Passionate Encounters: Emotion in Early English Biblical Drama

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate the ways in which late medieval English drama produces and theorises emotions, in order to engage with the complex nexus of ideas about the links between sensation, emotion, and cognition in contemporary philosophical and theologial thought. It contributes to broader considerations of the cultural work that religious drama performed in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England in the context of the ongoing debates concerning its theological and social relevance.

Drawing on recent research in the cognitive sciences and the history of emotion, this thesis conceives of dramatic performances as passionate encounters between actors and audiences – encounters which do not only re-create biblical history as a sensual reality, but in which emotion becomes attached to signs and bodies through theatrical means. It suggests that the attention paid to the processes through which audiences become emotionally invested in a play challenges assumptions about biblical drama of the English towns as a negligible contribution to philosophical and theological thinking in the vernacular.

The analysis is conducted against the background of medieval and modern conceptions of emotions as ethically and morally relevant phenomena at the intersection between body and reason, which is outlined in chapter one. Each of the four main chapters presents a detailed examination of a series of pageants or plays drawn mainly from the Chester and York cycles and the Towneley and N-Town collections. These are supplemented, on occasion, with analysis of individual plays from fragmentary cycles and collections. The examinations undertaken are placed against the

devotional and intellectual backdrop of late medieval England, in order to demonstrate how dramatic performances of biblical subject matter engage with some of the central issues in the wider debate about the human body, soul, and intellect.

The second chapter focuses on the creation of living images on the stage, and specifically on didactically relevant stage images, in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, the Chester *Moses and the Law*, and the N-Town *Moses*. The third chapter shifts the focus to the performance of the Passion in the N-Town second Passion play and the York *Crucifixio Christi*, concentrating on the potential effects of the perception of physical violence on audience response. The subject of chapter four is the emotional behaviours and expressions accorded to the Virgin Mary in the Towneley and N-Town Crucifixion scenes, and those of her precursors, the mothers of the innocents, in the Digby and Coventry plays of the Massacre of the Inncocents. In chapter five, the analysis finally turns to dramatisations of the Resurrection, examining its realisation on stage in the Chester Skinners' play, as well as staged responses to the event by the apostles and the Marys in the N-Town *The Announcement to the Three Marys; Peter and John at the Sepulchre* and the Towneley *Thomas of India*. These four central chapters pave the way for a summary, in the conclusion, of the central problematic underpinning this thesis: how the evocation of emotion in an audience is linked to embodiment in theatrical performance, and tied to a certain awareness, on the part of playwrights, of the popular biblical drama's potential as a locus of philosophical-theological debate.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed: K Pfeiffer

Date: 2nd August 2011

Acknowledgements

List of Illustrations

Abbreviations and Quotations

Chester	*The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS SS 3, 9, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1974-86)
EETS	Early English Text Society
EETS OS	Early English Text Society original series
EETS SS	Early English Text Society supplementary series
LFC	*The Lay Folks' Catechism*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, EETS OS 118 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901, repr. Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1972)
LFC C	The Latin version of Archbishop Thoresby's catechism (1357)
LFC L	A Wycliffite adaptation of Thoresby's catechism
LFC P	The corresponding canons of the Council of Lambeth (1281)
LFC T	Archbishop Thoresby's instructions or catechism (English)
N-Town	*The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8, ed.* by Stephen Spector, EETS SS 11-12, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
REED	Records of Early English Drama
sd	stage direction(s)
ST	Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* 60 vols (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964-81)
Towneley	*The Towneley Plays*, ed. by Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, EETS SS 13-14, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
York	*The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the Corpus Christi Play in British Library Additional MS 35290,* ed. by Richard Beadle, EETS SS 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Notes on quotations

Individual plays and pageants are cited by number and line number(s) in the respective editions listed above. References to the commentaries on plays and pageants, which are usually contained (where applicable) in the second volume of the Early English Text Society editions used here, are given by short title, volume, and page number(s).

Translations of quotations from Latin, German, and French are mine, unless otherwise stated.

All biblical quotations in Latin are taken from *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. by Bonifatius Fischer and Robert Weber, 2nd edn (Stuttgart Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975).

All biblical quotations in English refer to the Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible <http://www.drbo.org/> unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

Some images stay with us for a life-time. In a much-anthologised anecdote, the reforming priest John Shaw recounts his encounter with a man in the parish of Cartmel in April 1644. Curious about the man's religious knowledge, Shaw asks him a series of questions such as how many gods there were and how he thought he would be saved. [1] The unnamed man, though 'sensible enough in other things' (*REED: Cumberland*, p. 219), according to the priest, appeared to have retained nothing he may have heard in sermons about Jesus, nor about salvation by his blood, despite attending 'Common prayer' (ibid.) regularly. But the mention of Christ's death on the cross triggers the memory of an image and an experience long past in the parishioner. 'I think I heard of that man you speke of,' he tells the priest, 'once in a play at *Kendall*, called *Corpus-Christi play* [sic], where there was a man on a tree, & blood ran downe' (*REED: Cumberland,* p. 219). The old man surely was no expert in Christian doctrine, yet his statement should not solely be understood as tacit testimony to the appalling theological ignorance of many medieval and early modern Christians.[2] All the old man knew about Christ he knew thanks to *a play about him.* The dramatic performance of the Crucifixion must have touched him so profoundly that the climactic image of the mutilated, bleeding body of Christ upon the cross burnt itself into his memory. What the quizzing of the old man

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[1] *Records of Early English Drama: Cumberland, Westmoreland, Gloucestershire*, ed. by Audrey Douglas and Peter Greenfield (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 219.

[2] Reformation historians tend towards such a reading of this statement, as Eamon Duffy points out in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400- c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 68.

by a zealous reforming priest really reveals is the enormous imaginative affectiveness of early religious theatre.

Most of the extant dramatic texts for biblical plays like the one the old man of Cartmel parish saw date in manuscript to the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth centuries in England, but civic records, monastic accounts and other sources show that these plays continued to be performed after the English Reformation and into the Elizabethan era. The earliest possible reference to a Corpus Christi play in York dates from 1377, the latest to 1579, for example.[3] Much has been done to assert the value of early religious theatre independent of classical and Renaissance understandings of mimesis, to re-create the material conditions in which it was written and produced, and to illustrate the political, social, and cultural work early drama does.[4] Yet although it is, as Greg Walker puts it, 'a truism that performances of all kinds strive to involve their audiences emotionally,' and that early drama sought to make an affective impression upon its audiences, the question of how *exactly* the "play of God" managed to captivate and move its audiences has often been neglected in studies of late medieval and early modern scriptural drama.[5]

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[3] See *The York Plays: A Critical Edition of the Corpus Christi Play in British Library Additional MS 35290*, ed. by Richard Beadle, EETS SS 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. xxi-xxii for a discussion of the performance dates of Corpus Christi plays in York and the dating of the earliest possible reference to a play.

[4] For a historical perspective on the communal functions of urban religious theatre see, for example, Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The extent to which local concerns shape the content of biblical plays in late medieval England as well as the experiences and visual expectations of spectators is the focus of Gail McMurray Gibson's study of East Anglian dramatic activity, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Claire Sponsler demonstrates how play-texts and documentary evidence of performances encode attitudes towards power relationships within the medieval urban community in *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). The engagement of early English religious theatre with the hermeneutic debates of the later Middle Ages is explored in Ruth Nissé, *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

[5] Greg Walker, 'The Cultural Work of Early Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 75-98 (p. 77).

The aim of this thesis is to address this omission by exploring the emotive and affective strategies deployed in a selection of dramatisations of the Passion and the Resurrection – two seminal events and focal points for late medieval devotion. Drawing on later medieval and contemporary notions of emotions and their relationship with perception and cognition, this thesis seeks to highlight the ways in which playwrights of "popular" scriptural drama used theatrical language to engage with the theologically and philosophically sophisticated debates of the clerical and academic elite. The later medieval biblical drama from England, I suggest, reveals a high degree of awareness of its own possibilities and limitations as a socio-cultural conduit of and to emotion and thought. My larger purpose in doing so is twofold. Firstly, I seek to add to an understanding of the cultural work the biblical drama performed in later medieval England. Secondly, I seek to suggest that attending to the question how a medieval spectator experienced and understood a performance event may bring us closer to understanding an often remarked upon phenomenon: the popularity of "revivals" of medieval religious plays with largely secular, twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences.

The specific and varied scholarly debates in which this project seeks to participate are discussed in individual chapters, whose arguments are sketched below. The remainder of this introduction will address the three areas of scholarship, which inform the line of enquiry I pursue and the close readings of play-texts and attendant documents I offer: treatments of medieval performance practice and audience response; phenomenological and cognitive perspectives on the interaction between actors and spectators in theatrical performance; and the methodologies developed by historians of emotions to talk about medieval emotions.

Performance and Response

The effect of a Passion play on its spectators is a major concern for a remarkable piece of late medieval theatrical criticism, which does not cease to attract scholarly attention.[6] The author of the late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* objects to plays, and to some pictorial representations, precisely because they evoke emotions in the onlooker and thus create an affective, sensual distraction from reality.[7] He offers a neat summary of common arguments in defence of drama's devotional value and efficacy, albeit only with the intention to refute them. At the root of his critique are two related ideas. Firstly, his critique is influenced by the notion that perception in general alters the body and does not only engage the five corporeal senses but the human soul. Perception, in other words, has ethical and spiritual consequences. This idea is ultimately grounded in medieval visual theories, which revolve around questions of the links between vision, touch, and agency.[8] Secondly, the author of the *Tretise* considers spiritual impoverishment a necessary consequence of the embodied practices of the drama. 'The weping that fallith to men and wymmen by þe sighte of siche myraclis pleyinge' (l. 302), he argues, 'is not alowable byfore God but more reprovable' (l. 306) even than the tears of the Daughters of Jerusalem whom Christ reproved on the way to Calvary, because such weeping is caused by the mere *pretence* of suffering. In other words, mimesis and human artifice make a mockery of proper

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[6] Recent studies include Lawrence M. Clopper, 'Is the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* a Lollard Tract against Devotional Drama?', *Viator*, 34 (2003), 229-71; Ruth Nissé, 'Reversing Discipline: The *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, Lollard Exegesis, and the Failure of Representation', *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 11 (1997), 163-94; Glending Olson, 'Plays as Play: A Medieval Ethical Theory of Performance and the Intellectual Context of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*', *Viator*, 26 (1995), 195-221.

[7] *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. by Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993).

[8] For a comprehensive overview of medieval theories of vision see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976). C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) provides an engaging account of popular beliefs concerning vision (pp. 147-89). The influence of visual theories on the understanding of perception in the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* is discussed by Davidson (see *Tretise*, pp. 23-32).

respect for divinity and obstruct spiritual belief – hence the associations of this tract with Lollardy. For the author of the *Tretise*, play can never be worship; hence 'miraclis pleyinge' abases God's word into carnal spectacle and thus sensual delight. This notion is epitomised in the dismissal of religious plays as 'signis without dede' (l. 207) in the second part of the *Tretise*. As John McGavin points out, the *Tretise* is as much concerned with the effects of watching plays as with 'pleyinge' itself.[9] The author's argument, he observes, 'does not seem to imply much distinction between the two categories of action, treating actors and spectators as participants in a common enterprise' (p. 186). However, "pleyinge" and the actors have received the lion's share of critical interest, while the question what effect "pleyinge" had on the people who watched it has often been set aside.

The paucity of comment on this issue within literary and historical criticism is perhaps unsurprising given the air of uncertainty which surrounds medieval performances. Any study which attempts to deal with "medieval English drama" as such and, more importantly, with responses to it, must inevitably be prefaced with a large number of caveats. The first one concerns the corpus of works itself. Most of the play-texts we have are recovered by their modern editors from single manuscripts dating to the late medieval and Renaissance period in England, some of which show clear signs of revisions postdating the Reformation.[10] In using modern editions of the extant play-texts, we are in effect basing our interpretations on 'fossilized' versions of the play, in Richard Beadle's words.[11] Moreover, it is difficult to gain an impression of 'the metamorphosis by which the texts were fashioned into performances' (Nissé, *Defining Acts*, p. 3). While some, such as the N-Town collection, include a plethora of

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[9] John J. McGavin, 'Medieval Theatricality and Spectatorship', *Theta*, 8 (2009), 183-200 (p. 186).

[10] Nissé discusses the problems for dramatic scholarship arising from the continuous use of manuscripts over many decades and the layers of revision they show (*Defining Acts,* pp. 3-4).

[11] 'The York Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 85-108 (p. 90).

stage directions, others such as the Towneley plays contain only sparse information about staging. Iconographic and comparative studies can fill in some gaps about the mise-en-scène, costumes, and movements, for example, and some information can also be gathered from extant civic and monastic records, or from the household accounts of the gentry, particularly where an existing play-text manuscript can be convincingly linked to such known external records of performance.[12] The publication of many such documentary materials of dramatic activity in the Records of Early English Drama project (REED) during the past three decades facilitated enquiries into the material conditions of performances, as well as the role of dramatic performance in local religious culture. Yet the availability of putatively stable and verifiable data has also, I think, encouraged a somewhat positivistic approach to late medieval drama, which favours the elaboration and explication of documentary evidence for performances over considering what kind of experience such performances provided for their fifteenth-and sixteenth-century audiences.

Among the few studies which have addressed the question how a fifteenth-century playgoer, well familiar with biblical stories, reacted to the performance of a Corpus Christi play, is V. A. Kolve's *The Play Called Corpus Christi*.[13] Kolve's main concern is with the didacticism of "play", and the effect he envisages being produced by the performance of Christological suffering amounts to a Christianised, moral variation on Aristotelian *catharsis*. Comic violence, he argues, functions as a distancing device, which helps 'to make the physical horror [of the Passion] tolerable as an

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[12] Early iconographic scholarship explored the similarities between art and drama with an eye to establishing one as the source of the iconography of the other. Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by Dora Nussey (London: Collins, 1961) provides an example such older approaches. Two recent publications which – unlike many others – consider religious theatre as part of the visual devotional culture of the day are the essays contained in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), and Theodore K. Lerud, *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[13] V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966).

aesthetic experience' (p. 199). The authors of the Middle English Passion plays, Kolve asserts, 'presented the death of Christ as a thing of consummate horror and shame clearly intending that the violence and laughter on stage should be answered by silence and awe in the audience [...]' (p. 138). While later medieval meditative and homiletic treatments of the Passion set forth such responses as the desired outcome of empathising with the physical suffering of Christ, Kolve's attempt to anchor audience response within the framework of later medieval affective devotion fails to take into account documentary evidence which suggests that even representations of sacred subject matters could arouse responses other than veneration.[14] For example, the Masons at York complained in 1431-32 that their play of the *Funeral of the Virgin* 'used to produce more noise and laughter than devotion' ('magis risu*m* & clamor*em* causabat q*u*am deuocionem').[15] Moreover, stipulating horror, pity, or awe as both desired and actual emotional responses on the part of the onlookers ignores the possibility of sadistic or masochistic pleasure from watching suffering. Moreover, it disregards that a spectator's engagement with public religious drama necessarily differs from his or her engagement with a literary text, a sermon, or a static image by merit of its embodied practices.[16]

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[14] For the ideals and practices of medieval affective devotion see, for example, Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686 with Introduction, Notes and Glossary*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005) and Shropshire canon-regular John Mirk's Corpus Christi sermon, which extols the virtues of crucifixes for spiritual edification (see *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. by Susan Powell, EETS OS 334 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 154-60, especially p. 157. The bases of affective piety in medieval visual theory and the development of new theories of atonement in the twelfth century are discussed in Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) respectively.

[15] *Records of Early English Drama: York*, ed. by Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978-79), II, 732 and I, 48 (Latin original).

[16] John Gatton points to the potential pleasure inherent in watching repulsive acts in John Spalding Gatton, '"There Must Be Blood": Mutilation and Martyrdom on the Medieval Stage', in *Violence in Drama*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 79-82.

The performative aspects of embodiment and its role in social and cultural transformation at the eve of the English Reformation are at the forefront of Sarah Beckwith's *Signifying God*.[17] Her study marks the departure in medieval drama studies from the New Historicist and cultural-materialist approaches prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s in that its core concern is theological. Beckwith's faith in the theological work religious drama can do thus stands in stark contrast to Nicholas Watson's famous dismissal of the vernacular religious drama as an 'ephemeral form' in his discussion of the developments of vernacular theology in the wake of Archbishop Arundel's Constitutions.[18] *Signifying God* has influenced a number of studies in recent years which seek to establish religious drama as 'a new style of English theology'.[19] Focussing on the York cycle, Beckwith approaches biblical plays as 'sacramental theater' (p. xvii). For her, religious theatre is therefore neither simply an expression, nor an experience, of religion; like the sacrament, it is a performance of community. Central to her study is the aim to present theology and medieval drama not as static binaries but as categories which share a system of signification and a reliance on performance (p. 122), epitomised by her understanding of the performer's body as a phenomenological object and a vehicle for semiosis (p. 64).[20] Any concern with signifying processes within religious plays necessarily raises questions about the ways in which a spectator may have engaged with and derived meaning from a performance. And yet, these are set aside in

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[17] Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[18] Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70 (1995), 822-64 (p.824, n. 4).

[19] Nissé, *Defining Acts*, p. 8. Or as Kate Crassons recently put it: 'Medieval drama largely explores religious issues in a non-academic mode that distinctively understands theology as a lived practice and experience'. See Kate Crassons, 'Performance Anxiety and Watson's Vernacular Theology', *English Language Notes*, 44 (2006), 95-102 (p. 99).

[20] Beckwith's understanding of drama as something to be only appreciated and understood when experienced in performance, is not fundamentally new. Rosemary Woolf already reminds the readers of her *English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) that the biblical drama was meant to be enacted and perceived visually rather than read in a book (p. 100). Gibson makes a comparable point when she asserts that the incarnational focus of medieval devotion allows for the human body to function as an icon (pp. 15-18).

two ways in *Signifying God*: firstly, through the levelling out of religious difference in Beckwith's understanding of the audience, and secondly, through fading out other aspects, which condition the spectatorial experience, such as socio-economic factors, or the viewing position of audience members.[21] Moreover, Beckwith's tight focus on the sacramentally powerful polysemy of biblical theatre, grounded in its conflation of actual and symbolic events, further encourages reflection on staged bodies, rather than on the audience. The audience Beckwith envisages for the York cycle functions predominantly as a community of believers; its presence is necessary for Christ to be present in 'sacramental theater' (pp. 87-88). The audience, in other words, is a homogeneous mass without a psychology.

The ways in which plays themselves shape audience response processes and script response roles is the main focus of Heather Hill-Vásquez's *Sacred Players*.[22] Hill-Vásquez's analysis draws on a number of different interpretative praxes, from reception theory, to new historicism, to feminist criticism and gender theory. Yet *Rezeptionsästhetik,* the preferred interpretative paradigm in German literary criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, with its emphasis on the importance of textual interpretation by the reader provides the theoretical underpinning for *Sacred Players,* as it allows Hill-Vásquez to approach the problem of how religious meaning is produced in dramatic performance without recourse to the theological framework employed, for example, by Beckwith. The emphasis in her investigation can thus rest on the factors which *shape* the way an audience interprets and responds to a performance – rather than the arguably elusive response itself. This may provide a model for examining the emotionality of medieval religious plays. However, Hill-Vásquez's conclusions about the dynamics of

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[21] A variety of factors shaping the spectatorial experience and the spectator's imaginative absorption into the play world are explored in McGavin, 'Medieval Theatricality'.

[22] Heather Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players: The Politics of Response in the Middle English Religious Drama* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

audience response are not necessarily always fully convincing. This includes, for example, the suggestion she advances with regard to the 'likely' (p. 129) reaction of an audience to the hypermasculinity of the ranting and raging Herod in the *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle*. She speculates in *Sacred Players*:

> [A] fully interactive audience, intent upon invoking the transcendent power of religious drama, would [...] embrace the opportunity to experience the disempowered and potentially emasculated state Herod's brutish treatment seeks. (pp. 129-30)

Despite the use of the conditional, this conclusion is problematic, as it is predicated on the idea that the audience's imaginative absorption into the world of the play is not unsettled in any way by extraneous non-theatrical circumstances and, more importantly, that they allow themselves to be absorbed. Much medieval drama aims at incorporating its audiences into the action by fusing the biblical narrative and historical present of the performance. However, McGavin cautions:

> Achieving a deep imaginative participation is not a *sine qua non* of spectatorship, however valued it might be in literary-critical circles. What spectators want is what they want, and that may not always be absorption in the event. ('Medieval Theatricality', p. 189)

This holds particularly true for outdoor events such as performances of the Digby *Candlemes and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle*. Not much is known about the exact provenance of the surviving play-text, which is largely written in an East Midlands dialect and can be dated to the early sixteenth century.[23] Yet the prologue to the play suggests that it perhaps belonged to a touring group of professional players (*Digby*, p. lix), presenting its play(s) in the streets, market squares, inn-yards, and greens of the towns they visited. In the absence of a dedicated playhouse, there was scope for the

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[23] *The Late Medieval Religious Plays of Bodleian MSS. Digby 133 and E. Museo 160*, ed. by Donald C. Baker, John L. Murphy and Louis B. Hall, EETS OS 283 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. lii-liii. For the play-text, see pp. 96-115. Subsequent references to the play-text are by the short title Digby, *Kyllyng*, followed by line number; references to the critical apparatus are by the short title *Digby* and page number(s).

spectator to choose his or her relationship to the theatrical action and thus their level of imaginative absorption.[24] The degree of theatrical engagement must have varied in nature and degree depending on the physical proximity of the spectator to the action as well as to those other spectators, on their relationship with other spectators and on what else they might have been doing while watching – or, in short, on such things as the socio-economic situation and gender of the spectator.[25]

Making an effort to understand audience reponse, then, would seem somewhat of a dead end in the light of the uncertainties surrounding medieval theatrical performances and their spectators. Yet questions about the potential impact of medieval religious plays are neither negligible nor impossible to answer. There has been a lot of interest in recent years in the ways in which performances of religious plays can function as religious, social, and cultural experiences. However we cannot fully understand performances of biblical plays as such experiences, if we only examine the refraction of theological ideas in individual plays, the material conditions of performances, or the contexts of historical performances, as has so often been the case. In order to grasp how a medieval playgoer derived meaning from the performance of a biblical play, we have to consider it as an element in the larger context of affective devotion in the later Middle Ages. This requires a certain amount of lateral thinking. Such thinking begins with the attempt to re-create the public spectacle of the feast day celebrations on which most of the extant biblical plays were staged, with attempts to decode references to (local) liturgical events, and with considering performances in the larger network of visual devotion in the later Middle Ages. It ends with thinking about "the audience" and its potential reaction to the events presented on stage. Conceiving of "the audience" as a coherent body is a vast generalisation, but a necessary one.

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[24] McGavin, 'Medieval Theatricality', p. 6. For the staging of the Digby play see *Digby*, pp. lix-lxii.

[25] McGavin, 'Medieval Theatricality', pp. 190-91 on importance of these factors for the experience provided by Heywood's *Play of the Weather*.

Theatre audiences are always made up of individuals, to whose inner life we do not and cannot have direct access. In the absence of such direct access (or documentary evidence), it is difficult to be confident about how a play is received by the people who watch it.[26] Ultimately, we can never know precisely what another person thinks or feels, be they our contemporaries or still more a member of the audience at the fifteenth-century performance of a biblical play. Yet late medieval affective devotion is influenced by a complex nexus of ideas about the interaction of perception, emotion, and cognition. And notwithstanding major differences in governing assumptions, these ideas often overlap with modern cognitive theories. It is such later medieval and modern cognitive theories, which allow us to catch a glimpse of the inner lives of historical others, because they offer a bridge, as it were, to the medieval spectator's experience of a biblical play built on his or her physical engagement with the stage action and the actors on the one hand, and our own corporeality on the other.

Spectatorship: Phenomenology and Cognitive Theory

Phenomenological approaches to theatre have long recognised the importance of the corporeality of both actors and spectators in shaping the experience of a performance. Simon Shepherd writes, for example:

> Theatre is an art of bodies witnessed by bodies. Witnesses are something more than passive viewers. In the act of witnessing a person attests to the truth of something that is or was present to them. [27]

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[26] Walker makes this point in 'Cultural Work', p. 82.

[27] Simon Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 73. John J. McGavin follows Shepherd's argument with regard to witnessing in *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

This holds particularly true for the biblical drama of later medieval England. As McGavin points out, '[b]earing witness to drama is not just a matter of highly-charged looking' ('Medieval Theatricality', p. 197). The notion that sight creates a physical link between the observer and the observed and might penetrate beyond the visible to the eternal realities of the divine, which then become physically present, is one of the capstones of late classical and medieval ideas about vision (Woolgar, p. 148). Bringing a past biblical event to life again on the stage in a consciously contemporary context, a scriptural play enables and encourages its audiences to respond actively to it and to attest to the legitimacy of what is seen. In medieval religious theatre, then, the body of the actor is invested with significance, but also that of the spectator. Recent treatments of spectatorship in (modern) theatre studies like Shepherd's may help us to understand this significance, as well as the role that the face-to-face interaction between performers and spectators plays in the creation of meaning in the performance of biblical plays.

Shepherd notes that for both actor and spectator of a play or performance, the body is the agent and site of theatrical experience. Some effects, he argues, 'are produced in the spectator simply as a result of materially sharing the space with the performance [and], bypassing the intellect, are felt in the body and work powerfully to shape a spectator's sense of the performance' (pp. 36-37). Others are brought about by the kinetic interplay between the bodies of actors and audiences created by the concurrent production and perception of signs and actions. Shepherd conceives of this interplay as a rhythmic confrontation between performers and spectators:

> [A] play's rhythm works on the audience. It does so through the agency of the performer body rhythm which stimulates response in audience bodies. The audience bodies are not, however, without their own rhythm, which is derived from their everyday lives. In watching, the rhythm of their bodies may be confirmed or drawn into a new rhythm by the play. [...] Thus body rhythm is the agency whereby a play may negotiate with its audience an affirmation or deviation from the rhythmic experience of their everyday lives. (p. 85)

The physically present performer executes actions and presents signs; the equally physically present spectator reacts bodily and interprets the signs he or she perceives. Thus for Shepherd, mimesis is not only the relation between the actor and the real world but also the 'physical behaviour of the audience in relation to the acted world' (p. 9). It is through the agency of, and rhythmic confrontation with, the performing body that the audience negotiate their relationship to time and space (p. 113) and derive meaning from the performance event. Meaning should not be solely understood as a mental phenomenon, but rather as a state of consciousness, as Erika Fischer-Lichte points out.[28] In *Die Ästhetik des Performativen*, she categorises feelings and emotions as meanings, which emerge from the act of perception and manifest themselves in and on the body (p. 263). In doing so, she draws directly on empirical work in the cognitive sciences, most notably the cognitive concept of the embodied mind.[29]

Bruce McConachie has made a case for the potential explanatory power of the cognitive sciences for theatre studies, because they appear to provide the beginnings of a biological explanation for audience engagement in theatre and the interactivity of spectatorship.[30] Recent research into human neural mechanisms has revealed a number of visuomotor neurons in the brain which fire both when we observe an action, and when we execute the same action or even when we just imagine it. However, such neural processes, involving what have come to be known as "mirror neurons," also

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[28] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Die Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 244-47, 267. Although Fischer-Lichte primarily explores the aesthetics of post-1960s theatre and performance art, her conclusions may help to make sense of past performance situations, not least becasue of the striking parallels between modern and medieval drama in terms of theatrical practices.

[29] Fischer-Lichte (p. 267) refers to Antonio Damasio's thesis that the motivation for our actions is not necessarily provided by rational reflection but by emotions and feelings, which he explores in *Descartes' Error,* rev. edn (London: Vintage, 2006), and *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000).

[30] See Bruce McConachie, 'Doing Things with Image Schemas: The Cognitive Turn in Theatre Studies and the Problem of Experience for Historians', *Theatre Journal*, 53 (2001), 569-94, and 'Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies', *Theatre Journal*, 59 (2007), 553-77.

occur in response to sound.[31] When we hear someone performing an action with a distinctive sound, such as hammering, the same action is simulated neutrally in our brain. Moreover, mirror neurons also respond to the perception of emotion.[32] It has therefore been suggested that neural mirror processes play a crucial role in understanding the actions and emotions of others, partly because they reconstruct these actions and emotions *in us*:

> With this mechanism [i.e. the mirror neuron system] we do not just 'see' or 'hear' an action or an emotion. Side by side with the sensory description of the observed social stimuli, internal representations of the state associated with these actions or emotions are evoked in the observer 'as if' they were performing a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion. [33]

Neuroscientists like Gallese emphasise that mirror mechanisms in the human brain may shed light on the way we empathise with others. Empathy can be thought of as a kind of 'as if'-performance made possible by the functional mechanisms described by Gallese and his colleagues above: embodied simulation. Damasio makes a similar point when discussing mirror neurons as part of what he calls the 'as-if-body-loop': the human body and mind interact in response to the image of an action 'as if' it were the real thing, so to speak. Thus the 'as-if-body-loop' presents the experiencer with a situation not unlike the theatre (*Descartes' Error*, pp. 155-58). Moreover, it has recently been proposed that such mirroring mechanisms and embodied simulations play a

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[31] For a brief overview of mirror neurons and the implications of their discovery for the cognitive sciences, as well as current debates concerning the human mirror neuron system, see Christian Keysers, 'Mirror Neurons', *Current Biology*, 19 (2009), R971- R973. Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirror in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, trans. by Frances Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) provides an accessible and comprehensive account.

[32] See Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, as well as Bruno Wicker and others, 'Both of Us Disgusted in *My* Insula: The Common Neural Basis of Seeing and Feeling Disgust', *Neuron*, 40 (2003), 655-64.

[33] Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers and Giacomo Rizzolatti, 'A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 8 (2004), 396-403 (p. 400). For Gallese and his colleagues, the human ability to access the emotions and intentions of others simply by watching them, grounded in the mirror neuron system, is the basis of social cognition. Similar positions are expressed by a number of other researchers, whose work will be discussed in the chapters where they are most relevant to my analysis. Yet it is necessary to bear in mind that mirror neuron research is still a relatively new field and hence constantly developing. Evidence of the role of the mirror neuron system in human cognitive functions is far from undisputed. Keysers, 'Mirror Neurons' offers a brief overview of recent challenges to the existence of mirror neurons in humans and to their role in action understanding, as well as a response to these challenges.

crucial role in aesthetic responses to works of art because they facilitate 'the direct experiential understanding of the intentional and emotional contents of images'.[34]

However, the findings concerning the mind's ability to engage in what is usually called social cognition, simulation, or empathy, can also help to understand how 'audiences "read the minds" of actors' or characters in a play, as McConachie argues ('Falsifiable Theories', p. 563). Firstly, it provides epistemological reassurance for historical enquiries into the experiences provided by performances.[35] Mirror mechanisms and embodied simulation processes are highly automatic and pre-conscious. In other words, certain aspects of human perception and experience are universal. Hence historical, cultural and contextual factors do not preclude the possibility of considering the responses to art works or performances by historically situated onlookers, when these are based on the neural processes arising from sensual engagement. I therefore agree with McConachie that 'if we are interested in audience response from a scientific point of view, the mode of imitation triggered by [mirror] neurons (and their consequences) should be part of our explanation' ('Falsifiable Theories', p. 565). Jill Stevenson's recent treatment of late medieval drama and its relationship with lay devotional culture in *Performance, Cognitive Theory and Devotional Culture* illustrates how this can be achieved and highlights the contributions cognitive theory can make to literary and historical studies.[36] Cognitive theory, in brief, offers new ways to read medieval biblical plays in the context of the generation, manipulation, and

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[34] David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, 'Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11 (2007), 197-203 (p. 202).

[35] In 'Falsifiable Theories', McConachie points out the challenges brought to historical notions of "experience" by poststructuralist theorists.

[36] Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Stevenson develops a concept of "performance literacy", based on cognitive blending, a theory based on the notion that humans develop coherent structures of meaning through the blending and unblending of mental concepts derived from percepts. Stevenson examines devotional objects and the physical space of York as 'material anchors' (p. 87) for conceptual blends, and argues that medieval performance events, by merit of embodiment, offer their audiences 'sensually enhanced blending opportunities that could generate extremely powerful devotional encounters' (p. 89).

perpetuation of devotional meaning in the Middle Ages through the physical stimulations triggered by the spectator's sensual engagement with a religious performance. In this project, I seek to explore how neuroscientific theory, in conjunction with the new emphasis on the relevance of emotional processes for social cognition, can shed light not only on the power of materiality in theatrical performance, but particularly on the contribution emotional displays on stage make to a spectator's response to a biblical play.[37]

Medieval Emotions

Historical approaches to emotions, a relatively new, yet rapidly expanding field, have long profited from research models emerging from the cognitive sciences and anthropology. The historian William Reddy, for example, draws on recent research in cognitive psychology and anthropology to provide the basis for his understanding of emotional expressions as types of speech act in *The Navigation of Feeling*.[38] Reddy conceives of emotional expressions primarily as utterances akin to linguistic performatives – as "emotives".[39] He defines "emotives" as 'first-person, present-tense

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[37] The essays contained in part four of *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. by Michael Lewis, Jeanette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett, 3rd edn (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), pp. 395-470, provide an overview of social perspectives. In this study, I will mainly draw on Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) and on psychological studies such as June Price Tangney, Jeff Stuewig and Debra J. Mashek, 'Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58 (2007), 345-74. For the interactions between neuroscientific perspectives and theory of mind, which also inform this thesis, see Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, 'Integrating Simulation and Theory of Mind: From Self to Social Cognition', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11 (2007), 194-96.

[38] William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[39] Reddy introduces the concept of "emotives" already in 'Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions', *Current Anthropology*, 38 (1997), 327-51 as a means (along with the concept of "translation") of bridging the theoretical and conceptual gulf between anthropological and some psychological approaches to emotions. While constructionist views dominate in anthropological research, a significant body of psychological work, particularly on so-called "basic" emotions, considers emotions to be a matter of biology. The ongoing debate as what emotions actually *are* will be outlined in chapter one of this thesis.

emotion claims' (*Navigation,* p. 104), which may function as 'instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions' (ibid.). The notion that emotives, like performatives, 'do something to the world' (*Navigation*, p. 111) provides the basis for his main argument in *The Navigation of Feeling*, that emotional utterances in eighteenth- and nineteenth century French literature were instrumental in bringing about the French Revolution. Thus *The Navigation of Feeling* provides a compelling example of the bridges which are being built between psychology and history, but also history and literature, through historical work on emotions.

Explorations of medieval emotions have fared rather well in recent years as historians have started to investigate specific emotions such as love, anger, fear, and hatred and seek to map the relationship between changes in 'emotional regimes' (Reddy, *Navigation*, p. 124) and other aspects of medieval culture.[40] The emphasis in existing scholarship is on the social and devotional functions of emotions. The German medieval historian Gerd Althoff, for example, has repeatedly argued that displays of particular emotions, particularly of anger, may function as signs within symbolic communication and ritual.[41] Barbara Rosenwein's latest study, *Emotional Communities*, similarly explores the collective dimension of emotions. However, instead of concentrating on strategic displays, as Althoff does, she aims to illustrate collective values through the emotional expressions found in individual classical and early medieval voices, from funery epitaphs to the writings of Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours and Merovingian saints' lives. The complexity of medieval emotional life and its

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[40] For a general overview of studies in particular emotions see Barbara H. Rosenwein, 'Writing Without Fear about Medieval Emotions', *Early Medieval Europe* 10 (2001), pp. 229-34 and her *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). For perspectives on anger see *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barbara Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[41] See, for example, Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003) and 'Ira regis: A Prolegomena to a History of Royal Anger', in *Anger's Past*, ed. by Barbara Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 59-75.

integration with the ideals and actions in religion is also a core concern of Sarah McNamer's *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*. [42] Questioning the origins of affective meditation, she approaches her subject through meditations on the Passion, texts which promote compassion with the suffering Christ as 'a historically contingent, ideologically charged, and performatively constituted emotion' (p. 3), and which is moreover 'gendered as feminine' (ibid.). Affective meditations, she argues, can be understood as 'intimate scripts', designed to be enacted by the reader in order to bring about the desired emotional experience: they 'teach their readers, through iterative affective performance, how to feel' (p. 2). McNamer's study is interesting for the purposes of this thesis due to the vernacular texts she considers, particularly Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, were highly influential in shaping the depiction of the Passion in biblical plays. [43]

McNamer mainly explores the verbal means through which these texts seek to shape and guide the meditative experiences of their readers. Her study thus clearly illustrates the methodologies deployed by historians to access medieval emotions.[44] For her, as for most of her colleagues, emotions are first and foremost words. In our daily lives, we do not have access to one another's emotions and feelings, but only to their bodily expressions, be those conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary, oral or gestural. Most historians of emotion are careful to point out that the gestures, physiological changes, words, exclamations, and tears we encounter in medieval texts and images are not the emotions themselves, but merely "symptoms", which are further

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[42] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[43] The influence of Love's *Mirror* on the biblical drama in the vernacular is discussed by Sargent as part of the introduction to his edition of Love's work (pp. 22-23). For the ways in which Marian laments, for example, shaped the configuration of characters and the dialogue in dramatic representations of the Passion story see Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Joseph R. Berrigan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

[44] For a discussion of the methodological hurdles facing historians of emotions see Rosenwein, 'Writing without Fear'.

obscured by thick layers of cultural description.[45] They must be interpreted both by the person experiencing them (in order to express them) as well as by the observer.[46] Hence a certain amount of lexicographical work forms the basis of virtually every historical enquiry into emotions, but much of the historical work lies in understanding the cultural significance and meaning of emotion words.

These largely text-based historical methodologies serve as a starting point for this project, as they help delineate the 'emotional communities', to borrow Rosenwein's expression, from which biblical pageants emerged. Given the embodied nature of the drama and the fluidity of the dramatic text, as well as its performance history, they cannot, however, suffice to explain how biblical plays engaged their audiences physically, emotionally, and intellectually – or indeed the (visual as well as verbal) discourses in which they participated. Medieval biblical theatre was always a community event of physically present people; therefore this project will draw on research models developed in theatre studies and the cognitive sciences for understanding physical interactions between actors and spectators, thus shedding light on how the embodied practices of drama may turn the performance of a biblical play into an emotional encounter and a comment on models of emotional production.

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[45] Carolyne Larrington stresses the importance of nonverbal psychological symptoms of emotions in a scholar's attempt to cut through 'the emotional display as part of a symbolic and theatricalised communication system' in 'The Psychology of Emotion and the Study of the Medieval Period', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2001), 251-56 (p. 254).

[46] See Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 27.

Passionate Encounters

The emotional resonances created in live performances of biblical plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are necessarily bound up with the unashamed didacticism of early religious drama. Biblical plays overtly sought to instruct and edify their audiences – with varying degrees of success, as the story of the old man from Cartmel parish, with which I opened this introduction, suggests. It is precisely the edifying and didactic qualities that are emphasised by many a surviving record of theatrical activity. Thus, the Corpus Christi Account Rolls for 1449-51 note that Sir William Revetour, a theatrically-minded civic clerk, left a book in English to the Corpus Christi fraternity in York containing several 'pages of instruction and information about the Christian faith, commonly called Creed play' ('paginas de instructione & informacione fidei christiane vulgariter vocate Crede Playe').[47] Revetour also donated ornaments, costumes and banners pertaining to the play, stipulating the following conditions:

> [T]hat within (every) 12 years at the most, if it can be fittingly (done) openly and publicly through the city of York in various <places> [*sic*], both to the praise of God and particularly to the educating of the people <...>, indeed so that the Creed may be brought to the ignorant of the city [...].[48]

The salvation of the uneducated of the city was obviously a matter close to Sir William Revetour's heart, and was considered best achieved by engaging with edifying subject matter, most notably the blood-soaked visions of Christ's Passion – the undisputed focus of medieval Christological devotion. Revetour's donation reflects an understanding of theatre as an instrument for imparting theological knowledge, and of dramatic representation as a conduit for spiritual engagement and edification. It thus

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[47] *REED: York*, II, 755. For the Latin original, see *REED: York*, I, 78.

[48] *REED: York*, II, 757. The Latin original reads:'[Q]uod infra xij annos ad maius si congrue poterit per Civitatem Ebor' palam & publice diuersis <…> & ad laudem dei erudicionem <…> populi specialius <...> immo ut crede porteratur ad ignorantium modicum commodum Civitatis' (*REED: York*, I, 80).

implicitly acknowledges that the sensually perceptible materiality of the performance image, with its ability to touch the observer, facilitates a spiritually efficacious encounter between the lay spectator and devotional or catechetical subject matters. Knowledge, perception, representation, and effect are key terms in two distinct yet related debates conducted in late medieval England: the debate concerning the religious education and devotional practices of the laity and that concerning the legitimacy of visual representation of sacred subject matters. They are also the key terms around which this thesis is structured.

Beginning with an overview of high and late medieval philosophical and modern understandings of emotions, and their relationship with perception and cognition, the chapters of this thesis move from discussing the overt dramatisation of catechetical materials to analysing the realisation on stage of Christological suffering, and finally to investigating enlivened takes on one of Christianity's most problematic doctrines: the Resurrection. The project draws on a selection of plays with biblical subject matters from a variety of locations in late medieval England, and the chronological edges of the surviving texts and performance histories of the scriptural plays discussed here are formed by the York and Chester cycles. The decision to include a wide range of biblical plays, rather than to focus on one collection or cycle is a deliberate one. My intention is not to evoke the world of medieval York or Chester, for example, but to highlight how later medieval drama in general provided a public sphere, in which the intellectual engagement with religiously relevant ideas and concepts could thrive.

Chapter One, 'Theorising Emotions', offers a brief overview of medieval and modern definitions of the ontology and function of emotions. It reads influential encyclopaedic and philosophical-theological accounts, such as Bartholomæus Anglicus's early thirteenth-century *De proprietatibus rerum* and Thomas Aquinas's *quaestiones* on the *passiones animae* in the *Summa theologiæ*, alongside Middle English homiletic and meditative materials, as well as modern research to highlight the connections between medieval and modern understandings of emotional production and the role of emotion in human social behaviour. This outline of medieval and modern conceptions of emotion as an ethically and morally relevant psychological phenomenon at the intersection between the body and reason serves as a backdrop for the central issue examined in subsequent chapters: the function assumed for emotions and the engagement with the debates surrounding emotion in the embodied spectacles of Middle English scriptural drama.

Chapter Two, 'Moving Images', focuses on the late medieval controversy over the legitimacy and usefulness of theatrical (re)presentation of catechetical materials through dramatisations of the Old Testament episode of the Giving of the Law. Modern scholarship, especially when invested in examining the signifying practices of biblical drama, frequently holds up the critique of religious theatre provided by the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* and the defences of (living) images mounted by Reginald Pecock and the anonymous author of *Dives and Pauper* as the richest sources of critical engagement with representational issues. This chapter seeks to show that biblical drama can be equally rich in its theatrical involvement with the contemporary image debate. By highlighting how the playwrights responsible for the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, the Chester *Moses and the Law*, and the N-Town *Moses* understood theological-

epistemological argument devotionally, this chapter illustrates the role of biblical drama as a powerful embodied alternative to the static devotional image.

The embodied practices of the theatre (in general) distinguish its mimetic strategies from those used in the visual arts and literature. This is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in treatments of the Passion. The frequently commented upon bloody realism of the Passion on the late medieval English stage is often approached with an eye to the ideals and practices of affective devotion with its emphasis on the excesses of Christ's physical suffering. The material presence of actors, I argue, allows the possibility of an alternative explanation for the graphic violence on the late medieval English religious stage. Chapter Three, 'Touching Sights', puts forward modern research into the links between perceiving and feeling as providing such an alternative. Current research into human neural systems suggests that perception involves a degree of physical engagement between the perceiver and the perceived, which is similar in some respects to the engagement proposed in medieval visual models. Chapter Three discusses dramatic scenes of violence against Christ's body not as a series of iconographic signs, nor (primarily) in terms of the devotional traditions with which they are usually associated, but rather as an experience which seeks to shape the spectator's perceptual (and hence cognitive) engagement with the Passion. The cruel punishments meted out to the Christ-figure in the N-Town trial sequence and the laborious stretching and nailing of Christ onto the cross in the York *Crucifixion* can, I suggest, be considered a means of solving 'the problem of other minds' by putting the watching and listening onlooker in Christ's skin, as it were.[49] More than this, though, the empathy with the perpetrators of violence encouraged by the York *Crucifixion* is representative,

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[49] Marco Iacoboni, 'Imitation, Empathy and Mirror Neurons', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60 (2009), 653-70 (653).

this chapter will argue, of an awareness of the physical and intellectual links between actors and spectators based in perception.

The intensity of Christological suffering on the late medieval English stage was usually compounded by lively displays of maternal sorrow in the figure of the Virgin Mary. The first part of Chapter Four, 'Staged Emotions', is concerned with the representation on stage of Marian grief. The bodily gestures and verbalisations of emotions accorded to the figure of Mary in the Towneley and N-Town Crucifixion episodes, I argue, shape the reception of these pageants by the audience, because they provide impulses for emotional contagion responses. Moreover, they illustrate how these pageants acknowledge existing emotion scripts for Marian grief, but make the Virgin the locus for the discussion of the theological dangers inherent in emotional excess. The second part of the chapter turns to a group of female characters, who are frequently considered precursors to the Virgin in their profuse expressions of grief: the mothers of the Innocents. In two existing dramatisations of the massacre of the children, the Digby play of *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle,* and the Coventry play of the Shearmen and Tailors, passive maternal grief turns into fierce resistance. Maternal anger here comes to be understood as a rational response to a transgressive act; examining the staging of maternal anger thus illuminates the significance of emotional displays for the creation of social meaning in and through biblical plays.

Questions of rationality and cognitive processing are the subject matter of Chapter Five, 'Making Sense'. The medieval debate about the value of sensory perception concerning matters of faith was shaped, firstly, by the neoplatonic distrust of the body which lived on in the Augustinian tradition, and secondly by the Thomistic emphasis on the necessity of thinking through *phantasmata,* or mental images, which are

the emotionally encoded key link between sense and understanding. 'Making Sense' examines the logic of sensation in dramatisations of the Resurrection, against the background of differing attitudes towards sensory perception, its emotional consequences, and its role in faith. It takes as its focus the staging of the Resurrection moment in the Chester Skinners' play, as well as reactions to the Resurrection in the N-Town *The Announcement to the Three Marys; Peter and John at the Sepulchre* and the Towneley *Thomas of India.* Bringing Christ back to life in the body of a living actor, these plays are in themselves manifestations of the re-orientation in later medieval religious culture from the word of God to verification by contingent experience. Moreover, the responses to the Resurrection staged here reinforce notions of female emotionality as opposed to male rationality palpable also in the scripted responses to the Crucifixion. Yet in doing so, these plays provide sophisticated explorations of the psychology of doubt and balanced comments on the epistemic function of sensation, as well as the role of reason and emotion in Christian faith.

The plays and pageants to be discussed here were all deeply concerned with questions of perception, emotion and cognition. In the chapters which follow, this thesis will argue that the Middle English scriptural drama deals with and places these concerns within a larger discourse on discerning truth from falsehood, reality and representation. The biblical plays of the fifteenth- and early sixteenth centuries, by employing and embodying terms and concepts from contemporary philosophical and theological discourse, present and explore the possibilities of theatre, allowing their audiences to see, hear, understand – and perhaps debate – in a public sphere a far greater range of concerns and questions than is often recognised.

Chapter 1
Theorising Emotions

Philosophical and medical speculation into the nature and value of emotions is at least as old as the pre-Socratics. Long considered the poor relative of reason, they have become a topic *du jour* in the fields of cognitive psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and literary history in recent years. The past three decades have seen a hitherto unprecedented explosion of interest in the physiological mechanisms and the human significance of the mental states commonly referred to as emotions. Contemporary discourses about emotions emphasise their role as the source of many of our actions and seek to "rehabilitate" them as non-antagonistic to reason.[1] In doing so, most existing studies position themselves as responses to seminal sixteenth and seventeenth-century psychological discourses on the passions with their often stark distinction between emotion and reason and their belief in the superiority of reason.[2]

Even though early modern discourses are in turn descendant from medieval conceptions of the *passiones*, enquiries into the historical provenances of modern theories of emotions have frequently blotted out the theological psychology of the Middle Ages from the ancestry of modern visions of the emotions. This is perhaps

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[1] For an overview of recent developments. see *Understanding Emotions*, ed. by Keith Oatley, Dacher Keltner and Jennifer M. Jenkins, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), and Robert C. Solomon, 'The Philosophy of the Emotions', in *Handbook of Emotion*, ed. by Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones and Lisa Feldman Barrett, 3rd edn (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), pp. 3-16.
[2] The clearest example of such positioning is Damasio's *Descartes' Error,* which presents a neuropsychological critique of Cartesian mind-body dualism.

most obvious in an editorial lacuna. In *What is an Emotion?,* Cheshire Calhoun and Robert Solomon intend to present a history of emotions by means of excerpts from key philosophical texts ranging from classical antiquity to the twentieth century.[3] However, medieval voices on the subject are conspicuously absent: the editors jump from Aristotle to Descartes, thus implying that little, or at least little worth mentioning, was written on emotions in the intervening centuries. The same holds true for a more recent publication, Daniel M. Gross's *The Secret History of Emotion.* Gross aims to provide a psychosocial perspective on emotions, but he too does not give much room to medieval thinking on the emotions.[4] The gap is only slowly being filled by studies such as Thomas Dixon's *From Passions to Emotions* and Simo Knuuttila's *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy.*[5] Knuuttila presents a continuous history of philosophical reflection on emotions from Antiquity to the eve of the Renaissance. His careful examination of primary sources makes his study a valuable resource for tracing the development of ideas about emotions up until the fourteenth century, yet the later Middle Ages are only dealt with cursorily. Dixon's study investigates the gradual transition from enquiries into the passions and affectations of the human soul in patristic and scholastic theology to the emergence of the psychological category of the "emotions" and thus provides a historically sensitive, general cognitive theory of emotions. It draws attention to the continuities and interactions between religious, philosophical, and scientific psychological theories in terms of their main areas of enquiry: the relation of emotions to the human body and to rationality, as well as their role in human social life.

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[3] Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon, *What is an Emotion? Classic Readings in Philosophical Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[4] Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's 'Rhetoric' to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).

[5] Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

Theories of the production, processing, and significance of emotions contribute no small part of the background against which the dramatic production and theorising of emotion in early drama must be understood. This chapter will provide a brief overview of definitions of the term "emotions" and perspectives on their function in social and religious life in the cognitive sciences and anthropology, as well as influential patristic and scholastic theologies of the soul. It then turns to later medieval ideas about what emotions *do*, exploring their role in late medieval affective piety through pastoral and homiletic literature in order to outline how emotions can become attached to signs and bodies.

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Discourses

The experience of emotions is a pervasive aspect of our daily lives and in everyday language the term often simply refers to feeling states such as happiness, love, fear or hate. The term itself, derived from the Latin *emovere* (to move out), does not enter the English language until the late sixteenth century. And only during the nineteenth century did "emotion" acquire its current psychological meaning of 'a mental "feeling" or "affection" (e.g. of pleasure or pain, desire or aversion, surprise, hope or fear etc.)', as well as the more abstract meaning of '"feeling" as distinguished from the other classes of mental phenomena'.[6] "Emotion" is therefore an umbrella term, which covers mental as well as physical aspects for which the Middle Ages knew different expressions: *passiones* (passions), *passiones animae* (passions of the soul), *affectiones* (affections), or *affectus* (affect), for example.

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[6] 'emotion', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

The term "emotion" has notoriously been used with very different meanings in psychological research.[7] What is an emotion? Well over 100 years ago, the American psychologist and philosopher William James used precisely this question as the title for an essay in *Mind*, which not only rekindled interest in the question, but also shaped the debate for years to come.[8] In a startling departure from the dominant accounts of emotions which emphasise their cognitive dimensions, James defines emotions thus:

> Our natural way of thinking about these standard emotions is that the mental perception of some fact excites the mental affection called the emotion, and that this latter state of mind gives rise to the bodily expression. My thesis on the contrary is that *the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion.*[9]

An emotion is thus essentially a sensation or a series of sensations caused by a kind of physiological disturbance rooted in perception. James's emphasis on the physiological nature of emotions is made even clearer when he asserts:

> If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feeling of its characteristic bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no "mind-stuff" out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of perception is all that remains (James, p. 25).

Emotional experience, for James, is therefore firmly located in the human body. This central point of James's argument has become the starting point for a spate of psychological and philosophical studies on mind-body interaction in the hundred years since its publication.

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[7] Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins provide a brief but helpful overview (p. 28).

[8] William James, 'What is an Emotion', *Mind*, 9 (1884), 188-205, repr. in *Philosophy and the Emotions: A Reader*, ed. by Stephen Leighton (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2003), pp. 21-37. For the influence of James's proposals see Leighton, pp. 9-10; Solomon, 'Philosophy of the Emotions', p. 9.

[9] James, p. 22 (original emphasis). James defines 'standard emotions' as emotions which are 'characterized [...] strongly from within and without' by 'bodily disturbances' and their outward expression (p. 22).

Damasio's definition of the brain and the body as an 'indissociable organism' (*Descartes' Error*, p. 88), for example, is indebted to James's belief that 'a purely disembodied human emotion is a nonentity' (James, p. 26). Damasio draws directly on James for his definition of primary (or "early") emotions (such as fear) as innate and preorganised physiological responses to certain stimuli. Yet he distinguishes these from feelings and from secondary (or "adult") emotions. Feelings, for Damasio, are first and foremost feelings of emotion states and thus depend on the realisation by the individual of the connection between the perceived object and his or her own emotional body state.[10] Feelings, then are the perception of the bodily changes which constitute what is usually referred to as emotional response (see *Descartes' Error*, p. 139). Secondary emotions, Damasio writes, 'occur once we begin experiencing feelings and forming *systematic connections between categories of objects and situations, on the one hand, and primary emotions, on the other*' (*Descartes' Error*, p. 134; original emphasis). They are based on a mental evaluative process relative to the situation or stimulus and thus not only involve bodily but also mental changes in the experiencer. Damasio's understanding of emotions and feelings is by no means undisputed, and he acknowledges the relative heterodoxy of his views in *Descartes' Error* (p. 146). In this project, I will use 'emotion' and the feeling thereof in the somewhat broader sense in which these terms are used in cognitive psychology.

Cognitive approaches to emotions are dependent on an understanding of an emotion as a relational perception that appraises an object, a situation or even a thought. Magda Arnold, one of the early leaders in cognitive psychology defined an emotion as 'a felt tendency toward an object judged suitable and a way from an object judged unsuitable, reinforced by specific bodily changes according to the type of

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[10] For Damasio's indebtedness to James, see *Descartes' Error*, pp. 131-32. For a detailed definition of feelings see *Descartes' Error*, pp. 143-64.

emotion'.[11] To use an example: let us assume that a person, A is in a dark alleyway. Suddenly they see a person, B wielding a club. The perception of the movements of person B induces a body state in person A which is characteristic of the emotion fear: A's eyes are likely to be wide open, his or her heart beats faster than usual, they start to sweat or tremble.[12] The physiological arousal described here causes A to interpret the situation as dangerous to them and to run away. This body-based decision-making process is common to humans and animals. The family cat which rushes up the tree in the garden to take shelter from the neighbour's escaped Jack Russell terrier was most likely jolted by a comparable body state, and also ran. Looking at her sitting among the branches of the maple tree, I can see her ribcage expand and contract, her tail twitching nervously to the rhythm of cat fear. Her reaction was intuitive and pre-reflective. She did not think through advantages and disadvantages of the various options open to her. In the human personal and social realm, however, emotions and reasoning always interact.

The question of the rationality of emotions has troubled thinkers since classical antiquity, and some patristic and scholastic perspectives on this question will be outlined below. The interplay of emotion and thought is already discussed at length by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, for example. Moving the listeners, Aristotle points out, is an essential prerequisite for being persuasive as an orator:

> The orator persuades by means of his hearers, when they are roused to emotion by his speech; for the judgements we deliver are not the same when we are influenced by joy or sorrow, love or hate[.][13]

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[11] Magda B. Arnold and J. A. Gasson, 'Feelings and Emotions as Dynamic Factors in Personality Integration', in *The Human Person: An Approach to an Integral Theory of Personality*, ed. by M. B. Arnold and J. A. Gasson (New York: Ronald, 1954), pp. 294-313 (p. 294).

[12] For the facial expression associated with fear see David Matsumoto and others, 'Facial Expression of Emotion', in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Feldman, eds, *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 211-34 (p. 213).

[13] Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, trans. by John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann, 1926), p. 17 (I.2.5).

Emotions thus colour our thoughts and judgements, and since 'the object of Rhetoric is judgement' (*Rhetoric*, p. 169 (II.1.2)), Aristotle goes on to discuss in detail the ways and means by which certain emotions can be evoked or dissipated (*Rhetoric*, pp. 169-247 (II.1-11)). Modern cognitive psychology and philosophy too consider that emotions (and related feelings states) affect cognitive functioning. Emotions are frequently said to act as 'prioritizers of thoughts, goals, and actions' (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, p. 260) as they have effects on the way we process incoming information and direct our attention to particular elements (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, p. 271). For Damasio, for example, emotion-related body responses, 'somatic markers' as he calls them, increase the accuracy and efficiency of the evaluating process at the basis of emotional experiences.[14] In other words, emotions affect our evaluative, causal, and moral judgement.[15]

Paul Rozin and colleagues observe that 'the human moral world involves strong feeling as well as reasoning and [...] there are universal and culture-specific linkages between the affective and cognitive aspects of morality.'[16] Yet the precise relation between emotions and the moral domain is controversial, not least because the difference between universal and culture-specific aspects of emotions, between conscious and unconscious, controlled and involuntary processes is not always clear-cut.[17] Nevertheless, cross-cultural psychologists in particular have set out to delineate the occurrence of 'moral emotions' as 'the motivational force – the power and energy – to do good and to avoid doing bad' (Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek, p. 347). The

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[14] See Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, p. 173. Damasio defines somatic markers as '*a special instance of feelings generated from secondary emotions.* Those emotions and feelings *have been connected, by learning, to predict future outcomes of certain scenarios*' (*Descartes' Error*, p. 174; original emphasis).

[15] For a brief overview of current positions on the interaction between emotion and cognition see Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, pp. 257-87.

[16] Paul Rozin and others, 'The CAD Triad Hypothesis: A Mapping Between Three Moral Emotions (Contempt, Anger, Disgust) and Three Moral Codes (Community, Autonomy, Divinity)', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76 (1999), 574-86 (p. 586).

[17] See Reddy, *Navigation*, p. 31.

principal clusters of moral emotions investigated usually include anger and disgust, the self-conscious emotions shame, embarrassment, and guilt, as well as compassion, gratitude, and elevation.

As Rozin and colleagues point out in their study, if investigating the emotional basis of morality involves conceiving of emotional reactions, i.e. expression and behaviours, as 'best predicators of moral judgement' (p. 574). The way we express emotions is necessarily shaped by the culture as countless anthropological studies have demonstrated.[18] Cultural variations in emotional expressions aside, there is little doubt that, in general, the outward expression of an emotional experience is a crucial element in human social interactions. Emotional displays, be they facial, gestural, tactile or verbal, fulfil informative functions, indicating the experiencer's emotions, but also his or her intentions and relationship to the object. Moreover, they are evocative of emotions in those who observe them.[19] As neuropsychological research into mirror mechanisms illustrates, the perception of facial emotional expressions triggers cerebral activations which overlap with those elicited by experience of the emotion.[20] It has therefore been hypothesised that the neural representations of emotions which result from the recruitment of a shared circuitry for experience and observation add 'emotive colouring' (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, p. 189) to the further processing of emotional stimuli. They also provide a pre-verbal mode of emphatic arousal, which may function as the intuitive key for the understanding of the emotive states of others.[21] However, such neural activities have also been linked to the frequently observed tendency in human beings to mimic and imitate the actions and expressions of others in social

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[18] Anthropologists who have long supported constructionist views of emotions (Reddy, *Navigation*, pp. 34-62).

[19] See Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, p. 96. In addition, emotions have incentive functions, as they point out (p. 97). Thus distress often evokes compassion, for example.

[20] See, for example, Wicker and others.

[21] See also Martin L. Hoffman, 'Empathy and Prosocial Behavior', in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Feldman, eds, *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 440-55 (p. 441).

interactions.[22] Mimicry and imitation may, in turn, 'cause or intensify emotions, though the intensity of these emotions remains low' (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, p. 134).

Recent psychological, anthropological and linguistic studies show that affective responses which go beyond near-automatic reactions to a stimulus (i. e. mimicry) are primarily shaped by the ways in which we talk about emotions and by the culturally contingent regulations and constraints which govern verbal expression as well as expressive behaviours (Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins, p. 98). In other words: emotions can be mobilised discursively, and emotional utterances have powerful effects on emotions. Emotional utterances are often conceived of as a type of speech act. Reddy, for example, states that emotion words 'have a direct impact on what they are supposed to refer to' (*Navigation*, p. 104). Unlike a performative, an emotive utterance (or "emotive", to use Reddy's term) is, however, not self-referential (*Navigation*, p. 105). 'Emotives,' he writes, 'are […] instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions, instruments that may be more or less successful' (ibid.), because they have both self-exploratory as well as self-altering effects on the speaker (*Navigation*, p. 103). Thus saying 'I am sad' can confirm or disconfirm the emotional claim made and may intensify or attenuate the state claimed. Naming emotions (and acting them out), then, are primary ways in which they are brought into being. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed likewise emphasises the role of emotional expressions for the creation of attachments that bind individuals to particular objects and to others. Feelings and emotions exist before the utterance, yet they only become "real" as an effect with the utterance. Naming an emotion, she argues, involves differentiating between the subject and object of feeling, and she uses the example of the statement "The nation mourns" to illustrate the difference. To say "'The nation mourns",' she

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[22] Iacoboni links models of imitation and the human mirror neuron system (pp. 653-70).

writes, 'is to generate the nation, *as if it were a mourning subject*' (Ahmed, p. 13). And she adds: 'The "nation" becomes a shared "object of feeling" through the "orientation" that is taken towards it' (ibid.). In saying "The nation mourns", then, we claim that the nation has a feeling, while at the same time generating the abstract concept of the nation as the shared object of our feeling. Emotion, in other words, helps us to create a sense of subjectivity through relating us as an individual to the collective. '[I]t is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others,' Ahmed maintains, 'that surfaces and boundaries are made (p. 11).

The explorations of the performative aspect of emotions offered by Reddy and Ahmed in their respective studies provide an essential influence on the approach this study takes to emotional expressions in dramatic performance. If we accept that the perception of the behaviours of others has the potential to generate certain emotional effects in us, as the recent developments in cognitive psychology outlined above suggest, we have to question the role of vocalisations of emotions in marking out bodies and theatrical signs as objects of emotion for the spectator. However, naming emotions in particular is not, as Ahmed put it, 'to make something out of nothing' (p. 93), but is dependent on the repetition of existing conventions. The specific medieval conventions associated with specific emotions relevant to this study will be discussed in the individual chapters that follow. The remainder of this chapter will turn to general medieval theories about the origins and nature of emotions and their significance in human social and religious life.

Scholastic Enquiries into Emotions

Some questions pertaining to human emotions have remained the same since antiquity. Medieval thinkers too grappled with questions about the relation between emotion and sensory perception, the classification of emotions into generic types, their physiological basis as well as their role in human moral life. And like their modern counterparts, they approached the subject from either a predominantly physiological or a predominantly cognitive angle.

Physiological and medical accounts, which flourished from the twelfth century onwards, conceive of emotions as a sequence of physical events caused by the movements of the spirits and changes in body heat.[23] The thirteenth-century Franciscan scholar Bartholomaeus Anglicus distinguishes between three kinds of spirit in his influential encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum*: natural, vital, and animal spirit.[24] From the blood seething in the liver arises a 'smoke' which is 'pured' and turned into a 'sotille spiritual substance' called natural spirit.[25] The natural spirit moves the blood and 'sendiþ it aboute into alle þe lymes' (*Properties of Things*, I, 122). Entering the heart, it is refined further and turns into vital spirit, while some of the latter makes its way to the brain, where it is 'iruled and imade sotile and bicomeþ *spiritus animalis*' (ibid.). From the foremost 'den' of the brain, some of the animal spirit spreads into the 'lymes of felyng' (ibid.) that is the sense organs, while some 'comeþ to þe sinews of meuynge so þat

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[23] For an overview of medical accounts see Knuuttila, pp. 212-18. Knuuttila emphasises the influence of the Latinisation of Arab works as an impulse for new medical enquiries into emotions.

[24] Bartholomæus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Soul and Body: De Proprietatibus Rerum Libri III et IV*, ed. by R. James Long (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies for the Centre for Medieval Studies, 1979). Subsequent references to this edition will be made by the Latin title, *De proprietatibus rerum* and page number(s). More than 100 manuscript copies of the Latin encyclopaedia survive along with numerous translations into vernaculars, which suggests wide-spread popularity for Bartholomæus's work.

[25] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Batholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum*, ed. by M. C. Seymour, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-88), I, 121. Subsequent references to Trevisa's translation will be made by the first word of the English title, *Properties*, volume and page numbers.

wilful meuynge may be gendrid in al parties of þe neþir body' (*Properties*, I, 122) via the spinal marrow.

Excessive emotions can upset the workings of the spirits. Excessive joy or anger, for example, cause the vital spirit and body heat to move away from the heart to the head and to the extremities, while fear and distress have the opposite effect. Hence a person goes red with anger and pale with fear. One of the most detailed and vivid descriptions of the physiological changes attending an emotion occurs in Chaucer's 'Book of the Duchess'. The Black Knight tells the Dreamer about the loss of his lady:

> Whan he had mad thus his complaynte,
> Hys sorwful hert gan faste faynte
> And his spiritis wexen dede;
> The blood was fled for pure drede
> Doun to hys herte, to make hym warm –
> For wel hyt feled the herte had harm –
> To wite eke why hyt was adrad
> By kynde, and for to make hyt glad,
> For hit ys member principal
> Of the body; and that made al
> Hys hewe change and weke grene
> And pale, for ther noo blood ys sene
> In no maner lym of hys.[26]

The emotion of grief is here conceived of as a weakening of the spirits and a contraction of the heart which makes all blood to rush towards it, thus causing paleness.[27]

Discussions within the medical tradition of unbalanced emotional dispositions such as melancholia illustrate that emotions were thought to be psychosomatic phenomena with medical consequences. Bartholomæus Anglicus (or his translator Trevisa) defines melancholy, a disease of the brain with many varieties, as 'a

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[26] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Book of the Duchess', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 330-46, ll. 487-99.
[27] For Chaucer's medical sources see J.A. Tasioulas, 'Science', in *Chaucer*, ed. by Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 174-89 (pp. 181-85)

sus[p]eccioun þat haþ maistrie of þe soule, þe whiche comeþ of drede and of sorwe' (*Properties*, I, 349). It may be cured pharmaceutically through 'purgaciouns and electuaries' (I, 350). Due to their somatic effects, however, emotions themselves can be used as a cure. Apart from a treatment of the humours and spirits, Bartholomæus also recommends that a melancholic person be withdrawn 'from cause and mater of busy þouȝtis, and he schal be gladed wiþ instrumentis of musik and somdel be occupied' (I, 350). Distraction in the form of activities which make a habit of joy can thus alter the unbalanced 'complexioun' (I, 176) of the brain in the melancholic person.

In contrast, cognitive accounts of human emotions can be found within philosophical and theological works where they are commonly attached to ethics and to enquiries into the nature, power, and the operations of the human soul. Nevertheless late medieval ideas about the series of acts which make up a complete emotional experience, as well as the significance of human emotionality – such as its moral implications – bear remarkable similarities to contemporary questions and accounts of the nature and structure of emotions in the cognitive sciences. Let us take Thomas Aquinas's theory of emotions as set out in his *Summa Theologiae* as an example. The *Summa* contains the most extensive medieval treatment of emotions, for which Aquinas uses the term *passiones animae* throughout.[28] A *passio animae*, Aquinas explains, is a passive reaction: the subject is stimulated to an affective act by a sensibly perceived or imagined object, followed by a bodily reaction. The *passiones animae* are thus always experienced in the body-soul composite.[29]

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[28] The "treatise" fills three volumes in the Blackfriars edition. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 60 vols (London: Blackfriars in conjunction with Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964-81), XIX*: The Emotions (1a2æ. 22-30)*, ed. by Eric D'Arcy (1967); XX: *Pleasure (1a2æ. 31-39)*, ed. by Eric d'Arcy (1975); and XXI: *Fear and Anger (1a2æ. 40-48)*, ed. by John Patrick Reid (1965). All further references to these volumes of Aquinas's *Summa* will be by the abbreviation *ST*, part, question and article.

[29] See *ST* 1a2æ., 22.1-3. Aquinas is thus rather free from the mind-body dualism which characterises most philosophical enquiries into emotions from Descartes to the middle of the twentieth century. His

Not unlike modern theories, Aquinas identifies five elements in emotional experience: perception and appraisal of the object, the affective reaction which is, strictly-speaking, the emotion proper, physical activities of expression, and action or behaviour. Physical movement provides him with a broad model for explaining the process of emotional experience. Just as physical movement is directed towards a specific goal, each emotion has an object which is to be attained or to be avoided.[30] For Aquinas, these objects differentiate emotions, and his classification of emotions is bound up with his belief in their parity with physical movement.[31] In *ST* 1a., 81.2 and *ST* 1a2æ., 23 he divides *passiones animae* broadly into the concupiscible passions love and hate, desire and aversion, pleasure and sadness and the irascible emotions hope and despair, fear and courage and anger.[32] The concupiscible passions have as their objects a sensible good or evil taken in an absolute way, while the irascible emotions have as their object a sensible good or evil which is seen as difficult or arduous.

The sequence in which the components of emotional experience mentioned above occur is not always clear from Aquinas's account. Bodily changes are a notable immediate effect of an affective response and they are dependent on the type of affective reaction, as well as its intensity.[33] Yet do we perceive something as a sense-good or sense-evil or do we perceive it and *then* judge it to be so? In any case, all evaluations are acts of cognitive power and can and should be controlled by a higher

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perspective on emotions draws heavily on Aristotle, who equally conceives of beliefs, bodily motions, and physiological changes as inseparable elements of emotion in *De Anima*. See Aristotle, *On the Soul; Parva Naturalia; On Breath*, trans. by W. S. Hett (London: Heinemann, 1935), pp. 8-203.

[30] See *ST* 1a2æ., 23.4, 25.2, 25.3, 26.2.

[31] Yet it is important to note that an appetitive motion is not the somatic event which necessarily accompanies a *passio animae*, as Robert Miner points out in *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of 'Summa Theologiæ' 1a2æ 22-48* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 46.

[32] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XI: *Man (1a. 75-83)*, ed. by Timothy Suttor (1970). All further references to this volume of Aquinas's *Summa* will be by the abbreviation *ST*, part, question and article.

[33] The somatic dimension of emotionality is given careful and extensive attention in the *Summa*. Aquinas devotes, for example, an entire *quæstio* (*ST* 1a2æ., 44) to the effects of fear, and he makes repeated reference to bodily modifications from neurological and cardiovascular reactions to movement of the limbs in his discussion of other emotions.

cognitive power: particular reason. For Aquinas, particular reason acts as a mediator between cognition and the *passiones animæ*. In *ST* 1a., 78.4, he defines particular reason against the background of sensation and emotion in animals and in humans. Animals respond instinctively to the perceptible and non-perceptible properties of things, Aquinas holds. In order to explain how animals can perceive and receive the non-perceptible properties or intentions of things (f. ex. edible or dangerous), Aquinas postulates the existence of an estimative faculty in the human brain. The link with emotions is not spelled out but obvious: when a mouse receives the intention of enmity from the cat in its estimative power, this triggers the emotion of fear (or at least avoidance) which causes and explains the mouse's flight.

A brief excursion on underlying assumptions about human mental processes is perhaps in order here. There is no one universally valid way of mapping mental processes in what is commonly termed medieval "faculty psychology". Aristotle's distinction between the faculties of common sense, imagination, and memory in *De anima*, mediated via the Arab scholar Avicenna, is ultimately at the basis of many an information processing model.[34] Despite differences in the number, nomenclature and precise function of the inner senses, there was an overall agreement that sensory information transmitted by the five external (physical) senses sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch is processed successively by a number of faculties located in three linearly arranged ventricles of the brain and thus becomes the material of knowledge.[35]

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[34] Avicenna's *Liber de anima* was written in the early eleventh century as part of *aš- Šifā* (*The Cure*), a compendium covering logic, natural philosophy, as well as mathematics and metaphysics. It was first translated from the Arabic in Toledo between 1152 and 1166. See Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De anima' in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul 1160-1300* (London: Warburg Institute, 2000), p. 1-5. Avicenna's influence is recognisable, for example, in the works of Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, and Aquinas (Hasse, pp. 55-72).

[35] For an overview of theories of the inner senses see H. A. Wolfson, 'The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophical Texts', *Harvard Theological Review*, 285 (1935), 69-133; Simon Kemp, *Cognitive Psychology in the Middle Ages* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 45-63, and *Medieval Psychology* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), pp. 53- 61.

In *The Properties of Things*, Trevisa writes:

> The innere witte is departid aþre by þre regiouns of þe brayn, for in þe brayn beþ þre smalle celles. Þe formest hatte *ymaginatiua*, þerin þingis þat þe vttir witte apprehendiþ withoute beþ i-ordeyned and iput togedres withinne, [...]. Þe middil chambre hatte *logica* þerin þe vertu estimatiue is maister. Þe þridde and þe laste is *memoratiua*, þe vertu of mynde. Þat vertu holdiþ and kepiþ in þe tresour of mynde þingis þat beþ apprehendid and iknowe bi þe ymaginatif and *racio*. (*Properties*, I, 98)

The anterior chamber assimilates mentally the experience of the world transmitted by the five exterior senses and produces mental images which are received in the second chamber in order to be operated on by *racio* before being stored in memory. Thus, the inner senses do not only communicate with each other but with the rational powers of the human soul.[36] They do, of course, also communicate with the motive powers, resulting in action.

The notion that there are three chambers in the brain which house faculties that receive, process, and store sense data and thus link the rational and the sensitive powers of the human soul is also expressed in Aquinas's *Summa*. Following his teacher, Albert the Great, Aquinas proposes a fourfold classification of the inner senses:

> So for the reception of sense forms there is the particular sense and the "common sense" […]. Their retention and conservation require fantasy or imagination, which are the same thing; fantasy or imagination is, as it were, a treasure-store for forms received through the senses. Instinct grasps the intentions which are not objects of simple sensation. And the power of memory conserves these; it is a treasure-store for the intentions of this kind.[37]

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[36] A diagram of Avicenna's concept of the inner senses contained in Cambridge University Library MS. Gg1.1, fol. 490ᵛ illustrates this connection by means of bridges linking the individual cells of the brain. The diagram is reproduced and described in *Cambridge Illuminations: Ten Centuries of Book Production in the Medieval West*, ed. by Paul Binski and Stella Panayotova (London: Harvey Miller, 2005), p. 315-16. 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. by Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 197-223 (pp. 198-201) outlines the relationship between the illustration and the text.

[37] *ST* 1a2æ., 78.4:

> Sic ergo ad receptionem formarum sensibilum ordinatur sensus proprius et communis […]. Ad harum autem formarum retentionem et conservationem ordinatur phantasia sive imaginatio, quæ idem sunt; est enim phantasia sive imaginatio quasi thesaurus quidam formarum per

In human beings, cogitation is the equivalent to estimation, and functions in relation to memory as sensation does to imagination. It discloses intentions through a kind of comparison, and another name for the same faculty is *ratio particularis* (*ST* 1a., 78.4). Particular reason, Aquinas holds, forms logical combinations of singular propositions and is guided and moved by universal reason (*ST* 1a., 81.3). Yet a human being is never a disembodied intellect according to Aquinas. Therefore sensation and the imagination can equally affect the sensitive appetite, for example, when we sense or imagine something pleasurable that reason forbids (*ST* 1a., 81.3). Weakness of will, in other words, is always possible. The cognitive penetrability of emotions is therefore fundamental to Aquinas's moral psychology, as it allows human beings to perfect themselves.

The first step to moral perfection is the rational control of one's emotions. In Aquinas's intellectual world, in which all moral life is founded on the will's movement towards the good, moral conduct is always rational conduct in that it is in accordance with right reason, which apprehends the objective good for man and dictates the means of attainment. Reason, under the impetus of will, must bring stability to a person's emotional life because 'emotion leads one towards sin in so far as it is uncontrolled by reason; but in so far as it is rationally controlled, it is part of the virtuous life'.[38] Virtue is therefore largely a matter of feeling the right thing, i. e. avoiding extremes. Following the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, Aquinas defines courage, for example, as the middle ground between cowardice and rashness.

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sensum acceptarum. Ad apprehendendum autem intentiones quæ per sensum non accipiuntur ordinatur vis æstimativa. Ad conservandum autem eas, vis memorativa, quæ est thesaurus quidem hujusmodi intentionum.

[38] *ST* 1a2æ., 24.2: '[...] passiones animæ inquantum sunt præter ordinem rationis inclinant ad peccatum; inquantum autem sunt ordinatæ a ratione pertinent ad virtutem.'

Simply considered in themselves, emotions are neither good nor bad in a moral sense. Yet owing to the reciprocal relation between cognition and emotion, the *passiones animæ* can either help or hinder moral choice and action (*ST* 1a2æ., 23.4 and 24.3-4). Upsurges of passion, unregulated by reason, can lead human beings to act contrary to right reason. However, when rational judgement precedes a passion, the presence of emotion may enhance the moral goodness of an act (*ST* 1a2æ., 24.3 and 23.4). This can be greatly helped by habits. Habits – here understood as a mode or pattern of behaviour encouraged by repeated acts – affect a person's patterns of emotional response to specific stimuli.[39] The responsibility for the evaluation, feelings and the resulting behaviour is thus placed squarely on the subject.

Aquinas provides a sophisticated account of the nature and structure of the *passiones animæ* as psychological phenomena, describing human psychological activity at as high an abstract level as contemporary cognitive theory. Although he approaches the passions with an eye to their causal connections to the faculties of the human soul, the questions he raises with regard to the activation and morality of the *passiones animae* overlap with issues debated within the cognitive sciences today, as we have seen. For Aquinas, the passions are directly relevant to morals. They are, as Miner comments, 'fundamental for understanding the rational creature's quest for beatitude' (p. 7). It is to the latter that this chapter will now turn.

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[39] Aquinas discusses habits in terms of material or quasi-efficient causes in *ST* 1a2æ 40-48.

Emotions and Late Medieval Religious Life

Thomas Aquinas considered the *passiones animæ* primarily as psychological states. An interest in subjective feeling and in an awareness of oneself as a feeling subject also characterises the spiritual and pastoral literature of the high and later Middle Ages. For the anonymous author of the *Ancrene Wisse* for example, an early thirteenth-century guide for three female recluses, the regulation of feelings is crucial to a virtuous life. He stresses the importance of bodily discipline but is aware of the inevitable cracks in self-control in those who are trying to lead a good life, yet find themselves heavily tempted. Many a sinful emotion can come unsought, he concedes. Anger, for example, can be a result of being verbally attacked. And strong emotions like anger are dangerous because they paralyse the mind. 'Hwil þe heorte walleð inwið of wreaððe, nis þer na riht dom,' he observes.[40] He adds that wilfully remaining in the grasp of an unsought strong emotion therefore equals foregoing one's humanity:

> 'Wreaððe', hit seið, 'hwil hit least, ablindeð swa þe heorte þet ha ne mei soð icnawen.' *Maga quedam est, transformans naturam humanam.* Wreaððe is a forschuppilt, as me teleð i spelles, for ha reaueð mon his wit ant changeð al his chere, ant forschuppeð him from mon into beastes cunde. (I, 3.30-34)

The danger and destructiveness of succumbing to an upsurge of emotion is expressed through an analogy with fire:

> A sihðe þet tu sist, oðer anlepi word þet tu misherest, ʒef hit eawt stureð þe, cwench hit wið teares weater ant mid Iesu Cristes blod hwil hit nis bute a sperke, ear þen hit waxe ant ontende þe swa þet tu hit ne mahe cwenchen. (I, 4.1697-1701)

Even if their lives are devoted to the pursuit of virtue, the anchoresses must know how to deal with the temptations of sin which they will doubtless encounter. Confession and

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[40] *Ancrene Wisse: A Corrected Version of the Text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 402 with Variants from Other Manuscripts*, ed. by Bella Millet, EETS OS 325-26, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005-6), I, 3.21-22.

penance are among the "antidotes" to temptation that the author recommends as the meditation on Christ's passion. His practical advice also includes, however, conjuring up 'willes wiðute neod arearet i þe heorte' (I, 4.904). The reciprocity of thoughts and emotions can be exploited in order to tackle sinful impulses, because emotions bring with them physical changes and behavioural suggestions which can be morally desirable. A good example is fear. According to the author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, fear reigns in the temptations of the flesh and can be aroused by thinking of a frightening situation (see I, 4.899-966). If an anchoress notices the 'dogge of helle cume snakerinde wið his blodi flehen of stinkinde þohtes' (4.1597), she should cry out to Christ for help on her knees and defend herself by swinging the crucifix in all directions thus making the sign of the cross. In case these measures should not fend off the 'dogge of helle', the author recommends the following: 'Nempne ofte Iesu; cleope his passiunes help; halse bi his pine, bi his deorewurðe blod, bi his deað o rode, flih to his wunden. […] Creop in ham wið þi þoht' (4.1627-30). In other words, in order to feel fear, you have to act (or imagine to act) as if you feel fear. The notion, expressed in the *Ancrene Wisse* that the performance (in body or thought) of the outward signs of a particular emotion through the subject can bring about changes in their inner landscape calls to mind Reddy's assertion that emotions can change reality for subjects as the act of expression changes what is felt ('Against Constructionism', p. 331).

Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection*, a late fourteenth-century spiritual guide aimed at an unnamed anchoress, also sees godliness tied to emotional control. However, Hilton's main focus is the attainment of contemplation, the highest form of union with God the human soul can achieve in this life. He distinguishes three kinds of contemplation: firstly, intellectual contemplation brought about by study and reason; secondly, affective contemplation, that is knowing God in the emotions; and lastly

contemplation in 'cognicion and in affeccion.'[41] The happy combination of intellect and emotion in contemplation can only be achieved when the soul is purged from everything that ties it to the material world including the 'alle ertheli and fleisschli affecciones' (*Scale of Perfection*, 1.150). 'Affecciones' is a key word in Hilton's guide and derived from notion of *affectio* as a state of the soul in Latin writing on the psychology of the soul. However, he often uses it in the modern sense of "affection" or "love", for example, when he defines contemplation in 'cognicion and in affeccion' as contemplation 'in knowyng and in perfight lovynge of God' (1.147-48). 'Affecciones' are closely linked with 'stirynges', sinful impulses and arousals of emotion based on corporeal sensation (see 1.1506-07). Although Hilton mostly uses the term 'stirynge' to describe the awakening of pride, envy and other emotions designated as sins in a subject, he does not ignore the beneficial aspects of emotional arousal, for example, when he refers to the stirring 'to mekenesse and to charité' (1.1796).

So how is contemplation to be achieved? Contemplation is ultimately a gift of grace, but also requires conscious spiritual effort. The mind, feelings and will of a person have to be occupied with God in reading, meditation or prayer, Hilton points out. A crucial prerequisite for achieving an earthly state of perfection when God is both perfectly known and perfectly loved, is, however, humility. Yet what if one is not sufficiently humble? Like for the anonymous author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, "feeling the right thing" is a question of willpower for Hilton:

> [Y]if thou mai not fele this mekenesse in thyn herte with affeccion as thu woldest, do as thou may: meke thisilf in wille bi thi resoun, trowynge that it shulde be so as I seie, though thou fele it not. (*Scale of Perfection*, 1.464-66)

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[41] Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, ed. by Thomas H. Bestul (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 1.147. All further references to this edition are by book and line numbers, unless otherwise stated.

Hilton's advice to the unnamed anchoress bears witness to the extent to which meditative texts can be read, as McNamer suggests in *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, as 'intimate scripts' for the performance of feeling. It is indicative of a performative model of emotional production.[42]

Negative affirmations, Hilton asserts, help to put a meditant in the right frame of mind for being humbled in a meditation on Christ's passion. The anchoress, for whom Hilton writes, is advised to think of herself as wretched and despicable and cautioned to break down every 'risynge of [her] herte' (*Scale*, 1.470) or feeling that tells her otherwise:

> And so bi the grace of Jhesu Crist thorugh devoute biholdynge on His manhede and His mekenesse schalt thu mykil abate the stirynge of pride, and the vertu of mekenesse that was first in the nakid wille schal be turnyd into feelynge of affeccioun. (*Scale*, 1.472-74) [43]

For Hilton, compassionate meditation on Christ's Passion is key in the quest for the reformation of the soul, as empathy and compassion open the "inner eye". Hilton describes the state thus:

> [W]hanne it is so that thou art stired to devocion, and sodeynli thi thought is drawen up from alle worldli and fleischli thinges, and thee thenketh as thu seighe in thi soule thi Lord Jhesu Crist in bodili likenesse as He was in erthe, how he was taken of the Jewes and bounden as a theef, beten and dispisid, scourgid and demed to deeth; hou mekeli He baar the Cros upon his bak, and hou crueli He was nailed therupon; also of the crowne of thornes upon His heed, and upon the scharp spere that stonge Him to the herte. And thou in this goostli sight thou felist thyn herte stired into so greet compassioun and pité of thy Lord Jhesu that thou mornest, and wepist, and criest with alle thy myghtes of thi bodi and of thi soule, wondrynge the godenesse and the love, the pacience and the mekenesse of oure Lord Jhesu, that He wolde for so sinful a caitif as thou art suffre so mykil peyne. (*Scale*, 1.901-11)

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[42] Thus Hilton's advice provides a counter-argument to the "hydraulic" model posited as a standard model for the Middle Ages by the first historian of medieval emotions, Norbert Elias, in *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*, 2 vols (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), first published in 1939.

[43] The term 'felynge' is used, particularly in book two, to denote the source of love and desire for God.

Contemplating the Passion thus essentially means getting spiritually and affectively involved in the event by means of visualisation. For Hilton the desire for the union with God is first and foremost a desire to *see*. Seeing here has the transformative power of witnessing: to see the Crucifixion in the 'goostli sight' is to stand face to face with God. Yet if one's emotions are out of control, one is blind to the truth. Although Hilton sees perception and emotion as closely interwoven in contemplation, his understanding of contemplation does not depend on physical sensation. He accords the eye merely a mediatory, not an epistemic function. As the medieval notion, expressed in meditative literature and optical theory alike that corporeal sight is intimately connected to spiritual and intellectual vision, constitutes a key element in my readings of the dramatic images created on the early religious stage, I would like to insert a brief excursion on medieval theories of vision here.

The notion that gazing gives power to see beyond the corporeal, expressed here by Hilton, is bound up with the widespread medieval belief that the act of looking is in itself powerful. Both in visual theory and popular understanding, sight was considered to establish direct contact, effectively touch, between the visual object and the perceiver. Trevisa's translation of Bartholomæus Anglicus's chapter on vision provides a succinct summary:

> In ten [and] ix. *de animalibus* Aristotil seiþ þat seyinge is nouȝt elles but þat þe siȝt passe out to þe þing þat is isene. Þerfor *super Genesim libro primo et sexto musice* Austyn seiþ þat noȝt comeþ fro þe þing þat is iseye but þe liknes of þe siht. Noþing of þe substaunce of þe eiȝe comeþ out, but out of þe eiȝe comeþ a small piramis þat is schape as a toppe oþir a schelde, and þe brode ende þerfor is ispraddee vppoun ale þe vttir partie of þe þing in himself. (*Properties*, I, 110)

Bartholomæus refers here to the two principal theories of how sight operates and to their best-known respective proponents in the Middle Ages. Aristotle is usually

associated with the intromission theory, which postulates the existence of light rays travelling from an external object through the air and to the eye of the perceiver.[44] Augustine, in contrast, is considered an exponent of an alternative theory, usually ascribed to Plato and propounded by neoplatonic writers. The extramission theory assumes projective rather than introjective visual rays, issued by the eye. These touch (and mingle with) the visual object before returning to the eye with an impression from the object.[45] Even though Plato is generally credited with being the most prominent exponent of eyebeam emission, the emphasis in his theory of vision – as outlined in the *Timaeus* – is not on the emission of an effluence from the eye or indeed the visual object, but on the formation of a visual body which serves as a material intermediary between the eye and the visual object:

> Of those (i.e. organs) they first made the circles of the light-bringing eyes for the following reason. There are two virtues of fire, I believe, one consuming and destructive, the other mild with innocent light. To this fire then, from which the light that brings the day is spread out, the divine powers devised the personal and friendly body of the eyes, since they wanted the innermost fire of our body, in as much as it is related to the brilliant, clear and pure fluidity of fire, to flow through the eyes and down, so that it flows through the polished and assembled circles of light which have been approved of by firmer density, but which have a small, narrow, more delicate centre, and the clear light flows through this centre. Thus when the streams flowing from the eyes connect with daylight, then – without doubt- two of the same kind meet and mingle in the appearance of one body through which the power of sight shooting forth and flowing out, and the glance of the inner fusion from the meeting with the contingent image is reflected. What is called vision causes all this which has been brought about by choosing suffering and on account of the indifferent likeness of this suffering, when something touches another or is itself touched

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[44] The intromission theory was popularised in the West through the influx of Aristotelian and Arab scholarship during the scholastic period. For the influence of Aristotelian and Arab scholarship on later medieval theories of vision see Lindberg, *Theories*, pp. 33-86.

[45] The extramission theory provides the background for a popular conceit in medieval literature: the lover's gaze which penetrates the eye and wounds the heart. For an exploration of this conceit see Sarah Stanbury, 'The Lover's Gaze in Troilus and Criseyde', in *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by R.A. Shoaf with the assistance of Catherine S. Cox (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 224-38.

by another, spreading itself in the entire body through the motion of touches and, extending its senses, through the body all the way to the soul.[46]

Although fire issues from the eye, there is also a motion or emanation coming from the visible object, as the last sentence of the passage quoted above reveals. Strictly speaking, Plato's theory as outlined in Calcidius's version of the *Timaeus* is therefore a combined intromission and extramission theory. In the Platonic text the stress is not on the emission of an effluence from either the eye or the visual object, but on the formation of a visual body, which serves as a material intermediary between the eye and the visual object.[47]

Trevisa's reference to the existence of a 'small piramis' (*Properties*, I, 110), a 'cone-like body of light rays' (*Properties,* III, 283), the base of which is in the visual field and the apex in the perceiver's eye, points to Eastern optical and ophthalmological influences on his account of sight. Bartholomæus thus uses some of the same sources as the English Franciscan scholar Roger Bacon after him.[48] In his *Opus Majus*, Roger Bacon posits a visual pyramid or cone formed by perpendicular rays to explain how

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[46] Plato, *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, ed. by J. H. Waszink and P. J. Jensen, Corpus Platonicum Medii Aevi. Plato Latinus, 4 (London: Warburg Institute, 1962), pp. 41-42. The Latin text reads:

> Huic igitur, ex qua lux diem inuehens panditur, domesticum et familiare corpus oculorum diuinae potestates commentæ sunt, intimum siquidem nostri corporis ignem, utpote germanum ignis perlucidi sereni et defaecati liquoris, per oculos fluere ac demanare uoluerunt, ut per leues congestosque et tamquam firmiore soliditate probatos orbes luminum, quorum tamen esset angusta medietas subtilior, serenus ignis per eandem efflueret medietatem. Itaque cum diurnum iubar applicat se uisus fusioni, tunc nimirum incurrentia semet inuicem duo similia in unius corporis speciem cohaerent, quo concurrunt oculorum acies emicantes quoque effluentis intimae fusionis acies contiguae imaginis occursu repercutitur. Totum igitur hoc similem eandemque sortium passionem et ob indifferentem similitudinem eiusdem passionis effectum, cum quid aliud tangit uel ipsum ab alio tangitur, tactuum motu diffundens se per omne corpus perque corpus usque ad animam porrigens sensum efficit qui uisus uocatur.

Calcidius's translation of Plato's work is used here, as Calcidius provided the 'central portal through which the Latin West visited the *Timaeus*', as Paul Edward Dutton observes ('Medieval Approaches to Calcidius', in *Plato's 'Timaeus' as a Cultural Icon*, ed. by Gretchen Reydam-Schils (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 183-205 (p. 183).

[47] See Lindberg, *Theories*, pp. 3-6. Calcidius, however, shifts the emphasis towards eyebeam emission in his translation and particularly in his commentary on the passage quoted above. In section 246 of his commentary he explains that an inner light, similar to daylight, flows from the eyes, unites with the exterior light and thus becomes capable of drawing colours from visible objects (Plato, *Timaeus*, p. 256).

[48] For the influence of Eastern traditions on Bartholomæus Anglicus, see Lindberg, *Theories,* pp. 41, 253, n. 26.

human beings can perceive the objects sharply.[49] However, as Biernoff points out, 'the visual pyramid also circumscribes the eye's visual power' for Bacon (p. 77). Bacon's optical theory seeks to syncretise intromissive and extramissive strands of thinking about sight partly with the help of his theory of species, which generally provides him with a *modus operandi* for sensation, cognition, and understanding alike (Biernoff, p. 74). Bacon uses the term species in the sense of "likeness" of what is perceived by the external senses (sensible species) or by the mind (intelligible species). More will be said about species and their significance particularly for perceptual certitude in chapter five. For now, I restrict myself to stressing that for Bacon, the action of species explains *how* we actually see. Sight occurs when the species emitted by objects converge in the eye of the perceiver, while the species of the eye itself '[travel] in the locality of the visual pyramid.'[50] Bacon describes the effect of intromitted species on the eye thus:

> [The lens] must be somewhat thick, in order that it may experience a feeling from the impressions [species] that is a kind of pain. For we observe that strong lights and colour narrow vision and injure it, and inflict pain [...]. Therefore vision always experiences a feeling that is a kind of pain.[51]

Vision, then, is a fundamentally physical interaction between the perceiver and an object akin to touch, in which the eye of the perceiver is both a passive organ and an active agent of the sensible soul. The eye is susceptible to physical (and emotional) change, thus allowing for the perceiver to be affected and moved by what he or she sees.

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[49] See Lindberg, *Theories*, pp. 107-16 and Biernoff, pp. 68-84 for an account of the Baconian synthesis of visual theories.

[50] *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon: A Translation*, trans. by Robert Belle Burke, 2 vols (New York: Russel & Russel, 1962), II, 471.

[51] *Opus Majus: A Translation*, II, 445-46. See also Roger Bacon, *The 'Opus Majus'*, ed. by John Henry Bridges, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897-1900), II, 27-28:

> [E]t ideo oportet ut sit aliquantulum spissus, quatenus patiatur a speciebus passionem quæ est de genere doloris; videmus enim quod fortes luces et colores angustant visum et ledunt et dolorem inferunt. [...] Ergo visus semper patitur passionem quæ est de genero doloris[.]

The Shropshire canon-regular John Mirk voices similar thoughts in a Corpus Christi sermon. Since 'þe mynde of Chrisi passion is þe best defence aȝens tempaticons of þe fende,' as Mirk argues, quoting from Augustine, that it is expedient to have crucifixes and other images in churches as visual reminders of Christ's sacrifice for the world.[52] However, many people, he suggests, would not be able to imagine the Passion and thus to respond to it, if it were not for visual representations:

> [Þ]er ben mony thowsaund of þe pepul þat cowde not ymagyn in her herte how Criste was don on þe rode, bot os þei lernyn it by sytght of ymages and poyntowrs. (*Festial*, p. 157)

Representations of the Passion, then, allow the lay observer to visualise Christ's suffering; they may also help him or her to empathise with Jesus, because the sight of his tortured body on the cross touches their 'hert'.[53]

Yet sermons themselves had the power to evoke strong emotions in their audiences. In chapter 61 of her *Book*, Margery Kempe recounts the arrival of the distinguished Franciscan friar William Melton at Lynn. Melton's 'name & hys perfeccyon of prechinge spred & sprong wondyr wyde', so that 'þe peple cam rennyng to heryn þe sermown.'[54] Melton is warned by the parish priest that Margery 'wepith, sobbith & cryeth, but it lestith not longe' (p. 149) whenever she hears about Christ's Passion and manages to ignore her 'boystows wepyng' (ibid.) at first, but eventually loses his nerve, blaming Margery's weeping on 'a cardiakyl er sum oþer sekenesse' (p. 151) and complaining: 'I wolde þis woman wer owte of þe chirche; sche noyith þe pepil' (p. 149). Attempts to persuade him that her crying was a gift from God were in vain, and Margery was banned from listening to Melton's sermons for years. Margery Kemp

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[52] *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. by Susan Powell, EETS OS 334 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 157.
[53] The connections between sense perception and emotional arousal will be discussed in more detail in chapters two and three.
[54] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS OS 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 148, 149.

might arguably not be representative of late medieval lay women, and her tears and cries have to be seen in the overall context of her spirituality and her illnesses subsequent to her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The physical pain she experiences during her illness, she claims, gives her experiential knowledge of the Passion (*Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 136-38).[55] Yet the medieval church generally encouraged emotional responses to sermons, and priests frequently drew on a wide variety of rhetorical means to effect maximum emotional appeal – not only as a prelude and aid to edification and spiritual enrichment, but also as a means to a practical end.

With regard to rhetorical strategies, Aristotle explains in his *Rhetoric* that in order to be persuasive, a speaker has to create a certain impression of himself as possessing 'good sense, virtue and goodwill' (p. 171 (II.1.5)) and put his audience – which acts as a judge – in the right frame of mind (pp. 169-71 (II. 1.1-4). The latter is a matter of leading them to feel a particular emotion through the speech:

> The emotions are all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgements, and they are accompanied by pleasure and pain; such are anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries. (p. 173 (II.1.8))

Moreover, it is crucial to know, firstly, the state of mind of listeners when in the grasp of an emotion, its object, as well as its usual causes, in order to understand, how emotions can be evoked or dissipated by a speech (p. 173 (II.1.9)).

The position of the medieval preacher does, of course, differ from that of other public speakers in two aspects: he announces or teaches an absolute truth while being at the same time a representative of this truth in so far as his own life and conduct is supposed to demonstrate what he proclaims. In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine argues

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[55] We should also not forget that Margery's book is a discursive reconstruction of her life from recollection. For the way in which her meditational experience affect the ways she recollects her life see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

that even an absolute truth must be presented well. No matter how true or important the content of a speech is, it will not find attentive listeners if it is boring.[56] Hence, in book four of *De doctrina christiana,* he concerns himself with the question how *suauitas,* the sweetness of eloquence, may help to transmit the Christian message. Yet he cautions preachers against 'pernicious sweetness' (quoted in Waters, *Angels,* p. 83) of eloquence, which seeks to eclipse spiritual content.

Mirk's *Festial,* a collection of 68 vernacular sermons for the higher festivals in the Church year aimed at parish priests, illustrates the use to which rhetorical means could be put in order to maximise the emotionality of a sermon. We can take the affective stylistics of Mirk's Advent sermon as an example. The sermon begins with a sober definition of Advent as 'Crystes comyng' (*Festial,* p. 3) of which there are two, the nativity and his second coming on doomsday, before moving on to a brief explication of the liturgical implications of both. With regard to the first coming, the sermon then introduces the tripartite division of 'burþe, trauel, and deth' (p. 4). These categories are first related to Christ, then to human beings, before the congregation is reminded of the necessity of confession in a successful merger of theological explanation and pastoral exhortation:

> And for dred of deth he mot maken hym redy to hys God when he wol sende aftur hym, þat ys to saye, scryve hym of alle 'his' synnes þat ben in hys concyens, not for to abyde fro ȝer to ȝere, but also sone as he feleth hymself in synne to scryve hym and mekely take þe dom of hys scryfadur.
> [Þ]en schal he haue at þe 'day of' dom gret worshep. (p. 4)

The audience is thus kept in suspense about the nature of the second coming, which is the focus of the main part of the sermon.

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[56] For an account of Augustine's views on rhetoric and its uses and dangers for the Christian preacher in *De doctrina christiana* see Claire M. Waters, *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance, and Gender in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 80-84.

The keyword in the discussion of the second coming is 'dred' – fear or terror.[57] For the 'drede of deth' (*Festial*, p. 4) people should prepare for judgement day which is preceded by 'fyftene tokenes of gret drede', so that 'by þe euedens of þe tokenes komyng byfore, a mon may knowe in party þe grede horribylyte and drede þat schal come at þe dom aftur' (p. 5). It is precisely 'dred' of the pains of hell and awe of the judgement that the sermon seeks to inspire. Based on St Jerome, Mirk provides an evocative account of the haunting events of the last fifteen days in the life of the world brimming with images of fiery destruction, confusion and distress. Yet he also provides the readers and listeners of his sermon with a graphic image of the risen Christ who shows 'hys wondes, fresch and new bledyng as þat day þat he dyed on the cros' (p. 5). Christ's words of judgement which are closely modelled on Matthew 25. 34-35 are delivered in direct speech, before Mirk launches into an evocation of the judgement, proper. The latter finds its dramatic climax in description of the pains of hell complete with 'fyre and stench' (p. 6) and a renewed exhortation to repentance:

> Þerfore whyl ȝe ben here, makes amendus fore ȝowre euel dedus and makes ham ȝowre frendes þat schal be ȝowre domus-men at þe day of dome and truste not to ham þat cometh aftur ȝow leste ȝe ben begyled. Dredeth þe peyne þat schal last euer wythout ende. (p. 6)

The concluding *exemplum*, taken from Bede, also begins rather soberly with a story of an ill man who 'lay as ded fro þe euentyde tyl þe morwoo' (p. 6), only to get up the next day, part with his worldly goods and spend the rest of his life in penance. The story is presented chronologically and factually, and information about his life-changing nocturnal experience is deliberately withheld at first. Yet emotional intensity gathers pace quickly when the exemplum turns to the events of the night – a vision of the mouth of hell in which the souls are 'bulmen up and doun, crying and waylyng for woo

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[57] 'dred(e), (n.)', in *Middle English Dictionary* .

and sorwe' (*Festial*, p. 7). The dramatic climax of the *exemplum* – and indeed the whole sermon – is an emphatic account of the pains of hell straight from the mouths of the devils: 'Sle, sle, sle. Sle sle, sle! Put on 'þe' broch, rost hote, kast into þe cawdren, seth fast in pych and kode and brenston and hote led!' (p. 7). Repetition, alliteration, assonance and parallelism contribute to the overall harrowing effect of this exclamation, which repeats and expands the images of fire, roasting and burning that dominate the whole sermon and retains its impact beyond the concluding short prayer.

The intensely emotional atmosphere of Mirk's sermon owes as much to language as to structure. One further factor, which has a direct impact on how a sermon is received by its audience, is the preacher's bodily comportment. While classical orators, most notably Cicero, envisioned the use of acting techniques without compromising themselves, Christian preaching theorists from Augustine onwards were wary of the notion that a preacher acts as a 'performer of truth.'[58] We cannot know how the parish priests, for whom Mirk wrote his *Festial,* drew on their own physicality to underline the messages of the sermons contained in Mirk's book. However, we can glean some information about how preachers make use and take account of their own bodies, as well as the impact of acting on audiences from the twelfth-century preacher Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium Kambriae.*

In his account of his eventful tour of Wales with Archbishop Baldwin in 1188, Gerald claims that he and his fellow clerics managed to persuade over 3,000 men to take the cross, and he puts their success largely down to their – and particularly his own – preaching skills. At Haverford, Gerald tells us, there was a great and socially mixed crowd assembled to listen first to Baldwin and then to Gerald himself. Although Gerald

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[58] Waters, *Angels*, p. 45. Waters explores the theatricality of the preacher's task in *Angels*, pp. 31-56. See also G. R. Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit*, 2nd rev. edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p. 547.

chooses to preach in Latin and French, languages which, he concedes, many of the people present could not understand, the sermon manages to move everybody to tears and persuades them to take the cross.[59] He delivers a brilliant (verbal) performance – one which implies that he considered what is said in a sermon to be less important than how it is said. It is clear from his *Itinerarium* that Gerald conceived of the universal weeping his sermons inspired as an unmistakable sign of conversion to the crusades – and of his own success as a preacher. Where people do not show signs of being moved or are not persuaded on the spot to take the cross, the sermon must be regarded as a failure, and only miracles can help. In the second book of his *Itinerarium Kambriæ,* Gerald recounts an episode at Anglesey where he and his fellow travellers preached to a group of young people. Despite all their eloquence, their sermons fell on deaf ears. It takes divine retribution in the form of a bloody confrontation with a band of robbers for the youths to change their minds and to take the cross (p. 126).

In the absence of miracles, physical exertion may make a crucial difference, as a further anecdote from the *Itinerarium* suggests. When Archbishop Baldwin delivers a sermon at Radnor, Gerald throws himself at the Archbishop's feet and becomes the first to receive the sign of the cross: '[A]d pedes viri sancti provolutus crucis signaculum devote suscepit' (p. 14). Slipping into the role of an audience member, Gerald attempts to convey the message of the sermon via his own body – he *performs* the desired and expected response. The bishop of St David's, Peter, and many others immediately follow his example, others take the cross the following day (p. 16). As Gary Dickson observes, Gerald's conscious decision at Radnor to represent an audience member and act as a stimulus, reveals a high degree of 'understanding of crowd suggestability' on his

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[59] Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriæ*, in *Geraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. by John S. Brewer, George F. Warner and James F. Dimock, 8 vols, Rerum Britannicum medii aevi scriptores, XXI (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861-91), VI (1868), 82-83.

part.[60] Gerald's actions undoubtedly reveal that he knew how to manipulate crowd behaviour, and that he consciously did so for a pre-determined end, which raises questions about his understanding of the preacher's body and representation, particularly in the light of the warning against becoming a mere *histrio* voiced in the *artes praedicandi*. What is interesting for the purposes of this project is the underlying assumption of the positive valences of theatricality in this particular communicative context. Baldwin preaches with the aim to convert his listeners to the crusades; Gerald's physical performance brings about the desired outcome. Gerald's story of the events at Radnor describes a mimetic performance which made public what had been private: persuasion. Gerald falls at Baldwin's feet 'propriæ ratione persuasione' (*Itinerarium Kambriæ*, p. 14). Given that for Gerald, the arousal of strong emotions was a pre-condition for conversion and a pathway to persuasion, throwing himself at Baldwin's feet demonstrates a clear awareness of the power of the acting body to elicit such strong emotional activations in a watching and listening audience.

For Bacon, whose scientific love affair was with optics, this would primarily be a matter of the eyes. He considered the arousal of strong emotions to be achievable visually through the use of the body and the eye, based on the notion that seeing is a form of feeling.[61] As we have seen, medieval theories of vision such as Bacon's have been demonstrated to have a basis in sensorimotor fact by research in the cognitive sciences. Contemporary researchers in the cognitive sciences and in performance studies would surely also point to the physicality of Gerald as the performer and the audience as a crucial factor for the emotive impact of Gerald's display. The observation of his response to the sermon – that is his throwing himself at the archbishop's feet – can be considered to trigger a contagion response. Experimental research has

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[60] Gary Dickson, 'Medieval Christian Crowds and the Origins of Crowd Psychology', *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 95 (2000), 54-75 (64).
[61] For Bacon's forays into crowd psychology see Dickson, pp. 70-74.

demonstrated that human beings partly or fully embody the emotional expressions and movements of others. The muscular and neurological responses that watching the actions or emotional expressions of others evoke in us are often so small that they escape our conscious recognition, and yet they have significant influence on our behaviour. In other words, we unconsciously mirror the motor actions and emotional expressions of those we observe. The emotions induced by such mirroring change how people think. The implication for those involved in the business of persuading people to take the cross is that there is an interactional relationship between a priest-performer like Gerald and the audience which does not rely on signification. When they pay attention to his motor actions, the observation automatically triggers the formation of a motor plan for these movements in the spectator which facilitates the unconscious mirroring of such movements. The cognitive information can be used directly to understand the intentions and also the emotions of the performer. Of course, the members of Gerald's and Baldwin's audience at Radnor also have to interpret for themselves the verbal content of the sermon and engage in other mental operations. However, embodied responses shape subsequent cognitive processing. Watching Gerald fall at the feet of the Archbishop, they will tend to form judgements about his honesty and conviction partly on the basis of their emotional response to him.

Gerald's performance raises questions about the relationship between emotion and cognition, but also between theatricality and teaching. It is interesting for the purposes of this project not only due to the rhetorical affinities between sermons and the vernacular drama.[62] Bringing into sharp focus how theatricality and performance can be used to manipulate the emotions of audiences for social, political, or religious effects, it may serve as a starting point for the issues explored in the following chapters:

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[62] For the relationship between sermons and the vernacular drama of the later Middle Ages, see Owst, pp. 161-68. Owst went as far as to claim that the medieval vernacular play was 'little more than a dramatised sermon or a set of sermons' (p. 547).

the didactic efficacy of dramatisations of the Giving of the Law in the context of the medieval image debate; the performance of Christological suffering and of emotional responses to this suffering in the light of notions about the physical, spiritual, ethical, and moral consequences of perception; and the influence of later medieval theories concerning the relation between perception, knowledge and belief on representations of certainty and doubt in Resurrection plays.

Chapter 2
Moving Images

Throughout most of the modern period, Middle English religious drama has been understood to be a didactic genre – as doctrine expressed in dramatic form. According to Kolve, the main aim of scriptural drama was 'to instruct in matters central to the salvation of soul' (p. 20), and more recently, Duffy singled out the vernacular religious drama as a 'fundamental means of transmitting religious instruction and stirring devotion' (p. 67).[1] However, the view that religious theatre strengthened the faith and inspired devotion was also widespread in the later Middle Ages. An entry for 1426 in the York A/Y Memorandum Book, for example, relates how William Melton, a well-known Franciscan preacher, 'has commended the said [Corpus Christi] play in several of his sermons, by affirming that it was good in itself and most laudable.'[2] And the Chester Early Banns (1539-40) announce that the Corpus Christi plays are to be performed:

> for the Augmentacion & incresse of the holy and catholyk ffaith of our savyour cryst Iesu and to exhort the myndes of the comen peple to gud devocion and holsom doctrine ther of but Also for the comen welth and prospentie of this Citie[.][3]

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[1] Woolf makes a similar point in *English Mystery Plays* (pp. 75, 92).

[2] *REED: York*, II, 728. The Latin text reads: 'Super hoc quidam vir maxime religiosus frater Willelmus melton odinis fratrum minorum sacre pagine professor verbi dei famosissimus predicator ad istam veniens ciuitatem in suis sermonibus diuersis ludum predictum populo commendauit affirmando quod bonus erat in se & laudibilis [...]' (*REED: York*, I, 43).

[3] *Records of Early Drama: Chester*, ed. by Lawrence M. Clopper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 33.

While it is generally accepted that the vernacular drama arose within the efforts of the Church to instruct the laity, there is very little engagement in existing scholarship with the relation between theatricality and didacticism beyond a rather narrow focus on the rich intertextual relations between play-texts and catechetical or devotional materials.

As regards the selection and arrangement of episodes in the urban play collections, modern critics have usually turned to the liturgy of the Church and Latin liturgical drama, ecclesiastical documents pertaining to the establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi and the liturgy surrounding it.[4] However, Patrick Collins has argued that long-standing traditions of pictorial representation rather than patristic commentary or the liturgy provide the structural framework for the collections.[5] Through pictorial representations, audiences became familiar with the subject matter of the biblical plays, Collins asserts, which allows the authors of the plays to include episodes of little dramatic tension in the cycles (p. 136). Collins' argument needs to be modified in the light of recent research which challenges the binary model of theatrical activity underpinning his study and calls into question the presumed status of the Towneley and N-Town collections as cycles, both of which are central to Collins' case.[6] Moreover, an indisputable direction of influence is hard to prove. As Evelyn Newlyn illustrates in her nuanced discussion of the St Neot Creation window in relation to the Cornish *Creation of*

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[4] For the influence of the feast of Corpus Christi on the format of vernacular play collections see, for example, Kolve, pp. 48-49; Woolf, pp. 71-76.

[5] Patrick J. Collins, 'Narrative Bible Cycles in Medieval Art and Drama', in *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. by Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1982), pp. 118-39 (p. 119). Collins thus reverses the view – propounded predominantly by art historians – that the drama informed the iconography of contemporary art. See, for example, Emile Mâle, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, repr. New York: Noonday, 1970).

[6] Collins illustrates his argument by pointing to the resemblance between the N-Town collection and Croughton church murals in terms of subject matter (p. 133). For a brief summary of recent developments with regard to the status of extant plays see Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 1-2.

the World, absolute certainty about the relation between art and drama is impossible.[7] Nevertheless, Collins's approach may serve as a starting point for the re-investigation of a set of plays whose sole dramatic merit is often considered to be that they provide a smooth transition from the Old to the New Testament or draw out a religious lesson: Moses plays which include a recitation of the Decalogue.[8]

Even though contemporary eyewitness reports testify to the power of visual images to affect the hearts and minds of their beholders, the living and moving stage images of the Moses plays have frequently been neglected in the modern critical discussion due to a perceived paucity of solid evidence for performance particulars. The emphasis is instead on literary parallels to the versions of the Decalogue recited on stage as well as on typological aspects. Yet such marginalising of the visual impairs a sound understanding of the plays, for in theatre the spoken word never simply exists in a verbal context. It is necessarily tied to a visible speaking body. And because speaking and listening always happen as part of a bodily experience, the consideration of the perceptible aspects of a play is linked to the larger matter of its perceived meaning. In the case of dramatisations of the Decalogue, this does not necessarily only extend to the wish to reinforce a lesson derived from catechetical materials.

This chapter seeks to investigate the links between the cognitive and affective dynamics of the beholder and the stage action that he or she beholds in dramatic representations of the Ten Commandments. It takes as its context the catechetical agenda and instructional practices of the later medieval Church and the related discourse concerning the use of devotional images as it was viewed in both orthodox and heterodox circles. These discourses, I argue, are reflected in the texts and the

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[7] Evelyn S. Newlyn, 'The Stained and Painted Glass of St Neot's Church and the Staging of the Middle Cornish Drama', *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 14 (1994), 89-111.

[8] See Woolf's comments on the dramatic value of prophets' plays (p. 158).

performance configurations of dramatisations of the Decalogue. The first part of this chapter will give an overview of the catechetical preoccupations of the Church in England during the later Middle Ages and briefly discuss homiletic, literary, and pictorial examples of how Church teachings were transmitted to the laity. The second part turns to the three surviving Old Testament expositions of the Decalogue in the Chester cycle and the Towneley and N-Town collections in order to explore how these pageants, which invariably have to engage with the commandment forbidding image-making, deal with their own status as living images, as word made flesh.

'For commune profet'[9]: Instructing the Laity

The Fourth Lateran Council had identified deficiencies in clerical and lay education as the root of the proliferation of heresies, and thus sought to improve both, by providing an official framework for lay instruction. Among the reforming canons produced by the Fourth Lateran Council was constitution 21, which required annual communion from every one:

> All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to do the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter.[10]

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[9] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, EETS OS 118 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901, repr. Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1972), T.46. All further references to this edition will be as *LFC*, followed by the text referred to and line numbers.

[10] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. by Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), I, 245. The Latin original reads:

> Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis per venerit, omnia sua solus peccata confiteatur fideliter, saltem semel in anno proprio sacerdoti, et iniunctam sibi poenitentiam studeat pro viribus adimplere, suscipiens reserventer ad minus in pascha euchristiae sacramentum. (*Decrees*, I, 245)

Closely related to this penitential canon is canon 10, which required the instruction of the laity in the essential of the faith by their parish priest (*Decrees*, I, 239-40).

The reform programme of the Church set out in the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council laid the onus of priestly education squarely on the bishops who ordained them. This resulted, in England, in provincial and diocesan legislation designed to provide support for the parochial clergy who frequently failed to live up to the expectations of their superiors and their parishioners alike.[11] Two programmes of instruction aimed at the parochial clergy proved to have a particularly pervasive influence: the institutions of the Council of Lambeth (1281), better known by their incipit as *Ignorantia Sacerdotum,* and Archbishop Thoresby's catechism (1357). The *Ignorantia Sacerdotum* formulates a basic curriculum for parochial education in the fundamentals of the faith:

> The fourteen articles of the faith; the ten commandments of the Decalogue; the two Gospel precepts, that is to say the two precepts of love; also the seven works of mercy; the seven deadly sins and their offspring; the seven cardinal virtues; as well as the seven sacraments of grace.[12]

These were to be expounded to the parishoners four times a year in the vernacular (*LFC,* P.18-19). For the benefit of poorly educated priests, a brief exposition of these basic elements of the faith then follows. This syllabus, drafted by Archbishop John Peckham's Council of Lambeth, aimed at providing medieval Christians with the basic means to examine their consciences in order to enable them to fulfil the obligation of annual confession and communion to the parish priest.

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[11] For the notorious lack of knowledge among parish priests and the deficits in clerical education see, for example, Margaret Deanesly, *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), pp. 188-204; Duffy, p. 58.

[12] *LFC*, P.19-22:

> XIIII Fidei articulos; X. Mandata decalogi; duo Præcepta evangelii, videlicet, geminæ charitatis; et VII. etiam Opera misericordiæ; VII. Capitalis peccata, cum sua progenie; VII. Virtutes principales; ac etiam VII. Gratiæ sacramenta.

All translations from the Latin texts printed in the *LFC* are mine unless otherwise stated.

However, the *Ignoratia Sacerdotum* is not a compendium of parochial theology and was thus soon complemented by more comprehensive pastoral manuals, most notably Archbishop John Thoresby of York's set of instructions for his parochial clergy, issued in 1357.[13] Translated officially from Latin into English verse by the Benedictine monk John Gaytryge the same year, Thoresby's instructions became better known as the *Lay Folks' Catechism* and were widely circulated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[14] In its incarnation as an English verse treatise, Thoresby's pastoral manual also undergoes a generic transformation, becoming an instrument of lay instruction. Where the Latin version is concise, the English verse translation is much fuller and expanded. In its treatment of the sin of lechery, for example, the Latin text limits itself to a brief enumeration of different kinds of lechery. It simply states: 'The sin of lechery is so exceedingly known these days as incest, adultery and fornication, and therefore it is not necessary to expose its foulness.'[15] The brevity of the clause only heightens the author's apparent disgust. The English verse translation, in contrast, fleshes out the various permutations of the sin:

> The seuent dedely syn is lecheri,
> That is a foule likyng or lust of the flesch;
> And of this syn comes many sere spices.
> Ane is fornication, a fleshly syn
> Betwix ane aynlepi man, and ane aynlepi woman,
> That forthi that it is ogaynes the lawe
> *And* the leue, *and* the lare that hali kirk haldes,
> It is dedely syn to tham that dos it.
>   An other is auoutry, that is spousebrek,

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[13] In its original Latin form, Thoresby's catechism is closely modelled on Peckham's syllabus and equally seeks to equip the parish clergy with the knowledge necessary to teach their flocks the most important articles of doctrine 'saltem diebus dominicis' in English (*LFC*, C.13) rather than just four times a year. Thoresby also envisaged confession to function both as an exploration of people's moral condition and their knowledge of the faith (see *LFC*, T.66-71).

[14] With regard to the identity of the translator, Simmons and Nolloth quote a note at the end of a copy of Thoresby's catechism in London, British Library, MS Harley 1022, which mentions 'Johannem de Taystek' as the translator (*LFC*, p. xvii).
See also Anne Hudson, 'A New Look at the Lay Folks' Catechism', *Viator*, 16 (1985), 243-58, for the precedence of variant texts and manuscripts.

[15] *LFC*, C.233-35: 'Peccatum vero luxuriæ est his temporibus nimis notum, ut incestus, adulterium, fornicatio et ideo non oportet exponere ejus fœditatem.'

> Whether it be bodily or it be gastely,
> That greuouser *and* gretter is than that othir.
> The third is incest, that is when a man synnes
> Fleshly with any of his sib frend,
> Or any other that is of his affinite,
> Gastely or bodili, whethir so it be.
> Othir spices many ma springes of this syn,
> That ou*er* mikel er knawen and kennd in the werld,
> With tham that ledis thair lifs als thaire flesch yhernes. (*LFC,* T.543-60)

Thus the Latin *termini technici* incest, adultery, and fornication are filled with meaning for those potentially unfamiliar with them.

The *Lay Folks' Catechism* was vastly influential and 'imitated or directly used in dioceses all over England up to the Reformation' (Duffy, p. 54). The impact of Thoresby's instructional programme can be observed in Mirk's *Festial*. The instructional duties of the priest are mentioned in sermons 15 (the seven deadly sins), 16 (the corporeal works of mercy), 17 (parts of the Creed), 29 (the major virtues and vices), and 38 (the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven deadly sins). The sermon for the fourth Sunday in Lent (22) includes the Decalogue. Like most sermons in the *Festial*, this sermon combines the reading of the day with explications of extra-scriptural church tradition. Thus Mirk presents the Easter processions to the 'fonte' as a commemoration of the passage of the Red Sea, and he even alludes to the iconographical tradition of depicting Moses as "horned" after his encounter with God on Mount Sinai:

> And whan he com doun to þe pepul, hys faas was so bryght as þe sonne and too spyres sto[don] oute of hys heued lek too hornys, so þat þe pepul myghte not spekon with hym for clerenesse, tyl he toke a kerchef and heled hys face. (*Festial*, p. 90)

The convention is based on St Jerome's mistranslation of an ambiguous Hebrew phrase in Exodus 34. 29-35, which describes the peculiar appearance of Moses' face.[16]

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[16] For the iconographical convention of depicting Moses with horns, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

Mirk's treatment of the Ten Commandments in his sermon takes as its starting point the Augustinian division into three commandments pertaining to God and seven pertaining to humans (see *LFC*, T.170-72). For the most part, it consists of enumerating the commandments in English. Mirk makes it unequivocally clear that those who break them are headed for eternal damnation unless they confess their sins. Yet unlike in his apocalyptic Advent sermon, in which he harangues his audience with threats of fire and brimstone should they not repent their sins in time, Mirk here simply declares:

> For he þat wyl schryuen hym klene and leuen hys foule lyving and [holde] þe cownandes þat he made wyyth God in hys folwyng, he schal gedur togydur [uertues] so þat he schal encreson hem herer þan any hul in erþe. (*Festial*, p. 91)

Only the second, the fourth, and the fifth commandments are accorded brief expositions in which Mirk attempts characterisations of the moral law in its relation to human life. With regard to the second commandment, he explains:

> [Þ]ou schalt not takon þi Goddys name in vayne, þat is, þou schalt not be callud a criston man but þou lyf a criston lyve. For þagh þou be called a criston man and seruyst moste þe fende, þat name standeth þe in veyne. And also þou schalt not sweron be God, ne no parte of hys body, ne by noþing þat he made, bot in affermyng of trewth, and ȝitte whan þou arte constreynod þertoo (p. 90).

By supplying a brief moralising comment, Mirk thus offers a glossed version of the commandment which is akin to that given in the English version of Thoresby's catechism (see *LFC,* T.182-86). Mirk's comment on the fifth commandment warns against the murder of a fellow human being through the agency of the hands as well as the tongue:

> Þou sc[h]alte no[t] slene no man neþur wyth þine hande, ne wyth þine tonge, ne wyth euel ensampul, ne wythdrawe lore and techyng fro þem þat þou arte holde to teche. (*Festial*, p. 90)

The notion that speech may pose a threat to the physical and the spiritual body of the listeners and the subjects of speech alike, was widespread in the later Middle Ages as the discussion of the fifth precept in *Dives and Pauper* illustrates. The author of *Dives and Pauper* quotes Augustine in saying that 'þe tunge of þe flaterere doth more harm þan þe swerd of þe enmy pursuynge […].'[17] However, like Mirk, he also stresses the restorative aspects of speech in the form of teaching, when he equates withholding God's word from others with manslaughter:

> Syth þanne Godys word is lif & sauacion of manys soule, alle þo þat lettyn Godis word and lettyn hem than þat han autorite to prechyn & techyn þat þei mon nout prechyn & techyn Godis word ne Godis lawe, þei ben mansleeris gostlyche & gylty of as many soulys as perchyn & deyyn gostlyche be swiche lettynge of Godis word[.] (*Dives and Pauper*, I, part 2, 22)

Instructing the ignorant counts among the seven practices of charity towards the soul of one's neighbour which are commonly known as the spiritual works of mercy.

While preaching certainly constituted an important way of instructing the laity, it was by no means the only one. The catechetical requirements were also transmitted through other contexts such as pictorial treatments in church decorations and furnishings and through an increasing number of often illustrated devotional and didactic works for the growing number of literate, educated laypeople.[18] Instructional literature frequently draws a link between the Mosaic Law and sin or penance. A short lyric in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. (poet) F. 32 ties the Commandments in with the seven deadly sins and the five corporeal senses:

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[17] *Dives and Pauper*, ed. by Priscilla Heath Barnum, EETS OS 275, 280, 323, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1976-2005), I, part 2, 3.

[18] For the growth of religious interest and piety among the laity and the ensuing inflation of mystical and devotional literature in the vernacular to cater for lay readers, see G. H. Russell, 'Vernacular Instruction of the Laity in the Later Middle Ages in England: Some Texts and Notes', *Journal of Religious History*, 2 (1962), 98-119.

> All fals goddis þou shalt foresak
> Hi name nott in Idell take
> Hold well þyn halyday
> Worshep thy fader & moder ay
> Mansleer shalt þou non be
> Lechery þou shalt fle
> No man is gwod þou shalt stere
> Nother false wytness bere
> Couete þou no man is wyff
> Nore no þyng þat to hym heþe
> Myspend we nott fyve
> And fle we seven
> Kepe wel .x. & com to heuen [.] (Russell, p. 112)

Likewise, in a prayer from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawl. liturg. e.7, the Ten Commandments are each broken down into sins:

> The ten comawndementis I haue broke
> Many a tyme with wickede skylle;
> To falce goddus I haue spoke
> And wrowghte, a-gaynes my lordis wille.
>
> Many a tyme I haue take
> Goddes name in Idylsheppe,
> There-fore I tremell, drede and quake.
> Mercy! god, for thi lordshepe.[19]

As a confessional mirror, the Decalogue is, however, often supplanted by lists of sins in penitential material, as 'The Parson's Tale' in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* illustrates.[20]

Images as Didactic Tools[21]

The Seven Deadly Sins were a popular subject in late medieval art in their own right. An interesting example can be found in the church of Wigginhall St Germans in Norfolk. The medieval pews in the main nave show on the south side carvings of Lust, Gluttony,

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[19] *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 211-12, ll. 1-8.

[20] 'The Parson's Tale' uses material from the 1236 *Summa vitiorum* by the Dominincan friar William Paraldus for the Parson's explication of confession. See 'The Parson's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 288-307, ll. 390-955, and p. 956.

[21] For a detailed discussion of the functions of images in medieval devotion, see Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England, 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), esp. pp. 43-68.

Avarice, Anger and Pride. Sloth and Envy do not survive, and Pride is damaged. The sins are all depicted in little scenes on the left-hand side of the pew-end and set in the mouth of Hell. Lust, for example, is shown as an embracing couple, with the woman holding a money-bag (figure 1). The right-hand side of the pew-end usually features an angel pointing towards the sin scene. However scenes from the life of Moses – including the Giving of the Law – were usually included in typological schemes. Mirk sums up the typological correspondence between Moses and Jesus in his Quarta Quadragesima Sunday sermon discussed earlier: 'Þus was Moyses a fugure and a tokyn of Criste. For Moyses com before and ʒaf þe lawe, and Criste com aftur and ʒaf grace, and mercy and trewthe' (*Festial*, p. 90). Salvation history is thus usually divided into three great phases: *ante legem, sub lege*, and *sub gratia.*[22] Such exegetical thought is presented pictorially, for example, in the *Bibliae Pauperum*. Popular from the thirteenth century onwards, the *Bibliae Pauperum* tell the story of Christ in 34 to 48 scenes with each New Testament scene (the "antitype") set in the middle of the page and flanked by two Old Testament episodes or prophecies understood to prefigure Christ (the "types"). In a mid-fifteenth-century printed block-book version of the *Biblia Pauperum* (Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Handschriften-sammlung, Inv.-Nr. g 152 d), the nativity is flanked by Moses and the burning bush on the left, and the budding of Aaron's rod on the right. The triad is accompanied by four prophets above and below.[23]

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[22] The typological handbook *Pictor in Carmine* follows this principle. See M. R. James, '*Pictor in Carmine*', *Archæologia*, 94 (1951), 141-66. On *Pictor in Carmine* see Herbert L. Kessler, 'Gregory the Great and Image Theory in Northern Europe During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. by Conrad Rudolph (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 151-72, and 'Turning a Blind Eye: Medieval Art and the Dynamics of Contemplation', in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey L. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Princeton University Department of Art and Archaeology in association with Princeton University Press), pp. 413-39, esp. pp. 415-20.

[23] For the structure of *Bibliae Pauperum* see for example, Francis Wormald, 'Bible Illustration in Medieval Manuscripts' in *The Cambridge History of the Bible,* ed. by Peter R. Ackroyd and others, 3 vols (Cambridge:

The typological schemes in the *Bibliae Pauperum* or in stained glass windows such as the Corona Redemption Window in Canterbury Cathedral, to name but one example, thus demand a certain degree of visual literacy. The onlooker must be able to negotiate and interpret the information presented in an image or a series of images to construct their spiritual meaning. Thus the resonance between the images always depends – to a certain degree at least – on the onlooker's perception and on his or her understanding of the multiple layers of meaning. And yet medieval visual art is frequently considered as a testament first and foremost to the ubiquity of the catechetical efforts of the Church, rather than as a vehicle of exegetical thought. For Émile Mâle, for example, the Gothic cathedrals were gigantic bibles in glass and stone for the illiterate (*The Gothic Image*, p. 398). Many of Mâle's *dicta* have been subject to withering critique in recent years in an ongoing re-appreciation of images as social agents in their own right.[24] However, the notion which underpins much of his work that images are subservient to the word has a long tradition and can be traced back to Pope Gregory the Great's defence of images in his letters to the iconoclastic bishop Serenus of Marseille.[25] For Gregory, images are, above all, a substitute for the written word for the illiterate, and thus serve as a means of preserving the word.

Cambridge University Press, 1969-70), II: *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. by Geoffrey w. H. Lampe (1969), 309-37, 332-34. See also Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, pp. 172-73.

[24] The essays in *The Mind's Eye* provide a useful overview of current work on the devotional and theological role of images in the Middle Ages.

[25] 'Gregorius Iohani Episcopo Syracusano' in *Gregorii I Papae Registrum Epistolarium*, ed. by Paul Ewald and Ludwig M. Hartmann, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae [in quarto], I-II (Berlin: Weidmann, 1887-99), II, 270 (IX.42):

> Aliud est enim picturam adorare, aliud picturae historia, quid sit adorandum, addiscere. Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa ignorantes vident quid debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nescunt.

> It is one thing to worship a picture but another thing to learn through the story of a picture what is to be worshipped. For what writing presents to those who can read, a picture presents to the unlearned who beholds it, since in a picture even the ignorant can see what they ought to. In a picture, the illiterate read.

The mnemonic function of images is also at the centre of Reginald Pecock's discussion of the benefits of devotional art in the *Repressor*. [26] In the latter, Pecock gives clear expression to the late medieval orthodox position that images are signs represented in material form, whose purpose it is 'to be had and vsid as rememoratijf signes of God, and of hise benefetis, and of his holi lijf and passioun, and of Seintis and of her conversacioun' (*Repressor*, I, 167). Yet images can also become material channels of grace if they are venerated as signs. Or as Pecock observes:

> [T]he liknes of a signe to his significat, (that is to seie, to the thing signified bi him,) wole helpe the signe forto signifie and forto make remembraunce the bettir upon the thing signified [.] (*Repressor*, I, 163)

The entire late medieval image debate hinged on the very question about the relation between signifier and signified. [27]

In its discussion of the first commandment, *Dives and Pauper* presents a compact version of the two main positions as regards devotional images in the fifteenth-century debate. [28] The iconoclastic position, usually associated with Lollard polemic, is taken up by the rich Dives. It is motivated, firstly, by a literal interpretation of the prohibition against graven images, and, secondly, by the dangers inherent in the ambiguous nature of images as material objects in a market economy and signs of an immaterial reality. [29] It is only a short step from worshipping before an image to worshipping the image itself with all its material seductions (see *Dives and Pauper,* I, part 1, 81). A similar point is made by the author of the Wycliffite *Tretyse on Ymages*, which condemns both visual

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[26] Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. Churchill Babington, 2 vols, Rerum britannicarum medii aevi scriptores, XIX (London: Longman, 1860).

[27] For an overview of texts which take up this debate, see Anne Hudson, *Selections of English Wycliffite Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 179-81, and Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), pp. 11-37.

[28] See also Kamerick, pp. 48-51 for a more detailed discussion of the defence of images in *Dives and Pauper*.

[29] For a discussion of images as material objects and the public anxieties surrounding devotional images in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

representations and pilgrimages as twin forms of idolatry. Decorated images, the *Tretise on Ymages* argues, encourage people to attribute agency to dead matter:

> ꝫit þe puple is foul disceyuyd by veyn trist in þes ymagis. For summe lewid folc wenen þat þe ymagis doun verreyly þe myraclis of hemsilf, and þat þis ymage of the crucifix be Crist hymsilf, or þe seynt þat þe ymage is þere sett for lickenesse. (*Selections of English Wycliffite Writings*, p. 87)

The *Tretyse* has little faith in the ability of ordinary people to distinguish between the material object and spiritual meaning. Some people are just too 'lewed' to distinguish the signifier from the signified, the material from the immaterial. Pauper, in contrast, an educated mendicant priest, takes up the orthodox position that visual representations of the sacred are often considered to be particularly beneficial to the 'lewyd man' (*Dives and Pauper*, I, part 1, 87) because they are pictorial "texts".[30] However, in his concise threefold defence of images, this time-honoured Gregorian notion comes last. First of all, Pauper points out, 'þey [=images] been ordeynyd to steryn manys mende to thynkyn of Cristys incarnacioun and of his passion and of holye seyntys lyuys' (ibid.) and secondly, they 'been ordeynyd to steryn mannys affeccioun and his herte to deuocioun, for ofte man is more steryd by syghte þan be herynge or reddynge' (*Dives and Pauper*, I, part 1, 82). On lay people, images can have a more lasting effect than the words of the priest because the uneducated can learn from images what they cannot learn from the written word, but also because images affect them in a way that words or letters cannot move them.

Medieval Aristotelianism sets up a context for the defence of images in the later Middle Ages. In *De anima*, Aristotle emphasised the necessity of *sensibilia* and the mental

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[30] It is tempting from a modern perspective to equate 'lewyd' with unlearned and illiterate. Yet it need mean no more than unable to read Latin fluently or lay as Meg Twycross has pointed out in 'Books for the Unlearned', in *Drama and Religion*, ed. by James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 65-110 (p. 67). Recent studies have shown that a summary illiteracy of late medieval people cannot be presumed, and that the average fifteenth-century playgoer was most likely to be at least functionally literate (see King, *York Mystery Cycle*, p. 32).

images derived from them for the process of thinking and understanding (see pp. 145-55 (III.2) and p. 177 (III.7)). Aquinas drew heavily on Aristotle for his own account of cognition, not only with regard to the apprehensive powers in the sensitive soul, i.e. the inner senses, but also in terms of the relationship between his epistemology and images. For Aquinas, *phantasmata* or images for the mind's eye which are derived from sense perceptions and formed in the imagination function as the link between body, soul, and intellect: 'For the soul understands nothing without imagery, and there is no imagery apart from the body, as is said in *De Anima*.'[31] Central to this conception is the idea that sight is generically different and superior to the other senses – a conception which will be explored further in chapter four. For Aquinas, the superiority of sight is grounded in the spiritual rather than the physical change it produces in the viewer (*ST* 1a., 78.3); for Bacon it is the notion that 'vision alone reveals the differences of things' (*Opus Majus: A Translation*, II, 419) and thus represents the human potential for knowledge.[32] Pecock's *Repressor* illustrates the influence of such notions and their correlative cognitive models on some defences of images. Pecock states:

> [T]he iȝe siȝt schewith and bringith into ymaginacioun and into the mynde withyinne in the heed of o man myche mater and long mater sooner, and with lasse labour and travail and peine, than the heeringe of the eere doth. (*Repressor*, I, 212-13)

The perceived superiority of sight and its alignment with cognitive functions in medieval Aristotelianism also helps explain why human beings are more moved or moved more easily by what they see rather than what they perceive through the other senses. Aquinas states directly that the sensitive appetite is not only moved by the cogitative power but

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[31] *ST* 1a., 75.6: 'Nihil enim sine phantasmate intellegit anima, phantasma autem non est sine corpore, ut dicitur in libro *De anima*.'

[32] The frequently postulated paradigmatic relationship between thinking – the *oculi mentis* – and corporeal sight is apparent today in the fact that most terms for mental activity in Indo-European languages derive from words for vision or the visible. The Indo-European roots *woid-, originally a perfect form of *woi- (to see), is the source of Latin *videre* (see), Greek *oida* (I know), French *voir* (see), and German *wissen* (know). See 'wit, *v.¹*,' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

also by imagination and sensation where vision dominates (*ST* 1a., 81.3). Moreover, Aquinas holds, sense perception and the *phantasmata* composed and stored in the imagination may work together to produce a passion (see Miner, p. 67). For example, if I see a house which I have seen before, it is likely that mental images of this house are stored in my imagination from prior acts of sensation. Hence these can interact with my immediate sensation of the house to activate a movement of the sensitive appetite, i. e. a passion. As Miner points out, 'this interaction explains why appetitive motion sometimes seems "out of proportion" to the thing sensed' (p. 68).[33]

The late medieval arguments for and against the use of devotional images are interesting because they resurface in debates about the legitimacy of the religious plays, which were phenomenologically placed in the same aesthetic category as static images.[34] The potential of the visual image to overwhelm the lesson inherent in it, which underpins Pauper's repeated warnings to do one's worship 'aforn þe ymage nought to þe ymage' (*Dives and Pauper*, I, part 1, 85) is also at the basis of the attack against biblical plays mounted by the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. Applying iconoclastic arguments to drama, they argue that theatrical representations are something of a Platonic cave, shadows playing upon shadows. They are 'signis withoute dede' (*Tretise*, l. 207) and 'feinyd tokenes' (l. 226) – mere external signs without substance, which distort reality (see ll. 359-61), to which people do, however, give credence. In short: for the authors of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleying*, religious plays are not useful recreation but 'maumetrie' (l. 614). The second part of this chapter now turns to the question how dramatic representations of the Decalogue in the Chester, N-Town and Towneley Moses-plays

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[33] Miner uses the example of Hitchcock's character Marnie in Alfred Hitchcock's eponymous film to illustrate this point.

[34] For an overview of attitudes towards the drama see Marianne G. Briscoe, 'Some Clerical Notions of Dramatic Decorum in Late Medieval England', in *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. by Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1991), pp. 210-22 and Nicholas Davis, 'Spectacula Christiana: A Roman Christian Template for Medieval Drama', *Medieval English Theatre*, 9 (1987), 125-52.

engage and position the audience to ensure the affective and mnemonic efficacy of the performance image.

Moses as Living Image

In the Towneley, Chester and N-Town collections, the commandments are expounded twice. An Old Testament version based on Exodus 20. 1-17 and Deuteronomy 5. 6-21 is delivered by Moses or God in a prophets' play or a Moses play, while a Christianised version, which combines the two Gospel precepts with the first commandment, is usually the subject of the disputation between the young Jesus and the Doctors. The York cycle stands alone in not staging an Old Testament version of the Decalogue. The wording and the expositions of the commandments in these plays generally follow conventional medieval models.[35] In terms of scope, they range from God's unembellished recitation in the Chester Cappers' play (*Chester*, 5) to Moses' lengthy delivery of a versified sermon in the N-Town *Moses* play (*N-Town*, 6). In the Towneley collection, Moses recites the commandments in an incomplete *Processus Prophetarum* pageant (*Towneley*, 7) which also features David, the Sibyl, and Daniel.

Wedged inbetween a Jacob play and a Moses and Pharaoh pageant, the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum* opens with Moses' request for audience attention for a messianic prophecy based on the *lectio* or Matins of Christmas, which is followed by an exposition of the Decalogue.[36] The pageant devotes altogether six stanzas to the Decalogue which are framed by three introductory and one concluding stanza. The commandments follow the account in Exodus in their arrangement, with the exception

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[35] For textual parallels see *Towneley,* II, 459-64; *N-Town,* II, 429-31; *Chester Mystery Cycle*, II, 60-76.
[36] For the source of the prophecy see *Towneley,* II, 459-60.

of the ninth and tenth commandments, which follow the order in Deuteronomy. The order of the fifth and sixth commandments is switched.

In visual terms, the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum* is a comparatively austere pageant, as it places its sequence of Old Testament prophets in front of the audience on a stage unspecified as regards time and space and using very few stage props. As the only person present on stage, the actor playing Moses necessarily fixes the audience's attention visually and aurally. His stage portrait presents an image which is strongly reminiscent of purely visual representations and the *tableaux vivants* of processions.[37] It comes close to what Milla Riggio termed an 'iconic stage portrait': a stage image which is temporarily frozen in front of the spectator.[38] However, the function of the Towneley portrait of Moses is somewhat different from the one Riggio envisages for the portraits of Anima and Christ in her discussion of *Wisdom.* The tableau-like stasis of the Towneley Moses-episode creates a stage image not primarily aimed at inspiring piety but at activating memory.

The pageant text does not prescribe a specific costume for Moses, but performance possibilities can be gleaned from the iconographical traditions for Moses and the prophets in the visual arts. Single figures appearing as part of the sculptural decoration of churches often depict the patriarch as bearded, dressed in a long garment, and carrying some of his traditional attributes. A life-size sculpture of Moses from St Mary's Abbey in York, for example, shows Moses with the tables of the law, a staff with a coiled serpent, and horns (figure 2). The attributes most commonly associated with prophet-figures in late medieval art, are, however, a scroll and a hat (see figure 3).

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[37] For the use of *tableaux vivants* in Corpus Christi processions see Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* p. 272.
[38] Milla Riggio, '*Wisdom* Enthroned: Iconic Stage Portraits', *Comparative Drama*, 23 (1989), 249-79 (p. 261).

After speaking the opening lines in Latin, which contain the prophecy he elaborates on in the first thirty lines of his speech, Moses turns to address the audience: 'All ye folk of Israell, | Herkyn to me!' (*Towneley*, 7.1-2).[39] And he repeats this injunction later, however, with a slight modification:

> MOYSES   Herkyns all, both yong and old!
> God that has all in wold
> Gretys you bi me.
> His commaundementys ar ten;
> Behold, ye that ar his men,
> Here ye may theym se. (7.31-36)

Both injunctions are more than mere calls for audience attention.[40] The move from the auditory to the visual appeal, from 'herkyns' to 'behold', marks the transition from the prophecy of the Redemption to the exposition of the Ten Commandments. Prescribing different modes of perception for the different parts of his speech and their respective contents, Moses echoes the late medieval understanding of the hierarchy of the senses which gives hearing primacy over vision in the confrontation with the divine mysteries. The common understanding was that hearing is less easily deceived than the other senses, and that it inspired belief, as illustrated by the second stanza of *Adoro te devote*, one of five sacramental hymns for the Corpus Christi liturgy by Aquinas:

> Sight, touch, taste are all deceived in their judgement of you,
> but hearing suffices firmly to believe.
> I believe all that the Son of God has spoken:
> there is nothing truer than this word of Truth.[41]

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[39] I am grateful to Brian Murdoch for pointing out that Moses' words here appear to echoe the first part of the Shema Yisrael in Deuteronomy 6. 4.

[40] David Mills, '"Look at me when I am speaking to you": The "Behold and See" Convention in Medieval Drama', *Medieval English Theatre*, 7 (1985), 4-13 has argued that the 'behold and see'- convention in Passion plays is a means of sustaining audience attention.

[41] *Handbook of Prayers*, ed. by James Socias, 6th edn (Princeton: Scepter, 2001), p. 321. The Latin text reads:
> Visus, gustus, tactus in te fallitur,
> Sed auditu solo tute creditor;
> Credo, quidquid dixit Dei filius,
> Verbo veritatis nihil verius. (*Handbook of Prayers*, p. 320)

An equally high evaluation of hearing is expressed in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*.[42] In this twelfth-century allegory of the quest for knowledge, Phronensis travels to heaven in a chariot drawn by the five senses represented as horses. At the limits of the universe, where the heavenly light is already too bright for mortal eyes, the horses initially refuse to go farther, but taking advice from Faith, Phronesis is able to continue her journey with the second horse, Hearing. Thus it is through the sense of hearing that the transcendental, divine world becomes accessible.

However, Moses' second imperative, 'behold', also reflects an awareness that plays work first and foremost visually on their audiences. Although the scene is largely silent on the fixed (as well as the non-fixed) features of spatial communication arising from the physical presence of the actor, it is clear from Moses' words '[b]ehold, ye that are his men, | Here ye may theym se' (*Towneley,* 7.34-36) that the actor playing the prophet comes on the stage bearing the tablets of the Law. The use of the proximal 'here' may well imply a gestural reference to the tables. Moses' subsequent admonition to the audience also implies that he points to the displayed tables before reciting the Ten Commandments:

> MOYSES His commaundementys that I haue broght,
> Looke that ye hold thaym noght
> For tryfyls ne for fables;
> For ye shall well vnderstand
> That God wrote theym with his hand
> In *thyse same tables*. (*Towneley,* 7.38-43; my emphasis)

The intrinsic visual strategies of the pageant thus do not only draw the spectator's gaze directly to the iconographical figure of Moses through the use of props and gestures. They also allow him or her to enter into a mental dialogue with the stage image through the reciprocal act of seeing, while the repeated injunctions to listen function as a further

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[42] Alain of Lille, *Anticlaudianus,* trans. by James J. Sheridon (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973).

summoning call to the spectators to engage with the speaking image of Moses. It is this

dual sensory appeal of the theatrical performance that makes it livelier than purely visual

representations can ever be and therefore easier to imprint on the memory of the

beholder, as even the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* concedes, albeit grudgingly (ll. 179-85).

Medieval memory advice frequently stresses the crucial role of aural-visual synaesthesia

in the making of memory images, as Mary Carruthers has pointed out. [43] The thirteenth-

century French writer Richard de Fournival, expresses this notion succinctly:

> God has given man a faculty which is called memory. Now there are two
> gateways to memory, seeing and hearing, and each of these two gateways has
> one path through which it may be reached: painting and word. Painting is
> useful to the eye, the word to the ear. [44]

However, the passage from the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum* quoted previously is not

only interesting for its sensory references in the context of memory advice. The

injunction to 'looke', coupled with the explanatory '[f]or ye shall well vnderstand'

(*Towneley,* 7.40), reiterates notions of the privileged relationship between the eye and the

intellect central to medieval theories of cognition. However, in *Memory, Images, and the*

English Corpus Christi Drama, Lerud conceives of such audience-oriented speech first and

foremost as a means 'to gloss or to explicate the images on stage' (p. 47). This

understanding of dialogue is bound up with an understanding of dramatic

representations as 'the externalization of the inward, the concretizing or giving corporeal

form to the images [...] that are essential [...] to move the mind toward understanding

and ascent to God' (p. 43). For Lerud, biblical plays are primarily external sets of

memory images, in other words. While he investigates the theatricality of Corpus Christi

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[43] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: The Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 76, 291-92.

[44] '*Le Bestiaire d'amour' de Richard de Fournival suivi de la 'Réponse de la dame'*, ed. by Célestin Hippeau (Paris: Auby, 1860; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), p. 2. The original text reads:

> Dex […] a donné à home une maniere de force qui a non memoire. Cette memoire si a 2 portes,
> veoir et oïr, et a chascune de ces 2 portes si a 1 chemin par où on i puet aller: Painture et parole.
> Painture siert à oel et parole à oreille.

plays in the light of scholastic epistemology and medieval memory theory, he does not give much attention to the relation between the experience of time and sensory experience, nor to the memory of sensory experience provided by and through the dramatic representation of a biblical event.

Moses' injunction to look '[f]or ye shall well vnderstand' (*Towneley,* 7.40) provides more than a gloss to the stage image when seen in the context of temporal experience. In book XI of the *Confessions,* Augustine writes:

> What is by now evident and clear is that neither future nor past exist, and it is inexact language to speak of three times – past, present, and future. Perhaps it would be exact to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things to come. In the soul there are these three aspects of time and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation.[45]

For Augustine then, the relationship between the past event represented in a play and the *phantasmata* resulting from the sensory perception of the play is one of similarity, which allows for their ontological difference to be dispensed with in the act of thinking. For the spectator of a biblical play, which brings a past event to the present-day stage, past and future thus only exist in the mind. Moses' assertion '[f]or ye shall well vnderstand' (*Towneley,* 7.40) is not so much an explanation, but a verbalised expectation.

Yet the Moses scene in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum* shows affinities with Augustine's understanding of time and memory beyond this. Addressing the audience as the 'folk of Israell' (7.1), Moses ostensibly makes present the sacred past in the

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[45] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 235 (XI.20). For the original Latin see *St Augustine's 'Confessions' with an English Translation by William Watts 1631*, ed. by T. E. Page and W. H. D. Rouse, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1912), II, 252:
> Quod autem nunc liquet et claret, nec futura sunt nec praeterita, nec proprie dicitur: tempora sunt tria, praeteritum, praesens et futurum, sed fortasse proprie diceretur: tempora sunt tria, praesens de praeteritis, praesens de praesentibus, praesens de futuris. sunt enim haec in anima tria quaedam, et alibi ea non video: praesens de praeteritis memoria, praesens de praesentibus contuitus, praesens de futuris expectatio.

performance by positing a coalescence between worldly and salvific time. This non-linear temporal model, which is also at the basis of the Church's notion of liturgy, is in evidence in many Corpus Christi pageants. As Beckwith explains: '[T]he absolute contemporaneity of theater makes it an embodiment, a present event, which never simply refers to something happening elsewhere' (*Signifying God*, p. 88). In the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, there is, strictly speaking, no coalescence of past historical events and the present lives of the audience as, unlike in the corresponding Chester or N-Town plays, Moses is presented entirely outwith his historical context. However, the temporal and spatial continuum he establishes for himself and the audience through his audience address and the frequent use of the deictic 'ye' has a liminal dimension.[46] This is apparent in Moses' explication of the salvific implications of God's law, which immediately precedes his recitation of the Commandments and underlines the transformational potential of the performance by means of a change in verb tense:

> MOYSES Ye that thyse in hart will hald,
> Vnto heuen shall be cald –
> That is, fyrst to com;
> And ye that will not do so,
> Till hell-pyne mon ye go
> And byde a bytter dome. (*Towneley*, 7.43-48)

Throughout the classical era and the Middle Ages, the heart was persistently used metaphorically for memory in literature, even though late medieval philosophical discourse located consciousness entirely in the brain (Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 59). Moses' audience address '[y]e that thyse in hart will hald' thus explicitly establishes a mnemonic function for the performance, whereby the ambiguous pronoun 'thyse' can be understood as a verbal pointer (perhaps accompanied by an appropriate gesture) to

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[46] For liminality in religious theatre see Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'The Medieval Religious Plays – Ritual or Theater?' in *Visualizing Medieval Performance*, ed. by Elina Gertsman, pp. 249-62. For the transformative power of theatre see Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2003), particularly chapter 4 (pp. 112-69).

the material law tables mentioned in the preceding line, as well as as a reference to what they symbolically stand for. The deictic address 'ye' does not only draw the spectators into the performance, but also places the responsibility for its salvific efficacy squarely on them. The prospects of the individual at the final reckoning depend on the efficacy of the interactive process of familiarisation with God's law in memory. Once committed to memory and firmly entrenched in the minds of the spectators, the stage image of Moses with the Law tables can be re-enacted in acts of mnemonic remembrance, thus increasing the chances of the doctrine behind it being embraced.[47]

Vying for Audience Attention

The impact of the recitation of the Decalogue in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum* is bound up with the inclusivity of the scene. In the corresponding Chester *Moses and the Law* play, the recitation of the Decalogue is disrupted by the Doctor, an expositor figure which appears at various strategic points within the cycle. The Doctor's speech separates the dramatisations of the first and the second Giving of the Law in an oddly composite pageant which also stages the story of Balaam, one of the Old Testament's more reluctant prophets, and the Moabite king Balaak. The episode of Moses and the Law is only treated cursorily, and the post-Reformation banns actually omit to mention it altogether, emphasising instead the spectacular elements of the Balaam and Balaak story:

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[47] For the role of memory in religious experience see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

> Cappers and Lynen Drapers, see that ye for the bringe
> In well decked order that worthie storye
> Of Balaam & his Asse & of Balaacke the king
> Make the Asse to speake and sett hit out lyuelye[.] (*REED: Chester*, p. 243)

The conclusion to the banns does, however, mention the 'Cappers', 'Wyerdrawers', and the 'Pynners' as performing 'kinge Balack & Balaam *with* Moyses' (*REED: Chester*, p. 249), and so do the sixteenth-century early banns.[48] The play-text of the story of Balaam and Balaak does indeed point to a visually striking performance involving, among other things, swords being brandished and thrown up into the air, a speaking donkey, horses, as well as a mountain on the set. However, the visual aspects of the Moses scene – the scenery, movement, and the way the actors are set among them – also create a stimulating experience for their viewers.

Several stage directions indicate that the spatial configuration of the scene includes a mountain-like structure which Moses ascends to converse with God and which he descends before the arrival of Balaam and Balaak. It is from this mountain that he addresses the 'populo' below: 'Tunc Moyses in monte dicat populo' (*Chester*, 5.32). Moreover, as in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, there are contextual cues pointing to a visual display of the Decalogue. The stage directions at line 80 explicitly require the presence of stone tables: 'Tunc Moyses faciet signum quasi effoderet tabulas de monte et, super ipsas scribens, dicat populo.' It is, however, not entirely clear whether the first part of the pageant also includes a stage prop. The Doctor's speech suggests that this is not the case, but Moses remarks after the first reception of God's law:

> MOYSES   Fortye dayes now fasted have I,
> that I might bee the more worthye
> to lerne this tokenn trulye. (*Chester,* 5.29-31)

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[48] *REED: Chester*, p. 249. For the banns see *REED: Chester*, p. 31.

We have seen earlier that *Dives and Pauper* has recourse to the ancient *topos* of images as 'a tokene and a book to the lewyd peple' in its tripartite defence of devotional images (*Dives and Pauper*, I, part 1, 82). In Moses' comment quoted above, 'tokenn' cannot only be understood as denoting the material stone tablets displayed on stage, but also the re-creation in theatrical performance of the biblical event and its implications for humankind. In this polysemy, the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual are blurred, while the typological aspects of the term 'tokenn' are persistently bound to the embodiment of this typology – the actor playing Moses – for the audience.

Despite God's biblical invisibility, God, too, must be embodied on stage. Moses' comment 'for I stood | to here thee nowe full styll' (*Chester,* 5.27-28) may suggest that the actor playing God may not be fully visible, yet a stage direction requires that he 'appereth agayne to Moyses' (5.64 sd) after the Doctor's speech, implying a temporary absence and, conversely, his presence on stage. Moreover, a stage direction in the Balaam and Balaak episode specifies that God be seated when addressing Balaam (5.183 sd), which again points to his visibility on stage. The latter is also suggested by Moses' first address to the 'populo' after having first received the commandments:

> MOYSES Good folke, dread yee nought.
> To prove you with God hath this wrought.
> Take these wordes in your thought;
> nowe knowne yee what ys sinne.
> By this sight nowe ye may see
> that hee is pearles of postee.
> Therefore this token looke doe ye,
> therof that yee ne blynne. (5.33-40)

The 'sight' of an embodied representation of God on stage in a recreation of sacred events functions as proof of the omnipotence of God above because the two realities – the lives of the present audience and biblical events – intersect and merge in the performance. Like his counterpart in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, Moses assumes

contemporaneity between the audience and the Israelites in his addresses to the 'good folke' (5.33) and 'Godes folke of Israell' (5.81), as does God when he invokes 'all my people that bine here' (5.2) as participants in the events presented on stage. Thus, the Chester Moses play, too, infuses past events with present meaning for each member of the audience, which is underlined by the recurrent use of direct address ('ye').

Both the Towneley *Processus* and the Chester *Moses* play present the Decalogue as the basic set of morals which delineates both the cornerstones of a life agreeable to God and, implicitly, the vertices of sinfulness (*Towneley*, 7.43-48; *Chester*, 5.36), yet the Chester Moses does not dwell on its eschatological dimension. Only after the second reception of the law, does Moses assert in no uncertain terms the consequences of failing to keep the commandments: 'Whoe doth not this, dye shall hee' (*Chester,* 5.89). Thus he reinforces the emphasis on obedience that runs through his speeches and is echoed in the scene of Balaam and his donkey in the second part of the pageant.

Moses' first address quoted above reveals an interest in epistemology rather than eschatology, and more particularly in the epistemology of sight. Moses explicitly stresses the importance of the visibility of the re-enactment of the (first) Giving of the Law as evidence of God's power (*Chester,* 5.37-38) and highlights that it is the *visual* dimension of the performance that transforms it into a sign (5.33-40). Like the emblematic Towneley image of Moses, this too, is a sign that can be conserved, constructed, and reconstructed in memory. The spatial configurations of the scene provide a mnemonic framework for the spectators akin to the practices of classical architectural memory and monastic *memoria*. Carruthers explains that arranged memory images in larger spatial frameworks are essential to the act of memory, as is the mental picturing of movement through physical, as well as mental *loci* (*Craft of Thought*, pp. 7-24, 251-69). As the actors

move through and within the stage scene, it is up the viewers to follow them (see also Lerud, pp. 7-13).

Although the exchanges between Moses and God in the Chester Moses play exploit mnemotechnics to a certain degree, their potential is not fully realised due to the intrusion into the episode by the Doctor, who interrupts the flow of the stage action and provides, for the duration of his three-stanza speech (and during his longer, narrative epilogue to the Balaam and Balaak episode), a different focal point in a *tableau vivant* for audience contemplation. Assuming the role of preacher and expositor, he was probably costumed as a contemporary cleric. Many writers have noted the Doctor's unusual position between the actors and the audience and have suggested that he is a Reformation addition to the cycle.[49] He certainly exhibits anxieties about the possible multivalence of theatrical performance as its bodies mediate past, present, and future, which is reminiscent of positions normally associated with reforming circles. Providing a linear narrative to link the first and the second Giving of the Law, he is ostensibly preoccupied with drawing out a precise meaning for the events presented on stage.

Already in his opening words, the Doctor establishes himself as a teaching figure keen to guide the audience towards the lesson they need to learn:

> DOCTOR   Lordinges, this commandement
> was the firste lawe that ever God sent;
> x poynctes there bine – takes intent –
> that moste effecte ys in. (*Chester,* 5.41-44)

In stressing the importance of the Ten Commandments as the first and fundamental set of laws given to humankind, the Doctor reinforces Moses' earlier point about their role as God's eternal moral law. His attempts to deliver an exact interpretation of the events

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[49] See, for example, Hill-Vásquez's discussion of the Chester Expositor in *Sacred Players,* especially pp. 23-39.

re-created on stage are also evident in his concluding speech to the story of Balaam and Balaak when he sums up the essence of the seduction of the Israelite youths by the Moabite women thus: '[I]n conclusion, | his lawe they sett at naught' (*Chester,* 5.414-15). He justifies the selectiveness of his narrative epilogue with the intractability of the biblical material:

> DOCTOR Lordings, mych more mattere
> is in this storye the yee have hard here.
> But the substans, withowten were,
> was played you beforen. (5.440-443)

However, in his earlier speech in the Moses scene, it is the educational value of an episode in the biblical narrative that determines its inclusion or exclusion from his account. Only the 'moste fruitefull' (5.47) parts of Exodus are to be related, he asserts, and limits his summary of the intervening biblical events to a brief reference to idolatry. His mention of the 'mawmentrye' (5.54) of the Israelites during Moses' absence occurs separated from its biblical context. It echoes the prohibition against graven images normally included in the first commandment, which is, however, not voiced explicitly in the pageant.

The Doctor's monologue, which separates the two scenes between Moses and God, is interesting for the three temporal references:

> DOCTOR After, wee reden of this storye
> that in this monte of Synaye
> God gave the lawe witterlye
> wrytten with his hand
> in stonye tables, as reede I;
> before men honored mawmentrye.
> Moyses brake them hastelye,
> for that he would not wond.
>
> But after, played as yee shall see,
> other tables owt carved hee […]. (*Chester,* 5.49-58)

The first use of 'after' picks up from the just-dramatised first Giving of the Law, while the second occurrence of 'after' should be understood as "thereafter" (see *Chester*, II, 64), as it leads on to the performance of the second Giving of the Law. 'Before', in contrast, is somewhat ambiguous, as Lumiansky and Mills point out (*Chester*, II, 64), but it safely places the idolatrous Israelites in the past. Through his temporal references, the Doctor thus locates the biblical events in a time and place different from that of the present audience. In doing so, he distances the audience from the events presented on stage and thus diminishes the impact of the insistence on their physical presence voiced by God and Moses in their dialogues.[50]

Moreover, the Doctor emphasises the representational nature of the performance through references to its scriptural sources ('wee redden of this storye', 5.49) and by pointing out the artifice ('played as yee shall see', 5.57). The anxieties about theatrical make-believe he articulates here call to mind the criticism voiced in the Lollard *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* that religious plays are 'fals equite' (l. 358) as well as the reformers' insistence that the written text had primacy over dramatic performance.[51] While Moses and God in the Chester play see the performance as a sign and as a guide toward a proper devotional state of mind because it allows the spectator to make contact with the reality represented, the Doctor points out the insufficiency of the dramatic scene *vis-à-vis* its scriptural sources and questions its function as a channel between the viewers and the transcendent reality.

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[50] See Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, p. 37.
[51] See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, pp. 121-60

Re-creating Sacred Spectacle

The nervousness about visual stimulation apparent in the Doctor's commentary on the stage action of the Chester Cappers' play is not shared in the corresponding N-Town play of *Moses*. The N-Town *Moses* stands in stark contrast to the pageants discussed above as regards its scope and the visual aspects of its production. The pageant merges separate events from Exodus which were sometimes combined in book illumination: the episode with the burning bush and the giving of the Ten Commandments. For example, the beginning of Deuteronomy in a late fifteenth-century Bible printed in Augsburg is marked by a woodcut which combines God's appearance in the burning bush, the giving, and the transmission of the law.[52] It shows a kneeling, horned Moses receiving the tables of the law from God, whose torso and haloed head emerge from a bush with flame-like leaves in the right-hand side of the illustration. Meanwhile, in the left half of the woodcut, a standing Moses holds the law tables and displays them to kneeling figures. The N-Town *Moses* also merges these three scenes which are separated by time and space in the biblical account and combines the overt claim to teach the Decalogue with visual spectacle. However, like the Moses scenes in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum* and the Chester Moses and the Law pageant, the N-Town *Moses* also engages with questions about the affective power of the stage picture.

The instructional focus of the *Moses* pageant is established in the Proclamation which refers to his transmission of the Ten Commandments to the people:

> PRIMUS   Moyses than doth nevyrmore sese,
> VEXILLATOR   But prechyth duly both ȝere and woke
> The lawes [.]' (*N-Town,* Proclamation, ll. 98-100)

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[52] The illustration is reproduced in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. by Peter Ackroyd and others, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963-70), II: *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. by Geoffrey W. H. Lampe (1969), plate 22 (a).

In the actual pageant, Moses' teaching takes the form of a fifteen-stanza sermon. The Proclamation also indicates that the play, like its Towneley and Chester counterparts, incorporates a visual display of the Decalogue when the first banner-bearer announces, 'þe Ten Comaundementys […] | In oure play ȝe xal hem sene' (ll. 101-02). Moreover, there are also textual cues that a performance includes a stage prop which God gives to Moses with the words '[t]hese tabellis I take þe in þin honde' (*N-Town*, 6.38) and which Moses refers (and probably points) to as 'þese tablys tweyn' (6.60).

The play-text connects with the Proclamation's emphasis on preaching, not only through the actual sermon it incorporates, but through repeated references to teaching and preaching. The pageant opens with Moses' prayer to God to 'enforme and teche us all þi plesans' (*N-Town,* 6.14) whereupon God reveals himself in the burning bush and, having handed over the ten Commandments, enjoins Moses to preach his laws 'all abowte' (6.41). The subsequent sermon on the Decalogue conforms to the divine command as Moses explains:

> MOYSES The comaundement of þi Lord God, man, loke þu kepe
> Where þat þu walk, wake or slepe.
> Euery man take good hede,
> And to my techynge take good intent,
> For God hath sent me now indede
> Ȝow for to enforme his comaundement.
> Ȝow to teche God hath me sent
>   His lawys of lyff þat arn ful wyse.
> Them to lerne be diligent;
>   Ȝoure soulys may þei saue at þe last asyse. (*N-Town,* 6.49-58)

Unlike in the Chester and Towneley plays, the audience is not explicitly invoked as participating in the events here, but as Moses' words quoted above illustrate, the spectators are included in the ethical realm of the play and placed at the centre of the play world through the interpersonality of address ('þu') and proximal deixis ('now'). The importance of the Commandments, come the last reckoning, expressed in 'Ȝoure

soulys may þei saue at þe last asyse' (*N-Town,* 6.58), is frequently invoked throughout Moses' sermon. For example, with regard to the second Commandment, which is here – as in the Chester Cappers' play – understood as swearing falsely by God's name, Moses warns, '[a] lytyl othe, þis is serteyn, | May dampen thy sowle to helle pytt' (*N-Town,* 6.89-90).[53]

In the prologue to his sermon, Moses refers to the Augustinian division of the commandments into three commandments pertaining to God on the first tablet and seven pertaining to humankind on the second tablet. The sermon on the Decalogue itself, which takes the Latin formulations of the commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy as its structure, connects with this division by repeatedly referring to the two tablets (see ll. 83, 115). However, by according two stanzas to each of the first four commandments and thus accentuating the fourth, it also undermines the pre-eminence of the first three commandments. As the biblical quotations are extra-metrical, it is not clear whether the Latin words are to be spoken in a performance. The sermon employs conventional motifs from homiletic literature and shows many parallels with the *Lay Folks' Catechism.* In the context of the first commandment, for instance, Moses interprets covetousness as transgressing the injunction to have no other gods when he preaches against 'ryches and werdly good' (*N-Town,* 6.76) which interfere with 'gostly helth' (*N-Town,* 6.82). The Wycliffite adaptation of the *Lay Folks' Catechism* equally understands the worship of worldly goods as a breaking of the first commandment: '[c]ouetyse ys worschepy*n*g of fals goddys' (*LFC,* L.501-02).[54] John Gatrynge's translation of Thoresby's instruction, in contrast, puts more emphasis on idolatry and magic (see *LFC,* T.175-81). The *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* equates covetousness and idolatry (ll. 608-10)

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[53] For parallels see also *LFC,* L.599-604 and *Middle English Sermons,* ed. by Woodburn O. Ross, EETS OS 209 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 23, 109.

[54] For further parallels between Moses' sermon and the various versions of the *Lay Folks' Catechism* see Arthur C. Cawley, 'Middle English Metrical Versions of the Decalogue with Reference to the English Corpus Christi Cycles', *Leeds Studies in English,* n. s. 8 (1975) [1976], 129-45 (pp. 131, 136, 143-44).

and draws a link between the idolatrous Israelites worshipping the golden calf and play-goers:

> No dowte that ne the puple doth more maumetre now in siche miraclis pleyinge than dide the puple of Israel that time in heringe of the calf in as myche as the lesingis and lustus of miraclis pleyinge that men worshipen in hem is more contrarious to God and more acordinge to the devul than was that golden calf that the puple worshipid. (ll. 647-53)

Moses' exposition of this commandment in the N-Town *Moses* play omits the prohibition against image-making but does refer to 'werdlys vanyté' (*N-Town*, 6.74), which may include idols. The omission goes hand in hand with a pronounced emphasis on the traditional pre-eminence of hearing at the beginning of the sermon when Moses admonishes the audience, '[h]erk now well, man what I xal seyn, | And prent þise lawys well in þi mende' (*N-Town*, 6.65-66). His words also echo biblical injunctions to listen to the word of God such as Psalm 77. 1: 'Attend, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth' (Adtendite popule meus legem meam, | inclinate aurem vestram in verba oris mei).

However, Moses' command to listen in order to remember is somewhat unusual because, as Mary Carruthers observes, there 'is no classical or Hebrew or medieval tradition regarding an "ear of the mind" equivalent to that of the "eye of the mind"' (*Book of Memory*, p. 31). Medieval writers on memory do not distinguish between auditory memory, as distinct from visual memory, as they consider visual perception to be the best and most reliable means to activate memory. Albert the Great, for instance, writes with reference to Horace that 'things intrusted to the ear | Impress our minds less vividly that what is exposed | To our trustworthy eyes.'[55] Consequently, every sense impression, once it gets into the brain via the corporeal sense, is translated into a phantasm which can be seen and surveyed by the *oculi mentis*.

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[55] Quoted in Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 19.

It is the sense of vision that is given pre-eminence in the first part of the pageant, the episode with the burning bush and Moses' dialogue with God. Unlike the latter part of the pageant, which is dominated by the static image of the preaching Moses, the opening scenes are visually striking. The pageant opens with Moses' prayer to God for mercy and salvation (see *N-Town,* 6.1-16), but quickly proceeds to his vision of the burning bush. Concrete documentary references to stage props and costumes are generally scanty, yet we may assume that God's appearance in the burning bush calls for elaborate costuming or, conceivably, fireworks. The medieval love of pyrotechnics to mark out supernatural events on the stage is much in evidence in extant play-texts and dramatic records. Thus a stage direction in the oldest English morality play, *The Castle of Perseverance,* specifies that the entry of the devil Belyal shall be accompanied by appropriate diabolical noise and fire: '[a]nd he þat pley Belyal loke þat he haue gunnepowdyr brennynge in pypys in hys handys and in hys erys and in hys ars whanne he gothe to batayl.'[56] And the Chester *Harrowing of Hell* requires 'lux in inferno materialis aliqua subtilitate machinata' from the start.[57] Visual spectacle does not, however, only accompany hell and its inhabitants, but is also used as a metaphor of divine power and glory. The Chester *Pentecost* play, for example, demands that God send forth the Holy Spirit 'in spetie ignis' while two angels sing the antiphon 'Accipite Spiritum Sactum' and cast fire upon the apostles (*Chester,* 22.238a). We may therefore safely assume that special effects were involved in bringing the burning bush onto the Chester stage.

The penchant for presenting striking images which can be observed in many a religious play resonates with medieval mnemonic theory, as Lerud observes. Medieval memory advice frequently emphasises that the human mind retains better what is visually striking. The fourteenth-century theologian Thomas Bradwardine, for instance,

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[56] *The Castle of Perseverance* in *The Marco Plays*, ed. by Marc Eccles, EETS OS 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 1-112 (p. 1).
[57] *Chester* 17, initial stage direction.

stresses in his treatise *On Acquiring a Trained Memory* (*De memoria artifciali adquirenda, c.* 1335) that images 'should be wondrous and intense because such things are impressed in the memory more deeply and are better retained'.[58] Hence his advice for memorising the signs of the zodiac involves making violent and sexual mental images which are placed within specific frames and places (see Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 364).

What makes striking images of this kind more memorable than others is the fact that they are more emotionally charged – an aspect which Lerud only alludes to in his discussion of cognitive and mnemonic theory in the Middle Ages. In medieval descriptions of the neurophysiology of memory, based as they (usually) were on Aristotelian thought, the making and the representation of a mental image or *phantasma* is closely linked with the physiology of emotion, as Carruthers observers (*Book of Memory*, p. 85). '[T]he phantasm by its very nature evokes emotion,' Carruthers writes (p. 85), because it does not only contain in itself the form of a sense perception but also the perceiver's reaction or response to this perception or *intentio,* as Avicenna called it (p. 65). In Avicenna's scheme of cognitive functioning, every sense perception affects changes in the perceiver, including those changes or movements of the sensitive soul which are played out in the theatre of the body and are commonly termed emotions. Consequently, every memory-image is necessarily emotionally tagged.[59] For the often spectacular stage images in Corpus Christi plays, including the Chester *Moses*, this means that their mnemonic efficacy does not necessarily rest only on presenting the spectator with "ready-made" external memory images, as it were, complete with appropriate frames, as Lerud argues. Rather they facilitate the formation of sensorily derived and

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[58] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, p. 362. Carruthers provides a full translation of Bradwardine's treatise (pp. 361-68). For a discussion of his work, see pp. 163-72.

[59] Modern neurological accounts confirm the interaction between emotion and memory. The engagement of memory-specific neural processes has been found to have modulary effects on the quality and quantity of information remembered. See Elizabeth A. Kensinger and David L. Schacter, 'Memory and Emotion', in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Feldman, eds, *Handbook of Emotion*, pp. 601-17.

emotionally tagged mental images, rich in associations, by the spectator, which can then subsequently be stored in memory. It is the imprinting of personal emotional associations like fear and desire, pleasure or discomfort on the appearance of a dramatisation as part of an associational web which ensures that images like Moses and the burning bush can be mnemonically affective.

If we are to believe the stage directions, the actor playing Moses in the N-Town *Moses* pageant is expected to signal a sense of amazement as he perceives and comments on the spectacle of the burning bush ('admirande dicit', 6.16a):

> MOYSES A, mercy, God, what menyth ȝon syte?
> A grene busch as fyre doth flame
> And kepyth his colowre fayr and bryghte,
> Fresch and grene withowtyn blame! (6.17-20)

Moses' description of the burning bush adds to both the spectacular aspects of the stage action as well as to its spiritual significance. In medieval commentary, the burning bush is considered a type of the Virgin Birth and is referred to as such, for example, in the Chester *Emmaus* play (*Chester*, 19.80-87). Moses alludes to its typological importance when he notes, '[i]t fyguryth sum thynge of ryght gret fame | I kannot seyn what it may be' (*N-Town*, 6.21-22), but, unlike his Towneley and Chester counterparts, he refrains from engaging explicitly with the issues of signs and signification. Yet in its evocative vividness, Moses' description makes a subtle point and communicates with the audience in two ways. Firstly, it transmits perceptual information to the spectators and thus allows them to partake in Moses' vision of God. Secondly, it brings 'ȝon syte' closer to the viewers through verbalising and thus making accessible Moses' emotional response. By means of verbal description of the stage scene, the pageant therefore establishes an emotional as well as intellectual continuum which extends beyond the temporal and spatial continuum assumed by the characters. From within the process of dramatic

performance, the audience's engagement with Moses' perceptions encourages a personal and present understanding of the catechetical material to follow. Thus meaning unfolds in the work of the pageant.

Conclusion

The Middle English dramatisations of the Decalogue in the Chester cycle and the Towneley and N-Town plays self-consciously address their status as vernacular works that disseminate the word of God. However, their renderings of the Decalogue are limited to doctrinally innocuous recitations of the individual commandments in English in the Towneley and Chester pageants, or conventional expositions of each commandment in the N-Town *Moses*. Thus the pageants remain clearly within the educational framework delineated by the late medieval Church, in which the Decalogue formed part of the knowledge of Catholic faith and practice expected of every Christian, and was usually transmitted by the parish clergy by means of sermons.

The Moses pageants make allowance for the traditional pre-eminence of the word in religious instruction. However, they also palpably comment on the late medieval debates around image-use and the status of theatrical performance by exploring issues of signs and signification in live performance and by presenting their spectators with strong visual images. In the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, the powerful, almost statuary image of the prophet Moses draws the spectator's gaze and the Chester *Moses* is dominated by the image of the commenting Doctor. The N-Town *Moses* play, in which the biblical narrative is generated by the performance to a greater degree than in the Towneley or Chester pageants, combines visual spectacle with an emblematic image

of the preaching patriarch. Harnessing the syntax of visual communication, the dramatisations of the Giving of the Law create stage images which can function as mnemonic aids by being both memorable and providing a stimulus for recollection. Moreover, these stage images necessarily have an affective impact. In a world that defines an image as a commemorative token allowing for an exchange to take place between the onlooker and the spiritual signified through the representation, and that conceives of emotion as a form of material alteration or movement set in motion by sensation, the visual-aural synesthesia of the dramatic image does not only ensure the mnemonic efficacy of a performance, but also its affectiveness. The latter is reinforced by the homeostatic unity of past and present posited in all three plays, which underlines the moral timelessness of God's law, but also ostensibly implicates the audience in the dramatic performance.

The audience's implication in and engagement with the performance is also the main concern of the next chapter, which turns to a set of plays and pageants widely recognised for their spectacularity: dramatisations of the Passion of Christ. The chapter seeks to shift the focus from cognitive to physical aspects of audience engagement to highlight the impact of the embodied practices of drama on responses to the Passion and to illustrate that the violent visions of excess staged in Passion plays present more than merely memorable stage images or reflections of affective piety.

Chapter 3
Touching Sights[1]

In March 2004, Mel Gibson's then newly-released film *The Passion of the Christ* sparked

outrage in the cultural sections and supplements of British newspapers for its cruel,

protracted scenes of torture and crucifixion. James Caviezel's Jesus is bludgeoned with

wooden canes before being flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails by drunken Roman soldiers

and crowned with a crown of thorns. When he is finally crucified, the nails are shown

going through his limbs one by one, before the cross is turned over so that the nails can

be flattened out on the other side. This scene in particular was seen as an example of

gratuitous violence, drowning potential spiritual profundity in rivers of blood and

turning the film into 'an incredibly obtuse piece of sadomasochism, overlooking Jesus's

message of love and his human complexity in favour of a bizarre make-up bloodbath.'[2]

Yet the merciless violence meted out to the Christ figure in Gibson's film is not

without precedent. Brutality is a crucial feature of the dramatic simulacra of Christ's

Passion and death on the medieval English stage. The Chester banns of 1539-40, for

example, declare that the play of the trial and the flagellation, produced by the fletchers,

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[1] Parts of this chapter will be published as 'Feeling the Passion: Neuropsychological Perspectives on Audience Response' in *postmedieval* (forthcoming, 2012).

[2] Peter Bradshaw, 'The Passion of Christ', *Guardian*, 26 March 2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2004/mar/26/dvdreviews.shopping2> [accessed 14 August 2009] (para. 2 of 10). See also Cosmo Lansman, 'Film: Crime of the Passion', *The Sunday Times*, 28 March 2004, <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/article1050992.ece?> [accessed 14 August 2009] and Sukhdev Sandhu, 'The Masochistic Passion of Mel Gibson', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 March 2004 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3614414/The-masochistic-passion-of-Mel-Gibson.html> [accessed 14 August 2009].

bowyers, coopers, and stringers will show 'the Tormentors | that bobbyde god w*i*th gret horrors' (*REED: Chester*, p. 37). In the N-Town *Trial before Pilate*, the Jews '*pulle of Jesus clothis and betyn hym with whyppys*' (*N-Town*, 30.236 sd) while mocking him, 'Jesus, þi bonys we xal not breke, | But we xal make þe to skyppe' (30.237-38) before beating him '*all bloody*' (30.244 sd). In the Towneley *Scourging* pageant, the torturers similarly strip and batter Jesus 'blak and bloo' (*Towneley*, 22.160) until the 'bloode downe glyde' (*Towneley*, 22.177) and only stop short of killing him for fear of Pilate (22.194-95). In the preceding *Buffeting* pageant, Jesus is already beaten with fists, and so heavily that Froward remarks: 'In fayth, syr, we had almost | Knockyd hym on slepe' (*Towneley*, 21.610-11). In the second York *Trial before Pilate*, the soldiers equally hit Jesus with 'bittir brasshis' (*York*, 33.351) and continue to 'hertely hitte on his hippes | And haunch' (33.367-68) until he is covered in blood, commenting that 'with choppes þis churll we sall chastye' (33.377).

The emphasis in such plays on the 'technologies of torment' (Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, p. 147) is palpably shaped by, and responds to, literary and pictorial treatments of the Passion and their graphic non-scriptural violence. And thus more than any other sequence of pageants in Middle English religious drama, the blood-soaked visions of the Passion and death of Christ have come to exemplify the means and aims of medieval Christological devotion: violence in such plays is considered to be enacted in service of the spiritual edification of the individual and the community, and it ultimately functions as a means of community formation.[3]

However, the invocation of concepts such as personal and communal salvation and community formation assumes conscious perception of the stage action on the part of the spectator – that is, the perception of the suffering body onstage *as* the body of Christ. However, the materiality of this body never only functions as a signifier that is

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[3] See Beckwith, *Signifying God,* pp. 65-71, and Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, pp. 80-91.

assigned to Christ as a signified. The body is always a phenomenological object, too (Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik*, p. 245; Beckwith, *Signifying God*, p. 64). Thus, the perception of the spectator necessarily vacillates between the plane of presence and representation, not least because the Middle English biblical plays are staged at the borderline between fiction, the "non-fiction" of Christ's life and Passion, and the real world, which provides the backdrop for performances. For Pecock, this blurring of boundaries between real world and play world is the basis of the efficacy of the religious drama as a means of devotional communication. Discussing Lollard objections to images, he maintains in his *Repressor* that, while 'the liknes of Crist hanging on a cros nakid and woundid' is the best means for lay people to understand the suffering humanity of Christ, it is much more effective 'whanne a quyk man is sett in a pley to be hangid nakid on a cros and to be in semyng woundid and scourged' (*Repressor*, I, 221). Recent research into the neural activations caused by sensory stimuli appears to corroborate Pecock's observation about the efficacy of the performance image.[4] As we have seen in chapter one, the audiovisual perception of a living body (in real life or in film) triggers neural processes that do not occur in our engagement with literary texts or purely static representations, and that facilitate our intuitive understanding of the sensations and feelings of others.

It is my contention in this chapter that contemporary research into the links between seeing and feeling can bring us closer to the experience of a fifteenth-century spectator of a Passion play because it provides a means of understanding the impact of the embodied practices of the drama on his or her sensory engagement with the stage

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[4] The remark quoted above is made in the context of Pecock's refutation of the Lollard argument that living people are more appropriate images of God than man-made representations can ever be. Pecock argues that the crucifix meets the three conditions necessary for a perfect image: it resembles what it is meant to represent; it is made for the purpose of representation; and it represents only one single thing (*Repressor*, I, 219-22). Lerud makes the point that Pecock's exception here, the living image of drama, can read as evidence for a tendency to place plays firmly in the same phenomenological realm as static images in the later Middle Ages (p. 61). However, I agree with Stevenson that Pecock's valorisation of the performance image functions first and foremost as an acknowledgement of the role of the shared corporeality of actor and spectator for the devotional efficacy of the performance (see Stevenson, p. 34).

action. The ways in which the steering of perceptual processes in and through theatrical means bears on the dynamics of audience engagement will be explored here with regard to the complex, exuberant N-Town second Passion play and the theatrically very different York *Crucifixio Christi*. This chapter will then move on to investigate a phenomenon frequently remarked upon by modern critics of the York cycle – the urge of the critic or spectator to laugh with (and at) the soldiers as they bungle the job of nailing Christ to the cross. Theories of sharing emotions, I will argue, help us to understand such reactions as contagion responses, which colour the cognitive processing of the stage action by the spectator. An understanding of the internal stimulations caused by perception allow us, I argue, to view the visions of violence enacted on the stage as a means to bridge the gap between a first-person perspective and a third-person perspective as well as between actor and spectator in theatrical performance.

Seeing and Feeling the Passion

Theological changes from the eleventh century onwards shifted the emphasis from Christ's transcendent divinity to his humanity and physical presence and brought with them changes in the depiction of Christ. Between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries, the humiliated, whipped, pierced, dying yet ultimately life-giving body of Christ becomes the dominant icon of the medieval Church, replacing the regal *Christus victor* of the earlier Middle Ages.[5] A late fourteenth-century wooden, Y-shaped crucifix

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[5] These theological changes are too complex to be discussed in detail within the scope of this study. It has to suffice here to point to the emergence of a new understanding of redemption in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which links sins, the Passion, and the sacrifice at Mass, and conceives of forgiveness of one's sins in terms of reconciliation with God through personal identification with the suffering felt by his son, the god-man Jesus. For a comprehensive account of doctrinal developments and ensuing changes in

from the Corpus Christi church in Wrocław provides a memorable example of the centrality of the suffering body of Christ as an icon in later medieval devotion across Europe. The crucifix displays Christ's body with its thin arms tensely stretched. The left arm is further pulled tight by the weight of Christ's elongated, bony torso with its tiny scourge wounds leaning to the right. The shortened, bunched up legs cannot support the weight of the body. Its incessant downwards movement is echoed in Christ's closed eyelids and their bloody lashes, the blood running from his hands, the drapery that frames his sides, and – most prominently – in the neatly arranged drops of curdled blood gushing from his side wound.[6]

In its palpable emphasis on the brutality and savagery against the body of Christ, the Wrocław crucifix is a product of complex sets of imaginative fabrications which sought to expand the meagre accounts of the Passion in the Gospels.[7] Of the flagellation, cause of the Wrocław Jesus's myriad scourge wounds, the four Evangelists simply state that it took place, remaining silent on the question of how (see, for example, John 19. 1). The same holds true for the crowning with the crown of thorns. For example, Matthew merely observes: 'And platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand' (27. 29).[8] The Crucifixion is dealt with in one brief statement, which again gives no information about how this was done: 'And

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devotional patterns see McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 1-115 and Marcia L. Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition 400-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 234-44. Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion* highlights the particular contribution of Anselm of Canterbury to soteriology (pp. 170-92). For art-historical perspectives see Frederick P. Pickering, 'The Gothic Image of Christ: The Sources of Medieval Representations of the Crucifixion', in *Essays on Medieval German Literature and Iconography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 3-30, 202-06, and Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, 5 vols (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gert Mohn, 1968-1990), II*: Die Passion Jesu Christi* (1968).

[6] A photograph of the crucifix is reproduced in Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure, and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2005), plate 1.

[7] For the development of imagery to depict the Passion in the later Middle Ages see James H. Marrow, 'Inventing the Passion in the Late Middle Ages', in *The Passion Story: From Visual Representation to Social Drama*, ed. by Marcia Kupfer (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), pp. 23-52.

[8] See also Mark 15. 17: 'And they clothe him with purple, and platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon him.' John states: 'And the soldiers platting a crown of thorns, put it upon his head; and they put on him a purple garment' (19. 2), while Luke has Pilate announce rather vaguely: 'I will chastise him therefore, and release him' (23. 16).

when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified him there'
(Luke 23. 33; see also John 19. 2). The medieval imagination filled the silence of the
Gospels on the *how* of the Passion with visions of brutality and torment, creating vivid
descriptive narratives of suffering in art and literature.

One example of such a pictorial narrative can be found in the fourteenth-
century *Holkham Bible Picture Book* (London, British Library, Additional MS 47682),
which duplicates the flagellation of Christ before the Crucifixion. The naked Christ is
first tied to a post and scourged with flails and sticks until his entire body is lacerated
with wounds after his trial before Annas and Caiaphas (figure 4) and then scourged a
second time after the second round of trials before Herod and Pilate (figure 5). The
Passion is, strictly speaking, a process rather than one event, a process which is
represented through a series of illustrations in the *Holkham Bible Picture Book*. Yet many
representations usually associated with Passion devotion isolate or highlight particular
events (or sequences of events) in snapshot depictions, or they go beyond the
immediate Passion narrative. One such image is a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-
century woodcut found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. d. 403, fol. 2ᵛ. [9] This
features Christ as the Man of Sorrows surrounded by a border depicting the *arma Christi*,
complete with an indulgence underneath the central image. The image recalls Christ's
suffering, but does not depict this suffering as a series of torments. By placing the
instruments of Christ's torture in the border, it rather invites the onlooker to re-create
for themselves the process of the Passion (Swanson, p. 6). It thus underlines the
importance of the individual, personal relationship with Christ which was considered to
be at the core of devotional responses to the Passion (Swanson, p. 11).

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[9] The image is reproduced in R. N. Swanson, 'Passion and Practice: The Social and Ecclesiastical
Implications of Passion Devotion in the Late Middle Ages', in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-
Medieval Culture*, ed. by A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert
Forsten, 1998), pp. 1-30 (p. 7).

Devotional art and texts focussing on the suffering body of Christ reinforced the notion that vision offered laypeople an opportunity for participating in, or identifying with, the divine based on conceptions of sight as a physical activity akin to touch. As we have seen in chapter one, in medieval visual theory seeing something meant in effect touching it through the agency of visual rays. This is bound up with the Aristotelian valorisation of touch as the most necessary of all senses. Although it has no obvious sense organ, Aristotle assigns touch a pivotal role because it is crucial to nutrition and hence survival (*De anima*, pp. 199-203 (III.13)). Trevisa, translating Bartholomæus Anglicus, acknowledges the notion that touch underpins all other senses when he states that 'þe wit of groping is ground and þe fundament of þe oþer wittis' (*Properties*, I, 120). As a consequence, sight – like touch – effects bodily changes. Bacon notes in his *Opus Majus* that light and colour, as embodied forms, cause transformations in the membranes of the eye and in the three bodily humours which fill the interior of the eye. For Bacon, vision therefore 'always experiences a feeling that is a kind of pain' (*Opus Majus: A Translation*, II, 446). The notion that vision does not leave the viewer untouched or physically unchanged is also bound up with an understanding of vision as a process of assimilation. Bacon writes in *De multiplicatione specierum*:

> [B]efore the action, the recipient is of itself dissimilar to the agent, and through the action it becomes similar as Aristotle says; and when the agent acts on the recipient, it at once assimilates the latter to itself and makes the recipient to be such as the agent in actuality[.][10]

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[10] *Roger Bacon's Philosophy of Nature: A Critical Edition with English Translation, Introduction, and Notes, of 'De multiplicatione specierum' and 'De speculis comburentibus'*, ed. by David C. Lindberg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 7. The Latin original reads: 'Et in principio est de se dissimile agenti ante actionem, et per actionem fit simile, ut dicit; et agens statim quando operatur in patiens assimilate illud ei et facit illud

The emphasis on physical transformation and assimilation between the viewer and the visible object in Baconian optics helps us to understand the medieval belief in the salvific, transformative powers of the visual forms of art – and, by extension, also of drama.[11] Reciprocal vision collapses the distance between seeing subject and visible object and with it, in the case of the drama, the boundaries between the semiotic and the performative. In other words, if we conceive sight in terms of bodily interaction and affinity between the seer and the seen, the representation and verisimilitude of Christ's suffering can carry over into an *imitatio Christi*.[12]

The revelations of Julian of Norwich provide us with an example of the power of the devotional image to function as a trigger for a devotional experience centred in the body. Julian's revelations are apparently triggered by the immediate presence of a crucifix (Biernoff, p. 137). Thus her second revelation opens with the following words:

> And after this I saw wi*th* bodily sight in the face of the crucifixe that hyng before me, in þe which I beheld contynually a parte of his passion: dyspyte, spyttyng, solewyng and buffetyng, and manie languryng paynes, mo than I can tell, and offten chaungyng of colour.[13]

Some years later, when gravely ill, another of her revelations is provoked by the sight of a crucifix which an attendant priest brings with him (*A Book of Showings*, II, 291). The bodily, visual encounter with Christ's body in its shattered, crucified form provides her with a gateway to spiritual vision and understanding (I, 224), but Julian's desire is ultimately for *feeling with* Christ, who suffers for humankind, as she explains in her account of the second revelation:

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patiens esse tale quale est ipsum agens in actu' (*De multiplicatione specierum*, p. 6). Aristotle makes a similar point in *De anima,* pp. 95-101 (II.5).

[11] Biernoff discusses the importance of Baconian optics for an understanding of late medieval spirituality with reference to the ideal of the *imitatio Christi* and devotional motifs such as the Man of Sorrows theme (pp. 133-64).

[12] *Imitatio Christi* was, as Swanson observes, 'a potent and long-established model' by the later Middle Ages (p. 15) and counted as one of the ideals of Christological devotion along with *conformatio* and *devotio.*

[13] *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, 2 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), II, 324.

> Thus thouȝt me that I might with his grace have his wonndys that y hadde before desyrede; but in this I desyrede neuere ne bodely sight ne no manere schewynge of god, botte compassyonn as me thought that a kynde sawlle might have with oure lorde Jhesu, that for love wolde be come man dedlye.[14]

For Julian, the body is the primary site of religious experience. She understands *compassio* first and foremost literally as suffering with Christ – that is as corporeal participation in his suffering. She asserts repeatedly in her account of the revelations that she longed to re-live the pain Christ suffered in her own body. When ill, she asks, for example, 'that [her] bodie might be fulfilled with mynd and feeling of [Christ's] blessed passion' (II, 292) and that 'his paynes were [her] paynes', culminating in the assertion: 'With him I desyred to suffer, liuyng in my deadly bodie, as god would giue me grace' (II, 293). For Julian, only suffering as Christ creates the real immediacy of the suffering God, or, as Suzannah Biernoff puts it: 'Mystical union, as Julian saw it, occurs in the shared flesh of Christ and his bride' (p.135).

Devotional texts such as Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* or Love's *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* aim at evoking a different empathetic relationship between their readers and the suffering body of Christ. Hilton writes:

> For a man schal not come to goostli delite in contemplacioun of His Godhede, but yif he come first in ymaginacion bi bitirnesse and compassioun and bi stable trouthe and stidefaste mynde of His manhede. (1.922-24)

The empathetic bond between the reader and the suffering Christ depends on 'ymaginacion', which conjures up images that evoke compassion. Imagination also plays a crucial role in Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, a meditation of the events of the life of Christ, which has long been noted as a source for later medieval biblical drama, and particularly for the N-Town collection (p. lxvi). The *Mirror* constantly appeals to its readers to visualise Christ's sufferings (and those of his mother, Mary) in

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[14] *A Book of Showings*, I, 210. The wounds Julian refers to here are 'the wonnd(e) of contricyoun, the wonnde of compassioun and the wonnde of wylfulle langgynge to god' (I, 206).

great, vivid detail. Throughout the Passion section, the reader is asked again and again to behold and to 'take hede', for example, of the events of the trials or the events at Calvary. With regard to the preparations for the Crucifixion, Love writes:

> Take hede now diligently with alle þi herte, alle þo þinges þat be now to come, & make present þe here in þi mynde, beholding alle þat shale be done aȝenus þi lorde Jesu & þat bene spoken or done of him. And so wiþ þe innere eye of þi soule beholde sume, settyng & ficching þe crosse fast into þe erþe. Sume makyng redye þe nailes & þe hameres to dryue hem wiþ. Oþere making redy & settyng vp ladders, & ordeinyng oþer instrumentis þat hem þouht needful, & oþer faste aboute to spoile him, & drawe of hees cloþes. (Love, p. 174)

Love ends his chapter on a description of Christ on the cross, which amounts to a summary of the purpose of the visualisations he recommends throughout:

> Soþely þis siht of oure lord Jesu hangyng so on þe crosse by deuote ymaginacion of þe soule, is so likyng to sume creatours, þat after longe exercise of sorouful compassion, þei felen sumtyme, so grete likyng not onely in soule bot also in þe body þat þei kunne not telle, & þat noman may knowe, bot onely he þat by experience feleþ it. (Love, p. 179).

Like Hilton, Love then sees 'deuoute ymaginacion' as a precondition for 'compassion', which is not the bodily suffering with Christ that Julian of Norwich yearns for, but a more cognitive form of compassion which incorporates pleasure or joy at the prospect of salvation through Christ's suffering. McNamer has recently argued that the calls for immediate participation in witnessing the events of the Passion in Love's text are a manifestation of its performative trajectory (*Affective Meditation*, pp. 134-42). We will come back to this aspect of the *Mirror* in chapter four. For now, let us examine the link made between seeing or visualising the Passion and feeling compassion which pervades both Love's *Mirror* and Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* from a modern neuropsychological perspective.

Recent neuroimaging studies suggest that the postulated link between seeing and feeling in medieval visual theory has a basis in sensorimotor fact. Some brain areas that

are activated during a first-person experience (I do, I feel) are also involved in third-person experiences (he does; he feels). This sharing involves mirror neurons, specialised brain cells in a number of different cortical areas that are activated both when we perform an action and when we observe someone else performing the same action. Since their accidental discovery in the 1990s, mirror neuron systems have aroused much interest inside and outside the cognitive sciences because they seem to provide a physiological explanation for our ability to empathise – a crucial building block of human sociality and morality (Tangney and others; Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, p. 190). For example, in an fMRI experiment during which the participants were touched on their legs and viewed films of other people or objects being touched, Keysers and his colleagues found that a small region in the second somatosensory cortex was activate during the observation of touch as well as when touch was performed. They conclude:

> Equipped with such a shared circuitry for touch, when we witness touch, we do not only just *see* touch but also *understand* touch through an automatic link with our own experience of touch. The brain implicitly transforms the sight of touch into an inner representation of touch. (Keysers and others, p. 343; original emphasis)

This understanding is neither explicit, nor does it reflect reflexive knowledge that the action seen and an action executed are similar, because it is based on an involuntary, automatic neural mechanism (Keysers and others, p. 343). However, Keysers and his colleagues suggest that this activation may reflect 'an integration of other human beings or objects into our own embodied schema' (ibid.).

Clinical data and imaging studies indicate that a similar mechanism underlies our capacity for emotion recognition in others. An experiment focusing on disgust conducted by Bruno Wicker and others demonstrated that cerebral activations following the experience and the observation of disgust overlap, as we have seen in chapter one. Both when the participants experienced disgust and when they observed facial

expressions displaying the tell-tale signs of disgust, the left anterior insula and the right anterior cingulate cortex were activated. 'This suggests,' Wicker and his colleagues observe, 'that the understanding of the facial expressions of disgust as displayed by others involves the activation of neural substrates normally activated during the experience of the same emotion' (Wicker and others, p. 657). It has therefore been hypothesised that the neural representations of emotions that result from the recruitment of a shared circuitry for experience and observation add 'emotive coloring' (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, p. 189) to the further processing of emotional stimuli and provide a preverbal mode of emphatic arousal (Hoffmann, p. 441), which may function as the intuitive key for understanding the emotive states of others.

However, a clear distinction needs to be maintained between sharing someone else's emotions, sensations, and actions on a visceromotor level and feeling empathy, which is commonly defined as an emotional state in which one feels what the other feels as a result of cognitively processing emotional cues, such as outward behaviour and facial expressions (Hoffmann, p. 440). Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia maintain that 'the two processes are distinct in the sense that the latter implies the former, but not vice versa' (p. 191) Thus the perception of pain, for example, does not automatically solicit compassion in the observer. In other words, mirror mechanisms supply the neural substrate for empathic sharing, but they constitute a modality of understanding that is distinct from empathy. By transforming what we perceive other people to do or to feel into our own inner representations of similar actions and feelings, we gain an intuitive, automatic understanding of the inner lives of others. At first sight, few things would appear more elusive to us than the thoughts and feelings of a fifteenth-century spectator of a Passion play. Yet, since the processes described above are pre-reflective and hence do not involve culturally contingent judgments or the imagination, they potentially

provide a key also to the inner lives of historical others who are watching another person being beaten, scourged, humiliated, and crucified on a stage. The remainder of this chapter will investigate the theatrical devices through which two Middle English plays of the Passion shape the empathetic relationship between actor and spectator.

Whips, Wounds, and Bloodshed

One of the most exuberant dramatic incarnations of Christ's martyrdom and death on the late medieval English stage occurs in the fifteenth-century N-Town collection of biblical plays. The N-Town Passion sequence is usually divided into two Passion plays, the complexity and sheer scale of which exceed that of the corresponding pageants in other cycles.[15] Both Passion plays require a poly-scenic set similar to the *platea*-and-scaffold theater envisaged for *The Castle of Perseverance* and rely on spatial configuration to bear visual meaning for the audience.[16] Thus heaven is clearly an elevated area in the pageant of *The Betrayal*, where an angel descends from heaven to bring a chalice and a host to Christ and ascends again afterwards (see *N-Town*, 28.52 sd, 28.64 sd).The first Passion play covers the events from the conspiracy and the Entry to Jerusalem (play 26), to the last Supper and the Conspiracy with Judas (play 27), and the Betrayal (play 28), and calls for a cast of 56 speaking parts. The second Passion play consists of a sequence of four pageants covering the trials of Christ, the way to Calvary and the Crucifixion, and involves approximately 62 speaking parts, intricate costumes, props, and stage

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[15] Spector notes that the two Passion plays may, in an earlier version, have existed independently of the remaining plays in the collection, from which they differ stylistically and prosodically as well as in their indebtedness to the *Northern Passion* (*N-Town*, II, 506).

[16] For the spatial semantics of *platea* and scaffold-staging, see Glenn Ehrstine, 'Framing the Passion: Mansion Staging as Visual Mnemonic', in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 263-77 (p. 268). For the differences between processional pageant wagon-based and *platea*-based performances see Pamela King, 'Spatial Semantics and the Medieval Theatre', *Themes in Drama*, 9 (1987), 45-58.

movements frequently described in comparatively lengthy stage directions.[17] The second Passion play unleashes a spectacle of brutality in which explicit elaborations of the cruelty of Christ's torments function as largely silent climaxes of dramatic activity at the end of the three trial pageants.

The buffeting, a brief yet brutal scene in which Jesus is not only beaten but also spat on and knocked down, concludes the lengthy trial before Caiaphas. Christ's tormentors remain silent during the initial attack on the body of the actor playing Christ and only start their customary mockery when they turn the punishment for 'blasfemyng' (*N-Town*, 29.180) ordered by Annas into a game of blindman's buff.[18] A non-scriptural scourging scene follows the trial before Herod in the subsequent pageant. Unlike the York Tilemakers' play of *Christ before Pilate 2: The Judgment*, in which each crack of the whip is accompanied by taunts and mockery from the soldiers (*York*, 33.340-41), the stage direction here only requires three Jews to '*pulle of Jesus clothis and betyn hym with whyppys*' (*N-Town*, 30.236 sd) until '*he is all blody*' (30.244 sd), and this is accompanied only by a brief, functional exchange. Secundus and Tertius Judeus merely reiterate the assumption, voiced earlier by an exasperated Herod, that the whip may loosen Christ's tongue (see *N-Town*, 30.237-44).[19] In the closing episode of the subsequent *Second Trial before Pilate*, a bloodthirsty silent crowd whips Jesus a second time before crowning him

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[17] These are *Herod; The Trial before Annas and Caiaphas* (play 29); *The Death of Judas; The Trials before Pilate and Herod* (play 30); *Satan and Pilate's Wife; The Second Trial before Pilate* (play 31); *The Procession to Calvary; The Crucifixion* (play 32).

[18] The buffeting is reconfigured as a game in all existing Middle English dramatic representations of Christ's Passion. In the Towneley *Coliphazio*, for example, Primus Tortor begins his beating of Christ with the words: 'We shall teche hym, I wote | a new play of Yoyll' (*Towneley*, 12.239). For a discussion of the ludic elements in Passion plays see Kolve, pp. 175-205.

[19] The long pageant of the trial before Herod and Pilate contains more silent violence in the depiction of the death of Judas. The apostle 'goth and hangyth hymself' (30.32 sd) after Annas dismisses his attempt to repay the thirty pieces of silver. The *N-Town Proclamation* suggests that the death of Judas may originally have been the matter of a separate pageant in which Judas hangs himself on a tree, his soul being carried away by a devil (see *N-Town,* Proclamation, ll. 360-72). While the death of Judas has no dramatic parallels in extant Middle English drama, it was frequently included in Continental European Passion plays. For the N-Town death of Judas episode see Davidson, 'Gesture', p. 80 and Woolf, p. 243. For continental European versions of the episode see Lynette R. Muir, *The Biblical Drama of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 131-32.

with the crown of thorns. An indication of the savagery simulated on stage is given in the stage directions, which specify that Christ's clothes be torn off his body and the crown of thorns be pushed down on his head with forks. A '*cloth of sylk*' soon turns into a '*purpyl cloth*' (*N-Town*, 31.212) when put on the actor after the second scourging.[20]

We may assume that the marks of Christ's physical torment in these episodes of punitive and interrogatory cruelty were depicted with all the realism medieval stagecraft could bring to bear, given documentary evidence for an extensive repertoire of special effects. Thus the Smiths' expenditures for 1451 in Coventry list 'vj skynnys of whit ledder' (Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, p. 147), which could have been prepared in order to simulate the appearance of torn and beaten flesh and could have been used in conjunction with whips and rods dipped in red paint, which turned the body of the Christ-figure bloody when struck.[21] Moreover, we cannot exclude that the simulation of pain may accidentally cause some real pain, particularly where stage effects go wrong.[22]

In *Bodied Spaces*, Stanton Garner argued that spectators undergo 'a mimetic inhabiting of the suffering body' when watching a play which dramatises human suffering.[23] Garner's notion of 'mimetic inhabiting' is supported by recent neuroscientific evidence for the existence of 'tactile empathy' (Keysers and others, p. 335). As we have previously seen, this research found that the first-person experience of being touched on one's body activates the same neural networks activated by observing the body of someone else being touched. This double pattern of neural activation suggests that our capacity to understand the tactile experiences of others is mediated (at least partly) by the externally triggered activation of some of the same neural networks

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[20] Stephen Spector notes parallel between this scene and the *Northern Passion* (*N-Town*, II, 510).
[21] Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 200.
[22] See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, p. 66, and Enders, *Theater of Cruelty,* pp. 196-97.
[23] Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 183.

that underpin our own tactile experiences. Similar mechanisms appear to accompany our experience of the painful sensations of others. Recent empirical evidence from functional Magnetic Resonance Investigations (fMRI) suggests that the anterior cingulate and the anterior insular cortices are activated during the personal experience and the observation of pain inflicted on others.[24] However, Vittorio Gallese notes that the degree and quality of the activation of shared neural circuits depends on the observer's mental attitude in such experiments.[25] Watching pain being inflicted on another person, the 'observer extracts the basic sensory qualities of the pain experienced by others mapping it somatotopically onto his/her own sensory-motor system' (Gallese, 'Intentional Attunement', p. 19). However, when participants in pain-related studies were required to *imagine* the pain suffered by someone to whom they were emotionally attached out of their sight, only the brain areas mediating the affective quality of pain – that is the anterior cingulate cortex and the anterior insula – were activated (Gallese, 'Intentional Attunement', p. 19). The notion that seeing pain being inflicted triggers a different neural response from imagining it is interesting with regard to the progressively gory torture scenarios staged in the N-Town second Passion play.[26] Unlike purely static depictions of Christological suffering such as crucifixes, which foreground the wounds left by the buffeting and scourging and leave the process of infliction up to the onlooker's imagination, the captivating images of violence against the body of the actor standing in for Christ in the N-Town trial plays re-create for the audience the sensation of painful touch. By allowing the spectator to see blow after blow land on the body of an actor standing in for Christ, these plays allow him or her to feel the pain they cause not only vicariously but almost personally because the feeling is reproduced in them.

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[24] Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, 'Towards a Unifying Neural Theory of Social Cognition', *Progress in Brain Research*, 156 (2006), 379-401 (p. 386). See also Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, p. 187.

[25] Vittorio Gallese, 'Intentional Attunement: A Neurophysiological Perspective on Social Cognition and Its Disruption in Autism', *Brain Research*, 1079 (2006), 15-24 (p. 19).

[26] Stevenson makes a similar point with an eye to the York Crucifixion pageant (p. 220 note 53).

Three possible objections to this conclusion suggest themselves. Firstly, witnessing someone hitting another person is strictly speaking a complex situation involving several modalities – that is, an action, a sensation, and an emotion – which work in conjunction (Keysers and Gazzola, p. 391). Moreover, this situation is perceived not only visually but also aurally. Even though the mirror neuron systems in both monkeys and humans have been shown to be sensitive to auditory stimuli related to actions, we ought to be careful with hypotheses concerning a spectator's neural response to the cracking of whips, for example.[27] Secondly, tactile empathy depends to a certain extent on the experience of the observer, which might not include being beaten or whipped within an inch of his or her life, although it quite probably includes physical pain caused by knocks or the breaking of skin. A third caveat concerns the question of audience response. Even if the images of violent excess in the N-Town trial plays evoke 'tactile empathy' in their audiences, this does not allow us to infer an empathic audience response. Documentary evidence corroborates the notion that pity and empathy for victims are not the only possible responses arising from watching violence (re)enacted on stage. As we have seen already, the masons at York complained in 1431-32 that their play of the *Funeral of the Virgin* evoked laughter rather than devotion (*REED: York*, II, 732). Inappropriate audience response is also a sticking point for the Franciscan friar William Melton, who complains in a 1426 sermon that many people 'attend not only to the play on [Corpus Christi] but also greatly to feastings, drunkenness, clamors, gossiping, and other wantonness.'[28] Whether the partly ludic scenes of punitive and

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[27] For the auditory sensitivity of mirror neuron systems in monkeys see Evelyne Kohler and others, 'Hearing Sounds, Understanding Actions: Action Representation in Mirror Neuorns', *Science*, 297 (2007), 846-48. For the audiovisual mirror neurons in humans see Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, 'The Mirror-Neuron System', *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 27 (2004), 169-92 (p. 187) and Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti, 'A Unifying View', p. 397.

[28] *REED: York*, II, 728. The Latin original reads:

> [...] ciues predicte ciuitatis & alij forinseci in dicto fest confluentes ad eandem non solum ipsi ludo in eodem festo verum eciam comessacionibus ebrietatibus clamoribus cantilenas & alijs insolencijs multum[.] (*REED: York*, I, 43)

interrogative torture staged in the N-Town second Passion play solicited terror and fear, pity and empathy, sadistic responses, or simply guffaws and laughs in their fifteenth-century audiences, we cannot know, as the cognitive processes of the spectator necessarily elude us. Even though we can safely say that the emotions generated through embodied simulations influence people's thinking, every spectator still comes to the performance of a Passion play with their own experiential past. Or as Sponsler put it, the consumption of a play is 'indeterminate and open to conflicting understandings, with the effects on the individuals being more plural than singular' (*Drama and Resistance*, p. 163). However, I will briefly discuss a factor that affects the cognitive processing of the stage images and encourages a potentially empathic response to the suffering represented on the part of the audience: the attentional mechanisms at work in the plays.

Target Victims

An empathic response is commonly considered to be dependent on the similarity and proximity of a victim to the observer as well as on the vividness with which suffering is perceived.[29] Recent experimental research into the relationship between affective and attentional systems demonstrates that attention is a crucial factor in determining the way in which we respond to visual stimuli. In short, the more attention we pay to a particular

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[29] Stephan Dickert and Paul Slovic, 'Attenional Mechanisms in the Generation of Sympathy', *Judgement and Decision Making*, 4.4 (2009), 297-306 (p. 297).

stimulus, the stronger our response to this stimulus. With regard to the N-Town trial pageants, the notion that visual attention to a target victim may intensify our emotional response is pertinent, given the ways in which these bustling poly-scenic pageants guide the sensory perceptions of their audiences.

The multi-locational set required for the staging of the pageants in the N-Town second Passion play allows for simultaneous action – a feature that is also exploited in the first Passion play. In Passion Play I, Rewfyn and Lyon appear in the place while a messenger informs Caiaphas that Annas wished to see him (*N-Town*, 26.244 sd), and Jesus '*rydyth out of þe place*' while Peter and John stay behind, preach and meet with him afterwards (*N-Town*, 26.385 sd). Many of the numerous 'in þe menetyme'-stage directions in both Passion Plays seem concerned, first and foremost, with providing cues and ensuring that there is no disruption to the flow of the play action. The initial stage direction of *Satan and Pilate's Wife; The Second Trial before Pilate* specifies that the Christ-figure be led through the place to Pilate after having been scourged and clothed in white, while Satan divulges his plan to destroy Jesus to the audience and thus sets the dream of Pilate's wife into action (*N-Town*, pageant 31). And according to the stage directions for the Crucifixion, as many as three distinct actions can take place at the same time in the same location: Christ's executioners play dice for his clothes, while '*sympyl men*' take on the task of crucifying the two thieves. And '*in þe menetyme*' (*N-Town*, 32.92 sd) the Virgin arrives with the three Marys and John, throws herself down in front of the cross and embarks on a lament. Multi-locational staging thus provides the spectator with several, potentially competing focal points.

Yet in the torture scenarios that conclude the trial pageants in the N-Town second Passion play, the body of Jesus, or more precisely the actor standing in for him, is the visual and auditory focus of the stage action. For the spectators, there is very little

distraction from the violence inflicted on this body as all other stage activity and all other dialogue ceases. But where were the spectators? The demarcation between playing space and viewing space is not clear-cut. There are cues in the play-text which suggest that audience members were considered active participants in the Passion play. In the *Trial before Pilate*, Annas invokes 'all þis pepyll' (*N-Town*, 30.119) to bear witness to Jesus's preaching and miracle-working. There is reason to assume that 'all þis pepyll', who, according to the following stage direction comment on Annas's speech by shouting '3a! 3a! 3a!' (30.120 sd) might have referred to the audience as well and not just the three Jews and two Doctors, which the scene requires in addition to the high priests, Pilate, and, of course, Jesus. A second such incident occurs later in the same pageant as part of the second trial before Pilate when a stage direction specifies that the people shout: 'Crucifigatur, we sey atonys' (*N-Town*, 30.112 sd and 30.113). Moreover, the Crucifixion requires the presence of 'poer comonys' (32.88 sd) to be bullied into executing the two thieves by the 'Jewys iiij or v' (ibid.) who have just crucified Christ.

The stage action moves further to the central playing space as ever greater amounts of Christ's blood are being spilled. While the buffeting takes place on or just underneath the scaffold Caiaphas and Annas share (29.117 sd), the first scourging is enacted on Herod's scaffold (30.152 sd). The second flagellation and the mocking, however, are set in the '*cowncel hous*' (31.117 sd), which is earlier described as being located in 'mydplace' and featuring a '*lytyl oratory*' (26.288 sd), but is here referred to as resembling a court room (31.170 sd). The Crucifixion, too, is staged '*in þe place*' (32.20 sd). Moreover, an increasing number of people witness the infliction of pain upon Christ. The buffeting, carried out by four Jews, is witnessed by Annas, Caiaphas, and three doctors, while the first scourging is attended by Herod, Caiaphas and Annas, and at least two doctors. The second scourging episode includes all of the above (except for

Herod), as well as Pilate and Barabas, while the Crucifixion involves at least twelve witnesses – not counting the audience.

Ehrstine has noted that the movement of actors and particularly of expositor figures between different locations is central to the experience of a multi-locational play as movement directs the audience's gaze and hence their attention to specific scenic elements (p. 266). In the N-Town second Passion play, there is no single figure intervening in the dramatic action in order to direct the audience's attention about the stage or to explicate the stage action in the same way as, for example, the Expositor in the Chester *Moses* does. All main actors move within the playing space as they enter and exit their scaffolds via the place, which they also have to cross in order to move from station to station. However, this movement is framed by a prologue spoken by Contemplacio at the beginning of play 29 (*Herod; The Trial before Annas and Cayaphas*). Contemplacio is also the name of an expositor-figure who appears in the Marian plays of the N-Town collection, yet Spector notes prosodic and stylistic differences between the speeches of Contemplacio here and in the Marian plays (*N-Town*, II, 506). Contemplacio first lists the biblical stories dramatised 'last ȝere' (29.6) and then enjoins the audience: '[W]e beseche ȝow þat ȝoure wyllys be good|To kepe þe Passyon in ȝoure mende, þat xal be shewyd here (*N-Town,* 29.7-8). Contemplacio's plea is interesting for the many contexts it points to. It is informed, firstly, by the medieval ethics of perception, which stress the necessity of voluntary control over one's sensory perceptions; secondly, by theories of cognitive processing (as discussed in chapters one and two), which consider concentration crucial to the making of successful memory images; and thirdly, by the meditative literary tradition, which combines elements of both of the above in punctuating graphic descriptions of suffering with injunctions to see and feel in order to encourage compassion for and devotion to the suffering Christ.

In the Augustinian tradition, perception is initially an uncontrolled act. However, the controlling will can react to a perception by either consenting to it or refusing it.[30] In other words, it is up to our will whether we allow ourselves to be distracted by something that catches our eye, for example. For Augustine, voluntary control over the five outer senses is essential, so that the temptations of taste, the allures of smell, the delight of the ear, and the gratification of the eye do not lead human beings away from God through bodily pleasure (*Confessions*, pp. 203-08 (X.30 – X.33)).[31] When Comtemplacio asks of the audience 'þat [their] wyllys be good', he does not only ask them to concentrate on the performance but also implicitly puts the perception of the performance in a particular ethical and moral context. This becomes more obvious towards the end of his monologue when he warns: '[F]or mede of ʒoure soulys […] take good hede' *(N-Town,* 29.20). Contemplacio therefore attaches a redemptive function to bodily sight as a conduit between humanity and divinity based on the medieval understanding of seeing as a physical affect – a kind of feeling on and in the body.

The York Crucifixio Christi

Questions about the implications of attentional focus on a target victim are particularly interesting with regard to another play, which has often been termed the most harrowing, the most emotive, and the most dramaturgically effective of all Middle English Passion plays by merit of its narrative concentration: the York *Crucifixio Christi*.[32] More has been written about the York *Crucifixio Christi* than about any other pageant in the York cycle or indeed any other Middle English Passion play. Mounted by the Pinners at the time of its recording, it is a deceptively simple pageant that requires only

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[30] See, for example, *Confessions*, pp. 147-48 (VIII.9).

[31] The idea that the human soul may be assaulted through the five senses was often formulated visually in art. See Carl Nordenfalk, 'The Five Sense in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 48 (1986), 1-22.

[32] For the dramaturgic efficacy of the York Crucifixion pageant, see King, *York Mystery Plays*, pp. 143-44, for example.

five actors and a minimal scenic apparatus, and it is unique among the Middle English Passion plays in isolating the stretching and nailing of Christ on the cross from the other events at Calvary.

Psychological research shows that sympathy for individuals is dependent on the presence or absence of others, who can assume a distracting role (Dickert and Slovic, p. 298). Unlike the N-Town Crucifixion episode, in which the two thieves crucified with Christ make an appearance, there are no distracter victims in the York Crucifixion pageant. Nevertheless, the play text suggests that during the central action of the pageant, the laborious stretching and nailing of Christ's body on the cross, the spectator's attentional focus is not necessarily on the victim of violence. Unlike in the N-Town trial plays, the visual and verbal strategies of the York *Crucifixion* encourage the spectator to shift his or her attention to the perpetrators of violence.

The York *Crucifixio* opens with a relatively static stage image: all five actors stand on the pageant wagon, while the soldiers discuss their task. Before the soldiers begin their work, they studiedly display the tools of their trade – hammers and nails (*York*, 35.30) – to the audience, while '[þ]e crosse on grounde', the fourth soldier assures his comrades, 'is goodely graied | And boorede even as it awith' (35.39-40). In a scene with no obvious focal point, this marks the future instruments of the Passion out as significant objects (Mills, "'Look at me'", p. 7). The picture held up to the audience *after* the elevation of the cross is equally static and dominated by strong vertical lines: the cross itself; Christ hanging from it; the soldiers standing at the base of the cross, wrangling for Christ's garments. Yet the central action works primarily on a horizontal plane from the moment the actor playing Christ lies down on the cross and the executioners position themselves at its four ends (Beckwith, *Signifying God*, p. 65). For the audience looking on from underneath the pageant-wagon on which the pageant is

staged, the sight of the body of the Christ-figure would at times be obscured by the four nameless men carrying out the Crucifixion. Consequently, the potent sensorimotor impact of seeing physical interactions and the possibilities for an automatic, intuitive sharing of the Christ-figure's suffering on the part of the spectator would also appear limited. In addition, the spatially fore-grounded men draw the audience's attention through their incessant chattering, thus reinforcing the visual focus on their bodies and actions.

The unindividuated, nameless soldiers present themselves as ordinary workmen doing their assigned task with careful, methodical devotion and an eye on practicalities. They joke, bicker, and complain about bad backs (*York*, 35.194) and dislocated shoulders (35.190) as much as about one another's unwillingness to pull their weight in a communal effort. '3a, þou comaundis lightly as a lorde; | Come helpe to haale [hym], with ille haile' (35.115-16), the third soldier grumbles when the first delegates the hard work of stretching Christ with ropes to the other three. However, this does not stop him from trying to sneak away before raising the cross himself (35.151-52). Eager to please their superiors (35.14), the soldiers re-imagine their task as a contest (35.84). As a 'doote' (35.5), 'cursed knave' (35.45), 'vnthrifty thyng' (35.90) and a 'fraitoure' (35.36) whose crimes are worthy of 'þe foulest dede of all' (35.21), Jesus ceases to be a human being in their eyes.

The pageant's emphasis on actions and the conversation of the soldiers in the York *Crucifixio Christi* can nevertheless be considered to contribute to an intuitive audience understanding of suffering not unlike the enactment of violence in the N-Town trial sequence. fMRI scans in recent neuroimaging studies concerning neural activation through auditory stimuli have revealed that the cortical areas active while listening to sentences that describe actions overlap with those active during the

observation of these actions. Rizzolatti and Craighero conclude that there is 'clear evidence that listening to sentences describing actions engages visuo-motor circuits subserving action representation' (p. 187).[33] Even though the soldiers joke and bicker, their conversation is dominated by references to the actions they are carrying out. Thus the second soldier describes taking the right hand of the actor playing Christ and pulling it toward the pre-bored hole in the cross:

> II MILES   ʒis, certis, I hope I holde þis hande,
> And to þe boore I haue it brought
> Full boxumly, withouten bande. (*York*, 35.98-100)

Embedded stage directions suggest that the actor then holds up the nail for the audience to see (35.102) before driving it 'thurgh bones and senous' (35.103). The third soldier, in charge of the left arm, announces that he 'schall tacche hym to' as well (35.119). The deed done, he remarks: 'Þis werke will holde, þat dar I heete, | For nowe are feste both his h[e]nd[e]' (35.121-22). While the palpable emphasis on 'werke' and the task at hand in the soldier's conversation can be read as the dramatic expression of an 'artisanal ideology,' as Beckwith maintains (*Signifying God*, p. 53), it can also be understood in terms of substituting for, or supplementing, visual information. This is most obvious in the exchanges concerning the stretching of Christ's legs to the borehole. The conversation accompanying the procedure narrates the violence being inflicted while it is staged:

> I MILES   Feste an þanne faste, þat all be fytte,
> It is no force howe felle he feele.
> II MILES   Lugge on ʒe both a litill ʒitt.
> III MILES   I schalle nought sese, as I haue seele. (*York*, 35.135-38)

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[33] See also Marco Tettamanti and others, 'Listening to Action-Related Sentences Activates Fronto-Parietal Motor Circuits', *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 17 (2005), 273-81. Tettamani and colleagues note:

> [L]istening to action-related sentences activated a left-lateralized fronto-parieto-temporal system, which has been shown to be activated also by action execution and observation. Our findings are thus consistent with the hypothesis that the activation of this system contributes to the understanding of the action-related content conveyed by sentences. (p. 275)

The exchange between soldiers provides a running commentary not only on the stage action but also on the consequences of this action, which only becomes fully visible with the elevation of the cross. The dialogue is laced with references to pain. The second soldier, for example, takes sadistic delight in the idea of causing Christ pain by tugging his feet to make him fit the ill-prepared cross. 'Þat corde full kyndely can I knytte, | Þe comforte of þis karle to kele,' he announces (35.133-34). The drawn out description of the soldiers' work emphasises the gruesome details of the different stages of the Crucifixion from the brutal stretching of Christ which makes sure that 'assoundir are bothe synnous and veynis | On ilke a side' (35.147-48), to the driving of nails 'thurgh bones and senous' (35.103), and the setting of the cross in the mortise 'so all his bones | Are asoundre nowe on sides seere' (35.224-25).

The spectacular acts of violence enacted in the York *Crucifixio Christi* have attracted different readings. Woolf notes parallels with the devotional treatments of the Passion in the attention given to detail (pp. 262-63), while Beckwith emphasises the positioning of the audience *vis-à-vis* the violence staged, arguing that the spectator is not to 'merge with Christ in the identificatory theatre of passion, not to become him, or to enter or be at one with him, but to *bear a terrible witness*' (*Signifying God*, pp. 69-70; original emphasis). Drawing on Beckwith's assertion, Stevenson asserts that the York *Crucifixio Christi* seeks to exercise control over the potentially empathetic relationship between the Christ-figure and the audience by foregrounding the soldiers and their actions (pp. 145-46), which limits the possibilities for bodily responses to the perception of pain and suffering. The pain suffered by the Christ-figure, she argues, is not mapped onto the spectator's sensorimotor system because it is not seen but merely imagined (Stevenson, p. 146). This assertion does not, however, take into account that the spectator not only sees the actions which are causing pain and hears action-related sounds, but also hears

action-related sentences in the conversation of the soldiers. Tettamanti and his colleagues conclude in their study on the impact of action-related sentences on visuo-motor circuits that '[i]n this domain, language does not appear to be detached from the evolutionary ancient sensorimotor system, but rather strictly linked to it' (p. 278). Thus we perhaps ought to be careful with statements about the precise neural activations triggered by this apparently simple and yet complex pageant. For Keysers and Gazzola, the automatic transformation of the visual and auditory descriptions of the actions of others into neural representations normally associated with our own execution of similar actions adds 'the richness of our subjective experience of actions […] to the objective visual and auditory description of what has been seen' ('Unifying View', pp. 390-91). This would suggest that the audiovisual narrative staged in the York *Crucifixio Christi*, like the N-Town Crucifixion episode, may solve – to a certain degree – the 'problem of other minds' (Iacoboni, p. 653) through direct sensory engagement of the spectator, even though such automatic, pre-reflective neural activations never exist in isolation and can exist alongside experiences that are not necessarily congruent with such responses.

Catching the Emotions of Others

It is a frequently commented-upon aspect of the York *Crucifixio Christi* that the main part of this pageant appears to solicit sympathy for the perpetrators of violence rather than for their victim. Beckwith, King, and Hill-Vásquez have highlighted some of the devotional and social contexts, staging practices, and rhetorical means by which the audience is drawn into the ethical realm of the pageant so as to encourage audience

identification with the perpetrators of the violence against Christ.[34] Chief among these are the social similarity between the actors and their audiences, who were largely drawn from the same urban class of trades- and craftspeople, and the general practice in medieval religious plays of casting the audience as participatory agents. Further, we can say that the very fact that the actors playing the soldiers are required, as part of their roles, to laugh, to get angry – in other words to display emotions – encourages similar responses in the audience.

Augustine famously observed in his *Confessions* that certain emotions, and most notably suffering and pain, may transfer, as it were, from the performing actor to the watching and listening audience. While his younger self was enthralled by the drama, the converted Augustine wonders:

> Why is it that a person would wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure.[35]

Emotions, in other words, appear to be contagious, and the audience takes pleasure in mirroring what the actors on stage are doing.

Recent research into mirror neurons has revealed an important part of the neurological basis for such mirroring. We have already seen that if an action is seen, the inferior parietal and pre-motor areas of the brain add an inner representation of the action to our observations. When we witness a sensation such as touch, the somatosensory cortices add an inner representation of touch. If we witness the bodily expression of an emotion like disgust, the insula helps to map out a mental plan for

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[34] See Beckwith, *Signifying God*, pp. 59-71; King, *York Mystery Cycle,* pp. 143-49; Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, pp. 109-15.

[35] *Confessions,* p. 35 (III.2). For the Latin original see *St Augustine's Confessions,* I, 100: 'quid [*sic*] est, quod ibi homo vult dolere luctuosa et tragica, quae tamen pati ipsi nollet? et tamen pati vult ex eis dolorem spectator, et dolor ipse est voluptas eius.'

disgust and thus adds "emotive colouring" to our observation. Such neural processes have recently been linked to psychological theories of imitation and mimicry (Keysers and Gazzola, pp. 390-97; Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, pp. 188-89). While the precise links between neural mirroring and imitation are debated, there is no doubt that our motor systems mirror the facial movements, postures, movements, and behaviours of others (Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, pp. 188-89). Examples from everyday life are legion: it is difficult to suppress a yawn when we see someone else yawn; seeing an errant ball fly toward the person next to us in a park, we duck away as they duck away; and laughter is famously contagious. Such imitation and mimicry are pervasive and automatic. More importantly, however, mimicry of facial expressions in particular has been shown to facilitate empathy. As such, mimicry influences the subjective emotional experience of the imitator and induces physiological changes characteristic of the emotional expression (Matsumoto and others, pp. 217-19). Embodying the emotions of others, then, produces emotions in us. 'The implication for those playing the make-belief game of theatre,' McConachie observes, 'is that spectators are virtual Typhoid Marys when it comes to catching emotions and passing them on' ('Falsifiable Theories', p. 563).

In theatre studies and film theory, emotional contagion – that is, the automatic, unintentional, and uncontrollable "transfer" of emotions from one subject to another based on sensory stimulation and subsequent physiological responses to this stimulation – is recognised as an important part of a spectator's emotional engagement with audiovisual narratives.[36] Emotional contagion is also clearly distinguished from empathy responses, which involve affect as well as the imagination and higher-order cognitive processes (Coplan, p. 32). The concept of emotional contagion can, I suggest, help us understand why laughter is a possible audience response to the York *Crucifixio Christi*. As

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[36] For discussions of emotional contagion responses in theatre, see McConachie, 'Falsifiable Theories', for the role of emotional contagion in responses to film, see Amy Coplan, 'Catching Characters' Emotions: Emotional Contagion Responses to Narrative Fiction Film', *Film Studies*, 8 (2006), 26-38.

the spectator sees and hears the light-hearted banter, the laughter and the levity of the soldiers, he or she is induced to mimic it. Laughing in turn influences his or her subjective emotional experience and induces physiological changes characteristic of joy. The theatrical aspects of the York *Crucifixio Christi* may thus encourage the emotional convergence of the audience with the merciless tormentors of Christ. This emotional convergence is, of course, not a conscious, voluntary, or reflected process, but it ultimately contributes to the spectator's overall emotional experience of the pageant.

The possibility of such a response is underscored by the pageant text itself. After the elevation of the cross, the Christ-figure addresses first the audience, and then God:

> JESUS   Al men þat walkis by waye or streete
> Takes tente ȝe schalle no trauayle tyne.
> Byholdes myn heede, myn handis, and my feete,
> And fully feele nowe, or ȝe fyne,
> Yf any mournyng may be meete,
> Or myscheue mesured vnto myne.
> My fadir, þat alle bales may bete,
> Forgiffis þes men þat dois me pyne.
> What þei wirke, wotte þai noght;
> Therefore, my fadir, I craue,
> Latte neuere þer synnes be sought,
> But see þer saules to saue. (*York*, 35.253-64)

Stevenson reads Christ's speech first and foremost as an interruption of a moment of possible audience identification with the now visibly suffering Christ (p. 147). Yet a number of things make this speech, which echoes the responsory 'O vos omnes', sung at Matins on Holy Saturday, interesting (Beckwith, *Signifying God*, p. 66). Firstly, Christ is visually the focal point, but through his speech he ostensibly draws attention to the symbols of his sacrifice: his head, hands, and feet. Mills reads the frequent invitations to look which are uttered by the figures of Christ in Passion plays merely as a means of catching the audience's attention ('"Look at me"', pp. 5-6). While it certainly has this effect, Christ's invitation to behold him spoken from the cross is not merely a call to

attention, I would argue. Against the background of medieval perceptual theory, it is also an invitation to the audience to interact physically, cognitively, and emotionally with the stage action. Moreover, McNamer has recently demonstrated using lexicographic work, that "beholding" is more than a synonym for seeing in the later Middle Ages. 'To behold,' she argues, 'seems to be a distinct way of seeing and feeling that is coded simultaneously as an ethical imperative' (*Affective Meditation*, p. 137). The verb is also used in this sense in Christ's speech in the York Crucifixion pageant. The pronouns used in the second part of Christ's speech are sufficiently ambiguous to imply that – '[a]l men þat walkis by waye or street', having just passively stood by and watched the Crucifixion take place, are partly responsible for the suffering he has endured. This is shown when Christ asks his father's forgiveness for 'þes men þat dois me pyne' (35.260).[37] As King pointed out, the pronominal ambiguity of Christ's speech indicates that the spectators are considered to be just as implicated in the execution of Christ as the soldiers who carried it out on the stage (*York Mystery Plays*, p. 149). The pageant thus makes a point about the necessity of redemption in an effective fashion, attaching itself to the world of the spectator and highlighting the contemporary relevance of Christ's sacrificial death. The contemporary relevance of the stage action is made even more explicit in the corresponding pageant in the Towneley collection, in which Jesus draws the 'pepyll that passé me by' (*Towneley*, 23.233) into the ethical realm of the play in his address to the Virgin from the cross:

> JESUS   Blo and blody thus I am bett,
> Swongen with swepys and al to-swett,
> Mankynde, for thi mysdede. (*Towneley*, 23.525-27)

Christ's words from the cross here collapse the frames of symbolic imitation and historical relation by making the audience stand in for sinful mankind.

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[37] Deixis in this passage is also discussed in the readings of the pageant by King (*York Mystery Cycle,* p. 149) and Hill-Vásquez (*Sacred Players*, p. 114).

The image of the suffering Christ presented in the York *Crucifixio Christi* and in the second Passion play in the N-Town collection captures the tension between theatre's semiotic and phenomenological lives. The neuroscientific research noted here poses a problem for readings of Passion plays which focus exclusively on their material reality or representational meanings. Both phenomenological and semiotic approaches assume that a spectating subject looks at a performance, including the actors as objects, regardless of whether the actors function as signs which 'correspond to something in the objective world or [else] images that somehow relate to the subjective imagination of the perceiver' (McConachie, 'Falsifiable Theories', p. 565). However, the neuro-scientific research noted here has discovered an interactional relationship between the actor and the spectator which occurs prior to any cognitive distinctions between subjects and objects and which does not rely on signification. When the spectator pays attention to the human action staged in Passion plays – provided that it is intentional action –they may unconsciously mirror these actions and use the emotional and cognitive information generated by such mirroring directly to understand the intentions and emotions of the characters presented on the stage. Put another way, the activation of the mirror neuron network provides a direct stimulus to conceptual operations of the human brain (McConachie, 'Falsifiable Theories', p. 565). Seen from a neuroscientific angle, there is no ontological difference between the spectating subject and the represented object: both are linked through their embodied interactions. The existence of an embodied mind thus undercuts the premises of both semiotic and phenomenological approaches to such plays.[38]

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[38] McConachie explores the challenges of embodied realism to semiotics, phenomenology, and post-structuralism in 'Falsifiable Theories', pp. 565-66

Conclusion

The visual and verbal strategies deployed in the N-Town second Passion play and the York *Crucifixio Christi* to represent the suffering and death of Christ suggest an awareness on the part of the playwrights of an interactional bond between the performers on stage and the spectator which is based in perception.

The trial sequence in the N-Town second Passion play embellishes and foregrounds those narrative events which are considered particularly emotive in devotional literature and art, and thus fit into the schema of late medieval Christological devotion. They transform the buffeting, scourging and mocking of Christ – three events which are recounted with the utmost brevity in the Gospels – into the silent high-points of the dramatic action in which the mutilated, broken, bleeding body of Christ becomes the centre of audience attention as all other action and dialogue in these often poly-scenic plays ceases. Unlike purely static representations or subjective visualisations of Christological suffering, the playing or acting out of moments of painful touch on the stage has a sensorimotor impact on the spectator. Its perception by the spectator facilitates "tactile empathy", an automatic (in the sense that it is obligatory), non-conscious, and pre-reflexive mechanism, which, according to embodied simulation theory, contributes to our understanding of the experiences of others. This capacity to understand the tactile experience of others, and by extension to understand others as experiencing selves, needs to be seen in the context of more general cognitive mechanisms, but offers the beginning of a biological explanation for the communicative efficacy of embodiment in Passion plays. Brutality against the Christ-figure is not enacted here as 'violent theatre for a violent era' (Gatton. p. 80), nor as a mere dramatic reflection of the preoccupation with Christological suffering in devotional art and

literature, but as a bridge between the first- and third-person experiences of sensations (emotions, actions) – two perspectives which are usually sharply distinguished, but which are somewhat more blurred at the level of the neural mechanisms, as recent neuroscientific evidence suggests. The depiction of violence, then, allows the spectator access to Christ's world of experience. Notwithstanding major differences in governing assumptions, modern discussions of the links between seeing and feeling thus overlap with medieval visual theory and devotion which emphasise the significance of seeing for the understanding of, and participation in, the divine.

While the theatrical devices used in the N-Town trial plays can be seen to coax spectators into an empathetic relationship with the suffering Christ by encouraging an involuntary, pre-reflective link between living bodies, the York *Crucifixio Christi* appears to foster a different relationship: that between the spectator and the perpetrators of violence. Foregrounding their actions and conversation, and removing the Christ-figure (at least partially) from sight until the moment of the elevation of the cross, the pageant encourages emotional contagion responses to the soldiers on the part of the audience. Moreover, Christ's speech from the cross at the end of the pageant suggests that the pageant's devotional goals rely, in part at least, on the religious meaning spectators derived through such contagion responses. However, the York *Crucifixio Christi* never loses sight of the physically present – and yet visually absent and silent centre of all stage action: Christ's body. The pageant mediates the extremity of suffering in the Crucifixion verbally through detailed descriptions of the soldiers' actions and their consequences, which complicates how we think about empathetic audience responses to the enactment of violence against Christ, and therefore audience response to the pageant as a whole. In the light of contemporary research in the cognitive sciences, understanding Christ's sacrifice and suffering in the York *Crucifixio Christi* is not just a matter of theologically

informed *reflection* on the stage action. It is also a matter of responding to the play action *before* any reflection on subjects and objects of feeling occurs.

While the Passion plays discussed here are based on the underlying assumption that looking at the suffering inflicted on the body of an actor standing in for Christ – feigned or not – prompts an emotional response from the spectator, they also give much room to emotional responses to Christ's suffering from certain characters. It is to these that the next chapter will turn.

Chapter 4
Staged Emotions

Emotional displays on stage do not leave audiences untouched. Augustine notes in his *Confessions* that before his conversion, he 'was captivated by theatrical shows' and commiserated in the amorous misery shown on the stage.[1] 'They were full of representations of my own miseries and fuelled my own fires,' he notes.[2] Yet in retrospect, he wonders about his former inability to distinguish between his own experience and the imagined dramatic reality of Roman theatrical performances, which, for the Christian Augustine, are nothing more than debauched social activities grounded in paganism. For Augustine, being moved by counterfeit emotions presented on the stage poses an ethical problem. While plays arouse pity for fictional characters, they do not go beyond enticing sorrow in the observer. 'A member of the audience is not excited to offer help, but only invited to grieve,' Augustine observes.[3] Yet proper Christian compassion calls not only for pity for those who suffer but also for action aimed at alleviating suffering. For Augustine, theatre cannot reinforce the Christian demand for compassion, because the emotions it evokes remain vicarious and self-centred (see Dox, p. 14).

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[1] *Confessions*, p. 35 (III.2). See also *St Augustine's Confessions,* I, 100: 'Rapiebant me spectacular theatrica, plena imaginibus miseriarum mearum et fomitibus ignis mei.'

[2] *Confessions*, p. 35 (III.2). Augustine's attitude towards theatre is discussed in Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of Theater in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 11-24.

[3] *Confessions*, p. 36 (III.2). For the Latin text, see *St Augustine's Confessions* I, 100: 'non enim ad subveniendum provocatur auditor, sed tantum ad dolendum invitatur.'

However, Augustine's misgivings do not appear to trouble the playwrights of religious drama in late medieval England. Thus the author of the Brome *Play of Abraham and Isaac* palpably counts on the contagious nature of emotions when he gives the two main figures a prolonged dialogue, in which Abraham explains his anguish over the sacrifice of his only son.[4] This becomes obvious in the Doctor's concluding remarks to the play:

> DOCTOR How thynke ȝe now, sorys, therby?
> I trow ther be thre or fowr or moo;
> And thys women that wepe so sorowfully
> Whan that hyr chyldryn dey them froo,
> As nater woll, and kynd. (Brome *Abraham*, ll. 447-51)

By giving his Doctor lines which imply that seeing the story of Abraham and Isaac recreated on stage moves the audience to tears, the Brome playwright constructs emotional responses to his play as consistent with the affective spirituality of the later Middle Ages.[5] He also extends the rhetorical reach of the play into the medieval present by separating the audience according to gender, and singling out mothers as privileged spectators: women who have lost children require less of an imaginative effort to understand Abraham's sorrow at losing his son.

This chapter seeks to explore the influence on audience response of staged emotional expressions in two other scenes of loss. It consists of two parts. The first part considers the representation of grief through Marian responses to the Crucifixion. The second part focuses on the 'fruitless but determined resistance' (Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, p. 140) put up by the mothers of the children of Bethlehem to Herod's soldiers in dramatisations of the Massacre of the Innocents.

[4] *The Brome Abraham*, in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. by Norman Davis Harrison, EETS SS 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 43-57. The dialogue between Abraham and Isaac takes up over two hundred of the 465 lines in this play.

[5] The latter is, of course, a major sticking point for the author of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. His tirade against the fact that the Passion plays are often 'movyd to compassion and devocion, wepinge bitere teris' (*Tretise*, l. 164) proceeds along Augustinian lines.

The presence of the Virgin at the Crucifixion is, strictly speaking, unbiblical. Of the four evangelists, only John places her at the scene on Calvary. His terse comment 'Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen' (John 19. 25) does not ascribe any kind of utterance, let alone emotional expression, to her. Late classical and medieval imagination filled the silence of the gospels. From the thirteenth century onwards, literary and visual representations of the Virgin Mary at the foot of the cross increasingly explored Mary's own experiences and sought to dramatise her suffering.[6] The Virgin who feels the physical pains of her son in spirit shares an experience with the reader or listener, which is, as Fulton writes, so 'irretrievably subjective, so isolating, so utterly destructive of language as to be beyond communication from one person to another in anything other than metaphor or simile' (p. 426). Or as Duffy posits: the Virgin's pain of loss provides 'a natural focus for the attempt to realize for oneself the suffering of Jesus' (p. 260). Like depictions of Christ's suffering, the increasingly detailed treatments of Mary's suffering in word and image seek to provide 'cues for empathy' (Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 247) for the reader, listener or onlooker.

The same is considered to hold true for the inclusion of Mary and her grief in dramatisations of the crucifixion on the medieval religious stage. Thus Sticca argues that the inclusion of representations of Marian grief in dramatic re-enactments of the passion allowed 'a more intense participation of the people in the representation of the Passion' because the Virgin could thus 'share with the faithful her exemplary grief and offer herself to them as a real and concrete model'.[7] David Eshelman has recently also

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[6] Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2010), p. 244.

[7] Sticca, pp. 120, 177. As Sticca points out, the *planctus* as a dialogue between the Virgin and an implied listener is dramatic in its conception and can therefore easily be integrated into a play (pp. 170-78).

argued for the figure of Mary as a 'model for appropriate spectator response,' that is for 'compassionate and tearful empathy'.[8]

Yet how exemplary are the Virgin Mary's laments on the late medieval English stage? Are they really nothing more than a script for the performance of feelings? I use the term 'script' here to stand for two things. Firstly, it stands for the cultural prescripts and social forces which help to establish and maintain what Reddy and Rosenwein have, respectively, termed 'emotional regimes' and 'emotional communities'. Reddy develops the first term in *The Navigation of Feeling*; the second is at the centre of Rosenwein's argument in 'Worrying about Emotions in History' and *Emotional Communities*. Secondly, it includes descriptions of discourses and actions associated with a particular emotion which seek to elicit similar feelings in their readers or listeners. My usage of the term in this sense is inspired by McNamer's recent interpretation of affective mediations as 'intimate scripts' designed to be enacted by the reader (*Affective Meditation*, p. 12).[9] Taking an approach strongly influenced by neuropsychological theories of sharing emotions, performance phenomenology, and recent research into the affective performativity of meditative texts alike, this chapter explores the performative aspects of Marian laments. Therefore, my inquiry turns to play-texts, iconography, and documentary materials for clues to the performance of grief on the stage – that is the gestures and bodily movements which accompany vocalisations. However, I am not only interested in how a pageant *performs* emotions, but also in what this performance reveals about underlying ideas concerning the function and status of

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[8] David J. Eshelman, '"Great mowrning and mone": Modeled Spectatorship in the Towneley Scourging', *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance*, 2 (2005), 23-34 (p. 23, 32).

[9] An argument can be made for distinguishing between emotional scripts for re-enactment in McNamer's sense and Rosenwein and Reddy's reference to cultural forces on the grounds that emotional reactions elicited by performances of feeling do not necessarily have to be in accordance with prevalent cultural norms. Josip Vučković does so in 'Compassionate Tears: A Study of Emotions in Medieval Croatian Passion Plays' (unpublished master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2010), p. 38. However, I believe that reducing the term 'script' to its literal sense, as Vučković does, dissociates the feelings performed and potentially elicited in the spectator from the social forces which shaped them.

emotions in medieval social and religious life. Through a close reading of two particular representations of Marian grief, the Towneley and N-Town Crucifixion episodes, I seek to demonstrate, firstly, that the present-tense emotion claims made by the figure of Mary in both these pageants bear witness to a performative model of emotional production and secondly, that they require interpretation within contexts beyond the purely devotional.

Dramatisations of another incident of maternal loss, the massacre of the children of Bethlehem, have already frequently been considered in broader social and theological contexts. Critics have repeatedly pointed to the verbal parallels between the laments of the mothers and Marian laments, as well as the element of social critique contained in their fierce resistance to Herod's soldiers. However, their words and actions have not yet been considered in the light of emotion theory. Reading the two plays which develop the conflict between the mothers and the soldiers most fully, the Coventry play of the Shearmen and Tailors and the Digby *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle*, I seek to illustrate that the confrontation serves as a means to explore questions of anger and revenge in a socially consequential sense.[10] Attending to how emotions are expressed and constructed on stage, then, reveals a sophisticated understanding of emotional production and the communicative role of emotions in social life. It can also open up new questions about the place and function of affective devotion in the religious life of the laity in late medieval England.

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[10] *The Pageant of the Company of Shearmen and Taylors in Coventry*, in *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. by Clifford Davidson and Pamela M. King (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000). Subsequent citations are from this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text. For the publication information for Digby *Kylling of þe Children*, see chapter 1, n. 23.

Performing Grief

By the last decades of the fourteenth century, the Virgin Mary had come to 'encompass all the pain associated with the crucifixion as a drama of loss and bereavement' (Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 246). Laments of the Virgin in lyric, prose, and dramatic form had become one of the most abundant, elaborate and intensely emotional kinds of Passion literature, and her sorrow was ever-present in Crucifixion altarpieces and devotional works of art. In prayer books, her suffering was stylised as schemes of her Joys and Sorrows, as Rubin notes (*Mother of God*, p. 315). Before turning to specific dramatisations of Mary's response to the Passion, let us therefore take a brief look at portrayals of the Virgin's sorrow at the foot of the cross and their relation to medieval theories of grief.

The Virgin's Sorrow at the Crucifixion and Medieval *tristitia*

The rhetorical amplification of the Virgin's voice in the early fifteenth century is neatly illustrated in a lament included in Manchester, Ryland's Library, Lat. MS 395 (*Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century*, pp. 17-18). Taking the form of a conversation between a speaker and a vision of the grieving Mary, '[h]ir soon in hir lap' (l. 3), the poem emphasises the tears of the Virgin as much as the physical suffering her son endured in the Passion. This is achieved through variations on the idea that Mary 'sobbid' because Jesus was 'bobbid' and then 'robbid' of his life, which appear at the centre of each of

the four stanzas of the poem. The force and stridency of the Virgin's voice is at its height in stanza three:

> 'Now breke hert, I the pray, this cors lith so rulye,
> So betyn, so wowndid, entreted so Iewlye,
> What wiȝt may me behold & wepe nat? noon truly!
> To see my deed dere soone lygh bleedying lo! this newelye.'
>> Ay stil she sobbid
>> so hir soone was bobbed
>> & of his lif robbid,
> Newyng þe wordis as I say thee,
> 'Who cannot wepe com lerne at me.' (ll. 19-27)

For the Mary of this poem, grief for the loss of her son is all too human and thus must touch the hearts even of the 'harde hartid' (l. 10). 'Lo!', she admonishes the speaker, '[n]ature shall move þee thou must be converted | Thyne owne fadder þis nyght is deed' (ll. 12-13). Mary's weeping, wailing and expressions of despair go hand in hand with a refusal to be consoled and a self-understanding as a role-model or teacher.

The interest in the *mater dolorosa* has a long pedigree. Iconographical scenes of the Crucifixion habitually included Mary and John the Evangelist as mournful witnesses from roughly the year 1000 onwards (Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 128). Mary becomes a central preoccupation in monastic life, but beliefs and devotional practices of the Virgin Mary were also taught and preached in sermons, liturgy, song and prayer.[11] However, until the mid-thirteenth century, the predominant way of representing her was as a figure of controlled sorrow. Visual representations of the Crucifixion placed Mary to the right of Christ on the cross and John the Evangelist to the left, usually against an empty or abstract background.[12] The representation of the Crucifixion in the Peterborough Psalter provides an example (figure 6). The full-page crucifixion miniature shows the thin, curved body of Christ on a green cross against a gilt

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[11] See Rubin, *Mother of God*, pp. 121-22.
[12] For a summary of conventions concerning the representation of the Virgin Mary, see Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 243.

background. The Virgin and St John stand by. Mary rests her head in her left hand, clasping a book with her right, while John wrings his hands. These gestures expressing grief are reinforced by the thrusting forward of John's leg, which implies tenseness.[13]

The development of a new religious culture in the thirteenth century in the context of Franciscan spirituality brought the emotional life not only of Jesus, but also of his mother into sharper focus for the laity. Making Jesus and Mary more accessible to lay people, Rubin argues, encouraged considerations of the Virgin Mary's maternal sorrow and pain (*Mother of God*, p. 242). Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Mary's equilibrium, her small gestures and sometimes rigid grief gradually give way to displays of near unbearable sorrow and pain in visual and literary representations of the Crucifixion. The fifteenth-century Mary at the Crucfixion frequently faints into the arms of her female friends or those of John, gesturing and gesticulating at the cross.[14] A fifteenth-century English alabaster panel, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, shows the Crucifixion with the Virgin Mary on the left of the panel, wearing a close-fitting gown and a cloak (figure 7). She swoons to the left and is supported by one of two similar figures behind her who represent Mary Magdalene and Mary Cleophas. The beardless John the Evangelist is seated to the lower right of the panel, looking downwards and with his head resting on his right hand.

'The visual imagery of Mary at the foot of the cross,' Rubin argues, 'followed a rich and growing body of exposition on the Passion, which directed readers, listeners and viewers to approach the Passion through Mary's eyes' (*Mother of God*, p. 244). Two of the best-known literary examples of this period are the hymn *Stabat mater dolorosa* and

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[13] For medieval gestures of grief and mourning see Clifford Davidson, 'Gesture in Medieval British Drama', in *Gesture in Medieval Art and Drama*, ed. by Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), pp. 66-127.

[14] For a survey of iconographical conventions concerning the pictorial representation of the Virgin Mary see Schiller, II, 164 and IV, 216-17.

the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (*c.* 1300). Both position Mary as the main mediator for Christ's pain and offer her co-suffering with her son for imitation by their readers or listeners.[15] The *Meditationes* are frequently considered 'the single most influential devotional text in the later Middle Ages' (McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 87).[16] The exclamations of feeling which are included in the *Meditationes*, as well as the invitations to enter the scene at Calvary, the graphic descriptions of Christ's tormented body, and the use of the Virgin Mary as a model for response all directly influenced artistic experiments with representations of Mary losing control at the foot of the cross, as Rubin argues (*Mother of God*, p. 247).[17]

From the fourteenth century onwards, the Virgin's sorrow at the Crucifixion is frequently distilled into one single image: the *pietà*. The image of Mary lamenting her son's death, his dead body lying limp in her lap, provides 'access to Passion-centred compassion for Christ' (Swanson, p. 8, n. 18), but may also function as a focal point for Marian devotion, as it shifts the emphasis from Christ's corporeal suffering in the Passion to the emotional suffering of his mother. Margery Kempe's response to seeing the image of Our Lady of Pity in St Stephen's Church in Norwich underlines these links between Marian and Passion devotion. She recounts:

> And thorw þe beholdyng of þat pete hir mende was al holy ocupyed in þe Passyon of owr Lord Ihesu Crist & in þe compassyon of owr Lady, Seynt Mary, be whech sche was compellyd to cryyn ful lowde & wepyn ful sor, as þei sche xulde a deyd. (*Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 148)

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[15] See Rubin, *Mother of God*, p. 246. The sixth stanza of the *Stabat mater* gives clear expression to this:
> Sancta mater, illud agas,
> crucifixi fige plagas
>   cordi meo valide;
> tui nati vulnerati,
> tam dignati pro me pati,
>   poenas mecum divide.

(*The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*, ed. by F. J. E. Raby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 435-37, ll. 31-36)

[16] For a discussion of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi,* see McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 86-115.

[17] For Mary as a model for response in the *Meditations Vitae Christi*, see McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, p. 93.

Moreover, when on pilgrimage in Jerusalem, 'owyr Ladijs sorwe' becomes 'hir sorwe' during a highly visual meditation on Mount Calvary (*Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 71). Liz Herbert McAvoy argues that iconographical and literary representations of the grief of the Virgin at the foot of the cross provide a model for Margery's identification with Mary whilst in Jerusalem.[18] Among the most influential of these were doubtless the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and its early fifteenth-century English translation, Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, an important source for religious drama (Love, pp. 22-23). Throughout chapters 44 to 47 of the meditation for Friday, the *Mirror* asks its readers to imagine not only the instruments of Christ's suffering in the Passion, but also repeatedly 'his most sorrowful modere, whose compassion & sorowe made him hir sone to haue þe more bitere peyne' (Love, p. 176). Nevertheless the Virgin remains largely silent in Love's visualisation of the events at Calvary until after her son's death, when she weeps 'sore without remedye' (p. 178) at the sight of her son. At the deposition, Love's Mary 'takeþ in hir hands reuerently oure lords riht hande, & beholdeþ it & leiþ it to hir eyene & deuoutly kisseþ it, sore wepynge & sihhyng,' before taking Christ's head and shoulders in her arms (p. 183).

The emotional fervency of the lament and its visual corollary, the *pietà,* sit uneasily with modern understandings of grief. Since Sigmund Freud's 1917 treatise 'Trauer und Melancholie [Mourning and Melancholia]', grief has usually been defined as the distress or intense sorrow felt in response to the loss of a person, thing or ideal to which one is strongly attached.[19] Freud's conception of grief as a process and as a state to be gradually overcome through separation from the loved one or the things lost (*Trauerarbeit*) underpins the contemporary Western understanding of grief as 'a problem,

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[18] Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 40.

[19] Sigmund Freud, 'Trauer und Melancholie', in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Anne Freud and others, 6th edn, 17 vols (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1973), X: *Werke aus den Jahren 1913-17*, 428-46.

to be managed as unobtrusively as possible.'[20] From a modern point of view, it is easy to denounce the medieval Virgin Marys who weep, swoon and wail loudly, who cannot let go of their dead sons, as indulging in 'immoderate grief' as Woolf does (p. 262).[21] However, this does not take into account rhetorical conventions, the prevailing aesthetic of the period, or indeed the theological and psychological contexts for these representations. Modern psychology usually distinguishes grief from related emotional phenomena such as sadness, depression and compassion.[22] The underlying notion that there is a fundamental difference between emotions which are aroused by events concerning other people (such as sympathy, compassion, Schadenfreude, envy) and evoked by our own experience of an event, distinguishes modern and medieval concepts of grief.[23] In the medieval conception, grief – in the sense of sorrow and mental suffering or pain after bereavement – is only one aspect of grief (*tristitia*).

Medieval *tristitia* can also be a psychological consequence of wrath, or a feeling of tedium akin to *acedia*, as Dietrich Ruprecht notes.[24] Moroever, it has sinful aspects, particularly in the form of *tristitia mortifera* – otherwise also known as *desperatio* (Ruprecht, pp. 9-11). In the moral theology of the early and high Middle Ages, *tristitia* was therefore frequently counted among the seven deadly sins. However, it occupied an exceptional position among these, as not all forms of *tristitia* were considered to be sinful per se. *Tristitia utilis*, that is sorrow for one's own sins or those of others, may

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[20] Peter N. Stearns and Mark Knapp, 'Historical Perspectives on Grief', in *The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions*, ed. by Rom Harre and W. Gerrod Parrott (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 132-50 (p. 147). Stearns and Knapp consider contemporary grief culture in the context of a general hostility towards emotional display in post-war societies. Freud considers depression a result of a failed attempt to work through grief.

[21] McNamer also makes this point in her discussion of Woolf's vigorous denunciation of the *planctus* (p. 159).

[22] Carol Barr-Zisowitz, '"Sadness" – Is There Such a Thing?', in *The Handbook of Emotions*, ed. by Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, 2nd edn (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), pp. 607-22.

[23] Elke Koch, *Trauer und Identität. Inszenierungen von Emotionen in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), p. 34. Koch provides a comprehensive overview of modern and medieval discourses on grief.

[24] Dietrich Ruprecht, *Tristitia. Wortschatz und Vorstellung in den althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmälern* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959).

function as the first stage of penance, and is thus equivalent to *contricio* (Ruprecht, p. 16).

Tristitia as a response to loss and as *contricio* plays a crucial role in Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine's account of his grief over the loss of his friend and his mother provided the authoritative model for the representation of Christian mourning throughout the Middle Ages (Koch, p. 34). In both instances, grief is initially portrayed as an overwhelming affect, which finds its outward expression in floods of tears. 'I wept very bitterly and took my rest in bitterness', Augustine admits when writing about the death of his friend.[25] With hindsight, Augustine's grief for his friend is cast in terms of self-pity, and it links the experience of grief with the human condition.[26] Hence, the 'groaning and weeping and sighing and mourning' (*Confessions*, p. 58 (IV.6)) must be controlled by reason as Augustine makes clear when describing his reaction to his mother's death:

> And I closed her eyes and an overwhelming grief welled into my heart and was about to flow forth in floods of tears. But at the same time under a powerful act of mental control my eyes held back the flood and dried it up.[27]

And yet, Augustine admits, '[t]he inward struggle put [him] into great agony' (*Confessions*, p. 174). Only after having retreated after the funeral and alone with God in prayer he allows himself to weep for his mother:

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[25] *Confessions*, p. 58 (IV.6). See also *St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 164: '[E]t flebam amarissime et recquiescebam in amaritudine.'

[26] Koch notes that the notion that *tristitia*'s existence is – like that of death, suffering, and pain – grounded in the Fall, is fundamental to medieval treatments on the subject (p. 34).

[27] *Confessions*, p. 174 (IX.12). The Latin original reads:
> Premebam oculos eius; et confluebat in praecordia mea maestitudo ingens et transfluebat in lacrimas; ibidemque oculi mei violento animi imperio resorbebant fontem suum usque ad siccitatem, et in tali luctamine valde male mihi erat. (*St Augustine's Confessions*, II, 56)

> I was glad to weep before you about her and for her, and about myself and for myself. Now I let flow the tears which I had held back so that they ran as freely as they wished. My heart rested upon them and it reclined upon them because it was your ears that were there, not those of a human critic who would put a proud interpretation on my weeping.[28]

Augustine's clandestine tears are not merely expressive of his personal grief over the loss of his mother. They are also an outward sign of his realisation of the postlapsarian need for redemption. In his prayers for his mother's soul, Augustine's tears function as a kind of offering to God and a means of ritualising (rather than alleviating) grief – in the sense, importantly, of grief for one's own sins and those of others. Grief, in the sense of *tristitia utilis*, can thus be constitutive of the human way to salvation because it is the appropriate emotional reaction humankind's fallen state.[29]

The idea that one should grieve for the sinfulness of humankind only, also underpins the criticism of the emotionality of religious plays in the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*. It frequently finds expression in pictorial and homiletic treatments of the Last Judgment. These ascribe gestures to the damned which are commonly associated in the later Middle Ages with extreme sorrow or mourning.[30] The miniature depicting the Last Judgement in the *Holkham Bible Picture Book*, for example, shows the sinners wringing their hands in sorrow over the fate that awaits them. The motif of the sinner as a mourner also pervades the Middle English Christmas sermon from London, British

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[28] *Confessions*, p. 176 (IX.12). The Latin original reads:
> [...] et libuit flere in conspectu tuo de illa et pro illa, de me et pro me. et dimisi lacrimas, quas continebam, ut effluerent quantum velent, substernens eas cordi meo: et requievit in eis, quoniam ibi erant aures tuae, non cuiusquam hominis superbe interpretatis ploratum meum. (*St Augustine's Confessions*, II, 62)

Chadwick notes that the latter remark refers to Plotinus's assertion that allowing oneself to be moved by the death of close friends or relatives is unreasonable and a sign of deficient intelligence. See *Confessions*, p. 176, n. 33.

[29] Augustine makes this point in *Confessions*, p. 176 (IX.12).

[30] For medieval gestures of mourning and grief in general and their potential use in the staging of religious drama see Anke Roeder, *Die Gebärde im Drama des Mittelalters. Osterfeiern, Osterspiele* (Munich: Beck, 1974), pp. 66-70, 169-71.

Library, MS. Royal 18 B. xxiii, which first warns against a variety of sins, before evoking

a vision of hell:

> What trowe we, þan, what siȝthe woll it be, þousand*es* of dewels þ*at* bethe þ*er*?
> ȝiff a dampned ma*n* coveyt to here delactabull þing*es*, þer is no songe but
> oribull rorynge of dewels *and* wepynge and gnastynge of thethe *and* weylyng of
> dampned men, crying "Ve! ve! ve! q*ua*nte sunt teneb*ræ*! – vo! vo! vo! how gret
> is þis derkenes!" (*Middle English Sermons*, p. 240)

Weeping and gnashing of teeth are the gestures predicted for the damned in the gospel

of Matthew (25. 30), yet weeping in particular is also associated with intense sorrow and

grief. For the damned in hell, sorrow over their sins comes too late, of course. Yet for

the living, *tristitia* – if controlled by reason – may serve as a first step towards contrition

and penance and can thus, according to Aquinas, be counted among the human virtues

(*ST* 1a2æ., 59.3).

Of all the *passiones animae*, sorrow (*tristitia)* receives the fullest treatment in

Thomas Aquinas's treatise on the passions in his *Summa theologiæ* (1a2æ., 22-48). Aquinas

begins by investigating the relation between sorrow (*tristitia*) and pain (*dolor*), stressing

that any kind of *dolor* requires the perception (*perceptio*) of a thing 'under the aspect of

[...] evil (*sub ratione [...] mali*)' (*ST* 1a2æ., 35.1). Thus he follows Damascene's definition

of sorrow as a response to the perception of evil, rather than Augustine's concept of

sorrow as first and foremost a reaction to loss.[31] The difference between *dolor* and

tristitia arises out of the different faculties involved in the perception of a thing as evil.

Apprehension of something through the exterior senses results in outward pain (*dolor*

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[31] Miner also makes this point (p. 198). Although Aquinas is interested in pain and sorrow in a general
sense, he includes a brief discussion of related emotional phenomena in the last article of quæstio 35.
Drawing on Nemesius, Aquinas identifies four species of sorrow: firstly, pity (*misericordia*) or the 'sorrow
for another person's misfortune, which is nevertheless regarded as one's own' (*tristitia de alieno malo,
inquantum tamen aestimatur ut proprium*); secondly, envy (*invidia*), which is the kind of sorrow aroused by
looking at another person's good fortune 'as evil fortune for oneself' (*ST* 1a2æ., 35.8); thirdly, anxiety
(*anxietas, angustia*), and fourthly, topor (*acedia*). While the first two pertain to the object of one's sorrow,
the latter two pertain to the characteristic effect of sorrow, i.e. the inclination of the human appetite to
take flight from the things it presently perceives as evil.

exterior), while the inward apprehension of a thing as evil in the imagination can cause inward pain (*dolor interioris*) (*ST* 1a2æ., 35.7). Both outward and inward pain can be felt by rational and irrational animals. However, the pain caused by the rational apprehension of something as evil – *tristitia* – is unique to human beings. Involving a reflective, cognitive act, Aquinas's *tristitia* thus 'extends to evils of the past, present, and future,' as Miner notes (p. 196).

Yet what causes the human mind to perceive something as evil? Aquinas argues that there are subjective as well as objective causes for sorrow in quæstio 36, and he postulates that the presence of love (*amor*) as a precondition for the generation of sorrow, as love is the basis for regarding something as a present evil. In addition to love – understood by Aquinas in the sense of a desire for good – the human 'appetite for unity (*appetitus unitatis*)' (*ST* 1a2æ., 36.3) also plays a role in the production of sorrow. What produces sorrow, according to Aquinas, is our recognition of the potential gap between our desire for unity and the condition we find ourselves in, which Aquinas describes in terms of separation (*separatio*).[32]

Sorrow and pain diminish a person's capacity to learn, depress the soul, weaken the body's activity and can therefore be more harmful to the body than any of the other *passiones animae* according to Aquinas (*ST* 1a2æ., 37). Nevertheless, he holds that they ought not to be eliminated from human life with the help of earthly remedies such as distraction and pleasure, of which contemplation of the truth is the highest (*ST* 1a2æ., 38.1 and 34.4). On the contrary, he argues that the experience of moderate sorrow, flowing as it does from the human capacity for love, does not necessarily need to be remedied, as it can have a transformative effect on the experiencer. Moderate sorrow – that is sorrow which is regulated by reason – does not immobilise the mind. Rather, it

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[32] See also Miner, p. 199.

encourages the person who experiences it to look what lies *behind* sorrow and thus to overcome it:

> Moderate sorrow, such as does not cause distraction, can be positively conducive to study, especially of such things as a person hopes can release him from sorrow. It is in this way that men *in their distress* are more receptive of God's teaching.[33]

It follows that moderate sorrow may be energising, particularly when mixed with hope, and may contribute to the perfection of a human being.

The concepts of *tristitia* reflected in Augustine's *Confessions* and Aquinas's *Summa theologiæ* provide a general framework for late medieval literary, pictorial and dramatic treatments of grief. The following section will turn to two dramatic representations of Marian grief at the Crucifixion in which the Virgin's emotionally expressive behaviours clearly serve as a means of engaging with two of the main points raised by Augustine and Aquinas: the danger of losing rational control over one's grief, and the potentially mitigating power of prayer.

Lost in Tears

The Towneley *Crucifixion* pageant combines the basic narrative of the Crucifixion of Christ with a number of lyric monologues. The first one is spoken by Christ (*Towneley*, 23.233-96, 23.503-35). The second one, spoken by the Virgin Mary, comprises two parts (23.311-44, 23.367-82) separated by intervening lines given to John. This is followed by John's conversation with Mary (23.345-452) and a concluding lament by the Virgin (23.461-502).

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[33] *ST* 1a2æ., 37.1:
> [T]ristitia moderata, quæ excludid evagationem animi, potest conferre ad disciplinam suscipiendam , et præcipue eorum per quæ homo sperat se posse a tristitia liberari. Et hoc modo *in tribulation murmuris* homines doctrinam Dei magis recipiunt.

No source has yet been identified for the two Marian laments in the play (*Towneley*, II, 579). However, the depiction of Mary's sorrow at the cross draws on many of the standard topoi of the Virgin's grief and compassion popularised in homiletic and meditative treatments of the Crucifixion, such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and its English translation, Love's *Mirror*. In what follows, I would like to argue that, whilst the play affirms the influence of the existing emotion script for Marian grief by presenting a Virgin who embodies Love's vision of Mary as 'alle out of hir self' (p. 178) at the Crucifixion, it nevertheless goes on to perform an alternative emotion script, which blurs the boundaries between compassion, grief and loss of rational control, as well as those between the representation of emotional experience and the emotional experience of the spectator.

How does the Towneley Virgin express her grief? The Virgin's sorrow under the shadow of the cross is first and foremost a maternal experience. In her laments she addresses herself to her 'son' (23.313, 317), her 'barn' (23.324, 332), 'childe' (23.338) and her 'feyr' (23.344). She sums up:

> MARIA   Sich sorrow for to se,
> My dere barn, on the,
> Is more mowrnynge to me
> Then any tong may tell. (23.323-26)

The play does not only stress the intimate familial relationship between Jesus and Mary through Mary's mode of address but also foregrounds the link between the Virgin's body and that of her crucified son.[34] Jesus the son is flesh from her flesh and bone from her bone, as the Virgin makes clear when she says:

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[34] At the end of chapter 43 of the *Mirror*, Love underscores the close relationship he imagines between Mary and her son, incorporating into the meditation the silent prayers that the Virgin and Christ make for a quick end to each other's suffering (see p. 178).

MARIA His robe is all to-ryffen,
That of me was hym gyffen,
And shapen with me sydys. (23.405-7)

In her first lament, Mary's role in the Incarnation, her motherhood, and the identification of her body with the body of Jesus play into her experience of compassion as bound up with remembrance of the past. The memory of feeding her 'dere barn' (23.319-26) merges with the pain of seeing her 'feyr' (23.344) bloody, beaten, humiliated.

In the Towneley *Crucifixion*, seeing Christ's pain is presented as the principal elicitor for Mary's sorrow. 'How shuld I stand in sted,' the Virgin asks, '[t]o see my barn thus blede?' (23.331-32). She relates the physical horrors of the Passion in explicit detail in the last two stanzas of her first lament: so great are Christ's wounds, his head punctured by the crown of thorns, his body '[b]ett as blo as lede' (23.333), his limbs nailed onto the cross and his skin torn that '[t]eres of blode downe glide | Ouer all [his] body bare' (23.341-42). As in Love's *Mirror*, Mary's fixation with, and distress at, seeing her son's suffering manifests itself in an abundance of apostrophes and exclamations, most of which open with the interjection 'alas'. [35] It is further underlined by the use of deictic rhetoric and by the many questions she directs at her crucified son. 'Why hyngest thou, son, so hee?', she wonders upon her arrival at Calvary (23.313), for example. And later she asks: 'What wonders has thou wroght, | To be in payn thus broght [?]' (23.376-77).

Even though Mary's questions convey a sense of momentary incomprehension with regard to the events unfolding in front of her eyes, the Virgin leaves little doubt as to the effect of these events on her emotional state. The Towneley Virgin Mary

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[35] 'Alas' usually signals distress, pain etc. See 'alas (int)', in *Middle English Dictionary*. For the literary means used in Love's *Mirror*, see McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, pp. 128-34.

frequently names the emotions she expresses. Throughout her laments and her subsequent conversation with John, she repeatedly refers to the 'drede' (23.312), 'sorow' (23.323), 'mowrnyng' (23.325), and 'care' (23.338) that she experiences in the shadow of the cross. The most frequently recurring emotion word that in Mary's laments before the death of her son, however, are 'bayll' and 'wo'. Upon her arrival at Calvary, her 'bayll begynnes to brede' (23.314) and she exclaims, 'In warld, son, were neuer we | So wo as I in wede' (23.317-18), asking Christ later to 'thynk on [her] wo' (23.379). With their connotations of intense physical as well as mental suffering, both 'bayll' and 'wo' reinforce the idea implied by the emphasis on the imagined identity of Mary's and Christ's bodies: Mary experiences and shares Christ's corporeal pain in spirit. [36]

The Virgin's expressions of pain and mourning are ostensibly overlaid with a sense of loss of rational control. The Towneley Mary is, as it were, out of her mind with grief, as a remarkable, extensive description of her emotional state during her conversation with John illustrates. In direct response to John's reference to the redemptive necessity of Christ's sacrifice, the Towneley Mary admits:

> MARIA Mi sorow is so sad,
> No solace may me safe;
> Mowrnyng makys me mad,
> None hope of help I hafe;
> I am redles and rad
> For ferd that I mon rafe;
> Noght may make me glad
> To I be in my grafe. (23.396-403)

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[36] Fulton notes that this understanding of Mary as the compassionate and ultimately co-crucified mother has its origins in Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce the Virgin's heart (Luke 2. 35), and was a common element in devotion to the Virgin in her grief from the twelfth century onwards (see p. 199). However, it is ultimately dependent upon conceptual changes concerning the image of Christ from crucified judge to suffering man. Fulton discusses the interdependence of conceptions of Mary and of Christ with recourse to the prayers of Anselm of Canterbury (pp. 204-43).

In the absence of descriptive stage directions, these lines given to Mary give us hints as to how her 'wo' might have been performed on stage. Implicit stage directions at the beginning of the first Marian lament already call for the Virgin to 'drowþe' (see 23.312) and to 'dare in drede' (23.312), which suggests that she trembles (Davidson, 'Gesture', p. 82). She sighs heavily ('sore syghyng is my sang', 23.470), and John's comments on her tears (23.363) suggest that she is supposed to weep. Her later exclamation, 'My dede now comen it is; | My dere son, haue mercy!' (23.501-2), which concludes her second lament and precedes Christ's address to his mother from the cross, echoes Love's vision of the Virgin sinking to the ground half dead (Love, p. 178) and suggests that she is seen collapsing.

However, the palpable fear and helplessness in the Virgin's self-analysis quoted above call for more violent non-verbal emotional expression than merely sighing, weeping and swooning. The (male) actor playing Mary may have visually underlined the Virgin's 'redles' state and her fear that 'that [she] mon rafe' (23.401) by tearing at his hair, wringing his hands or striking them together – two gestures often associated with grief and despair in medieval visual arts. The latter is a gesture used to signify the Virgin's extreme sorrow and grief in the Cividale *Planctus*.[37] Bartholomæus Anglicus – or his transator Trevisa – also reminds us that 'it is þe maner of wymmen to cracche here chekis in sorowe'.[38] Thus this is another possible gesture to accompany this extraordinary piece of self-analysis.

The Virgin's expressions of fear for her own sanity in mourning call to mind the affinity frequently posited in the medical literature of the Middle Ages between

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[37] The fourteenth-century Cividale *Planctus* is a treasure-trove for information on non-verbal signals of grief, as each verse makes reference to a gesture (Roeder, p. 70, n. 301). For other more violent instances of self-touching to communicate grief including breast-beating, which doubles as a gesture for contrition, see J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 30.

[38] Cited in 'cracchen (v.)', in *Middle English Dictionary*.

mourning and the medical category of melancholia. Medieval melancholia roughly equates with the modern diagnosis of depression, and in the medical literature of the time, it is generally described with recourse to the theory of humours inherited from classical antiquity. As it can bring about delusions, Bartholomæus Anglicus classifies *melancolia* (along with *mania*) as a form of madness. For Bartholomæus, *melancolia* is the result of an infection in the middle ventricle, which deprives the individual of 'resoun', while *mania* is caused by an infection of the front ventricle, resulting in the loss of imagination (*Properties*, I, 349). This infection can have endogenous and exogenous causes such as 'malecholy metis' or 'dringke of strong wyn þat brenneþ þe humours and turneþ hem into askes' (*Properties*, I, 350).[39] With reference to Constantinus's *De melancholia*, Bartholomæus also states clearly that melancholy may be the result of fear and sorrow. '[M]elancolia [...] is a *sus*[p]eccioun þat hath maistrie of þe soule, þe whiche comeþ of drede and sorwe' (*Properties*, I, 349).[40] Aquinas makes a similar point in his treatise on *tristitia* when he observes that excessive sorrow causes harm to the body and its activity and depresses the soul because intense *aggravatio animi* hinders the soul's ability to preserve its natural capacity for repulsing whichever evil weighs it down (*ST* 1a2æ., 37.2).

In the Towneley *Crucifixion* play, the Virgin experiences her intense sorrow at her son's treatment as an immobilisation of the heart. 'My hart is styff as stone, | That for no bayll will brest' (23.422-23), she admits to her interlocutor John. The statement enhances the notion that her grief borders the excessive, encapsulated in her express

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[39] Among the many symptoms of melancholy, Bartholomæus includes speaking at inopportune times, being taciturn, retreating and turning to violence against loved ones (*Properties*, I, 162).

[40] The closeness of melancholy and mourning – something that also Freud observes in 'Trauer und Melancholie' – is manifest in the similarity of remedies recommended for both in medieval explorations of these two phenomena. Distraction, pleasurable pastimes, baths and sufficient sleep are among the remedies Augustine first resorts to in order to ease his grief over the loss of his friend (*Confessions*, p. 59 (IV.7)) and his mother (pp. 175-76 (IX.12)). They are also among the recommended earthly reliefs for *tristitia* in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiæ* (1a2æ., 38.5) and are advocated as a remedy for 'madnes' by Bartholomæus Anglicus (*Properties*, I, 350).

fears that she 'mon rafe' (23.401). Through including such first-person emotion claims in the dialogue, the play generates the character of Mary as a feeling subject. However, in naming emotions and establishing a verbal link between her emotions and Christ's pain, Mary's utterances also generate Christ as a legitimate object of 'wo', 'sorow' and 'mowrnyng' and thus reinforce the imperative to empathise with Christ's suffering. Or to use Ahmed's terminology: within the framework of affective devotion, the Towneley Mary's laments work by sticking the signs "pitiable" and "grievable" to the mangled body of Jesus (p. 13). The crucial point is that Mary's emotion claims are spoken *to others*. As Ahmed observes, in order for the affect in such speech acts to have an effect, they must be shared with other witnesses to the event or the object which elicits the emotion expressed in such claims (p. 94). The feeling subject may ask the witnesses to repeat the attribution of (for example) grief implicit in his or her emotion claims, thus making them 'stick' to others (ibid.). To return to the example of Mary in the Towneley *Crucifixion*, the Virgin's utterances, as well as the eliciting event, are witnessed by two kinds of witnesses: intradiegetic biblical characters on the stage with her and the extradiegetic medieval audience. The play moves both groups into a relationship with the grieving mother of Christ through the Virgin's conversation with the apostle John.

Mary's fervent lament is scripted to have a perceptible effect on John, who expresses empathy for her outpourings of grief. At the beginning of their exchange, he echoes her own words and her emphasis on her intimate familial relationship with Jesus when he says:

> IOHANNES   He was thi fode, thi faryst foine,
> Thi luf, thi lake, thi lufsom son,
> That high on tre thus hyngys alone ,
> With body blak and blo. (23.349-52)

By repeating Mary's words, the character of John underpins her status as a feeling subject and the emotional attributions she makes. Later on, he prefaces an attempt to put the Passion in its redemptive context for the Virgin by a more explicit expression of empathy:

> IOHANNES   A, lady, well wote I
> Thi hart is full of care,
> When thou thus openly
> Sees thi childe thus fare. (23.424-27)

John's empathetic words draw a link between seeing and feeling and thus affirm the affective efficacy of witnessing. It is the *sight* of Christ's plight that causes Mary 'care'. Since John is a witness both to Christ's suffering and to Mary's affective response, both of these sights leave an impression on him. The character picks up on one of the Virgin's emotion words, 'sorow', but attributes it not merely to Christ's suffering but to the entire event of the Passion:

> IOHANNES   Dere lady, well were me
> If that myght comfort the;
> For the sorow that I *see*
> Sherys myn harte in sonder,
> When that I *se* my master hang
> With bytter paynes and strang [.] (23.453-58; emphasis mine)

Just as Mary's 'wo' is conceived as *compassio* with the corporeal suffering of Christ, John's experience of compassion is equally keyed to the experience of pain, expressed here in the violent image of rupture of the heart. This pain is coincident upon observing suffering: it is the sorrow that he *sees* which tears his heart apart.[41]

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[41] McNamer has recently pointed to the gendered aspects of John's role in the Crucifixion. She asserts that in the context of affective meditations, 'to perform compassion [...] is to feel like a woman' (*Affective Meditation*, p. 3). Thus she conceives of the empathetic figure of John in Love's *Mirror* as a 'feminized man' (p. 142), a liminal figure, who 'moves with ease between masculine and feminine spaces and places' (p. 144), and also as 'an idealized model for the embodiment of feminine feeling in a masculine self' (p. 148).

The event of the Passion and Mary's publicly enacted and proclaimed grief have the potential to move the extradiegetic audience as the Mary character suggests when calling out to her almost dead son: 'I mowrne, and so many mo | That sees this payn on the' (23.451-52). The particular impact of perceptible mourning is foregrounded in an earlier appeal of Mary's:

> MARIA   Madyns, make youre mone,
> And wepe, ye wyfes euerichon,
> *With me*, most wrich in wone,
> The childe that borne was best! (23.418-21; emphasis mine)

The editors of the Towneley *Crucifixion* suggest in their notes in the play that Mary's words may be directed at the other Marys accompanying the Virgin to the Crucifixion mentioned in the biblical accounts of the events at Calvary (*Towneley*, II, 579-80). They are not given speaking parts, yet it is possible that they were represented on stage, as they were often included in pictorial representations of the Crucifixion. However, in her maternal sorrow, the Towneley Virgin may well call out to the female members of the audience as privileged spectators, inviting them to participate in the (re-)creation of spatial and temporal transcendence in and through biblical drama. The Virgin's appeal reveals awareness on the part of the playwright of the contagious nature of emotional expressions as well as of what Ahmed calls 'the loop of the performative' (p. 194). In reading the character of Mary as grieving (and compassionate), the watching and listening spectator is filled up with similar feelings, which validates their reading of the character as grieving (and compassionate).

Modern neuroscientific research appears to underscore such theoretical approaches to the grief of Mary in the Towneley *Crucifixion*. By giving flesh to human feeling, the phenomenological body of the actor playing Mary potentially bridges the experiential distance between bodies. Or in other words: the third-person experience of

observing Mary grieve for her son facilitates the first-person experience of grieving. Firstly, the neural mechanisms of the fifteenth-century playgoer allow him or her not only to see a grieving person on stage, but to understand this person's grief through their own experience of grief. Secondly, the body of the actor provides a stimulus for a potential emotional contagion response (see chapter 3). As the spectator observes the performance of emotional expressions, he or she may unwittingly mimic these, and feedback from this mimicry in turn may influence his or her subjective emotional experience.

And yet the Towneley Mary cannot be considered a mere 'mirror character', whose main function is to project out onto the audience a devotionally-sanctioned model response to the witnessing of the Crucifixion. I borrow the term 'mirror character' from Frank Brandsma, who employs it chiefly to explain the function of minor characters and the detailed descriptions of their responses to particular events in Arthurian literature.[42] Brandsma argues that such mirror characters offer a gateway to the emotions the author may have sought to invoke in his audiences and that their inclusion is a deliberate narrative strategy. Although grounded in a different genre, Brandsma's concept can be applied to the drama, as Vučković demonstrates in his MA thesis, because it may provide insights into the impetus behind the inclusion of Marian laments into the dramatic action beyond the popularity of devotion to Mary as *mater dolorosa*.

However, the irrational, unrestrained elements of the Towneley Mary's grief call into question the suitability of her performance as a model and as an emotion script for the audience, I propose. For if today it is considered "uncivilised", as Elias would say,

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[42] Frank Brandsma, 'Mirror Characters', in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness*, ed. by Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 275-82, and 'Arthurian Emotions', in *Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of the International Arthurian Society* <http://www.sites.univ-rennes2.fr/celam/ ias/actes/ pdf/brandsma.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2010].

to exhibit intense grief in public, it was considered potentially un-Christian in the Middle Ages, as Augustine's musings on the subject of loss illustrate.[43] Extreme mourning for a loved one and the loss of control associated with public mourning challenge the eternal order, because they deny faith in God's plan. Fulton remarks that medieval women might therefore not have been allowed 'any greater laxity in the control of their emotional response to death than are their modern descendants' (p. 215).

The eternal order and the *regula rationis* of grief are central concerns in the presentation of Marian sorrow in the N-Town *The Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion*, where they become the subject of an extended conversation between the Virgin and John. In the following section, I seek to explore how this play employs portrayals of grief in order to broach the theological issues surrounding mourning for the god-man Jesus. Through the characters of Mary and John, the N-Town *The Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion* offers an example of how grief after loss can and should be transformed into a devotionally useful emotion.

Transforming Grief

The N-Town *Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion* stands alone among the surviving Middle English Passion plays in including altogether six lamentations of different length, which are woven into the dialogue of the play. Four of those are spoken by the Virgin in the second part of the play, *The Crucifixion*. The first is occasioned by her arrival at Calvary, the second, by Christ's address to the thieves crucified with him. A short outburst after Christ's words commending her to the care of John is followed after Christ's death by a

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[43] See Fulton, p. 215. Fulton discusses the theological problems concerning weeping for the dead in more detail with reference to John 11. 35 (pp. 417-28).

conversation with John under the towering cross. The first part of the play, *The Road to Calvary*, opens with two unnamed women bewailing the sight of Christ carrying the cross, who are referred to by Jesus as the 'daughters of Jerusalem', and also includes the apocryphal encounter between Christ and Veronica on the way to Calvary. Even though these encounters are indebted to embellishments of the Passion narrative in literature and the visual arts, they should not be seen solely within the parameters of the iconographic and literary tradition. By staging these encounters, the pageant establishes a framework for the exploration of theological problems surrounding the intense mourning for Christ in the second part of the play.

The "daughters of Jerusalem" provide the link between the *Second Trial before Pilate* and *The Road to Calvary*. The unnamed women appear at the end of the trial play, '*wepyng and with here handys wryngyn*', as they watch Christ being dragged by ropes (*N-Town*, 31.212 sd).[44] Their gestures of mourning are accompanied by two short speeches of four lines each, which constitute the opening of the subsequent play, *The Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion*. Using literary techniques similar to those in the Towneley Marian laments, such as exclamations, fragmentary sentences, and the reiteration of 'allas' and 'a' to indicate distress, these speeches script an emotional experience of great intensity which is coincident upon the harsh, unfair treatment Jesus has received and the prospect of his underserved death. 'Þat þu art þus dyspoylyd, allas!' (*N-Town*, 32.2), the first woman exclaims when she first sees Christ, while the second laments, 'A, here is a rewful syth of Jesu so good, | Þat he xal þus dye aȝens þe ryth' (32.5-6). Christ's

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[44] Jesus's address to the daughters of Jerusalem is included in all surviving Middle English collections and cycles of biblical plays. However, in the corresponding plays from York, Chester, and Towneley the speech is not delivered to unnamed women but to various combinations of Marys. Jesus addresses his mother and Secunda Maria in the York Shearmen's Play, Prima and Secunda Maria in the Chester Ironmongers' Play, and Mary Magdalene and Mary Jacobi in the Towneley *Scourging*. No setting is specified for the encounter between Jesus and the women in the N-Town pageant, but the information given in the stage directions at the end of play 31 that Jesus is to be dragged forward by ropes after the second scourging suggests that the action takes place on ground level rather than on a scaffold. Moreover, Christ is then required to meet Simon of Cyrene in the place (see *N-Town*, 32.20 sd), which also implies that he encounters the women near there.

reproof that the women should weep for their own sins and for their children rather than for his physical suffering remains close to the account in the gospel of Luke (23.27-30), on which this first scene of the play is based.

The admonition to the daughters of Jerusalem famously provides the author of the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* with an argument against affective responses to dramatic representations:

> For sithen Crist himself reprovyde the wymmen that wepten upon him in his passioun, myche more they ben reprovable that wepen for the pley of Cristis passioun, leevinge to wepen for the sinnes of hemsilf and of theire children, as Crist bad the wymmen that wepten on him. (ll. 306-11)

And in a performance of a 'pley of cristis passioun' (*Tretise*, l. 309), Christ's reply to the 'daughters of Jerusalem' may also serve as a reminder for the nearby audience that there is a larger context to be considered and that there are reasons for assuaging grief. This notion is developed further in Christ's exchange with Veronica.

Veronica's inclusion in the N-Town *Road to Calvary* episode provides the play with an embodied opposite to the mourning of the daughters of Jerusalem. Her compassion manifests itself in action rather than in streams of tears. 'Allas, holy prophete, Cryst Jhesus,' she exclaims, '[c]areful is myn hert for the' (32.43-44). She wipes his blood-encrusted, sweaty face with her 'kerchy' according to the accompanying stage directions (32.44 sd). The episode, which comprises eight lines of dialogue in total, presents a condensed version of the Veronica legend popular in the later Middle Ages.[45] N-Town is the only surviving Middle English play collection to include

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[45] Veronica is traditionally identified as the woman with the issue of blood healed by Jesus during in his ministry (Matthew 9. 20-22; Mark 5. 25-34; Luke 8. 43-48). One of the first works to associate her with the veil of Christ is the apocryphal *Mors Pilati*, which serves as a source for the version of the legend recounted in the *Gilte Legende,* ed. by Richard Hamer with Vida Russell, EETS OS 327, 328, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006-), I, 248-49). Here she explains to a man named Volusian, who is looking for Christ on behalf of the emperor Tiberius, how she came by the cloth. Veronica was not written into the Passion narrative until the thirteenth century, as Schiller notes (II, 89). The versions of

Veronica's encounter with Christ in its Crucifixion play.[46] The episode of the veil further comments on the theological implications of mourning Christ. After thanking her for her kindness, Jesus declares: 'I xal þem kepe from all mysese | Þat lokyn on þe kerchy and remembyr me' (32.47-48). The assertion that merely looking at his likeness imprinted on the cloth will restore the onlooker to wholeness echoes the assurance Veronica gives her interlocutor Volusian in the *Gilte Legende*: '[A]nd I dare well saye,' she tells him, 'yef thi lorde [Tiberius] behelde deuoutely the figure of this image he shall anone be hole' (I, 248-49). Christ's remark in the N-Town *Road to Calvary* both attests to the belief in the miraculous powers accorded to the cloth and hints at the origin of the same powers. Those '[þ]at lokyn on þe kerchy' will be able to remember Christ because just as his face imprinted itself on the cloth, it also imprints itself on the memory, and thus on the soul of the beholder. Although the N-Town play omits the reference to the inner disposition of the individual present in its source, the *Mors Pilati,* Christ's brief speech thus links up to notions of personal salvation as dependent on Christ's presence in the soul rather than his physical presence in the world. The emotive power of Christ's physical presence and suffering, which is palpable in the reaction of Veronica as much as in the reactions of the unnamed women at the beginning of the play, comes to the fore in the Marian laments.

The stage directions tell us that the Virgin arrives at Calvary accompanied by John, Mary Magdalene, Mary Cleophas, and Mary Jacobi. While they remain to one side of the cross, the soldiers, who have just crucified Jesus and the two thieves, brawl and

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the Veronica legend given in the *Mors Pilati* and in Jacob of Voraigne's *Legenda Aurea* are discussed in detail in James F. Rhodes, 'The Pardoner's "Vernycle" and His "Vera Icon"', *Modern Language Studies*, 13 (1983), 34-40.

[46] Her presence is mentioned in the Cornish *Ordinalia*, but lines for her have been omitted from the manuscript. See Brian Murdoch, 'Mary's Lament, the Gospels, and the Cornish *Ordinalia*' [forthcoming]. Veronica is also listed in the York *Ordo paginarum*, yet her role on the way to Calvary is curiously taken by one of the Marys who accompany the Virgin and John in the York Shearmen's play (*York*, 34.183-89).

play dice for Jesus' clothes. The Virgin is described as '*swuonyng and mornyng*' (32.92 sd).[47] The Virgin's '*mornyng*' in the N-Town play may be expressed by any of the gestures discussed earlier, and swooning is likely to have involved being supported by the actor playing John.[48] The N-Town *Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion* does not give a full lyrical complaint to the Virgin but only 'brief snatches of impassioned outcry' (Woolf, p. 265), which are matched visually by gestures specified in stage directions and implied in the play-text. Both the Virgin's vocalisations and gestures are strongly influenced by established motifs. Like her Towneley counterpart, the N-Town Virgin Mary raves and protests at her son's treatment as well as the shamefulness of his mode of execution through apostrophes, exclamations and deictic rhetoric. She is less specific as regards emotion words and mostly describes the feelings she embodies with 'sorwe'. 'Sorwe' is strictly speaking an umbrella term, which denotes emotional or mental distress, grief, sadness, and anxiety, as well as care and sorrow.[49] The N-Town Mary performs all of these facets, albeit with varying degrees of intensity.

The language of the Mary-figure is infused with a profound sense of waste and futility. Her outcries are dominated by appeals to death to take her, such as the concluding sharp blast of her first lament, with its percussive, pounding repetition of the [d]-sound and its stress on the word 'kylle':

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[47] A late fourteenth-century wall painting on the north wall of the parish church at Crostwright in Norfolk provides a pictorial analogue to the scene. The third register of the painting is divided and depicts the flagellation and the crowning with the crown of thorns on one side and the Crucifixion on the other. The latter includes additional figures such as the two thieves, Longinus and Stephaton, along with John and the Virgin, who is shown fainting. The painting is described in Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *The Early Art of Norfolk: A Subject List of Extant and Lost Art Including Items Relevant to Early Drama* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), p. 83.

[48] The Crucifixion scene of the Despenser Retable (*c.* 1385) in Norwich Cathedral offers some insight into how the swooning of the Virgin may have been staged. Here, John is shown supporting the unconscious Mary who is in danger of sinking to the ground. See Stanbury, *Visual Object*, p. 76 for a reproduction of the Retable.

[49] 'sorwe', in *Middle English Dictionary*.

MARIA   A, out my hert – whi brest þu nowth?
               And þu art mayden and modyr, and seyst þus þi
                   childe spylle!
              How mayst þu abyde þis sorwe and þis woful þowth?
                A, deth, deth, deth! Why wylt þu not me kylle? (32.97-100)

Mary's yearning for death was, as Spector notes, a familiar motif popularised through the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and its English versions (*N-Town*, II, 514). It is dramatised in all existing Middle English Passion plays, as well as in the Digby *Christ's Burial* and directly linked to the Virgin's compassion for her dying son resulting from the physical bond between them. In the Towneley *Crucifixion*, Mary exclaims, for example, in her conversation with John: 'Me thynk now that I lyf to lang, | To se my barne thus blede' (23.437-38). The N-Town Mary's yearning for death is reiterated at various points in the crucifixion play. It culminates verbally in her wish to be hung upon the cross with Christ – 'for þer he is, þer wold I be' (32.164) and finds its visual corollary in her collapse under the wrenching feelings provoked by the death of her son towards the end of the play. '*Hic quasi semi-[m]ortua cadat prona in terram*' (32.269 sd), the stage directions specify.[50]

The N-Town Mary's yearning for death is frequently linked to references to her 'hert in pyghte' (32.268) and occasioned by her perception of her son's mistreatment and agony. Thus Mary bewails the fact that she sees her 'childe spylle' when she arrives at the scene of the Crucifixion (32.98) and cries out after Jesus's death:

MARIA   Alas! Alas! I leve to longe
            To se my swete sone with peynes stronge
            As a theff on cros doth honge
               And nevyr ȝet dede he synne! (32.222-25)

In the ensuing conversation with John, Christ's favourite disciple proves mindful of the 'dolful dolour' (32.259) which the sight of the elevated cross presents, and affirms its

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[50] For this motif see Love, p. 178.

emotive power. '[W]han þis sight ȝe se nought may,' he assures Mary, '[ȝ]oure care may waxe more light' (32.260-61) – an argument which he repeats at various points throughout his conversation with the Virgin.

Maternal care is clearly a relevant issue for the N-Town Mary-figure, and yet, for her, the familial relationship with Jesus comes with attendant obligations on both sides. She clamours for filial acknowledgement when she cries out after Christ's address to the thieves crucified with him:

> MARIA   What! Haue I defendyd þe?
> Þu hast spoke to alle þo þat ben here,
> And not o word þu spekyst to me. (32.134-36)

The Towneley Mary similarly wishes for some form of acknowledgement of her grief from the silent Jesus when she says: 'A, son, thynk on me wo! | Whi will thou fare me fro?' (23.379-80). Yet unlike the Towneley play, the N-Town *Crucifixion* ascribes to the Virgin disappointment at being ignored, and this disappointment feeds into her great 'sorwe'. This is most poignant in the third and last stanza of the second lament:

> MARIA   A, my soveryn Lord, why whylt þu not speke
> To me þat am thi *modyr*, in peyn for þi wrong?
> A, hert, hert, why whylt þu not breke,
> Þat I wore out of þis sorwe so stronge! (32.141-44; my
> emphasis)

Her complaint encapsulates in its first two lines the N-Town Virgin's struggle with the dual nature of the God-man Christ. The play flags up the ambivalence in the relationship between Jesus and Mary by having both characters vacillate in their addresses to one another. Mary defers to Christ's divinity when she calls him 'my good lord' (32.93) or 'my soveryn Lord' (32.141), but underlines their familial relationship when addressing him as her 'sone', 'childe', and 'darling dere'. Likewise, Jesus refers to her from the cross both as 'woman' (32.145, 149) and 'modyr' (32.154) and thus shifts

the terms of identity. Nevertheless, the N-Town Mary's 'sorwe' is maternal sorrow, and its intensity at this point is reflected in her 'hysterical embrace of the Cross', as Woolf (p. 265) so memorably described the stage direction which follows Christ's words from the cross commending Mary to the care of John: '*Here our Lady xal ryse, and renne, and halse þe crosse*' (32.156 sd).

Thus the N-Town Mary's laments do not merely consist of tender expressions of maternal love, but include vocalisations of anger, guilt and even a certain degree of despair in her frequently reiterated yearning for death. Thus her impassioned outcries illustrate the perceived link in the medieval understanding between sorrow and other *passiones animæ*. Aquinas draws a close link between sorrow and another present-related passion, anger, in the *Summa theologiæ*. In the section on anger he writes that 'an angry reaction arises only when one has endured some pain, and desires and hopes for revenge.'[51] Yet it does not arise 'unless there is something notable at stake' with regard to its object, something that "elevates" an object of sorrow or desire to an object of anger.[52] Notwithstanding major differences in governing assumptions, Aquinas's conception of the link between sorrow or grief and anger, and the portrayal of Marian grief in the N-Town *The Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion* resonate with the stage theory of grief. Now a widely accepted model of how human beings cope with bereavement, the stage theory of grief considers anger as a key step in the subject's process of adjustment after loss.

In the N-Town dramatisation of the Crucifixion, the Virgin rails against the executioners who kill her son as much as she argues with John, who maintain that Christ's death is necessary for the greater good. The dialogue between John and Mary

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[51] *ST* 1a2æ., 46.1: 'Non enim insurgit motus iræ nisi propter aliquam tristitiam illatam et nisi adsit desiderium et spes ulcisciendi[.]'

[52] *ST* 1a2æ., 46.3: '[N]on enim insurgit motus irænisi aliqua magnitudine circa utrumque existente.'

after Christ's death in the N-Town Crucifixion episode is the longest exchange between these two characters in the Middle English Passion plays. In the Towneley *Crucifixion*, John tries to console Mary *before* Christ's death. Yet neither he nor Mary speak after Christ's death. The York *Mortificatio Christi* includes a three-way conversation between Mary, Jesus and John, while the Chester Ironmongers' play of the *Passion* (16a) merely gives John one stanza.

John's words in his conversation with the Virgin bear witness to a concept of emotional production which is performative rather than 'hydraulic' in that they imply that there is no dichotomy between thought and feeling.[53] Unlike Mary, John draws comfort from the divine plan for salvation. Thus he argues that Christ agreed 'wylfully his deth to take' (32.233) and reminds the Virgin of the necessity of his sacrifice due to original sin (32.250-52). In doing so, the character underscores that emotions like grief – and particularly grief for Jesus – ought to be a matter of voluntary and rational control. Mary can change the way she feels about her son's death by changing the way she thinks about it, John argues, when he appeals to her to 'chaunge [her] thought' (32.230), to be 'of good chere' (32.236) and 'mery in hert' (32.253) at the thought of her son's wilfully accepted selfless sacrifice for humankind.

Yet for the Virgin, Christ's death clearly fails to make human sense. Again and again in this play, the Virgin invokes her role as mother to Jesus as if her relationship with him and their bond in suffering were reason enough to call off the divine plan that features his death as a necessity. Her response to John's rather blunt reminder 'had he

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[53] Rosenwein uses the term 'hydraulic' in 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *The American Historical Review*, 107.3 (2002) <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ ahr/107.3/ah0302000821.html> [accessed 30 June 2011] in order to describe models of emotional production in which emotions are presumed to be already present in the subject and are either held back or released. For an example, see the model of emotional production used by Elias in *Über den Prozeß der Ziviliastion*.

not deyd, we xuld to helle' (32.247) illustrates neatly that the N-Town Mary cannot square her maternal feelings of loss with the prospect of Redemption:

> MARIA A, dere frende, weel woot I this,
> Þat he doth bye us to his blys,
> But ȝitt of myrth evyrmor I mys
> Whan I se þis sight. (32.254-57)

It is only after her collapse that the Virgin moves from loud, public mourning for the loss of her son, the 'emotion of physical kinship', to use Augustine's words (*Confessions,* p. 176 (IX.13)), to sad acceptance of the events and begins to embrace the sorrow that flows from her love for her son as a means of bringing her closer to God.

The last section of the dialogue between Mary and John (after Christ's death) suggests that repeated affective practices can have cognitive effects. Thus Mary asks to be taken to the temple, so that she 'may prey God with sore wepynge | And mornynge þat is prest' (32.276-77). John affirms the potential efficacy of prayer to 'chaunge [her] mood | And cauwse [her] chere to be more good' (32.282-83) and thus calls to mind Augustine's and Aquinas's reflections on prayer and contemplation as the most durable remedies for sorrow. Writing about the death of his friend, Augustine recalls that in 'groans and tears [...] alone was there some slight relief' to his 'vast load of misery' at the time, but he adds with the benefit of hindsight: 'I should have lifted myself to you, Lord, to find a cure.'[54] For Thomas Aquinas, too, the outward expression of inner turmoil – be it through tears or talking to sympathetic friends – helps to mitigate sorrow, because they constitute a form of pleasure for the sorrowful person.[55]

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[54] *Confessions*, pp. 59-60 (IV.7). The relevant passage in the original Latin reads:
 [E]t quidquid non erat quod ille erat, inprobum et laediosum erat, praeter gemitum et lacrimas: nam in eis solis aliquantula requies. Ubi autem inde auferebatur anima mea, onerabat me grandis sarcina miseriae, ad te, domine, levanda erat et curanda, sciendam, sed nec volebam nec valebam[.] (*St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 168)

[55] Aquinas discusses the mitigating effect of tears in *ST* 1a2æ., 38.3. He identifies pleasure as the most basic remedy for pain and sorrow in *ST* 1a2æ., 38. 'Any pleasure offers a remedy for the mitigation of any sorrow, no matter where it comes from,' he writes in article 1 of quæstio 38.

However, they are merely temporary palliatives. The highest form of pleasure available to human beings in this life is contemplation of the truth. 'This is why men find joy in the midst of tribulation by contemplating the things of God and the happiness to come,' Aquinas explains.[56]

In prayer, then, lies the potential to transform grief over the loss of the man Jesus (or a loved one) into devotionally useful, self-reflective grief and tears of mourning into an offering to God. It is prayer that helps the N-Town Virgin to move from implicitly questioning the divine plan for redemption to an understanding of her son's death not as a present, human evil or as earthly separation, but as an integral part of God's redemptive plan. In the concluding stanza of the play, spoken from inside the temple, the N-Town Mary is heard vowing to serve God 'with hertyly drede' (32.287) and considers weeping as her 'fode and fede' in the temple (32.288) until such time as God comforts her.

With its reference to the 'iij^{de} day' (32.291) on which Christ shall rise again, this last stanza provides a link to plays covering the Resurrection and Christ's subsequent appearances to the disciples. However, it also provides a conclusion to a play which externalises emotional experiences in witnessing the Passion as well as the cognitive processing of these experiences on the part of the Virgin. While the play acknowledges that strong emotions such as grief are human and understandable, it does not advocate unfettered emotionalism even with regard to devotion to the Passion. Affect must be channelled and controlled by reason.

As we will see, dramatisations of the incredulity of Thomas are similarly framed by language that links perception, emotion and rational control. But instead of travelling

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[56] *ST* 1a2æ., 38.4: 'Et ideo homines ex contemplatione divina et futuræ beatitudinis in tribulationibus gaudent[.]'

forward at this juncture, I suggest moving back in biblical time, as it were, from the trials and the Crucifixion of Christ to an incident traditionally considered to foreshadow the Passion: the massacre of the innocents.[57] Dramatisations of the killing of the children of Bethlehem allow us to see another important aspect of enacting emotions on stage. In these plays, the performance of feeling does not primarily function as a comment on devotional practice, but the representation of affect – specifically anger – serves as a vehicle for sophisticated explorations of the social dimensions of emotions.

Beyond Sorrow

Dramatisations of the Slaughter of the Innocents have a long tradition. Latin liturgical drama represents the massacre, as Kolve notes, in a grave and exalted way which 'concentrates on the theological element in its source' (p. 207) in the laments of the mothers.[58] In contrast, the many Middle English iterations of the incident show an interest in the psychology of the biblical characters involved and no small amount of enthusiasm for violence.[59] They dissect the character of Herod, examine the motives of his soldiers for beheading, impaling, stabbing and tearing apart the children, and dramatise the mothers' response to the killings as a mixture of wild lament and violent resistance with fists, distaffs, and pot-ladles.

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[57] The biblical source for this episode is Matthew 2. 16-18. Patristic commentary primarily conceives of the children as the first martyrs, as Woolf notes (p. 392). It is on this tradition that Mirk draws in his sermon *De festo innocencium et martirium* for 28 December (*Festial*, pp. 35-37). The notion that in their death the innocent children are types of Christ can be found in mystical literature (Woolf, p. 392).

[58] For a discussion of Latin liturgical plays of the Slaughter of the Innocents, see Kolve, pp. 207-08 and Woolf, p.13.

[59] On similar psychological interests in the Massacre in the visual arts, see *Wörterbuch der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. by Hannelore Sachs, Ernst Badstübner and Helga Neumann, 8th edn (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2004), pp. 62-63.

Critics have long noted that the dramatisation of female resistance and the display of mutilated bodies in the massacre plays present a critique to unchecked power, embodied by Herod and his soldiers.[60] However, they have expressed surprise at the 'ferocity of tone' (Woolf, p. 207) in all but the N-Town and York pageants, in which 'lyrical laments stand out unmuffled by colloquial outbursts of anger' (Woolf, p. 207). Craik, for example, considers it 'unseemly' of the mothers to 'make their sorrow at the loss of their children take the form of grotesque and comic violence'.[61] The closeness of the mothers' 'colloquial outbursts of anger' (Woolf, p. 207) to the stock repertoire of comic misrule is well established (Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, p. 145), yet they have recently also been linked to the enactment of a complex social critique in the Slaughter plays.

In *Drama and Resistance,* Sponsler holds the massacre of the innocents up for comparison with the Crucifixion, arguing that in both abused bodies function 'not just as a sign of victimization but also as an inspiration for resistance' (p. 155). By construing the male characters in the massacre plays as violent, evil and bordering on the monstrous, the plays question masculine control and 'violence used in the service of power' (p. 155). However, Sponsler understands violence both as an aspect of feudal rule and as an underpinning of the urban economy.[62] Consequently, the staging of female resistance to male aggression performs potentially transgressive ideological work because it questions the place of the female worker's body in the medieval urban

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[60] See, for example, Woolf, p. 205, who follows the interpretation given by Owst, pp. 331-34, 493-95 of Herod as a feudal tyrant.

[61] T. W. Craik, 'Violence in the English Miracle Plays', in *Medieval Drama*, ed. by Neville Denny (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), pp. 173-95 (p. 195). Having little time for this 'business with distaffs and pot-ladles' (ibid.), Craik duly praises the Girdlers' and Nailers' pageant in the York cycle for its portrayal of the mothers as passive and grieving, thus anticipating in their laments the planctus spoken by the Virgin Mary in the *Mortificatio Christi* pageant.

[62] Sponsler bases her argument chiefly on the Towneley version of the Slaughter, which ostensibly uses the terminology of commercial transaction to describe the violence re-created on stage.

economy and thus the social categories on which order and authority in the community are predicated (p. 142).

Sponsler's emphasis on the ideological implications of male and female behaviours in the Slaughter pageants has been taken up by a number of scholars. Thus Nolan Sidhu argues that the Slaughter plays go beyond misogyny in giving women an unprecedented public voice.[63] Hill-Vásquez asserts with regard to the Digby *Kyllyng of þe Children* that the challenging of conventional notions of gendered behaviour in the staging of female resistance serves as an 'active reference [...] to a late medieval devotional practice that extended the re-creative potential of the sacred drama to the role of gender' (*Sacred Players*, p. 148). And Eshelman sees the rebellious women in the Towneley *Herod* play as touchstones for audience identification based on their role as spectators of violence within the plays, a role which resembles that of the spectator outwith the play (p. 30). Their physical action, he argues, constitutes an attempt to save their children, which changes into lamentation and cries only after the children have been killed. Hence, their response is diametrically opposed to the passivity of the Virgin Mary in the Passion (p. 31). Eshelman does not elaborate on the *purpose* which audience identification with the active, rebellious mothers might serve, but points instead to the discrepancy between their response and the emphasis on empathetic tears in spiritual writings.

Yet the massacre plays are not only interesting for their gender politics or the symbolic function they attach to bodies – be it those of the mothers or those of the children –, or indeed for the social function they (implicitly) posit for the religious drama. I will argue that the Coventry *Play of the Shearmen and Tailors* and the Digby

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[63] Nicole Nolan Sidhu, 'Female Muscle: Violence, the Working Woman's Body and the Public Sphere in Fifteenth-Century Drama', unpublished paper presented to the 18th Biennial Congress of the New Chaucer Society, Siena, 15-19 July 2010.

Candlemes Days and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle figure the resistance of the mothers less as the fury of rebellious housewives than as the justifiable vindication of a perceived wrong. The staging of the response of the mothers in the Slaughter plays, therefore, presents a study of anger and its role in social interaction.

Transgression

The Coventry play of the Killing of the Children produced by the Shearmen and Tailors combines a number of biblical episodes from the Annunciation to the Flight into Egypt with a prologue spoken by Isaiah, a *processus prophetarum*, and an extended episode centring on Herod including the Killing of the Innocents. The episode is known chiefly for its inclusion of the carol 'Lully, lully, þow littell tine child', sung by the mothers as they come on stage with their children in their arms (*Coventry*, p. 246). They appear to be aware of the plot against their children from the outset, as Woman III reveals:

> WOMAN III   Be styll, be styll, my lyttull chylde,
> That Lorde of lordis saue bothe the *and* me,
> For Erode hath sworne wi*th* wordis wyld
> Thatt all yong chyldur sclayne þe schal be. (*Coventry*, *Shearmen*, ll. 781-84)

At this juncture, the scene changes to Herod's palace in order to give room to an exchange between Herod and his soldiers, which establishes the injustice of the plot to kill the children.[64] Unlike in the York version of the massacre, for example, Herod is solely responsible for devising the plan for murdering the children of Bethlehem. His soldiers initially express reluctance to follow his orders. Their scruples are first and foremost political in nature: they warn Herod that a massacre will incite people to 'make a rysyng in þi noone cuntrey' (l. 745). Nevertheless, they acknowledge the in-

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[64] Davidson and King point out that the Coventry plays were most likely staged in processional performance, using the cityscape as a backdrop for pageant wagons (*Coventry*, pp. 9-13).

appropriateness of the task they are asked to perform. Myles I calls it a 'schame' (l. 740) and a violation of the chivalric code to kill defenceless children. Yet the king's rage in the face of criticism from his subordinates, which is summed up in the stage direction '*There Erode ragis ageyne* [...]' (at l. 746), quickly elicits protestations of compliance and confidence in their ability to carry out their assigned task from the soldiers.

> MYLES II   All the chyld*er* thatt I fynd scalyne þe schal be,
> Thatt make many a mod*er* to wepe
> An be full sore aferde
> In owre amor bright when the hus see. (ll. 756-59)

Yet confronted with decidedly uncooperative mothers, the same soldier admits: 'We mvst fullfyll Erodes com*m*andement, | Ellis be we asse trayturs *and* cast all in care' (ll. 791-92). The women pick up on the reference to the chivalric ideal of protecting women and children when encountering the soldiers. Woman I immediately appeals to their honour as knights: 'Thys dey shame not youre chevaldre,' she urges them (l. 794).

Chivalry is first and foremost a warrior code, but as a moral system it goes beyond the rules of combat. The choice of verb for the first woman's utterance quoted above implies that shame is both in the act of killing defenceless boys and in being found out, as it were.[65] In modern psychological theory, shame counts among the self-conscious emotions and is usually considered the product of a complex set of cognitive activities relating to an individual's interpretation of an event.[66] It can centre on moral action, as Lewis points out ('Self-Conscious Emotions', p. 748). Thus people usually feel ashamed when they transgress a set of moral standards, rules or goals (ibid.). The feeling of shame is more than an emotion in that it designates social status, legitimated

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[65] The shame of being found out, of making public what should remain private, connects the Coventry play of *The Kyllyng of þe Children* with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For a discussion of shame in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* see William Ian Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 183-95.

[66] Michael Lewis, 'Self-Conscious Emotions: Embarassment, Pride, Shame, and Guilt', in Lewis, Haviland-Jones and Feldman, eds, *Handbook of Emotions*, pp. 742-56.

and imposed on us by the community we live in (Miller, p. 135). Shame, in other words, may function as a means of social control. In the Coventry play of the Shearmen and Tailors, the mothers imply that the knights should feel ashamed by their failure to measure up to the communally accepted standards and values of knightly conduct. Yet the transgression of moral codes is closely associated with the occurrence of so-called "other-critical moral emotions". The violation of rights against the self and those close to the self has been linked to anger by thinkers from Aristotle onwards, while transgressions against the ethics of community are associated with contempt (see Rozin and others). Anger plays a crucial role in social functioning as it regulates interpersonal behaviour and comes to be regulated in an interpersonal context. It is an emotion which is closely intertwined with others. For Aquinas, for example, these are hope, desire and sorrow. In order to understand the fierce response of the women to the transgressions of Herod's soldiers, it is necessary to briefly explore the psychological contexts of anger.

Anger is usually defined as a developmental emotion, which human beings learn to control and express appropriately during childhood. It has long occupied a privileged place in the Latin West, as Rosenwein points out (*Anger's Past*, p. 5) due to its curious entanglement with sin. Anger arises primarily as a reaction to an injustice and cannot usefully be understood without the other passions, as we have seen previously. According to Aquinas, we are angered by harmful acts done to others if they have something in common with us such as 'blood relationship, friendship, or at least the same human nature.'[67] The evil we perceive in the object of anger thus has a deeply

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[67] *ST* 1a2æ., 47.1:

> Ad secundum dicendum quod irascimur contra illos qui aliis nocent, et vindictam appetimus inquantum illi quibus nocetur aliquot modo ad nos pertinent, vel per aliquam affinitatem, vel per amicitiam, vel saltem per communionem naturæ.

For Aquinas, all phenomena which can cause anger (for example, others forgetting about us, or their pleasure in our misfortunes) eventually boil down to a kind of slight in *ST* 1a2æ., 47.2.

personal character for Aquinas. As Miner observes, '[i]t is not merely apprehended as a harm, either or be resisted or to be succumbed to, but more profoundly as an injury that slights, and means to slight, its target' (p. 265).

Yet for Aquinas – and many other thinkers on the subject – the object of anger contains both a perceived evil (the person who slights me or someone close to me) and a perceived good: revenge or vindication. Aristotle already makes revenge a necessary feature of anger in the *Rhetoric* when he writes: '[I]t has been well said of anger, that [...] it is accompanied by a certain pleasure, for this reason first, and also because men dwell upon the thought of revenge' (pp. 173-75 (II.2.1)). Augustine similarly asserts in his *Confessions* that 'anger seeks revenge' (p. 31 (II.6)) – an observation that Aquinas refers to in the *Summa*: '[T]he desire for revenge is something agreeable because revenge is a matter of justice.'[68] However, to vindicate, for Aquinas, means first and foremost to set things right in the sense of mitigating or removing the sorrow that underpins anger.[69]

Setting things right, I would like to argue, is what is at stake in the mothers' responses to violence against their children in the Coventry Shearmen and Tailors' play. The killing of the children of Bethlehem constitutes a violation of both autonomy (the individual rights of the children) and of community in that Herod's knights transgress a communal moral code through their actions. There is no indication in the play-text of the precise point in the stage action when the soldiers draw their swords and begin their grisly task. Yet the sudden change from the first plea to loud, fierce counter-attack in the subsequent speeches by the two remaining mothers suggests that the killing begins immediately after the appeal to chivalry. We may assume that the murders themselves

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[68] *ST* 1a2æ., 46.2: 'Sed appetitus vindictæ est appetitus boni, cum vindicta ad justitiam pertineat.' Aquinas's understanding of *vindicta* cannot be reduced to revenge because he understands the emotion of anger as fundamentally rooted in the human desire for good, as Miner warns (p. 271). Miner notes that Aquinas uses a form of *ulscior* whenever he tries to convey what is covered by the terms revenge and vengeance in English (p. 271).

[69] For a more detailed discussion of Aquinas's understanding of vindication see Miner, p. 283.

were staged for maximum gruesome effect, with large numbers of rag dolls used to represent the children.[70] Embedded stage directions suggest that the mothers two and three, faced with the imminent death of their children, set upon the soldiers fiercely in word and action. 'Se, thow fals losyngere,' the second woman cries out to the second soldier, '[a] stroke schalt thow beyre me here | And spare for no cost' (*Coventry, Shearmen*, ll. 804-06). This is not a gratuitous insult, as her opponent – like his comrades – must indeed seem a 'fals losyngere' in almost every sense of the word: a hypocrite for betraying the chivalric ideal, a coward who hides behind Herod's orders.[71] And Woman III invokes her 'womanly geyre' (l. 813) with which she intends to make the soldiers' 'braynis addull' (l. 809). Myles I reflects after the event that 'soch a crye' (l. 816) and such great 'reybukyng of chewaldry' (l. 818) has hardly ever been heard before.

How the combat against Herod's soldiers might be staged can be gleaned from a mid-fifteenth-century stained glass window in St Peter Mancroft in Norwich. The window includes a representation of the Massacre of the Innocents, which depicts a soldier with an infant impaled on his sword, who is held in a choke by a female figure.[72] The Coventry play envisages the bodies of the dead children to be transported to Herod with wagons, as the second soldier explains:

> MYLES II   Yett must the all be broght hym to
> With waynis and waggyns fully fryght.
> I tro there wol be a careful syght. (ll. 827-39)

That the dead children should be a difficult sight for the soldier to stomach foregrounds the excessiveness and (perhaps also) the injustice of the killings. This is reinforced later by two further comments given to Myles II. Firstly, he tells Herod that

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[70] For staging practices see *Coventry*, p. 247. Davidson and King suggest in their comments on the play that the cruelty of the scene in the Coventry pageant may have inspired Shakespeare for the graphic description he gives to his Henry V with regard to the consequences for the citizens of Harfleur lest they surrender (pp. 247-48).

[71] 'losenger (n.)', in *Middle English Dictionary*.

[72] The window is described in detail in Eljenholm, *Early Art of Norfolk*, p. 67.

although his wishes must be obeyed, '[t]here ma no mon sey there ageyne' (l. 833). Secondly, he reveals an awareness of the consequences of the event when he expresses fears that 'moche wengance þeroff wull c*um*' (l. 822).

Getting even

Vengeance is a key-word in the dialogue which accompanies the stage action of *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle* contained in MS Digby 133. It is a composite pageant. Framed by a prologue and epilogue spoken by Poeta, which places the massacre in its liturgical and narrative context, the pageant stages Herod's plotting of the massacre, the encounter between the soldiers and the mothers, Herod's death, Simeon in the temple, as well as the flight into Egypt.

The action involving the mothers of the children and Watkin, Herod's messenger and would-be knight, is often read as a comic element in this otherwise grim play, which sees children stabbed and a remorseful Herod overcome by disease. Woolf notes that the character Watkin has received much critical attention, because his behaviour in the play undermines the romance ideal of chivalry (p. 392, n. 69). Watkin is undoubtedly construed as a braggart and a coward. In his comic inability to hide the fear he harbours of coming 'amonge women | For thei fight like deuelles with ther rokkes whan þei spyne' (*Digby, Kyllyng*, ll. 223-24), along with his ongoing claims to strength, valour, and bloodlust, he neatly illustrates the ways in which the Digby version of the massacre suspends the boundaries of gender, as Hill-Vásquez argues (*Sacred Players*, pp. 133-38). For her, Watkin's discussion of manly and knightly qualities with Herod prepares the audience for the climactic massacre scene (*Sacred Players*, pp. 142-49). I would like to suggest that this scene is presented to the spectator as an

exploration of maternal anger evoked not only by transgression against a (largely) secular moral code but by the violation of divine law.

In his exchanges with the soldiers and with Watkin, Herod aligns brutality, violence and mercilessness with manly and knightly behaviour. He commands his knights to arm themselves physically 'in stele shynyng bright' (*Digby*, *Kyllyng*, l. 106), as well as mentally for the task ahead: 'Make alle the children on your swordes to dey! I charge you, spare not oon for mercy or pyte!' (ll. 115-16). Mercy, that linchpin of Christian and knightly conduct alike, which influences the will of the individual to have compassion for others and to alleviate their misfortunes, is precisely the quality the knights do *not* embody in their encounter with the women. In the face of their aggressive threats, the Digby mothers are assertive from the beginning of the scene, declaring their willingness and ability to resist Herod's armed soldiers:

> PRIMA MULIER   Fye on you traitours of cruelle tormentrye,
>   Wiche with your swerdes of mortalle violens
> SECUNDA MULIER Oure yong children, that can no socoure but crie,
>   Wylle slee and devoure in ther innocens!
> TERCIA MULIER   Ye false traitours! Vnto God ye do grett offens,
> To sle and mordere yong children þat in þer cradelle slumber!
> QUARTA MULIER   But we women shalle make ageyns you resistens,
> After oure powere, youre malice to encomber! (ll. 297-304)

The words of Prima, Secunda and Tercia Mulier construct the soldiers both as cruel and as traitors to the fundamental Christian principles of justice and mercy. Slaying the innocent and defenceless is an offence against God, as Tercia Mulier points out, but the use of the term 'traitours' also flags up the element of social transgression contained in the act. The soldiers do not only betray God, but also fail their community. Quarta Mulier adds the notion that 'malice' provides their motivation, thus countering the claim made by the first knight at an earlier point that they are bound by the commandment of the king (l. 286). Unlike their Coventry counterparts, the Digby

soldiers indeed do not express scruples. As Hill-Vásquez has pointed out, the fourth woman's forceful 'But we women shalle make ageyns you resistens' (*Digby Kyllyng*, l. 303), can be read as reaching out to the female members of the audience, urging them to identify with and participate in resistance (*Sacred Players*, p. 143). Instead of pursuing questions of audience identification at this point, I would like to examine the configuration of resistance as retaliation in the Digby play in order to highlight the wider social and emotional dimensions of the women's violent action.

The Digby mothers do not start to bring down their distaffs and pot-ladles onto the soldiers, and Watkin in particular, until the killings – summarised in the terse stage direction '*Hic occident pueros*' (at l. 314) – begin, and Prima Mulier cries revenge:

> PRIMA MULIER   Alas, alasse, good gossyppes! This is a sorrowfulle peyn,
>   To se oure dere children that be so yong
> With these caytyves thus sodeynlye to be slayn!
>   A vengeaunce I aske on them alle for this grett wrong! (ll. 315-18)

Secunda Mulier reinforces the idea of revenge of a like-for-like variety: 'And a very myscheff mut come them amonge, | Whersoeuer thei be come or goon' (ll. 319-20). While the women are portrayed as leaving the punishment of Herod, as the person ultimately responsible for the unchristian murders, to divine retribution, they take revenge on Herod's henchmen in their own hands. Thus Quarta Mulier exhorts, 'I pray God bryng [Herod] to an ille ending, | And in helle pytte to dwelle euer in peyn!' (ll. 324-25). Yet in the meantime, she and her friends set about making the here and now of the play-world a most uncomfortable place for Watkin and company. They are beaten up out of anger – out of an emotional reaction to the 'grett wrong' that is the killing of defenceless children and to the verbal slights Watkin hurls at them. Watkin insults the women calling them 'folysshe quenys' (l. 305), 'skowtys' (l. 313) and 'harlottes' (l. 326), with the latter insult sparking off the scene for which the pageant has

become famous, and in which the women set upon Watkin with distaffs. Female

violence is thus presented as a kind of vindication resonant with Aquinas's

understanding of the term, that is as a means of righting a wrong. It springs from the

mothers' desire for justice and for good, both of which are violated by the actions of

Watkin and the soldiers. As such, their anger stands in stark contrast to the now

proverbial rage of Herod.

Blind Rage

All surviving Middle English dramatic versions of the Slaughter of the Innocents

present Herod as a choleric braggart who more often than not has the whiff of sulphur

about him.[73] Herod's wrath springs from fear of challenges to his authority and god-like

self-perception, which the character reveals in grandiloquising monologues (Woolf, p.

203). It is explosive, and the descriptions of its symptoms embedded in Herod's

monologues frequently tally with the somatic changes outlined by Aquinas in his

Summa. In accordance with tradition, Aquinas summarises these as *magna perturbatione*

cordis (*ST*, 1a2æ, 48.2). The 'fervor in the blood and the vital spirits around the heart'

can be so marked, he writes, as to affect the 'external members of those who are angry'

(ibid.).[74] The Towneley Herod provides a particularly vivid example of the physiological

symptoms of anger. His heart and spirit are so disturbed when he hears about the birth

of Christ that he suffers palpitations ('O, my hart is rysand | Now in a glope!', 16.382-

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[73] Herod's devilish affiliations have their origins in patristic commentary and are underlined in Middle English plays through his vanity and pride, which link him with Lucifer, and through his frequent association with Mahound, a heathen deity scarcely distinguishable from the devil himself. Occasionally, Herod's anger is attributed to demonic possession, for example in the Towneley play of *Herod the Great*, where Herod observes: 'I anger: | I wote not what dewill me alys' (16.165-66). For an overview of patristic commentaries pointing up the similarities between Herod and the devil, and for a discussion of their implications for costuming see Woolf, pp. 391-92, nn. 63, 64.

[74] Aquinas quotes Gregory the Great to elucidate the external manifestations of anger:

> *[I]ræ suæstimulis accensum cor palpitat, corpus tremit, lingua se præpedit, facies ignescit, exasperantur oculi, et nequaquam recognoscuntur noti; ore quidem clamorem format, sed sensus quid loquatur ignorat.* (*ST* 1a2æ., 48.2; original emphasis)

83), experiences a burning feeling inside ('Within I fare as fyre', 16.147) and fears to burst with anger (16.180-81). The 'agitation of the body heat, the material element in anger' may interfere with and impair reason, because it urges the person who experiences anger to swift action, Aquinas maintains (*ST*, 1a2æ, 48.3). Herein lies the danger of anger. Although it is not in itself a sin, it can become sinful when it clouds rational judgement and thus ceases to be useful to the human being (Miner, p. 286).

In the Coventry play, Herod's anger is first and foremost directed at the challenge to his authority posed by the failure of the three kings to comply with his wishes and return to court with intelligence of the whereabouts of Christ:

> ERODE   I stampe! I stare! I loke all abowtt!
> Myght I them take, I schuld them bren at a glede!
> I rent, I rawe, and now I run wode!
> A, that these velen tryturs hath mard þis my mode!
> They schall be hangid yf I ma cum them to!
> *And here Erode ragis in þe pagond* and *in the street also.* (*Coventry, Shearmen*, ll. 724-29)

The embedded stage directions in the speech give an indication of the bodily movements required of the actor on stage to give flesh to Herod's wrath, while at the same time underlining the great excessiveness of this wrath through references to loss of rational control ('I run wode'). The Coventry Herod's second outburst is provoked by the scruples voiced by his subordinates (see stage direction at l. 746). His plan to murder all male children under two years of age is cast in terms of relieving him of the root cause of resistance to his authority – the king born at Bethlehem.

The Digby Herod similarly feels 'diceyvid by straunge kynges three' (*Kyllyng*, l. 83), yet he casts his plans for carnage in terms of vindication. He itches to be 'avingid' (l. 94) on the three kings, who fooled him with 'froward collusion' (l. 92), by undermining their attempt to protect the Christ-child. The murder of the children also

ensures Herod's absolute rule as his instruction to the knights illustrates: 'Sle alle the children, to kepe my liberte!'[75]

In both the Digby and the Coventry plays of the killing of the children of Bethlehem, the figure of Herod embodies the third deadly sin, *ira.* The *Lay Folks' Catechism,* for example, defines wrath as a stirring or swelling of the heart which causes 'a man willenesse for to take wrake | Or wickedly to venge him opon his euen-cristen' (*LFC,* T.485-86). Sinful anger, one of the principal vices in the late medieval understanding, can take many forms, from indignation and resentment to outrage and violent vengefulness. In any case, it can so grip a person that they lose all rational control. Mirk's guideline questions in his *Instructions for Parish Priests* sum up succinctly the dominant understanding of *ira.*[76] Thus the parish priest is to ask the penitent: 'Has þow any tyme be wroth so | Þat þy wyt hath be a-go?' (ll. 1251-52). Clouding the capacity for judgement, anger may give rise to a variety of evils, as Mirk's subsequent questions illustrate. 'Hast þow in wraþþe slayn, | Or holpe þer-to by thy mayn?' (ll. 1263-64), for example, implies that excessive vengeance without a proper motive is one of the potential consequences of anger. And in a subsequent question, Mirk provides a glimpse of his understanding of the causes of anger. The question 'Hast þou any tyme in malencoly | I-corset ay þynge bitterly [?]' (ll. 1269-70) draws a clear link between resentful anger and melancholy – a state of being that, as we have seen, is closely linked with grief in the medieval understanding.[77]

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[75] l. 96. Hill-Vásquez stresses Herod's interest in earthly power (*Sacred Players*, p. 137).

[76] John Mirk, *Myrc's Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. by Edward Peacock, EETS OS 31 (London: Trübner, 1868).

[77] The connection between grief over loss and anger is elaborated further in the concluding question of Mirk's section on *ira.* The priest is to establish whether the penitent has been 'inpacyent' (*Instructions*, l. 1273) due to 'any gref' (l. 1274) sent from God, such as the loss of cattle or the 'los of frendes or of any þynge' (l. 1279).

Triggered by a perceived slight, Herod's anger in the Digby *Kyllyng of þe Children* immediately stirs in him an overwhelming desire for vengeance, which blinds his judgement and causes him to act irrationally. The result is much 'mannes slaughter' (*LFC*, T.490). The injustice and excessiveness of the bloodshed is underlined not only by repeated references to the defencelessness and innocence of Herod's victims, but by the very fact his speeches clearly identify one child and the three kings as the (real) objects of his anger. His 'revenge' misses its target, strictly speaking. Herod's anger, established from the outset as sinful in each pageant, thus functions as a foil for the righteous anger of the mothers.

Humiliation

Such righteous anger is empowering. In the Coventry play of the Shearmen and Tailors, as well as the Digby *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle*, motherly sorrow transformed into anger overpowers Herod's rule and supremacy.[78] In the Digby Play, the palpable pleasure that the beating of Watkin is shown to bring the women in the play reinforces the notion that violence functions as vindication. Thus Prima Mulier mocks the increasingly fearful figure of Watkin:

> PRIMA MULIER   What, thus javelle! Canst not haue do?
>   Thu and thi cumpany shalle not depart
>   Tylle of oure distavys ye haue take part!
>   Therfor, ley on gossippes, *with a mery hart*,
> And let them not fro vs goo! (*Kyllyng*, ll. 345-49; emphasis mine)

Taking revenge on the soldiers is – to a certain extent – also a question of honour, as the figure of Secunda Mulier underlines when she threatens Watkin: 'And if I seas, thane haue I shame, | Tylle thu be fellid down to the grounde!' (ll. 331-32). The

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[78] See also Hill-Vásquez, *Sacred Players*, p. 153.

paradigmatic context for her shame is one of losing or maintaining face against challenges to her status as a mother, i. e. someone who can be 'as fers as a lyon in a cage' (l. 231) when defending her children. Secunda Mulier's words are thus indicative of a social world which values ideas of honour, reputation and respect and permits vindication and revenge as a means of social control.[79]

The substance of the mothers' revenge on Watkin is humiliation. The would-be knight Watkin fancies himself as of higher social status than the Digby mothers by virtue of gender and his connections with the king. Part of his self-definition depends on their deference, as his reply to Quarta Mulier prior to the killings reveals:

> WATKYN   Peas, you folysshe quenys! Wha shuld you defende
>   Ageyns vs armyd men in this apparaile?
> We be bold men, and the kyng vs ded sende
>   Hedyr into this cuntre to hold with you bataile! (ll. 305-08)

Yet Watkin belongs, strictly speaking, to the same social group. His attempted crossing of group boundaries invites humiliation. '*If shame is the consequence of not living up to what we ought to, then humiliation is the consequence of trying to live up to what we have no right to*', Miller writes (p. 145; original emphasis). It is by humiliating the soldiers, most notably the vain and presumptuous Watkin, that the mothers get even. Watkin ostensibly postures before them until his pretension is deflated by their distaffs and '*the knyghtes* [...] *come to rescue hym*' (stage direction at l. 349). For all its comic aspects from the perspective of third parties (audience, readers), the conflict between the mothers and the knights, and most notably Watkin, in the Digby *Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle* thus provides an anatomy of the passion of anger along with an exploration of the emotional world which undergirds the maintenance of moral and social distinctions.

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[79] For a discussion of shame as a means of social control, see Miller, pp. 134-36.

Conclusion

The practices and literature of late medieval affective devotion exhibit a hitherto unprecedented interest in the emotional life of biblical characters. Thus meditative, lyrical, as well as pictorial representations of the Virgin Mary within the Passion narrative attribute to her emotional responses not included in the Gospels. They frequently blur the boundaries between Mary's grief for her son's death and compassion for his suffering. Dramatisations of the Crucifixion on the late medieval English stage draw on motifs from such sources and give considerable room to the representation of Marian grief. However, their palpable interest in the emotional life of the Virgin is not merely a byproduct or a manifestation of late medieval affective piety.

In the Towneley *Crucifixion* and the N-Town *Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion,* the vivid performances of Marian grief through the body of an actor provides a stimulus for a potential emotional contagion response. Yet in both plays the unrestrained experience and expression of Marian feeling at the scene on Calvary shows overtones of a potential disintegration of grief into madness. Mary's expressions of grief thus become the locus for discussions of the dangers inherent in emotional excess. While the Towneley *Crucifixion* picks up on the fervency of feeling frequently ascribed to the Virgin, emphasising the irrational, uncontrolled elements of her grief, the N-Town *Road to Calvary; The Crucifixion* takes a broader perspective, using a dialogue between Mary and John to highlight the redemptive dimensions of the Passion and to advocate prayer as a means of overcoming earthly, human emotions.

The dramatisations of the Slaughter of the Innocents in the Coventry *Play of the Shearmen and Tailors* and the Digby *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle* bring the degree to which performances of feeling allow the examination of the wider

social functions of emotions into sharp focus. Intense mourning, these plays suggest, is not the only possible reaction to the loss of a loved one. If this loss is grounded in an unjust, transgressive act on the part of another member of society, anger and its attendant desire for revenge are called for. In these Middle English plays, then, the audience is invited to witness and potentially share emotional responses to devotionally relevant scenes from biblical history, but also, in the exploration of the links between perception, emotion and the dangers inherent in emotional expression, to consider the role of reason in affective devotion.

The demonstrated interest in these plays in human emotionality and its intersections with rationality is also at the centre of dramatisations of one of the most problematic Christian doctrines: the Resurrection. The next chapter will turn to the representation on stage of the moment of the Resurrection, as well as responses to it by the apostles and the Marys in order to highlight the ways in which the complex interactions between sensation, emotion, and cognitive processing are played out on the late medieval religious stage.

Chapter 5
Making Sense

In the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, a parish priest in Warwickshire finds himself faced with the task of expounding the Creed to his parishioners. It is a serious matter, as the articles of the faith must be learned by all the faithful and cannot be questioned under pain of heresy.[1] Therefore, after going through each of them, the priest admonishes his listeners: '[T]hese articles ye be bound to believe, for they be true and of authority.'[2] But he appears to have second thoughts about the faith of his flock and adds: 'And if you believe not me, then for a more sure and sufficient authority, go your way to Coventry and there ye shall see them all played in Corpus Christi play' (*A Hundred Merry Tales*, p. 116). This jest-book anecdote is interesting for the two apparent paradoxes it suggests with regard to spectatorship. Firstly, it implies that a play can carry more authority than the words of a priest in matters engaging the faith, even though religious plays are necessarily at odds with Christian Platonic metaphysics on account of their reliance on sensory perception to convey immaterial religious truths. Secondly, the anecdote suggests that an artistic representation of a past biblical event can assert a reality in which the biblical realm joins contemporary reality, thus allowing the representation to function as a confirmation of belief. Although the first paradox concerns first and foremost the epistemic function accorded to sensation and the

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[1] Aquinas stresses the latter point in his *Summa theologiae*. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, XXXI: *Faith (2a2æ., 1-7)*, ed. by T. C. O'Brien (1974), 1.9.

[2] *A Hundred Merry Tales and other English Jest-Books of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,* ed. by Paul M. Zall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 116.

second the kind of reality the theatrical event has for the spectator, both paradoxes

point to a single problematic: the relationship between sensation, engagement, and

cognitive processing in the experience of the spectator. It is on this relationship that the

present chapter will concentrate.

While the number of studies devoted to explorations of the influence of

medieval perceptual theory on literary language increases steadily, dramatic scholarship

has so far largely turned a blind eye to the impact of late medieval preoccupations with

sensory perception on Middle English religious drama, instead favouring theological

approaches.[3] Beckwith, for example, reads the York pageants dealing with the

Resurrection as 'explorations of the relationship between the visible and the invisible

central to sacramentality', without as much as mentioning the pivotal role accorded to

vision in later medieval epistemological thought (*Signifying God*, p. 73). However, Middle

English plays frequently address questions about the possibilities, limitations and

reliability of sensory perception in general and visual perception in particular –

especially in plays dramatising miraculous events such as the Resurrection and Christ's

subsequent manifestations to his followers before the Ascension.

Plays dedicated to the mystery of Christ's corporeal Resurrection from the dead

constitute a central feature of the English theatrical landscape from the twelfth to the

sixteenth century. Unlike the Latin liturgical plays, which usually only stage the visit of

the three Marys to the sepulchre and the disciples' encounter with the risen Christ on

the way to Emmaus, all surviving Middle English cycles and collections include the

Resurrection moment as well as several emotionally intense encounters between the

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[3] Good examples are Stanbury, 'The Lover's Gaze' and Carolyn P. Collette, 'Seeing and Believing in the Franklin's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 26.4 (1992), 395-410. More recent studies include Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in the Canterbury Tales* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

risen Christ and his followers.[4] Woolf maintains that the popularity of the Resurrection

scene in the visual arts from the thirteenth century onwards prompted the inclusion of

the Resurrection moment in Middle English scriptural drama.[5] Yet as Gibson and

Schiller point out, the devotional art of the late Middle Ages testifies to a desire to

objectify the spiritual, which is closely bound up with changes in medieval visuality and

visual theory as a result of the reception of Aristotelian thought and Arab commentary.[6]

Meanwhile Cora Dietl has recently linked the reception of Aristotelian epistemological

thought in the West with the emergence of the German vernacular religious drama,

pointing out that the Aristotelian valorisation of vision gave rise to the notion that the

interplay between the senses of hearing and sight is pivotal in the cognition of religious

truths. German vernacular religious drama, Dietl concludes, did not aim at

commemorating biblical events but rather at validating them (p. 470).

This chapter takes Dietl's approach to the drama as a starting point for a re-

assessment of the Middle English Resurrection plays not solely as emotionally charged

visualisations of the historical event of the Resurrection dependant on visual habits, but

as a means of persuasion. To this end, the chapter will first examine the staging of the

Resurrection moment in the Chester Skinners' play. Secondly, it will explore how the

biblical account of apostolic responses to the Resurrection and to Christ's subsequent

appearances is expanded into an exploration of the sources and motivations of human

doubt in the N-Town *Announcement to the Three Marys; Peter and John at the Sepulchre* and

the Townley *Thomas of India* play. Focussing on sensory references within the play texts,

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[4] For the Latin liturgical drama, see Woolf, pp. 3-24; Muir, *Biblical Drama*, pp. 13-17.

[5] See Woolf, p. 274. For the iconography of the Resurrection, see Schiller, III, 68-88.

[6] Schiller considers the increasing '*Schaubedürfnis*' of the later medieval faithful (p. 76) as a crucial factor in this development. The Resurrection moment is not described in detail in the Gospels, which left much room for artistic imagination. For changes in visuality, see Michael Camille, 'Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing', in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 197-223 and Cynthia Hahn, '*Visio Dei*: Changes in Medieval Visuality', in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. by Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 169-96.

the chapter illustrates the ways in which these plays engage with contemporary philosophical and theological debates about the epistemic function of sensation through affirming and challenging received notions about the relationship between sensation, emotion, cognition, and faith. Moreover, it outlines the means by which the plays seek to redefine the parameters in which spectatorial perception and engagement can operate. However, in order to do so, it is expedient to first look in more detail at the paradigms of thinking which shape late medieval notions about sensation and its links with knowledge and faith in philosophical theology.

Making Sense of Sensation in Scholastic Thought

For all key thinkers in the later Middle Ages, religious faith means the acceptance of certain truths on the authority of divine revelation and it constitutes a source of knowledge necessary for mankind in its present, unredeemed state. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas, for example, defines faith as follows:

> Faith is concerned chiefly with the realities we hope to contemplate in heaven – *Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for* – and so the matters engaging faith for their own sake are those that directly point us towards life eternal: the three persons in almighty God, the mystery of the Incarnation and so on.[7]

Aquinas goes on to draw a clear distinction between faith and knowledge based on their respective objects: through faith, we hold the revealed truths of theology with certitude; knowledge, in contrast, pertains to empirical facts drawn from the material world through sensory perception and reasoning (*ST* 2a2æ., 1.5). He holds with Aristotle that

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[7] *ST* 2a2æ., 1.6:
> Quia vero fides principaliter est de his quæ vivenda speramus in patria, secundum illud *Hebr., Fides est substantia sperandarum rerum*, ideo per se ad fidem pertinent illa quæ directe nos ordinant ad vitam æternam, sicut sunt tres personæ omnipotentis Dei, mysterium Incarnationis Christi et alia hujusmodi.

the material world is structured intelligibly and that the human mind is therefore capable of knowing it with the help of sense perception.[8] Thus he asserts in the *Summa*: 'The knowledge that is natural to us has its source in the senses and extends just so far as it can be led by sensible things.'[9] In other words: the embodied human mind is always dependent on the mediation of experience by the senses to produce knowledge of the material world, and can know spiritual and supra-sensible realities only in so far as they are manifest in the material world (see *ST* 1a., 77.5). However, Aquinas is heir not only to the Aristotelian principle that knowledge begins with the senses but also to Neoplatonic distrust of the body and its carnal modes of knowing and Christian metaphysics, which demand that supernatural sources of knowledge be available. The following section will first sketch the positions which frame the late medieval debate about the value of sensory perception through Aristotle's and Augustine's positions on perception and knowledge in *De anima* and the *Confessions* respectively, before surveying their reverberations in three works reflecting the Aristotelianising of theology and natural philosophy in the thirteenth century discussed at various points throughout the first four chapters of this thesis: Bacon's *Opus Majus*, Aquinas's *Summa theologiæ,* and Trevisa's translation of Bartholomæus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*.

Aristotle and the Power of the Human Intellect

In *De anima* II.2, Aristotle declares that it is the capacity for sense perception that distinguishes animate and inanimate beings (p. 75). In the course of ten chapters devoted to the perceptive faculty of the human soul, he argues that sensation provides the principal means by which embodied beings acquire knowledge about the world. In sensation, Aristotle explains, an external object acts on a sense organ and leaves an

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[8] See also Colish, p. 298.

[9] Aquinas, *Summa theologiæ*, III: *Knowing and Naming God (1a. 12-13)*, ed. by Hubert McCabe (1964), 12.12: 'Dicendum quod naturalis nostra cognitio a sensu principium sumit. Unde tantum se nostra naturalis cognitio extendere potest in quantum manuduci potest per sensibilia.'

impression in the sense faculty of the soul – the sensible species – which is an exact duplicate of the original object that caused it, albeit one that has left matter behind.[10] The agent intellect then operates on the sensible species by making these species abstract before impressing them on the passive intellect. Aristotle employs an analogy with light in order to explain the operation of the agent intellect: just as light makes potential objects of sight in the external world visible to the eye, the agent intellect turns potentially thinkable things into objects of thought.[11] While several of his predecessors held that the processes of sensation and thinking are identical because they come about through the action of like upon like, Aristotle thus attributes different agent causes to sensation and cognition: the agent cause of sensation is the physical, sensible object which acts upon the human senses, while in intellection or cognition it is the active (agent) intellect which creates the objects of thought.[12]

The question of how humans acquire knowledge is not fully answered in *De anima*. Yet it is clear that, for Aristotle, the senses are first and foremost a means of cognition and mediation between the outside world and the human mind. Moreover, they are inextricably linked with desire. In the second book of *De anima*, Aristotle states that whenever there is sensation, there is also 'imagination and appetite, and where these are there must also be desire,' (p. 77, (II.2)) because it is the bodily senses that convey to desire (an appetitive faculty) the availability of objects of desire. At the same time, the senses can themselves become instances of the fulfilment of desire, for example, when one sees or smells chocolate and subsequently eats it. Aristotle's examination of the faculties of the human soul and the powers of the senses suggests

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[10] *De anima*, p. 137 (II.12). Aristotle uses the signet ring analogy to explain this process.

[11] See *De anima*, p. 171 (III.5). For a more detailed discussion of the agent and the potential intellect in Aristotle's thought, see John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy, 1150-1350* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 98-101.

[12] At the beginning of *De anima*, p. 155 (III.3), and at greater length in pp. 19-31 (I.2), Aristotle engages with, and subsequently modifies, earlier theories postulating the identity of thinking and sensing.

that he considers all knowledge to be grounded and completed in our sensual experience of the material world. Regarding the origin of knowledge, he thus differs radically from later Christian thinkers such as Augustine, who distinguishes between cognition of the material world and intellective knowledge, and for whom the faculty of desire is in constant conflict with reason.

Augustine and the Necessity of Divine Illumination

For Augustine, the human intellect in itself is incapable of acquiring knowledge about intelligible things by virtue of its created nature. He asserts in the *Confessions*:

> [T]he soul needs to be enlightened by light from outside itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the nature of truth.[13]

He goes on to make broad claims for the universal necessity of divine illumination when he declares: 'None other than [God] is teacher of the truth, wherever and from whatever source it is manifest.'[14] In other words: just as the eyes need light to perceive sensible objects in the material world, the human mind requires the light of God in order to see transcendental reality. For Augustine, the starting point for knowledge is faith. Faith is enables us to know because it 'clears' the soul:

> By believing I could have been healed. My mind's eye thus purified would have been directed in some degree towards [God's] truth, which abides for ever and is indefectible.[15]

Seeing with the mind's eye is, in Augustine's understanding, a rational operation of the human soul through which human beings may reach a deeper understanding of higher

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[13] *Confessions*, p. 68 (IV.15). For the Latin text, see *St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 192: '[...] nesciente alio lumine illam inlustrandam esse, ut sit particeps veritatis, quia non est ipsa natura veritatis [...].'
[14] *Confessions*, p. 78 (V.6). *St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 224: '[...] nec quisquam praeter te alius doctor est veri, ubicumque et undecumque claruerit.'
[15] *Confessions*, p. 95 (VI.4). *St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 280: 'et [*sic*] sanari credendo poteram, ut purgatior acies mentis meae dirigeretur aliquo modo in veritatem tuam, semper manentem ex nullo deficientem.'

truths.[16] The bodily sense organs are merely instruments that inform the embodied, sentient soul about the material world.[17] Bodily sensation *per se* is, for Augustine, generally not to be trusted because it is 'mired in the flesh' (Biernoff, p. 105). Following the Platonic and neoplatonic traditions, he rules out the physical world as an object of true knowledge and with it the external senses as a source of such knowledge. The bodily senses transmit to the human mind information about the external world which testifies to the creative power of God, but they cannot transcend the phenomenal world in order to grasp the truths that lie behind the material. Moreover, as a source of bodily pleasure, the external senses must be reined in by will, which Augustine envisages as a kind of police officer whose beat includes the bodily senses. Even though perception is initially an uncontrolled act, the controlling will can react to perception by either refusing it or consenting to it, Augustine maintains.[18] Thus if a bird catches our eye, we can either allow ourselves to continue looking at it or re-direct our attention to whatever we were doing before the bird appeared in our visual field.

In the *Confessions*, Augustine repeatedly expresses distrust of the desire and pleasure inherent in the process of bodily sensation and warns against directing one's capacity for sensation to improper ends. One such improper end is 'the lust for experimenting and knowing' – sensation for sensation's sake – which he castigates as mere curiosity and concupiscence by another name, and which he blames for the

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[16] To describe the faculty as such, the term *oculi mentis* is frequently used coterminously with "common sense" and "sixth sense". For an overview of the history of the sixth sense or the *oculi menti*s see Peter von Moos, 'Le sens commun au moyen âge: sixième sens et sens social: Aspects épistémologiques, écclesiologiques et eschatologiques', *Studi Medievali*, 43 (2002), 1-55.

[17] The concept of the clarity of the *oculi mentis* as opposed to the cloudiness of the *oculi carnis* ultimately has its origin in the exegesis of Genesis 3. 7 and becomes somewhat of a patristic commonplace. Virgilius Maro Grammaticus even creates new lexemes which take over the incorporeal senses of sense verbs. While *uidere* denotes the physical action of seeing, his newly created *uidare* gives linguistic form to the act of seeing with the *oculi mentis*. For a discussion of Virgilius, see Vivien Law, 'Learning to Read with the *Oculi Mentis*: The Word-Play of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', in *Grammar and Grammarians in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 224-45.

[18] *Confessions*, pp. 147-48 (VIII.9). See also *St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 446-48.

excesses staged in public shows.[19] The potential consequences of lack of self-control over one's senses are given memorable expression in Chaucer's 'Boece'. Lady Philosophy closes her retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice story with the cautionary warning that humans lose sight of the divine if they pay too much attention to earthly matters:

> For whoso that evere be so overcomen that he ficche his eien into the put of helle, that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes into erthly thinges, al that evere he hath drawen of the noble good celestial he lesith it, whanne he looketh the helles, that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe.[20]

For Christians in the Augustinian tradition, sensation and perception are thus always a moral issue, because sensation is both at the basis of embodied life and the potential cause of spiritual death if not reigned in by volition.

Perception and Cognition in Bartholomæus Anglicus, Bacon, and Aquinas

Augustine's admonition that faith functions as a 'gateway to understanding' is at the basis of Anselm of Canterbury's reflections on the relation between faith and cognition, epitomised in his famous *credo ut intellego*, while his belief in the natural inability of the human intellect to acquire knowledge and the correlative necessity of divine illumination appealed to the mystic schools of the later Middle Ages. [21] Lingering traces of his suspicions about the powers of the human intellect and the epistemic value of sensation can also be found in the late medieval encyclopaedic tradition such as Trevisa's translation of Bartholomæus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*. Trevisa echoes long-standing Augustinian suspicions about the powers of the human soul in book III.

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[19] See *Confessions*, p. 211 (X.35). See also *St Augustine's Confessions*, II, 174.

[20] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Boece', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, book III metrum 12, ll. 60-69. Collette, *Species*, pp. 21-31, provides a good guide through the labyrinthine problem of rational control over the senses. Kemp, *Cognitive Psychology* offers a summary account of medieval theories about cognition in the rational soul (pp. 64-90).

[21] Robert E. Cushman, 'Faith and Reason in the Thought of St Augustine', *Church History*, 19 (1950), 271-94 (p. 272).

'Þe resonable soule is euerlastinge, incorruptibil, and may noȝt die,' Trevisa asserts, and he concludes that '[þ]erfor [the rational soul's] principal act and dede, þat is *intellegere* 'vndirstonde', is noȝt dependaunt of þe body (*Properties*, I, 101). He distinguishes between the faculties of *intellectus* and *racio*. *Intellectus*, Trevisa writes, helps man to know 'matere and bodililes þinges as God and angelis and oþir siche' (*Properties*, I, 95). It thus differs from *racio*, 'resoun', which 'biholdiþ þe neþer þinges' (ibid.). The embodiment of the human soul is ultimately an impediment to the acquisition of true knowledge according to *The Properties of Things:*

> Þerfor [the rational soul] lyueþ parfitrliche and vndirstondiþ whan he is departid from þe body. And þe more he drenchiþ him into þe body, þe more slowliche and þe lasse parfitliche he vndirstondiþ. And þe more he wiþdrawiþ him from þe boundis and likinge of fleissche, þe more esiliche and clereliche he vndirstondiþ. (*Properties,* I, 101)

These explicit doubts about the ability of the human soul to truly understand or truly know as long as it depends on the material world for information detract somewhat from the profound influence of Aristotelian thinking on the account of the physiology of sensation given by Bartholomæus and Trevisa.[22]

Bacon's pronouncements on sense perception and knowledge in the *Opus Majus* are usually read as an attempt to reconcile the Aristotelian emphasis on the powers of the human intellect with Augustinian theories about the necessity of divine assistance – or, as Joseph Owens points out, Bacon's aim is 'to explain Augustine by means of Aristotle'.[23] The pivotal point in Bacon's theory of cognition is his understanding of the generation and operation of sensible species, which he models on Robert Grosseteste's

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[22] For the physiology of sensation in *The Properties of Things,* see I, 108-21.
[23] Joseph Owens, 'Faith, Ideas, Illumination, and Experience', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 440-59 (p. 449).

account in *De lineis, angelis et figuris*.[24] Grosseteste defines sensible species as a bridge between the interior and the exterior which 'multiplies its power continuously from itself to a recipient'.[25] Their effects differ in different recipients: in material recipients, sensible species have material effects; in immaterial recipients, their effects are equally immaterial. Grosseteste's notion of sensible species as a power that propagates itself and can act without a receiver paves the way for a reassessment of the truth value of knowledge derived from the senses in the thirteenth century, as it is bound up with an understanding of sensation as an objective process. Sensible species do not 'act through deliberation and choice' (*per deliberationem et electionem*), Grosseteste writes.[26] Stripped of its subjective aspects, sensation can therefore be studied as a scientific phenomenon, at the heart of which is geometry, and Grosseteste's philosophy of light makes geometrical optics central to the study of sensation. Grosseteste writes: 'The consideration of lines, angles, and figures is of the greatest usefulness, as it is impossible to understand natural philosophy without them.'[27] Lindberg notes that because optics 'could reveal the essential nature of material reality, of cognition, and indeed of God himself, its pursuit became not only legitimate, but obligatory' for Grosseteste and his followers (*Theories*, p. 99). It should be noted, however, that Grosseteste 'was content with a Neoplatonically based theology derived largely from Augustine and did not try to Aristotelianize Christianity' (Colish, p. 320) even though he accepted Aristotle's scientific method.

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[24] The theory of sensible species, which finds its fullest expression in the works of Grosseteste and Bacon, has its origins in the neoplatonic theory of emanation, in neoplatonic concepts of light, and in Greek geometrical optics, which reached the West via Arab scholars in the thirteenth century. On neoplatonic light imagery, see Colish, pp. 292-93. For Bacon's sources see Lindberg, *Theories*, pp. 104-06.

[25] Quoted in Lindberg, *Theories*, p. 98.

[26] For the Latin text see Robert Grosseteste, 'De lineis, angelis et figures', in *Die philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste, Bischof von Lincoln*, ed. by Ludwig Baur (Münster: Aschendorff, 1960), pp. 59-65 (p. 60).

[27] Grosseteste, p. 60: 'Utilitas considerationis linearum, angulorum et figurarum est maxima, quoniam impossibile est sciri naturalem philosophiam sine illis.'

A limited acceptance of Aristotelian epistemology also characterises the work of his pupil, Roger Bacon. Bacon follows Grosseteste in defending the utility of optical studies for Christianity and in using visible light as a model for all sensible species on the grounds that 'the multiplication of light is more apparent to us than the multiplication of other things.'[28] His theory of the multiplication of species conceives of sensible species as ontologically continuous with both the sensible (external) object and the inner (mental) representation of it. Or as Biernoff notes with reference to Bacon's *De signis*: '[S]pecies are *natural* signs of their objects, because they communicate the nature and essence of those objects to the recipients' (p. 75; original emphasis). Thus the connection between sensible species and the intellect is real for Bacon. By positing a continuum between sensation and intellection through the multiplication of sensible species, Bacon underpins the Aristotelian dictum that sense perception is a precondition of knowledge. He also leaves some room for the Christian need for a 'realm of pre-existing, universal an immutable truths' (Biernoff, p. 84).

A similar balancing act is achieved by Aquinas. He rejects neoplatonising notions about the necessity of divine assistance for ordinary human cognitive acts, and is committed to Aristotelian ideas about the powers of the senses and the human intellect. The embodied human mind is always dependent on sense experience for the inital acquisition of knowledge, but also when using already acquired knowledge, as Aquinas states in his discussion of human intelligence:

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[28] Bacon, *De multiplicatione specierum*, p. 93 (2.1). The Latin orginal reads:
> Et alia ratio est huiusmodi nominationis, quia scilicet magis manifesta nobis est multiplicatio lucis quam aliorum, et ideo transumumus multiplicationem lucis ad alias. (Bacon, De multiplication specierum, p. 92)

For Roger Bacon's defence of optics, see Colish, p. 322.

> It is impossible for our intellect, in its present state of being joined to a body capable of receiving impressions, actually to understand anything without turning to sense images. [...] Hence it is obvious that, for the intellect actually to understand (not only in acquiring new knowledge but also in using knowledge already acquired), acts of the imagination and other faculties are required.[29]

It should be noted in this context that Aquinas understands *intellectus* as the human capacity for understanding and thought and that like Barthomomæus Anglicus, he considers understanding and reasoning as two stages of the same process.[30] In the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas suggests that we enjoy *intellectus* when we apprehend a self-evident truth, but we exercise *ratio* when we move step by step to prove a truth which is not self-evident (*ST* 1a., 79.8). Aquinas maintains the Aristotelian distinction between the passive and active intellects. The function of the active agent intellect is to provide 'objects of thought', Kenny observes.[31] Considering the Augustinian claim that 'pure truth should not be looked for from the senses of the body' (*ST* 1a., 84.6), Aquinas writes:

> Augustine's words should be understood here in the sense that truth is not to be looked for *entirely* from the senses. For the light of the agent intellect is required for us to know the truth found in changeable things in an unchanging way, and to distinguish real things from the likenesses of things.[32]

Although Aquinas, unlike many other Aristotelians, does not conceive of the agent intellect as a separate power acting on human beings from outside, but as a faculty of

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[29] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, XII*: Human Intelligence (1a 84-89)*, ed. by Paul T. Durbin (1968), 84.7: Dicendum quod impossibile est intellectum nostrum, secundum praesentis vitae statum quo possibili corpori conjungitur, aliquid intellegere in actu, nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata. [...] Unde manifestum est quod adhoc quod intellectus actu intellegat, non solum accipiendo scientiam de novo, sed etiam utendo scientia iam acquisita, requiritur actus imaginationis et ceteram virtutum.

[30] Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 56.

[31] Kenny, p. 43. For a detailed account of Aquinas's understanding of human intellect, see Kenny, pp. 41-58.

[32] *ST* 1a., 84.6: Ad primum ergo dicendum quod per verba illa Augustini datur intellegi quod veritas non sit totaliter a sensibus expectanda. Requiritur enim lumen intellectus agentis, per quod immutabiliter veritam in rebus mutablius cognoscamus, et discernamus ipsas res a similitudinibus rerum.

the human soul, he leaves some room for ideas of divine illumination.[33] Whilst human beings possess the capacity for thought without the need of illumination, he does not altogether remove God from human cognition:

> [T]he human soul knows everything in the divine ideas, and [...] by participation in them we know everything. For the intellectual light in us is nothing more than a participating likeness of the uncreated light in which the divine ideas are contained.[34]

Thus even if all knowledge begins with sense-experience, human beings may not fully attain knowledge of what transcends the sensible world through reflection on the data of sense experience. Hence rationalisation may lead to knowledge about the physical world, but human cognition is subordinate to faith in the realm of the supra-natural. Only with faith, Aquinas argues, can the revealed truths of Christianity become to the Christian faith what 'the first principles are to a discipline evolved by natural reason' (*ST* 2a2æ., 1.7). In other words: the revealed truths contained, for example in the Creed, are not self-evident, cannot be rationalised and must therefore be believed.[35]

The difficulty of believing in a religious truth that cannot be rationalised is at the centre of the jest-book anecdote mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It is also the subject of a Middle English Easter sermon from London, British Library, MS Royal 18 B XXIII, whose author cautions his listeners with regard to the mystery of the Resurrection: '[Þ]e principall mynde þ*at* þ*o*u shalte haue in þe blisse of heaven shall be þ*at* þ*o*u shalte leve þoo þinges þat passeþ þi witt' (*Middle English Sermons*, p. 128). The sermon uses the Eucharist as an example to illustrate the importance for a 'lewd man'

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[33] See *ST*, 1a., 79.4. For Aquinas's deviation from Latin Averroism with regard to the agent intellect, see Colish, p. 297.

[34] *ST* 1a., 84.5:
> [A]nima humana omnia cognoscat in rationibus aeternis, per quarum participationem omnia cognoscimus. Ipsum enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis nihil est aliud quam quædam participata similitudo luminis incredi, in quo continentur rationes æternæ.

[35] Colish discusses Thomas Aquinas's understanding of faith and of the non-self-evident nature of the articles of the faith (p. 298).

of following the church's teaching without, and argues that trusting solely in one's own sense perception leads down a slippery slope into heresy. '[ʒ]iff þou shuldest deme aftur þe sight of þin eye,' he thunders, 'þan þou shuldest erre aʒeyns þe feythe' (*Middle English Sermons*, p. 127). The fact that – contrary to the evidence of the senses – the Eucharist requires belief in the physical presence of Christ's body in the bread and wine after consecration, was a major sticking point for John Wyclif as well as Lollard thinkers.[36] Mirk remarks with some resignation in a Maundy Thursday sermon contained in the *Festial* that 'lewed men', who 'beth of many wordus and prowde in here wytte', tend to ask their priests more probing questions around Easter than any other time of the year (p. 124). This may at least partly be a result of the biblical silence on the particulars of many Easter events such as the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The following section will look at how this miraculous event of the Resurrection of Christ is visualised on the Middle English stage, focussing on the play which is most explicit with regard to performance particulars: the Chester Skinners' Play.

Constructing Fleshly Realities

The Chester Skinners' play (play 18) is the only surviving Middle English Resurrection play to contain extensive information on performance particulars in the stage directions and the play-text. The staging of the Resurrection scene in the Chester cycle is noticeably influenced by the ways artistic imagination tried to fill the gap left by the lack

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[36] For a general discussion of heretical (Lollard) positions on Eucharistic doctrine, see Richard Rex, *The Lollards* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 42-45 and Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 281-90). Heather Phillips demonstrates that Wyclif drew directly and indirectly on Baconian optical modals of natural causation and the multiplication of species for arguments against transubstantiation in 'John Wyclif and the Optics of the Eucharist', in *From Ockham to Wyclif* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 245-58. Phillips maintains that Wyclif's 'eucharistic theology was, through and through, optically conceived' (p. 254).

of explanation in the Gospels and narrative accounts of the Passion as to how exactly Christ rose and emerged from the tomb. A good example of a widespread way of depicting the scene can be found in the *Holkham Bible Picture Book*. In the upper register of an illustration which also depicts the Visit to the Sepulchre, a robed Christ emerges from the tomb holding a pennant depicting a cross, while the four soldiers guarding the sepulchre are stunned and falling over each other. Christ's wounds are clearly visible, as is his crossed nimbus.[37] In the Chester Skinners' play Christ rises to the sound of angelic singing of the hymn 'Christus resurgens a mortuis' (*Chester*, 18.153 sd), an antiphon usually sung between Easter and the feast of the Ascension.[38] As he emerges, Christ steps on one of the unconscious guards (*Chester*, 18.153 sd), who later recalls: 'He sett his foote upon my backe | that everye lythe beganne to cracke' (*Chester*, 18.274-75). This triumphal gesture, which is associated generally with victory in combat but more specifically also with the victory of the virtues over the vices, is often depicted in medieval art.[39] Although the staging of the Chester *Resurrection* is informed by iconographic convention, the play does not aim merely at visualising a historical event. It reflects the late medieval epistemic valorisation of sight by offering a tangible demonstration of the mystery behind one of the central doctrines of Christianity. In addition to thus validating the mystery, the play also underscores its continuing relevance to the audience.

In the Chester Skinners' play, as in all other surviving Middle English Resurrection plays, the first visible appearance of the risen Christ is to the audience

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[37] See Brown, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book*, plate 65, pp. 79-80.

[38] Brian Murdoch, *Cornish Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), p. 68. See also Duffy, p. 30. The Towneley Resurrection moment is equally accompanied by the singing of the hymn 'Christus resurgens' (*Towneley*, 26.229 sd), even though it is only clear from the subsequent Visit to the Sepulchre that the voices of two angels are to be heard. The York Carpenters' play merely states: 'Tunc "Jesu resurgente"' (*York*, 38.186 sd).

[39] For pictorial examples, see Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtuers [sic] and the Vices in Medieval Art from Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century* (London: Warburg Institute, 1939, repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), plates X and XI.

alone. Although the guards at the tomb later inform Pilate how Christ 'through his might ys risen agayne' (*Chester*, 18.244), the stage directions and cues in the play text suggest that they are asleep or unconscious as Christ steps out of the tomb. Thus after seeing the empty tomb, a startled Primus Miles admits: 'I wott not, witterlye, | whether I be on sleepe or waken' (18.192-93). The stage directions specify after the second soldier has spoken: 'Tunc taget socium et de somno surgere coget' (18.201 sd). The second soldier defends the guards' inability to stop Christ from leaving to Pilate, complaining that Christ caused the guards to fall asleep (18.247-48), while the third guard claims they were 'bemased and in a swoone' (18.264). The basis for the unconsciousness of the guards is to be found in a passage in the gospel of Matthew, which describes them as becoming like dead men upon beholding the angel at the tomb (see Matthew 28. 4).

As Woolf notes, two traditions developed with regard to the state of the soldiers during the Resurrection: while a "naturalistic view" held that they neglected their duty and fell asleep, the *Gesta Pilati* has them unconscious and immobilised as a result of being in a trance (Woolf, pp. 275-76). The surviving Middle English Resurrection plays vary with regard to the interpretation of the events they follow. While the York Carpenters' pageant seems to subscribe to the *Gesta Pilati*-version and has its soldiers freeze with terror and dismay (*York*, 38.369-70), the N-Town Resurrection play sees sleepy soldiers lie down one by one. Based on the biblical association of sleep (at the wrong time) with spiritual death or incredulity, medieval exegesis frequently considers the sleeping soldiers at the tomb as embodiments of disbelief.[40] The Chester Skinners' play combines both traditions by leaving it unclear as

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[40] For a discussion of the motif of the sleeping soldier and its exegetical roots in the visual arts, see Schiller, III, 75.

to whether the guards at the tomb fall asleep or are captured in a trance, but reinforces their association with disbelief through a reversal of the order of biblical events.

Unlike any other surviving Middle English Resurrection play, the Chester Resurrection stages the waking of the soldiers and their exchange with Pilate and the high priest before the arrival of the three Marys at the tomb. Their response to the sight of the empty tomb is replete with references to sense perception and particularly visual perception. When the first soldier suddenly awakes after Christ has left the sepulchre, he is blinded and shaken:

> PRIMUS   So bright abowt ys hereby
> MILES   that my hart wholey
>   owt of slough ys shaken. (*Chester*, 18.187-89)

The second soldier, also blinded and disoriented by the 'wonder cleare' (18.195) around him, equally complains about his heart breaking through his chest (18.200-01), while the third appears immobilised: 'Marred I am, both mayne and might; | to move have I noe mayne' (18.212-13). He can, however, make out the source of the dazzling light: the 'two beastes' positioned at either end of the tomb (18.214). Blindness occurs frequently in the New Testament both in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense. Used as a metaphor, it usually points to ignorance of the divinity of Christ as, for example, Christ's words to the Pharisees illustrate:

> Jesus therefore said to them: Yet a little while, the light is among you. Walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not. And he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth.[41]

The decided emphasis on blindness in the conversation between the guards is distinctive to the Chester play. At first glance, it calls to mind the legend of Longinus, in which spiritual blindness manifests as disbelief and is linked to physical blindness as an

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[41] John 12. 35: 'Dixit ergo eis Iesus | adhuc modicum lumen in vobis est | ambulat dum lucem habetis ut non | tenebrae vos comprehendant | et qui ambulat in tenebris nescit quo vadat [.]'

outward sign of such disbelief. [42] The soldiers repeatedly bear witness to Christ's divinity in their exchange with Pilate, Annas and Caiaphas (see *Chester*, 18.202-09, 18.218-33). Yet the dazzled, frightened and immobilised guards of the Chester Skinners' play serve as examples of the consequences of faithlessness, rather than of the illumination of the spiritually blind, as they approach their task with strong belief in their capacity to see. When commissioned to guard the tomb, the first soldier urges his fellows to take up positions that would allow them to see 'yf that he ryse and would goe' (*Chester*, 18. 147). And yet, their corporeal eyes fail them miserably when confronted with the divine light surrounding the empty tomb. The guards are in this play literally blind to the truth of what is happening, because they rely on the wrong set of eyes – their carnal eyes rather than the eyes of faith. Even though the soldiers can be heard referring to the prophecy of the Resurrection (18.224-25) and recognising Christ as 'Goddes Sonne verey' (18. 227), they accept the bribe offered by Pilate.

In a discussion of the role of the guards in the Chester Skinners' play we should not forget that they are represented by actors drawn from the local lay community. [43] Any re-enactment of biblical events through living actors transports the past into the medieval present and at the same time locates this present in the biblical past. It thus underlines the Christian conception of time as both linear and cyclical as well as the timelessness of Christian truth. [44] Moreover, as Kablitz points out, representation and participation necessarily coincide at least to a certain degree in medieval scriptural

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[42] The Chester Crucifixion pageant identifies Longinus as the soldier who pierces Christ's side with a spear and expands somewhat on his blindness – he has been blind 'this seaven yeare' (*Chester*, 16A.375) – but gives little information about the miraculous restoration of his sight. In a profession of his new-found faith he leaves, however, no doubt that his initial blindness is to be understood as spiritual blindness: 'Of mercye, lord, I thee nowe praye, | For I wyste not what I did' (*Chester*, 16a.398-99).

[43] American scholarship in particular has put forward the thesis in recent years that the Middle English biblical drama functions as a kind of theatrical self-portrait of a civic, Christian community. See, for example, Beckwith's studies of the York cycle.

[44] For a discussion of Christian concepts of time and their influence on narrative structures, see Andreas Kablitz, 'Representation and Participation: Some Remarks on Medieval French Drama', in *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kablitz and Alison Calhoun (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 194-205.

drama (p. 201). However the Chester Resurrection pageant does not only blur the distinctions between ongoing and represented reality, between actor and spectator, through the act of re-enactment on the streets of medieval Chester. By resurrecting Christ on stage, the play places the risen Saviour directly in front of the audience's gaze. This underscores – to borrow Ernst Bloch's terminology – the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* (simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous) inherent in biblical drama through yet another deviation from (and expansion on) the biblical account of the Resurrection: the risen Christ speaks.

Christ's initial appeal, 'Earthlye man that I have wrought, | awake out of thy sleepe' (18.154-55), immediately establishes for the audience through the use of the second person pronoun the contemporary relevance of his words concerning the virtues of repentance (18.164-66) and the necessity to receive the Eucharist in a state of grace (18. 172-85).[45] The interpersonality of address continues to collapse the frames of worldly and salvific time throughout the speech, thus including the audience into the ethical realm of the play. This is evident, for example, in the invitation the character of Christ issues to read him as a figure of the Eucharist:

> JESUS And that bread that I *you* give,
> *your* wicked life to amend,
> becomes my fleshe through *your* beleeffe
> and doth release *your* sinful band. (*Chester*, 18.174-77; my emphasis)

Lumiansky and Mills note that the reference to 'youre beleefe' is somewhat difficult as it seems to suggest that 'an act of faith on the part of the recipient effects transubstantiation' (*Chester*, II, 282). However, regardless of its precise doctrinal implications, the use of the personal pronoun places the responsibility for the

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[45] Corresponding speeches occur in the Towneley and N-Town plays of the Resurrection before the Visit to the Sepulchre. York stands alone in following the tradition of the Latin liturgical drama and omitting such a speech. All speeches draw on existing lyrics in the tradition of the vernacular complaint (Woolf, p. 275).

transformation squarely on the listeners and underlines the importance of personal faith, a concern already introduced with the initial reference to sleep. In addition to pronominal deixis, shifts in verb tense from the past ('From heaven mans soule I *sought* | into a dungeon deepe', 18.158-59), to the present ('I *am*', 18.162), and the future ('Whoe eateth that bread, man or wife, | *shall* lyve with me withowt end', 18.172-73) help to expand contemporaneity to contain the biblical past, medieval present and eschatological future.[46] Thus the speech establishes a direct link between individual past deeds ('your wicked life'), individual fate in the Last Judgement and the immediate, yet eternal, presence of Christ. The latter is underlined by present propositions such as Christ's concluding warning to those who receive the Eucharist not in a state of grace: 'When hee ys dead, though fooles read | then ys he brought to payne and stryffe' (18.184-85).

Similar strategies of audience inclusion can be observed in the corresponding, much longer Towneley speech of the risen Christ. The Towneley Christ equally addresses himself to '[e]rthly man' (*Towneley*, 26.230) with the call '[w]ightly wake and slepe thou noght' (26.231), and he uses pronominal deixis to effect imaginative absorption into the play on the part of the spectator. However, the emphasis of his speech is less on Eucharistic doctrine than on mankind's (and therefore the listeners') implication in Christ's violent death on the cross.[47] He makes his listeners directly responsible: 'Thus was I spylt, | Man, for thi gylt' (26.273-75). The Christ-figures states unequivocally that the appropriate responses to the realisation of one's implication in his suffering and death are contrition and love: 'Thou must me luf that thus gaf than | My lyfe for thyne' (26.246-47). The speech is extraordinarily sensual owing to repeated visual and tactile references. Christ draws attention to the visual marks of his ordeal. He

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[46] Emphasis mine throughout.

[47] Stevens and Cawley note that the speech shows strong parallels with the lyric 'Thou Sinful man that by Me Goes' from London, British Library, Arundel MS 285 (*Towneley*, II, 605).

urges his audience: 'Behold how dere I wold the by! | My woundys ar weytt and all blody' (26.236-37). As in the speeches from the cross, the command to behold functions as a means to incorporate the spectator into the play-world through creating a mental and physical link between the speaking Christ and the viewer by means of visual rays. Like the Chester Resurrection, the Towneley play provides an immediate experience of the risen Christ and thus bridges the gap between believing and experiencing, between faith and knowledge. Theatrical make-believe here functions as a means of persuading the audience of the reality of the Resurrection.

An immediate experience of the risen Christ is not the first proof of the Resurrection offered to most biblical characters. For the soldiers, the three Marys as well as some of the apostles, the first evidence of the Resurrection is the physical absence of the corpse from the tomb. Physical encounters with the resurrected Christ follow. The next two sections of this chapter aim to illustrate how plays which dramatise the responses of Christ's followers, both to his absence from the tomb, and to subsequent encounters with him in the flesh, explore the relation between belief and bodies through the (mis-)location of belief in the Resurrection as having visible or tangible evidence for its occurrence.

Limited Visions

The N-Town collection contains a dramatisation of the Resurrection which is distinct from those in the Chester and York cycles and the Towneley collection. The Resurrection is here staged as the resuscitation of Christ's body through the reunion with his soul. It merges with Christ's apocryphal appearance to Mary, which is also

staged in the Cornish *Ordinalia* and links the two parts of the Harrowing of Hell (plays 34 and 36). Christ's soul announces the Resurrection directly to the audience before the event:

> ANIMA CHRISTI   Now wele I rysyn flesch and felle,
>   Þat rent was for ʒoure sake.
>   Myn owyn body þathynge in rode,
>   And, be þe Jewys nevyr so wode,
>   It xal aryse, both flesch and blode.
>   My body now wyl I take. (*N-Town*, 35.67-74)

The stage directions immediately following these lines spoken by Anima Christi suggest that the actor playing Christ's soul walks over to the corpse of Christ, embodied by another actor, who then rises and addresses the audience in a short speech. This speech underlines Christ's regained physicality through references to his physical suffering in the Passion. Thus the Christ-figure observes: 'My flesch was betyn to þe bon, | My blood I bledde clere' (*N-Town*, 35.79-80). The emphasis on the physicality of Christ's body continues throughout the subsequent play, which dramatises the announcement to the three Marys, as well as Peter and John's race to the sepulchre.

The dialogue of the three Marys in which the women frequently voice their desire to see, hear or touch the broken body of Christ is replete with references to sense perception. Thus Mary Magdalene urges her companions: 'Go we with salvys for to leche | Cryst' (*N-Town*, 36.3-4). And Mary Salome declares that '[o]n þe woundys we wold haue eyn' (36.31), before adding: 'We wold hym towch' (36.37). Consequently, the women conceive of the absence of Christ's body from the tomb first and foremost as a "denial" of a physical encounter. Mary Magdalene foregrounds the absence of Christ's body from the tomb when she tries to make sense of the sight of the empty sepulchre, where not too long ago the body that 'bledde bowndyn in bere' (36.40), the 'body with wounde' (36.44) was buried. Mary Jacobi bemoans their inability to embalm and thus

touch the broken body of Christ with its 'woundys depe and wyde' (36.50), and a similar sentiment is also expressed by Mary Salome when she grieves: 'I wold han softyd his sore dent' (36.57). Only Mary Magdalene makes an attempt at interpreting what she perceives (the emptiness of the tomb) when suggesting that the Jews are to blame for the absence of the corpse (36.43-44). Nevertheless, she and her companions accept the angelic explanation.

The evidentiary value of the visible emptiness of the tomb is at the centre of the following scene in which the women inform the apostles of the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene's news that '[the] Lord is resyn agayn' (*N-Town*, 36.98) meets with mild scepticism on the part of Peter:

> PETRUS   Sey me, systeryn, with wurdys blithe,
>   May I troste to þat ȝe say?
>   Is Cryst resyn ageyn to lyve
>   Þat was ded and clode in clay? (36.111-14)

Peter's words are reminiscent of the widespread late medieval distrust of women as unreliable witnesses. The conventional view of women in the Middle Ages was one of intellectual inferiority on account of their perceived biological and social inferiority as well as their dependency on men in terms of creation.[48] As Owst points out, homilies and sermons constantly warned against the 'queyntise and whiles of women', which are also the target of a misogynist diatribe delivered by the apostle Paul in the corresponding scene at the beginning of the Towneley *Thomas Indie* play (p. 385).

The Towneley Peter's astonishment at the women's news of the Resurrecion finds expression in the exclamation, 'Thou carpys wast! | It is som spirite or els som gast' (*Towneley*, 26.7-8). Yet it is Paul who warns, drawing on the Epistles, that '"There is

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[48] See for example, Aquinas's discussion of women in *Summa theologiæ*, XIII: *Man Made to God's Image (1a. 90-102)*, ed. by Edmund Hill (1964), quæstio 92.

no trust in womans saw, | No truth faith to belefe'" (26.29-30). When Mary Magdalene persists in claiming to have met and spoken to Christ in the flesh, despite Paul's rational conclusion that since they all saw him die on the cross (*Towneley*, 28.13-18), Christ cannot be alive, Paul embarks on a 24-line tirade against the 'quayntyse' and 'gyle' of women (28.32). It culminates in the following assertion:

> PAULUS   Therfor trast we not trystely
> Bot if we sagh it witterly;
> Then wold we trastly trow.
> In womans saw affy we noght,
> For thay ar fekill in word and thoght;
> This make I myne avowe. (28.47-52)

In medieval faculty psychology, the mental capacities of the perceiver are central to perceptual cognition, as is illustrated in Chaucer's 'Boece', where Lady Philosophy maintains: '[F]or al that evere is iknowe, it is rather comprehendid and knowen, nat aftir his strengthe and his nature, but aftir the faculte (that is to seyn, the power and nature), of hem that knowen' (book V, prosa 4, ll. 137-41). It would therefore seem only understandable that the apostle would like to see for himself.

While the Towneley Paul expressly makes a link between seeing the empty tomb and establishing the credibility of the women's account, the N-Town apostles Peter and John at first give a rather different sentiment as an explanation for their express desire to visit the sepulchre themselves. Instead of showing overt mistrust of the women, they profess joy at the news they bring. John declares: 'I wyl go renne in hast, iwys, | And loke my Lord yf I may se' (*N-Town*, 36.121-22), prompting Peter to announce: 'For joye also I renne with the' (36.123). However, it is noticeable that all three women invoke the authority of the angel from whom they received the news of the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene points out that '[a]n aungel us bad right þus, sertayn | To þe, Petyr, þat we xulde telle' (36. 99-100), while Mary Jacobi maintains that she gives 'trewe recorde | By

wurdys þat þe aungel tolde' (36.105-06). And Mary Salomé insists: 'And so an aungel us tolde þis day | With opyn voys and speche expres' (36.117-18). The women's insistence on higher authority suggests an awareness of the possible lack of credibility of their words.

Moreover, the exchange between Peter and John at, or in, the empty tomb points to a different motivation than simply joy. In accordance with the biblical account, the disciples repeatedly describe what they *see*: the emptiness of the tomb; the shroud; the napkin that was wrapped around Christ's head (*N-Town*, 36. 126-34). The tomb has to be a sculpted, spacious structure, perhaps akin to the Easter Sepulchres in churches, so it is possible that the audience is not able to see (or can only partially see) the items they are describing. [49] From inside the tomb John declares:

> JOHANNES The same sudary and þe same shete
> Here with my syth I se both tweyn.
> Now may I wele knowe and wete
> Þat he is risen to lyve ageyn! (36.135-38)

John seems to be willing to accept the physical absence of Christ as proof of the Resurrection. By making the sight of the empty tomb the corporeal origin and requirement for knowing the truth of the Resurrection, he thus apparently affirms the epistemic value attached to vision in later medieval Aristotelianism.

For one of medieval Aristotelianism's chief proponents, Roger Bacon, vision was undoubtedly the queen of the senses. 'Vision alone reveals the differences of things, since by means of it we search out experimental knowledge of all things that are in the heavens and in the earth,' he asserts in the *Perspectiva* (*Opus Majus: A Translation*, II,

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[49] Duffy points out that in many churches, the Easter sepulchre was a permanent feature of the overall architecture, while others had timber constructions (p. 32). For an example of such a timber structure, see Gibson's description of the Clopton Easter sepulchre at Long Melford (pp. 92-93).

419).[50] Even suspicious Augustine concedes that 'among the senses the eyes play a leading role in acquiring knowledge,' and that we therefore understand seeing as apprehending physically and cognitively.[51] The epistemic pre-eminence of sight has classical roots and is bound up with a belief that vision is generically different from the other bodily senses.[52] Thus Plato observes in the *Timaeus*:

> In my opinion vision is the cause of the greatest advantages for us because most of what we are discussing now would not have arisen and been established easily and nothing could have been said of universal matters, if we would not have seen the sun and the heaven before.[53]

Albert the Great equally holds that sight is of the greatest use to human beings because it is versatile:

> Let us speak of all senses separately, firstly of vision, because vision is the most versatile: it grasps both transient and intransient things and apprehends its sense objects not just in one direction but in several.[54]

The notion that vision is the bodily sense most compatible with the rational and spiritual life of the human soul is at the root of Thomas Aquinas's pronouncements concerning the primacy of sight. '[S]ight,' he claims, 'because it does not involve physical change on the part of either the object or the organ is the most spiritual, the highest of the senses, with the widest range of objects.'[55] The nobility and versatility of sight is also evoked by Trevisa, who states that it is 'more sotil and more lifliche þan

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[50] See also *The 'Opus Majus'*, II, 2: 'Visus solus ostendit nobis rerum differentias: per illum enim exquirimus certas experientias omnium quae in coelis sunt et in terra.'

[51] *Confessions*, p. 211 (X.35).

[52] For examples, hierarchies of the senses, see Woolgar, pp. 23-24, and Gino Casagrande and Christoph Kleinhenz, 'Literary and Philosphical Perspectives on the Wheel of the Five Senses in Longthorpe Tower', *Traditio*, 41 (1985), pp. 311- 27. The pre-eminence of sight in Antiquity and the Middle Ages is reflected in memory training, which often recommends visualisation as a mnemonic technique as Carruthers has shown in *The Book of Memory*.

[53] Plato, *Timaeus*, p. 44: 'Uisus enim iuxta meam sententiam causa est maximi commodi plerisque non otiose natis atque institutis ob id ipsum quod nunc agimus; neque enim de uniuersa re quisquam quaereret nisi prius stellis sole caeloque visis.'

[54] The Latin text is quoted in Dietl, p. 472: '[D]icamus singillatim de omnibus sensibus, et primo de visu, eo quod ipse plurium est differentiarum: comprehendit enim et corruptibilia et incorruptibilia et apprehendit suum sensatum non in una medii dispositione, sed in pluribus.'

[55] *ST* 1a., 78.3: 'Visus autem, quia est absque immutatione naturali et organi et objecti est maxime spiritualis, et perfectior inter omnes sensus, et communior.'

oþir wittis' (*Properties*, I, 111) because sight apprehends a range of objects from a distance and 'distingwiþ in an esy manere bytwene þinges þat ben isene by þe kinde of þe more noble þinges and þe disposicioun of þe lyme (*Properties*, I, 112).[56] For Bacon, in contrast, the primacy of sight is grounded in the geometrical principles which underlie both the external world and the internal structure of the eye, which he conceives of as spherical. Consequently, sensible species propagate along perpendicular lines in vision, which for Bacon 'signifies certainty and intelligibility' (Biernoff, p. 81) and thus forms the basis for the paradigmatic relationship between sight and knowledge that he postulates in the *Opus Majus*.

Although the response of the N-Town John quoted above appears to suggest that visual confirmation through the empty tomb engenders belief in the mystery of the Resurrection, the N-Town play seeks to reveal the limits of visual perception. Firstly, for the women at the sepulchre, recognition of the truth about the Resurrection is not brought about by the sight of the empty tomb but by the words of the angel. Thus the play affirms the traditional pre-eminence of hearing as the principle vehicle for learning and instruction as well as its alignment with faith. Secondly, the evidentiary value of the empty tomb is qualified in the course of the play, for example when John declares: 'As women seyd, so haue we fownde' (*N-Town*, 36.151). The notion, evident in these words, that seeing the tomb merely confirms the women's claims about Christ's absence from it, is bolstered and elaborated in the second apostle's concluding words to the episode, which are aimed at the assembled disciples:

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[56] However, sight is also 'more worþi þan oþir wittis' (*Properties*, I, 111), Trevisa writes, because it provides both experience of the world and an indication of how this experience has shaped the soul. The eye is 'þe token of þe soule' (*Properties*, I, 178), showing its trouble, as well as its delight.

> PETRUS   The trewth to tellyn, it passyth oure witt!
>   Wethyr he be resyn thorwe his owyn might,
>   Or ellys stolyn out of his pitt
>   Be sum man prevely be nyght.
>   That he is gon we saw with syght,
>   For in his graue he is nowth.
>   We cannot tellyn in what plight
>   Out of his graue þat he is browth. (*N-Town*, 36.159-66)

The N-Town Peter's admission 'it passeth oure witt' summarises the difficulty of making sense of sense perceptions explored in the course of the play. The character's attempts at rationalising what he sees, that is, his efforts to arrive at an explanation for the emptiness of the tomb, illustrate the limits of knowledge derived from the senses. The event(s) which lead to Christ's absence from the tomb – the mystery of the resurrection – eludes verification through the bodily senses. Thus the play carefully balances an affirmation of the epistemic value of sense perception against the metaphysical premises of Christianity by emphasising the limits of sense perception with regard to knowledge of the divine.

The Psychology of Doubt

The difficulty of interpreting information transmitted to the human mind by the senses is also a concern of those plays which dramatise physical encounters between Christ and his followers. The Gospels list between ten and thirteen manifestations of the risen Christ to a variety of people (Woolf, p. 278). The surviving Middle English cycles and collections of plays focus their attention on three particular appearances, which are covered in three (Chester; Towneley) or four (York; N-Town) plays respectively: Christ's encounter with Mary Magdalene in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea; his exchange with two disciples on the road to Emmaus; the appearance to the assembled

apostles and later to Thomas. All of the plays comment on the epistemic value of sense perception, yet it is the plays dealing with the incredulity of Thomas which give most room to human disbelief.[57] This holds especially true for the Towneley *Thomas of India* (play 28), the longest and most elaborate of all surviving Middle English Thomas plays.

Despite its title, only the second part of the Towneley *Thomas of India* play recounts the story of the incredulity of Thomas, which it dramatises as a debate between the apostles, followed by a penitential monologue delivered by Thomas and a concluding speech by Christ. The first half of the play centres on the conversation between Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene discussed earlier, as well as on Christ's first appearance to the ten apostles. The latter is interesting as a prelude to the Thomas episode, as it draws attention through the reactions of the apostles to the limits of understanding derived from sense perception, and establishes physical interaction with the risen Christ as a first step towards recognition of his godhead and manhood.

The manhood of the risen Christ is difficult to fathom, as Paul implicitly admits at the end of the race to the tomb, when he appeals to (the still invisible) Christ: 'Grauntt vs grace that we may yit | Thi light in manhede se' (*Towneley*, 28.103-04). When the reincarnated Christ appears in the midst of the assembled apostles, they recognise his divinity, yet fail to appreciate his corporeality. Thus Tertius Apostolus is taken by the 'red clethyng' (28.109) of the figure before him that so '[s]oftly on the erthe […] trade' (28.111), but assumes, wrongly, that it is the Holy Ghost in the shape of Christ

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[57] In accordance with the biblical account (John 20. 14-17), the N-Town *hortulanus*-episode, for example, gives the sense of hearing priority over sight. Mary Magdalene clearly mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener on the basis of sight. Recognition is only brought about by the word. Only when Jesus addresses Mary with 'M.A.R.I.A.' (*N-Town*, 37.37), does she recognise him as her 'mayster and Lorde' (*N-Town*, 37.38). Mary Magdalene's failure of sight is mirrored in the Emmaus plays in which two apostles, frequently named as Lucas and Cleophas, mistake Christ for a fellow pilgrim. In the surviving pilgrims' plays, it is not only the sense of sight that fails the apostles: their hearing is equally fallible, as the York Supper at Emmaus play (*York*, 40) illustrates. The apostles – here referred to only as I and II Peregrinus – firstly admit that they did not believe the words of the women who brought them the news of the Resurrection, and secondly fail to recognise the risen Christ, even when he debates the truth of the Resurrection with them.

that he perceives (28.107). The fourth apostle appears to agree, as he appeals to God to send his 'blissed bone' (28.117) so that they may, 'haue of hym a sight' (28.120), as does the fifth, who also longs to see the body which 'died on tre' (28.128). The reactions of the apostles illustrate the notion frequently expressed in the Augustinian tradition in particular, that according to which corporeal sight only provides limited and fallible understanding.

Despite its epistemic value and inherent nobility, sight was frequently considered the most fallible of all human senses in later medieval natural philosophical and theological discourses. Trevisa sums up this notion succinctly when he writes that the eyes can be 'enemyes and þeues and robbiþ mannes inwit' (*Properties*, I, 365) if the controlling will fails to negotiate the network of sensible species in the world and their correlative *phantasmata* in the human mind (Collette, *Species*, p. 25). The dangers inherent in the powerful forces exerted by *phantasmata* are illustrated in Chaucer's 'The Franklin's Tale', as Collette has demonstrated.[58] While things in the world have the power to impress themselves on the mind of the beholder through sight, it is ultimately the observer's mental capacity and his or her will that determine the way phantasms are received into thought.[59]

In a longish address to the assembled apostles based on Luke 24. 44-48, the character of Jesus criticises the apostles for their failure to believe in his 'manhede'

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[58] Carolyn P. Collette, 'Seeing and Believing in the Franklin's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 26 (1992), 395-410. Collette argues that 'Dorigens "derke fantasye" is an excellent example of sense experience producing, through species, phantasms which, uncontrolled by will operating through the rational faculties, multiply in strength and number' (p. 404).

[59] Collette, 'Seeing and Believing', p. 405. The potentially unhealthy consequences of losing one's grip on the image present in the imagination are illustrated by Arcite's fate in 'The Knight's Tale'. Out of prison and deprived of the sight of his beloved Emilye, Arcite can neither eat nor sleep as his 'celle fantastik', the front ventricle, is infected with 'manye', which causes him to lose control over his imagination and prevents him from storing new mental images. The love-sick Arcite is stuck with the mental image of Emilye. See Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Knight's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 37-66, ll. 1374, 1375. For an explanation of 'manye' see *Properties of Things*, I, 350. I am indebted to Dr Jacqueline Tasioulas of Clare College, Cambridge, for first bringing to my attention the impact of perceptual theory on Chaucer's works in her paper 'Lovesickness in Chaucer's Knight's Tale', delivered to the Department of English Studies at the University of Stirling on 28 September 2005.

(*Towneley*, 28.219), which he considers a 'dysseferance' (28.226). However, he implicitly acknowledges that only physical interaction with his resurrected body will banish the doubts of the fearful disciples and therefore invites them to '[g]rope and fele flesh and bone' (28.133) of his body and offers to eat with them.[60] Moreover, the Towneley Christ acknowledges that the disbelief of the apostles has its roots in their fear and grief following his death when he states: 'Youre hartes was fulfillyd with drede | Whyls I haue fro you bene' (27.217-18). The disciples confirm the link between their emotional states and their failure to recognise Christ, when, for example, the eighth apostle entreats his friends:

> OCTAVUS   Brethere, be we stabyll of thought,
> APOSTOLUS   Wanhope put we away,
>   Of mysbelefe that we be noght [.] (28.249-51)

Thus he leaves no doubt that it is despair ('wanhope') over the death of Christ on the cross, which causes them to have insufficient faith in God's mercy and power to acknowledge the corporeal Resurrection of Christ. Like the N-Town Virgin Mary, whose grief is so overwhelming that she implicitly questions the divine plan for redemption, the apostles here are in danger of challenging a central doctrine due to their 'wanhope'.

The influence of feelings and emotions on perception and belief is developed further in the debate between the apostles and a newly-arrived, sceptical Thomas following Christ's first appearance in their midst. The Towneley *Thomas of India* play stands alone in fleshing out the brief biblical reference to the incredulity of Thomas in a long, didactic sequence in the form of a formal debate, in which the apostles and Thomas take turns in advancing arguments for and against the bodily resurrection of

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[60] These instances are based on Luke 24. 39 and 24. 41-43 respectively.

Christ which are predominantly based in (sense) experience and perception.[61] Of all surviving Middle English Thomas plays, the Towneley *Thomas of India* play places most emphasis on the psychological motivation behind Thomas's incredulity and his scripturally warranted desire to touch Christ's side-wound.[62] Thomas emerges not as an unbeliever *per se* but as a human being, who would like to believe in the Resurrection if it were not for his grief-fuelled scepticism and over-reliance on verification through sense-perception.

Grief is foregrounded in the play when Thomas comes on stage lamenting the loss of Christ and reacts with irritation to Peter's news that Christ 'rose from deth to lyfe | And shewyd hym till [them] all' (*Towneley*, 28.303-04). 'Whannow, Peter, art thou mad?', he snaps and brings up Peter's earlier denial of Christ as evidence of his madness (28.05). Throughout the debate, Thomas repeatedly questions the reliability of the apostles' perceptions, and suggests that they have fallen victim to a kind of mass hysteria brought on by grief and wishful thinking. Thus he responds to Paul's assertion that Christ showed them his wounds and ate with them, speaking the following words:

> THOMAS   Fantom dyssauys the.
> Ye sagh hym not bodily;
> His gost it might well be,
> For to glad youre hartes sory
> In youre aduersyté. (28.322-26)

If not a phantom or a ghost, it could have been 'his cors that maide shewyng' (28.355), Thomas suggests and challenges the disciples' ability to distinguish a 'spyryte' (28.375)

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[61] Thomas in particular who employs the terminology of debate such as 'flyte', 'resons', and 'skyll'; (*Towneley*, 28.369-71) and makes repeated reference to the progress of the argument (*Towneley*, 28.385, 402, 421-22).

[62] The York Scriveners' pageant of the incredulity of Thomas shows formal similarities with the Towneley Thomas play, yet although it also contains a debate between Thomas and the rest of the apostles which advances some of the same points as the Towneley play, it is, at 102 lines, considerably shorter. The same holds true for the corresponding N-Town play (*N-Town*, 38), which stages an argument between Peter and Thomas. The Chester Saddlers' play (*Chester*, 19) only includes a brief exchange between Peter, Andrew and Thomas, in which Thomas immediately denies any belief in the words of his fellow disciples with the words: 'I leeve not tell I see' (*Chester*, 19.231).

from the resurrected Christ. Through the apostle's criticism of his fellows, the play thus makes much the same point as the N-Town Crucifixion play with its warnings against the dangers of emotional excess in the conversation between the Virgin Mary and John.

It becomes clear, however, that the real problem for Thomas in the Towneley *Thomas of India* – as for Peter and Paul earlier – lies with the lack of his own sensory experience which could act as confirmation of what is heard. When the seventh apostle replies positively to Thomas's question as to whether the apparition asked them to feel him, and stresses that '[h]is woundes had bene pyté| To towch that were bledand' (*Towneley*, 28.399-400), an increasingly exasperated Thomas accuses the disciples of being mentally weak with grief ('Youre resons ar defaced,' 28.402). He points out that Christ's 'cors that dyed on rood | Foreuer hath deth enbraced' (28.407-08) and dismisses a reference to Mary Magdalene's encounter with Christ in the garden (28.415-16) as 'womans witnes' (28.419). His trust in his own senses and judgement does not falter. 'Might I se Iesu, gost and flesh,' he boasts, '[g]ropyng shuld not gab me' (28.423-24), thus implying that touch is a more reliable instrument of authentication even than vision.

Although, according to the Church fathers, the tactile sense was often considered to be the most bestial of all human senses and the one which most threatens to degrade the human soul by dragging it away from the spiritual, touch plays a pivotal role in many medieval analyses of human sensation.[63] Trevisa provides a succinct summary of thinking on the tactile sense in *The Properties of Things*. Touch, he writes, is the least subtle and lowest of all human senses because, unlike sight or hearing, it requires close proximity. And yet 'þe wit of groping,' Trevisa writes, 'inprentiþ his

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[63] For a detailed assessment of Augustine's stance on touch, see Eugene Vance, 'Seeing God; Augustine, Sensation, and the Mind's Eye', in *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols, Andreas Kablitz and Alison Calhoun (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 13-29, especially pp. 16-17.

felinge in alle þe lymes of oþir wittis and so doþ none of þe oþir wittis' (*Properties*, I, 120-21). Hence, 'if þe groping is ilost alle þe wittis beþ ilost' (I, 120).[64] The belief expressed here that touch underpins all other senses goes back to Aristotle and is also manifest in the notion, prominent in both optical discourses as well as the late medieval popular understanding, that the agency of visual rays establishes direct contact – and therefore effectively touch – between the perceiver and the visible object (see chapter 1). Aristotle argues the fundamental necessity of touch for the survival of any embodied being at various points in *De anima*.[65] He takes his ideas about the primacy of touch rather far by claiming that 'men are well or poorly endowed with intelligence in proportion to their sense of touch' (p. 121 (II.9)). Yet this notion is taken up by Aquinas among others, who claims: 'And for this reason man is the most touch-perceptive of the animals and intelligent men the most touch-perceptive of men.'[66] However, the two senses of touch and sight are at either end of the medieval hierarchy of senses in terms of reciprocity. Just as sight (in the understanding of Bacon and his contemporaries) can be projective and introjective at the same time, touch was commonly considered to be present in an active mode (in the sense of touching something) as well as a passive mode (as "being touched" by something).[67]

The Towneley *Thomas of India* play captures the reciprocity of touch in its use of the hard heart as a metaphor for incredulity. His 'hart is hevy as led' (28.358) and 'hard as stele' (28.387) with grief over the loss of Christ, Thomas admits at various points in the play.[68] The play establishes a direct link between Thomas's feelings and his inability to believe in the words of his friends, for example when he tells the apostles: 'Thou sys

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[64] For an overview of medieval thinking on the subject of touch, see Woolgar, pp. 29-62.

[65] The fullest discussions can be found in *De anima*, II.9 and III.13.

[66] *ST* 1a., 76.5: 'Et propter hoc homo inter omnia animalia melioris est tactus et inter ipsos homines qui sunt melioris tactus, sunt melioris intellectus [.]'

[67] See Woolgar, p. 29.

[68] See also *Towneley*, 28.441, 453, 537-42.

soth: hard and heuy am I | To trow that ye me say' (28.537-38). Although the Thomas-figure acknowledges that grief steels him against being touched by news of the Resurrection, this bout of self-awareness does not stop him from accusing the apostles of only seeing an apparition of Christ because their 'hartes was full wo | And fownd with vanyté' (28. 549-50).

The Towneley Thomas provides an embodied example of the dangers of giving in to grief-fuelled 'wanhope', against which the eighth apostle warns after his encounter with Christ. Thomas's loss of faith in the divine power of Christ is inextricably linked with a correlative excessive valuation of sensory experience. The latter is illustrated, firstly, in Decimus Apostolus's plea to him to cease seeking sensory confirmation of the Resurrection and to simply '[t]row his rysyng by days threyn' (28.555) and, secondly, in Christ's subsequent warning to Thomas to let go of 'errowre' (28.563) and to 'let no wanhope [him] dere' (28.568).[69] However, as with the other apostles, it is the physical interaction with Christ that transforms the sceptic into a penitent witness to the truth, as Christ acknowledges when he remarks in his concluding monologue that none other than himself could have brought Thomas to believe (28.617-20). Only after the Thomas-figure has placed his hand in the side-wound of the re-appeared Christ does he cry out: 'Mercy, Iesu, for I se | Thi might that I not vnderstode' (28.571-72). Nevertheless, as Thomas's reference to vision illustrates, what is decisive even for the incredulous Towneley Thomas is not so much a re-evaluation of touch but a reappraisal of sight as a means of confirmation. However, the closing words to the play, spoken by Christ, realign the play with the subordination of sight to hearing implied in the biblical account. In a paraphrase of John 20. 29 the Towneley Christ concludes:

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[69] The reference to error here might not just refer to plain incredulity but also to the overt doubts of the power of God Thomas displays in the course of the debate. While he praises at one point 'Myghty God […] | That neuer dyed ne shall' (28.297-98), he comes rather close to saying God is dead on two occasions when he expresses fears about who might have the power to restore the God-Man Christ to life (see 28.340-44, 28.527-28).

> IESUS   All that [the Resurrection] trowes and not se,
> And dos after my lare,
> Euer blissid mot thay be,
> And heuen be theym yare. (28.645-48)

Through the inclusion of these words, which unequivocally give priority to the word, what is heard is played directly against what is seen. The audience are necessarily caught inbetween the competing contexts of both senses, as they are perceiving an audio-visual representation at the heart of which lies a divine mystery deemed inaccessible to the bodily human senses. Moreover, the relevance for the audience of the issues of the epistemic value of sensory perception and its relationship with faith that are raised in the play are underscored by the inclusive nature of Christ's statement quoted above, and his preceding reminder of the Last Judgement. Christ's warning that '[w]hoso hath not trowid right | To hell I shall theym lede' (28.625-26) might well be spoken with an eye firmly fixed on the watching and listening onlookers.

Conclusion

Middle English dramatisations of the Resurrection and Christ's subsequent appearances to the women as well as to his disciples exemplify the essence of the medieval "mystery play". Bringing Christ back to life on stage in the body of a living actor, the plays seek to underscore belief in the mystery of Christ's corporeal Resurrection on the third day after the Crucifixion by providing a direct sensory experience of the event, and thus of the risen Christ, for the audience. In doing so, the Resurrection plays both acknowledge and critique the human need for verification through the bodily senses and thus pick up on the conflicts between Christian Platonic metaphysics (as exemplified by Augustine)

and medieval Aristotelianism in a very different realm and a very different context – that of scholasticism.

Re-creating religious truths as sensible events, these plays offer sophisticated explorations of the relationship between belief and sensation. They palpably comment on later medieval debates surrounding the epistemic value of sensation (evident in the works of Bacon and Aquinas) through the biblical characters that bear witness to the Resurrection. In the Chester Skinners' play, the blinded and disorientated guards at the tomb serve as embodied examples of the much reiterated notion in Christian thought that the divine truth remains inaccessible to the corporeal senses, as well as to those lacking faith. In the N-Town and Towneley dramatisations of the race to the tomb, the apostles' responses to the news of the Resurrection (brought by the three Marys or Mary Magdalene) illustrate the difficulty of believing without having visual confirmation, which is epitomised in Christ's words at Emmaus (John 20. 29). At the same time, the apostles' responses in the N-Town and Towneley plays also point to the epistemic limits of vision. The fallibility of the latter sense is a main concern in the Towneley *Thomas of India*, which takes the audience through a variety of arguments for and against the truth of the Resurrection in its long, formal debate between Thomas and the other disciples.

The plays seek to ensure spectatorial engagement with the epistemological issues raised through encouraging the conviction that what is seen and heard is not only a believable representation of a past event, but *is* actually occurring in the present moment of watching. The biblical and contemporary realms are joined, firstly, through the act of re-enactment by delegates of the local community *per se*, and secondly, through direct audience address by the character of Christ immediately following his Resurrection. Moreover, the plays palpably explore the dynamics of the psychology of

incredulity. The apostles, especially the Towneley Thomas, frequently function as mouthpieces for common sense-based doubts about the possibility of the corporeal Resurrection of Christ – doubts which were not unknown to the medieval spectator, if we are to believe the Warwickshire priest, as well as John Mirk and the unknown author of the Easter sermon.

Conclusion

> But at that time, poor thing that I was, I loved to suffer and sought out occasions for such suffering. So, when an actor on stage gave a fictional imitation of someone else's misfortunes, I was the more pleased; and the more vehement the attraction for me, the more the actor compelled my tears to flow. There can be no surprise that an unhappy sheep wandering from your flock was infected by a disgusting sore. Hence came my love for sufferings, but not of a kind that pierced me very deeply; for my longing was not to experience myself such miseries as I saw on the stage. I wanted to hear stories and imaginary legends of sufferings which, as it were, scratched me on the surface. Yet like the scratches of fingernails, they produced inflamed spots, pus, and repulsive sores. That was my kind of life. Surely, my God, it was no real life at all?[1]

Augustine's concluding words to the second chapter of book three of his *Confessions* bear eloquent witness to the affective power of the theatrical image. For the young Augustine, the attraction of the theatre lies precisely in the emotional effect it produces in him. As Dox points out, his desire for the theatre was largely a 'lust for emotional intensity' (p. 14). The more intense the feelings evoked by the pangs of amorous suffering and sorrow presented on the stage by an actor, the more pleasurable his experience. One should note that Augustine's post-conversion attitude toward the theatre is conditioned by his neoplatonic distrust of sensual perception; moreover, he does not consider sharing the joy or sorrow of the actors as cathartic in the Aristotelian

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[1] *Confessions*, p. 37 (III.2). See also *St Augustine's Confessions*, I, 104:

> At ego tunc miser dolere amabam, et quaerebam, ut esset quod dolerem, quando mihi in aerumna aliena et falsa et saltatoria, ea magis placetbat actio histrionis meque alliciebat vehementius, qua mihi lacrimae excutiebantur. quid autem mirum, cum infelix pecus aberrans a grege tuo et inpatiens custodiae tuae, turpi scabie foedarer? et inde errant dolorum amores, non quibus altius penetrarer – non enim amabam talia perpeti, qualia spectare – sed quibus auditis et fictis tamquam in superficie raderer: quos tamen quasi ungues scalpentium fervindus tumor et tabes et sanies horrida consequebatur. talis vita mea numquid vita erat, deus meus?

sense of purging the individual spectator from negative emotions. Just as the emotions presented on stage are feigned, the compassion they elicit in the spectator is contrived, and ultimately false, according to Augustine (see Dox, pp. 15-16). Theatre, in other words, perverts human emotions (Dox, p. 15). This is an accusation which is reiterated in much the same form in the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* some one thousand years later by an author keen to lay on the scriptural theatre's doorstep a host of sins and social ills.

This study has primarily been an inquiry into the ways in which early English drama produces and theorises emotions. The first chapter focused on scholastic and modern conceptions of emotions and the function attributed to emotion in later medieval affective piety. The following chapters investigated the links between theatrical means by which emotions are induced in the audience; they also examined the nexus of philosophical and theological ideas which not only inform the creation of theatrical images, but colour the biblical narratives presented on the late medieval religious stage. A brief recapitulation will highlight the main points and the contribution this study makes to existing scholarship in the field.

Strategies of Emotionalisation

For fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Christian audiences, the stories staged in biblical drama were true historical narratives, not fictions, and reminders of their religious truthfulness were readily available in devotional art and architecture, literature, at Mass, or in sermons. Yet biblical drama is also a genre which, as Enders puts it, 'did something *in* real life and *to* real life', a genre that reshapes biblical history to suit the needs and tastes of a lay urban viewing public, and therefore it combines a variety of narrative,

visual, and verbal rationalisations with a powerful emotionalising tendency that manifests itself in a number of ways.[2]

All of the plays discussed in this study seek to establish the dramatic re-creation of biblical history as a liminal event in three ways: by using civic spaces as a backdrop for performance; by evoking a homeostatic unity of past, present, and future; and by breaking the mimetic frame. They frequently cast their audiences as participatory agents in the simulation of the sacred as a sensual reality, which is first and foremost an audio-visual reality. The plays make deliberate use of costuming, stage properties and special effects from pyrotechnics to trapdoors to create spectacular stage images based on iconographic conventions, which suggests an awareness of the frequently reiterated notion in visual and mnemonic theory that striking images 'penetrate the hearts and [...] wound the minds' much more quickly and more effectively than words alone.[3] This notion, which also underpins the proliferation of devotional art in the later Middle Ages, is based on a conception of sight as a form of touch. Augustine's account of his youthful theatrical exploits in Carthage alludes to this widespread conception when he describes the theatrical images as 'scratching' him and leaving a wound, albeit a superficial one. However, it is my contention in this study that the emotionality of a religious play is more than simply a matter of creating a spatio-temporal continuum akin to that of ritual and religious practice, as is often implied in existing scholarship. Nor can the emotional impact of a religious play be fully appreciated and explained through the medieval intellectual traditions and theories associated with the visual process alone. Emotionality, I have argued here, is a question of embodiment.

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[2] Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 11.

[3] Quoted in Michael Camille, 'Mimetic Identification and Passion Devotion in the Later Middle Ages: A Double-Sided Panel by Meister Francke', in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late Medieval Culture*, ed. by A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos and R. M. Schluseman (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), pp. 184-210 (p. 197). The quotation is usually attributed to an Augustinian monk writing during the lifetime of Meister Francke, i. e. the first half of the fifteenth century.

Augustine's remarks about his youthful love of theatre with which I opened this conclusion draw attention to the significance of embodiment. For the late adolescent Augustine, it was the fact that love stories and tragedies were acted out by living bodies on the stages of Carthage that touched him and ensured that the 'love for suffering' (*Confessions,* p. 37 (III.2)) presented on stage could take hold of his body and soul like an infection. The corporeality of both actors and spectators has only recently come to the attention of medieval drama scholars, even though its influence on shaping the spectator's engagement with the theatrical event has long been recognised in theatre and performance studies. Where a spectator is physically engaged in a performance, he or she is engaged – first and foremost – with the material reality of the performance rather than its representational aspects. Approaching biblical plays with an eye to the empirical evidence from the cognitive sciences which already informs contemporary theatre studies can thus help to complicate our understanding of audience response processes because it offers an insight into the physical engagement of the perceiver and the perceived, as this study illustrates.

How does watching a biblical play leave a lasting mark? Firstly, the biblical plays examined in this study, particularly dramatisations of Christological suffering, can be considered to encourage "tactile empathy" in the onlooker. Neuropsychological enquiries into human perception have revealed that the traditional alignment of seeing and feeling has a basis in sensorimotor fact, in that the audio-visual perception of actions and emotions in others triggers the simulation of these actions and emotions in the brain and body of the perceiver. This helps us to understand the stage images which form Passion plays not merely as manifestations of the incarnational preoccupations of the later Middle Ages, but as an attempt to elicit a pre-reflective understanding of Christ's suffering – an attempt to solve the 'problem of other minds' (Iacoboni, p. 653).

The plays discussed here – the N-Town trial sequence and Crucifixion and the York *Crucifixio Christi* – communicate sensations first and foremost through minute attention to visible action and running commentaries on the stage action. Extended scenes of punitive and judicial violence in trial and crucifixion episodes are thus not primarily an expression of a generally brutal culture, as Gatton alleges (p. 80), nor a vestige of mnemonic theory, nor indeed a reflection of medieval spirituality with its intense focus on Christological suffering. They re-create for the audience the experience of painful touch, thus allowing them to feel tactile empathy with Christ, thus laying the neural groundwork, as it were, for empathetic sharing and potentially a true *imitatio Christi*.

Yet the emotional impact of a Passion play (or indeed of any other biblical play) does not rest on the elicitation of tactile empathy alone, but also depends on the emotional displays ascribed to the characters on stage. In the section of the *Confessions* quoted earlier, Augustine makes it clear that it was the feigned, the impersonated expression of misery that made his eyes well up in the theatre. Recent neuroscientific and psychological research suggests that dramatic emotional displays, whether they be of the kind Augustine witnessed in Carthage, or which a fifteenth-century citizen of York saw during a Corpus Christi play, or we observe on the contemporary stage have one thing in common: The actor's use of language and non-linguistic modalities of expression (gestural-mimic, auditory visual) not only performs an emotion, but also evokes the production and circulation of emotions in the audience. In *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, Kolve suggested that '[t]he only real feelings presented in a theater, or in a medieval marketplace on Corpus Christi day, are those induced in the audience; the rest is feigning' (p. 138). Feigning, however, is done with a high degree of realism, if we are to believe the play-texts. While the emotional displays in the plays discussed here broadly follow iconographic and literary conventions, the reactions and emotions

represented – from Mary's sorrow at Calvary to Thomas's resigned doubt – are credible and can function as stimuli for emotional contagion responses. Moreover, audience addresses, such as Mary's words to the female spectators in the Towneley *Crucifixion*, Abraham's comments in the Brome *Play of Abraham and Isaac*, and Jesus's words from the cross at the end of the York Crucifixion, suggest that a certain amount of emotional convergence between the character and the audience is actually aimed for by the playwrights.

Tactile empathy and emotional contagion are strategies of emotionalisation which are automatic, pre-reflective responses based on sensory engagement with a kinetic performance event. Hence they are not culturally or historically contingent, although the cognitive processes that they invariably colour are. Reading medieval drama against research into such phenomena can thus give us a glimpse of the medieval mind, but also explain why the medieval play of God, so rooted in specific localities and in late medieval affective piety, can be relied upon to draw sell-out audiences and have a powerful impact on modern, mostly secular spectators. Since William Poel's staging of *Everyman* in 1901, almost every extant medieval English religious play has been performed at least once.[4] While some scholars, including Beckwith, conceive of revivals as too tight a corset for historical reflection about the plays, such events still draw largely appreciative sell-out audiences. 'Entertaining fun', 'magnificently spectacular', 'an unforgettable experience' – those are the qualities members of the audience associated with the performances of the York cycle of biblical plays in 2000 and 2003.[5] One spectator at the 2003 performances valued them as 'an opportunity to find out about

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[4] For an overview of modern productions, see John McKinnell, 'Modern Productions of Medieval English Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 287-325.
[5] Vivienne Smith, *The Press*, 26 June 2003, Readers' Letters
<http://www.thisisyork.co.uk/york/archive/2000/06/26/york_news_readersletters2ZM.html>
[accessed 9 July 2005]; Margret Lawson, *The Press*, 18 June 2000, Readers' Letters
<http://www.thisisyork.co.uk/york/archive/2003/06/18/york_news_readersletters2808ZM.html>
[accessed 9 July 2005].

God, without it being a pressure religion-selling crusade'.[6] For modern spectators, the actions and emotional expressions performed by the actors are just as contagious as for their fifteenth- or sixteenth-century counterparts, because embodiment breaks down the cultural and linguistic barriers between actor and performer and facilitates sharing.

The expectation of a mimetic engagement on the part of the audience, expressed by audience-attentive figures in some of the biblical plays discussed here, is underscored by performance records and commentary on the religious stage. Together these are indicative of a performative understanding of emotional production: emotions can be induced in the observer through the performance of expressive behaviours associated with them – provided, of course, that the observer wills them to occur. This study thus contributes to a growing body of scholarship providing cultural evidence for a performative model of affect as the default mode for the Middle Ages.

The significance of this model for the mimesis of actors merits further investigation, however. Geoffrey of Vinsauf remarks in the *Poetria Nova*: 'The outward emotion corresponds with the inward; outer and inner man are affected alike. If you act the part of this man, what, as a reciter, will you do? Imitate genuine fury[.]'[7] Current psychological research also suggests that the performance of feeling does not only bring emotions into being in the onlooker, but also has a self-altering effect. This is a phenomenon commented on already by the second-century Greek writer and satirist Lucian of Samosata who recounts the story of an actor playing the part of Ajax who

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[6] Paul Hudson, *The Press*, 18 June 2003, Readers' Letters,
<http://www.thisisyork.co.uk/york/archive/2003/06/18/york_news_readersletters2808ZM.html>
[accessed 9 July 2005]. More recently, a reader of *The Press* online with the (in this context) rather interesting username leninwasright commented on a report on the 2010 production: 'Terrific event. Particularly as this is York-specific, it's live, it's amateur, it's great spectacle and it's been going on since the C14 at least. What a wonderful place York is.' Quoted in Charles Hutchison, '2010 York Mystery Plays Draws [sic] the Crowds', *The Press*, 12 July 2010, <http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/8266388.2010_York_ Mystery_Plays_draws_the_crowds/> [accessed 15 July 2010].
[7] *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. by Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1967), p. 90.

shows clear signs of having gone mad in the process.[8] Stories of the psychic risks of theatre, originating in the seed of emotion sown by play-acting, raise questions about the effects of impersonation on the actors in biblical plays, which could be addressed through the (re-)examination of documentary evidence for performances.

While the already staggering bibliography on emotions in Old and Middle English imaginative and devotional literature continues to expand, drama has so far not been considered a source for information about medieval conceptions of emotions. As this study illustrates, early English biblical plays can contribute to our understanding of medieval theory of affect not only because they seek to evoke emotions, but also because they make the performance of affective states a locus for comment on the place of emotion in late medieval devotional and social life. The rehearsal of anger given by the mothers of the innocents in the Coventry *Play of the Shearmen and Tailors* and the Digby *Candlemes Day and the Kyllyng of þe Children of Israelle* provides an anatomy of the socially relevant communicative powers of anger. In the N-Town and Towneley *Crucifixion* plays, expressions of grief voiced by the Virgin Mary in conversation with the apostle John highlight the theological dangers inherent in emotional excess, while an exasperated Thomas further underlines the necessity of voluntary, rational control of one's feelings in the Towneley *Thomas of India.* My readings of these plays give new impetus to investigations of the relationship between emotion and gender and its cultural significance in late medieval English religious and social life, as they highlight the ways in which biblical drama both sediments and contests the centuries-old stereotype of women as more vulnerable to emotions than men. Late medieval biblical drama can therefore be used profitably in the future to develop analyses of emotions in religious and social contexts.

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[8] The anecdote is discussed by Enders in *Death by Drama*, pp. 43-51.

Perception, Emotion, and Cognition

The foregoing account of the strategies of emotionalisation employed in the scriptural plays discussed in this thesis makes it clear that the treatment of biblical events is in each case combined with a palpable interest in the psychology of perception and thought, which is also part of a wider debate about the human body, soul and intellect in medieval philosophy. Biblical drama engages directly with some of the metaphysical and epistemological issues at the centre of this debate.

The attention given to generic issues in my chosen play-texts reflects a certain awareness on the part of their authors of the intrinsic paradox that besets Christian religious drama. To believe without having seen is an essential demand on every Christian. However, biblical plays quite literally make the word flesh. By virtue of their reliance on sensual perception to convey immaterial truths, biblical plays are necessarily at odds with the Christian metaphysics of the Incarnation. Some of the plays discussed here deal with this paradox through an expositor-figure who mediates the dramatic experience by highlighting the representational nature of the performance and providing guidance for "proper viewing" in a series of audience addresses. As we have seen, the Chester Doctor in the *Moses and the Law* is at pains to emphasise the scriptural sources of the pageant, thus revealing anxieties about the potential multi-valence of theatrical performance, and of individual interpretations of the theatrical images presented on the stage. Contemplacio's introduction to the N-Town *Herod; The Trial Before Annas and Caiaphas* invokes the significance of the performance for the spiritual well-being of the audience and equally appeals to their right understanding.

However, most of the plays and pageants I have considered here do not break the mimetic frame in quite the same way. Outside the Chester and N-Town collections,

expositor figures are rare, even though characters within the play world, most notably God, may take on a similar pastoral role in relation to the audience. The play-texts suggest that the plays seek to structure and shape audience perception of the theatrical image through spatial configurations which bear visual meaning (particularly in multi-locational plays), and also through movement and dialogue. Thus frequent exhortations to look and behold, as well as verbal emphasis placed on objects handled by the actors in the course of the performance (such as the instruments of the Passion in the York *Crucifixion*) help to draw attention to specific, devotionally relevant scenic elements.

The plays' interest in the process of perceiving the stage image as an embodied activity is indicative of a certain underlying understanding of medieval models of the cognitive process on the part of the playwrights. This process was often conceived of as analogous to perception itself, epitomised in Aquinas's dictum that human beings cannot think without *phantasmata*, which form the emotionally encoded key link between sense and understanding in the sensitive soul. The accompanying epistemic valorisation of sight is implicitly and explicitly upheld in my chosen plays through a variety of means: visually, through the use of spectacle; verbally, through frequent exhortations to look and behold, as well as detailed descriptions of visual or tactile experiences; and, in terms of narrative, through the inclusion of scenes like the race to the sepulchre, or the incredulity of Thomas – both of which enliven the problem of belief as a problem of believing what has only been heard and give much room to the expression of common-sense doubt by the apostles. The plays discussed here thus embrace the epistemological aspects of medieval Aristotelianism by creating a theatrical world in which make-believe can function as a means of making (or helping) people believe because it transforms an immaterial, scriptural reality into sense-data, which forms the perceptual foundation of knowledge.

My chosen plays master the balancing act between Aristotelian ideas about the powers of the senses and human intellect on the one hand, and Christian metaphysics (including a well-developed distrust of the carnal modes of knowing) on the other, by coordinating an interest in the epistemic functions of vision with the traditional hierarchy of the senses in respect to matters of doctrine and spiritual belief. This is obvious in Moses' monologue in the Towneley *Processus Prophetarum*, for example, where Moses prescribes different modes of perception for learning about salvation (hearing) and learning the Decalogue (seeing). The inaccessibility of divine truth through the sense of sight is, moreover, dramatised directly through the guards at the tomb in the Chester Skinners' play of the Resurrection. The most poignant critique of an over-reliance on sensory perception and the material world for knowledge about the divine occurs, of course, in dramatisations of the incredulity of Thomas, which acknowledge and critique the human need for verification through the bodily senses, and offer sophisticated explorations of the relationship of sensation, knowledge, and belief.

The examination of the dramatic production and theorising of emotion in early English biblical drama undertaken in this thesis thus reveals that the play-texts of biblical plays are not simply artefacts which transform scriptural history into didactic entertainment. They are concerned with the relation between emotion and other mental and physical states, as well as questions of how emotions can be controlled or overcome, and they combine participation in contemporary philosophical discourses with an embodiment or a reassertion of traditional Catholic teaching. While there is a palpable interest in exploring epistemological questions, the metaphysical premises of orthodox belief remain unchallenged. For the authors of the embodied play of God, the contingent world of nature and time is not incidental, nor can it be ignored, which might explain why the biblical drama remained unchallenged by Archbishop Arundel's

punitive legislation, even though it could be accused of doing precisely what Arundel's Constitutions sought to curb and regulate: lay access to the Bible.

By presenting mere mortals incarnating the Incarnation, early English scriptural drama creates an affective encounter with biblical history – an encounter which is necessarily unique for each individual spectator. The prevalent critical tendency to conceive of Middle English biblical drama as a form of public devotion and a mass enactment of community piety has masked the deeply personal experience that these spectacles present. Yet the old man of Cartmel parish mentioned at the beginning of this study, whose knowledge of Jesus Christ was limited to the memory of the theatrical image of 'a man on a tree, & blood ran downe' (*REED: Cumberland,* p. 219), serves as a reminder of the necessity for any spectator of a medieval biblical play to negotiate his or her relationship with the performance image. His story also highlights materiality's crucial contribution to the encounter between the spectator and the performance image. It is the shared corporeality of the viewer and the 'man on a tree' that allows the theatrical image to set in motion changes in the internal affective state of the spectator which ensure that the performance image, once seen, is never forgotten.

Illustrations

Figure 1
Lust. Wigginhall, St Germans

Figure 2
Life-Size Figure of Moses from York, St Mary's Abbey (*c.* 1180-85)

Figure 3
Prophet. London, Westminster Abbey, Lady Chapel (1503-12)

Figure 4
Christ Mocked and Scourged; Peter's Denial. London, British Library,
Additional MS 47682, f. 29ᵛ

Figure 5
**Christ before Herod and before Pilate; The Flagellation of Christ. London,
British Library, Additional MS 47682, f. 30ᵛ**

Figure 6
The Crucifixion. Peterborough
Psalter (*c*. 1220-25)
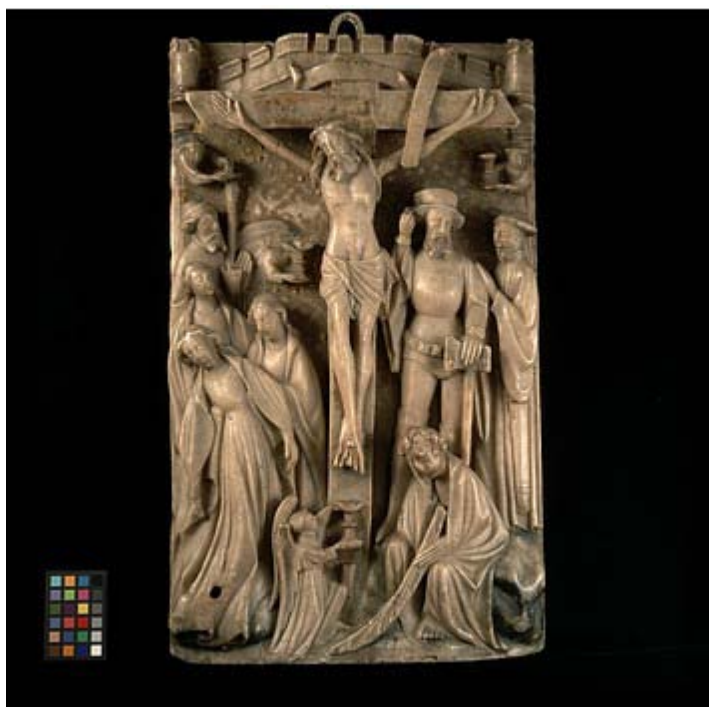

Figure 7
The Crucifixion. England,
15th Century

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