women's Musical Agency in the Middle Ages*, eds. Anna Kathryn Grau and Lisa Colton (Brill, 2022), 341. See also Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (University of California Press, 1984).

[119] John, 19: 28; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (Yale University Press, 2022), 252–255.

[120] Luke, 22:18; Matthew, 26: 29; Mark 14: 25.

the brooks, and thus to Christ as the melancholic lover.[121] The laity would have been familiar with this image because of its inclusion in the *Dirige*.[122]

Christ's Burial gives the *sitio* saying a great deal of attention, in many ways foregrounding it as the preeminent saying of Christ on the cross; as I explore in greater detail in chapter four, it is one of only three instances in which the characters report Christ's direct speech, and the only directly quoted saying on the cross.[123] As Mary Magdalene explains:

> But fewe wordes he hadd,
> Saue that in grete agonye
> He saide thes wordes: "I am thrustye"[124]

Such a pithy statement needs parsing, so Joseph asks if Christ meant this literally: "suppose ye his desire was to drinke?" (212), to which she responds in the negative. She says she "think[s]" that Christ's thirst was metaphorical: he did not thirst for "lyquore"; "[f]or the helth of mannys saulle cheflye / He thrustid and desirede" (219–220). Her answer, couched as it is in supposition, leaves open a literal understanding of *sitio*. The word "liquor" had strong remedial connotations, so that even though Mary Magdalene believes he was not physically thirsty, here too the diction retains a medicinal flavour.[125]

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[121] Walter S. Melion, "Meditating the Unbearable in a Fifteenth-Century Netherlandish Manuscript Prayerbook with Printed Images," in *Vernacular Books and Their Readers in the Early Age of Print (c. 1450–1600)*, eds. Anna Dlabačová, Andrea van Leerdam, and John J. Thompson (Brill, 2023), 365.

[122] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 253.

[123] The other last sayings are: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke, 23: 34); "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke, 23: 43); "Woman, behold thy son […] Behold thy mother" (John, 19: 26-27); "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark, 15:34 and Matthew 27: 46); "It is finished" (John, 19:30); "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke, 23:46).

[124] *CB*, 208–210.

[125] Lucas, "Julian of Norwich's Medical Hermeneutic," 9.

Mary Magdalene's metaphorical interpretation of *Sitio* is a conventional one.[126] In *Piers Plowman*, Christ glosses *sitio* similarly: "love is my drynke, [...] me thursteth yet, for mannes soule sake." [127] Some authorities stressed the bodily dimensions of his thirst as well. Nicholas Love, for example, follows his Pseudo-Bonaventurean source by pointing that he is thirsty because he is "alle drye":

> For þouh it so be þat it may be vnderstande þat worde | *Sicio, I þriste*, gostely to þat entent, þat he þrestede þanne þe hele of soules. Neuertheless also in soþenes the þristede bodily bycause of þe grete passing out of blode whereþorh he was alle drye wiþinforþ & þristy.[128]

Julian's is the most extensive meditation of the dry Christ, and it a theme that continually appears in her *Showings*. Her vision of the dying Christ "fulfils both theological and humoral convention, leaving him drained and dry, while providing the medicine [...] which will ease humanity's 'disese.'"[129] She embraces both the literal and metaphorical meaning of *sitio*, seeing "in Criste a dowbylle thurst, oon bodely and a nother gostly."[130] Indeed, it is to Christ's dryness that Julian attributes his greatest suffering. Christ shows her "a parte of his passyon nere his dyeng":

> This was a petufulle chaungyn to se, this depe dying and also hys nose clange to geder and dryed to my syght. And the swete body waxid browne and blacke, alle chaungyd and turned oute of the feyer, fresshe and lyvely coloure of hym selfe in to drye dyeng. For that same tyme that oure blessyd Savyour dyed uppon the rode

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[126] See for example: "in bodi for peyne & in soule þou þristidist deliueraunce of soulis in helle," Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, vol. I, ed. Carl Horstmann (London, 1895), 101; Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 39.

[127] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Passus XVIII, 366–368, 321.

[128] Love, *The Mirror of The Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (University of Exeter Press, 2005), chapter 44, 177.

[129] Lucas, "Julian of Norwich's Medical Hermeneutic," 15.

[130] Julian, *Showings*, chapter 17, 27.

> it was a dry, sharp wynd, wonder colde as to my syght. And what tyme that the precyous blode was bled out of the swete body that myght passe ther fro, yet ther was a moyster in the swete flessch of Crist as it was shewde. Blodlesseshed and payne dryed with in and blowyng of the wynde and colde comyng from with out mett to geder in the swete body of Crist, and thesse iiii dryed the flessch of Crist by prosses of tyme.[131]

As Vincent Gillespie has argued, Julian's "colour palette," of blues, browns and blacks in this vision associate Christ's dying visage "to bile and melancholy, to cold and dryness".[132] In his "drye deyeng" Christs turns from sanguine to livid, his "lyvely colowr" turned to saturnine hues. Julian specifies four drying factors, that "mett to geder" for maximum dryness: external wind, external cold, internal blood loss, and internal pain. Today we might not automatically consider pain as a drying phenomenon. Yet, as we have seen, pain was considered a kind of compassion, drawing lifegiving blood towards the afflicted part and thus disrupting the humoral balance.[133]

Julian's vision is simultaneously still and in motion, the nose collapses and dried before her eyes, the remaining "moyster" in the flesh dissipates "by prossess of time." Yet it is also a "contynual[ ]" process, drawn out beyond natural time. The drying accelerates the symptoms of death in the body so that it appears to have been dead for a week, a Christological impossibility:

> And ther I say it semyd as he had bene sennygh deed, it specyfyeth that the swet body was so dyscolouryd, so drye, so clongyn, so dedly, and so pytuous as he had been sennyght deed, contynually dyeng. And me thought the dryeng of Cristes flessch was the most peyne and the last of his passion.[134]

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[131] Julain, *Showings*, chapter 16, 27.

[132] Vincent Gillespie, "The Colours of Contemplation: Less Light on Julian of Norwich," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium VIII : Papers Read at Charney Manor, July 2011*, ed. E. A Jones (D.S. Brewer, 2013), 24.

[133] Langum, "The Wounded Surgeon," 281.

[134] Julian, *Showings*, chapter 16, 27.

At the end of this vison, Julian reaches towards superlatives: "so dyscolouryd, so drye, so clongyn" (shrivelled), implying a body of the limits of recognisability. The shrivelled nose was a classic emblem of death in the Middle Ages, referenced in medical and spiritual literature.[135] The destruction of the nose was also thought to deform the face to the limits of what is recognisably human, and was thus used as a dehumanising form of punishment: "when the nose is disfigured, the entire human being is deformed."[136] Julian's vision leans into the aesthetic extremes of Christ's suffering, presenting a corpse far from the incorruptible bodies of the saints, one that appears supernaturally corrupted by a concatenation of drying factors. Similarly, we might imagine that the corpus in *Christ's Burial*, in its stiff, resistant materiality, derived theological and dramatic impact from its dissimilarity to a living body; the movable sculpture of Christ crucified might have appeared as the paradigmatic image of "depe dyeing."

The stretching of the corpus during the crucifixion, which has a rich visual and exegetical framework of its own, also interacts with these themes of the dry Christ.[137] The Passion meditations of John of Fécamp (d. 1078), which "enjoyed undiminished popularity throughout the later Middle Ages" and particularly in England, figures Christ's stretching as a means of drying: "tensa arent uiscera."[138] These processes relate to the metaphor of the corpus as parchment; Christ is "streyned to drye vp-on a tre / As

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[135] Rossell Hope Robbins, "Signs of Death in Middle English," *Mediaeval Studies* 32 (1970): 282–298.

[136] Groebner, *Defaced*, 76.

[137] For the Christ as the skin drum, see Pickering, *Literature and Art*, 285–307.

[138] John of Fècamp, Passion Meditations, in *A Durham Book of Devotions*, ed. Bestul (Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987), 35. "His stretched out innards grew dry." Trans. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 37–38.

parchemyn oveth for to be," as the *Long Charter of Christ* puts it.[139] *Christ's Burial* also employs this imagery of the "parchment [...] stitchit owt of syse" (274), further evoking a sense of the corpus as a desiccated body. All these interlocking images frame the crucifixion as an act of ultimate kenosis. The tortures Christ undergoes deform him to such an extent that he is almost unrecognisable as a human body.

In Bridget of Sweden's *Liber celestis*, the Virgin describes holding the dead Christ in similar terms to those of Julian. This moment encapsulates the way in which humoral discourse colours how people imagined Christ post-mortem. The Virgin, speaking to Birgitta, remembers the deposition:

> [H]e was takine doun of þe cros, whome I tuke vpon mi knees, as he had semed leprous and bloo, for his een were dede and full of blude, his mouthe was cold as snowe, his face drawen togidir and contractid. His handes were so starke [stiff], þai might noȝt be put forthir þan aboute þe nauill. And I had him on mi knees, as a man contracted in all membres.[140]

Cold, leprous and blue, the corpus has been exhausted of blood. The Virgin tries in vain to fold his limbs and hands together so he can sit like an infant on her lap, but in death's rictus, the hands cannot be put "forthir þan aboute þe nauill." This "man contracted in all membres" is precisely what a movable sculpture of Christ crucified would have been able to simulate for the audience of *Christ's Burial*, a push-and-pull between a living actor and a stiff corpse. It is an image of suspended animation, the Virgin mourning a body that is frozen in death, "cold as snowe." As I have argued in this chapter, this imagery is both naturalistic and exegetical, tying together medical learning with

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[139] British Library MS Additional 11307,folios 89^{r}-97^{r}. Edited in Mary Caroline Spalding, ed. *The Middle English Charters of Christ*, ed. (Bryn Mawr College, 1914), lines 78–79, 26.

[140] Roger Ellis, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden*, vol. 1., EETS (Oxford University Press, 1987), book X, lines 22-27, 22.

scripture. In the play, this underscores the theological paradoxes of Christ's post-mortem body. The characters in the play must come to terms with his biological death, must affectively "behold" the "starke and cold" body hanging in front of the audience (86). But they must not lose sight of the resurrection either. The more stiff, desiccated and leprous that body appears, the more astonishing the leap of faith.

3.4 The *Crucifixi Dolorosi*

Throughout this chapter, I have suggested ways in which the puppetry of *Christ's Burial* might be seen to complement the play's affective programme. I have sketched possibilities for how the performers moved this performance object, and how this metascript of the puppet could have added to the tension of the deposition scene. Lastly, I have shown how the themes of the text might have changed what one looked for in the corpus at any given moment – be it signs of dryness, weeping wounds, or ashen colouring. Throughout I have refrained from speculation as to the possible aesthetic tradition of this object, as this is unknown. The play's references to the thirsty Christ, the Christ with skin as parchment, however, calls to mind a category of fourteenth-century

movable sculptures of Christ crucified known as “Skin Christs,” that sit within, or adjacent to, the conceptual framework of *crucifixus dolorosus*.[141]



Figure 21. Skin Christ (1410), Monasterio de Santa Clara, Palencia.

Skin Christs are characterised by their full body casings of leather, their padded armature and their natural hair. Jørgensen, who coined the term, points to three in Galicia, an example from Valvasone (near Trieste), the Burgos Christ in Castille-Leon as well as the Döbeln *Mirakelmann,* which I discuss in the previous chapter.[142] Carla Bino mentions four examples of Skin Christs in Italy.[143] Bino additionally suggests that a 1448

[141] Jørgensen, “Skin Christ,” 134, 139, 140.

[142] Galician examples: Ourense (Orense) (c.1330-1340), Finisterre (Fisterra), and in the Convent of Santa Clara in Palencia (1410); Sara Carreño, “De imagen a cuerpo santo: el crucifijo polimatérico de la Catedral de Ourense (siglo XIV). Historia, usos, recepción,” *Crocifissi polimaterici: Approcci multidisciplinari Arte Cristiana* 935 (2023): 106–117. Kopania, “The Power of Images of Passion: Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ and the Problem of Visualizing Suffering in Medieval Art,” in *Performing the Sacred: Christian Representation and the Arts*, eds. Carla Bino and Corinna Ricasoli (Brill, 2023), Figure 6.7, 98.

[143] Busseto (Province of Parma), Mercatello sul Matauro (Marche), Fara Sabina (Lazio, outside Rome) and Francavilla Angitola (Calabria); Bino, “Le statue del cristo crocifisso,” 277–311; dating these objects is very difficult and Bino later designates the Fara Sabina and Busseto examples as “non-medieval” in Bernardi and Bino, “Interactive Images,” note 18, 275.

performance, which mingled play and homily, held on Good Friday in Perugia was performed using a Skin Christ;[144] like *Christ's Burial*, this performance featured a vernacular pietatic lament in which a human actor playing the Virgin held a movable sculpture of Christ crucified.[145] These objects were less common than movable sculptures made of polychromed wood – though the wooden ones often had joint coverings made of leather or parchment, so that they too possessed a wrinkled, skin-like quality about their joints.[146]







[144] Bino, "Le statue del cristo crocifisso," 289.

[145] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 281–284. See Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 286.

[146] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 107.

Figures 22, 23 and 24. Skin Christ (c.1350 – c.1400), Museo del Capitolo, Perugia.

The fourteenth-century Burgos Christ is perhaps the most famous Skin Christ, situated on the pilgrim road to Compostela. Its armature is of pinewood, covered in chopped wool, which then is encased in calfskin. The corpus' "inflamed ulcers and oozing craters were sculpted in relief, made from gesso, plaster, glue, and pieces of sheep skin."[147] It is jointed in its shoulders, elbows, wrists and neck as well as in its knees and hips and toes, additionally it has wires linking each phalange of the fingers, which allows a degree of poseability. The image too seems a thing of "suspended animation". Its material composition aides this idea of being semi-animate. Its beard and hair are natural, as are its fingernails, which are made from thin slices of horn, moulded onto the wooden fingertips through the application of heat.[148] As Elina Gertsman writes:

> his body, both emaciated and swollen, is covered with lacerations and furuncles; the wounds bleed profusely; his head drops to the side; his face is splattered with blood, with mouth frozen in death's rictus and teeth showing; his heavily lidded eyes are barely open.[149]

Like Julian's image of the dry Christ, the Burgos Christ appears neither alive nor dead but continually dying.[150]

The flagellant confraternity of the Oratorio dell'Annunziata in Perugia had a similar object (figures 22, 23, and 24 (1350–1400)), which was likely used for the performing the

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[147] Jørgensen, "Skin Christ," 139.

[148] Kopania, "The Power of Images of Passion," 97.

[149] Gertsman, "Bewilderment Overwhelms Me," *Preternature* 4, no. 1 (2015): 1–12, 6.

[150] Vincent Gillespie writes that Julian's image "functions like the a temporal Passion image of the Man of Sorrows, who speaks from a non-linear and non-chronological 'nowhere.'" Gillespie, "Seek, Suffer, and Trust: 'Ese' and 'Disese' in Julian of Norwich," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017): 129–158, 134.

vernacular *laude* discussed in chapter two. It is life-sized and its trunk is completely hollow, making it easy to puppeteer. The cavernous torso offered other affordances: a 1564 visitation to the confraternity noted a seemingly long-standing practice of depositing almonds in its side-wound, leaving them there for a year and then crushing them to use as medicine.[151] India Kane has suggested that the object was made by soaking the chamois leather and letting it set over a mould before removing it and sewing it up; the resulting object "can be frequently handled and that is able to keep its shape and structural integrity without the need for internal supports."[152] A similar technique, known as *cuir boulli* was used to make hard leather armour. Skin is not just a coating for this Christ sculpture, it is its primary medium and, as such, demands specific skills and techniques.

The hair, beard and fingernails of the Burgos Christ were thought to continually grow and thus need trimming "at regular intervals, almost like a liturgical cycle of ritual maintenance."[153] These kinds of legends surrounded other Skin Christs; the example in Ourense, known as the *Santo da Barba Dourada*, was thought to need shaving every fifteen days.[154] The reformer Nicholas Wyse refers to "a holy rode standyng in England,"

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[151] Pascale Rihouet, "Public Life in Perugia and the Material Culture of the Annunziata Confraternity, 14th–17th centuries," in *Material Culture: Presence and Visibility of Artists, Guilds and Brotherhoods in the Pre-modern Era*, eds. Andreas Tacke, Birgit Ulrike Münch, and Wolfgang Augustyn (Michael Imhof, 2018), 46.

[152] India Kane, "Skin and Bone," *Crafting Flesh: Collaboration in Italian Multimedia Sculpture, 1300-1700*, Queen's University, Virtual Exhibition (2024).

[153] Jørgensen, "Skin Christ," 139.

[154] Jørgensen, "Skin Christ," 139.

belonging to a house of friars who "haue made the people to beleue and thynke yt the heare of his heed and berde dyd grow."[155] Did this sculpture have a natural wig? Did the friars propagate this belief by pretending to trim it, an act somewhere between a trick, a ritual, and an intimate act of care? A number of extant movable crucifixes have natural wigs adding to the verism of the movement when they are taken down from the cross. [156] A wig on a sculpture gives it an organic fragility that sculpted hair does not. Hair is more fragile than wood: the Döbeln *Mirakellmann*, which we discussed in the previous chapter, originally had hair plugged into its scalp in the manner of a Barbie doll, but for unknown reasons this was shaved and replaced with a wig, which was subsequently lost. This material history attests to the fragility of natural hair, its need for certain forms of care.

The movable sculpture of Christ crucified in Bad Wimpfen am Berg (1481) bears some of the traits associated with *crucifixi dolorosi*. Christ's face is gaunt, his mouth hanging open. The veins, ribs and side-wound are raised from the skin. The nipple hairs may be later additions, but add to the overall sense of naturalism. The natural hair of the head and beard are now tangled. Standing before the object, one might feel disgust at its matted hair, combined with a tender wish to comb out its tangles. This is not a Skin Christ, but has joints covered in parchment, giving it a skin-like quality. Harder to see is

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[155] Nicholas Wyse, *A consolacyon for chrysten people to repayre agayn the lordes temple with certayne places of scrypture truely applyed to satysfye theyr myndes for ye expellyng of ydolatry* (London, 1538), [unpaginated]; Peter Marshall, "Forgery and Miracles in the Reign of Henry VIII," *Past & Present*, no. 178 (2003): 39–73, 58.

[156] All Skin Christs have wigs; wooden movable sculptures of Christ crucified with wigs are found in: Zurich (beginning of the sixteenth century); Palma de Mallorca (fourteenth century); Como (end of the fourteenth century); Agneza (c. 1490); Bad Wimfen am Berg (c. 1480); Schönback (c. 1490); Seitenstetten (c. 1520); Caravagio (Lombardy) (first decade of the sixteenth century). Rath, *Gliederpuppe*, 111.

the neck joint, which articulates either the moment of death (slumping forward) or some kind of nodding gesture. We can imagine that the wig exaggerates this movement, so that Christ's hair falls forward in death. It is an extension of his animation, as a well as a sign of his helplessness.





Figures 25 and 26. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (1481), Bad Wimpfen am Berg.

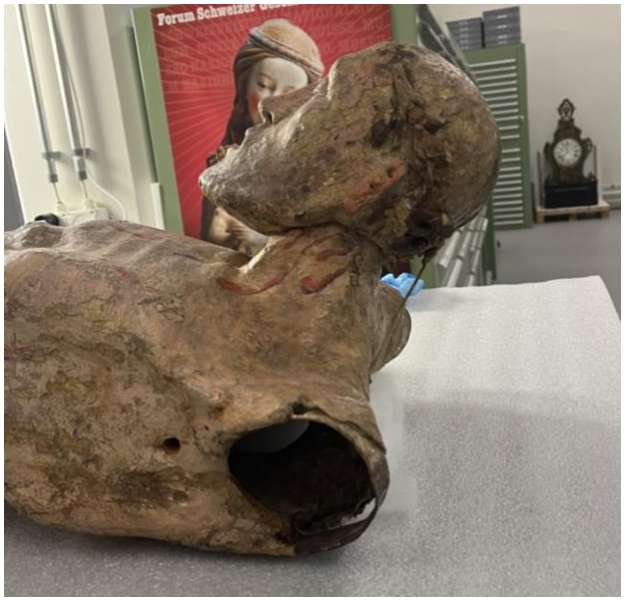
The movable sculpture of Christ crucified (1500-1510), now in the national museum of Switzerland, also had a wig as well as a mechanism that allowed its head to slump forward – as a sign of death, acquiescence or both.[157] The rope that controls this movement has survived, and is feed through a cavity in the back of the image. Though the

[157] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, cat. 126, 282.

arms are movable, it seems unlikely this object was taken down from the cross during performance, such handling would obstruct the free movement of the rope, which only partly held within the object by a metal plate in the back. If one looks closely at the head, one can see that the cranium has been stuffed with some kind of natural material, presumably to soften the nodding gesture. Here we can see a clear, material sign of Mill's concept of "suspended animation," in which the moment of death is literally padded out in order to be slowed down.









Figures 27, 28, 29, and 30. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (1500-1510), National Museum of Switzerland.

Scholars identify the impetus behind Skin Christs as part of a programme of naturalism in late medieval art; the animal dermis, the flexibility of the object and the padded armature make the corpus more realistically dead. As Jørgensen writes, they were crafted to "imitate the physical processes and anatomical appearance in order to engage

a bodily response from the viewer-toucher."[158] This naturalism went so far as to incite rumours that they were made out of mummified human remains.[159] Further their desiccated flesh functioned for some as relics. What would it mean for a medieval viewer to suspect that the crucified image was a human corpse? Would it be any different to having an actor perform as Christ? These questions speaks to the potential for anxiety surrounding images of Christ that Groebner registers when discussing Christ and his "doubles" in the late Middle Ages.[160]

We can also frame Skin Christs within a dense exegetical lexicon of suffering and melancholy, so that the wrinkled skin and horny nails are the embodiment of lovesickness. The Skin Christ is the hart panting at the stream; it is the postnatal mother leeched of blood. Like the *Döbeln Mirakellman*, the Burgos Christ had the technical ability to emit liquid from its sidewound, which it would perform every Friday. It was also allegedly able to sweat, thus performing its own process of fluid purgation. Gertsman argues that the Burgos Christ must be understood as both a "puppet put to the service of salvatory technology," and a kind of *crucifixus dolorosus*.[161] These crucifixes, characterised by their twisted, emaciated bodies, the profusion of wounds covering the surface of the body, and their cadaverous mien were thought to offer the viewer the challenge of finding beauty in deformity.

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[158] Jørgensen, "Skin Christ," 6.

[159] Bernardi and Bino, "Interactive Images," 280.

[160] Groebner, "The Crucified and his Doubles," *Defaced*, 87–125.

[161] Gertsman, "Bewilderment Overwhelms Me," 5, 8.

This idea of hidden beauty within Christ's ruined body is well attested in literature, primarily resting on the contrast between two descriptions in the Old Testament, which were taken to be prophetic descriptions of Christ. One of these is Psalm 44:3, "thou art beautiful among the sons of men." *Christ's Burial* references this Psalm in one of the rare instances of Latin in the text; the Virgin says to the corpus in her lap:

> Dere son, ye haue steynyd your face,
> Your face to frely to behold
> Thikk bludy droppes rynnes down apace
> "*Speciosus forma*," the prophet told.
> But, alese, your tomentes so manyfold
> Hase abatid your visage so gloriose![162]

Christ has stained his face, marring his colour and ruining his "frely" (beautiful) appearance. Christ's torments have "abatid" his prophesied beauty. The image of this face "abatid" with torments re-appears in *Christ's Resurrection*, when John conjures or ventriloquises the Virgin's lament for Peter (533-544); 'Now of his visage spekes shee, / Defilid with deformyte, / Of fowlle spittinge, alasse!' (539–541).

The idea of *Speciosus forma* was frequently held in contrast with to the description of the leper in Isaiah 53, traditionally considered a prefiguration of Christ crucified: "Ther is not shap to hym ne fairnesse and wee seeyen hym and he was not of sihte and we desireden hym dispisid [...] and wee heelden hym as leprous."[163] Examples of this figuration are too numerous to fully recount, and although *Christ's Burial* does not directly quote Isaiah, the contrast between beauty and gore put forward in play draws on this exegetical tradition. Already in the ninth century, Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) wrote of

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[162] *CB*, 642–644.

[163] Conrad Lindberg, ed. *Ms. Bodley 959: Genesis–Baruch 3.20 in the Earlier Version of the Wycliffite Bible*, vol. 5 (Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959), 154. Quoted in Orlemanski, "How to Kiss a Leper," *Postmedieval* 3, no. 2 (2012): 142–157, 149.

Christ as the leper of Isaiah: "If you wish to enter into life through Jesus, who is the way and the door [...] do not let it deter you, nor seem to you vile [...] his body is torn to pieces, and like a leper he is ugly to look upon."[164] The influential *Stimulus amoris* of Ekbert of Schönau (d. 1184) compares Christ to a leper and "tanquam abortivum, quod projicitur a vulva";[165] "Iste formosus prae filiis hominum, quam deformis prae filiis hominum factus est!"[166] These ideas were so common that the bodies of people with disfiguring diseases could be made to function as devotional images.[167]

Such descriptions often related the outward appearance of the crucified body to the aetiologies of various unsightly and therefore stigmatised diseases. For example, Christ is like a leper because his scourging pocks him with the black spots symptomatic of the disease; Christ is like a lunatic because the spit of his tormenters in his beard mirrors the lunatic's drooling; Christ is like a dropsical patient because he suffers severe thirst and is distended on the cross like a tympanum – one form of dropsy was called tympanites, because is swelled the body like a drum.[168] These analogies do not function as deep, sustained modes of analysis, but rather as a map, with which one can navigate an imbricated system of ideas and images relating to scripture, as well as to the

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[164] Hrabanus Maurus, *Opusculum de passione Domini*, quoted in Rachel Fulton Brown, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 154.

[165] Ekbert of Schönau, *Stimulus Amoris*, in *Die Visionen der hl. Elisabeth und die Schriften der Aebte Ekbert und Emecho von Schonau*, ed. F. W. E. Roth (Brünn, 1884), PL 158: 756. "Like an abortion cast from the womb." Trans. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 41.

[166] Ekbert of Schönau, *Stimulus Amoris*, PL 158: 756. "He who was fairest among men has been made exceptionally deformed." Trans. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 41

[167] "sche myth not duryn to beheldyn a lazer er another seke man, specialy yyf he had any wowndys aperyng on hym. So sche cryid and so sche wept as yyf sche had sen owr Lord Jhesu Crist wyth hys wowndys bledyng." *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 326–327.

[168] Holly Johnson, "A Fifteenth-Century Sermon Enacts the Seven Deadly Sins," in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan Janet Ridyard (Boydell & Brewer, 2012).

disfiguring illnesses to which in our fallen condition we are prone. As Julian asks of her vision of the dry Christ "how myght this ymage be so dyscolouryde and so farre from feyerhead?'[169] The Virgin in *Christ's Burial* puts forward the same idea: how can Christ be at once "steynyd" and "abatid" to the point of being unrecognisable, he who was the most beautiful among men?

These overlapping strands of exegesis and iconography sometimes found practical application within a medical setting. When preaching to members of a leper colony, a thirteenth-century cleric in Liege asked his audience to lift their heads and look at the crucifix hanging above them, pointing out above all the similarity between his audience's sores and gangrenous limbs and Christ's lesions, and reminding them that Christ was "made leprous on the cross for us."[170] The wounded crucifix was positioned as a mirror for the patients confined there; but perhaps what they saw reflected was not Christ's perfect sacrifice, but their own terrors. Likewise, the greenish, blackened images of the dead Christ in the Isenheim altarpiece were thought to have "primary reference to the Lord *quasi leprosus*, particularly since the altarpiece was painted for a hospital order and could be viewed by diseased patients."[171] The Antonines, who kept the altarpiece, would bring their patients before it as part of the therapeutic process. These patients suffered from ergotism, which often manifested as gangrene.[172]

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[169] Julian, *Showings*, chapter 10, 18.

[170] Sara Lipton, "'The Sweet Lean of His Head': Writing about Looking at the Crucifix in the High Middle Ages." *Speculum* 80, no. 4 (2005): 1172–1208, 1193, Appendix 3, 1208.

[171] Marrow*, Passion Iconography*, 54.

[172] Gregory C. Bryda, "The Exuding Wood of the Cross at Isenheim," *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 2 (2018): 6–36.

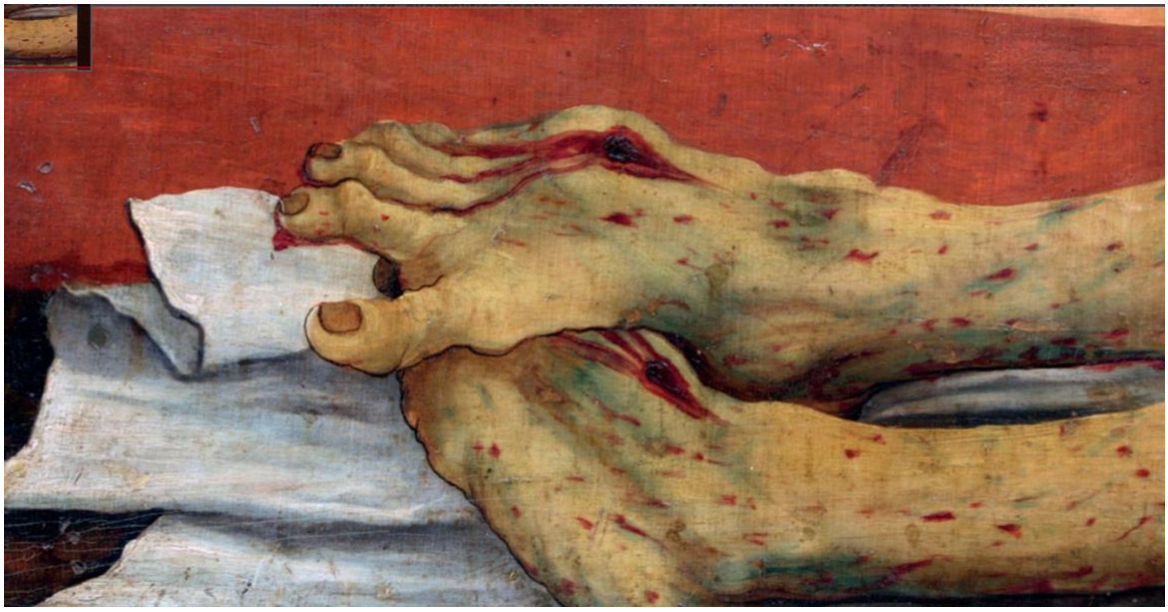


Figure 31. Matthias Grünewald, first view, lamentation detail, Isenheim Altarpiece (1512-1516), Underlinden Museum, Colmar.

We might think of a scene in Forough Farrokhzad's 1963 film documenting the residents afflicted with Hansen's disease in the Bababaghi Hospice in Iran; the teacher asks the resident schoolchildren to name beautiful things. They answer: moon, sun, flower. They are then asked to name ugly things, and the response is: hand, foot and head. Throughout this chapter, I have written of "aesthetics" as if they were neutral, distant, and culturally stable. Yet the images examined here – Christ as a post-partum producing baths of maternal blood; Christ as leper, as a desiccated corpse – are far from neutral or stable. This chapter sought to explore the ideas the play puts forward about feelings in order to better understand its affective strategies. I began with Groeneveld's suggestion that the play might have been performed at St Michael's Hospital in Hull, and may have offered "consolation to the old, the poor, and the chronically ill."[173] Untangling the play's medical framework both enriches and complicates this picture. As with the

[173] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 68.

Isenheim altarpiece and the crucifix in the leper colony at Liege, we might imagine that atmosphere of enervating sickness in the play might have reminded any audience not of Christ's loving sacrifice, but of their own mortality. Probing the differences and overlaps between beauty and ugliness might have been particularly painful there.

Christ's Burial frames the corpus within a specific spiritual medical hermeneutic built upon images of abjection and disease. Whatever object was used in performance, this framing would have influenced how the audience interpreted its puppeteered performance. The disturbing potential of a crucifix is not a modern gloss we apply to the historic artefact, as if it were an antique doll which, once sweet but now decrepit, becomes a figure of horror. Whatever its original condition might be, it was supposed to elicit, among other feelings, feelings of fear and disgust. As Bale reminds us, "to feel afraid was edifying *because* it was disturbing."[174] The corpus is of course bound up in the language of healing and salvation, but it also seems to emanate a kind of sickness, cooling and drying the bodies of the women onstage. As Julia Kristeva writes: "the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything."[175]

In an unfinished 1522 treatise, Sir Thomas More described the experience of visiting the Dance of Death mural that was in the Pardon Church yard in St Pauls. Though the cadavers pictured there are "ougly to behold," the sight itself is only impressive because the viewer's mind turns it onto their own body:

> neither the sight thereof, nor the sight of all ye dead heades in ye charnel house, nor the apparicion of a very ghost, is halfe so grisely as the depe conceiued fantasy of deathe in his nature, by the liuely imaginacyon grauen in thyne owne

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[174] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 23.

[175] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1980), 3.

> heart. For there seest thou, not one plain grieuous sight of the bare bones hanging by the sinewes, but thou seest (yf thou fantasye thyne own death, for so art thou by this counsell aduised) thou seest I saye thy selfe yf thou dye no worse death, yet at the leastwise lying in thy bedde, thy hed shooting, thy backe aking, thy vaynes beating, thine heart panting, thy throte ratelyng, thy fleshe trembling, thy mouth gaping, thy nose sharping, thy legges coling, thy fingers fimbling, thy breath shorting, all thy strength fainting, thy lyfe vanishing, and thy death drawyng on.[176]

This aestheticisation of mortality offers moral instruction: we are "aduised" to "fantasye" our own death, not as a loss of life but as a material fact.

[176] Thomas More, "The Last Things," in Anthony S. G. Edwards, Clarence H. Miller, and Katherine Gardiner Rodgers eds., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* , vol. 1 (Yale University Press, 1997), 139–140. Quoted in Sophie Oosterwijk and Clifford Davidson, eds. *John Lydgate, the Dance of Death, and Its Model, the French Danse Macabre* (Brill, 2021), 4.

Chapter Four: Animating the Sculpture

When her own failing body has cut short her lament, the Virgin in *Christ's Burial* attempts to pass on this burden:

> A! A Mawdleyn, why devise ye nothinge
> To this blessid body for to gif praysinge?
> Some dolorose ditee express now yee,
> In þe dew honour of þis ymage of pitee![1]

The Virgin is asking Mary Magdalene to compose ("devise") an extempore lyric.[2] But who or what is "þis ymage of pitee," the object of the versifying? The audience may have understood the "ymage of pitee" to be the wounded corpus she is holding, which – neither alive nor straightforwardly dead – could function as an *imago pietatis* or Man of Sorrows. In this case, the two diectics ("this blessid body" and "þis ymage of pitee") refer to the same thing. Alternatively – perhaps additionally – the "ymage of pitee" is the *pietà*, the iconographic assemblage the Virgin is making with the corpus, which was also called a "pity," or "image of pity" in Middle English.[3] Such terminological ambiguity attests to the anachronism of our terms for iconographic tropes, but also to the virtuality of the

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[1] *CB*, 793–796.

[2] Along with "song" and "tretys," "ditee" was a generic term for a short poem in Middle English. Julia Boffey, "What to Call a Lyric? Middle English Lyrics and their Manuscript Titles," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 83, 3 (2005): 671–683, 675. MED dĭtē̆ n.1. Any literary composition in verse or prose, whether intended to be read, recited or sung.

[3] MED, pitē̆ n. 5. A representation in painting, sculpture, etc., of the seated Virgin holding the body of the dead Christ on her lap; "this creature sey a fayr ymage of owr Lady clepyd a 'pyte,'" *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 286. Varnam, "The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic," 220.

movable sculpture, which affords multiple iconographic roles.[4] As we have seen in the previous chapter, *Christ's Burial* operates as a set of *tableaux vivants*, through which the corpus is puppeteered. The actor playing the Virgin could choose how to play this request, lifting the corpus to emphasise "*þis* ymage of pitee," the Man of Sorrows, or perhaps leaning back to emphasise *this* pietà. Her facial expression – whether passive, agonised, or even smiling slightly – would have tied her into iconographic traditions, with which the audience may have been familiar.[5]

The Virgin's request for an extempore "ditee" goes unmet, sharpening the tension between action and lament that runs through the play, and creating a sense of rupture. Without advocates, and no longer able to speak for herself, this marks the moment in which the corpus can be forced out of the Virgin's programme of stasis and delay and begin its final *ductus* "down" into his "grave" (777). We are primed to notice moments of rupture, as "the protocols of modern and contemporary formalist analysis have internalized procedures that privilege breaks in regularity as sites of formal revelation."[6] In rupture we read disjuncture and doubt, as well as the revelation of form. The Virgin's request for a continuation of lament is one such rupture, a metatheatrical moment that

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[4] The problem of defining the Man of Sorrows image "possibly never existed when these works were actually made. Perhaps it is better for all of us to abandon our wish to catalogue and define and instead let the images work on their own"; Colum Hourihane "Defining Terms: Ecce Homo, Christ of Pity, Christ Mocked, and the Man of Sorrows," in *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, ed. Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Barcham (Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 40; Bernhard Ridderbos, "The Man of Sorrows: Pictorial Images and Metaphorical Statements," in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. Alistair A. MacDonald, Ridderbos, and Rita M. Schlusemann (Egbert Forsten, 1998).

[5] For smiling pietàs, see Elisabeth Reiners-Ernst, *Das Freudvolle Vesperbild und die Anfänge der Pietà-Vorstellung* (Neuer Filser-Verlag, 1939).

[6] Chaganti, *Strange Footing*, 179.

point to the formative principles of the text, which is made up of laments occasioned by the corpus. In positioning herself as an icon seeking its own ekphrasis, the Virgin discloses a tight network of interrelated artforms: live performance, the plastic arts and poetry. The Virgin's self-referential request thus lays bare not only the ekphrastic rhetoric of the play, but also that which underlies much late medieval lyrical practice, as many *planctus* refer explicitly to sculptural *pietàs*;[7] we can thus see this as a moment in which the play comments upon its own practice, that enlivens the devotional experience by setting text and image in motion.[8]

As I touched upon in the previous chapter, many scholars including Baker, Murphy and Hall describe the Virgin's lament as "static." Pointing to the centrality of the Mary Magdalene character in both plays, they write that she "sustains [*Christ's Burial*] through the long, static *pietà*." They state that Mary Magdalene's *planctus* in *Christ's Resurrection*, by contrast, "conveys even something of excitement."[9] For them, the pietatic lament of *Christ's Burial* lacks "goes on far too long for modern taste."[10] It is hard to say what counted as boring in the Middle Ages. Reading the lament from the perspective of puppetry, shows instead an intriguing dynamic, unique to Middle English literature. The lament is indeed "static," but I contend that this is not a shortcoming, rather a considered dramaturgical strategy.

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[7] Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (Taylor & Francis, 2020), 137.

[8] For the metatextual qualities of ekphrasis, see Valerie Allen, "Ekphrasis and the Object,"' in *The Art of Vision: Ekphrasis in Medieval Literature and Culture*, eds. Andrew James Johnston, Ethan Knapp, and Margitta Rouse (Ohio State University Press, 2015), 23.

[9] BMH, xciv.

[10] BMH, lxxxviii.

While the previous chapter examined how the corpus is handled in *Christ's Burial*, this chapter looks at moments in the play in which the boundaries between performer and performance object blurs, facilitating a transfer of energy (in Kaplin's terms) that animates the performance object. The first is the pietatic lament, in which the Virgin speaks as a complex assemblage of actor, sculpture and textual artefact. This strategy is not only apparent in the moment of rupture described above, but also throughout the speech. As my slightly awkward term implies, the pietatic lament draws together text, voice, puppet and human actor into an "assemblage," to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's concept.[11] Michael R. Ott has suggested the medieval notion of a knight does not refer to one human being, but to an "assemblage" of human and non-human, living and non-living parts: man, horse, textual inscription and weaponry.[12] Similarly, the pietatic lament draws together human and more-than-human parts, as well as known lyric artefacts, such as refrains witnessed in other Middle English lyrics.

As we will see, Mary Magdalene and Joseph's exchange beneath the crucifix represent a very different programme of animation. Mary Magdalene not only demonstrates how the corpus can be used as a *lectio Domini*, she also speaks *for* the silent Christ, showing how his words can be appropriated by an attentive devotee. The duologue reflects upon the difference between canonical speech and imagined speech; quotations of Christ's words occur only infrequently in the text, but each instance shows

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[11] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Continuum, 2004). See also Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010), 23–24.

[12] Michael R. Ott, "Text-Bearing Warriors: Inscriptions on Weapons," in *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment*, 279.

a subtly different approach to the articulation of the divine voice. These moments of animation not only enliven the corpus in the play, they also instruct the audience in ways in which they might privately animate images.

This chapter builds on Mary Hayes's study of "divine ventriloquism" in medieval literature, which shows how the transmission of the divine voice in the Middle Ages was haunted by the idea of speech deviated from its proper organs. As she explains, the term "ventriloquist" originated with the oracle of Delphi.[13] Early Christian writers such as Origen describe how evil spirits entered the oracle's belly, and thus caused her to prophesy, which "seemed a base parody of the Virgin Mary's birth of the Word."[14] Although the word "ventriloquism" was not used in the Middle Ages to describe anything other than this set of pagan practices, Hayes shows how the mediation of the divine voice through human organs remained troubled by ideas of the idea of the "autophone," an idol which is made to appear to speak through a tube or pipe. Although Hayes does not discuss *Christ's Burial*, the play shares the concerns she identifies in other medieval texts, exploring how the divine voice might be "'played back' in devotional scenes" and what distortions might arise in the process.[15]

This is a qualitatively different kind of puppetry than that discussed in the previous chapter, in which the corpus is playing dead. Here, the performance object is made to

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[13] She was known as the *engastrimythos*, which carried over into Latin as "ventriloquist," belly-speaker; Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism*, 3.

[14] Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism*, 4.

[15] Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism*, 13.

tremble on the brink of life, seeming *almost* to speak, and producing signification in the moments of its death. As Heidi Støa has argued, "lively bodies" in late medieval literature – that is, animated corpses and humanoid automata – are not simply "ekphrastic pauses" within a text, but a way of speaking about the act of literary creation itself.[16] We can thus place the corpus in *Christ's Burial* among the ranks of other semi-animate bodies in Middle English literature, like the "cors" in *St Erkenwald*, which have been seen to perform metatextual functions.[17]

The final section of this chapter explores how this programme of animation in *Christ's Burial* might reflect on the lost performances of the Boxley Rood of Grace, which appears to have been built to simulate speech acts and facial expressions. Though the Rood is well-attested to in scholarly literature, the precise quality and nuances of its performance have not been discussed in depth. I suggest that, like *Christ's Burial*, the Rood's performances might have played with the ambiguity of Christ's voice on the cross, which articulates the border between life and death. Pilgrim souvenirs offer a glimpse of the Rood's appearance, as well as its miniaturised afterlives in the pockets

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[16] Heidi Støa, "Lively Bodies: The Aesthetics of Vitality and Animation in Late Medieval Literature," (PhD diss, Indiana University, 2018), v.

[17] Hayes discusses Lazarus on the Middle English stage as "a conceit for the affiliation of literary figuration with death," through the conceptual framework of "cryptomimesis": Hayes, "The Lazarus Effect: Translating Death in Medieval English Vernacular Drama," *Philological Quarterly* 97.4 (2018): 445–466, 446. *St Erkenwald* has been read by many as "medieval metahistory"; Cynthia Turner Camp, "Spatial Memory, Historiographic Fantasy, and the Touch of the Past in 'St. Erkenwald.'" *New Literary History* 44, no. 3 (2013): 471–491, 472; Camp, "The Temporal Excesses of Dead Flesh," *Postmedieval* 4, no. 4 (2013): 416–426; John Scattergood, "*St Erkenwald* and the Custody of the Past," *The Lost Tradition: Essays in Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (Four Courts Press, 2000); D. Vance Smith, "Crypt and Decryption: Erkenwald Terminable and Interminable," in *New Medieval Literatures*, 5, eds. Rita Copeland, Wendy Scase, and David Lawton (Oxford University Press, 2002); Chaganti, *Poetics of the Reliquary*, 47–71. See also Kenneth Rooney, *Mortality and Imagination: The Life of the Dead in Medieval English Literature* (Brepols, 2011).

and on the clothes of visitors. Following Kopania, Bino and Bernardi, this chapter also brings the Rood into conversation with the so-called Talking Crucifixes of Northern Italy.

4.1 The Pietatic Lament

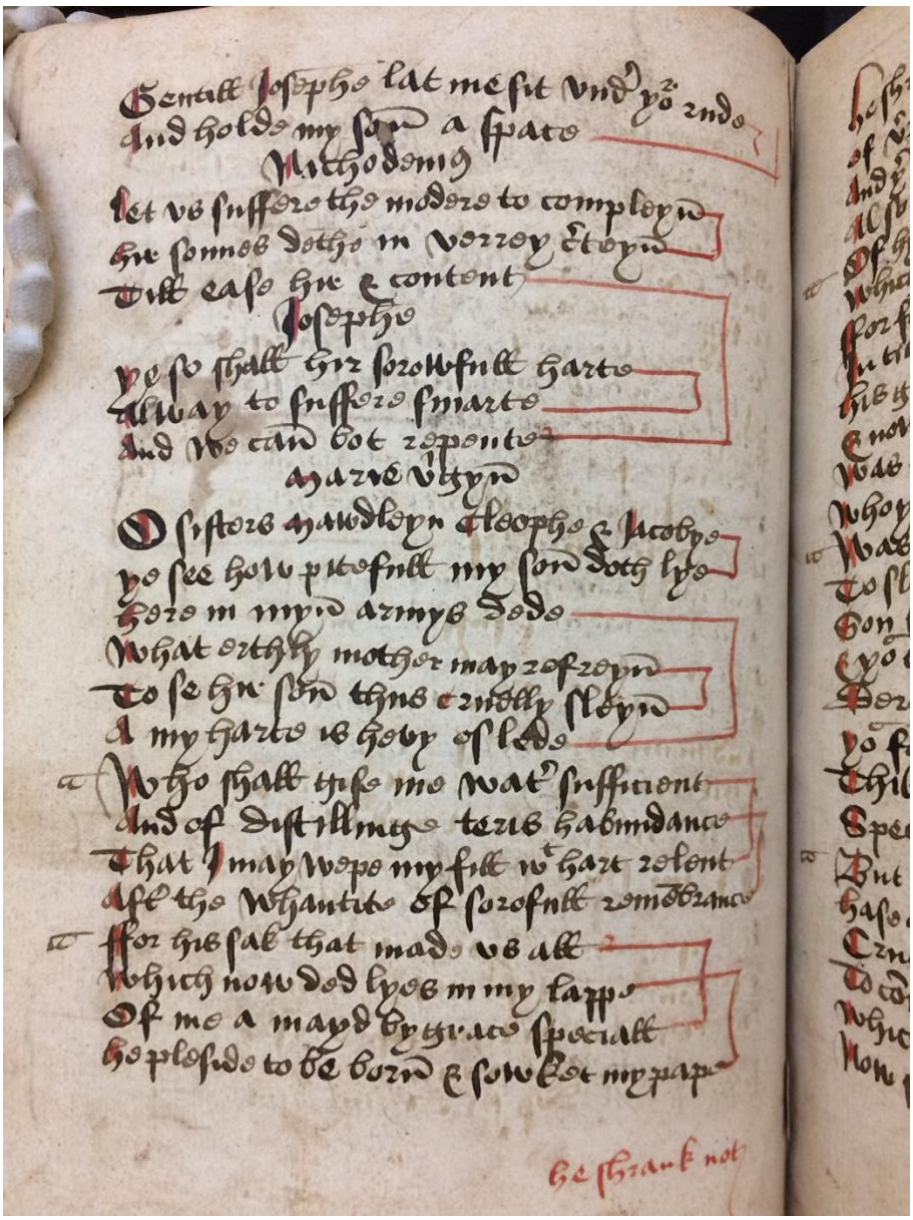


Figure 32. Beginning of the pietatic lament, Museo, folio 151ᵛ.

By far the longest speech in this playscript, the pietatic lament (lines 612–791) falls short of Julia Boffey's "vigorously minimalist definition of the Middle English lyric": a short

poem in Middle English.[18] It is well integrated into the dialogue, so we can treat it as a fully considered part of the play. However, it also remains distinct in several key ways. I have hitherto treated "the lyric" in the play as a mode of speaking, rather than a distinct speech. Speech acts occasioned by the corpus bear generic indications of the lyric mode: they are descriptive and exclamatory; they centre around the "I and the you," and they pose rhetorical questions.[19] However, the pietatic lament is formally distinct from the rest of the play. It contains contrastive patterns of versification as well as refrains, which are found nowhere else in the text. It is also the only section of the witness grouped into stanzas, with paraphs of brown ink. Figure thirty-one shows where the lament begins on folio 151^{v}, with a dramatic initial "O" initial midway down the page. The change in verse form is clear from the shift in the rhyme bracketing, and the first paraph marks the start of this shift in form. One can see these paraphs continuing in the gutter edge of folio 152^{r}. Such formal markers generate for the reader a sense of an authorial lyric voice that is distinct from the rest of the play.

For the reader as well as the audience of the pay, the formal singularities of the pietatic lament produce a feeling of time arrested; the Virgin pauses the action of the play in order to speak in a non-linear, repetitive manner that alludes to texts the audience may have read or heard previously. The shift in meter is apparent to anyone listening, and the introduction of refrains gives the whole a unique rhythm. The Virgin looks to her son's

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[18] Adam Kumler, "Lyric Vessels," *What Kind of a Thing Is a Middle English Lyric?*, eds. Cristina Maria Cervone and Nicholas Watson (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 182.

[19] "I" addressing "you" is axiomatic of lyric poetry. John Anthony Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature 1100-1500* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 64; Judson Boyce Allen, "Grammar, Poetic Form, and the Lyric Ego: A Medieval *a priori*," in *Vernacular Poetics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lois Ebin (Medieval Institute Publications, 1984); Andrew Albin, "The Sound of Rollean Lyric," in *What Kind of a Thing*, 224–225.

body and repeats verse lines, so that her speech circles back on itself. Yet her speech also insists on the present moment: the exclamatory "now," a word used eight times in the lament; "if narrative is about what happens next, lyric is about what happens now."[20] The Virgin holds her reflections on her and Christ's shared past continually in tension with the present horror of his corpse, the horror of the present moment. Eleanor Johnson and Marion Turner have discussed how the prosimetric form of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* engenders a particular temporal rhythm in the text.[21] As Johnson writes, the "independent lyrical interludes" that punctuate the *Consolation*'s prose narrative "do not link up with each other, as the successive *prosae* do, but instead stand outside of time, spoken in a narratively disembodied voice that seems to look back upon the rest of the narrative from a distance."[22] The pietatic lament similarly produces a sense of warped time, but here the voice is richly embodied.

One way of playing with time in this lyric is through textual echoes. The three refrains – "Who cannot wepe come lern at me," "Which sumtym gafe yow mylk of my pape," and "Remembere, myn awn son þat ȝe sowket my brest" – sit in distinct sections of the pietatic lament, leading some to suggest it was built out of "three distinct *planctūs* with individual refrains and stanzaic forms."[23] Like the Debs burials discussed in chapter two, the lament thus evinces, in Ingrid Nelson's influential formulation, a "network of

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[20] Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?' *PMLA* 123, 1 (2008): 201–206, 201.

[21] Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 199.

[22] Eleanor Johnson, "Chaucer and the Consolation of Prosimetrum," *The Chaucer Review* 43, No. 4 (2009): 455–472, 461. See also Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 33, note 40.

[23] BMH, xcii.

lyric practice" in which "partial texts serve as records of and cues for a vibrant culture of performance and dissemination."[24] My interest is not in tracing the provenance of this unique lament, rather in how it works to animate the corpus for the audience; it is, however, worth situating the text within its poetic tradition, in order to understand what textual resonances the audience might have heard. As Johnathan Culler writes:

> The capacious category of charms, including work songs, drinking songs and lullabies, recalls what in "Che cos'è la poesia?" Jacques Derrida describes as the lyric's demand to be learnt by heart, its appeal to *Gedächtnis* rather than *Erinnerung*, to rote memory, the by-heart, rather than the memory of understanding. With novels we characteristically recall plots and characters rather than phrases, but to remember a lyric is to remember at least some of its words.[25]

The pietatic lament is an exercise in remembering; the Virgin recalls her personal past as a mother and the lullabies she sang; the audience may remember hearing snatches of these, but more broadly they are being encouraged into a devotional programme of remembering.

It is hard to say exactly where the pietatic lament begins. The Virgin starts speaking at line 612; the scribe begins paraphing at line 618, while the editors start the "first" planctus at line 622, where the stress patterns change. This section (622-725) consists of thirteen stanzas of eight lines each and an *ababbcbc* rhyme scheme, and contains the refrain "Who cannot wepe, come lerne at me." The refrain appears in two other distinct poems; one is called "Sodenly afraide, half waking, half slepyng," which

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[24] Ingrid Nelson, *Lyric Tactics: Poetry, Genre, and Practice in Later Medieval England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 7.

[25] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 139. Jacques Derrida, "Che cos'è la poesia?" *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, trans., ed., Peggy Kamuf (Columbia University Press, 1991), 230.

has two late fifteenth-century witnesses;[26] the other is *De arte lacrimandi*, a longer English *planctus* with four witnesses.[27] "Sodenly afraide" is a dream vision in which the Virgin addresses the dreamer while holding her dead son. Likewise, in *De arte lacrimandi*, the narrator imagines kneeling "[b]efore an image of pite":

> Purtreyd and peyntid piteously
> This ymage was with terys of blode
> As for a meroure veryly
> Of oure lady I vnderstode
> Hir sone vppon hir kne did ly
> All rent and revyn brought fro þe rode.[28]

This "image of pite" is neither the Virgin nor Christ, but a "meroure" of "oure lady," a point of entry to the mediatrix. Observing this *pietà*, the narrator "thought she seide these wordis goode / Who can not wepe come lerne att me." The refrain, and the speech following, are thus cast as imaginative extrapolations based off the appearance of a "peyntid" image. As we shall see, this is a similar kind of ventriloquism to that performed by Mary Magdalene in *Christ's Burial*. In using the "Who cannot wepe" refrain, *Christ's Burial* realises the ekphrastic programme of *Sodenly afraide* and *De arte lacrimandi*, putting it in the mouth of a speaking, moving *pietà*.

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[26] DIMEV 6724. Baker, "'Therfor to wepe, cum lerne off me': A 'Planctus' Fragment in MS. Corpus Christi College Oxford F. 261," *Medium Ævum* 38, no. 3 (1969): 291–294. Th poem is also known as "Sodenly afraide, half waking, half slepyng," see Karen Saupe, *Middle English Marian Lyrics* (Kalamazoo,1997), number 39; its witnesses are: Manchester Rylands Library 18932 (Latin 395), folios 120^{r}–120^{v} and Trinity College Cambridge 1450 (O.9.38), folios 63^{v}–64^{r}.

[27] DIMEV 3777. Baker, "'De arte lacrimandi': A Supplement and Some Corrections," *Medium Aevum*, 52, no. 2 (1983): 222–226; its witnesses are: British Library Harley 2274, folios 35^{r}–46^{v}; Bodleian Library Bodley 423, folios 192^{v}–205^{r}; Trinity College, Dublin 160, Part I, folios 1^{r}–13^{v}; Oxford, Corpus Christi College 261, folio 101^{r}.

[28] Robert Max Garrett, ed. "De arte lacrimandi," *Anglia – Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 32 (1909): 269–294.

After this first section, the *ababbcbc* rhyme scheme shifts to rhyme royal. The next section (lines 726-760) comprises of five stanzas of seven lines each (except for one six-liner). This sections' occasional refrain "Which sumtyme gafe yow mylke of my pape" appears to be unique to this text, though the lappe-pape-hape-shape rhymes referencing a breastfeeding infant are common to Marian laments, and may have sparked recognition in that sense.[29] The rest of the lament (761–787) employs the same rhyme scheme and has the refrain "Remembere, myn awn son þat ȝe sowket my brest." After the abruption caused by the Virgin's fainting, this stanzaic pattern of seven lines with *ababbcc* rhyme scheme carries over into the dialogue until line 794, which is the middle of the Virgin's exhortation to Mary Magdalene to "express" "[s]um dolorose ditee" (795). The rest of the play is in couplets.

Baker, Murphy and Hall identify similarities between the lament's final refrain ("the child is ded þat soke my brest") and a lyric called "Our Lady's Imprecation," which has three fifteenth-century witnesses.[30] This poem strikes a distinctly bloodthirsty, antisemitic note, fantasising about punishment meted out to Judas and the devils in hell, who are broadly equated with the Jewish people. Like other medieval Marian *planctus*, the pietatic lament in *Christ's Burial* is an exercise in "imaginary persecution;"[31] the Virgin rails against the "[c]ruell Jewes," who have heaped curses upon themselves and made

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[29] BMH, notes 767-780, 225.

[30] DIMEV 3119. Cambridge University MS. Ff. 5. 48, folios 71^{r}–72^{v}; Cambridge University MS. Ff. 2. 38, folios 55^{r}; British Library Harley MS. 5396, folios 283-285; Carleton Brown, ed. *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century* (Clarendon, 1939), 18–22. BMH, lxxxix.

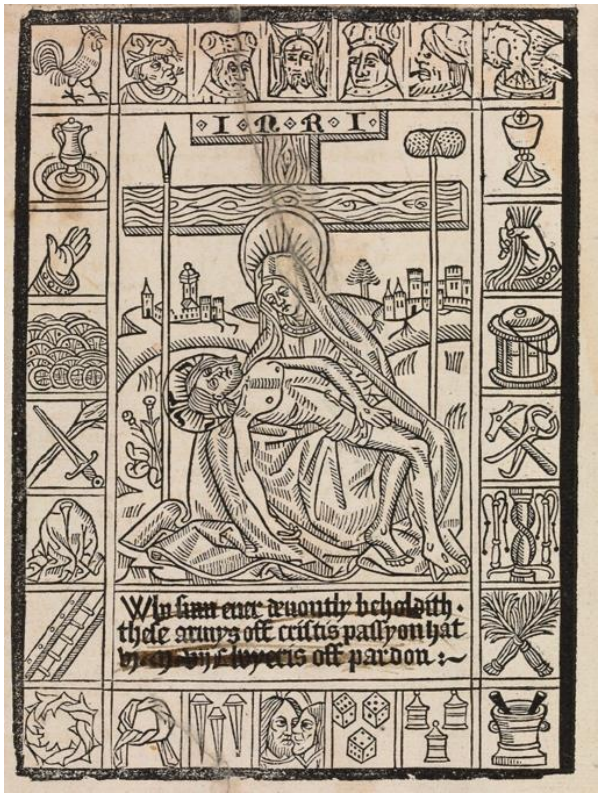
[31] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 17.

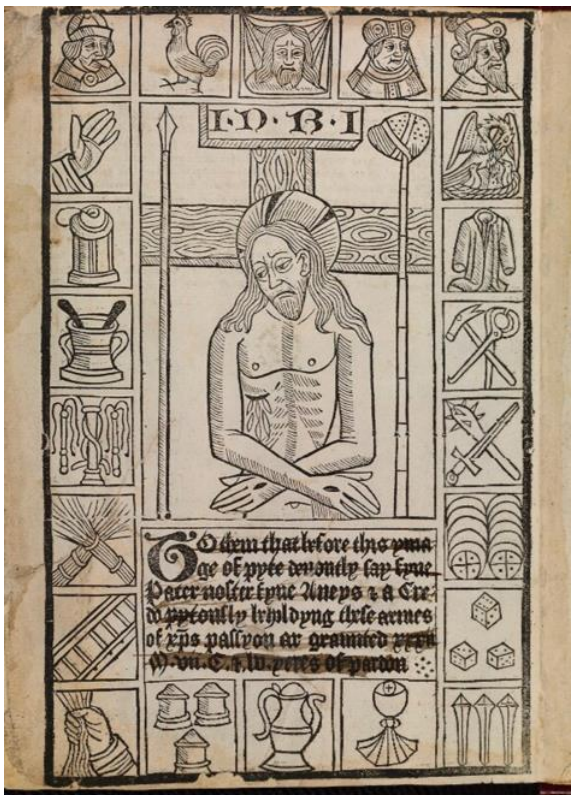
themselves eternal “vagabundes” (648–653). Yet, overall the pietatic lament places more emphasis on the connections between the Virgin and Christ than on shared enmity.

These lyric artefacts, recast into a new text, might have delivered “the delightful shock of the familiar made strangely new,” as Alan Fletcher writes of the snatches of Middle English lyrics within sermons.[32] These allusive refrains might have also functioned to collapse past and the present:

> allusion both embeds the lyric within a broader temporal framework (the longue durée of an unfolding literary tradition) and also flags up its anachronism, just as it purportedly seeks to bring its addressee into the now of enunciation.[33]

In performance, this allusion operates on visual and auditory levels. Just as the audience may have recognised echoes of other poems in the lament, so too would they have recognised the iconography of the tableaux before them.





[32] Fletcher, “The Lyric in the Sermon,” in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (D.S. Brewer, 2005), 190.

[33] David Nowell Smith, “Parsing Time in the Lyric,” *The Critical Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2022): 138–154, 149.

Figure 33. (Left) Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Rawl. D. 403, 1^{v}.

Figure 34. (Right) Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Rawl. D. 403, 2^{v}.

The fifteenth century saw a rise in the popularity of both the *pietà* and the *imago pietatis* as private devotional images. The audience may have seen woodblock imagetexts like those pasted into a Latin devotional manuscript from Syon Abbey, dating from around the time of *Christ's Burial* (1490-1510). Here the images of pity are framed by the *arma Christi*, with written indulgences.[34] The "ymage of pyte" on folio 2^{v} bears the conventional hallmarks of the *imago pietatis* – Christ is bare chested, half-length and post-crucifixion. The *imago pietatis*, like the *pietà*, sits somewhat outside of Biblical time; neither fully living nor dead, the image is particularly associated with Eucharistic devotion.[35] In England such images were "endlessly reproduced, both in the form of cheap block-prints to be pinned up in the houses of the poor, and as an illustration for Passion prayers and devotional poems."[36] The indulgence on folio 1^{v} does not mention the *pietà* at its centre, only the "armyus off cristis passyon," yet clearly constitutes a

[34] Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Rawl. D. 403.

[35] Kathryn M. Rudy, "The Mass of St Gregory, the Man of Sorrows and Prayers for the Arma Christi," *Rubrics, Images and Indulgences in Late Medieval Netherlandish Manuscripts* (Brill, 2017); Erwin Panofsky, "*Imago pietatis*: Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des 'Schmerzensmanns' und der 'Maria Mediatrix,'" in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstage* (Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1927), 261–308; Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (Palgrave, 2002), 172–173.

[36] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 239.

devotional whole.[37] Though the indulgences have been struck through, they remain legible, suggesting a wish to retain their utility.[38]

It is debateable whether a medieval audience would have puzzled over whether "þis ymage of pitee" in *Christ's Burial* referred to the *pietà* or the *imago pietatis* precisely; the two images fed into each other, as Laura Varnam writes:

> the *pietà* operates on the threshold of death and resurrection, sorrow and salvation, and as such it drew upon, and was strengthened by, multiple iconographic traditions [...] The coexistence of Passion and compassion associated the *pietà* with the *imago pietatis*, Christ as the Man of Sorrows, an iconography that conferred upon the pietà additional power and significance.[39]

Varnam, in her discussion of devotional images and performative identity in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, stresses how the *pietà*, as a physical image or lyric artefact, invites extremely personal and affective forms of devotion, functioning as a "community-building event that reshapes sacred space and those who control it."[40] By the fifteenth century, the *pietà* was "universally popular throughout late medieval Europe," and was present in most English churches, in the form of wall paintings, sculptures or stained glass.[41] Just as *Christ's Burial* may have been performed using a movable sculpture with which the audience were familiar, the pietatic lament could have been performed with local objects in mind. We can see from bequests to images in parish churches that their

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[37] For discussion of another early print *pietà* with *arma Christi*, see Martha W. Driver, *The Image in Print : Book Illustration in Late Medieval England and Its Sources* (British Library, 2004), 9–12 .

[38] Gayk, "Early Modern Afterlives of the *Arma Christi*," in *The* Arma Christi *in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of "O Vernicle"* eds. Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown (Routledge, 2016), 281.

[39] Varnam, "The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic," 222.

[40] Varnam, "The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic," 229.

[41] Richard Marks, "'An Ymage Ful Notable Lyke a Pyte': The Proliferation of Marian Images," *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Sutton, 2004), 123, 124.

accoutrements were sometimes passed down from living owners, particularly from women to female statues.[42] We could imagine a play director choosing to costume the Virgin like a local statue, so that the performance plays with the animate potential of images on multiple levels.

John Lydgate, the "most ambitious producer of multimedia literary works" in Middle English, wrote poems that variously allude to the *pietà* and the *imago pietatis*.[43] In "The Dolerous Pyte of Crystes Passioun," Christ offers instructions on how to "behold" "this ffygure," a devotional image of himself "set here in picture."[44] Shannon Gayk has idenitifed the "pite" in the poem as an *imago pietatis*, but Mary Flannery suggests it is "a *pietà* or an image of the Crucifixion." This speaks to the generality of the poem: it presents a reading strategy for virtually any image of Christ with wounds, real or imagined. As Gayk comments, Christ's "disembodied voice" speaks *about* an image "without speaking from the vantage point of the image. The image itself is dead and voiceless." Gayk registers this as a reluctance on Lydgate's part to straightforwardly ventriloquise a "dead" image.[45]

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[42] Nicola A. Lowe, "Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350–1550," Gender and History 22, no. 2 (2010): 407–429, 414–415; Roberta Gilchrist, "The Materiality of Medieval Heirlooms: From Biographical to Sacred Objects," Mobility, Meaning and the Transformations of Things : Shifting Contexts of Material Culture through Time and Space, eds. Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss (Oxbow Books, 2013), 176.

[43] Mary C. Flannery, "Multimedia Lydgate and Stories 'Shewyd in Fygur,'" in *Oxford Handbook Topics in Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2014). See also Christine Cornell, "'Purtreture' and 'Holsom Stories': John Lydgate's Accommodation of Image and Text in Three Religious Lyrics," *Florilegium* 10, no. 1 (1991): 167–178; Catherine Reynolds, "'In ryche colours delytethe the peyntour': Painting and the Visual Arts in the Poems of John Lydgate," in *Late Gothic England: Art and Display*, ed. Marks (Shaun Tyas, 2007).

[44] Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken, EETS (London, 1911), 250–252, line 16, line 2, line 5, 250.

[45] Gayk, "Early Modern Afterlives of the *Arma Christi*," 108.

Elsewhere Lydgate writes about "pyte"s as *pietàs*.[46] "The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary," for example, begins with the narration of a solitary reader who opens a book, that was "contemplatiff" (5) and finds a poem with an accompanying illustration of the Virgin and a kneeling supplicant:

> Tofor which was sett out in picture
> Of Marie an ymage ful notable,
> Lyke a pyte depeynt was the figure
> With weepyng eyen, and cheer most lamentable:
> Though the proporcioun by crafft was agreable,
> Hir look doun cast with teerys al bereyned, –
> Of hertly sorwe so soore she was constrained.[47]

This passage makes clear that the figure is pictured in a similar way to the Virgins in *pietàs* – with weeping eyes and a sad expression. Without the corpus to complete the assemblage, the mourning Virgin is "[l]yke a pyte." Lydgate continually emphasises the artifice of the image, contrasting the narrator's aesthetic enjoyment with the depicted misery. The "werkemann" shaped the proportions of the figure "maisterly," and all was "parfourne[d] by craffty excellence." Though the semiotic content of the image was one of sorrow, the aesthetic impact was "agreable." Lydgate places his almost-*pietà* within a self-referential artistic framework.

Lydgate's "On The Image of Pity" takes a different tone, offering the addressee ("O wretched synner" (1)) urgent, brief instructions in how to approach a *pietà*.[48] Its rubric in one witness describes the lyric as a "devoute exortacoun to meeve men devoutely to þe

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[46] In "A Procession of Corpus Christi," Lydgate describes a 'pyte pleyning with a ful hevy cheere' (204), who 'bought her sones dethe to deere' (207); Sponsler, *Lydgate's Mummings and Entertainments* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), 80.

[47] Lydgate, *The Minor Poems*, lines 8–14, 268.

[48] Lydgate, *The Minor Poems*, line 62, 297–299.

ymage of pyte."[49] The poem urges the sinner to "in hast, knelle doun, behold and se / The moder of Cryst" and the corpus "wounded & arayd." After praying there, one should "with hasty pace / Renne to a prest" and confess (16-20). As Varnam points out, this haste "with which the devotees must run to a priest, presumably within the very church in which they viewed the image, prevents any personal devotional impulses from getting out of hand."[50] The poem then asks the sinner to imprint the words of the poem mentally on their heart (25), to imagine the crucifixion (27) and then again to: "Remembre all so this dolourus pytie, / How þat this blyssid ladye thus doth enbrace / Her dere son ded, lygyng vpen her kne" (29-31). The exercise thus circles back to the *pietà*, that, once seen, can be reinforced in memory. It concludes by reflecting on the power of its own "lesson [...] bothe short and lyght" (33), as well as on the purpose of "ymages of dyverse resemblaunce" that allow "holsom storyes" to be committed to memory.

As this brief discussion has shown, the pietatic lament in *Christ's Burial* sits within a specific lyric tradition but, as a text to be staged as well as read, it takes the logic of this tradition to the furthest extent. Poems like "The Dolerous Pyte," "The Fifteen Joys and Sorrows of Mary," "Sodenly Afraide" and *De arte lacrimandi* refer to the images as devotional and mneumonic tools. The pietatic lament in *Christ's Burial* also serves as a stark mnemonic and didactic emblem, using the audience's visual and auditory memories to imprint affective scripts in their minds. The images of the suffering Christ and sorrowing Virgin were spiritually important things to remember, and the pathos such images engendered made them memorable. As Carruthers writes, the deliberate

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[49] Bodleian Library, Ashmole 59 (SC 6943), folio 68^{v}. DIMEV 4102.

[50] Varnam, "The Crucifix, the Pietà, and the Female Mystic," 227.

production of dolour "even to the point of tears, was a commonplace means (though not the only possible one) of initiating one's cognitive, mnemonic image-making."[51] However, the pietatic lament also portrays a more complex and unsettling programme of animation, that plays out both in the language of the poem and in the staged dynamic between the body of the Virgin and the corpus she holds, narrowing the "distance" between them, to use Kaplin's concept.[52]

The pietatic lament continually asserts the fluidity of the somatic boundaries between the Virgin and her son. The three refrains "Who cannot wepe come lern at me," "Which sumtym gafe yow mylk of my pape" and "Remembere, myn awn son þat ȝe sowket my brest" emphasise the extrusion and exchange of fluids. As we saw in the previous chapter, bodily fluids bear a great deal of semiotic weight in the play. Tears, breastmilk and blood are, as Tu puts it, an "unrelenting presence" in the play as a whole and the pietatic lament in particular.[53] She argues that this allows the solitary male reader of the prologue to inhabit a differently gendered body, referring to the audience as someone who "reads, utters, or hears" the text. We must, however, also consider the visual impact of such language. How might this system of fluid exchange affect the dramaturgy of the script?

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[51] Mary Carruthers, "'The Mystery of the Bedchamber'. Mnemotechnique and Vision in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*," in *The Rhetorical Poetics of the Middle Ages: Reconstructive Polyphony*, ed. John M. Hill & Deborah M. Sinnreich (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 79. Quoted in Gabriella Mazzon, Pathos in Late-Medieval Religious Drama and Art: A Communicative Strategy (Brill Rodopi, 2018), 76.

[52] Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree," 28–35.

[53] Melissa Tu, "'Who Cannot Wepe," 341.

The Virgin begins by appealing to the women of the company and mothers in general, emphasising the visual experience and appealing to women: "O sisters, Mawdleyn, Cleophe, and Jacobye / Ye see how pitefulle my son doth lye / Here in myn armys, dede" (612–614) and asks what "erthly mother may refreyn / To se hir son thus cruelly sleyn?" (615). She then begins to describe Christ's birth and circumcision:

> Of me, a mayd, by grace specialle,
> He pleside to be born and sowket my pape.
> He shrank not for to shew the shape
> Of verreye man at his circumcision,
> And þer shed his blude for mannys hape.
> Also at my purification
> Of hym I made a fayre oblation[.][54]

The interwoven pronouns – "me," "he," "my," "his" – bind the two bodies together. The inverted syntax – "Of me [...] / He pleside to be born" – reflects a complicated play of agency between the two figures. He chose her and actively "sowket" from her, yet she also enveloped, fed and contained him. Christ decided to be born "of" her, yet the Virgin makes an oblation "[o]f hym" at her purification, so that their entrances into various worlds are made through each other: he is born in her and she in him. Rhyming "pape" with "shape" also parallels their secondary sexual characteristics in a way reminiscent of some "sensual" Northern European Madonna and Child images. As Andrea Pearson writes of a 1521 example by Jan Gossart:

> their flesh reciprocates, one body to the next, as the gentle curve of the Virgin's upper bare breast nestles beneath the lower contour of Christ's: the widest arc of her form aligns in perfect measure with the Infant's ribcage, as if their bodies were one and the same.[55]

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[54] *CB*, 624–630.

[55] Andrea Pearson, *Gardens of Love and the Limits of Morality in Early Netherlandish Art* (Brill, 2019), 299

The enjambment "shape / Of verreye man" performs Christ's *ostentatio genitalium,* holding a moment of delicate suspension before making the reader and listener aware that the object "shew[n]" is his penis.[56] This "tonal eroticism" is made especially arresting if we imagine its object to be a hinged sculpture. The unabashed nakedness of the baby's flesh described here chimes strangely with the stripped and bloodied corpse that the Virgin holds.

Despite the horror of this present moment, the lament dwells on themes of bodily pleasure and revelation. Christ "pleside" to be born of Mary, just as she felt joy at his arrival:

> In your conception ye reyoyet my harte;
> But now of dedly woo so gret cawse I find,
> That þe joy of my haylsinge is passit fro my mynd.[57]

Even in denying any lingering joy, the sentence begins and ends with the pleasure of conception, the "haylsinge," which means both embrace and sexual intercourse.[58] The second person pronoun here seems only to refer to Christ as the active party in his own conception; the godhead does not enter into this poem to perplex the exceptional intimacy of this mother-son relationship.

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[56] For *ostentatio genitalium*, see Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (Faber, 1984); Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1986): 399–439; Vida J. Hull, "The Sex of the Savior in Renaissance Art: The Revelations of Saint Bridget and the Nude Christ Child in Renaissance Art," *Studies in Iconography* 15 (1993): 77–112; Pearson, *Gardens of Love*, 304. Jutta Gisela Sperling, "Address, Desire, Lactation: On a Few Gender-Bending Images of the Virgin and Child by Jan Gossaert," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 76 (2015): 49–77.

[57] *CB*, 742–744.

[58] MED halsing(e ger (a) Act of embracing; an embrace; also fig.; (b) sexual intercourse.

Addressing the corpus, she reminds him that when his "fleshe was soft os tender silke" (774), she refused to feed him "grosse metes" but gave him only "the licour of a maydyns mylke" (776). Eschewing coarse foods, the Virgin ensured that her divine milk was the baby's sole sustenance; he has been in a sense made out of her milk, and has thus taken on the silky qualities of that substance. As McAvoy points out, "[w]ithin this schema, having taken on human flesh from Mary and been fed by her own transmuted blood in the form of breast milk, Christ's own blood and the breast milk which fed him were ultimately one and the same."[59] McAvoy is here referencing other texts, but again we can see how *Christ's Burial* responds to the spiritual medical hermeneutic of the time.

The Virgin's description of her labour in the pietatic lament draws together these themes of agency, liquid, and pleasure. She reminds Christ of his "natiuitee":

> What vesselle I brochit to your nobille grace
> Was þer neuer moder that brochit sich a ton!
> From my virgyne pappes mylk ran owt apasse.
> To your Godly power natur gaf a place;
> Ye sowkit maydens milke, and so did neuer none
> Nore herafter shalle, saue yourself alone' (782–787)

The chiasmic pattern of the first two lines with the repetition of "brochit" (broke or breached) linking the receptacles ("ton", "vesselle") narrows our focus into a central gynaetheological mystery.[60] What exactly was the nature of that breach? And how was she able to break her waters without a loss of virginity? This is an image of a

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[59] McAvoy, "Bathing in Blood," 94; Bynum, "Woman as Body and as Food," *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (University of California Press, 1987), especially 271–272.

[60] Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 57.

"transformatively vaginal" saint and these lines periphrastically approach what is enacted in the Chester and N-Town nativities, when the Virgin is manually explored "in sextu secreto."[61] The lament continues its images of breaching with the sudden outpouring of milk, which does not leak but runs "owt apasse," another miraculous bodily feat marvelled at by the N-Town midwives.[62]

The Virgin breaks open the fountain sealed (Song of Songs 4:12), resulting in an outpouring of fluids. This breaching is not something done to her, but something she actively does ("I brochit") *to* Christ's godly power. She remains the subject of these lines, while the Godly attributes of Christ occupy the object position. Similarly, "natur" (the maternal body) "gaf a place" to the Godly power belonging to Christ. Such imagery emphasises the creative power inherent in the "borderlessness of the female reproductive agency," what Katherine Jager calls "yielding agency." Jager discusses the Marian lyrics of the Sloane manuscript, which equally represent the Virgin's impregnation and labour as consensual and full of eroticised desire.[63]

This presents a different kind of relationship between performer and performance object than that which we saw in the deposition scene at the beginning of chapter three. Within Kaplin's "Puppet Tree" paradigm, the deposition has a high performer to object

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[61] "Tunc Salome tentabit tangere Mariam in sexu secreto," Play VI, *Chester Cycle*, 339a, 118; "Towch with youre hand and wele asay", Play 15, *N-Town Plays*, lines 251-252, 140. See: Gibson, "Scene and Obscene: Seeing and Performing Late Medieval Childbirth." The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 29, no. 1 (1999): 7–24; Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (Allen Lane, 2009), 212, 299.

[62] Play 15, *N-Town Plays*, lines 235–236, 139.

[63] Katherine W. Jager, "'And sok his fille of þat licour': Maternity, Sovereignty, and Song in the Marian Lyrics of London, British Library, MS Sloane 2593," in *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature: With an Edition of Middle English and Middle Scots Pastourelles*, eds. Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris, and Elizaveta Strakhov (Penn State University Press, 2022), 154.

ratio (3:1). The pietatic lament, by contrast, has a 1:1 ratio, and the transfer of energy between the two covers less "distance" than in the deposition scene. The corpus sits in the Virgin's lap; it is not moved through vertical space. Hinges would have allowed it to nestle there, and that as she breathes, or moves, or rocks, so too does the corpus. In the Virgin's lap, performer and performing object become an iconographic unit. This visual tableau finds reflection in the language of the lament. After describing the vessel she "brochit" to his "noble grace," she brings these images of rupture to bear on the body before her: "When ye sowkid my brest, your body was hole and sound; / Alese! In euery place now se I many wound" (788–789). When she was leaking and opened, the infant was somatically intact; now, however, the infant has come to resemble her. As Stanbury writes of similar late medieval Marian lyrics, such "systematic violation of boundaries even pertains to the most fundamental distinctions, marking self and non-self, male and female, in the recurring language of incest."[64]

Like many Marian laments, the pietatic lament of *Christ's Burial* also looks back to Christ's infancy to approach the indescribable pathos of his death. My last chapter looked at the way in which the lament, as a mode of speech within the play, functioned as an impediment to the linear flow of the plot. The lament goes further, collapsing the living child into the dead adult, and the living mother into the dead child. This inward-turning *pietà* speaks to Seeta Chaganti's concept of a "poetics of enshrinement," which is the "dialectical interaction between inscription and performance." In this case, the

[64] Stanbury, "The Virgin's Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion," *PMLA* 106, no. 5 (1991): 1083–1093,1086.

inscription is the inscribed body of Christ, overwritten with "many bludy letters" (272), as well as the lyric artefacts recast in performance.

In this sense, the pietatic lament resembles a *Shrine Madonna*. As we saw in chapter one, Durham Priory used a shrine Madonna with a removable crucifix to carry out their *Depositio*. Elina Gertsman frames this performance as kind of puppetry, at the centre of which

> is animation: the animation of the Virgin's womb, which opens and closes in a reenactment of birth; the animation of Christ performing his own death, deposition and resurrection; the animation of the operator, who handles the sculpted bodies; and the animation of beholders, from whom an unconditional somato-sensory participation is emphatically required.[65]

Though Christ remains dead throughout the performance, the Virgin draws out glimpses of his prior animation. The lament puts forth a double-vision whereby the child is superimposed onto the adult, which the audience sees folded into the lap like a nursing baby. The Virgin echoes a lullaby: "I sange 'lullay' to bringe you on slepe, / Now is my songe 'Alese, ales, my child!'" (719–720).[66] Many medieval *planctūs* reference lullabies, further embedding this dramatised lament into the lyric genre. Both "ales" and "lullay" are non-verbal sounds, gesturing to the insufficiency of language itself to express her maternal feelings.

On many levels, then, the pietatic lament points out its own artifice. In performance, this text actualises the ekphrastic programme of other lyrics, presenting a unique case study in the connections between visual art and poesis in the late Middle

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[65] Gertsman, *Worlds Within*, 101.

[66] For other *planctūs* that echo lullabies, see Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 40–45.

Ages. The tonally erotic connections the text makes between mother and son must have felt inescapable in performance, when the two bodies are joined in an embrace. The Virgin's request for Mary Magdalene to produce her own "ditee" gestures to expansiveness of this genre, the openness of the lyric form to call and response, to endless dilation. Yet the play presents multiple formal ruptures: the Virgin's request goes unmet, her lament ends mid-stanza, and she is forced to give up the corpus. The suspended moment of the lyric is abrupted and the corpus returns to an object to be handled, rather than a thing on the brink of animation.

4.2 Ventriloquising the Crucifix

Although Christ remains silent throughout the play, there are many ways in which he is made articulate. During the pietatic lament, the Virgin speaks as a devotional assemblage of mother and son, transferring some of her fluid agency onto the corpus and allowing the audience to glimpse the living child in the dead man. As I touched on in the previous chapter, the play's object-lesson positions the corpus as an inscribed object, which can be made articulate through a "reading" in the manner of a *lectio Domini*. I have also shown how the corpus functions as a lyric invitation, eliciting expressions of lament from those around it and casting them into a desperate lovesickness. This final section ties these ideas together, by reflecting on how *Christ's Burial* helps us think more broadly about the articulation of dead bodies in medieval literature.

The simplest way in which the divine voice is played back in *Christ's Burial* is through scriptural quotations of what Christ said during his ministry. Mary Magdalene

recalls his appeal for her to "[l]eve thy syn" (246); similarly, Nicodemus recounts his nighttime conversation with Christ (John 3: 1–21): "[m]any swete wordes it plesit hym to spend"(429). He relates how Christ told him "[t]hat no man to hevyn myght clym, / But if it were by grace of hym / Which com down to make vs free" (431–433); Nicodemus then quotes the according scripture (434). Nicodemus' translation is written as indirect speech, making the separation between scripture and play text clear.

A more complex form of parsing Christ's words appears in the play's object-lesson in viewing the corpus. Because Mary Magdalene's language is so insistently ekphrastic, Christ's recounted words appear to be thrown onto the body itself in a kind of speculative ventriloquism. Joseph and Mary Magdalene analyse his sayings on the cross in a *quaestio* dialogue, for which they employ both direct and indirect speech. As the scene progresses, these characters hone their focus on the actual "wordes" he "saide," while also showing how these can be padded out or subject to interpretation.

Mary Magdalene refers to two of the seven canonical sayings of Christ:

> When sho harde hym for his enmyse praye,
> And promesis the thefe the blissis aye,
> And to hirself no word wald saye,
> She sighid, be ye sure.[67]

Here Christ's words, directly quoted in the Scriptures, are distanced from the audience.[68] These words are one person's report of what another person (the Virgin) heard a third person (Christ) say to a fourth group (the thief and sinners). We catch Christ's words through these narrative layers. Jospeh urges Mary Magdalene for more detail; if Christ indeed said "no word" to his Mother, did he have "ony mynd of hir in his passion?" (185).

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[67] *CB*, 172–175.

[68] Luke 23: 34, 43.

Mary Magdalene affirms, "3e, yee, Josephe, of hir he had grete compassion / Os apperit by evidence" (187). The "evidence" she gives is purely visual:

> He lukyd on that maide, his moder, rewfully,
> And with a tender cow[n]tenance,
> As who say, "Modere, the sorow of your harte
> Makes my passion mor bitter and mor smarte[."][69]

Mary Magdalene attributes words to his facial expression; he looked *as if* to say the given words. She interprets his gaze as a look of tender, filial devotion. The six lines she quotes are presented as Christ's direct speech but are framed as a supposition based on his appearance. The speech is an emotive elaboration of John's account of the crucifixion in which Christ says to the Virgin "Woman, behold thy son" and says to John, "Behold thy mother."[70] The play gives Christ's succinct statement a pathetic spin. His look tells the Virgin that she is always in his mind, and that, because he has to leave her, his cousin John will attend her as her "comforte" (196).

Mary Magdalene gives the traditional interpretation that this moment teaches "alle children to be kind / To fader and modere" (198–199).[71] The Christ portrayed here is passive, almost infantile: "[t]his child wald not lefe his moder alone" (200).[72] Mary Magdalene's reported speech of Christ's addresses a quandary medieval commentators had with the verse in John; Nicolas Love, for example, explains Christ's seeming callousness in calling his mother "woman" thus: "[h]e clepede hir not at þat tyme,

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[69] *CB*, 189–193.

[70] John 19: 26–27.

[71] "John 19," *John Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, eds. Michael A. Thomas and Bryan A. Stewart (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 17–20.

[72] Groeneveld, "Christ's Burial," 65.

modere, lest she sholde þorh feruent tendirnes of loue haue bene more sorye."[73] In supplementing Christ's words here, Mary Magdalene is performing an accepted form of devout imagining. As Love writes, not everything "þat Jesus dide" appears in the Gospels. Thus in order to produce the "mylke of lyȝte doctryne" for the unlearned, the "holi writte may be expownet" and padded out "diuerse ymaginacious," so long as these do not stand in the way of Christian belief and they have their basis in scripture as well as in "diuerse auctoritis."[74] Mary Magdalene's speech puts this idea into effect.

Furthermore, looking at an image of a crucifix and imagining it speaking or gesturing was an established devotional practice. For example, the spread of Christ's arms and his leaning face, his "tender cow[n]tenance," as Mary Magdalene puts it, was often read as a wish to embrace the viewer, a practice shaped by the changing form of the crucifix over time.[75] In the fifteenth-century dialogic theological commentary *Dives and Pauper*, Dives asks how he might "rede in þe book of peynture and of ymagery," and Pauper replies with a list of physical attributes of crucifixes and their higher meanings; "as Seynt Bernard byddyȝt, take heid be þe ymage how his heid is bowyd doun to the, redy to kyssyn the."[76] This passage in *Christ's Burial* thus ties into the logic of the performance as a piece of puppetry. The physicality of the corpus is not a side-note to a

[73] Love, *Mirror*, chap. 44, 177.

[74] Love, *Mirror*, "Proem," 10–11.

[75] Sara Lipton, "'The Sweet Lean of His Head,'" 1172–1208; Lieke Smits, "Wounding, Sealing, and Kissing: Bridal Imagery and the Image of Christ," *Medium Ævum*, vol. 88, No. 1 (2019): 1–22.

[76] *Dives and Pauper*, ed. Priscilla Heath Barnum, EETS (Oxford University Press, 1976), vol. 1, part 1, Chapter ii, lines 1–2, lines 39-40, 83–84.

reading of this play; it is an essential, grounding reality, so that the play functions as a series of intense and multivalent responses to a work of devotional art.

The play does not let go of this question of voice yet. Joseph responds to Mary Magdalene's conjecture of the exchange between Christ and the Virgin by asking whether he actually said anything on the cross: "But can ye telle what wordes saide hee / There in that grete distresse?" (204–205). The word "wordes" is used three times in seven lines, stressing the difference between what Christ might *appear* to say from his outward mien, and what the scripture actually relates. Mary Magdalene replies:

> [MAVDLEYN]. But fewe wordes he hadd,
> Saue that in grete agonye
> He saide thes wordes: "I am thrustye,"
> With chere demure and sadd.
>
> [J]OSEPH. Mawdleyne, suppose ye his desire was to drinke?
>
> [M]AVDLEYN. Nay verrelye, frend Joseph, I think
> He thrustide no lyquore.
> His thruste was of charitee.[77]

Christ's sayings have been winnowed down to just one, *sitio*, so brief that is only takes up half a line. In the previous chapter, I described the way in which these two interlocutors parse Christ's statement, so that the play leaves room for a literal reading of Christ's thirst. Thus the words of the scripture remain open to the interpretation of the audience, whom we can imagine hearing these words and gazing upon the crucified corpus. They might indeed try to parse the image for outward signs of thirst, for signs of love-longing.

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[77] *CB*, 208–215.

The most radical prompt for this kind of speculative ventriloquism is offered by Joseph; he describes the wounded corpus hanging on the cross:

> On yche parte he is paynede sore,
> Saue only the tunge, which euer more
>
> For synners did prayee.[78]

While the body is constrained, wounded and in pain, "the tunge" alone remained active, pulsing out a litany of prayers. This image of Christ's ever-pulsing tongue occurs at the end of Joseph's exhortation to "alle the pepille that passis here by" (277) to behold "this displaied body" (313) before them. He enumerates the various hurts it has sustained – the "thorns thrust in his braynes" (306), "the bones alle to-brake" (307), etc. The body is broken, but the tongue flickers with life. The scriptural basis for this image is Isaiah 1:6, "from the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness in him but wounds and bruises, and teeming sores," which was "one of the most frequently cited texts in the Passion narratives."[79] Pinned to the cross, Christ cannot act, he can only speak. A Middle English sermon, from the mid-fifteenth century contains a similar image to *Christ's Burial*'s; Christ had "non hool parti in all is bodie but is tongue, with þe wiche he preyed for synnefull men."[80] The sermon goes on to quote what Christ said "on þe Crosse" in both Latin and English, which the author takes not from the Gospels but from Lamentations 1:12.[81] In *Christ's Burial*, Joseph implies that Christ's tongue pulsed out not one prayer, but innumerable, successive prayers; the phrase "euer more" indicates

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[78] *CB*, 319–321.

[79] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 33.

[80] MS Royal 18 B xiii (c. 1450), Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*, EETS (Oxford University Press, 1940), sermon 19, lines 18–19, 111; for dating see xxxiv-xl.

[81] *Middle English Sermons*, sermon 19, lines 20–25, 111.

that these prayers are constant and innumerable; not a singular, canonical but an effusion.

Although the prayers Joseph speaks of happened in the past (he "did prayee"), we might imagine that the audience might have looked for signs of movement in the mouth of the sculpted corpus, and might have been moved to imagine articulation at that sight, a semantic layer that runs co-currently with the play. The invitation here is both private and public: the corpus *qua* puppet can be made to speak for an audience, as is the case in this play. Similarly, the corpus *qua* doll can be made to speak for the viewer alone, in a private imaginative exercise.[82] Sight and apprehension were thought to be active and reciprocal; the seer actively searched, grasped and pierced the objects of sight.[83] Because the audience's eyes are continually trained upon the corpus, *Christ's Burial* invites the onlookers to participate in this active, speculative gaze.

Medieval writers were interested in the sound and quality of Christ's voice of the cross. This applies also to his non-verbal exclamation in the Gospel of Mark: "And Jesus having cried out with a loud voice, gave up the ghost" (Mark 15:13). It was thought this cry was so loud it was heard in hell.[84] The *Groenendaal Passion*, a late fifteenth-century collection of spiritual exercises in Latin and Middle Dutch accompanying twelve print images by Israel van Meckenam, reflects upon the quality of Christ's voice on the cross; "[e]nde hi spaerde niet sijnen gequesten mont, noch sijn h[eilige] doerwonde verdoernde

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[82] See Speaight's distinction between puppet and doll in introduction, note 47, 17.

[83] Camille, "Before the Gaze."

[84] "Soþly þis crie was so grete as holi men seyne, þat it was herde in to helle," Love, *Mirror*, chapter 44, 178.

hoeft mer hi las die heiligen psalmen wt, van sijnder h[eilige] passien."[85] Expressed through these painfully parched organs, Christ's voice takes on particular sonic resonances: "[e]nde sijn h[eilige] stemme was bevende ende vijerende, ende als nu was si stille ende als nu was si geluyt ende seer wenende."[86] Similarly, one Middle English sermon frames Christ's shout on the cross as like the roar of a lioness. This derives from idea that a lion cub is born dead but revivified by the mother's roar after three days.[87] The author of the sermon compares this maternal roar to the "noyse þat [Christ] made on þe Crosse," which "ȝaue liff to mans soule as doþ þe lion to is qwelpe."[88] Exegetes often drew out the song-like qualities of Christ's voice on the cross: in his stretched out dryness, his body is transmuted into a harp or drum to body forth salvific harmony.[89] As Bruce Holsinger has stressed, this "typological musicality" reflects the idea that "*musica* exists within the human body as an internal *materia* actualized when the body experiences extreme forms of pain, desire, or religious ecstasy." [90] Thus Christ's tongue on the cross comes into focus as an instrument to express the *musica humana*. In John

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[85] "And he spared neither his bruised mouth nor his holy mangled, parched head, but read out the holy psalms of his sacred Passion." *The Groenendaal Passion*, Metropolitan Museum Album 2003.476, folio 36r. This text is partly edited and translated in Melion, "Meditating the Unbearable," 367, Appendix 14.

[86] "And his godly voice trembled and burned, and was soft, and now was loud and wailing." Melion, "Meditating the Unbearable," 367, Appendix 14, 391.

[87] "þe lion crie and make a keendly noyes, þe which noyse passeþ oute of ius mouthe and at is erries and at is noyse as seys þis clerke. Þan þe qwelpe þat is dede borne takeþ liff þer-by," *Middle English Sermons*, sermon 22, lines 5–8, 126.

[88] *Middle English Sermons*, sermon 22, lines 30–32, 126

[89] Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, 165–166.

[90] Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Stanford University Press, 2001), 12.

Pecham's (1230–1292) *Philomena*, Christ's voice on the cross is related to the death rattle of Philomel:

> Sic quassato organo huius Philomenae,
> Rostra tamen palpitans fit exsanguinis pene,
> Sed ad nonam veniens moritur iam plene,
> Cum totius corporis dirumpuntur venae.[91]

Here, sonic beauty emerges from the destruction of the sonic instrument, an idea that also colours our understand of miraculous song the *Prioress' Tale*.[92]

The *lectio Domini* section of *Christ's Burial* offers a "script[ ] for the performance of feeling," for which Christ is not only passively read, but animated to the brink of speech.[93] Mary Magdalene ventriloquises an inanimate crucifix in manner reminiscent of preachers.[94] In the Good Friday sermon in the *Speculum Sacerdotale*, the preacher directs the audience to look at Christ on the cross hanging in the church "in þe same fourme þat he suffred deþ in."[95] The text includes what Varnam calls "inset lyric," which the preacher is to perform in the voice of Christ in his dying moments: "To the, man, well

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[91] John Pecham, "Philomena," *Analecta hymnica medii aevi*, vol. 2, ed. Guido Maria Dreves (Leibzig, 1907), 602–603. "Thus with the nightingale's instrument shattered, the palpating beak nearly drained of blood; but approaching None it soon fully dies, every vein in its body burst." Trans. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire*, 231

[92] See discussion of the tale in Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire*, 259–295.

[93] McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 12.

[94] Charlotte Steenbrugge has stressed that there are "surprisingly few uses of the sermon as a textual genre on the fifteenth-century English stage," and in most instances we should think in terms of cross-fertilisation rather than direct allusion to the form. Steenbrugge, *Drama and Sermon in Late Medieval England: Performance, Authority, Devotion* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), 43.

[95] Edward H. Weatherly, ed., *The Speculum Sacerdotale,* EETS (Oxford University Press, 1936), 112. Quoted in Varnam, *The Church as Sacred Space in Middle English Literature and Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2018), 167.

lowde I crye; / For thy loue þou seest I dye."[96] Here the sculpture within the church is animated with the insertion of the lyric form into a sermon. Lyrics were a useful tool, as they were easy to remember and their "I" and "you" form makes them transferable onto any interaction. Presumably, the audience of this sermon are supposed to take the lyric with them in their daily life, putting it into the mouth of other images they encounter, real or imagined.

4.3 The Boxley Rood of Grace

Though Christ's speech on the cross is only imagined in the play, the situation affords a glimpse of how a medieval audience might have experienced the Boxley Rood of Grace. Leanne Groeneveld has made the convincing case that the Rood operated as a form of "theatrical puppet," used to dramatise the last words of Christ on the cross. Though Boxley was far from Museo's birthplace, a medieval English audience may well have been aware of the Rood as it was an important pilgrim attraction between London and Canterbury. We can witness its cultural dissemination through the numerous pilgrim badges that appear to depict the Rood.[97] This final section draws on written and artefactual evidence to recover what the Rood's performances looked like and what they might have meant to a medieval audience, expanding Hayes' concept of divine ventriloquism to include puppet performance, in which voices are literally thrown into a performance object.

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[96] Weatherly, ed. *Speculum Sacerdotale,* 112. Varnam, *The Church as Sacred Space*, 167.

[97] Brian Spencer lists twelve unique badges of the Rood in London. Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (Museum of London, 1998), 165–166. The Portable Antiquities Scheme have suggested others, which are awaiting validation: S. Maslin (2023), *SUR-AF1814*; M. Foreman (2019), *NLM-88CDE5*; S. Wyatt (2017), *LON-859A7A*; E. Wood (2016), *LON-374369*' B. Paites (2013), *LON-CCE076*; K. Creed (2011), *LON-912381*.

Descriptions of the Rood written during the Reformation give a sense of its affordances. When it was taken from Boxley in 1538, Geoffrey Chamber, who was in charge of liquidating Boxley, wrote to Cromwell; he recounts that when they took the Rood down from the wall, they discovered

> certen ingynes and olde wyer, wyth olde roton stykkes in the backe of the same, that dyd cause the eyes of the same to move and stere in the hede thereof lyke unto a lyvelye thyng; and also the nether lippe in lyke wise to move as thoughe itt shulde speke.[98]

This is an eye-witness account written in a private conversation, without any particularly polemical spin, and is therefore a valuable source for the construction of the Rood.[99] Philip Butterworth has compared the mechanisms described here to those in a modern "ventriloquist's doll," in which the eyes and jaw are operated by individual wires fed through tubes.[100] Some later sixteenth-century reformists ascribe to the Rood the ability to move its arms and legs and to weep tears, though the accuracy of this has been questioned.[101] We can say with near certainty though, that the Rood's lower lip (or jaw) was movable and that its eyes could be moved in its head.

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[98] Geoffrey Chamber, *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History*, vol. III, ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1864), 168.

[99] Kopania, "'The idolle that stode there, in myne opynyon a very monstrous sight': On a Number of Late-Medieval Animated Figures of Crucified Christ," *Material of Sculpture: Between Technique and Semantics*, ed. Aleksandra Lipińska (Wrocław University Press, 2009), 143–144. Groeneveld, "'lyke unto a lyvelye thyng': The Boxley Rood of Grace and Medieval Performance," in *Medieval Theatre Performance*.

[100] Butterworth, *Magic*, 126.

[101] Lightsey, "The Paradox of Transcendent Machines in the Demystification of the Boxley Christ," *Postmedieval* 1, no. 1 (2010): 99–107.

Before destroying the Rood in February 1538, the Reformers "re-animated it in strange spaces."[102] Chamber removed it from its shrine and brought it to nearby Maidstone and "in the cheff of the markett tyme dyd shew itt openly unto all the people ther beyng present, to see the false, crafty sotell handelyng therof."[103] It is unclear whether this was a performance or merely a display of the interior: the audience seem to be passersby, giving the occasion a sense of informality. The Rood was then brought to London for a more official performance at St Paul's Cross; the Bishop of Rochester presented it during a public sermon on idolatry. Charles Wriothesley, who was probably present at the event, describes how the bishop broke the "vice" (devise) of the image himself and then invited others to join so that "the rude people and boyes brake the said image in peeces." This final performance points out the irony of iconoclastic acts: in publicly executing the image as if it were a heretic, they grant it a kind of power. But what did the Rood's performances look like when the performance was in earnest?

Like Chamber, Wriothesley describes the Rood's innards. When pulled apart, it was apparent that it "was made to move the eyes and lipps by stringes of haire." He also comments that it "was made of paper and cloutes from the legges upward; ech legges and armes were of timber."[104] As it could be set upon by multiple iconoclasts, it was probably fairly large. Making the trunk of the corpus out of paper and cloth, presumably bound together with some sort of plastic mass, allowed it to be light as well as to hold its

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[102] Groeneveld, "'lyke unto a lyvely thyng,'" 211.

[103] Chamber, *Original Letters*, 169.

[104] Wriothesley, *Chronicle of England,* vol. I, 75.

internal mechanisms.[105] As we shall see, its material detail links it to a set of large Italian Talking Crucifixes.[106]

The Rood's arrival at the Cistercian house at Boxley can be dated fairly exactly, though its provenance is unknown.[107] As Elizabeth Eastlake has shown, its emergence in the late fourteenth century permanently changed the fortunes of the monks and household living at Boxley. It is worth summarising her findings, because they show that the Rood is not only older than some scholars speculate, but also more influential.[108]

Because income to the sacrist was only specified as offerings to the Rood in 1371, the sculpture probably arrived a little before this. In 1378, the Abbey had to hire a "warden of the holy cross" to man it, as they were apparently understaffed for the numbers flocking to see it.[109] It was also in this period that the house refreshed its appearance: the cloisters were renovated, and the house spent over £22 on new vestments and altar cloths, which were fringed in gold and spangled with blue.[110] Around the same time, the account rolls attest to an uptick in the number of swans bought for eating, reflecting an increase in notable visitors.[111] Eastlake explains that it would have

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[105] Kopania, "'The idolle that stode there,'" 144.

[106] Kopania, "'The idolle that stode there,'" 142–147.

[107] William Lambarde relates story of the Rood's arrival on the back of a horse; Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent: Conteining the Description, Hystorie, and Customes of that Shire; written in the yeere 1570, first published in the year 1576, and now increased and altered from the author's owne last copie* (London, 1826), 205–207.

[108] Kopania, *Animated Sculptures*, 90. Lightsey argues that it was only after the rood left "the quiet locality of Boxley Abbey" to be destroyed, did it occasion "a series of wonder-narratives in which a simple mechanical doll became an emoting, agentive thing." Lightsey, "The Paradox," 104.

[109] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 123–124.

[110] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 133.

[111] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 161.

been unrealistic for Boxley to compete with the nearby shrine of St Thomas so "a mechanised wooden crucifix was a much more practical solution."[112] The Rood thus stood and (probably performed) at Boxley for over a century and a half. It seems to have maintained its popularity, though most of the surviving financial records for the Abbey date from the late fourteenth century.[113]

What did visitors to Boxley experience? The house had a miraculous statue of St Rumwold, which predated the Rood.[114] In his *Perambulation of Kent* (1570), William Lambarde describes how the statue could be made "fast and unmovable" with "the helpe of an engine fixed to the backe thereof," so visitors struggled to lift it. When the "engine" (seemingly a pin that held it in place) was removed, it became light again.[115] According to Lambarde, this exercise (as well as confession) was part of one's preparation before seeing the Rood itself. Within Kaplin's paradigm, would the monk inserting the pin into the Rumwold sculpture be said to be a "performer" or merely a source of raw energy through which the mechanism operates? Johannes Tripps, for example, writes about a weeping *pietà* in Rostock from the late fourteenth century, whose miraculous tears were apparently powered by small fish put in the cranial cavity.[116] Do we take the fish to be the performers, or the person who stocked the cranium?

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[112] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 126

[113] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 10.

[114] Eastlake, "Redressing the Balance," 124.

[115] Lambarde, *Perambulation*, 210. Sidney Heath, *Pilgrim Life in the Middle Ages* (Kennikat Press, 1971), 232–233; Sarah Salih, "Idol Theory" *Preternature* 4, no. 1 (2015): 13–36, 33.

[116] Tripps, "The Joy of Automata," 16, note 24, 27.

A post-Reformation description of the shrine of St Albans amalgamates some of the elements of the Boxley experience. We find this in an antiquarian record of the childhood memories of Robert Shrimpton (b. 1505), mayor of St Albans, which describes how, as a boy "he had many times crept into the hollow part" of a statue of the town saint "wherein one being placed to govern the wires, the eyes would move and head nod, according as he liked of disliked the offering."[117] This object was puppeteered internally as well as externally by two people; it was carried in procession

> and after it had been set down awhile at the market-cross, and the monks essaying to take it up again, they pretended they could not stir it, and then the Abbot coming and laying his crosier upon the image, and saying these words, "Arise, arise, St. Alban, and get thee home to thy sanctuary," it then forthwith yielded to be borne by the monks.[118]

Like St Rumwold, the statue could be made to appear miraculously heavy. Shrimpton's description attests to the localised identities of these cult images. The abbot addresses the statue as "St Alban," but designates its "home" as the statue's own particular shrine. The procession gains piquancy through the translation of a known object into a new setting. When the Rood was shown at Margate in the market square, perhaps some of the people there would have wished for their local cult object to go "home."[119] The description of the St. Albans statue shows how familiar the object was to its parishioners; because its hollow body had "many times" offered the young Shrimpton a hiding space,

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[117] "From a Loose Paper in Mr Ashmole's Handwriting, 26th August 1668," *The Antiquarian Repertory* III, ed. Francis Gross (London, 1780), 60–61; Groeneveld, "A Theatrical Miracle," 39–40.

[118] *The Antiquarian Repertory*, 61.

[119] For the Rood as a destination for Margate locals, see Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (Hambledon andL ondon, 2000), 251.

it appears that the keepers of the image did not try to hide the mechanisms of its movement, but allowed it to be a familiar object of play within the church.

Like many cult objects, the Rood was thought to affect cures. In a 1538 letter, John Finch describes how "great numbers afflicted with divers diseases were carried to [the Rood], and laid prostrate before it." Finch, a reformer, makes it clear that the Rood cured no one,

> unless someone disguised himself of set purpose, and pretended to be sick; in which case it would give a nod, as though promising the restoration of health, that it might by this means confirm its imposture. Then again, by some other contrivance unknown to me, it opened and shut its mouth.[120]

Like the St Alban statue, the Rood gestures its assent. In this scenario the devotee and the Rood are actors in a spectacle of healing: the Rood nods and the man acting sickness pretends to be revived. It is noteworthy that Finch does not describe the Rood *speaking*, only mouthing: were words supplied for it? Did the monks offer interpretations of its gestures, in a similar way to Mary Magdalene in *Christ's Burial*?

Art historians have noted the similarity between the construction of the Rood and the Talking Crucifixes made by Giovanni Tedesco (also known as Giovanni Teutonico), an Umbrian artist working in the second half of the fifteenth century.[121] Just as the Boxley Rood was said to be "compacted of wood, wyer, paste and paper," the torsos of Tedesco's crucifixes are made of a paste of canvas, plaster and glue; they would be applied onto a wooden mould, then removed and the two halves would be joined. This not only helped the artist to hide internal mechanisms of movement, it also mitigated the

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[120] "John Finch to Conrad Humpard," in *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, vol. II, ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge University Press, 1847), 606–607; Groeneveld, "The Boxley Rood of Grace," 15.

[121] Kopania, "The Idolle," 115.

weight of these large crucifixes. It has even been suggested that some of these sculptures were made using a process of live casting, where a human model would serve as a mould.[122] Such techniques are comparable with the production of death masks.[123]

A narrated conversation that took place in Bologna in 1547 suggests further connections between Italian sculptures and the Boxley Rood. This detail appears in William Thomas' defence of Henry VIII, which was published only in Italian (1552). The English manuscript version was published in the nineteenth century. Here William is discussing false miracles:

> In times past, England hath been occupied with more pilgrimages than Italy is now. [...] we [have] our Lady of Walsingham, of Penrice, of Islington, St. Thomas, St. John of Salstone that conjured the devil into a book, and so many holy roods that it was a wonder. And here and there ran all the world ; yea, the King himself, till God opened his eyes, was as blind and obstinate as the rest. I mean in the time when he wrote against Martin Luther. And those roods and these our Ladies were all of another sort than these your saints be; for there were few of them but that with engines that were in them could beckon, either with their heads and hands, or move their eyes, or manage some part of their bodies, to the purpose that the friars and priests would use them ; and especially one Christ Italianate, that with the head answered yea and nay at all demands.[124]

The nodding "Christ Italianate" is probably the Rood, who is in good company among other miraculous images. Thomas must be exaggerating when saying that "there were few of them but that with engines that" made them move; most of England's statuary were probably simply statues; yet his suggestion that pre-Reformation England could vie

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[122] Lambarde, *Perambulation*, 205. Kopania suggests that this is the most accurate part of Lambarde's description of the Rood, as it matches Wriothesley's. Kopania, "The Idolle," 144.

[123] For the plastic arts and the technology of casting death masks, see Urte Krass, *Nah zum Leichnam : Bilder Neuer Heiliger im Quattrocentro* (Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012).

[124] William Thomas, *The Pilgrim: A Dialogue on the Life and Actions of King Henry the Eighth*, ed. J. A. Froude (London, 1861), 37–38.

with Italy for the richness and variety of movable images is intriguing. It is also noteworthy that none of the images are described as talking images, merely gesturing images.

What Thomas meant by "Italianate" is unclear; it could be a by-word for popish, but Groeneveld suggests that it "refers to the motion of the image or Rood. If this is the case the Rood may have been unlike Italian religious images but like Italian marionettes, automata, 'motions.'"[125] I am not sure that this follows: North Italian religious images had more in common with the Rood than marionettes or motions. It could be that while in Northern Italy Thomas saw one of these Talking Crucifixes.

As Sara Cavatorti explains, it is often hard to understand the precise function of the tongue mechanisms in movable sculptures of Christ crucified because many have been compromised by later restoration work.[126] Furthermore, many are yet to be subjected to forensic analysis. Cavatorti's study of Giovanni's Tedesco's crucifixes notes twelve examples with movable tongue but not movable arms, and three that have movable arms and a movable tongue. An earlier example (1380–1390) from San Fidenzio in Polverara near Padua seems to have been fitted with some kind of mechanism in its mouth; a large hole in the chin leads into the mouth cavity.[127] Carla Bino has discussed Tedesco's sculpture in Pordenone, whose tongue seems to have been activated remotely by a rope, either passed through the legs, the back of the neck, or the mechanism is set in motion by the insertion of the spear into the side-wound, so that the

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[125] Groeneveld, "A Theatrical Miracle," 22.

[126] "meccanismi delle braccia mobili e della lingua basculante spesso risultano compromessi da interventi di restauro," Cavatorti, *Giovanni Teutonico*, 207.

[127] Elizabette Francescutti, "Il Crocifisso di Polverara: Considerazioni in Margine al Restauro di un Capolavoro," and Milena Dean, "Il Crocifisso di Polverara: Considerazioni Sulla Tecnica di Esecuzione e Riflessioni per il Restauro Ancora in Corso," in *L'uomo Della Croce: L'immagine Scolpita Prima e Dopo Donatello*, eds. C. Cavalli and A. Nante (Scripta, 2013), 83–99.

tongue pushes to the front of the mouth to simulate the exhalation of the last breath. As Bino writes, the latter is unlikely as the mechanism only causes a antero-posterior excursion of around three millimetres, so if extremely subtle.[128]

What is the effect of such a subtle movement of the tongue within the mouth of a sculpted crucifix? Perhaps the devotees are supposed to stare intensely at the mouth of Christ to extrapolate words from a subtle throbbing. This is a similar devotional task to that in *Christ's Burial* when Joseph described the crucifix pulsing out a litany of prayers: "On yche parte he is paynede sore, / Saue only the tunge, which euer more/ For synners did prayee" (*CB*, 319–321).

More equivocal still are the burn marks and traces of incense sometimes discovered within the cranial cavities of Talking Crucifixes from Norcia (1494) and Venice (fifteenth century).[129] Ilinca Stingaciu has kindly shared her experimental research on the Venice Talking Crucifix, which models the kinetic interaction between the sculpture's tongue and the incense thought to have been put inside its mouth; Stingaciu has observed that the motion of the tongue creates oscillating patterns in the smoke that is fanned out of the mouth.[130] In this way, Christ's breath or voice develops as a physical and olfactory presence within the space of the church. In her study of the smells of the cathedral in sixteenth-century Antwerp, Wendy Wauters mentions the movable

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[128] Bino, "Le statue del cristo crocifisso," 292.

[129] Dent, "The Late Medieval Action Figure and the Living Image," in *Dolls, Puppets and Living Images: From the Middle Ages to the End of the 18th Century*, ed. Kopania (The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art, 2017), 24.

[130] Ilinca Stingaciu, forthcoming PhD diss., Queens University.

sculpture in Norcia with reference to the purported medicinal qualities of incense.[131] Sweet smells were also intimately linked to holiness, a connection attested to by the many saints' lives in which the corpse exudes fragrance rather than the scent of decay.[132] Someone experiencing such an exhalation might have reflected upon the healing qualities of Christ's body, which we explored in the previous chapter. They might have asked themselves what exactly they were meant to be seeing: is this the spirit escaping? Or some kind of sanative vapour as the corpse dries up in death?

[131] Wendy Wauters, *De Geuren van de Kathedraal: De Overweldigende 16de Eeuw in Antwerpen* (Lannoo, 2023), 107–108.

[132] Truitt, *Medieval Robots*, 106. Such sweet smells were also associated with corpses that have been deliberately embalmed so as to last longer in a state of semi-animation, Støa, "Lively Bodies," 55–66, 154–155.

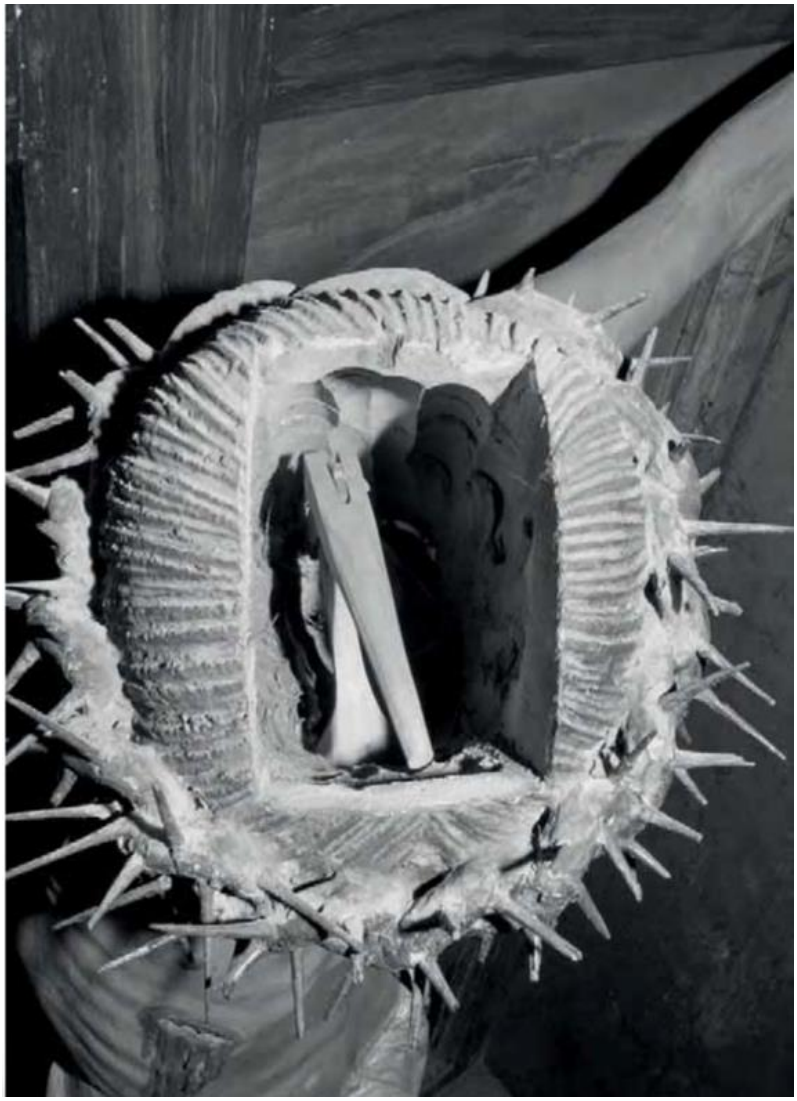


Figure 35. Giovanni Tedesco, sculpture of Christ crucified with a movable tongue, Perugia, Santa Maria Nuova.

What kind of voice were these articulating crucifixes given? We might think of the "corce" in *St Erkenwald*, who is able to speak only with difficulty, and hardly able to move, when asked to give an account of itself to the bishop:

> Þe bryȝt body in þe burynes brayed a litell,
> And with a drery dreme he dryues owte wordes

Þurgh sum lant goste-lyfe of hym þat lyfe redes.[133]

As Anne Schuurman writes, the corpse's response here raises more questions than it answers: "what is the nature of the thing that speaks at the behest of the bishop? If the corpse's soul is in purgatory, how are its earthly remains able to recount the soul's memories and deeds to the citizens of London?"[134] Medieval writers often puzzled over the nature of the post-mortem voice. A late-medieval ghost story, for example, describes a revenant speaking directly with his guts, not with his mouth.[135] Augustine considers the preservation of internal organs in the resurrected body, reasoning that the instruments of the mouth are preserved because "[d]entes enim non tantum nos adjuvant ad mandendum, verum etiam ad loquendum; sicut plectru nervos, sic linguam nostram, ut syllabas sonet, percutientes."[136] Though base functions like digestion are eschewed, the oral apparatus is conserved for the purpose of speech.

The many pilgrim badges of the Rood offer insight into its form and function. The cross on which it hung was a lignum vitae type, with lush trefoils bursting from its beams

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[133] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *St Erkenwald: A Critical Edition* (Liverpool University Press, 2024), 190–192. Chaganti, *The Poetics of the Reliquary*, 53–54.

[134] Schuurman, "Objects of Wonder," 286.

[135] "loquebatur in interioribus visceribus et non cum lingua sed quasi in vacuo dolio," Royal MS. 15. A. xx, folio 142v. Edited in M. R. James, "Twelve Medieval Ghost-Stories," *English Historical Review* 37, no. 147 (1922): 413–422, 418. Polina Ignatova, "The Undead: Ghosts and Revenants," in *A Companion to Death, Burial and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe 1300–1700*, eds. Elizabeth C. Tingle and Philip Booth, (Brill, 2021).

[136] Augustine of Hippo, *Sermones* 123.4, *Patrologia cursus complerus*, *series Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1844–1864), 38, col. 1145. "[W]e employ the teeth not only for chewing, but also for speaking, our tongue like a plectrum striking strings that it might articulated syllables." Trans. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire*, 80.

and quatrefoils at the terminals.[137] A Middle English adaptation of Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae*, reflects on the "medicynable leeues" of the living cross, urging "þe persoone þat feliþ him silf infect; go and renne to þe leeues in þe tre."[138] The Rood is sometimes depicted with an altar beneath, that bears the words "GRAS" or has a small monk next to it, who gestures to the offerings left on the altar.[139] As we can see from figures thirty-six, thirty-seven, and thirty-eight, the appearance of the corpus varies slightly. In figure thirty-seven, Christ is dressed in a patterned garment, while in the other two he is in a loincloth. It is unclear how accurate pilgrim badges were, or tried to be, though it is also possible that the statue was dressed on occasion.[140] These miniature heads return us to the notion of the puppet as a conduit for fantasies of violence. Miniaturised representations of the Boxley Rood allow the buyer to take home a potential performing object. Though these pewter badges do not move, they might have encouraged people to remember and maybe even recreate the performances of the movable sculpture of Boxley.

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[137] Bryda, "The Vegetable Saint," in *The Trees of the Cross: Wood as Subject and Medium in the Art of Late Medieval Germany* (Yale University Press, 2023).

[138] Catherine Innes-Parker, "*Þe Passioun of Our Lord*: Prologue and Branches I–IV, Sections 1–16, edited from St John's College, Cambridge, MS G.20," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 44, no. 3, (2008): 276–294, 278.

[139] "Rood of Grace," Museum of London, 80.82/12; "Rood of Grace," Museum of London, 8673.

[140] Blick, "Reconstructing the Shrine of St. Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral," in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*, eds. Sarah Blick and Rita Tekippe (Brill, 2004), 263. For dressing images, see Charlotte Klack-Eitzen, Wiebke Haase, and Tanja Weißgraf eds., *Heilige Röcke: Kleider für Skulpturen in Kloster Wienhausen* (Schnell & Steiner, 2013); Diana Pereira, "Clothes as Animation Devices: Miracle-Working Images, Enshrinement, and the Production of Matter in Early Modern Portugal" in *The Living Image*.



Figures 36, 37 and 38. Pilgrim badges of the Rood of Grace (fifteenth century), England.

A more equivocal souvenir is a "hollow-cast tin head of finger-puppet proportions, with a cylindrical socket-like neck."[141] According to Brian Spencer, the streaming tears identify it as a depiction of the Boxley Rood.[142] It is possible this was part of a full crucifix.[143] If we estimate the head to be about twenty percent of the height of the corpus, then the corpus as a whole would be around twenty centimetres, which is abnormally large for a souvenir as well as for a slush cast pewter object.[144] Furthermore, its upright, "socket-like neck" implies that it did not have a body attached; within the iconographic of this period, Christ's head on the cross tilts to the right. This object prompts a question that can never be fully answered: "[a]fter pilgrims bought, displayed, and enjoyed their souvenirs, what happened to them?"[145] As Sarah Blick has shown, people did many suggestive things with these souvenirs – they sewed them onto clothing or into books, cast them into bells, nailed them on the walls of homes of stables, and dropped them down wells.

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[141] Spencer, *Pilgrim Badges*, 166

[142] Spencer, *Pilgrim Badges*, 166.

[143] This is suggested in the Museum of London object description. See "Rood of Grace," Museum of London, 97.84.

[144] Daniel Berger, "Herstellungstechnik Hoch- Und Spätmittelalterlicher Kleinobjekte aus Zinn," *Heilig en Profaan: 1300 Laatmiddeleeuwse Insignes uit Openbare en Particuliere Collecties*, Rotterdam Papers 13 (2012): 39–55.

[145] Blick, "Bringing Pilgrimage Home: The Production, Iconography, and Domestic Use of Late-Medieval Devotional Objects by Ordinary People" *Religions* 10, no. 6 (2019): 392–418.



Figure 39. Rood of Grace (pilgrim souvenir). Museum of London.

Figure 40. Puppet Head (?) with pointed hat. Museum of London.

Is this weeping head, as Geoff Egan has suggested, the head of a glove puppet, whose body was made of less durable material?[146] In putting forward his glove puppet theory, Egan links this "Man of Sorrows" head to other fourteenth-century heads, that equally lack bodies and have cylindrical necks: "one appears grotesque and the two others, which are identical to each other may depict a caricatures Jewish man's head," as they appear to wear the *pileus cornutus*.[147] These four figures could have been cast in

[146] Geoff Egan, *Playthings From the Past: Lead Alloy Miniature Artefacts c. 1300-1800* (Jonathan Horne Publications,1996), 64.

[147] Hazel Forsyth and Egan, *Toys, Trifles & Trinkets: Base Metal Miniatures from London 1150-1800* (Unicorn, 2005), 64. For the *pileus cornutus*, see Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible Moralisée* (University of California Press, 1999), 15–19.

"biblical or morality play with Christ, Judas Escariot and perhaps Kind Herod." Egan's suggestion is reminiscent of the Resurrection at Witney, which was performed using "certein smalle Puppets."[148]

Alternatively, these objects may have been designed to fit atop pilgrim staffs, which would explain the nail hole in figure forty.[149] This equally raises unanswerable questions: what is the purpose of topping a stick with a "Jewish" head? Does this create a curiosity item, like an umbrella with a duck's head handle? Or does the stick with the head in some sense take on a persona? Images of heads of sticks were common in this era, as the marotte had long been part of the fool's assemblage.[150] Used in this way, the addition of a head would turn a familiar object of use into an interlocutor, or a weapon, as the marotte developed from the club.

Given these possibilities, one wonders what spectacles of violence might have played out using these toys, especially given the tears of one, and the stigmatising clothing of the other. Homicide is one of the principal idioms of puppetry and, in this respect, the movable sculpture of Christ crucified is well integrated into the artform across time. Puppets were associated with violence, particularly with blows to the head:

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[148] See my introduction, note 87.

[149] This function has been suggested for other hollow cast figures with cylindrical collars, Spencer, "Becket Standing on a Peacock," *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London* (Stationery Office, 1998), 72–75.

[150] By the late thirteenth century, the fool's cudgel had developed into a head on a stick: "often a miniature representation of the fool who wields it, technically termed the marotte, which is sometimes made to deliver the fool's speeches"; the fool converses with the marotte "in much the same way as a modern ventriloquist uses his dummy," Malcom Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004), 106–107; see also Nicole Sheriko, "Prop Culture: The Shakespearean Clown and His Marotte," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2022): 126–149.

in an Occitan romance, a robber is killed by a flying decapitated head; the hero comments:

> Be semblavan bos companhos
> Quell mort ha mort lo viu baizan.
> En ayssi s'aucizon urtan,
> Cum aquelh des babastels.[151]

There is a dearth of evidence for how small puppets were used in the Middle Ages; in order to better understand these miniature, hollow heads, we can look at similar objects from a different time. In his discussion of glove puppets in the Third Reich, Alexander Wessely describes a glove puppet of a black character, whose head was reinforced with a metal plate, so that it could withstand the blows rained upon it in performance. Puppets such as these were distributed from a centralised authority. Play texts, miniature sets and glove puppets of an Aryanised Kaspar (a Punch-like German character puppet) and his racialised foes could be ordered from mail-order catalogues distributed by the *Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel*.[152] This ideological centralisation and mobilisation of puppetry is alien to a medieval context. However, it shows the power in puppets, the way in which they can channel, release, and solidify racial hatred. Looking at the medieval hollow heads, with their tell-tale pointed caps, one wonders what fantasies of Jewish perfidy and Christian victimhood they were made to play out. The

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[151] "The dead has killed the living with a kiss. In the same way do the puppets slay each other by knocking together." Arnaut Vidal, *Guillaume de la Barre: Roman d'Aventures*, ed. Paul Meyer (Paris, 1895), lines 3168–3171, 93; translation in Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 31.

[152] Wessely, "'Wie überall kommt es auch beim Puppenspiel auf die Haltung und Gesinnung an [...]': Zur Frage eines Zusammenhanges zwischen Handpuppenspiel und Propaganda im Dritten Reich - Eine Annäherung," (PhD diss., Univerity of Vienna, 2009), 211.

tears on the Man of Sorrows head might have prompted the player to reign blows upon him and his prominent lips might have invited a Judas's kiss. Like the glove puppets of the Third Reich, these figures miniaturise larger societal narratives, releasing them into the world of private play.



Figure 41. Papier mâché puppet of a Jewish man in a prison uniform (1941–1944). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection.

On the whole, however, most of the violence that occurs with respect to a movable sculpture of Christ crucified has happened before the performance commences. This puts additional pressure on its ability to make meaning, to be legible as a speaking body, to articulate the hurts done to it. But what kind of voice does a moveable sculpture possess? Recently Kim W. Woods has suggested that immobile, open-mouthed crucifixes and Man of Sorrows images might have evoked liturgical scripts spoken in Christ's voice, such as the Easter Reproaches.[153] *Christ's Burial* invites the audience to focus in on the corpus' tongue as the site of articulation and to imaginate words there. Though we cannot know what form this corpus took, we can learn from continental movable sculptures of Christ crucified the importance of the tongue as the site of articulation within the crucifix. Bino has suggested that the Italian Talking Crucifixes were intended for Lenten and Good Friday sermons reflecting on Christ's last words on the cross.[154] The devotees could glimpse a flickering of life within the mouth of the corpus, which the preacher parsed Christ's last words, ventriloquising the divine voice in the manner of Mary Magdalene in *Christ's Burial*.

These moments of animation in *Christ's Burial* speak to the ambiguity of the iconography of the wounded Christ, who stands somewhere between his life and resurrection, as well as to the porousness of the boundaries between him and his mother. This chapter began by discussing the pietatic lament as an "assemblage" of parts: actor, object and textual artefact, that is made to come alive in performance. The text signals a diffusion of agency between the Virgin and her son, and in that sense he is

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[153] Kim W. Woods, *Speaking Sculptures in Late Medieval Europe: A Silent Rhetoric* (Lund Humphries, 2024), 103–108, 35–41.

[154] Bino, "Le statue del cristo crocifisso," 294.

brought to the brink of animation. Joseph and Mary Magdalene's ventriloqual performances also shift "energy," in Kaplin's terms, into the hanging, dead corpus, inviting the audience to literally put words into its mouth, and to read words onto its body.[155]

As Holsinger has shown, the medieval body in pain was thought to be sonorous, and yet people puzzled over what kind of voice it expressed.[156] Writers drew on a range of musical metaphors to imagine Christ's voice on the cross, a quandary that returns vividly to us when we consider the affordances of Talking Crucifixes – from Kent to Perugia. The next chapter examines a different kind of sonorous body – the miraculous singing corpses in the *Prioress' Tale* and "The Chorister." However, the central questions remain the same: how can an inanimate body be puppeteered to move an audience? How can the dead be made articulate? The next chapter therefore continues this investigation of divine ventriloquism, considering texts not directly related to the puppetry of movable sculptures but whose affective strategies share certain similarities with the puppetry of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* rites.

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[155] Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree," 32.

[156] Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire*,

Chapter Five: The Puppetry of Martyrdom

As this dissertation has illustrated, movable sculptures of Christ crucified cannot be considered isolated curios, rather, they are co-performers in vibrant dramatic situations, and can be seen to respond to wider devotional and artistic trends. The previous chapters have offered suggestions as to how movable sculptures of Christ crucified were used and understood within England. This chapter investigates how they might have influenced the wider medieval imaginary and the poetics of death, by comparing the Barking rites to a set of Middle English blood libel poems.

As we saw in chapter one, the Barking nuns celebrated Easter with vibrant and innovative performances at the heart of which was likely a movable sculpture of Christ crucified. Around the time that these rites were recorded, Geoffrey Chaucer was writing a tale told by a Prioress, about a dead, semi-mobile child, handled by the clergy and containing a sacred "greyn" nested inside him (662).[1] Chaucer's daughter, Elizabeth, was a nun in Barking at that time, and would have performed in her abbey's Holy Week drama.[2] I do not argue that Chaucer explicitly referenced – or necessarily knew of – this performance object at Barking. Rather, this chapter adds to existing scholarship that

[1] Chaucer wrote the tale around 1380–1390. Beverly Boyd, ed., *A Varorium Edition of the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. II, Part 20 *The Prioress's Tale* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 26–7.

[2] 12/05/1381 John of Gaunt paid £51.8s.2d. for Elizabeth Chauncy when she entered Barking Abbey. Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, eds., *Chaucer Life-Records* (Clarendon, 1966), 546; Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 209. In a review of Turner's book, Alistair Minnis has stated that there is not sufficient evidence to designate this woman as Chaucer's daughter; Alastair Minnis, "Marion Turner, Chaucer: A European Life," *Spenser Review* (Winter 2020). However, I follow Turner's assessment of *Chaucer Life-Records* here.

situates the *Prioress' Tale* within the cultural framework of late medieval devotional culture.[3] Scholars have mostly compared the language of the tale to devotional texts of the time, positioning the written word as the site of cultural transmission. I focus on the less tangible but nevertheless important role of performance in the transfer of meaning, which the Barking nuns seemed to have valued. The sequence of dramas at Easter "reflect a deepening interest at Barking in using enactment as a spiritual tool."[4] They were spectacles designed to capture the imaginations both of the nuns who performed them and the laity who stood in the audience. The Barking rites thus assert their relevance to the wider medieval imaginary .

Scholars have approached Chaucer's texts by reconstructing certain facets of the visual culture of his time. These have been dubbed "Chaucerian Imagescapes": "specific cultural realms of clustered imagery" that have now faded but which were alive for Chaucer and his readers and shaped how they verbalised experience.[5] I posit the Holy Week dramas at Barking as just such an "imagescape" and one that deepens our understanding of how the *Prioress' Tale* generates affect. Monastic institutions were not closed cultures. Marion Turner has shown that "Chaucer, like most medieval people, was used to living cheek by jowl with religious institutions" and the *Canterbury Tales*

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[3] Gina A. Dominick, "'Countrefete Cheere': Kitsch, Taste, and *The Prioress's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 31, no. 1 (2019): 1–21; Carolyn P. Collette, "Sense and Sensibility in the "'Prioress's Tale,'" *Chaucer Review* 15, no 2 (1980): 138–50; Collette, "Chaucer's Discourse of Mariology: Gaining the Right to Speak," in *Art and Context in Late Medieval Narrative: Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr*., ed. Robert R. Edwards (D. S. Brewer, 1994), 127–47; Helen Barr, "Religious Practice in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*: Rabbit and/or Duck?" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010): 39–65; Richard H. Osberg, "A Voice for the Prioress: The Context of English Devotional Prose," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 18 (1996): 25–54; Hardy Long Frank, "Seeing the Prioress Whole," *The Chaucer Review* 25, no. 3 (1991): 229–37.

[4] Stevenson, "Rhythmic Liturgy," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, 248.

[5] Susanna Fein and David B. Raybin eds., *Chaucer: Visual Approaches* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), xix.

shows a deep awareness of the rhythms, routines, and architecture of monastic houses.[6]

Previous scholars have noted the way in which the *Prioress' Tale* reflects late medieval devotional culture. Sarah Stanbury writes that the clergeon's "body is conscripted into a public shrine in ways that re-enact liturgical performances on many levels."[7] This chapter narrows this analogy, taking the affordances of movable sculptures, and that of Barking specifically, as a lens to explore two aspects of the tale that readers have found troubling: the uncanny revivification of the clergeon and the animating function of the "greyn" nested inside him. This chapter will also discuss the *Prioress' Tale* alongside its closest analogues "The Chorister" and the "Jew of Bourges" in the Vernon manuscript, which figure similar schemes of transformation to the Barking script. [8] Movable sculptures of Christ that are made to perform lifelike movements in death can help us understand the affective power of these half-dead literary children, who are puppeteered from without by church authorities, and animated from within by sacred objects.

Throughout this dissertation I have avoided describing movable sculptures of Christ crucified as "abject" or "uncanny." The impulse to mechanically animate a corpse and then, further, to love said mechanically animated corpse might appear as a

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[6] Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 493, 494.

[7] Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire*, 169.

[8] Laurel Broughton, "The Prioress's Prologue and Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. II, eds. Mary Hamel and Robert M. Correale (Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 600–604, 624–627. In titling these poems, I follow Denise Despres. Despres, "The Protean Jew in the Vernon Manuscript," in *Chaucer and the Jews: Sources, Texts, Meanings*, ed., Sheila Delaney (Routledge, 2002). From here I will put line references in brackets with abbreviated title.

moribund pleasure. Yet the Barking Christ was not simply a performer in the nuns' Easter drama; it hung as a devotional object throughout the year and the drama provided annual opportunities to engage with it in intimate ways – wash its wounds, prepare its bedclothes, lament over its limp form. We must conclude that the community who used the object found sweetness and pity there. As Mary Douglas has shown, the boundary between what is disgusting and what is sacred, what is to be abjected and what is to be embraced, is drawn along cultural as much as evolutionary lines.[9]

Reading the *Prioress' Tale* and "The Chorister" draws out an alternative reading of the semi-animate body, one which plays with the boundaries of disgust. Previous scholars have drawn out the disturbing or uncanny aspects of the clergeon's cut body; "The Chorister" and the *Prioress' Tale* generate a sense of revulsion by working the bodies of the boys to the very limit of somatic wholeness. Here disgust functions as both a lens of enquiry and an affective response to the text.

The final part of this chapter looks at the visual aspects of the Vernon Tales. Situating "The Chorister" and its analogue blood libel tale "The Jew of Bourges" within their manuscript context, which sit on facing pages of the Vernon manuscript (MS Eng. Poet. A. 1), I suggest these poems represent mirrored schemes of transformation. They are not only thematically paired within the Miracles of the Virgin section, they are also visually equated on the page. The main characters look virtually identical in each miniature and each image's *ductus* reflects the other. These schemes of transformation are, I argue, comparable to the optical trick at the heart of the Barking script, in which a

[9] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge, 2002); Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2011) 16–17.

semi-animate image is hidden and a host drawn out in its place. Gaze is crucial to this play of substitution.

5.1 Chaucer, Female Piety and a Question of Taste

The Prioress is one of the two female monastics on the road to Canterbury and scholars have looked to her tale to illuminate aspects of female piety.[10] The spiritual practices of enclosed women were far from esoteric; monastic culture dynamically informed lay literature on multiple levels.[11] Female-coded cultures of piety and spiritual writings "are profoundly embedded in the modes of writing that Chaucer deploys and the epistemologies he inhabits."[12]

The *Prioress' Tale* and *Second Nun's Tale*, for example, have been shown to be conversant with the Brigittine tradition, which "emphasises maternal intercessory and didactic power, the authority of the Virgin Mary [...] and positive presentations of the vernacular as well as of female religious speech."[13] The *Prioress' Tale* not only reflects liturgical practice, it is also attests to the diversity of kinds of devotional performance:

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[10] Elizabeth Robertson, "Aspects of Female Piety in the Prioress's Tale" in *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Steve Ellis (Routledge, 2014).

[11] Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Cornell University Press, 2002); Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Nicky Hallett, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Ashgate, 2007).

[12] Roberta Magnani and Liz Herbert McAvoy, "What Is a Woman? Enclosure and Female Piety in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 42 (2020): 311–324, 312.

[13] Nancy Bradley Warren, *Chaucer and Religious Controversies in the Medieval and Early Modern Eras* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2019), 16.

from the clergeon kneeling privately before the image of Mary on his way to school, to his singing on his school commute, to the climactic public interrogation of the semi-animate body before the abbey's "chief auter" (636).[14] The text has also been said to be particularly interested in the notion of performance itself.[15] The authorising role of women in these performances has been seen as a potentially disruptive element of the text. Nancy Bradley Warren has argued that the description the Virgin Mary delivering the "greyn" into the clergeon's mouth is a "quasi-sacramental act" and one that recalls "anxieties about the existence of Lollard female priests who would perform the sacraments."[16] In the *Prioress' Tale*, it is the mother who teaches the clergeon to sing and finds him in the toilet, and it is the Virgin who controls the singing child; the male clergy appear more reactive than active.

These discussions have sometimes centred around Barking Abbey as a centre of female learning within the Prioress' own orbit; scholars generally interpret her house in "Stratford atte Bowe" to be St. Leonards Priory; the two Benedictine houses were situated only a few miles apart and held neighbouring land.[17] The *Prioress' Tale*, with its

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[14] For liturgical echoes in the text, see Collette, "Chaucer's Discourse of Mariology"; Boughton, "The Prioress's Prologue and Tale," 584–586, 589–591.

[15] William Orth has pointed out that the verb "perform" in Chaucer's corpus and Middle English generally is transitive; people perform objects (such as books, chairs, enterprises) but they do not perform in the intransitive sense; the exceptions to this are in the Prioress' prologue in which the word is used twice to 'refer to a repeated action rather than to a concrete "thing"'. William Orth, "The Problem of the Performative in Chaucer's Prioress Sequence," *The Chaucer Review* 42, no. 2 (2007): 196–210. See also Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 185–198.

[16] Nancy Bradley Warren, "Sacraments, Gender, and Authority in the Prioress's Prologue and Tale and Pearl," *Christianity & Literature* 66, no. 3 (2017): 385–403, 395.

[17] Ernest P. Kuhl, "Notes on Chaucer's Prioress," *Philological Quarterly* 2 (1923): 302; W. Rothwell, "Stratford Atte Bowe Re-Visited," *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 2 (2001): 184–207; Carol M. Meale, "Women's Piety and Women's Power: Chaucer's Prioress Reconsidered," in *Essays on Ricardian Literature: In Honour of J.A. Burrow*, eds. J. A. Burrow, A. J. Minnis, Charlotte C. Morse, and Thorlac Turville-Petre (Clarendon Press, 1997). Elizabeth Solopova has also noted the inclusion of "Saint loy

schoolboy singer, is interested in the stages of musical pedagogy, a detail of the text that is not found in the analogues; the seven-year-old clergeon, on the brink of the *infantes* category, develops his skills over the beginning of the tale. He is taught the *Alma redemptoris* by an older student, who is able to repeat but not expound the song ("I lerne song; I kan but smal grammeere" (536)). The clergeon learns "by rote [...] Fro word to word, acordynge with the note" (545–547), mimicking the sounds without understanding Latin. The Virgin also acts as a kind of cantrix for the clergeon in the toilet; he says she arrived and "bad me for to synge / This anthem verraily in my deyynge" (659–660); she only delivers the "greyn" (662) once he had finished, almost as if this boon were dependant on his performance. Yardley compares these themes of musical pedagogy to the cultural world of Barking; the cantrix singing to meet the musical demands of the liturgy and boys living in the Abbey for their early education would have been under her direction; like the clergeon, these *infantes* (girls and boys up through seven) were taught to recite short chants.[18]

Reading the Barking script alongside the *Prioress' Tale* is also serendipitously apt in that they shared a cultural world; Chaucer's daughter joined the convent in 1381 where she remained until at least 1397 and probably until her death.[19] Her first cousin Margaret Swynford was already at Barking when Elizabeth joined.[20] Margaret was the daughter of

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confessour" in a calendar which she argues belonged to Barking Abbey; this rare mention "brings to mind Chaucer's Prioress whose greatest oath...was 'by Seint Loy,'" Elizabeth Solopova, *The Wycliffite Bible: Origin, History and Interpretation* (Brill, 2017), 82.

[18] Yardley, "The Musical Education of Young Girls in Medieval English Nunneries," in *Young Choristers, 650-1700*, eds., Susan Boyton and Eric Rice (Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 53.

[19] Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 209.

[20] Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 210.

Chaucer's sister-in-law Katherine Swynford, mistress to John of Gaunt; she was nominated to Barking in 1377 and became abbess in 1419.[21] As Abbess, Swynford would have been responsible for casting the Maries.[22] The "imagescape" of the Barking drama is one with which Chaucer may have been familiar. As Turner writes, "Chaucer had reason to be closely interested in the life of a nunnery, through his intimate family connection with a life of enclosure."[23] While there is no evidence that Chaucer was familiar with the Barking Easter rites or with the affordances of their sculpture of Christ, his connections to this institution invite us to think more broadly about their cultural resonances.

Both ironised by and ventriloquised through a male author, the Prioress remains, however, an ambivalent figurehead of a female religious authority and creativity. The tale's relationship to female piety is troubled by both the character of the Prioress and the violent content of the story. Few medieval texts have engendered such fraught and varied critical debate as the *Prioress' Tale*.[24] This has been driven in part by a need to address the tale's antisemitism, its position as "one of the Christian ur-texts of Jewish infanticide" while also recuperating the text as an object of study.[25] It is the only text in

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[21] Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 205.

[22] The ordinal states that the abbess announced this cast at a meeting in the chapter house on Holy Saturday. Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1*,* 103.

[23] Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, 205

[24] "[I]t is essentially impossible to arrive at a single definitive interpretation of the tale," Howell Chickering, "The Object of Miraculous Song in 'The Prioress's Tale,'" in *Medieval Women and Their Objects*, eds., Jenny Adams and Nancy Mason Bradbury (University of Michigan Press, 2017), 56–68, 65; Shannon Gayk, "'To wondre upon this thyng': Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*," *Exemplaria* 22, no. 2 (2010): 144–149; Heather Blurton and Hannah R. Johnson, *The Critics and the Prioress: Antisemitism, Criticism, and Chaucer's Prioress's Tale* (University of Michigan Press, 2017), 15.

[25] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted*, 40.

the substantial blood libel genre that has a narrative frame; the Prioress' voice can be used as a unique window into attitudes towards Jewish communities in post-expulsion England. But hers is a difficult and elusive voice; Chaucer characterises the Prioress with many ambivalent, ironising traits; as Carol Meale writes: "the overall slipperiness of tone of Chaucer's description of her continues to elicit unease."[26] Critics are perennially interested in the interiority of the Prioress; "her relation to her tale, her degree of responsibility in telling it, her potential for self-awareness and self-governance, her culpability or even her elusive values" have come to overshadow the tale itself within critical discourse.[27] David Lawton describes "targeting the Prioress herself" as a "comfort zone" in Chaucer criticism, and one which too easily tales the speaking subject as character distinct from the rhetoric of the text itself.[28] Whether Madame Eglantine's character is a satire remains an unresolved question and the critical corpus offers diverse opinions.[29]

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[26] Meale, "Women's Piety and Women's Power," 43.

[27] Blurton and Johnson, *The Critics*, 9. For personal critiques of Madame Eglantine see: Dawn F. Colley, "Creating a Martyr," *CEA Critic* 78, no. 3 (2016): 292–300; Lee Patterson, "'The Living Witnesses of Our Redemption': Martyrdom and Imitation in Chaucer's Prioress's Tale," *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 3 (2001): 507–60; Richard Rex, *"The Sins of Madame Eglentyne," and Other Essays on Chaucer* (University of Delaware Press, 1995); Becky Renee McLaughlin, *Hysteria, Perversion, and Paranoia in "The Canterbury Tales": "Wild" Analysis and the Symptomatic Storyteller* (Medieval Institute Publications, 2020). For the idea that the Prioress' voice is empty or self-cancelling see: Zieman, *Singing the New Song*, 181–209; Osberg, "A Voice for the Prioress"; Louise O. Fradenburg, "Criticism, Anti-Semitism, and the Prioress's Tale," in *Chaucer's Cultural Geography*, ed., Kathryn L. Lynch (Routledge, 2002); Meale, "Women's Piety," 40; Greg Wilsbacher, "Lumiansky's Paradox: Ethics, Aesthetics and Chaucer's 'Prioress's Tale,'" *College Literature* 32, no. 4 (2005): 1–28.

[28] David Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 80.

[29] For the claim that Chaucer is satirising his character, see: Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales"* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), 128–137; Roger Dahood, "The Punishment of the Jews, Hugh of Lincoln, and the Question of Satire in Chaucer's Prioress's Tale," *Viator* 36 (2005): 465–491. For the idea that the pilgrims respond to the tale with suppressed laughter, see: Lawrence Besserman, "Chaucer, Spain, and the Prioress's Antisemitism" *Viator* 35 (2004): 329–354; Besserman, "Ideology, Antisemitism, and Chaucer's

This chapter does not have the scope to enter these debates, nor to satisfactorily address the tale's antisemitism – if such a thing is possible. Yet, although I focus on the tale's positively positioned axis (the child), this is indivisible from its negatively positioned one. The tale works in opposites: sweetness and disgust, spiritual gems and physical dung, liberated Christians and the "cursed folk of Herodes" (574). As much as these are contraposed, they also form a mutual whole that generates an uncomfortably unresolved aesthetic effect. So, although I focus on the supernatural changes the child undergoes in the tale, and think this through in terms of play and performance, it is necessary to acknowledge the tale's horrifying context. As Susan Sontag writes: "[t]o name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires deep sympathy modified by revulsion."[30] The *Prioress' Tale* generates multiple shades of revulsion in its readers, but this revulsion is not something that should pull us away from the text but rather is essential to our analysis at multiple levels. Past scholarly appraisals have been made on aesthetic as much as moral grounds, leading scholars to question whether or not the tale is "bad art."[31] One way around this is to insist on "the historical specificity of the *Tale*'s aesthetic effect" and specifically its relation to what have been seen to be gendered forms of piety.[32] Carolyn Collette, for example, has compared the

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'Prioress's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 1 (2001): 48–72. For the claim that the pilgrims respond with pious silence, see: Denise Despres, "Cultic Anti-Judaism and Chaucer's Litel Clergeon," *Modern Philology* 91 (1994): 413–427, 423; Albert Friedman, "The Prioress's Tale and Chaucer's Anti-Semitism," *Chaucer Review* 9 (1974): 118–129, 118.

[30] Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 53.

[31] "The Prioress's Tale must be dealt with aesthetically for what it is—kitsch, bad art,"' Dominick, "Countrefete Cheere," 4. "We cannot escape the virulent anti-Semitism of the *Prioress's Tale*, even if Chaucer realized that diatribes against the Jews (or against anybody) make for bad art" John Archer, "The Structure of Anti-Semitism in the 'Prioress's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 19, no. 1 (1984): 46–54, 46.

[32] Dominick, "Countrefete Cheere," 3.

aesthetic bent of the text to fourteenth-century spiritual practice that foregrounded "emotion, tenderness and the diminutive."[33] Similarly, Gina Dominick has situated the tale within the aesthetic framework of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century *Nonnenarbeiten* – technically unsophisticated religious images produced by and for nuns. However, as Dominick makes clear, even as critics using an historicising lens, we cannot shed our sense of taste.

Dominick defines the aesthetic mode the tale shares with *Nonnenarbeiten* as *Kitsch*.[34] *Kitsch* is "cute, sentimental, gaudy [and] cheap" as well as "ugly, prevaricating, and belittling."[35] Like the cute, it is a slippery and ambivalent aesthetic that can be both banal and subversive.[36] In adopting this aesthetic mode, Chaucer:

> provides more than a peek into the artistic imaginary of the cloister. Through kitsch, we see the complexity of history in relation to taste — and, especially, a taste for death. In deforming the tropes of a miracle story, while emphasizing its reliance on death for dissemination, Chaucer calls attention to how such literature evokes feelings of compassion and pity to offset fear and horror elicited by the idea of death and the image of the corpse.[37]

In Dominick's reading, Chaucer is exaggerating the *kitschiness* of a literary genre in order to call attention to its workings. This echoes the idea within some Chaucer criticism that in overdoing various rhetorical and aesthetic effects, Chaucer makes the Prioress sound inauthentic, even childish.[38] Yet Dominick also acknowledges the historical relativism of

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[33] Collette, "Sense and Sensibility," 138.

[34] Dominick, "Countrefete Cheere," 5.

[35] Dominick, "Countrefete Cheere," 2.

[36] For the ambivalence of the cute as an aesthetic category, see Sianne Ngai, *The Cute* (Whitechapel Gallery, 2022).

[37] Dominick, "Countrefete Cheere," 13

[38] Osberg, "A Voice for the Prioress," 27.

taste. However "ugly and violent" today's viewers might find *Nonnenarbeiten*, the works "felt beautiful within the walls of the cloister."

There is no single way to interpret the tale's relationship to medieval cultures of female piety. Thinking in terms of the puppetry of the Barking Easter rites helps us access the "imaginary of the cloister" in a more specific way. One of the difficulties with Dominick's argument is that even as it denies our ability to speak for the aesthetic sensibilities of the past, it nevertheless supposes a binary between what is horrifying and what is beautiful. As explored in chapter three, ugliness and deformity had clear spiritual and cognitive functions in the Middle Ages, the meanings of which we must work to recover.

Movable sculptures of Christ crucified are also in a sense "bad art." They are technically unsophisticated and their clunky, visible mechanisms mar their aesthetic appeal. Like *Kitsch*, they too could be called "sentimental, gaudy [and] cheap." There is also something vaguely belittling about their doll-like hinges; these objects in particular seem to justify the Protestant critique that priests play with images "[n]one otherwise then little gyrles with Puppets vse to do" seems justified.[39] They are also vaguely disgusting. Christopher Swift, in his study of medieval Spanish automata of the Virgin, acknowledges the involuntary feelings of "revulsion," "shame" and "an acute sense of the uncanny" that the modern scholar experiences when examining these mechanised sculptures.[40] Yet this was probably not the case for their original devotees. Movable sculptures of the dead Christ blur the boundary between wonder and disgust. These too

[39] Googe, *The Popish Kingdome*, 689–690.

[40] Christopher Swift, "Robot Saints," *Preternature* 4, no. 1 (2015): 52–77, 53.

must have possessed a kind of sweetness for those who built and handled them, for those who prepared their bedclothes and prayed before them. Yet their aesthetic effect remains intermingled with horror – the horror of Christ's suffering and human sin. These objects – like the *Prioress' Tale* – challenge our aesthetic sensibilities.

5.2 The *Prioress' Tale* and "The Chorister"

The *Prioress' Tale* and "The Chorister" are the closest surviving pair in a group of Marian legends sometimes called the "lily miracles."[41] In both tales, a boy learns a Marian hymn and sings it while walking through a Jewish ghetto. As a result, one or more Jews decide to kill him; in Chaucer's tale the community hire a "homycide" (567); in "The Chorister," the perpetrator is "[o]n of þe Jewes Malicious" (37); the child's throat is slit and his body is dropped in a toilet. His mother goes looking for him in the ghetto and hears his hymn miraculously reverberating in the toilet. A crowd gathers to witness the miracle, the singing body is pulled out and a high-ranking cleric reaches into the body and draws out a sacred object – a lily in "The Chorister" and a "greyn" in the *Prioress' Tale*. Once the object is removed, the voice slackens and the body is buried with great pomp in the church. In Chaucer's tale the Jews who hired the murderer are drawn by "wilde hors" (633), but we are not told what happens to the "homycide." In "The Chorister," "[þ]e Jeuh was Jugget for þat Morþere" (124), but we are not told what that judgement was. Aside from Prioress' narrative framing, the *Prioress' Tale* contains several additional details. The boy in "The Chorister" sings his Marian hymn (the *Alma redemptoris*) in order to beg

[41] Broughton, "The Prioress's Prologue and Tale," 586.

food; the clergeon learns the *Alma* out of love, overcoming considerable risks: as he says, he will fall behind on his primer and "shal be beten thries in an houre" (542). Before removing the "greyn," the bishop takes the opportunity in this tale to ask the clergeon to identify the cause of his supernatural voice and so gives a glimpse of a strange play of autonomy, which the "greyn" facilitates.

In a broad sense, both poems describe how these two bodies are worked to generate affect. Geraldine Heng has pointed out how little these stories – as opposed to pre-expulsion blood libels – focus on the torture of the children. In Chaucer's tale, the Jews hire a "professional lackey" to dispatch the boy swiftly, while the Vernon poem neglects to punish its single Jewish murderer altogether.[42] "Post-expulsion, Jews – though convenient and useful villains – are no longer the point; the community that matters is the Christian community."[43] This is not to say that the tales' antisemitism is done away with; rather it has ossified into a foil for the miracle. The spectacle that unifies this community is not capital punishment but the supernatural bodies of the victims themselves, in all their equivocal splendour.

In both texts, church authorities take the corpses in "processioun" (*PT*, 623; TC, 131) through their respective towns. The clergeon is taken into the "abbay" (*PT*, 625) and put "[b]iforn the chief auter, whil the masse laste" (*PT*, 636); only after he has served as a tableau for the duration of mass, is he buried. Similarly, once the "lilie out was taken" (TC, 125) of the chorister that "holi liche" (TC, 136), is borne "þorw al þe Cite" "wiþ greete

[42] Geraldine Heng, "England's Dead Boys: Telling Tales of Christian-Jewish Relations Before and After the First European Expulsion of the Jews," *MLN* 127, no. 5 (2012): 54–85, 69–70.

[43] Heng, "England's Dead Boys," 72.

solempnete" (TC, 129–131) into the "Munstre" (TC, 137). As Denise Despres writes: "[t]he child chorister's shrouded body enters into public space like a relic for the witnessing."[44]

Furthermore, both poems depict a restless crowd drawn together temporarily to watch a spectacle; in the *Prioress's Tale*, the crowd "that thurghe the street wente / In coomen for to wonder upon this thyng" (*PT*, 614–615) – they are drawn away from the open-ended street by "this thyng," the spectacle of the boy singing in the toilet; their sense of wonder is "extraordinarily fleeting."[45] "The Chorister" figures the crowd's drifting more starkly still; the bishop arrives to the miraculous corpse "er þe peple passed in-sonder" (TC, 115), that is, the crowd dispersed. The reader can only conclude that had the bishop not arrived in time, the crowd would have left the boy singing in the toilet to go about their business.

In the *Prioress' Tale*, this sense of shallow interest in the events extends even to the "convent" (677) that aids the bishop in entombing. After the clergeon "yaf up the goost" (670), the abbot falls prostrate on the ground and weeps. Chaucer devotes three lines to describing the abbot's reaction, how his tears fell as rain, "gruf he fil al plat upon the grounde" (675). When the convent's reaction follows, it appears as a perfunctory mirror of the abbot's. "The convent eek lay on the pavement / Wepynge" (lines 677–678); they copy him and the delay in the poem between the event and the reaction to the event makes it seem like the monks followed their abbot's performative cues, rather than their own instinctual ones. This show of weeping ends abruptly:

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[44] Despres, "The Protean Jew in the Vernon Manuscript," 152.

[45] Gayk, "To wondre upon this thyng," 142.

> And after that they ryse, and forth been went,
> And tooken awey this martir from his beere
> And in a tombe of marbul stones cleere
> Enclosen they his litel body sweete.[46]

There is a sense here, at the culmination of the tale, of a performance ended, of actors drying their tears and packing up the pageantry. The swooning mother who accompanied the bier in "greet processioun" (623) to the Abbey is not mentioned again; the clergeon's body is literally assimilated into the ornamentation of the church. This idea of laying prostrate before a dead body and then burying it chimes with the practice of creeping to the cross, which immediately preceded *Depositio* ceremonies. The Barking *Ordinale*, for example, stipulates that the abbess should lie before the cross "toto corpore prostrata" and kiss the right side, feet and hands of the corpus and then the other sisters should imitate these gestures.[47]

5.3 The Affordances of the Boy Martyrs

In figuring the children as semi-animate objects to be manually explored, the texts figure precisely this breakdown of subject-object relations. In both poems, priests draw out sacred objects from hidden chambers of these diminutive bodies. In the *Prioress's Tale* "[t]his hooly monk, this abbot, hym meene I / His tonge out caughte, and took awey the greyn" (*PT*, 670–671). It is a profoundly invasive and disturbing moment: as Stanbury

[46] *PT,* 679–681.

[47] "Cumque ad crucem peruenerit: toto corpore prostrata, pedes et manus dextrumque latus crucifixi, cum reuerencia et deuocione, osculetur, interim deprecans quod spiritus sanctus cordi eius inspirauerit. Quibus exemplum relique sorores imitantes: codem modo crucem adorent." Tolhurst, *Ordinale*, 1, 99.

asks, "[h]ow do we see this? The abbot is groping the body of the living dead."[48] In order to remove the secreted object, the abbot not only reaches into the boy, but he also grasps and pulls out the boy's tongue, making it move independently of the boy.

The disgust we might feel at this moment – the disgust Stanbury questions – is encouraged by the texts. In both, the moment in which the children are opened up is characterised with disturbing elision of subject and object.[49] This lily in the Chorister is much deeper – rooted, not cushioned: "Þe Bisschop serchede wiþ his hond: / Wiþinne þe childes þrote he fond / A Lilie flour" bearing the words of the "hymn" (TC, 119–121). The bishop acts on a body *with* his body, putting his entire hand down the cut throat of the child. There is an unpleasant parallel here between the bishop drawing the body out of the toilet and drawing the lily out of the throat. In the tale's possible source, the lily is not planted so deeply within the child; a barely-literate monk learns the words *Ave Maria*; when he dies, a lily grows on his grave, bearing these words; when the monks dig up the lily, they find it rooted in his jaws.[50] The difference here is that the monk's lily reaches above soil: the chorister's lily grows – entire – inside the child's throat; it is hidden until the bishop reaches in. The accompanying Vernon illustration does not shy away from this – in the picture, the bishop grasps an enormous lily with a fleshy, curving stem; it is so tall one cannot help but wonder how deeply it must have rooted within the child's body to be entirely hidden.

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[48] Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire*, 153.

[49] Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoetics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 75.

[50] Broughton, "The Prioress' Prologue and Tale," 615.

In Chaucer's tale, this abject moment is mediated through the Prioress. In describing the churchman grasping the child's tongue, the Prioress inserts herself in the first person to clarify subject-object relations:

> This hooly monk, this abbot, hym meene I,
> His tonge out caughte, and took awey the greyn,
> And he yaf up the goost ful softely.[51]

Her guidance here fails, causing the reader instead to stumble over who is who. She uses three deictics to emphasise who is the subject of the sentence: *This* hooly monk, *this* abbot, *hym* meene I. But this does not clarify the sense-unit; on the contrary, the two pronouns directly following refer to the clergeon. Her fumbling, almost squeamish narratorial insertion further blurs subject-object relations at the moment of penetration. And yet this is a corpse whose borders are being encroached. The passage generates a feeling akin to Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of the slimy, the nauseous dissolution of subject-object relations between the tool and the hand that grasps it.[52] The tool, like a viscous fluid, touched back as much as it is touched. There is a dreadful sense that a tongue – something literally slimy – would be difficult to grasp with one's fingers, particularly the small tongue of a child. This tongue is something that must be "caughte." The *General Prologue* states the Prioress "wolde wepe if that she saugh a mous / Kaught in a trappe" (144–145); the resonance here is disturbing, showing the tongue to be a pitiful, elusive thing.

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[51] *PT*, 670–672.

[52] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (Methuen, 1957).

As much as these children are invaded, they also project outwards in strange ways. They are, in this sense, machinic in character. They can act as a tool, as an extension of will. As Aura Satz writes of the animated sculpture of the late Middle Ages:

> The ontological status of the puppet and automaton is *already partly pried apart*. One sees into the object as both a successful mechanism and an illusion, a truth and a deception. Again, a "hand" is always implied somewhere inside the object. To put it simplistically, the locus of this dual vision is situated in the strings of the puppet, or the wind-up key within the automata. Here lies the converging point of inside and outside, the site of penetrability and incompleteness, the entrance for a manipulator.[53]

Both boys' bodies contain sacred objects that appear to power their singing. In the *Prioress' Tale*, the abbot asks how it is possible for the clergeon to sing '[s]ith that thy throte is kut to my semynge" (line 648); the child, with his gaping apertures, looks like something that should be dead. The child agrees that indeed his "throte is kut unto my nekke boon" (line 649) and so "by wey of kynde / I sholde have dyed, ye, long tyme agon" (lines 650-651); his extended life is supernatural. However, he explains, the Virgin came to him in the toilet as he was dying and asked him to sing. When he finished:

> Me thoughte she leyde a greyn upon my tonge.
> Wherefore I synge, and synge moot certeyn,
> In honour of that blisful Mayden free
> Til fro my tonge of taken is the greyn[.][54]

Although the child is explaining himself, doubt remains ("[m]e thoughte"). This highlights his passivity as much as his guilelessness; he is not the driver of the changes wrought on him. He both sings voluntarily ("I synge"), as he did before his mutilation, but is also constrained to sing ("synge moot") until the mysterious "greyn" is removed. The "greyn"

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[53] Aura Satz, "Off the Pedestal," 60–61.

[54] *PT*, 662–665

functions as an "off-switch" for the singing.[55] Previous scholars have made the case for seeing Chaucer's "greyn' as the host; this was often called the "singing bread," probably because of its association with singing mass.[56] While the "greyn" seems to be a deliberately mysterious feature of the text, the use of movable sculptures of the dead Christ that served as a repository for the host strengthens parallels medieval readers might have drawn between it and a Eucharistic wafer.[57] Further, while the lily inside the chorister might be ontologically clearer than Chaucer's "greyn," it too animates the boy from within. After the abbot removes the "greyn" the clergeon "yaf up the goost" (672) and, once the bishop removes the lily from the chorister "þe childes song began to slaken / Þat swete song was herd no more; / But as a ded cors the child lay þore" (126–128). The body is finally sloughed off and allowed to rest.

When the clergeon in the latrine draws a crowd, they have come to see this "thyng" (*PT*, 615); the boy and the toilet have become a unit. Similarly, the Mayor "serchen [for the chorister] so longe / Til he was founden in a gonge, / fful depe I-drouned in fulþe of fen" (TC, 107–109). The poem repeats the word "searchen" so that it is hard not to equate the excavation of the latrine and the excavation of the child: in each, a precious thing is drawn out from deep within a wet, dark cavity. Here we see a convergence of inside and outside essential to the mechanised body.

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[55] Gayk, "To wondre upon this thyng," 148.

[56] Warren, "Sacraments, Gender, and Authority," 385–403; Kathleen M. Oliver, "Singing-Bread, Manna, and the Clergeon's 'Greyn,'" *The Chaucer Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 357–364, 361; Stanbury, *Visual Object of Desire*, 169.

[57] "Chaucer can hardly have been unaware of the vagueness of his term, yet he employs it consistently – four times in ten lines – without introducing a synonym or indicating what kind of grain it is.' John M. Steadman, "The 'Prioress's Tale' and 'Granella' of 'Paradiso,'" *Mediaeval Studies* 24 (1962): 388–391.

The equation of the outward and the inward passages, furthermore, allows these children's voices to project beyond their human capacity. Andrew Albin argues that cutting the clergeon not only opened up a new mouth for him, but also turned the latrine into a bell-like extension of his windpipe:[58]

> Then he with throte ykorven lay upright,
> He alma redemptoris gan to synge
> So loude that al the place gan to rynge.[59]

His voice is now amplified by and projected through the toilet. If Augustinian progressivism takes technology as an extension of the body – a prosthesis that will help us return to our prelapsarian mastery – then Chaucer's ringing toilet is its terrifying end.[60] Similarly, the noise the chorister makes in his latrine cuts through the din of the crowd – "for al heore noyse / Anon þey herde þe childes voyse" (TC, 98–99). Never before, the poem tells us, had the child sung so loud (TC, 52) and "Þei herde him never synge so clere" (TC, 100). In two mirrored descriptions of the child's voice coming out of the toilet, the poem repeats word-groups at the ends of lines "hyȝe/herre" (TC, 52, 79); "cleer" (TC, 53, 77) and "fer and nerre" (TC, 53, 80), generating an echoing relay across the poem. The bodies of the chorister and the clergeon are thus not only open to intimate invasion, but also able to extend their capabilities beyond themselves, into other things.

There is a sense in these texts that the children are not resurrected but rather transformed into instruments of celestial and ecclesiastical power. Their limp bodies are

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[58] Andrew Albin, "The Prioress's Tale, Sonorous and Silent," *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 1 (2013): 91–112.

[59] *PT*, 611–613.

[60] "The dominant Augustinian Christian progressivism that saw technology as a prosthesis to supplement the fallen body of mankind was offset by the persistent notion that mankind's technological successes would come at a price." Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels,* 13.

moved from without by churchmen and animated from within by sacred objects. Though both children continue to sing after their throats are cut, they are incapable of independent movement. Readers of the *Prioress' Tale* liken the clergeon's body to a robot or puppet: his cut corpse is "automata-like" or "like a marionette [...] a thing virtually under the command of a transcendent mediatrix."[61] The singing clergeon is paraded about supine on a "beere" (625, 627, 635), while the chorister is drawn up singing from the toilet and remains immobile until the bishop puts his hand inside him and plucks out the miraculous lily.

These choreographed transformations in the text might have brought the Easter rites of the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* to the readers' mind. An object is put in motion to be buried on Good Friday. Another object is raised to the communal gaze on Easter Sunday. As we saw in chapter one, these ceremonies employed a range of objects that could be swapped for each other, or the one encased within the other. At Durham a crucifix was taken out of a Shrine Madonna to be entombed. To the tomb was added a "picture of our sauiour Christ, in whose breast they did enclose with great reuerence the most holy and blessed sacrament." On Easter Sunday, it was this resurrection sculpture, with its host displayed in "bright Christall" that was removed from the tomb.[62] The crucifix was not raised, but subtly returned to the womb of the Madonna later on in the day. Likewise, in the Abbeys of Prüfening and Barking, a sculpture of Christ crucified was deposed from its cross and buried on Good Friday. On Easter Sunday the priest reached into the tomb

[61] J. Allan Mitchell, *Becoming Human: The Matter of the Medieval Child* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 113.

[62] Fowler, *Rites*, 12.

and drew out a host instead of this image.[63] These various images, painted to look wounded or polished to shine "bright," are all tied into the same basic *ductus*.

5.4 The Vernon Miniatures

"The Jew of Bourges," "The Chorister" and the *Prioress's Tale* are all texts of extraordinary violence. Yet, as literary objects they exist to entertain as much as to transmit ideas and information. There is a kind of morbid playfulness in the way in which the children in each text are cycled through their deaths and emerge transformed. Each child is shut in a dark place – a toilet; an oven – and the narrative moves elsewhere. When it returns, they are pulled from that place into the public gaze, transformed into sacred objects. This section looks at the Vernon manuscript and its miniatures illustrating these tales. I posit that these little pictures organise the tales they illustrate as two mirroring systems of transformation. In each, the children are drawn through a dark aperture to emerge transformed. These systems refract in miniature form the transformation at the heart the *Depositio* and *Elevatio* rites. They also seem to figure what Steven Connor calls the essential "deathliness in play – not the simple deathliness of the inanimate object, but the impulse which all play releases and allows, of putting the toy to death."[64]

Miri Rubin has traced the way each iteration of the story of the Jew of Bourges binds together, in unique but interlocking ways, a complex web of associations in the Christian medieval imaginary that link the Jewish boy baked by his father to a baking host. The story predates that of "The Chorister," first appearing in the work of Evagrius

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[63] Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 1, 159. See chapter 1, 41–48.

[64] Steven Connor, "Guys and Dolls," *Women: A Cultural Review* 26, 1-2 (2015): 129–142, 140.

Scholasticus of Antioch (c.536–600), but gained wider popularity when adapted into the Marian repertoire by Gregory of Tours. [65] The story tends to run as follows: a Jewish boy follows his Christian playmates into a church and takes communion before a statue of Mary. Sometimes he is gifted a eucharistic vision: either the statue itself gives communion or the wafer turns into a tiny boy.[66] His father finds out and throws him into a furnace, but he survives, saved, he later explains, by the woman he had seen in the church. This poem literalises this imagined connection between the burning child and the host: the child is not simply likened to a host, he is framed by a monstrance-like oven *as* a host – he is spectacularised.

In a generic sense, the events of the tale mirror a ritualised entombment. When the father shuts the child in the oven, it seems like an entombment: "wiþ þe Mouþ-ston he stekeþ him faste" (JoB, 96). Just as the oven is the central space in the poem and its illustration, the Easter sepulchre was "emphatically a central part of the official liturgy of Holy Week."[67] Whatever the object buried, the responsory at this moment would run: "When the Lord was buried they sealed up the sepulchre, rolling a stone before the mouth thereof."[68] Barking was no exception and the line appears also in the *Regularis Concordia* and the Sarum Rites.[69] Thus the word "Mouþ-ston" might well have evoked this rite.

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[65] Julie Nelson Couch, '"The Child Slain by Jews" and "The Jewish Boy,"' in *Medieval Literature for Children*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (Routledge, 2003), 208. Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales*: *The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Yale University Press, 1999), 8.

[66] Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 10–11.

[67] Dunbar Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church* (University of Delaware Press, 2002), 39.

[68] Rev. B. Rayment, *The Divine Office for the Use of the Laity*, vol. I (Manchester, 1806), 451–452.

[69] Yardley and Mann, "Liturgical Dramas," 20–21, 16.

The child's removal from the oven is more complex. He is not simply taken out of the oven, but the oven becomes transparent, catching him in the centre of the flames, as if in amber.

> Þe Meir Commaundet: "doþ doun þe ston."
> Þer everi Mon wel i-seo
> Þe hovene-Roof, þat was so round,
> Hou hit was Blasyng al of bleo
> As glouwyng glos from Roof to grount
> Þe child sat þere boþe hol and sound[.][70]

Though the mayor commands that the oven be opened, the stone does not budge; instead, it becomes transparent and the child remains there for eleven lines of description. In order to get the child out, the mother has to jump in next to him "sturte him neih" (JoB, ll. 39) and breach him from that womb-like enclosure. The now-diaphanous roof had not previously been described as "round," which was the usual shape of medieval lunettes (the transparent part of the monstrance); the host's appearance was regulated in the thirteenth century, so that it should be unbroken, "hol and sound," as well as circular.[71] This exhuming – that delivers a pellucid symbol of life, held to a collective gaze – is reminiscent of the Barking *Elevatio*, where all eyes are trained on the "Lord's body in a glass."

This story of "The Jew of Bourges" has been described as the "inverted reflection" of "The Chorister."[72] In the Vernon manuscript, these analogue tales sit on facing pages. The two have typological parallels: the searching mother, the angry father and the Mayor, who helps exhume the child. The illustrations have also been made to mirror one

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[70] JoB, 129–134

[71] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 39.

[72] Heng, "England's Dead Boys," 61.

another. Although other images in the Miracles of Our Lady series have circular compositions, no two stories are so strongly analogous. Not only do the main characters look almost identical in the miniature, each image's *ductus* reflects the other on the page: the limner opens up a new interpretive plane, positing these two poems as mirrored systems of transformation.[73]





Figure 42. (Left) "The Chorister" miniature, MS Eng. Poet. a. 1, folio 124^{v}

Figure 43. (Right) "The Jew of Bourges" miniature, MS Eng. Poet. a. 1, folio 125^{r}

In his discussion of the image series of the Funeral of the Virgin at Chalgrove, Oxfordshire, Anthony Bale draws off the modern concept of "strip-art":

> Symbolic rather than natural, heavily invested in violent contrast and the grotesque, delineating and defining good and evil, focusing on physical violence and moral contrast, all through the uses of frames and, literally, "strips" of narrative. Moreover, like strip-art, sequences like the wall paintings at Chalgrove gains its audience's participation through the recognition of its generic nature, as

[73] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted,* 96.

> a cue to stories encountered previously and elsewhere, with an established moral and narrative end-point.[74]

The Vernon Miracles of Our Lady miniatures can be seen in this light; the tales themselves repurpose the stock material of antisemitic stories, which the pictures condense into pithy, dynamic miniatures. Rather than focusing on one moment of the story, the miniatures condense the narrative into a series of crowded, busy stills, so that one can see the whole *ductus* of the plot at a glance.

The miniatures of "The Chorister" and "The Jew of Bourges" both cycle around and through a blank-spot, reflecting the way each tale draws a child into a dark space and leaves him there; when the plot returns, he is altered. Denise Despres has discussed the illustration of "The Chorister" in terms of "symbolic contrasts: resurrection in contrast to bodily putrefaction; innocence in contrast to depravity; white in contrast to black."[75] I am more struck by the dynamic process of these scenes. The illustration trains the reader's eyes on these dark apertures, which, like the tomb in the Holy Week liturgical dramas, is the obscured site of substitution.

Medieval limners often do not adhere to their texts very closely.[76] This one, however, read the poems carefully. The monstrance allusions in "The Jew of Bourges" carry over into the illustration: the Jewish child ends his cycle framed in a golden sunburst, the 'round' roof of the oven arching above him. He is the epitome of "hool and sound" (JoB, 134), sitting smiling, with his legs tucked beneath him, his hands joined over a rounded belly. The limner takes similar care to relay the details of "The Chorister." The

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[74] Bale, *Feeling Persecuted,* 99.

[75] Despres, "The Protean Jew," 152.

[76] Daniel Wakelin, *Designing English: Early Literature on the Page* (Bodleian Library, 2018), 117.

child arrives into the picture holding the "[m]ete [He gat] from strete to strete" (18) in a cloth. In the poem, the Jewish man "[t]illed" (38) (coaxed, enticed) him in, and the limner shows the man beckoning from the doorway. Then, reading again right to left, the boy is cut and cycled through a dark aperture; he emerges altogether altered, half-raised on his bier, and so almost – but not quite – immobilised. The illustration thus figures the transformation in the poem from a "child" to a "cors" (128): the winding-sheet covers his green tunic and yellow hair, so that he is almost unrecognisable, a kind of grave effigy.

Key to this substitution is the manipulation of the onlooker's gaze, which is trained on the transformed figure. For Despres "the [toilet's] dark round hole symbolises Jewish physicality, corruptibility and filth."[77] While this is undoubtably true, it also seems this hole's matte black solidity also resists symbolisation. The limner otherwise follows perspectival rules exactly, but this hole, which should be slightly oblique, meets our gaze point-blank, matte black. Isidore of Seville writes that "the pupil (*pupilla*) is the middle point of the eye in which the power of vision resides: because small images appear to us there, they are called pupils, since small children are called pupils."[78] These illustrations reflect perhaps the "spectoral reciprocity" of the Eucharistic gaze;[79] the miniature of "The Chorister" trains the viewer's eye on the dark aperture from which the boy is removed: it is the blind-spot in which transformation occurs. The bishop's hand in the "Jew of Bourges" illustration does not point to the miracle of the boy in the oven, rather

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[77] Despres, "The Protean Jew," 151.

[78] Isidore of Seville*, The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, eds. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge University Press, 2006), X.I.i.37, 233.

[79] Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 162.

the spot where the boy disappears out of frame, leaving only his rump and little white toes. He is pushed out of sight and appears below, sitting like an apple at the centre of a lidded oven. In both pictures, around these dark or blazing centres, swim little boys, small pupils which find reflection in our own eyes. Theories of sight had undergone a radical transformation in the previous century. Roger Bacon claimed that objects reproduce themselves as species, which travel through the atmosphere to rest on the surface of what was known as the eye's "crystalline lens."[80] In reflecting the gaze, the limner draws attention to slips of perception, to the fact that the children in both poems undergo a strange transformation when the narrative gaze is elsewhere. The miniature scale of these illustrations in comparison to the vastness of the Vernon page add to this sense of playfulness, of visual trick. As Susan Stewart writes, the miniature affects time as much as space; "collapsed into the minimum of space" the viewer of the miniature experiences an arrested and therefore infinite time, the time of the reverie, of play.[81]

In making this comparison one can think broadly about the playful quality of the Vernon images. As miniatures, they present a delicious *fort-da* in which the little boys are cycled endless through their deaths. Positing these texts as playful, however, does not mitigate their essential violence, just as seeing the moveable sculpture as a kind of puppet does not dampen its affective potential.

Devotional interactions with performance objects are often discussed through the lens of gender and play. Women tended to be more strongly (but by no means

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[80] Denery, *Seeing and Being Seen*, 91.

[81] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Duke University Press, 1993), 39.

exclusively) associated with such tactile and playful forms of devotion.[82] Kempe's famous encounter with a doll of the Christ child was in a distinctly female setting; the woman who owned the "ymage" would take it out in "good citeys" was set upon "worshepful wyfys lappys."[83]

Influential women, such as St Hedwig of Silesia and Margarethe Ebner were closely associated with their devotional dolls.[84] The pipe-clay dolls mass produced in the low countries were mainly associated with women, though they have been found in male

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[82] There is a considerable body of scholarship on this. See for example Jacqueline E. Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Index of Christian Art, 2010); Christof Metzger, "'es muoss ein zeserlin haben…': Überlegungen zur Funktion des Naturalismus im späten Mittelalter und ein Jesuskind von Nikolaus Gerhaert von Leyden," *Menschenbilder: Beiträge zur altdeutschen Kunst*, eds. Ingrid-Sibylle Hoffmann, Ingrid-Sibylle, Andreas Tacke, and Stefan Heinz (Michael Imhof Verlag, 2011); Annette LeZotte, "Cradling Power: Female Devotions and Early Netherlandish Jésueaux," in *Push Me, Pull You*; Peter Barnet, "A Recently Acquired Christ Child at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Sculptures for Medieval Nuns," in *A Reservoir of Ideas: Essays in Honour of Paul Williamson*, eds., Glyn Davies and Eleanor Townsend (Paul Holberton Publishing, 2017), 204–214; Barbara Zimbalist, "Touching the Page and Touching the Heart: Manuscript Culture and Affective Devotion in Late Medieval Flemish Communities," and Laura Saetveit Miles, "Queer Touch Between Holy Women: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Birgitta of Sweden, and the Visitation" in *Touching, Devotional Practices and Visionary Experience*.

[83] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 177. Lavezzo, "Sobs and Sighs Between Women," 184–187. Liz McAvoy 112-113.

[84] Ulinka Rublack, "Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents," *Gender & History* 6 (1994): 35–57; Klapisch-Zuber, "Holy Dolls: Play and Piety in Florence in the Quattrocento," *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*; Corine Schleif, "St. Hedwig's Personal Ivory Madonna: Women's Agency and the Power of Possessing Portable Figures," in *The Four Modes of Seeing. Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline H. Caviness*, eds. Evelyn Staudinger Lane, Elizabeth Carson Pastan and Ellen Shortall (Ashgate, 2009); Natalia Keller, "'Pick Him up and hold Him in your arms': The Function of the Holy Dolls in the Convent Life of the Late Middle Ages," in *Dolls, Puppets, Sculptures and Living Images*; Simonds, "'Kiss the Feet of the Infant Jesus': The Emotional Efficacy of Early Christ Child Sculptures in Europe and Beyond," in *Emotions, Art, and Christianity in the Transatlantic World, 1450–1800*, eds. Heather Graham and Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank (Brill, 2021); Patricia Simons, "Re-thinking so-called 'Holy Dolls': The Performative and Devotional Context of Christ Child Sculptures in the Early Italian Renaissance," in *Holy Children and Liminality in Early Modern Art*, eds. Chiara Franceschini and Cloe Cavero (Brepols, 2025).

monasteries too.[85] Like puppet, the word doll carries a stigma of childishness and some scholars refrain from using the term.[86] Efforts have been made to recuperate these as objects of beauty as well as use.[87]

The fifteenth-century story of Geertgen Arents suggests that there was a stigma to these dolls even in the time of their use.[88] Journeying to enter a female convent, Arents began to feel ashamed of her small pipeclay figurine of the Virgin and threw it in a canal. After miraculous apparitions, it was retrieved and developed into a pilgrimage site "which, in turn, led to a mass-production of devotionalia, such as pilgrim badges."[89] The story relies on an assumption that the girl, on the brink of a new phase of life, feels her doll to be unsophisticated.

These objects are not toys, but as interactive, posable or hinged objects they invited the handler to play out imagined situations. The line between toy and sculpture is extremely hard to draw because it depends so much on the context and intention of the one interacting with it. As Stanley Cavell writes:

> The statue has aspects. By walking around it, by the changing light, in your changing mood, the figure can be seen as vulnerable, as indomitable, as in repose, as if in readiness. A doll has occasions. I am thinking of a rag doll. It can be happy or sad, fed or punished. In repose it has aspects, for example, it can be seen as sleeping or dead or sunbathing. But only if you know which is true.—There

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[85] Lieke Smits, "Small Pipe-Clay Devotional Figures: Touch, Play and Animation," *Das Mittelalter* 25, no. 2 (2020): 397–423, 339.

[86] Simons, "Re-thinking so-called 'Holy Dolls.'"

[87] Gerald Volker Grimm, *Kleine Meisterwerke des Bilddrucks: Ungeliebte Kinder der Kunstgeschichte* (Dr Faustus Verlag, 2011); Grimm ed., *Die Wormser Bilderbäckerei* (Dr Faustus Verlag, 2016).

[88] Roodenburg, "Imagination Over Matter?" 171.

[89] Smits, ""Small Pipe-Clay Devotional Figures," 419.

> is only one who knows which is true, the one whose doll it is. And that one cannot strictly be said to *know* it at all, except as a joke, or perhaps as a fiction.[90]

His definition is complex and at times contradictory: a doll "[i]n repose" is hardly distinguishable from a statue; what differentiates them is the authority of the beholder. You can imagine that a statue is resting, but the owner of the doll *knows* when the doll at rest. However, Cavell immediately undoes this distinction – the owner of the doll does not know "except as a joke, or perhaps as a fiction." Any object can be a doll as long as we invent occasions for it to perform. These occasions range from sportive (feeding the happy doll) to grim (punishing the sad doll) depending on the whims of one playing. As Joe Moshenska writes '[a]ny statue, any holy thing, any artwork is a doll *in potentia*.'[91]

Moshenska has explored the ways devotional objects were appropriated as children's toys after the Reformation. He shows how this cultural trend – instead of removing the objects' power – is conversant with some of the 'deliberate challenges of late medieval piety' in which the viewer was expected to encounter certain devotional objects simultaneously as holy matter and trivial plaything. He argues that this tension between piety and play is particularly acute in encounters with what he calls 'holy puppets' – a category that includes movable sculptures of Christ crucified. With their doll-like, disarticulated limbs and frequently bizarre special effects, these 'holy puppets' 'seem already to flaunt, to revel in, their ludicrous triviality'.[92] We are enjoined to view the

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[90] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 401. Quoted in Joe Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play* (Stanford University Press, 2019), 52.

[91] Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play*, 52.

[92] Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child's Play*, 81.

Barking Christ as both a toy and a deeply serious object that continually evoked Christ's suffering.

The Barking Christ resists categorisation, not only because it is lost but also because its meaning is so dependent on the people that handled it, that used it to produce meaning. It is a critical commonplace to acknowledge the thingness of objects, that they have their own resistant agency, they "are not static, but rather are always becoming, and are 'withdrawn' or 'hidden,' inaccessible to the human knower, and resistant to epistemological categorization."[93] This quandary is reminiscent of some discussions of the *Prioress' Tale* – a textual object that confounds critical glosses. As Shannon Gayk writes: "the Prioress's things — the animated body, the grain, perhaps even the tale itself — remind us that the material world has a life all its own, and that the meaning of things may be found less in their referentiality than in their movement among and shaping of human beings and communities."[94] Cavell's description above suggests that the unknowability material thing is particularly intense in the realm of play. The doll – whatever form it may take – can sustain the player's fictions over and over; it can be killed, can be rescued and nursed and killed afresh, but it always returns to itself.

[93] Anne Schuurman, "Materials of Wonder: Miraculous Objects and Poetic Form in Saint Erkenwald," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 39 (2017): 275–296, 275, 276.

[94] Gayk, "'To wondre upon this thyng,'"152.

Conclusion

The Barking *Ordinale*, *Christ's Burial* and the Boxley Rood indicate that movable sculptures of Christ crucified not only existed in the English-speaking world, but also that they were used for a wide range of mimetic practices. This dissertation has attempted to draw out the performance possibilities of each. In chapter one, I showed the complex play of devotional objects used at Barking to represent Christ's death and resurrection. This performance reflects the nuns' general interest in engaging, mimetic practices, which solidified their own authority. As this is the first written source in Europe that indicates the use of such an object, we might see the Abbey as on the cutting edge of new forms of performative piety.

The Boxley Rood emerged just thirty years before the Barking *Ordinale*, but functioned very differently from the Barking Christ. In chapter four, I explored its possible affordances as a visitor attraction, and questioned what kind of gestures or sounds it might have been made to make. The Talking Crucifixes of Northern Italy offer a good point of comparison, and it is also difficult to tell whether these were given voices, or whether the mouth acted as a more elusive or illusory site of articulation. This chapter showed how *Christ's Burial* offers an important window into such acts of "divine ventriloquism," whereby a crucifix is brought to the brink of animation and articulation, but it is not actually made to speak. Pilgrim badges depicting the Rood indicate that it was a monumental structure, with an altar, an ornate *lignum vitae* crucifix, and sometimes a monk standing beneath it. The presence of this figure, so unusual in pilgrim badges, suggests that he was in some sense involved in the encounter.

Looking at the *lectio Domini* section of *Christ's Burial* and Middle English sermons that animate images of the crucified Christ through language, chapter four suggested that the Boxley Rood did not literally talk, but would be brought by the monks onto the brink of speech. In this way, the pilgrims were able to take home not only the pewter replicas of the cross, but also affective scripts that they could put into the mouths of other images of Christ crucified that they encountered. This chapter positioned the Boxley Rood not only as an artefact and a spectacular puppet, but also as a performance possibility, that could be made to bloom afresh in the lives of those who saw it. This chapter also touched on the hollow, weeping head souvenir, which Geoff Egan suggests was a small puppet of the Man of Sorrows and which Brian Spencer identifies as a representation of the Boxley Rood. We will probably never know what this head truly represented, or the uses to which it was put. However, its portability, and its affordance as a walking stick-topper or glove puppet head, suggest a life for puppets of Christ beyond the abbey and into the home, the street, the wayside.

Although the Boxley Rood and the Barking rites are key pieces of evidence in the fragmented history of puppetry in the Middle Ages, this dissertation has been deliberately weighted towards *Christ's Burial*. Not a great deal has been written on the play, so I began this project with many unanswered questions. In order to approach the possible performance contexts of the Museo plays, I had to better understand their authorship. My analysis of scribal correction in Museo highlighted the difference between the kind of work apparent in the *Chronicle* and that apparent in the plays. This counters Donald C. Baker's idea that both the *Chronicle* and the plays were composed by the scribe using a similar "mode of operation," and corroborates Peter Meredith's suggestion that the play

was a copy, brought into the Charterhouse from elsewhere and partially (and abortively) adapted into a meditation to better suit monks' needs.[1]

The idea that the Museo plays were authored by their Carthusian scribe is an enduring one, which affects how scholars read its implicit cues. As I stress throughout this dissertation, many scholars have seen the play as "static," even dull. As Rosemary Woolf writes "when something potentially exciting takes place on stage it is performed only in mime."[2] "Despite the extravagant emotion expressed within the plays, only an audience which brought to them an alert devotional receptiveness could find them moving and un-wearisome."[3] One of my motives for writing this dissertation was to showcase the ways in which *Christ's Burial* is interesting, not just as a potential puppet play, but also as a text that consistently comments on its own practice. I argue, for example, that the Virgin's request for Mary Magdalene to perform an extempore "ditee," is a meta-textual reflection of the ekphrastic principals of the corpus of Marian laments from which the pietatic lament draws. *Christ's Burial* stages a powerful, sustained, and at times disturbing interaction between image and text that is unique to Middle English literature.

This dissertation is the first substantial attempt to read the play alongside other vernacular burial plays. Clifford Davidson's chapter on the Museo plays, for example, compares these "[a]typical [d]ramas" briefly to English *Depositiones*, while also

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[1] Baker, "When is a Text a Play?" 36–37.

[2] Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* , 332; Hogg, "Carthusian Drama in Bodleian MS E. Museo 160?" 268.

[3] Woolf, 335.

stressing their clear separation for the liturgy.[4] I do not write to criticise previous scholars' work on the plays, but rather to show how quickly the field has developed since Kopania's 2010 monograph. Much more interdisciplinary work needs to be done on the relationships and possible sites of transmission between these plays on a pan-European level, which was beyond the scope of this dissertation. Chapter two sought to point out some directions of travel and to highlight the work already done in the German and Italian realms.

Chapter three looked closely at the play's "implicit cues" to sketch the *ductus* of the corpus from cross to grave. My study showed that the words of the play closely follows the corpus' puppeteered action. Rather than a shortcoming, I reframed this idea of "stasis" as a deliberate aesthetic, that is fundamentally embedded in the push and pull of actor and corpus in performance. Set in a time of waiting, the play produces a sense of almost Beckettian inertia. *Christ's Burial* both interacts with and transmutes the tropes of late medieval Passional writing; the play's humoral tropes feed its stultifying atmosphere, which emanates from the enervated corpus – that melancholic lover – who is moved in fits and starts from crucifix to grave.

This dissertation focuses on the interactions between movable sculptures of Christ crucified and the texts that appear to contain them. It thus pays attention to the ways in which *Christ's Burial* is implicated in the literature of its time. The final chapter indicates ways in which the use of these objects in England could be seen to impact the literary wider imaginary in England. Literature offers pathways into the history of feelings;

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[4] Davidson, *Festivals and Plays*, 170–171.

texts like the *Prioress' Tale* and "The Chorister," build a complex picture of the affective potential of inanimate bodies in devotional spaces.

One of the considerations that pervades this thesis but I have not addressed directly is that of gender. As we saw in chapter three, the corpus in *Christ's Burial* is bound within an intensely gendered medical hermeneutic. My discussion of the pietatic "assemblage" made by the Virgin and child in this play equally emphasised the blurring of boundaries between mother and son, which disrupts a gender binary. The probability it was a male actor playing the Virgin compounds this. The Debs *Grablegungsspiele* and the Italian *laude*, which I discussed in chapter two, were also almost certainly performed by men, though the Virgin remains their central character. The Boxley Rood belonged to monks and was open to the public. I have therefore hesitated to discuss movable sculptures as indicators of female piety in particular.

The Marian miracles discussed in chapter five situate their boy martyrs within a particularly feminine sphere of power and authority that some scholars have seen to relate to particularly "female" devotional artworks. However, such agency is not straightforward in the *Prioress' Tale* or "The Chorister." Similarly, when the bodies of the body martyrs are discovered by the church authorities, they are handled and manipulated by men. The Barking Christ is in the hands of the priests, who orchestrate its movements and transformations. It is however embedded within a female community and within a set of rites in which women play male roles.

As we saw previously, *Christ's Burial* explores bodily difference through language as well as through puppetry. The two key pieces of puppetry the script reveals – the deposition and pietatic lament – show very different ways of handling the corpus which reflect a gender binary present in the text. Joseph apportions, divides and controls. The

Virgin enfolds the corpus into her own body, voicing it as part of the pietatic "assemblage." This binary is troubled, however, by the multi-gendered corpus itself, enfolded into the female body. As Christina Fitzgerald reminds us, has staged passivity is not the same as staged femininity: there was a masculine power in the silent, acquiescent body of Christ during the Passion.[5]

Looking at these objects from a literary and performance perspective expands our sense of what associations and feelings they may have provoked in those who encountered them. My project has built on the work of art historians, who are continually expanding our understanding of the location, form and function of these objects. The field has progressed enormously in the fifteen years since Kopania's seminal study. Queen's University, for example, now hosts a suite of online databases, high resolution photographs, and virtual exhibitions of polychrome sculpture in different regions of Italy as a permanent open-access archive which are in the process of expanding.[6] These projects have shed light on both published and unpublished examples of movable sculptures of Christ crucified, such as India Kane's experimental analysis of the Skin Christ in the Oratorio dell'Annunziata in Perugia, which I discussed in chapter three. Restoration work illumines material practices that are bound up in performance, as we saw from Illinca Stingaciu's upcoming experiments on the form smoke might take when

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[5] Christina M. Fitzgerald, "Acting Like a Man: The Solitary Christ and Masculinity," *The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[6] Claire Litt and D'Elia, "Renaissance Polychrome Sculpture in Puglia and Basilicata," https://hdl.handle.net/1974/29070; Kennis Forte and Una D'Elia, "Renaissance and Baroque Polychrome Sculpture in Lombardy and Piedmont," https://hdl.handle.net/1974/29202; Una D'Elia, Heather Merla, Rachel Boyd, and Bronwyn Bond, "Renaissance Polychrome Sculpture in Tuscany," https://hdl.handle.net/1974/14832.

it is fanned by a tongue mechanism. More work will need to be done to link up this new research with literary and performance studies, as well as studies of the liturgy.

The most extensive contribution to this topic since Kopania's monograph is Amy Powell's 2012 phenomenological exploration of moveable sculptures of Christ crucified. It is worth explaining why I have not discussed Powell's work in this dissertation. Drawing off Kristevan notions of the abject, Powell's book argues that:

> The Deposition rite, whose central gesture of putting away the image is hardly conducive to sensuous gratification, served as an antidote to the veneration of images at other times of the year. It served, we might say, as a ritual disavowal of the image under the guise of burial. [7]

Each chapter of her book ends with a reflection on a piece of modern art, which, she argues, resemble the medieval objects at hand in that they display "autoiconoclasm, that is a political self-negation." Powell thus sees movable sculptures of Christ crucified as precursors to the image breaking of the sixteenth century.[8] I share Powell's interest in the history of response to these objects but I draw different conclusions. As I have shown in this dissertation, there are many ways in which a *Depositio* rite can offer "sensuous gratification," as well as imaginative stimulus. The abjection of the image does not always mean that the image is dead; rather medieval writers explored a vibrant, sensory, and even erotic landscape precisely within their figurations of the Christ's death. As Julian's image of the dry Christ shows, a body that is "so dyscolouryd, so drye, so

[7] Powell, *Depositions*, 46.

[8] Powell, *Depositions*, 39.

clongyn, so dedly, and so pytuous as he had been sennyght deed" is a rich and rewarding vision, and one which is both still and continually in motion.[9]

Powell gathers her material mostly from the German-speaking regions, and mostly from polemical texts. She draws together examples of iconoclastic acts during Holy Week; crucifixes are destroyed, shot at and smeared with excrement. Like William Balowe's statement with which I began this dissertation, these are colourful responses, but not indicative of all responses. Without offering a unifying theory as to these objects' function, I suggest that positioning these objects within the literature of their time allows us to access different forms of emotional response towards them. My comparison for example, the performance of the Barking Christ to the strange animation of the clergeon in the *Prioress' Tale*, does not show as causal a chain of response as the man baring his buttocks to the host, but instead builds a ambivalent picture of a female world in which diminutive bodies are put into motion to generate affect, and in which violence is sublimated in complex ways. The narrative frame of the text can be seen as a difficult and equivocal lens of response to the tale.

Powell's focus on the Reformation in Northern Europe and on modern art in the West also leads her to underestimate the continued use and importance of movable sculptures of Christ crucified, many of which have no relation to iconoclasm.

> In the sixteenth century, iconoclastic reformers would depose all but a handful of these objects, inaugurating, in turn, a much longer period of the moveable crucifix's invisibility, which came to an end only in the 1960s, when art historians interested in late medieval liturgical culture began to bring these surprising objects to light – again.[10]

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[9] Julian, *Showings*, chapter 16, 27.

[10] Powell, *Depositions*, 17.

Here we can discern a certain privileging of the study of objects over their use within a living tradition. Innumerable lay confraternities in Europe still perform Easter rites using movable sculpture of Christ crucified and many churches, including the the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, still perform the *Depositio* using such an object, including .[11]

The Burgos Christ, arguably the most famous movable sculpture of Christ crucified, has been reproduced at least twice in the post-Reformation era. A double was made in order to continue to carry out the Good Friday rites without harming the fragile sculpture. Another replica, allegedly from the early 1700s, is in the town of Sariaya in the Quezon region of the Philippines. "Replica" is perhaps not quite the right word. Though the Sariaya Burgos Christ has a similar long, dark wig to its predecessor, it appears to be only moveable at the shoulders. Furthermore, it is a pilgrim destination in its own right, with its own miraculous attributes and back-story that relates to the conversion of the Philippine peninsula. Though there is little peer-reviewed material on the Sariaya Burgos Christ, social media affords intimate contemporary responses outside both the world of the art gallery and the world of academe. Over the course of my research, I have looked through a great deal of amateur documentation to find sculptures only mentioned in passing in academic literature. My journeys into the disorderly and sometimes confounding archive of travel blogs, home videos and public Facebook albums have not been reproduced in this dissertation. Yet they have impressed upon me continual

[11] Changuinian, "The Good Friday Ceremonies of the Burial of Christ," 57. Ruth Fernández González, "Sistemas de articulación," 13–14.

vibrancy of these traditions, and the diversity of uses to which a performance object might be put.

Given this project's focus on the affordances of the movable sculpture of Christ crucified, the clearest direction forward would be to stage a modern adaptation of *Christ's Burial*. As many scholars have shown, performance can be a powerful mode of analysis and a way of actuating the "possibilities of perception and feelings that lie attenuated and frozen" in a historic script.[12] Meredith seems to have put together a modern reading of *Christ's Burial*:

> When we gave a semi-staged performance of the *Burial* at the Dublin SITM Colloquium in 1980 most members of the audience who expressed an opinion agreed in finding the experience wearisome. Yet one said that it was the perfect preparation for attending Mass. Under what circumstances would these plays work?[13]

I have not managed to track down anyone who was present at this event, and so do not know what Meredith means by "semi-staged".[14] This performance clearly did not do a great deal to promote the interest in the play. The answer this dissertation gives to Meredith's question, however, is that these plays would work best if performed with the metascript of the puppet in mind. Without something standing in for the corpus and

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[12] Philip C. McGuire, "Introduction," in *Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension*, eds. McGuire, Philip C, and David A Samuelson (AMS Press, 1979), xx.

[13] Meredith, "The Bodley Burial," 149.

[14] I am grateful to Alan Fletcher and Martin Bažil for their help in this endeavour.

without the immediacy of language, one can imagine that much of the play's dramatic impact would be lost.





Figure 44. (Left) Nao d'amores, production of the *Misterio del Cristo de los Gascones*, Segovia 2016. Photo: David Rubio.

Figure 45. (Right) Cristo de los Gascones, twelfth century, San Justo, Segovia. Photo: Ruth Fernández González.

One model for this has been offered by Nao d'Amores, a theatre company that specialises in medieval and renaissance theatre. Their 2007 *Misterio del Cristo de los Gascones* is a modern interpretation of the Easter rites performed in the San Justo de Segovia Church, in Castile and León.[15] David Faraco directed the puppetry of the play and worked to produce a replica of a life-sized thirteenth-century movable sculpture of

[15] Nao d'Amores, *Misterio del Cristo de los Gascones*, https://www.naodamores.es/misterio-del-cristo-de-los-gascones-2/.

Christ crucified, known as the “Cristo de los Gascones,” from the San Justo de Segovia Church.

This dissertation has outlined a set of affordances that might be useful to a puppet practitioner looking to adapt this play: the sculpture would work best as be a *pietà* typus, jointed in the legs as well as the arms. It could have a wig of natural hair, or have some leather elements that would set off the humoral and corporeal themes of the play. In chapter two I suggested that the script offers an opportunity for an onstage *Acheiropoet*on, in which wet blood could be made to transfer onto Christ’s sudarium. The adaptor could easily produce such a bloody effect, which would give the ending of the play a strange turn. Performed in this way – that is, with puppetry included in directorial decisions – the play might resonate with modern audiences in a new way. Rather than the action-packed, open air York cycle, this is a taught, tense drama that revolves around a passive body, always on the brink of life.

List of Figures

Figure 1. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (c. 1350–1360), Stierisch-Laßnitz. Photo: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 2. Diagram of tongue and groove mechanism. Drawing: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 3. Interactive map of movable sculptures of Christ crucified, based off Kamil Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* (Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010). Map: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 4. Puppet Tree Diagram. Stephen Kaplin, "A Puppet Tree: A Model for the Field of Puppet Theatre," *The Drama Review* 43, no. 3 (1999): 28-35, 31. © Stephen Kaplin.

Figure 5. Puppet Tree Diagram of Medieval Puppets. Diagram: Sigrid Koerner.

Images within the diagram:

Two puppets in a castelet (folio 54^{r}), brown hobby stag (folio 70^{r}), Bodleian Library MS. Bodley 264, part 1. Photo: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Image altered by Sigrid Koerner.

Blue hobby stag (folio 115^{v}), Walters Ms. W.88, Book of Hours. Photo: © Walters Art Museum. Image altered by Sigrid Koerner.

Giant and Hob-Nob, The Salisbury Museum. Photo: © The Salisbury Museum. Image altered by Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 6. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (c. 1400), Łowicz. Photo: © Kamil Kopania.

Figures 7 and 8. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (c. 1380), Göttweig Abbey. Photos © Bernhard Rameder.

Figure 9. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified, (1350–1373), Chełmno. Photo: © Kamil Kopania.

Figure 10. Opening page of *Christ's Burial*, Museo, folio 140^{r}. Photo: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 11. Second page of *Christ's Burial*, Museo, folio 140^{v}. Photo: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 12. Proportion of self-corrections in samples performed in different inks in Museo. Diagram: Sigrid Koerner.

Table 1. Scribal self-correction in the *Chronicle* sample (1^{r}–25^{v}) and *Christ's Burial* sample (140^{r}–153^{r}).

Table 2. Phrase substitutions in the *Chronicle* sample (1^{r}–25^{v}).

Figure 13. Man of Sorrows with kneeling Carthusian c. 1490, England. British Library, Ms. Egerton 1821, folio 9^{v}. Photo: © The British Library Board.

Figure 14. The beginning of *Debs II*, Sterzing/Vipiteno, Stadtarchiv, Hs. IV, 12^{r}. Photo: Stadtarchiv Sterzing.

Figure 15. The beginning of Debs XIV, Sterzing/Vipiteno, Stadtarchiv, Hs. IV, 102^{r}. Photo: Stadtarchiv Sterzing.

Figure 16. Vigil Raber, *Neustifter Wappenbuch* (1548-1552), Neustift/Novacella, Augustiner-Chorherrenstift, Cod. s.n. Photo: manuscripta.at.

Figure 17. *Pietà* (1330–1340), Archdiocesan Museum Freiburg am Breisgau. Photo: Sigrid Koerner

Figure 18. Hans Memling, central panel, Greverade Triptych (1491), St Annen-Museum Lübeck. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 19. *Speculum humanae salvationis* (1470-1480), France, Marseille, Alcazar Library MS 89, folio 25^{v}. Photo: © Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes du Centre national de la recherche scientifique.

Figure 20. The *Mirakelmann* (c. 1510), St Nicolaikirche, Döbeln. Photo: Elvira Kless.

Figure 21. Skin Christ (1410), Monasterio de Santa Clara, Palencia. Photo: © Kamil Kopania.

Figures 22, 23 and 24. Skin Christ (c.1350–1400), Museo del Capitolo, Perugia. Photo: Una D'Elia.

Figures 25 and 26. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (1481), Bad Wimpfen am Berg. Photos: Sigrid Koerner.

Figures 27, 28, 29, and 30. Movable sculpture of Christ crucified (1500-1510), National Museum of Switzerland. Photos: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 31. Matthias Grünewald, first view, lamentation detail, Isenheim Altarpiece (1512-1516), Underlinden Museum, Colmar. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 32. Beginning of the pietatic lament, folio 151^{v}. Photo: Sigrid Koerner.

Figure 33. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Rawl. D. 403, 1^{v}. Photo: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Figure 34. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Rawl. D. 403, 2^{v}. Photo: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Figure 35. Giovanni Tedesco, sculpture of Christ crucified with a movable tongue, Perugia, Santa Maria Nuova. Photo: Sandro Bellu.

Figure 36. Pilgrim badge of the Rood of Grace, fifteenth century, Museum of London 8677. Photo: © London Museum.

Figure 37. Pilgrim badge of the Rood of Grace (1420/1430). The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry. Photo courtesy of Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Culture Coventry.

Figure 38. Pilgrim badge of the Rood of Grace. Brian Spencer, Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges (Woodbridge, 2010), 164, number 180d. Photo: © London Museum

Figure 39. Rood of Grace (pilgrim souvenir). Museum of London 97.84. Photo: © London Museum

Figure 40. Puppet Head (?) with pointed hat. Museum of London 84.240/4. Photo: © London Museum.

Figure 41. Papier mâché puppet of a Jewish man in a prison uniform (1941–1944). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, 2016.184.139 Photo: © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection.

Figure 42. “The Chorister” miniature, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. a. 1, f.124^{v}. Photo: © Bodleian Libraries.

Figure 43. “The Jew of Bourges” miniature, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. Poet. a. 1, f.125^{r}. Photo: © Bodleian Libraries.

Figure 44. Nao d’amores, production of the “Misterio del Cristo de los Gascones” in the Santa María la Mayor church, Segovia 2016. Photo: David Rubio. Published in Coca city council notices, 20/03/2016, https://www.ayuntamientodecoca.com/2016/03/coca-de-rinde-al-cristo-de-los-gascones.html.

Figure 45. Cristo de los Gascones, twelfth century, San Justo, Segovia. Photo: Ruth Fernández González, in González, “Sistemas de articulación en Cristos del Descendimiento,” (Máster en Conservación y Restauración de Bienes Culturales, Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, 2012), 16.

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