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Sound, Body and Space:

Audience Experience in Late Medieval English Drama

*by*

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*Abstract*

This thesis offers a new approach to the study of actor-audience relations in late medieval English drama and endeavours not only to emphasise the performative elements of medieval plays, but also the effects that they may have produced in performance. Adopting a phenomenological perspective, the work focuses on the audience's corporeal experience of the drama and draws on modern theories of performance, including the intersections with anthropology and, more recently, cognitive neuroscience. The literary, poetic and dramatic aspects of the three case studies chosen are analysed in depth with supporting evidence from the literature, iconography and theory of the period.

Five distinct chapters divide the thesis: the first is an overview of the broader context of the study and the methodology used; Chapter Five discusses the findings and implications of the work, and the three central chapters each consider one key element in an audience's experience of medieval performance. Therefore, Chapter Two examines vocal sound in *Christ before Herod*; Chapter Three investigates the effects produced by the actor's physical movements in *The Castle of Perseverance*, while Chapter Four shifts attention onto the audience's activities in *The Play of the Sacrament* and how they may have contributed to the dramatic event. The findings suggest that, in many cases, medieval playwrights and performers had a sophisticated grasp of their medium, understanding its unique impact on human physiology and psychology and, moreover, that they consciously manipulated the fundamental components of the drama to create an experientially profound encounter for their audiences.

These conclusions further highlight the need to re-evaluate current concepts of medieval performance space, as well as the extent to which the play texts themselves can illuminate the more ephemeral qualities of medieval theatre. But perhaps the most significant outcome of this thesis is the acknowledgement that medieval audiences not only read and heard what was presented to them, but felt the performances in both body and soul.

*For Grace*

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## *Preface*

All quotations from primary sources have been taken from modern editions or, in the case of plays, from anthologies. Spellings and punctuation of primary texts follow the editors' decisions and, therefore, 'u/v', 'y/i', 'þ', 'ʒ' etc. have not been normalised except where the source editor has chosen to do so. Words that are obscure or particularly difficult are glossed in square brackets. All works cited are listed in the bibliography; medieval and early modern texts are listed under either the author's name or, where a text is anonymous, under its title. Act, scene and/or line numbers are provided where possible and as they appear in the relevant edition.

Sue and Dave (for providing sanctuary), Pete (for the coffee) and Cassie and Rosey (for their support). Principal thanks, however, go to Gareth who had the most difficult job of all: keeping me rooted, sane, fed, watered and with paper and ink throughout the course of my PhD.

## Abbreviations

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| EETS | Early English Texts Society |
| EEBO | Early English Books Online, http://eebo.chadwyk.com/ |
| *MED* | *Middle English Dictionary* |
| *METh* | *Medieval English Theatre* |
| *PLS* | *Poculi Ludique Societas* |
| REED | Records of Early English Drama |

# Chapter One

# Introduction: Context and Method

This study began as an examination of the spatial aspects of actor-audience exchange in late medieval English drama. It was an attempt to establish how space functioned during the interplay between player and audience to further understand what effect the flexible boundaries between performer and spectator had on the reception of medieval plays. Initially, the study was to focus specifically on those explicit moments in the texts when an actor directly addressed his audience and so softened the presumed barrier between player and spectator; however, it very quickly became apparent that these moments, significant as they are, are only a small part of the relationship between player and spectator and the way that they interact, and that they were themselves dependent on a tacit relationship created by an experience far more fundamental to drama as a distinct communicative medium. The communication between actor and audience is far more diverse and intricate than the study of direct address or asides can account for; it involves not only verbal communication, visual cues, costumes, sets and props, but a subtle mix of various bodily sensations, energies, and half-acknowledged responses that are not always consciously understood or acted upon. Drama by its very nature is, as Simon Shepherd puts it, 'an art of bodies witnessed by bodies', but with so few images of medieval plays in action and a reliance upon the text for evidence of performance, it is all too easy to ignore the importance of the body

to the relationship and interaction between medieval actors and audiences, and to be distracted by the more ornamental devices that augment this basic theatrical constituent.[1]

Moreover, the examination of space is, to some extent, itself an examination of bodies in space. One of the most influential authors to recognize the pivotal relationship between space and the body, and certainly a key figure for this thesis, is Henri Lefebvre. In his pioneering work *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre returns time and again to this relationship. Initially, space is explained as a type of body in itself, generated by architectural structures each distinguished by its own characteristic design and operational traits. However, what Lefebvre terms 'the animating principle', that element of space which is active and vibrant, is not readable within the space itself but is instead present in the bodies that occupy and use the space, reproducing itself 'within their lived experience'.[2] Consequently, it is through bodily experience and the senses that space is experienced, perceived and understood; the body is central to the way in which we discuss and imagine space, the way we navigate through it and describe it to others. Lefebvre illustrates this process by describing how we encounter new, unfamiliar spaces:

> When 'Ego' arrives in an unknown country or city, he first
> experiences it through every part of his body – through his

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[1] Simon Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 73.

[2] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p. 137. See also, for example, Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

senses of smell and taste, [...] through his legs and feet. His hearing picks up the noises and the quality of the voices [and] his eyes are assailed by new impressions.[3]

So we feel heat and humidity on our skin, we smell dust and fragrances in the air, see the differences in the quality of light; we hear the different accents and languages, and feel the presence of the buildings and people around us. But the relationship is also reciprocal; space produces us, both physically and psychologically, it organises and prescribes to some degree our behaviour within it, but it is also produced by us, created, constructed and qualified through our use and perceptions of it. Therefore, changes to a performance space are precipitated by modifications in its use by the bodies that occupy it; in turn, these alterations in the space will produce changes in the inhabitants' experiences and physical attitudes.

So, the human body is at the centre of both the production and experience of space and at the heart of the dramatic medium, which, at its most basic, consists of the corporeal communication and interaction between the bodies of a performer and his audience. Although the intention of this thesis was always to emphasise the performative in medieval drama and the effects that actor-audience interaction produced, its focus has shifted from considering the changing functions of performance space to exploring how the actor's bodily occupation of it alters its nature and, therefore, the audience's experience of the performance as a whole. Space is still a vital component in

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[3] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 162.

this study, but it is now the vocal and physical activities of player and spectator, and the way in which each contributes to the making of meaning that have become the central concern of this thesis.

Although scholars in the last thirty years have viewed the surviving medieval dramatic texts as records of performance, there is a tendency to focus on the circumstances of the medieval theatrical event. While much of this work has been invaluable to the increased appreciation and understanding of medieval dramatic art (without it this thesis would certainly not exist), its focus on structures, patrons, troupes, dates, locations and costumes, among many other topics, has tended to undervalue the live, embodied experience of medieval plays. The work of, for instance, Clifford Davidson in his *Visualizing the Moral Life*, in which he explores the use of iconography in the arrangement of actors on stage, does not account for the impact of those live, moving bodies which contrast with the two-dimensional images from which their performances were potentially derived.[4] There have been studies which explore what the body symbolised in medieval society and how its individual limbs and organs can convey figurative meaning. Caroline Walker Bynum, Sarah Beckwith and Miri Rubin, for example, have all explored the place of the body as symbol and tool in late medieval religion, from lay piety through to female mysticism.[5] Christopher Woolgar and the contributors to *Rethinking*

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[4] Clifford Davidson, *Visualizing the Moral Life: Medieval Iconography and the Macro Morality Plays* (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

[5] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge

*the Medieval Senses*, have similarly looked into the importance of the senses in medieval English culture, while Jean-Claude Schmitt and J.A. Burrow have surveyed the significance of gesture in medieval culture and narrative respectively.[6] However, existing studies of the body on the medieval stage, such as Margaret E. Owens' book, *Stages of Dismemberment* and Claire Sponsler's *Drama and Resistance*, have tended to focus on the fragmented or damaged body as sign or symbol, rather than attending to its immediate presence.[7]

Very little has been done on the meanings or effects produced by the body in late medieval drama, not just as a symbolic object, but as a present, experiential force with the power to profoundly affect the spectator at a physical, as well as emotional level. However, recent research in the field has begun to adopt a phenomenological perspective which promotes this kind of approach to medieval performance, its effects and meanings. Put simply, phenomenology is concerned with an individual's lived experience of the

University Press, 1991). See also, *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. by Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis (York: York Medieval Press, 1997); and *Religion and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[6] C.M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); *Rethinking the Medieval Senses: Heritage, Fascinations, Frames*, ed. by Stephen G. Nicols *et al* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'The Rationale of Gestures in the West: Third to Thirteenth Centuries', in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 59-70; J.A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[7] Margaret E. Owens, *Stages of Dismemberment: the Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Rosemount, 2005); Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

external world, which, as Mark Fortier puts it, 'manifests itself not as a series of linguistic signs but as sensory and mental phenomena'.[8] In this theoretical vein, Peter Cockett, an actor with the *Poculi Ludique Societas* (*PLS*) as well as an established scholar, has, for example, highlighted the significance of an audience's 'corporeal witnessing' of faith in the performance of the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, a play which expressly denies the possibility of understanding God through reason or words alone.[9] The recently published *Performance, Cognitive Theory and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* by Jill Stevenson has introduced a more extensive and systematic phenomenological method of analysis, which emphasises the importance of the spectator's bodily experience of the York Corpus Christi Play. Stevenson's work shares many similarities with this thesis, especially in its acknowledgment of the impact of 'the performer's physical and vocal presence', which she likewise suggests was perhaps 'literally re-enacted within the spectator'.[10]

However, despite her recognition of the inherent corporeality of the medieval dramatic event, Stevenson continues to perceive the audience in a primarily spectatorial role, and therefore privileges sight above the other sensory or bodily perceptions. Although she does imply that sight provoked an entire bodily experience, such an emphasis suggests not only that all

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[8] Mark Fortier, *Theory / Theatre: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 29.

[9] Peter Cockett, 'The Actor's Carnal Eye: A Contemporary Staging of the Digby *Mary Magdalene*', <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/documents.php/50005.pdf> [accessed 16 March 2010], pp. 71, 69.

[10] Jill Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory and Devotional Culture: Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

experience in performance comes via visual perception, but also does not account for the potential influence of direct interaction and participation or the fluctuating boundaries between the roles of player and audience and the other forms of physical experience that these engender. The current study, in contrast, explores other primary forms of perception and foregrounds the communication, interaction and exchange that occurred between the medieval actor and his audience.

The study of medieval English audiences has been, on the whole, fairly restricted to general statements with few full, dedicated studies focussed specifically on audiences in medieval drama. Much of the work that has addressed the place of the spectator tends towards the more concrete study of admission prices, audience demographics, levels of participation, the general conditions pertaining that encourage interaction and exchange, such as shared light and space, and the role of the Vice figure in maintaining contact with the audience. Moreover, the subject of the spectator is frequently a small element within a larger study with only a few pages dedicated to the topic. For instance, in the 1994 edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Theatre* neither 'audience' nor 'spectator' appear in either the general index or the titles in the select bibliography, despite there being bibliographic sections on 'Character' and 'Staging', including actors, costumes and props.[11] The most recent edition of this volume, published in 2010, has added 'audience' to

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[11] *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

its index, but still does not dedicate any substantial space to the topic.[12] Although *The Companion* is aimed at undergraduate students its example serves to highlight the audience's marginal place in the study of medieval theatre.

Given the centrality of the audience in the dramatic event, it is perhaps surprising that the topic still only appears fleetingly within wider discussions of medieval drama. However, this probably has more to do with a lack of hard evidence than scholarly oversight. Even research into the audiences of contemporary drama has difficulty accessing the private thoughts, reactions and experiences of an audience; despite the use of modern technology, the researcher can never fully comprehend all that goes on in the mind and body of a spectator during the notoriously ephemeral event that is dramatic performance. In historical research, these difficulties are exacerbated by temporal, social, religious and cultural distances and the lack of contemporary records, which make the task of understanding the experiences of an audience virtually impossible to complete. These difficulties generate a justified caution in discussing medieval audiences and there is always the trap of universalism into which past scholarship has fallen, where medieval dramatic texts have been judged against naturalist expectations or the poetic heights of the so-called Elizabethan and Jacobean Golden Age of theatre.

There is a similar problem when we approach the other side of the actor-audience exchange, although there have been far more studies dedicated to the medieval actor, and there is a far greater volume of material evidence

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[12] *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, 2nd edn., ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

regarding players and performance troupes (scanty though this is in relation to later periods). Most of the work done in this area focuses on troupes, their itineraries and patrons, the debated professionalism of such actors, the nature and implications of cross-dressing for female roles or the probable style of medieval acting.[13] Many of these studies offer valuable insights into the processes of medieval acting and often highlight the emotional effectiveness of medieval actors. Nevertheless, there is still much to be said about the corporeality of the medieval player's performance, the different types or styles of acting that might have been used, the relationship between the movements and styles and the space, as well as the actor's potential to guide, teach and affect his audience.

As with studying medieval audiences, the difficulty is, of course, accessing a phenomenon that only rarely leaves the faintest of hints as to its nature, and as scholars we must necessarily accept that we will never understand the full extent of what went on during medieval plays. However, a key part of gaining that fleeting glimpse is to acknowledge and understand the drama as embodied and live and to recognise that the mere sharing of physical space would have had an important role to play in the creation of meaning in

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[13] See for example, Suzanne Westfall, *Patrons and Performance: Early Tudor Household Revels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); *REED Patrons and Performances* Website <http://link.library.utoronto.ca/reed/index.cfm> [accessed 28 April 2011]; John Wasson, 'Professional Actors in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama* 1 (1984): 1-11; Richard Rastall, 'Female Roles in All-Male Casts', *Medieval English Theatre* 7 (1988): 25-51; Meg Twycross, '"Transvestitism" in the Mystery Plays', *Medieval English Theatre* 5 (1983): 123-80; J.W. Robinson, 'Medieval English Acting', *Theatre Notebook* 13 (1959): 83-8; and John R. Elliot, 'Medieval Acting', in *Contexts for Early English Drama*, ed. by Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1989), pp. 238-51.

performance. In order to do that, we must first gain an understanding of the theories and ideologies surrounding the human body and its senses during the medieval period.

**Body, Senses and Corporeal Experience: Modern and Medieval**

Lefebvre's analysis of the relationship between body and space is very similar to, and in some cases draws on, the existential philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a contemporary of Sartre who similarly sought to discredit empiricist and idealist traditions. Influenced by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, Merleau-Ponty asserted that consciousness and the self are grounded in the experience of the body. The philosophical orthodoxy previously relied on dualist assumptions of the relationship between mind and body. Philosophers like René Descartes, John Locke and Immanuel Kant prioritised the mind, seeing the body as a material object controlled and operated by the transcendental self to fulfil necessary functions in the external world. Accordingly, the body was equal to other objects in the external world and was, therefore, treated and understood in a similar fashion so that, although the self perceived the world outside, external objects could have no impact on the inner subject. Furthermore, the sensory perceptions and the information they provided about the outside world were not to be trusted, and instead, it was argued, man must rely on science and reason to provide truth as to the nature of existence.

In contrast, Merleau-Ponty emphasised the body as fundamental to conscious life, claiming that it is impossible to think of one's self without reference to the body: '[w]e are through and through compounded of relationships with the world', he writes, 'there is no inner man, man is in the world'.[14] The basic idea is that consciousness is anchored to the physical, material experiences of our corporeal existence, consisting of interactions between our bodies and external objects as opposed to the pure consciousness of the immaterial 'inner man'. As Robert C. Solomon explains, '[c]onsciousness is analyzed [...] not as a knowing consciousness or as a primarily reflecting consciousness, but rather as an active, 'living' consciousness'.[15]

Key to this analysis is the phenomenon of perception. On an empiricist account, what we perceive is a purely causal reaction to qualities that are held by objects in the external material world. Therefore, perception is a passive act in which the object perceived imposes its qualities on our senses which we then interpret. But for Merleau-Ponty this was an invalid understanding of the relationship between the world and the self; instead, he argued that perception was an act that inherently involved the subject, the self, the 'I'. This involvement, Merleau-Ponty argues, is such that it is the self that structures how and what we perceive; so, rather than passively receiving the intrinsic qualities of an object, we are active in the formation of our own perceptions.

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[14] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. xiv-xv; p. xii.

[15] Robert C. Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism: Existentialists and Their Nineteenth-Century Backgrounds* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1972), pp. 258-9.

In turn this entails the recognition that there is no inside/outside dichotomy to consciousness, just as there is no distinction between mind and body. Inside and outside, mind and body are inseparable, one flows into the other and each influences the structure and form of its partner.

Until quite recently, the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty remained largely in the shadow of Sartre, but his emphasis on the embodied human experience and phenomenology has become increasingly important to many scholars from a variety of disciplines. Over the last few decades there have been a number of monographs and volumes published that are dedicated to the body and its key role in the formation of understanding, communication, mood and emotion. Initially, the influence of phenomenology and its emphasis on corporeal experience was limited to philosophical works, like Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* published in 1972, and studies in psychology and anthropology, such as David Howes' edited volume *Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Source Book in the Anthropology of the Senses* published nearly twenty years later.[16] More recently, however, the trend has spread to arts subjects, with works focussing on the history of the human body and how perceptions of it have changed over the course of centuries (for example, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* edited by Michel Feher; *Hearing History: A Reader* edited by Mark M. Smith and Robert Jütte's *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*).[17] In other

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[16] Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1976); *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Source Book in the Anthropology of the Senses*, ed. by David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

[17] *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, 3 Parts, ed. by Michel Feher with Ramana Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989); *Hearing History: A*

studies, such as *A Cultural History of Gesture* edited by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg or Anna Bryson's *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England*, these ideas have been extended to explore how notions about the body influence cultural values, acts and norms.[18]

The implications of such an intimate relationship between the body and the self for theatre and performance are potentially significant, as demonstrated by the growing number of studies on the topics of space, the body and the senses in drama, from Bert O. States' influential *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*, published in 1985, to *The Senses in Performance*, edited by Sally Banes and André Lapecki (which covers a broad range of theatrical events from theatre history to contemporary drama), Simon Shepherd's *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (an important source of inspiration for this thesis), and, most recently, Bruce R. Smith's *Phenomenal Shakespeare*.[19] Both the contributions to *The Senses in Performance* and Shepherd's

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*Reader*, ed. by Mark M. Smith (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. by James Lynn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005). See also, *The Book of Touch*, ed. by Constance Classen (Oxford: Berg, 2005) and Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001).

[18] *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. by Bremmer and Roodenburg (see Schmitt,, above); Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[19] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); *The Senses in Performance*, ed. by Sally Banes and André Lapecki, (New York: Routledge, 2007); Bruce R. Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). See also, Paul Zumthor, 'The Body in Performance', in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, trans. by William Whobray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 217-26.

monograph highlight the centrality of a play's corporeal, sensory subtext; even in spaces where the performers and spectators are distanced considerably from one another, the energy produced by the actions on the stage is palpable. But, in accordance with Merleau-Ponty, these works also draw attention to the fact that the experience of performance is not simply felt in the body, but can also have a more profound impact on those who watch and listen. The sensory experiences of an audience, it is suggested, have the power to alter both their physical and mental states, to change them through their bodily engagement with the dramatic action. We do not, for example, simply hear sound but often feel it resonate through our entire body; sound can cause us discomfort or alter our emotions, our state of mind, a facet explored historically in Smith's earlier influential monograph *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor*.[20] In this book, Smith not only highlights the importance of attending to the sound made in performance and the soundscape that surrounded it, but also of understanding the cultural and historical specificity of sound and hearing.

A new addition to the phenomenological study of theatre is cognitive neuroscience, often used to examine more deeply the effects of performing on actors and of watching performance on audiences. Rhonda Blair is a key proponent of this approach; working mainly with research into mirror neurons, Blair explores how our increasing knowledge of the relationship between identity, imagination, thought and memory and the body can shed light on the

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[20] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

process of acting, the relationship between actors and audiences, as well as what makes the experience so emotionally stimulating. The Watching Dance Project, a collaborative endeavour run by the universities of Manchester, Glasgow, York St. John and Imperial College London, similarly draws on the mirror neuron theory to interpret the intensely affective nature of the body in motion.[21] Stevenson's work, discussed above, also fits within this trend and shows how these new discoveries align with medieval theories of cognition, which seem to intuitively understand the relationship between mind and body, and the influence that that connection has over sense of self and interpretation of the outside world.

Despite their historical distance the corporeal philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty has much in common with a late medieval understanding of the role of the body in the life of man, although inevitably we may also observe some significant differences. The empiricist view of the body and its relation to the intellect, the soul, the self or our 'inner life', is based on the seventeenth-century theory of mind-body dualism, as exemplified in the works of Descartes, Locke and, in the eighteenth century, by Kant, in which the body and the soul/mind are two separate entities only tenuously connected to one another, the latter understood as the superior and, therefore, privileged entity. In the medieval period the soul was, likewise, more valuable than the body; it was the one core element of humanity that could reach God, heaven and eternal bliss, whereas the material body gradually became corrupted and decayed. But, unlike the empiricist tradition, the medieval understanding of the

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[21] See, for example, Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action* (London: Routledge, 2008) and The Watching Dance Project <http://www.watchingdance.org/> [accessed 1 March 2010].

relationship between body and soul was far more complicated than the simple oppositional body/soul dichotomy. For medieval Christians, the body was not merely a vessel that the mind or soul controlled and organised to fulfil necessary functions in the material world. Instead, the body was key to the salvation of mankind because of its potential to influence the moral state of the transcendent immortal soul within. It was, therefore, as for modern existentialists, of paramount importance to culture, society and the spiritual life of man.

Following the philosophy of Aristotle, medieval theologians acknowledged the existence of five physical senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Each of these was seen as a gateway through which the external material world was granted access to man's immortal soul.[22] In addition to these five bodily senses, there were believed to be five internal wits which linked the outer world with the intellect and the spirit. The first of these was the 'common sense', which received sense impressions and then conveyed them on to either the cognitive imagination (imagination based on fantasy and previous experience) or the estimative imagination (a more instinctive sense) for interpretation.[23] John of Salisbury explains a version of this process in more detail. Imagination, he suggests:

either formulates second judgement, or brings back first judgement. It is sensation which [originally] makes first judgement when it pronounces, for example, that something is

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[22] Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 11.

[23] Ibid., p. 19.

white or black, warm or cold. Second judgement, however, is reserved to imagination, which, for example, on the basis of an image that has been retained, affirms that something is perceived is this or that.[24]

But there was far more to this ostensibly causal relationship between inner self and outer world because, not only did the senses receive information about objects external to the body, they also communicated information about the individual to the outside world. As Bernard of Clairvaux writes, not only do souls need bodies, 'bodies needed senses by which to know and affect one another'.[25] In a sense, then, the soul of an individual could extend outside the body and interact with objects and other individuals via the sensory organs, an idea perhaps later reflected in Donne's eye-beams that 'twisted, and did thread / Our eyes, upon one double string'.[26]

The corporeal perceptions, therefore, formed what Christopher Woolgar calls a 'more open process' in which the body and 'the senses gave out information or affected others directly, as well as receiving information or serving as a conduit that might change an individual'.[27] The body was,

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[24] John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. by Daniel D. McGarry (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1971), Book IV, Chapter 11 (p.220).

[25] Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon IV on the Song of Songs, in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, ed. by Emilie Griffin, trans. by G.R. Evans (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), pp. 112-13.

[26] John Donne, 'The Ecstasy', in *John Donne*, ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), ll. 7-8.

[27] Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 2.

therefore, an expression of the condition of the soul within, as exemplified by the theory of physiognomy. This idea, as Debra Higgs Strickland explains, rests on two chief assumptions:

> The first is that mental disposition follows bodily characteristics, and the second asserts that the body suffers with affectations of the soul. This means that a person's character may be determined by correctly interpreting specific physical signs, such as movements and gestures; colour of skin, hair, eyes; facial expressions; growth of hair; skin texture; voice; condition of the flesh; bodily proportions and overall build.[28]

So, for instance, moles and freckles were often perceived as external replicas of the soul's internal blemishes and a cheat, liar or traitor in pictorial art was frequently presented with flaming red hair.[29] Physiognomical theory also influenced the interpretation of less visible sensory disorders and diseases. For example, a person's lack of a particular sense, as Woolgar explains, was often seen as evidence of the Devil's work or, as Augustine believed, that those born without hearing or speech were paying for the inherited sins of their parents.[30]

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[28] Debra Higgs Stickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 38.

[29] Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 vols., (Berkeley: University of California press, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 147-8.

[30] Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 10; Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses*, p. 91.

In medieval culture then, the idea of personhood was a 'psychosomatic unity', to borrow Caroline Walker Bynum's phrase, in which the soul was intimately bound to the body, its moral state mirrored in the physical state of the harbouring body, the immaterial spirit fused to the fate and actions of the material form.[31] An open body was consequently a danger to the soul of an individual; because the senses were viewed as gateways through which the outside world could affect the inner constituent of man, a poorly guarded, open gateway could result in the eternal suffering of the soul within. Moreover, once one part of the body or a sensory organ had submitted to sin, all the other senses were made vulnerable to the power of temptation. *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, a fourteenth-century translation of the French *Somme le Roi*, describes the slippery slope to damnation following a single breach of the body:

> And in þis synne [lechery] tempteþ þe deuel a man in fyue maneres, as seynt Gregory seiþ. First in folily lokes. And after in foule wordes. And after in foule touchynges. And after in foule kissynges. And after comeþ a man to do þe dede. For þurgh þe folily lokes comeþ a man to speke, and fro speche to touchynge, and fro touchynge to kyssynge, and fro þe kissynge

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[31] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages', in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, (see Feher, above), Part One, pp. 160-219 (p. 162).

to þe foule dede of synne. And þus sly3ly bryngeþ þe deuel fro

on in-to a-noþer.[32]

From one admiring, unchaste glance, the author warns, a man's sight leads him

via all his senses to eventually commit 'þe foule dede'.

However, the body was not always to be a negative force for

temptation, but was also vital to the salvation of mankind. As Sarah Beckwith

explains, Augustinian theology 'imagined the entire visible world as bearing

traces (*vestigia*) of God' and, therefore, 'the material world [became] a text

which [was] interpreted, scrutinized, allegorized and investigated for the way it

pointed to its exemplar and author: God'.[33] Beckwith goes on to explain that

the idea that God was an immanent presence within the material world meant a

new position for the body in the piety and devotion of the Middle Ages.

Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the main proponents of this corporeal piety, for

example, writes in one of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*:

But we live on after the body dies; still, there is no access open

to us, except through the body, to those things whereby we live

in happiness. He had perceived this who said: 'The invisible

things of God are clearly seen, being understood by those things

which are made' – that is, corporal and visible things – unless

they be perceived by the instrumentality of the body, do not

come to our knowledge at all. The spiritual creature, therefore,

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[32] *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth-Century English Translation of the* Somme le
Roi *of Lorens D'Orléans*, ed. by W. Nelson Francis, EETS O.S. 217 (London: Oxford
University Press, 1942), p. 43, ll. 5-26.
[33] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 49.

which we are, must necessarily have a body, [...] to know which constitutes blessedness.[34]

On this reading, the body is not in opposition to the soul, but is instead the central means of accessing the divine and, despite its weaknesses, could be used to achieve knowledge of God and an eternal resting place in heaven.

But, given the infectious nature of sensory temptation, if the body was to be used as a positive tool in devotion, it was necessary to be vigilant and to scrutinize it and its actions very closely. Reason was to rule the body and guard its sensory gateways, a theory exemplified symbolically by an image in Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough. Completed probably sometime between 1320 and 1340 the wall painting depicts each of the five senses as a particular animal that was strongly associated with a specific sense; so, for example, the cockerel represents sight and the spider the sense of touch. Each animal is located at a specific point around a five-spoke cartwheel behind which is the figure of a king with his hand placed upon one of the spokes. Most scholars agree that this kingly individual represents man's Reason and that he is painted to show his judgement of the perceptions that he receives from the five corporeal senses.[35] In addition to the power of reason, the defence of the soul against physical temptation was aided by conforming to a very restrictive set of corporeal rules and conventions that were believed to

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[34] Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon V, *Cantica canticorum: Eighty Six Sermons on the Song of Solomon*, trans., ed., and introduced by S. J. Eales (London: Elliot Stock, 1895). Quoted in Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 49. In Sermon IV, Bernard similarly writes: 'this majesty [God] has deigned to be present to his creatures, to be all in all things to all living things throughout their life'. See *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, pp. 112-13.

[35] See Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 26.

close the body off to worldly temptation.[36] Such a belief can be traced to

classical antiquity and the writings of Cicero, whose work was then absorbed

and adapted into a Christian framework. Cicero's core concept of *modestia*

was used in the education of young Roman noblemen and summarised a bodily

attitude that spoke of moral integrity and political brilliance, and was applied to

every motion, posture and gesture that their bodies performed.[37] As Jean-

Claude Schmitt explains, these ideas were then adopted by the Christian church

and assimilated into its body ideology. As in Cicero's writings, the body was

still thought to express the quality of an individual, only now, as I have already

mentioned, it was to convey spiritual rather than social virtues. For example,

Saint Ambrose advises young priests to mark their inherent authority, dignity

and spiritual serenity by practising a respectable gait, Hugh of Saint Victor

recommends modest and humble gestures, while Saint Bernard suggests that a

'man is great and to be preferred who in prosperity has not affected a more

frivolous laugh, more insolent speech, or more immoderate concern for his

clothes or body.'[38] In contrast, as I will discuss later in Chapter Three, strange

movements and actions were believed to reveal a diseased and sinful soul; but

it was not just the actions and postures of the body that needed to remain

closed: the voice too was often under scrutiny. Indeed, as Karma Lochrie has

highlighted, speech for cloistered women in particular betrayed 'the

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[36] Schmitt, 'The Ethics of Gesture', p. 148.

[37] Ibid., pp. 130-1.

[38] Ibid., p. 138. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Five Books on Consideration*, Book 2, Chapter 21 (p. 76).

promiscuity of body and soul' and, so, silence became 'as much a condition for chastity as [...] sexual renunciation'.[39]

The dangers that were posed by the open, freely accessible body led to strong moral connotations being attached to specific senses. Aristotelian philosophy, and consequently that of Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus among others, held that the five senses formed a hierarchical system which ranked perceptions according to their moral values. Although the positions of the individual perceptions within the hierarchy were occasionally disputed, the general consensus was that sight should occupy the highest level in the hierarchy. Because of their associations with light, truth, knowledge and understanding sight and the eyes were perceived as the most respectable of the senses. At the opposite end of the spectrum was touch, the basest of man's perceptions. This was the most dangerous of all; associated with flesh, lust and beastly appetites it was the most likely to land an individual in spiritual trouble.

The moral associations of the body, its parts and senses were also translated into and used as analogies for the ancient social structures dominating medieval society. The body was, for example, a key metaphor for the relationships binding the various sections of society, each bodily member representing a different social group and, because of the existence of a hierarchy of the senses, certain body parts held superior connotations. Consequently, because of its connection with sight and reason, the head was

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[39] Karma Lochrie, 'The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse', in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: State of New York Press, 1991), pp. 115-40 (p. 126).

often associated with superior spiritual worth, authority and governance, and was, therefore, frequently used to represent the powerful position of the king or the Church, depending on who was making the metaphor. In accordance, the lower extremities of the body, those furthest away from the superior head, were unruly, uncouth and beastly, hence they came to represent the rough and uncivilized peasants and workers controlled and ordered by the superior heads of Church and state. The same analogy was applied to marital relations where the wife, represented by the flesh and all its physical urges, was to be tamed, governed and ruled by the rational head of her husband.

## The Body, Senses and Late Medieval Piety

I have already briefly discussed how the body and its senses were seen to contribute to the spiritual growth of mankind, but the influence that this theory had on late medieval lay piety in particular is important, especially in relation to the drama and its potential affectivity for the Christian audience who attended. According to the New Testament, the Second Person of the Trinity was incarnated in human form as the Son of God, whose body and blood were to be made sacrifice for the sins of mankind. The doctrine of the incarnation, therefore, connected the purity of the divine spirit with the corporeal materiality of the human body, which was then the very source of salvation. Despite the very rigid notions of bodily conduct, lay piety in the later medieval period was often a deeply corporeal, somatic activity. Augustinian and Bernardine affective theology encouraged, as is suggested by the quotation

from Saint Bernard above, an understanding of God through his earthly creations; the only way to come to know God as immanent in the world was via the sensory perceptions, through the carnal body and, consequently, the central role of the body in worship came to prominence. This in turn led to what Sarah Beckwith describes as 'a new appreciation and re-evaluation of experience, affectivity and emotion', all of which were stimulated by contact with the external world of God's Creation.[40]

John of Salisbury, following Aristotle, argues that human 'emotions all proceed from sensation, through the activity of the imagination', and devotional texts, like Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* and the early fifteenth-century prose treatise *Dives and Pauper*, encourage a contemplation of Christ's tortured body in very immediate terms, to prompt a strong emotional response to the torments and lamentations of the Saviour.[41] But often the faithful craved a slightly more controversial experience; for example, in the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe both women yearn for a somatic as well as emotional or spiritual encounter with Christ, and experience their visions in highly physical terms in addition to visual imagery and aural communication. When Julian of Norwich experiences a moment of Christ's Passion during her eighth Revelation, she not only sees a static image of Christ's body, such as the iconography or sculpture used to aid contemplation, but witnesses a three-

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[40] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 50.

[41] John of Salisbury, *The Matalogicon*, Book IV, Chapter 9, p.220. Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004); *Dives and Pauper*, ed. by Priscilla Heath Barnum, 3 vols., EETS no. 275 (London: Oxford University Press 1976).

dimensional, moving, breathing vision, whose flesh changes colour as the blood drains from his wounds and dries on his flayed skin; in other words, Julian witnesses the physical process of Christ's death:

> I saw His swete face as it was drye and blodeles with pale deyeng, and sithen more pale, dede, langoring, and than turnid more dede into blew, and sithen more browne blew, as the flesh turnyd more depe dede [...] There I saw these four colowres, tho that were aforn freshe, redy, and likyng to my sigte. This was a swemful chonge to sene, this depe deyeng, and also the nose clange and dryed [...].[42]

In a similar manner, in Chapter Six of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery meditates on the life of the Virgin and is rewarded with a vision of Christ's birth, experiencing it as if she were present, aiding Mary and Joseph on their route to Bethlehem, and:

> whan Jhesu was born sche ordeyned beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in with hir blyssed sone. And sythen sche beggyd mete for owyr Lady and hir blyssyd chyld. Atfyrward sche swathyd hym wyth byttyr teerys of compassyon [...].[43]

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[42] *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Georgia Ronan Crampton, *TEAMS* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), Chapter XVI, ll. 589-96.

[43] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Lynn Staley, *TEAMS* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), Chapter 6, ll. 430-3.

In both instances, the visions are live to the perceiver and there is a sense of corporeal co-presence where the biblical figures inhabit the same space and time as the witnesses, and so they are not mere visions but embodied entities that interact with and have an effect on those they appear to. This is perhaps especially true of Margery's visions in which she not only sees and speaks with Christ and the Virgin, but witnesses them through her entire body, touching them, holding them, feeding them, which ultimately leads to a greater understanding of God and, often, has a dramatically physical as well as emotional effect on Margery herself.

For Margery and her contemporaries a bodily experience of the divine leads to more than an intellectual or emotional engagement with God; in a very literal way it could profoundly alter the nature of the individual. Woolgar emphasises at the very beginning of his survey that 'sensory perception was a much more open process' during the Middle Ages; not simply a means of transmitting information about external objects to the five internal wits, the senses also 'enabled tangible qualities and, indeed, spiritual or intangible qualities' to be passed to the receiver (and vice versa), thereby 'serving as a conduit' that had the potential to change the individual.[44] The fervent cravings to have a visceral experience of the spiritual are, then, precisely because, as Julian tells us: 'I would be purged be the mercy of God and after lyven more to the worshippe of God'.[45] Both women want to be changed, altered, purified by

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[44] Woolgar, *The Sense in Late Medieval England*, p. 2; See also, Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory and Devotional Culture*, p. 26.

[45] *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, Chapter II, ll. 60-1.

their sensory encounter with Christ and the Virgin and it is through their sensory organs that the grace of God can be received.

## The Potential of Corporeal Experience in Late Medieval English Drama

In many ways, the premise of affective piety matches those assertions made by modern phenomenological and neurological theories of the relationship between mind or soul and the body. As we are once again beginning to understand, corporeal experience is at the heart of mankind's perception of self, his experience of emotion and his understanding of the world around him. Similarly, the body was recognised as a significant element in all areas of the life of late medieval man. In addition to contributing to identity and faith, it was also seen to signal the true nature of the soul to those outside and it was the main source through which a person could be both tempted and redeemed. The senses were the tendrils that extended out into the world and brought knowledge of God to his creation in terms comprehensible to them, and it permitted a fundamental connection between mortal man and the pure, everlasting, immortal presence of his Saviour.

In the context of late medieval religious and moral drama, the emotional power of affective piety, where the objective was to bring about spiritual change, would probably have been invaluable, especially given the deeply corporeal nature of performance as a medium. Indeed, the bodily engagement of the medieval audience was one of the main arguments against the act of playing by anti-theatrical polemics. The author of *A Tretise of*

*Miraclis Pleyinge*, for example, writes that 'miraclis pleyinge is of the lustis of

the fleyssh and mirthe of the body' and, therefore, 'it suffrith not a man to

beholden enterly the yerde of God over his heved, but makith to thenken on all

siche thingis that Crist by the dedis of his passion badde us to forgeten'.[46] In

making his claim against religious drama, the author of the *Tretise* makes an

express complaint against the impact that the miracle plays have on the body

and the 'five wittis' of the audience; not only does religious playing 'reversith

Crist' by 'taking to pley that that he toke into most ernest', but by encouraging

the audience to love 'more the liking of theire body and of prosperite of the

world than likinge in God and prosperite of vertu in the soule'.[47]

As a multi-sensory medium, the drama of the medieval period was in an

ideal position to take advantage of the power and significance of the body and

its senses in the battle for mankind's salvation. On the whole, the main

purpose of medieval drama was spiritual education and edification, praise of

the Almighty and the strengthening of religious devotion. As such its aim was

not only to preach to an audience, but to encourage them towards a morally

good life and to bolster their belief in spiritual truth through the act of

performance. As the examples above from Julian of Norwich and Margery

Kempe show, knowledge of the divine was not easy to come by; the seeker had

to want, crave and search for the divine, also a prominent theme in

contemporary drama. Jesus in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, for example, tells

Martha and Mary Magdalene:

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[46] *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, *Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series*, 19 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), p. 96, ll. 112-13, 123-26.

[47] Ibid., p. 94, ll. 57-60; p. 102, ll. 318-20.

> To vndyr-stond þe reson, to know þe werke,
>
> the Ioye þat is in Ierusallem heuenly,
>
> Can never be compylyd be covnnyng of clerke.[48]

This passage highlights humanity's limitations; the ecstasy, joy and beauty of heaven is beyond the powers of human reason, and knowledge of the great works of God, of his plan and purpose for his Creation, 'þe werke', is beyond either the words or the 'covnnyng of clerke'.

However, direct experience of the divine, such as that encountered by Julian and Margery, can provide an insight, a true revelation of the glories of God and heaven. Others without the privilege of an audience with Christ were instead encouraged to imagine and create a surrogate experience of, for instance, the Crucifixion. As with the divine encounters of Julian and Margery, these imaginings were intended to prompt a greater appreciation for Christ's suffering and, therefore, increase compassion for and devotion to him. Love's *Mirror*, for instance, advises the reader to 'ymagine & inwardly þenk of him [Christ] in his passione' and 'make þe þere present in þi mynde, beholdyng alle þat shale be done ʒeynus þi lorde Jesu & þat bene spoken or done of him'.[49] Love's express direction that the reader make him or herself 'present' at the Crucifixion of Christ, even if only in his or her mind, is significant and recalls the immediacy in which both Julian and Margery describe their visions.

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[48] *Mary Magdalene*, in *The Digby Plays*, ed. by F.J. Furnivall, EETS E.S.70 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), ll. 804-6.

[49] Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, *Capitulum* xl, ll. 23-4 (p. 159).

Love continues to describe in detail for his readers the events of the Crucifixion, helping them to immerse themselves in that crucial moment:

> þan maist þou se, howe vileynsly þei taken him as a ribaude &
> kasten him done vp on þe crosse & þan as wode þeves drowen
> on boþe sides first hees handes & after hees feete, & so nailede
> him fast to þe crosse, & after with alle hir miht liften vp þe
> crosse with him hangyng als hye as þei miht & þan lete it falle
> done in to þe morteise [...] alle þe senewes to breken [...] Þan
> rennene out of his blessed body þee stremes of þat holiest blode,
> on alle sides abundantly fro þo grete wondes.[50]

Such an emphasis on the gruesome torments endured by Christ may seem distasteful to a modern reader, but to a late medieval audience the compassion and horror prompted by such an imagining led them to a greater appreciation of that sacrifice.  To feel was to understand.  Love and his contemporaries, therefore, seemed to recognise the power of presence, of spatial and temporal immediacy, to bring the Christian message out of history and make it present and pertinent to the population.

Jill Stevenson interprets still imagery of divine subjects in a similar way, as objects that provided the viewer with a literal presence to contemplate. She describes how, as an active entity, a roof boss in the nave of York Minster Cathedral depicting the Ascension of Christ, 'situates viewers as participants in

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[50] Ibid., *Capitulum* xliij^m, ll. 27-40 (p. 175).

the biblical event', its placement probably prompting 'the layperson to replicate physically the postures of the original witnesses'.[51] As with Love's imaginings and Julian and Margery's visions, the design of the boss, Stevenson suggests, was formed to enhance the viewer's emotional connection to God by simulating the experience of being present at the original event. If imagining and static images alone could produce such powerful emotions, then when that vision is made manifest in the palpably live body of an actor, the force of the effect must have been amplified tenfold. Theatre, as already discussed, is not a static, two-dimensional art, but is, as Brian Walsh highlights, an art constituted of the 'breathing, "lively" bodies of the actors'. As such it forces an 'intimacy with the body of the performer in real time', which will in turn heighten their awareness of the player's body.[52] So, even though the actor is not Christ and the audience are aware of this, the presence of another human body viscerally enacting the torments of the Saviour, transforms the story and its relevance into a real, felt presence, making it even more immediate than imagining the same scene, the impact of which could be felt directly by the audience.

Scholars have already acknowledged the mnemonic efficacy of religious performances like the Corpus Christi plays, which drew heavily on the visual arrangements of biblical characters in iconography. Moreover, medieval criticism, it has been argued, often seems to have understood drama in terms of moving pictures.[53] In a similar fashion to their pictorial analogues,

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[51] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory and Devotional Culture*, p. 68.

[52] Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men and the Elizabethan Performance of History*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 22-8.

[53] Meg Twycross, 'Beyond the Picture Theory: Image and Activity in Medieval Drama', *Word and Image*, 4.4 (1988): 589-617 (pp. 589-90).

Theodore K. Lerud argues, the visual arrangements in the Corpus Christi plays were designed 'as external versions of those images necessary to the psychological processes of memory and understanding', which when later recalled can jog or stir the mind in recollection of the devotional feelings experienced at that moment.[54] However, I would argue that, in addition to the visual pictures that the drama creates in the spectators' minds, it is their active engagement in this real-time action that instils those emotions more firmly in memory. Instead of having to imagine a scenario or animate a motionless image in their contemplative visualisations of biblical events, an audience member would probably have had a very real bodily memory of those events produced within the relative safety of the theatrical frame, as well as the emotions that were attached to it.

Although much of the discussion so far has been generally concerned with religious and biblical plays, a similar exploitation of the characteristic qualities of the dramatic form can be observed in morality plays and interludes. Regardless of their specific aim and genre, many medieval plays appear to utilise the physical presence of both actor and audience to create an event in which the spectator can become immersed, something that they can become a part of, so that their experience, if not exactly equal to, corresponds with the intended teaching of the performance. Furthermore, it will be argued, the bodily performance of the actor, his voice as well as his movements, impact and work on the audience's own physical and emotional sensations, changing

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[54] Theodore K. Lerud, 'Quick Images: Memory and the English Corpus Christi Drama', in *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 213-37 (pp. 213, 221).

their experience of the drama, be that a Corpus Christi pageant or a morality play, to produce a performance which simulates an encounter with the divine and demonic, heaven and hell, or the transition from virtue into vice, from sin to salvation. Vital to the creation of this experience is the audience's own contributions, their reactions, interactions and participation which so firmly embed feelings, lessons and ideas within the self of the individual.

## Methodology

The centrality of the close relationship between players and audience has been widely acknowledged. However, despite the popularity of affective lay piety in the late Middle Ages and the clear concerns of some contemporary authors about the powerful physical effects of drama on medieval audiences, a full study of the effects of, and meanings produced by the live interaction of living, breathing, active bodies on both sides of the actor-audience exchange remains to be done. The analysis of theatre audiences is, in general, an understudied area and the process of accessing the audience's immediate experience, even in modern drama where spectators can be questioned directly, is notoriously thorny and problematic, as I have already briefly mentioned above. Similar issues trouble the historical study of drama more generally, but especially enquiries into the connection between players and audiences, which is often neither explicitly scripted nor thought to be sufficiently unusual to warrant comment by contemporaries. The problem is further exacerbated in the field

of medieval drama by cultural and temporal barriers, in addition to a lack of recorded evidence of either actors or audiences, be that written or pictorial.

Jeremy Lopez offers a possible solution by suggesting that 'one can better understand the audiences of the English Renaissance', and by proxy other early periods in theatre history, 'if one better understands the plays they watched'.[55] He thereby encourages an appreciation of the text as key to the less tangible elements of performance. While I appreciate and agree with the sentiment here, and Lopez's book is useful in many ways, this quotation serves to highlight a key difference in the perspective adopted by Lopez and this thesis; that is, that part of understanding the plays that audiences watched is acknowledging that watching was only one part of their overall experience. Shakespearean scholarship is beginning to embrace more fully the phenomenological in early modern performance, as exemplified by Smith and Wes Folkerth, but also more recently by Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman's edited volume, *Knowing Shakespeare*.[56] As these works testify, early drama generated a multiplicity of perceptual sensations, some complementary, others deliberately incongruous with their sister senses. In medieval drama, for instance, alongside the colourful spectacle of the ornate York Doomsday pageant, the elaborate stages of the Digby *Mary Magdalene* and *The Castle of Perseverance*, and the sumptuous costumes of *Wisdom*, the records and texts

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[55] Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 7.

[56] Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2002); *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment and Cognition*, ed. by Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

tell of spectacular special effects, explosions, thunder, earthquakes and fireworks; of heavenly song and hellish cacophony; of the tactile experience of the rampaging Herod at Coventry and the fractious Nought in *Mankind* who shoves his way through the audience (only uttering the brief 'Avaunte, knawys' as a forewarning of his passage), as well as the disturbingly realistic use of saintly effigies which, as Glynne Wickham explains, were often 'stuffed with animal bones and entrails to crackle and smell', accurately replicating the sound and stench of a burning body.[57]

The main task for this study is, then, to access a portion of this multisensory experience and uncover some of the distant and ephemeral sensations produced by medieval drama, as well as how those experiences were interpreted by the culturally bound brain. Researchers of the early modern period, as we have already seen, have proved that it is possible to explore the body in historical performance through the meagre evidence that is left to us. Scholars like Skiles Howard and Mark Franko have succeeded in investigating the transient form of the body in motion, exploring how the moving body produced meaning in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dance, and their work, along with that of Smith and Folkerth in particular, can provide some successful examples of how to undertake a study of the embodied exchange between player and spectator in medieval performance.[58] Key to this process,

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[57] *Mankind*, in *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom, Mankind*, ed. by Mark Eccles, EETS no. 262, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), l. 637; Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300-1660*, Vol.1, 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4.

[58] Skiles Howard, *The Politics of Courtly Dancing in Early Modern England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the*

as mentioned above, is acknowledging the multi-sensory essence of the theatrical medium and that drama connects with a spectator on both an intellectual and a more immediate, physical level. In other words, although a medieval spectator would probably have read and interpreted the many culturally specific signs within a play, they may also have experienced something more basic and direct. As Shepherd emphasizes:

> [e]ffects are produced in the spectator simply as a result of materially sharing the space with performance. Many of these effects, bypassing the intellect, are felt in the body and work powerfully to shape the spectator's sense of the performance.[59]

An audience would, then, see and interpret the symbols on stage, be they structural, decorative or gestural, but they would also sense the kinetic energy that produced that gesture, hear the sounds that comprise the words, and feel the physical presence of the actors and the other audience members.

The arrangement and structure of the performance space would have been a significant aspect in the strength and effects of these energies and, therefore, all three chapters will begin with an initial exploration of performance space before moving on to consider the moving, speaking bodies within it. The more ephemeral, experiential properties of space, as well as its physical structures and socio-cultural associations will be examined, with

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*Baroque Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and *The Dancing Body in Renaissance Choreography* (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1986).

[59] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, pp. 36-7.

Henri Lefebvre's observations on the reciprocal relationship between space and body and Susan Bennett's work on the influence of place and spatial context on audience reception, in particular, as main theoretical frameworks.[60] In two out of the three case studies examined, no concrete evidence survives for a firmly locatable original performance site and, therefore, much of the discussion about space relies on evidence from the manuscript or the text itself, performance records from the relevant regions and some persuasive educated guesses from previous scholarship.

The play texts will also be the main source of evidence for the bodily and vocal performances analysed in each section. Initially, this perhaps appears unfeasible because how a written, two-dimensional text can tell us about the embodied actions of a three-dimensional being is not immediately obvious. To a degree, the text is limited in what it can tell us and, as always, we need to accept that inevitably there would have been meanings and effects produced in the various moments throughout a play's performance history that we can never again access, know or uncover. Nor can the text describe the audience's reactions and sensations during these moments. Nevertheless, as Shepherd points out: 'while audiences will of course vary in their states of excitability and cultural competence, the written text can indicate what is being produced for them, [that is], what is deployed in order to organise pleasure'.[61] Shepherd, in a similar manner to Lopez, outlines and argues here that, despite the changes in cultural expectations and the backgrounds of audiences over the

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[60] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1997).

[61] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, p. 76.

course of theatrical history (which, of course, need to be kept in mind), what survives through the dramatic texts can indicate the type of performances and bodies that were produced and, if not how the audience reacted, then at least the possible effects and kinds of experience the plays were aiming for.

The structure of a text, as all literature students know, is designed according to a specific plan, which the author hopes will prompt a certain understanding, emotion or other reaction from his reader. Medieval drama scholars have frequently noted specific shifts in register, language, rhyme scheme or stanza form in the plays and have suggested the possible reasons for those changes. For example, the shift from local colloquial expressions to the more sombre, respectful Latinate diction by Towneley's shepherds is a sign of their changed belief and holy status; similarly, the contrast between the whole stanzas of Christ and the fragmented words of his tormentors in the Passion sequence of the York Corpus Christi Play clearly identifies the divine nature of Christ through the harmony of his verse.[62] However, when the text is understood not as a text but as a script to be embodied by an actor, its literary features develop additional and alternative ways of communicating with an audience. For example, although the rhyme scheme would probably have served to mark a change in character or register, say, it would be appreciated aurally and the same with metre, rhythm, alliteration and so on. Likewise, actions that are implied by the words of one character or described in the

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[62] *The Second Shepherds' Play*, in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. by Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), ll. 653-97; *The Play of the Crucifixion*, in *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle (London: Edward Arnold, 1982); see also, Janette Dillon, *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 47-9.

explicit stage directions would have been made known primarily through the actual movements of the actors on stage. Moreover, as all actors and presenters know, the fundamental structure of a script, especially a script composed in verse, will demand very specific and particular things from the performer. In addition to, for example, stage directions and general dialogue, the rhythms, punctuation and literary style of the text would have had a direct impact on the actor's body, determining when he breathed and the effort required to sustain pace, projection and verse elements, such as rhyme and alliteration. As with modern play scripts, the medieval dramatic text would have shaped both the way in which the dialogue was delivered and the posture and movement of the actor's body, to indicate not only the mode or register of the performance, but how that register was conveyed to the audience through the performing body. The texts can, then, provide basic information about how the play may have been performed and the type of experience that it generated.

The foundation of this thesis is, therefore, a close and rigorous analysis of the chosen case studies, reading their effects as embodied performances that produced meanings through verbal and physical immediacy, as well as via explicit linguistic expression. Although much of the methodological inspiration comes from modern performance theory and analysis, the arguments made throughout will be underpinned by the relevant historical and contextual evidence. The role of the body in society and how its sensations and experiences are interpreted are always culturally and historically specific; the ideology of each specific time period, religion and society is inscribed into the bodies of its members, which come to represent their moral state, their status, community or group affiliations. Each chapter, therefore, draws on

appropriate evidence from contemporary records, literature, philosophy, art, and theology to both contextualise and illuminate the evidence of performance embedded in the text. The work of the *Records of Early English Drama* (*REED*) has been a valuable source in this endeavour, but, as the body is central to the discussion, other resources such as Books of Hours, prayer books, and iconography, as well as literary treatises and advice literature have proved invaluable. While having a primarily contextual function, such evidence also underlines the fact that, although at a neurological level we may share certain responses with our medieval forebears, the way that those reactions were interpreted, and emotionally experienced as a consequence, is culturally determined. The aim, then, is not to universalise theatrical experience through a phenomenological approach, but instead to emphasise and work with the particular influence of medieval culture and society on the reception of the drama.

**Thesis Structure and Chapter Breakdown**

The thesis is broken down into three independent chapters, each exploring one key facet in the creation of a corporeal dramatic experience. As I have already discussed, previous scholars have produced a considerable amount of research into the visual aspects and impact of medieval drama and, therefore, this particular element will only be included where it directly relates to or impacts on those that are the focus of the discussion. In addition, the place of smell and taste in medieval performance, both explored in Denise E. Cole's essay on

feasting and festivity on Tudor entertainment, will not be examined here, as in the context of the current work these senses, along with tactile experience, are both difficult to establish in the play texts and are not necessarily fundamental to a dramatic experience.[63]

Space, however, is an important factor in all of the case studies to be examined and does not, as a consequence, appear as an independent subject of enquiry, instead contributing to the contextualisation of each of the performances analysed and further illuminating the material conditions in which actors and audiences interacted. The chapters are arranged according to two key themes that run as threads throughout the entire thesis; the first is based on the basic constituent elements necessary for drama to occur, the actor (his voice and body) and the audience, and the second reflects a persistent thematic trend in the corpus of medieval drama, that is, an initial descent into chaos, represented in terms of the disintegration of stability, decorum and peace within the performance space, and a final return to order and the unity that this brings. Accordingly, the first two chapters represent the main tools of a player's art, with one chapter dedicated to his voice and another to his body, and suggest some of the potential ways in which each can create an experience of chaos before exploring the possible meanings generated through the bodily effects of those performances. Both chapters emphasise the heightened level of engagement encouraged through the player's performance, and show how these plays drew an audience in and transformed them into more than spectators to a

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[63] Denise E. Cole, 'Edible Performance: Feasting and Festivity in Early Tudor Entertainment', in *The Senses in Performance* (see Banes and Lepecki, above), pp. 92-104.

re-enacted historical event, constructing them instead as contributors, witnesses and partners to the corrupt and sinful world created on the stage. The final chapter then focuses expressly on the audience and how their direct physical participation in the play perhaps worked to initiate a specific and deeply emotional response to its process, so that they themselves helped to restore order and provide meaning in and through performance.

Each of the case studies has been chosen because it best exemplifies one of the core elements of performance and employs it with perhaps greater frequency or intensity than its contemporaries. So, Chapter Two focuses specifically on the aural effect of verse in medieval performance and, therefore, uses York's *Christ before Herod* as a case study, a play well known for its metrical diversity and use of alliteration. By closely analysing the extant text and considering how it might have sounded in performance, I argue that the play makes its own contribution to the noisy, bustling environment of York's Corpus Christi festival, the event at which the pageant was originally performed. The poetic devices used by the playwright, such as metrical variation, rhythm, alliteration and rhyme, seem to create a chaos of their own, so that the actor's active production of noise probably generated an experience of oppression and violence, which would then be sharply juxtaposed to the silent presence of Christ later in the pageant. The versification of the play, it will therefore be argued, is as much a theatrical device to influence audience response as it is a poetic, literary style.

Voice and gesture are very closely allied, the one corresponding and complimenting the tones and attitudes of the other. Thus, Chapter Three examines that inherent vocal-gestural link by using a close analysis of stage

directions, internal evidence and the demands made on the actor's body by the structure of the text itself. *The Castle of Perseverance*, as the stage diagram preserved in the manuscript indicates, created a performance dominated by the presence of evil, sin and temptation, and the stage directions similarly show the dominance of the negative forces of Evil in the performance space. Internal evidence also suggests that Evil's occupation of the performance space was frantic, lively and chaotic; using the script as a basic record of the players' movements, postures and gestures, and drawing on relevant evidence from literature, art and iconography, I suggest that the actors' bodily and kinetic performances are a vital means of representing the evil and demonic characters in the play. But this scripted occupation of the space would also have generated a certain kinaesthetic experience of the performance; engaging with the players, especially those within the open *platea*, it is argued, may have had a considerable effect on the audience's sense of their own bodies. Channeling the recent research into cognitive neuroscience and its application in performance studies, I suggest that the frantic movements of the players in *The Castle of Perseverance* caused the audience to experience a kinaesthetic empathy with those actions, and that the physical activities of the actors were to some degree replicated and experienced in the bodies of the audience. The unconscious pull and enjoyment of the chaotic action via this kinaesthetic connection, it will be concluded, perhaps literalised the moral message of the play and produced a simulated experience of the fall into sin and the rise towards salvation.

In the final chapter, the effects and purpose of the audience's direct participation and collaboration is taken further as I examine how a community

is threatened and then restored in the performance of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. The ritualistic elements of this unique and complex play have been much remarked on by previous scholarship, as have the spectacular activities of the Jews and the miracles they provoke; but in this chapter, I focus in particular on how the play guides the audience from the initial position of spectators through to becoming celebrants in a devotional procession. Examining the production and alterations of space through varying performance modes and activities, I explore how the differing forms of engagement and positioning of the audience guide them gradually across the border that separates actor from spectator and, furthermore, that through the eventual incorporation of ritual participation, the audience begin to feel the appropriate devotional responses and themselves work to create a renewed sense of community, harmony and order.

What binds all of these chapters is a sense that medieval drama, as a primarily didactic venture, sought not only to preach to its audiences, but also to entertain and to teach them through their own experience. Framed within the theatrical moment, the plays bring biblical and historical events and immaterial concepts into the audience's world and, for that period, unite them, creating a very real, palpable experience of theological or moral value. The absorption of the audience into the narrative, the action, the 'reality' of the play, be that as witnesses, contributors or as physical participants and co-creators, would have been a powerful technique, which not only stirred their emotions but taught them through their own actions and, therefore, made the lessons both more immediate and more memorable for the lay folk who had to exist within a fallen, corrupted world.

# Chapter Two

# Affective Sound in the York Cycle: *Christ before Herod*

Sound is a unique and central part of human experience. In the modern world we are constantly surrounded by sound of some kind, even though the constant drone of motorways, aeroplanes, computers, electric lights and central heating often become so ingrained in our daily experience that we forget the full significance of sound to the formation of mood, self, identity and community. In recent years the move by many scholars towards phenomenology has increased the awareness of the importance of sound and hearing to contemporary and past societies, and especially in the creation and effectiveness of the arts. Writers like Wes Folkerth, Bruce Smith and, most recently, Ross Brown have all taken a specific interest in the use of sound in dramatic performance: how environmental sound can communicate specific social and cultural ideas or imbue a space with a particular atmosphere and how sounds made in performance can create additional meaning for a listening audience.[1] What many of these scholars notice in particular is the peculiarly contradictory nature of sound and hearing. As Steven Connor explains, hearing is something of a paradox because 'it strikes us as at once intensely corporeal – sound literally moves, shakes, and touches us' and yet it remains

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[1] Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*; Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*; Ross Brown, *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

'mysteriously immaterial'.[2] Implicit in this statement is sound's innate penetrative quality; it is, as Don Ihde suggests, felt in the entire body: 'I literally "hear" with my body from bones to ears' so that 'the usual distinction between the senses of inner and outer is virtually obliterated'.[3] Moreover, sound is not limited to its bodily effects, but can also influence our 'affective life, that part of our subjective world which we often experience as profound, and beneath the surface', corroborating Merleau-Ponty's ideas as to the blurred boundaries between the inner self and our physical experiences of the outside world.[4]

Such an understanding of sound's potential to affect us on a more fundamental level is not, however, unique to modern thought. Indeed, in previous centuries, when the Word of God was received aurally by most people, sound, voice and word became especially significant. As Christopher Woolgar explains, one school of medieval thought held that 'sound was a material substance, coming from breath or *spiritus*, and as a material substance [...] it might be perceived as a form of touch'.[5] This theory further explained for some, like John of Salisbury, how sound and especially music caused physiological responses in the listener, but it also suggests that sound was more than an empirical phenomenon, that it was a vehicle for *spiritus*. Indeed, for many theologians, the divine Word was particularly potent in its relation to the soul: 'What have the Word and the soul in common?', asks Bernard of

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[2] Steven Connor, 'Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing', in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. by Veit Erlmann (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 153-72 (p. 157).

[3] Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, pp. 81, 75.

[4] Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare* p. 18.

[5] Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 64.

Clairvaux, '[m]uch, on all counts. In the first place, there is a natural kinship, in that the one is the Image of God, the other is made in that image'.[6] Because of their connection with the spirit or soul of an individual, certain sounds held moral associations in this period; as Woolgar goes on to suggest, sound could be either good or evil depending on whether it was harmonious or cacophonous, whole or fractured. In his study of music in medieval drama Richard Rastall describes how the harmony of song was a central means of communicating the perfection and goodness of heaven and the divine, that it was a representation of God and, therefore, more than simply a symbol of his presence. But, harmony had a natural acoustic opposite: the dissonant, disordered and loud cacophony of Hell. Any instrument, occupation or person producing similar noises, in performance or otherwise, was, therefore, automatically associated with the Devil.[7]

Thus, voice became a key component in the moral judgement of individuals; it was considered as a specific type of sound, one made only by a being which had a soul and so was perceived as the element of carnal man most akin to the spirit, as its channel to the outside world.[8] The voice was, then, one of the ten physiognomic signs, as outlined by Aristotle, along with

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[6] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs IV*, trans by Irene Edmonds (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980), Sermon 80.I.2 (p. 146).

[7] Richard Rastall, *The Heaven Singing: Music in Early English Religious Drama*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 183-204. For more on the associations of noise in medieval culture and literature see, Jeffrey J. Cohen, "Kyte oute yugilment': An Introduction to Medieval Noise', *Exemplaria*, 16.2 (2004): 267-76.

[8] Charles Burnett, 'Perceiving Sound in the Middle Ages', in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. by Mark M. Smith (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), pp. 69-84 (pp. 69, 80).

various other aspects of an individual's outer appearance, its quality and pitch similarly reflecting the moral state of the soul within.[9]

In addition to its moral associations and physiological effects, medieval thinkers were also keenly aware of the penetrative nature of sound and voice, their ability to stir the emotions and influence the inner workings of man. This was partly influenced by biblical sources, such as Isaiah 55, 10-11:

> For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: / So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it.[10]

So the Word of God was believed to embed itself in the soul of the hearer, the 'thing' to which the above passage refers, where it will prosper and encourage the growth of a faithful spirit who, when the body dies, will be received into the Kingdom of Heaven. However, via the same means people could also be seduced by bad sounds; the noise of the wicked, the harsh voices of the sinful

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[9] Aristotle, *Physiognomonics*, trans. by T. Loveday and E.S. Forster, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. 1, 806a, 27-34 (p. 1239).

[10] *King James Bible, Authorized Version with Apocrypha*, introduced by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

and heretical could equally invade the body and contaminate and change the soul of the listener.[11]

Given all the associations, meanings and qualities of sound and voice, the vocal sounds made by dramatic characters would probably have been a powerful and ambiguous element in medieval performance, especially where an intimate spatial relationship was fostered between players and audience. In addition to music, the sounds produced by the characters' verse would have marked their moral allegiances, the different poetic devices aurally representing their place in the ranks of good and evil. Richard J. Collier has already examined the importance of poetry in the York Corpus Christi Play, identifying the familiar opposition between harmony and cacophony. 'The high style of heaven', he writes, 'is juxtaposed to the colloquial coarseness of the devil's oaths', along with the shattering of stanza forms and the heavy use of alliteration.[12] Collier notes that most of the 'ebullient, noisy verse' occurs in the plays depicting Christ's Trials and those associated with the so-called York Realist, and suggests that the alliterative verse is 'perfect for the excessive display of the court, the pretensions of Princes [and] the cruelty of henchmen'.[13] The suitability of the alliterative line to such scenes has often been noted by scholars of medieval literature more generally; the feasting scenes of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where the colour, vibrancy and youth of Arthur's court are, for example, brought to life by the lively

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[11] Burnett, 'Perceiving Sound', p. 71; and Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, pp. 74-85.

[12] Richard J. Collier, *Poetry and Drama in the York Corpus Christi Play* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978), pp. 28-32.

[13] Ibid., pp. 41-2.

alliterative line, which also works to evoke the noise and action of the battle scenes in Laȝamon's *Brut*.[14] Although each poem depicts a very different event both equally require a verse form that can accurately convey the bodily and vocal animation and activity characteristic of both celebration and battle.

The success of alliterative verse in portraying such scenes is often connected to its 'inherent onomatopoeic qualities', attributes that are also deployed to great effect in the York Play.[15] For example, in the Tilemakers' *The Judgement*, a play in which the soldiers' vocabulary indicates the degree of violence used to torment Christ, the second soldier excitedly calls to his colleagues to 'driffe to hym [Christ] derfly with dasshes' so that 'Alle rede with oure rowtes we aray hym' and he 'swounes or sweltes' when they 'rente' and 'tere' him.[16] As Collier suggests, the sound of the alliteration and consonance here is almost onomatopoeic, the rolling /r/ of 'driffe', 'rede', 'routes' and 'rente' replicating the sound of tearing fabric and flesh as each blow descends on the body of Christ. Similarly, the /sʍ/ of 'swounes' and 'sweltes' seems to mimic the lashing of whips and swishing swords.[17] In *The*

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[14] Cf., for example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by R.A. Waldron (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), Fitt I, ll. 37-129; and Laȝamon, *Brut*, ed. by G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie, 2 vols. EETS O.S. 250, 277 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962-78), vol. II, ll. 12881-97.

[15] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1977), p. 39. For more on alliterative verse and its aural effects see also, *Three Alliterative Saints' Hymns: Late Middle English Stanzaic Poems*, ed. by Ruth Kennedy, EETS OS 321 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Donka Minkova *Alliteration and Sound Change in Early English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and *Studies in the Metre of Alliterative Verse*, ed. by Ad Putter, Judith Jefferson and Myra Stokes, Medium Ævum Monographs, New Series 25, (The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature: Oxford, 2007).

[16] *Christ before Pilate 2: The Judgement*, in *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle, *EETS* S.S 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ll. 354-55, 383.

[17] Collier, *Poetry and Drama*, p. 32.

*Crucifixion* that follows, the repeated use of sibilants in the description of the 'bones and senous' that 'go asoundre' when the cross is dropped into 'þis mortas heere' and allowed to 'falle in alle at ones, / For certis, þat payne schall haue no pere' adds a sinister hissing sound to the soldiers' description of their torturous activity.[18] Jeremy J. Smith refers to the correlation between sound-patterns and meaning in poetic verse as phonaesthesia, a notion first expressed by J.R. Firth. This concept outlines the intuitive notion that there are certain '"phonetic habits" which associate particular meanings [...] with particular sounds or clusters of sounds' in spoken and written language, despite there being intrinsically nothing to connect these sounds and meanings together.[19] So, although the alliterated sibilants in *The Crucifixion* extract above are not entirely onomatopoeic, that is they do not mimic the sound of ripping sinews or the thump of the falling mortise, they perhaps indicate through the use of sound the soldiers' attitudes or spiritual status and, if not the aural replication of Christ's torments then a strongly tactile, visceral sensory experience, making the players' mimicry of scourging and torture become, as Collier puts it, literalised and completed by the 'skilfully managed aural effects'.[20]

Thorlac Turville-Petre has warned of modern scholars' tendency to overemphasise the auditory power of the alliterative device, which, to a contemporary audience whose ears were 'attuned to the alliterative style', he suggests need have been no more conspicuous in its effects than those

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[18]*The Crucifixion*, ll. 103, 132, 220-2 (see *Christ before Pilate II*, above).

[19] Jeremy J. Smith, 'The Language of Older Scots Poetry', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scots*, ed. by John Corbett, J. Derrick McClure and Jane Stuart-Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 200-1.

[20] Collier, *Poetry and Drama*, p. 33.

produced by rhyming couplets.[21]  In the drama of York, however, the alliterative line would seem to have been a significant element in the performance.  As Collier argues, and as this chapter will go on to examine, the device was an acoustic means of representing character and event, the divine and virtuous as well as the demonic and sinful; but, given the corporeal impact of sound and voice on the listener, as understood by both medieval and modern theorists, alliteration in the York Play could also have had an important physical and affective influence on the audience's experience of the dramatic event.  To explore this possibility further, the current chapter will consider sound and voice in the most metrically diverse of York's pageants: *Christ before Herod*.  The acoustic impact of the famous biblical tyrant offers an extreme and unique example of the use of alliteration in medieval drama and is, therefore, an ideal text for the examination of the effects and affectivity of vocal sound in medieval performance.

**Case Study: *Christ before Herod***

**The City of York's Spatial and Acoustic Elements**

Space is an integral element of any performance and, therefore, the experience of a theatrical device is to some degree contingent upon the construction, atmosphere and connotations of the performance space in which it occurs.  So, before beginning to examine how *Christ before Herod* makes use of sound and voice, we first need to place the play in the spatial milieu against which its

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[21] Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*, p. 48.

acoustic qualities would have been heard. Space was of course important for provoking specific impressions, but it would also have influenced the way in which the sounds of performance would have been perceived. Bruce R. Smith explains how sound and space appear to be interconnected and reliant on one another for their formation. 'Features of the natural environment,' he suggests, 'affect the propagation of sound' as does the built environment:

> the size of the buildings, their shape, the materials out of which they are constructed, their placement vis-à-vis each other all determine how reverberant or damped the spaces are [and] how directly or obliquely sound travels from one place to another within the community.[22]

In turn, sound imbues space with a particular character, transforms it and brings it to life. This relationship is epitomised by an anecdote from Don Ihde. On entering Notre Dame Cathedral the author sees the space as merely 'a ghostly reminder of a civilisation long past, its muted walls echoing only the shuffle of countless tourist feet', but when he later returns during the singing of high mass 'suddenly the mute walls echo and reecho and the singing fills the cathedral. Its soul has momentarily returned, and the mute testimony of the past has once again returned to live in the moment of the ritual'.[23] For Ihde, sound not only fills the hollow cathedral, but gives it life, a purpose, a reason for being.

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[22] Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, p. 47.

[23] Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, pp. 50-1.

Sound is also a means of establishing boundaries, both spatial and social. Wes Folkerth, for example, recalls the variant use of the word *sound* in the early modern period: 'As a verb, *to sound* means not only to produce sound, but also to measure the depth of something, to establish its boundaries, to define it spatially'.[24] So, the echo from a well can indicate its depth, from a cathedral its height; how faint a voice is tells us how close or distant it is. Moreover, specific types of sounds define the boundaries of social space, an act fulfilled in towns by what Smith terms "soundmarks", those 'distinctive sounds that emanate from within,' as well as the sounds that come from outside, a community.[25] Soundmarks were specific to a district; the ringing of one church bell was, say, distinct from the one in the neighbouring parish and so the point at which one could be heard over the other established an acoustic boundary between the two parishes. The individual sounds associated with particular trades, like blacksmiths, cutlers, saddlers, shipwrights, cobblers, dyers or weavers who would have occupied particular areas within the walls of a town, would also have contributed to the separate identity of each local community.[26] John Stow, for example, records such districts existing in London in the sixteenth century where men 'of all trades, sellers of all sorts of wares, labourers in euery worke, euery morning are in their distinct and seuerall places'; the Goldsmiths, for example, worked specifically in 'the Southside of west Cheape' whereas 'the Peperers and Grocers of Sopers lane,

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[24] Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, p. 25.

[25] Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, p. 46.

[26] Ibid., p. 54.

are now in Bucklesberrie'.[27] Sound and space then work together to define and, as Jacques Attali notes, create and consolidate a community within which social interactions, boundaries and hierarchies are made known and understood.[28]

The York Corpus Christi Play would have performed in such an urban space. Each of the short playlets was performed on a pageant wagon, a wheeled structure that was pulled through the narrow streets of the city of York, stopping at specific points along a pre-designated, traditional route. Each pageant was then performed in full before moving on to the next station and the following pageant taking its place. The route began at Holy Trinity priory and made its way along Micklegate, crossing the river at Ouse Bridge and then turning up into Spurriergate, Coney Street, Stonegate, Petergate, the Mercery and finally ending at a station located at the Pavement. Not all of the stations were used every year but several seem to have been permanent sites of performance throughout the Corpus Christi Play's lifetime: the first was at the gates of Holy Trinity Priory on Micklegate, and the others the Common Hall, the Minster Gates and finally the station at the Pavement. Scaffolds were sometimes erected at the stations to accommodate paying audience members with the profits initially going straight into the pockets of those who happened to own property at the designated stop. But in 1417 the city took over and

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[27] John Stow, *A Survey of London: Reprinted from the Text of 1603*, intro. and notes by Charles Lethbridge Kingsford, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908) (Elibron Classics reprint, 2005), vol.1, pp.79, 81. For more on late medieval towns see, *The Medieval English Town: A Reader in Urban History 1200-1540*, ed. by Richard Holt and Gervase Rosser (London: Longman, 1990); and Heather Swanson, *Medieval British Towns* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999).

[28] Jacques Attali, 'Listening', in *Hearing History* (see Burnett, above), pp. 10-22 (p. 12).

ordered that every third penny of the profits made on the scaffolds be paid to the commons; failure to do so resulted in the stations being moved to a different site.[29]

Money, trade and commerce were present throughout the performance of the York Play: most of the streets along which the Play paraded were associated with commerce and trade; the pageants were paid for, organised and performed by the city's craft and merchant guilds, those who prospered in, and brought wealth and prestige to, York. In turn, the pageants were opportunities for the guilds to advertise their wares as well as proclaim the status and success of the city itself. Indeed, the location of the final station at the Pavement, the commercial centre of York, is significant. The choice of location would have highlighted for those present the controlling hand behind the day's spectacle and the source of York's influential wealth.[30] It would probably have suggested to the spectator that the pageants were both a celebration of Corpus Christi and, perhaps just as importantly, a celebration of the city itself and those who drove its burgeoning economy.

The exact proportions of the famous pageant wagons which occupied these stations were, as far as we know, never documented, in either civic or guild records, but through modern experimentation scholars have estimated them to have been around twelve feet long by between seven and nine feet

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[29] *A/Y Memorandum Book Y: E20*, 1417 (7 June), ff. 187v-8*, in *REED: York*, ed. by Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), English translation vol. II, pp. 713-14. See also, Richard Beadle, 'Introduction', in *The York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), pp. 32-3

[30] Beadle, 'Introduction', p. 29.

wide.[31] This approximation seems conservative in relation to the stages of modern theatres; however, the narrow streets of medieval York, which John McKinnell suggests may have been a restrictive fifteen feet wide in places, would have struggled to hold a larger structure and so a wagon with dimensions of twelve by seven feet would probably have been the maximum that the space could hold.[32] In addition to the horizontal limitations imposed by the width of the street, the space was further enclosed by the top level of the houses lining either side of the pageant route. Plate 1 shows examples of the surviving medieval houses on The Shambles in York, the second and third floors of which, in typical medieval style, jut out by at least a foot beyond the lower walls and, consequently, may have caused some difficulty for the taller pageants, like the Mercers' *Last Judgement* (in one modern production, this particular pageant reached more than twenty feet in height).[33] Of course the pageant may not have been the only structure in this space; the scaffolds erected for audiences were perhaps also present at certain stations and would have decreased the amount of performance space available, as well as increasing the sense of cramped enclosure for those below it.

The Mercers' pageant also provides us with a detailed picture of how remarkably ornate some of the wagons could be. Their guild indenture of 1433 records the Doomsday pageant, notably the last pageant of the day, and is

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[31] See, for instance, John Marshall, 'Modern Productions of Medieval English Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (1994), pp. 290-311 (p.304); and John McKinnell, 'The Medieval Pageant Wagon at York: Their Orientation and Height', *Early Theatre*, 3 (2000): 79-104.

[32] McKinnell, 'The Medieval Pageant Wagon': 89.

[33] Ibid.: 93.

remarkably detailed and worth quoting as fully as possible. For example, their pageant is described as requiring a:

helle mouthe [...] A cloud & ij peces of Rainbow of tymber [...] A great coster [ornamental hanging] of rede damaske payntid for the bakke syde of þe pagent ij other lesse costers for ij sydes of þe Pagent [...] iiij Irens to bere vppe heuen [...] A brandreth of Iren þat god sall sitte vppon when he sall sty [ascend] vppe to heuen [...] ij peces of rede cloudes & sternes [stars] of gold langing to heuen [...] iij peces of rede cloudes With sunne bemes of gold & sternes for þe hiest of heuen [...] vij grete Aungels halding þe passion of god Ane of þame has a fane of laton & a cross of Iren in his hede giltid iiij smaller Aungels giltid holding þe passion ix smaller Aungels paytid rede to renne aboute in þe heuen.[34]

Although the Mercers' wagon was probably unique in its extravagance, an example from British Library MS Additional 15707 (plate 2) similarly illustrates the level of detail that could be attained by the wheeled structures. It depicts a pageant wagon constructed as a ship, replete with mast, crow's nest, sails and rigging, and, although a continental source from early sixteenth-century Nuremberg, it demonstrates the structure's potential to assume the varying locations required by the biblical narrative. Such an elaborate design

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[34] *Mercers' Pageant Documents MA: D6\* (11 June)*, reproduced in *REED: York*, vol. 1, pp. 55, ll. 20-43.

**Plate 1** The Shambles, York. Photograph by C. Wright (2010).

**Plate 2** Pageant Wagon. London. British Library MS Add. 15707, f.70r

would, moreover, probably have occupied even more of the performance space, appearing as a collage of colour, texture and movement, a spectacle to consume a significant percentage of the audience's visual field. The mixture of York's narrow streets, its houses' overhanging jetties and the tall, bulky and, in some cases, highly ornate pageant wagons would have created a very limited and cramped performance space. In such conditions even the smallest of wagons would have consumed most of the available space, leaving very little room for the remaining audience to stand, let alone for the players to perform.

Originally, the pageants shared their performance day with the Corpus Christi procession led by the ecclesiastical authorities of York, although the two were always separate events. However, the popularity and festive environment of the pageants were considered a distraction from the sombre, dignified procession, and so from 1426 onwards the two were allocated separate days for their performances, the civic play taking Corpus Christi day itself and the ecclesiastical procession occurring the day after.[35] It is perhaps an indication of the guild corporation's influence that they were granted the feast itself on which to perform, and conceivably also a sign of the event's commercial success. Furthermore, the decision clearly indicates the difference in atmosphere between the two events; the enjoyment of the pageants by the lay participants was obviously far greater than that of the procession (or at least of a different nature), as evidenced by the concern that they detracted from the

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[35] *A/Y Memorandum Book* Y: E20, ff 187v-8* (*7 June*), reproduced in *REED: York*, vol.1, pp. 28-9; ff 278-8v*, vol. 1, pp. 42-4.

religious ceremony and that the 'proper observance of the feast was marred by the eating, drinking and merrymaking of the civic event'.[36]

As I will go on to discuss, sound can contribute to the atmosphere of a performance space, but it can also be a means to regulate the type of social interactions that are appropriate to a space or an event and how the boundaries within both are made known and understood. Jacques Attali, in his study on music and political power, proposes that sound is often used as 'a tool for the creation of a community [it] is what links a power centre to its subjects'; the medieval ecclesiastic and civic authorities appear to have used sound to achieve a similar end, employing it to command their congregations and citizens, to order their spaces and the activities which occurred within them.[37] The ringing of bells is an obvious example, whether, as Stow recalls, to mark a night curfew or to call a community to its compulsory church attendance.[38] The singing of the liturgy is a less obvious instance, which nevertheless probably would have prompted a set of ritualized and, presumably, reflexive movements and vocal responses, its Latin sounds indicating the sanctity and spiritual superiority of the priests. Evidence from contemporary records suggests that sound was also an important element in the correct observation of holy days: in 1343, for example, Archbishop de Zouche ordered that on 'that most distinguished day, viz, (the day) of Friday which is called the day of preparation before Easter', all citizens of York, 'each and every one of you subject to us in our city and diocese and in the individual churches of the same', must: 'let unseemly conversations and illicit discussions cease, let the

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[36] Beadle, *The York Play* (1982), p. 29.

[37] Attali, 'Listening', p. 12.

[38] Stow, *A Survey of London*, vol. 1, pp. 99-100.

regular judiciary order pause and all irregular noises be still on that day'.[39] The

Archbishop's emphasis on 'irregular noises' emphasises just how imperative

appropriate speech and the reduction of noise was to holy days; whatever these

illicit noises were, they probably indicated a person's rejection of, or at least a

lack of proper respect for, the prevailing beliefs and an overt challenge to the

authority of the church.[40]

The noise created by the participants of the York Corpus Christi Play

and its merry revellers was probably, then, a significant factor in the disruption

of the religious procession, especially given the volume of people who flooded

into the city from the surrounding towns and villages. The number of citizens

and visitors who came to see the York Cycle is undocumented, although there

were evidently enough people to cause concern that the pageants were

detracting from the religious service and to justify John Moreton paying for the

privilege of erecting a scaffold outside his house in Micklegate in 1417.[41] The

figure would undoubtedly have varied from station to station, pageant to

pageant and year to year, depending on such factors as the space available at

each location, the weather on the day, the popularity of specific pageants and

specific restraints enforced by civic government to counter such factors as the

outbreak of plague.[42] With these factors in mind, Greg Walker suggests that

the audience of citizens and visitors could, at certain stations, have numbered

around two hundred with people jostling for room in the narrow streets,

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[39] *Constitution of Archbishop de Zouche* BI: Reg. 10f 264*, reproduced in *REED: York*, Vol. 2, p. 688. Translated from the Latin.

[40] Attali, 'Listening', p. 13.

[41] A/Y Memorandum Book Y: E20, ff.187v-8*, *REED: York*, vol. II, p. 715 (Latin translation).

[42] McKinnell, 'The Medieval Pageant Wagon', p. 80.

hanging out of the windows of adjacent houses, pushing their way through the assembled mass on the way to another entertainment, or buying refreshments from street vendors.[43]

Spatially then, the pageant players performed, in many instances, in very contained, compressed spaces energised with the excitement of holiday spirit, spaces with undertones of the basic, incidental sounds of human habitation: clattering cartwheels, coughs, shuffling feet and the casual chatter of conversation. In addition to these, a performance space in York would have resounded with its own soundmarks, but these were probably very different from the habitual noises heard in that space on non-feast days, indicating a change in the usual routine: that is, the commencement and observation of the Corpus Christi celebrations. The lack of York's industrious sounds might, paradoxically, be considered as a soundmark, the cessation of the noises of trade and manufacture itself marking the beginning of the feast day. In their place was perhaps the ringing of bells, possibly to a different rhythm or combination, the distinctive chime of the Minster bells contrasting with those of the forty or so other churches erected in the city since the Norman invasion. The music or other entertainment of an independent performer was maybe also heard alongside the unfamiliar accents of the visitors from outlying towns and villages, the calls of hawkers and food vendors or perhaps even the excited cheers from a distant cockfight or bear baiting. It is also likely that the spectators, especially those on the crowd's periphery, would be able to hear the performances on either side of the pageant that they were watching. As Eileen

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[43] Greg Walker, 'Religious Narrative: The Biblical Plays. Introduction', in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. by Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 3.

White points out, from any given station along the pageant route it would probably have been possible to see the wagons both ahead and behind of any given pageant wagon; for example, an audience watching *Christ and the Doctors* at the Stonegate station would probably also be aware of the concurrent performances of *The Slaughter of the Innocents* (the previous pageant) at the Minster Gates station, and *The Baptism* (the next pageant to arrive) performing at the station on the corner of Coney Street and Stonegate. It is, White suggests, therefore also likely that other pageants were heard beyond the sounds created by the nearest performance, especially the noisiest of the pageants like *The Fall of the Angels, The Slaughter of the Innocents* and *The Harrowing of Hell.*[44]

Such soundmarks would have formed the distinctive sounds that defined York as a specific community, on a very particular day, and distinguished it from other urban environments by advertising the uniqueness of the event.[45] Despite the wariness of illicit sound expressed by Archbishop de Zouche, in many areas the medieval church was also acutely aware of the more positive, didactically useful qualities of sound and the extent to which it could move congregations to a willing and fervent devotion. In a recent article, Carolyn Muessig recounts an early sixteenth-century Good Friday sermon given by a Franciscan observant friar in Metz. In an attempt to create an emotional and very real experience for his audience, the friar concealed two or three accomplices within a chapel-like structure in the church of Saint Peter. As the preacher began to describe the crucifixion of Christ, one of the hidden

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[44] Eileen White, 'Places to Hear the Play: The Performance of the Corpus Christi Play at York', *Early Theatre*, 3 (2000): 49-78 (57).

[45] Ibid.: 54.

assistants 'hit hard on an anvil with a large hammer three times for every nail that went into the hands and feet of Jesus.' According to the chronicler, these sound effects had a significant emotional impact on the assembled congregation, 'bringing them to great compassion' and tearful empathy.[46] the friar's technique was obviously highly theatrical and it is not difficult to imagine medieval English performances and sermons using similar dramatic devices. Unfortunately, explicit evidence of such devices being used in English enactments of the Passion has not survived, but sound certainly played a central role in the realisation of many biblical episodes, the singing of angels, for example, or the crack of thunder and the moans of souls in hell. It is also possible that a similar effect was created through spoken dialogue; the onomatopoeic alliteration of York's *The Judgement* and *The Crucifixion*, discussed above, would actualise the activities of the soldiers, but it might also affect the audience in a similar way to the Metz friar's ringing anvil. Just as the friar used the anvil to mimic the noise of a hammer hitting nails, so the York playwright uses alliteration to mark the moment when whips and fists hit the flesh of Christ or those moments when his pain peaks, not simply to emphasise them but to intensify and deepen the trauma of such an experience for his audience. Such an encounter corresponds with the devotional methods of late medieval popular piety where, to prompt a greater appreciation for Christ's suffering, Christians were encouraged to visualise and experience for themselves the Crucifixion, and, in doing so, increase their compassion for and devotion to their Saviour. This form of devotion is well known through the

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[46] Carolyn Muessig, 'Performance of the Passion: the Enactment of Devotion on the Later Middle Ages', in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008), pp. 129-42 (pp. 134-6).

works of, for instance, Nicholas Love and Margery Kempe and for producing the now familiar image of the crucified Christ hanging painfully on the Cross, his body twisted unnaturally and his five wounds bleeding freely. But where these works prompt the reader to 'haue trewe ymaginacion & inwarde compassion of þe peynes & þe passion of oure lorde', medieval theatre brought an audience physically and directly into the scene, taking them back to the moment of sacrifice, actualizing its significance and importance for them personally through their participation and the direct physical and emotional impact that the event had on them, rather than through their imagination alone.[47]

**The Sound of Tyranny**

Important to the creation of York's lived biblical scenes are the oppressors, the perpetrators of the corrupt world so in need of Christ's birth. Echoing the arrogance of Lucifer, the biblical villains Pharaoh, Caiaphas and Pilate, the secular kings and religious authorities who condemn and persecute the faithful, bully and cajole their way through their pageants and their frequent commands for the audience to be silent can be seen as a way of producing the experience of earthly and spiritual oppression. For example, the Hosiers' Pharaoh, in the eleventh of York's pageants, declares 'O pees, I bidde þat no man passe, / But kepe þe cours þat I commaunde'.[48] Similarly, Caiaphas calls for 'Pees,

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[47] Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, Capitulum* xl, ll. 15-16 (p. 159).

[48] *Moses and Pharaoh* (see *Christ before Pilate II*, above), ll. 1-2.

bewshers' and Pilate, although offering a less emphatic order, also orders that the audience 'Restreyne you f[ro] stryuying for strengh of my strakis'.[49] In York, the recurring demands for silence from Pharaoh, Caiaphas and Pilate can be seen as a technique for the creation of a new "soundmark": the tyrant's own bellowing voice which pierces the acoustic space and insists that it be heard and obeyed.[50] Through a desire to control the acoustic environment the tyrants seek to curb the independent vocalisations of the audience, 'using sound as a weapon to effect [their] will', to remove the spectators' status as audience and recast them instead as fictional subjects to be governed and ruled.[51]

Perhaps the greatest example of such acoustic tyranny comes from one of the most famous characters in medieval English theatre: the thunderous, rampaging figure of Herod. Historically, three different Herods ruled the kingdom of Judea between 37 BC and AD 44. It is the first, known as Herod the Great, who, according to the bible, met with the Magi and ordered the Slaughter of the Innocents; his son Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist and mocked Christ before returning him to Pilate for judgement, and it is he who is the main protagonist of this case study, *Christ before Herod*. Herod the Great's grandson, Herod Agrippa, was the third of that name to rule Judea and was noted in history for his pride and vanity, a mortal king who proclaimed himself a god, the king who ordered the beheading of Saint James and the imprisonment of Saint Peter before finally being struck down by an avenging

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[49] *Christ before Annas and Caiaphas*, 1.1 and *Christ before Pilate I: The Dream of Pilate's Wife* (see *Christ before Pilate II*, above), ll.1-2.

[50] Attali, 'Listening', p. 13.

[51] Connor, 'Edison's Teeth', p. 163.

angel.[52] In some medieval literature the distinction between the three kings and their actions is maintained, as in *The Golden Legend* which clearly sets apart the three Herods by outlining their deeds, although the author also stresses that all three were 'notorious for their cruelty'.[53] In other literature, however, and especially in the drama, the deeds and characteristics of the three historical Herods are conflated, although whether deliberately or through misappropriation is not clear. In *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, for instance, both the Slaughter of the Innocents and the beheading of John the Baptist are attributed to a king named 'Herode', who is also punished by God by being 'put to dethe / by the smallyst worme', a death usually associated with the vain Herod Agrippa.[54] With the conflation of the different generations and their actions can also be seen the beginnings of Herod as a character type, his key traits of rage, envy, cruelty, lustfulness, vanity and pride being provided by his three historical antecedents.

Even in early liturgical drama the crimes of the Herod dynasty were attributed to a single individual and already he was beginning to exhibit his characteristic vices and behaviours and become the 'epitome of human

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[52] See S.S. Hussey, 'How Many Herods in the Middle English Drama?' *Neophilologus*, 48 (1964): 252-59 (252); Penelope B.R. Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Medieval English Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 96-7; and David Staines, 'To Out-Herod Herod: The Development of a Dramatic Character', *Comparative Drama,* 10 (1976): 29-53 (30-1).

[53] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), vol. 1, p. 56. Also see Volume II of *The Golden Legend*, pp. 5, 34, 132.

[54] *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, trans. by William Caxton, ed. by M.Y. Offord, EETS S.S 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 111, ll. 34-5.

wickedness'.[55] In the *Service Representing Herod* and the *Slaughter of the Innocents* episodes of the twelfth-century Fleury play, Herod is described as 'inflamed with rage' (*'furore accensus'*), the stage directions add that he and his son 'make threatening gestures with their swords' (*'Herodes et filius minentur cum gladiis'*), and later, in the *Slaughter of the Innocents*, Herod 'as if demented, having seized a sword, [should] contrive to kill himself' (*'Tunc Herodes, quasi corruptus, arrepto gladio, paret seipsum occidere'*).[56] These distinctive characteristics of rage, violence and madness are also seen in later drama. The Shearmen and Taylors' Herod, for example, famously rages in the streets of Coventry, and in Chester marginal stage directions seem to require Herod to throw and catch a sword, the symbol of his confrontational nature, which he then breaks in a fit of rage.[57] Consequently, as David Staines notes, by the thirteenth century the name of Herod evoked everything that was conceived as wicked in mankind and so came to represent not an individual historical character, as in *The Golden Legend*, but a 'personification of vice', an 'exemplum of the horror of vice and a frank warning to mankind to avoid evil'.[58]

Moreover, as a dramatic character Herod's raging, stamping aggressiveness seems to have contributed to the arrival of a particular style of

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[55] Staines, 'To Out-Herod Herod', p. 32.

[56] *Service Representing Herod*, in *Medieval Drama*, ed. by David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), sd. 58 (p.63), sd. 77 (p. 64) and *The Slaughter of the Innocents*, also in *Medieval Drama*, sd. 8 (p. 68).

[57] *The Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors*, in *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, ed. by Hardin Craig, 2nd edn., EETS O.S 87 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), sd. 783; *Play VIII: The Three Kings*, in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS S.S.3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), ll.196-204, 325, 349-89.

[58] Staines, 'To Out-Herod Herod', pp. 29-32.

performance. Chaucer's Absolon shows off his 'lightnesse and maistrye' by playing 'Herodes upon a scaffold hye', the performance obviously requiring a level of virtuosity to thus display Absolon's skill and agility.[59] The remnants of Herod's life as a dramatic character are recorded in Hamlet's stern warning to his player king, where he emphatically requests that the actor not 'mouth' his speech like a town-crier:

> Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious, periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.[60]

This famous speech lists many of the defining characteristics of the Herod role, the thrusting gestures (perhaps similar to the Chester Herod's sword-play) and the 'robustious' or violent attitude, but more importantly for this chapter the whirling tempest of noise that 'split[s] the ears of the groundlings' and rips 'a passion to tatters, to very rags'.

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[59] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), ll. 3383-4.

[60] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells *et al*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), Act 3, scene 2, ll. 3-14.

In York, Herod opens the thirty-first pageant of the day with a similarly tempestuous and bellowing 'Pes, ye brothellis and browlys in þis broydenesse inbrased' (1).[61] The initial interjection here, as with those of Pharaoh and Caiaphas, would almost certainly have had a pragmatic effect, the simple, single syllable 'Pes' offering a short, sharp order, calling attention to the player and the commencement of the performance. Such a sudden outburst would also ensure that the actor is not consumed by the noise of the city and the other pageants and entertainments close by, making him prominent within the soundscape and, so, a central figure within the performance space itself. In addition to being a pragmatic tool, the actor's dominance within both the acoustic and physical space is thematically significant. Herod, like Pharaoh, attempts to order the physical movements of the audience, demanding: 'Youre tounges fro tretyng of triffillis be trased' and 'Plextis for no plasis but platte you to þis playne' (3, 5), actions that communicate both obedience and loyalty to the king. It would appear then that Herod, like his predecessors, is attempting to assert a prescriptive soundmark within the performance space, to silence (as far as was possible) the pre-existing soundscape and impose his own bellowing, domineering voice.

In the manuscript, 'Pes' appears as a constituent word of the opening line, and both Richard Beadle and Greg Walker have interpreted it as such, reading, quite accurately, the scribe's punctuation as a comma in their own

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[61] All quotations from *Christ before Herod*, in *The York Plays*, ed. by Beadle (2009). Line numbers given in parenthesis.

edited texts.[62] In terms of metre, this would make the line a trochaic pentameter, beginning with a beat rather than an off-beat; however, it is unlikely to have been *heard* as such in performance. Herod's opening line would have been in competition with the array of sounds described above, a general cacophony of noise over which the performer needed to be heard. It is therefore likely that this initial monosyllabic eruption from the player would have been experienced as an individual unit of speech. Through a combination of the actor's vocal exertion and a momentary pause to regain his breath and reinforce its impact, this single word would probably have been heard as distinct from what is, textually, the rest of the line. The metre would, in consequence, have been experienced as an initial monometer, 'Pes!', followed by an iambic tetrameter line, 'ye brothellis and browlys in þis broydenesse inbrased' (1). After punching through the wall of sound, the verse then continues with a group of four regular iambic tetrameter lines, each containing four rounds of alliteration landing neatly on the iambic beat.

In examining the relationship between auditory rhythm and brain function, cognitive theorist Michael H. Thaut suggests that auditory rhythms communicate 'interval-based temporal templates' to the brain, in other words aural patterns based on regular timed beats, such as Herod's iambic lines above, and that these templates have a particular influence on the body's motor system.[63] As Jill Stevenson points out, research like Thaut's demonstrates that

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[62] See *The York Play: A Facsimile of British Library MS Additional 35290*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Peter Meredith (Leeds: The University of Leeds, 1983), f. 164; *The York Plays*, ed. by Beadle (2009); and *Medieval Drama*, ed. by Walker.

[63] Michael H. Thaut, 'Rhythm, Human Temporality, and Brain Function', in *Musical Communication*, ed. by Dorothy Meill, Raymond MacDonald and David J. Hargreaves, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 172-91 (p. 176).

auditory rhythm, whether in music or, as at York, in poetic verse, affects the entire body as well as aural sensation; as she puts it, aural rhythm entrains the human body.[64] The term 'entrainment' originates from physics where it refers to the moment when the frequency of one moving system becomes locked to the frequency of another driver system. So, in *Christ before Herod* the emphatic verse would become akin to the driver system, entering into the brains and motor systems of the listeners and tuning them into that same iambic rhythm. Perhaps the closest analogous experience would be that of listening to drumming, lyric poetry or folk music where the strength of the beat feels infectious and is, consequently, replicated in the unconscious tapping of fingers and feet. Herod's regular opening iambic rhythm then may have entrained the spectators' bodies, encouraging his audience to both anticipate and participate in that rhythm, a rhythm determined and regulated by the actor. As the driving force behind the beat, Herod, the player and the character, would have been to some extent in control of his subjects, his rule and governance subtly imposed on them through the auditory power of his verse.

So, despite the content of the opening four lines, the iambic tetrameter rhythm entices and seduces the audience into participating in the performance, the four lines of verse being just enough to initiate what Simon Shepherd terms 'body-group rhythm', in which each spectator passes on the 'physical contagion' to the next so that each audience member then feels compelled to 'participate in that group body, to share its rhythm [thus blurring] the separation between witnessing and participating'.[65] In *Christ before Herod*,

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[64] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 138.

[65] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, p. 89.

however, this is in fact an acoustic lure, for as soon as the audience have become familiar with that rhythm, to anticipate it and feel a part of it, Herod suddenly changes to a trochaic line: 'Plextis for no plasis but platte you to þis playne'. After the gentle, if somewhat incongruous, iambic lines, the sudden occurrence of the harshly emphatic 'Plextis for no plasis' would be jarring, defying the audience's expectation of a light initial off-beat and so creating an almost physical jolt, an acoustic punch which would unbalance the listener, disorientate them and immediately give Herod the upper hand. The metre, moreover, does not recover from this rhythmic break; for example, trochaic line five is followed by a further iambic line which 'With dasshis' (7) then interrupts severing the stanza in two. Following this, the king returns to a trochaic rhythm with 'Traueylis noʒt as traytours þat tristis in trayne,' then another iambic, 'Or by þe bloode þat Mahounde bledde, with þis blad schal ye blede' (8-9), and in line eleven there is a structural repetition of line one, 'ʒae, and lusshe all youre lymmys with lasschis', a pattern which is not repeated with any regularity beyond the first stanza. In addition to the erratic metrical pattern, there is very little consistency in line-length, which would again contribute towards the spectators' disorientation. In the opening twenty-six lines of verse, Herod varies from a minimum of one stress per line to a maximum of six, including in between trimeter, tetrameter and pentameters, jarring and twisting each to fit within his varying trochaic and iambic metres and repeatedly shattering audience expectations of a consistent tetrameter line. Herod's speech, then, never does permit a steady, reliable rhythm to become established, but continues to vacillate between an iambic and trochaic metre, never again permitting the audience to become accustomed to one particular

beat, to be equally part of the performance. Instead, the oscillating metre denies them equal ownership of the rhythm and so places them at the mercy of Herod's erratic and volatile reign.

The York Play is well known for its metrical diversity and for many years the variety of versification recorded in the surviving copy was presumed to be illustrative of the different stages of composition and the various styles of the dramatists who worked on the pageants. Early scholars like Charles Davidson, C.M. Gayley, W.W. Greg and, later, E.K. Chambers argued for three periods of composition, identified by metrical styles.[66] Richard Beadle characterises these three presumed stages as:

> a simple and dull didactic cycle dated *c.* 1350; the introduction
> of the work of a "great metrist" early in the fifteenth century;
> and the rewriting of a number of plays in the Passion section of
> the cycle later in the fifteenth century by a very able dramatist,
> also notable as a 'realist'.[67]

Understanding the metrical diversity of the York Play in this way is by no means conclusive; indeed, it was challenged as early as 1951 by J.B. Reese.[68] Moreover, it does not account for the possibility that the surviving text is a

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[66] Charles Davidson, 'Studies in the English Mystery Plays' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Yale, 1892); C.M. Gayley, *Plays of Our Forefathers* (New York: Duffield and Co., 1907); W.W. Greg, *Bibliographical and Textual Problems of the English Miracle Cycles* (London: Alexander Moring, 1914); E.K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945).

[67] Richard Beadle, 'Introduction' to *The York Play* (1982), p. 40.

[68] J.B. Reese, 'Alliterative Verse in the York Cycle', *Studies in Philology*, 48 (1951): 639-68.

record of a live performance at some point during the cycle's life and, consequently, does not acknowledge the potential for dramatic symbolism, meaning or effect to be produced by such metrical diversity. Even with York's poetic multiplicity, *Christ before Herod* is exceptional, being by far the most metrically diverse of the pageants. Beadle notes that this causes particular problems for the editor, who must decide when the metrical irregularity is down to scribal error and when it is a deliberate poetic device. He identifies 'a few alterations and additions by later hands', including marginal annotations and observations, and notes that the condition of the manuscript itself further hinders clarification.[69] Although such difficulties need to be acknowledged here they do not necessarily prevent us from exploring the effects and meanings that such metrical diversity could produce in performance, as Collier has previously shown; indeed, an examination of the verse's possible effects may in fact aid any study of the text's compilation and contributors.

Evidence for the intentional creation of a diverse metre in *Christ before Herod* can be found when it is compared with other pageants from the cycle. *The Nativity*, for instance, rarely deviates from its steady stanzas of seven iambic lines, starting with four tetrameter lines, a dimeter, a tetrameter and ending with a further dimeter. This pattern continues throughout the one hundred and fifty-four lines of the text, and even when shifts do occur, the change is almost imperceptible. Even Pilate opens *The Dream of Pilate's Wife* with a fairly consistent pattern of nine-line stanzas, all iambic, and only

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[69] Beadle, *The York Play* (1982), pp. 447-8.

varying occasionally between a three- and five-beat central line.[70] In comparison with these reliable rhythms such constant variation would clearly prevent harmony from developing in Herod's verse, the sharp, jolting and unexpected shifts in metre creating an impression of lawlessness and unpredictability. The aural experience of such metrical diversity would probably have actualised the meaning behind Herod's words. Having tuned the spectators in to his dominant sound, Herod promises physical violence but causes aural carnage; he would seem, as Hamlet says, to tear his verse to ribbons, breaking it, fracturing it to introduce further disharmony into the acoustic field. The experience of hearing this sharp rhythmic change had the potential to be quite disconcerting and uncomfortable, and so Herod's authority would be enforced through his metrical dominance and control. The audience, therefore, were not only witness to Herod's tyranny, they were victims of it, experiencing it directly through the psychological and physical effects of his irregular verse.

The playwright's inconsistent use of multiple metres is further enhanced by his employment of alliteration. Without a consistent metre, the traditional alliterative line of four stresses and an aa/ax pattern of alliteration cannot stand. As expected, however, the majority of alliteration does land on the metrical stress within the line; for instance, in line two, 'And freykis þat are frendely your freykenesse to frayne', the /fr/ lands neatly on each iambic beat (aa/aa). Most obviously, the addition of alliteration to a line would emphasise the word in which it occurred, ensuring that the most vital words within that

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[70] *The Nativity* and *The Dream of Pilate's Wife*, in *The York Plays* (2009) (*see Christ before Pilate II*, above).

sentence, in the instance above 'freykis', 'frendely', 'freykenesse' and 'frayne', would be heard above the background clamour. In the acoustic environment of fifteenth-century York, this would have been a vital means of ensuring that the message of the pageant was conveyed throughout the gathered multitude, even to those on the periphery of the crowd who were most exposed to the noise of other pageants and entertainments. By emphasising specific words through a combination of metre and alliteration, the playwright guaranteed that, even if much of a sentence was drowned out by the surrounding soundscape, the most significant words remained distinct and the audience could at least get the gist of what was being said. Moreover, because the majority of alliteration lands on the metrical beat, it would have enhanced the metre itself, helping to add stress to the rhythm and so compounding the disorientating effect of an erratic metrical structure.

But the alliteration would probably also have enhanced the experience of Herod's reign. Take, for instance, the powerful /p/ of 'Pes', which opens the pageant, and the first jump to a trochaic metre in line five, which is similarly marked by a highly emphatic /p/ sequence. This explosive sound can be performed quite forcefully, pronounced with emphasis and, when repeated in such quantities, can become a round of verbal shots, especially when accompanied by lines of other plosives /b/, /d/, /t/ and /k/ and fricatives /f/ and /s/. The playwright appears to be creating a torrent of aggressive, harsh and hostile sounds, the most powerful of which recur again and again in dizzying numbers. Although the fricatives are not as abrupt as the plosives they would nevertheless add a quiet, menacing note to Herod's otherwise explicitly antagonistic tone, offering a contrast between the two types of sound and so

drawing attention to the duplicitous, and potentially volatile, character of the king. Much of Herod's verse exploits this contrast between plosives and fricatives by combing them both into one line of entwined alliteration and consonance; so, plosive /k/ is combined with /s/ and the clusters /fr/ in 'freykis' and 'freykenesse' (2), while /tr/ mingles with /s/ in 'Traueylis', 'traytours' and 'tristis' (8). This is not, however, limited to fricative and plosive sounds, but is also produced by the various combinations of these with, for instance, lateral /l/ ('lusshe', 11), affricates /ʧ/ ('choppe', 17) and /ʤ/ ('jeauntis', 14), and nasal /m/, /n/ sounds, as well as frequent consonantal agreement. So, for example, line five above not only alliterates /pl/ (Plextis, plasis, platte, playne), but combines it with plosive /t/ and fricative /s/ consonance (plextis, but, platte, to; plextis, plasis, þis). There may also, potentially, be assonantal agreement in vowel sounds /ɛ/ and /a/ here, but of course this will depend on our interpretation of Northern Middle English vowel pronunciation and how they sound when joined with consonants /s/, /t/ and /y/, a discussion beyond the remits of the current work, but a linguistic point which we, nonetheless, need to be aware of.[71] Even without its potential assonance this one tetrameter line displays a bewildering array of sound combinations, creating a barrage of contrasting sounds which continues from line to line and verse to verse, generating a sustained assault on the already aurally vulnerable audience.

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[71] See G.L. Brook, *English Sound Changes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972); Charles Jones, *A History of English Phonology* (London: Longman, 1989); Jeremy J. Smith, *Essentials of Early English*, (London: Routledge, 1999); Simon Horobin and Jeremy J. Smith, *An Introduction to Middle English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002); Minkova, *Alliteration and Sound Change.*

In comparison with other cycle play renderings of Herod, the volume of alliteration, consonance and assonance used in York's version is striking. Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show analyses of Herod's longest speeches in York, Chester and N-Town, noting certain stylistic elements.[72] Although these tables offer only a very brief and basic analysis of the texts, they nevertheless exemplify, and give a visual representation of, the remarkable aural effects created by the York playwright. Counting only the most obvious use of alliteration, around 15% of the words in N-Town Herod's longest speech are alliterative; in Chester, the king uses only one per cent more, reaching around 16% of his words, but York far exceeds both of these with around 38% of Herod's vocabulary being alliterative and this does not include those instances in which the initial sound of a cluster alliterates with the first sound of an adjacent word, as with 'tounges' and 'tretyng' (3), or where a central segment of a word is in agreement with the alliteration throughout the rest of the line, 'jeauntis' and 'ingendis' (14), for example.[73] The tables also show that, very simply, York deploys a far greater volume of words within fewer lines than either N-Town or Chester; that is two hundred and forty-two words in twenty-six lines as compared with, say, the two hundred and twenty-six words in

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[72] All of the examples here refer to the judgement and mocking of Christ rather than to the Slaughter of the Innocents, in other words to episodes involving Herod Antipas rather than Herod the Great. Towneley *Magnus Herodus* has, therefore, been excluded from this comparison because it depicts the Slaughter of the Innocents. Because of the conflation of historical figures, however, it is possible to identify similarities in the characterization of the Towneley Herod. See *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*, ed. by A.C. Cawley, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958).

[73] *The Trials before Pilate and Herod*, in *The N-Town Play*, ed. by Stephen Spector, EETS S.S. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), ll. 189-208; *Play XVI: the Trial*, in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, vol.1, ed. by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS S.S 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), ll. 67-81.

**Table 2.1** Breakdown of metre, rhyme scheme, alliteration and consonance, *Christ before Herod*, in *The York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle, EETS S.S. 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ll. 1-26.

| Line | Metre | Alliteration/Consonance, etc. | Rhyme word | R. Scheme |
|------|-------|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 1 | 1, 4 | brothellis, browlys, broydenesse, inbrased | inbrased | a |
| 2 | 4 | freykis, frendely, freykenesse, frayne | frayne | b |
| 3 | 4 | tounges, tretyng, triffillis, trased; fro, of | trased | a |
| 4 | 4 | brande, bright, breste, brayne | brayne | b |
| 5 | 4 | Plextis, plasis, platte, playne | playne | b |
| 6 | 4 | drawe, drofyng, dresse, drede | drede | c |
| 7 | 1 | dasshis | dasshis | d |
| 8 | 5 | Traueylis, traytours, tristis, trayne; noȝt | trayne | b |
| 9 | 6 | bloode, bledde, blad, blede | blede | c |
| 10 | 4 | brittyn, bones, brede | brede | c |
| 11 | 1, 3 | lusshe, lymmys, lasschis | lasschis | d |
| 12 | 4 | Dragons, dredfull, derke, denne[s] | denne[s] | a |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | 4 | wrathe, when, we, writhe, wrathenesse, wapped | wapped | b |
| 14 | 5 | Agaynste, jeauntis, ongentil, joined, ingendis | ingendis | a |
| 15 | 4 | swannys, swymmyng, swetnes, suapped | suapped | b |
| 16 | 4 | joged, jolynes, gentries, engenderand | engenderand | c |
| 17 | 4 | choppe, cheynes; repreue | cheynes | d |
| 18 | 4 | renkkis, renand, reuerande | reuerande | c |

**New Stanza**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19 | 6 | bidde, bale, be | be | a |
| 20 | 4 | brothell, be, bolde, boste, blowe | blowe | b |
| 21 | 5 | luffis, liffis, listen | me | a |
| 22 | 4 | lorde, lerned, lede, lawe | lawe | b |
| 23 | 5 | my, men, my, menȝe | menȝe | a |
| 24 | 4 | comen, kyth, knawe | knawe | b |
| 25 | 4 | semlys, same, cyté; þis | cyté | a |
| 26 | 4 | sittiis, sadnesse, sette, sawe;vs | sawe | b |

**Table 2.2** Breakdown of metre, rhyme scheme, alliteration and consonance in Herod's speech, *The Trials before Pilate and Herod*, in *The N-Town Play*, ed. by Stephen Spector, EETS S.S. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), ll. 189-208.

| Line | Metre | Alliteration/Consonance/etc | Rhyme word | R. Scheme |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 189 | 1,3 | Serys, sayd;þese; materys; haue, herd | sayd | a |
| 190 | 3 | meche, more, me | telle | b |
| 191 | 3 | Alle, layde | layde | a |
| 192 | 4 | - | cowncelle | b |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 193 | 3 | - | me | c |
| 194 | 4 | - | sendyng | d |
| 195 | 4 | desyryd, se | se | c |
| 196 | 4 | - | knowyng | d |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 197 | 4 | me, many | thyng | a |
| 198 | 4 | - | sen | b |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 199 | 4 | þei, þat | levyng | a |
| 200 | 4 | - | ben | b |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 201 | 4 | wondyr, werkys, wrougth; These, þe | þe | c |
| 202 | 4 | what, wey, wolde, knowe, trew | sentens | d |
| 203 | 4 | - | se | c |
| 204 | 4 | meracle, my | presens | d |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 205 | 4 | do, dylygens | dylygens | a |
| 206 | 4 | - | the | b |
| 207 | 4 | - | presens | a |
| 208 | 4 | lyf, lyth | me | b |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 209 | 4 | Jesus; spekyst; kyng | kyng | c |
| 210 | 4 | so, standest, still; is; cawse | stylle | d |
| 211 | 4 | - | allthyng | c |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 212 | 4 | lyf, lyth; Thyn, deth, lyth | wylle | d |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 213 | 1,4 | What, why | why | a |
| 214 | 4 | þis, þe; so, acuse | acuse | b |
| 215 | 4 | not, but, telle | hey | a |
| 216 | 4 | þu, þiself; canst, excuse | excuse | b |

**Table 2.3** Breakdown of metre, rhyme scheme, alliteration and consonance *Play XVI: the Trial*, in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, vol.1, EETS S.S 3, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), ll. 163-202.

| Line | Meter | Alliteration/Consonance/etc | Rhyme Word | R. Scheme |
|------|-------|------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 167 | 1, 3 | - | verament | a |
| 168 | 3 | Pilate, present; his | present | a |
| 169 | 3 | ofetymes, that, intent | intent | a |
| 170 | 2 | - | sent | a |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 171 | 1,3 | have, hard | thee | a |
| 172 | 3 | some, see | see | a |
| 173 | 4 | - | majestie | a |
| 174 | 2 | - | here | b |
| 175 | 3 | pray | mee | a |
| 176 | 3 | prove, postie | postie | a |
| 177 | 3 | - | bee | a |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 178 | 2 | - | yeare | b |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 179 | 1, 3 | What, weene, wood | wood | a |
| 180 | 3 | - | good | a |
| 181 | 4 | Such, scalward, stood | stood | a |
| 182 | 3 | stowt, sterne | hee | b |
| 183 | 3 | Speake; Jesus; cockes | blood | a |
| 184 | 3 | - | hood | a |
| 185 | 4 | mend, mood; amys | mood | a |
| 186 | 3 | speake, somwhat | mee | b |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 187 | 1,3 | wood, woo | woo | a |
| 188 | 4 | Methinkes, man; this, thro | throo | a |
| 189 | 4 | dombe, deaf, doted, doo | doo | a |
| 190 | 3 | frenticke, faye | faye | b |
| 191 | 4 | sythen, soo; hasse | soo | a |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 192 | 4 | wrath, was; betweene; two | two | a |
| 193 | 3 | forgive, foe | foe | a |
| 194 | 2 | - | daye | b |
| **New Stanza** | | | | |
| 195 | 4 | Cloth, case | case | a |
| 196 | 3 | - | solace | a |
| 197 | 4 | - | was | a |
| 198 | 3 | were, wood | wood | b |
| 199 | 3 | madd, mase; hee, him | mase | a |
| 200 | 3 | seemes, his, face | face | a |
| 201 | 4 | him, hase, his; grase | grace | a |
| 202 | 2 | garment, good | good | b |

Chester's thirty-six lines. This relentless correspondence of sound is sustained throughout *Christ before Herod*, compressed into short stanzas with the effects building to intensify the audience's experience of Herod's reign. It could be argued that this is a stylistic trait of the playwright known as the York Realist, and certainly the evidence from *Christ before Pilate I* and *Christ before Annas and Caiaphas* has been used by past scholars to argue that these pageants and their author form the third stage in the Play's composition. However, regardless of the sequential authorship theory, it is also probable that the volume of alliteration and consonance that we see in *Pharaoh, Caiaphas, Pilate I* and *Herod* were devices used to generate a specific aural and theatrical experience, each creating through the repetition of various pronounced sounds a disordered and oppressive encounter, recreating the earthy and spiritual tyranny of these biblical villains. York's *Nativity*, as discussed above, offers an alternative to Herod's chaotic metrical structure, but it also contrasts significantly in its use of the alliterative device. During one of the most important moments in the entire cycle, Christ's birth, only 18% of the words spoken by Mary and Joseph are alliterative and only two words within those twenty-six lines are plosive /p/, the rest being fricatives /f/ and /s/ and nasal /m/, which, in this context, could perhaps invite a quieter, softer tone than the same sounds spoken by Herod.[74] It seems then, in York at least, that the volume of alliteration, like the regularity of the metre, corresponds to the content of the biblical scene; the more peaceful and sacred the scene, the lighter on the ears the verse appears to be, offering a sharp contrast between the moments of hope and the performance of oppression.

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[74] *The Nativity*, ll. 57-83.

The combination of an erratic and unpredictable metre with the alliteration, consonance and assonance, becomes then a sonic attack, a relentless striking of the audience's ears and a continual disruption of their audio-spatial experience. The variable metre of Herod's opening verses first unbalances the audience, tricking them into anticipating one rhythm before shifting repeatedly between iambic and trochaic patterns and never permitting a steady tetrameter to dominate. This array of rhythms is mixed with the incessant repetition of sounds, the majority of which are plosives and fricatives, to create a recurrent assault on the audience's aural experience, the irregularities, embodied in the actor, being stressed and accentuated at the player's will. In an essay which, in many ways, parallels Jeremy Smith's observations on phonaesthesia, Amy Cook argues that language communicates far more than what she terms 'a final-feeling state', in other words a description of a specific feeling, and that it instead makes us feel 'by activating our own experience of that state'.[75] *Christ before Herod* could perhaps, therefore, be seen as creating for its audience a dramatic experience in which the feeling of oppression, possibly even fear and loathing could be cultivated by language and its aural qualities. The playwright provides Herod with an effective strategy for the domination of the acoustic performance space; first he unsettles the audience before proceeding to harass them, dominating their soundscape in accordance with his rule and, therefore, asserting his ownership over what was once their own civic property. Through the tyrant's blustering,

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[75] Amy Cook, 'Interplay: The Method and Potential of a Cognitive Science Approach to Theatre', *Theatre Journal*, 59.4 (2007) <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R04096416&divLevel=0&area=abell&forward=critref_ft> [accessed 19 June 2011], (para. 23 of 37).

noisy verse, then, *Christ before Herod* assures the actor's genuine control over the crowd so that the chaos and discomfort of historic Herod's rule is experienced directly, and the audience come to know through their own encounters with the king the nature of his reign and thus the necessity of Christ's birth and sacrifice.

## Sound and Body

As I have already touched upon, the reach of Herod's oppressive noise is unlikely to have been restricted to the disruption of York's soundscape. His powerful verse would probably have derived much of its strength from its influence over the audience's physical experience. Like other means of sound production, the human voice can permeate the borders of an individual, integrating itself as part of their physiology and producing some acute responses to its various tones, pitches and rhythms.[76] Aristotle, in his 'On Things Heard', noted the power and physical impact of the human voice; his definition of hard voices, for example, describes not only how such a voice sounds but also the physical response of the listener's body: 'hard voices are those which strike forcibly upon the hearing; for which reason they are particularly unpleasing [...] any quickly yielding body which comes in the way fails to abide the impact and quickly springs aside'.[77] So, just as the perception of finger nails raking the face of a chalkboard can produce unpleasant reactions

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[76] Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, p. 79.

[77] Aristotle, 'On Things Heard', in *The Complete Works* (see *The Physiognomonics*, above) 802b, 30-4, (p. 1233).

and music prompt the automatic need to move and dance, human sound is also 'closely linked with touch and kinaesthesia. One "mouths" the words quite literally, and our hearing is partly feeling'.[78]

The aggressive alliteration of Herod's verse can perhaps be understood as contributing towards the harsh voice described by Aristotle; as illustrated above, the erratic metre and explosive sounds of the alliteration seem to have been designed to 'strike forcibly' upon the listener's ear and, therefore, encourage their 'quickly yielding body' to give way under the force of the aural attack. The recognition of the physiological, kinetic reactions that sound and voice can induce is important, especially in performances like York which were rooted in the corporeal, concrete forms of lay devotion and encouraged audiences to identify biblical events with their own present experiences. In contrast to his visual presence, then, Herod's voice would have invaded the bodies of the listeners, incorporating itself within to influence them through their most immediate and intuitive mode of experience.[79] As argued above, the erratic metre underlying Herod's opening verses unsettles the audience, unbalancing them by repeatedly shifting rhythms, tricking them into anticipating an iambic pulse and then jumping abruptly to a more aggressive metre. This unbalancing and disorientation of the audience probably created in them a vulnerability, the metre destabilising them in preparation for the tyrant's bombardment of contrasting sounds, which penetrated their bodies to be

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[78] Walter J. Ong, 'The Shifting Sensorium', in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*, ed. by Howes, pp. 25-30 (p. 25). See also Ihde, *Listening and Voice*, p. 79.

[79] Richard D. Cureton, 'The Auditory Imagination and the Music of Poetry', in *Stylistic Criticism of Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Text to Context*, ed. by Peter Verdonk (Florence, Kentucky: Routledge, 1993), pp. 170-82 (pp. 86-7).

experienced somatically, internally, as an invasive force repeatedly storming the gateway of the ear. Consequently, Herod's violent auditory attack probably began to affect the spectators – the way they held themselves, the postures that their bodies assumed, their behaviour and their attitude towards the rampaging character before them. The relentless torrent of harsh and aggressive sounds, colliding and tumbling endlessly on from line to line, would almost certainly have begun to colour their perception and understanding of the performance space, its order and their place within it.

A recent performance of Herod's opening speech at the University of Nottingham provides some interesting examples of this kind of shift in audience attitude and behaviour; however, it must be acknowledged here that, although the text can tell us a great deal about the medieval performance of the play, any conclusions made about either the player's delivery of the text or the audience's reaction to it are necessarily speculative. Therefore, what follows describes how the verse can create an affective experience for a twenty-first century audience and can only hint towards the possible performance and reactions that it created in fifteenth-century York. Herod's opening speech was presented to a group of students during a seminar session; his performance was influenced by the historical and literary accounts of the traditional Herod role and so displayed the raging, bellowing and aggressive demeanour associated with the character. The space chosen was deliberately familiar to the audience; a large workshop space used on an everyday basis for teaching drama classes and holding seminars and rehearsals, the intention being that the students would feel comfortable and confident within, and accustomed to, the environment, that they had some sense of ownership over it. Adjacent to this

large workshop space was a smaller, confined room with a lectern and raked seating (almost a miniature lecture theatre); prior to the performance, the students were introduced to extracts from the pageant and its contexts, which they then analysed and discussed. During this part of the session, the actor remained anonymous as one of their number. After a brief discussion of the relationship between text and performance, the students were invited through to the workshop space where a small rostrum had been placed along one wall, ready for the actor to emerge. In an attempt to parallel the relaxed social atmosphere into which the medieval Herod would probably have entered, a brief pause was introduced in the proceedings where the students were encouraged to chat amongst themselves and mingle for a moment as the technology was readjusted in preparation for the performance.

While this was happening, the actor subtly ascended the rostrum and began his performance as Herod. His entrance into this space was, of course, very different from his medieval counterpart's, as was the audience's experience of it and I do not want to suggest that this in any way was how the pageant began in fifteenth-century York. The extract's opening in Nottingham was deliberately engineered to surprise the audience, to erupt at a moment when they were least expecting it so that they could find out for themselves the effectiveness of Herod's explosive 'Pes!'. After an initial sharp intake of breath, the audience's first response was nervous laughter; as a conditioned modern audience, they were unsure of how to react to the direct address within such a small, confined space. Within a few lines, however, they began to display very specific physical responses. For example, after the performance some audience members reported an urge to retreat away from Herod as he

strode around the performance space (which included both the rostrum and the small area at ground level directly in front of the audience), in an attempt to avoid explicit interaction with the performer, and, where previously the students had stood quite erect with their shoulders relaxed and their heads in a level, neutral position, they began to adopt more submissive attitudes, dipping their heads and lowering their eyes to avoid contact, while hunching their backs and shoulders in an attempt to make themselves inconspicuous.[80] Some even confessed to a sense of discomfort and dread, despite knowing that the actor could not actually harm them, while others remarked on the relief they felt when unnoticed by the rampaging tyrant and a sense of alarm every time he came close. It would seem then, that Herod's performance changed the students' bodily relationship and attitude to the space surrounding them. Where they had once been equal in their possession and occupation of the space, they were now suddenly deferential to one specific individual; Herod was in control of the space, had become a dominant force within it by manipulating individual responses through his unpredictable, authoritarian performance, so that, even though the audience were aware of the fictitious nature of the action, they still physically responded to the performer's aural and spatial bullying.

These reactions were undoubtedly influenced by the actor's physical movements, the auditory force of the verse amplified by an equally aggressive use of the performance space, again emphasising the intrinsic connection between sound and body. Coming down off the rostrum, Herod was able to

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[80] *Sound and Performance* seminar session, University of Nottingham Distance Learning Summer School, University of Nottingham, 18 June 2008.

stride around the performance area, ensuring his occupation of its entirety so that no corner was left unoccupied or unthreatened. The actor also matched his movements and gestures to the rhythms and emphases of the verse, lunging towards spectators while, say, firing a round of plosives, or stomping across the space in time with the beat of 'and lusshe all youre lymmys with lasschis' (11). Such movements were possible because of the expanse of space available and the very small audience to whom the actor performed, but the fifteenth-century Herod would have had a very different space to contend with. Despite the clear direction in the Coventry play for Herod to rage '*in the pagond and in the strete also*', there is still some question over the frequency with which medieval players actually employed the street as a performance space and so, perhaps, the medieval player could not have coerced his audience in the same way as his twenty-first century counterpart did.[81] Even if Herod did rampage in the street it would have been virtually impossible for the actor to physically reach every audience member; although narrow, the streets of York were much larger than the indoor studio at the University of Nottingham, the audience may have been around twelve and a half times larger as well as more familiar with the direct contact he offered; his movements would have been restricted by the density of bodies surrounding the wagon and his voice in competition with their chatter and the bustle of the city. Although the spatial features may have limited the medieval actor's movements, they highlight for us the importance of his voice in the occupation of the performance space and indicate the need

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[81] *The Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*, in *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, sd. 783. For discussions on the frequency of similar uses of space see William Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre 1400-1500* (London: Routledge, 1986), p. 116, and Margaret Rogerson, 'Raging in the Streets of Medieval York', *Early Theatre*, 3 (2000): 105-25.

for a very different manner of delivery. To reach those on the outskirts of the crowd the medieval actor would have needed to be much louder than modern Herod was, projecting his voice into the space to fight with both the limited acoustics and the noise of the city itself. Combined with the tongue-twisting alliteration of the verse, the spatial environment of medieval York would have required a virtuoso performance from the actor playing Herod, such as that used by Chaucer's Absolon to display his skill and agility. For those closest to him, the volume of the player's voice would perhaps have been enough to prompt similar reactions to those displayed by the twenty-first century students, the full force of his erratic metre and aggressive alliteration pounding their bodies as each volley of sound hit them at its point of greatest intensity. In such a situation, it is easy to imagine the intensity of Herod's performance and the submissive responses from those on the front line who, overwhelmed by his belligerent attack on their senses, react bodily as Aristotle described.

But perhaps for the majority of medieval audience members, Herod's performance was not as intimidating as the spectators in Nottingham found his modern counterpart to be. For instance, his actions would probably not have been as unfamiliar to many of those constituting the medieval audience; as an annual event the York Corpus Christi Play probably drew its audiences not through novelty but by reputation, tradition and familiarity, and so perhaps Herod's performance would have been less daunting through acquaintance with his character type, the form of performance expected and possibly the actor. So, although some audience members may have responded meekly to Herod's quest for control, we need to imagine another possible response, one which reflects the audience's experience of and familiarity with Herod and his

performance. Perhaps we can then speculate as to whether some spectators would have challenged his claim to power, reacting to it by, say, standing taller, puffing out their chests and squaring their shoulders, returning Herod's threatening glare while parrying his acoustic assault with their own verbal attack of laughter, boos and hisses. Sarah Carpenter has recently uncovered an account from *c*.1522 in which the humanist Juan Luis Vives describes and comments on spectator reactions to biblical drama. Vives notes that 'euen at the celebration of Christs passion and our redemption' the spectators continued to hiss, boo and cajole the villains; for instance, when Peter cuts off Malchus's ear during Christ's capture in the garden, 'all resounds with laughter' and the spectators hiss when that same disciple later denies his connection to the Messiah.[82] This account, although different from the reaction I have suggested, nevertheless offers a picture of an audience willing to interact with a performer and respond emotionally and vocally to the character he represents. It is, therefore, not inconceivable that some audience members at York would have responded to Herod's seizure of the performance space in a similar manner, their bodies reflecting their rejection of his attempt at control and vocalising their challenge through taunts and jeers, hissing and booing.

Despite the apparent polarity between these two responses, they both comply equally with the new spatial order, one dominated by the chaos, noise and tumult of a volatile king. The more overtly compliant example most obviously displays the audience's acceptance of Herod's spatial control, but it

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[82] *St Augustine, of the Citie of God: with learned comments of Io. Lod. Vives, Englished by J.H.* (George Eld. 1610), courtesy of Sarah Carpenter, 'New Evidence: Vives and Audience-Response to Biblical Drama', paper presented at the *Medieval English Theatre* meeting, The University of Bristol, 29 March 2008.

is those who appear to resist the king who, ironically, would contribute most to his construction of the performance space. Their vocal responses would add to the chaos created by the verse and so enhance the disordering of the soundscape to become a constituent of Herod's subjugating force. In both cases the audience is, in Shepherd's words, 'having its physiological mechanisms controlled by the discourses working upon it', the chaos generated by the verse prompting a similarly chaotic exchange between player and spectator, with the latter becoming 'physically caught up' in Herod's suppressive discourse.[83] The opening verses of *Christ before Herod* appear, then, to be constructed to create a specific kind of experience, one which would elicit certain responses from the audience and allow the player as Herod to generate and control the performance space. Using his power, Herod co-opts the audience into his disruption of space and soundscape, turning them into the perpetrators of their own oppression, implicating them in the distortion of the world so that they too come to represent and perform degenerate humanity, whose souls can only be saved by the sacrifice of the Messiah.

**Noise *versus* Silence**

As the pageant continues Herod gains further allies in his campaign for spatial dominance. Gradually, more characters are brought into the scene until, when the questioning of Christ begins, Jesus is surrounded by a total of eight

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[83] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, p. 144.

speaking characters. The verse would now have become further disrupted by its division between these eight speaking roles. For example:

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| *I MILES*: | Lorde, welthis and worschippis be with you alway. |
| *REX*: | What wolde you? |
| *II MILES*: | A worde, lorde, and youre willes were. |
| *REX*: | Well, saye on þan. |
| *I MILES*: | My lorde, we fare foolys to flay |
| | þat to you wolde forfette. |
| *REX*: | We, faire falle you þerefore. |
| *I MILES*: | My lorde, fro ȝe here what we saie |
| | Itt will heffe vppe youre hertis. |
| *REX*: | Ȝa, but saie, what heynde haue ȝe þore? |
| *II MILES*: | A presente fro Pilate, lorde, þe prince of oure lay. |
| *REX*: | Pese in my presence, and nemys hym no more! (89-96) |

The quick exchanges here replicate natural dialogue, confirming Turville-Petre's statement that the alliterative rhythm 'allows more freedom for the natural movement of language'.[84] But in performance they would also hinder the flow of the verse by denying any one character a complete, whole stanza and so, again, rejecting any possibility of acoustic harmony. This stanza also shows how the playwright has divided single lines between two speakers, a technique similarly employed in *Pilate I* and *The Crucifixion*. Severing lines in this way fragments the verse, bouncing the rhymes, metres and alliteration

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[84] Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*, p. 48.

around the characters and so creating a general sense of disorder in the court of King Herod. It would, in addition, emphasise the differences between the voices of these eight speaking roles; as mentioned earlier, the voice was perceived as a vehicle of the soul and as such was seen as a physiognomic sign indicating the nature of the spirit within. Therefore, as Bruce Smith explains, the idiosyncrasies of each human voice were 'as easily distinguished by the ear as are facial characteristics by the eye'.[85] E. Catherine Dunn has identified evidence of such vocal characterisation in early medieval performance, suggesting that the rubrics inscribed near the words of the Holy Week Passion readings are in fact musical conventions, which indicate the intensity, pitch and velocity required by the actors to vocally represent the individual characters of the Gospel. For instance, God would be characterised by a slow, regular and low pitched chant, whereas the Jews would speak rapidly and in a much higher pitch, the contrast in sound indicating their character and directing the audience's reaction toward them.[86] Again, the representation of the characters through voice echoes the ideas of Aristotle, who suggests that the contrast between a deep, full voice and a high-pitched, shrill utterance distinguishes respectively a man of courage and of cowardice.[87] Perhaps, therefore, we can similarly imagine each of the eight characters in *Herod* to be characterised, and therefore identifiable by, the pitch, tone and evenness of his voice, which may or may not harmonise with the other players.

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[85] Bruce Smith quoting Quintilian, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, p. 222.

[86] E. Catherine Dunn, 'Voice Structure in the Liturgical Drama: Sepet Reconsidered', in *Medieval English Theatre: Essays Critical and Contextual*, ed. by Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 44-63 (p. 57).

[87] Aristotle, *Physiognomonics*, 806b, ll. 27-8 (p. 1239).

In the midst of this auditory turmoil is the solitary figure of Christ, bound as a captured criminal from Galilee and brought forth as a conciliatory gift from Pilate to Herod. Surrounded by the noise of Herod's court, the voluble responses from the audience and the bustle of the surrounding city, Christ enters and continues in silent compliance with his captors. Indeed, nowhere in the text is this central figure given any lines to speak, and the only stage directions directly relating to him are those implicit in the others' words, which tell us that he is not only silent but motionless, even during the court's interrogation. Christ's silence is a common theme throughout the Trial sequence with Caiaphas commenting on his notable reluctance to talk, anticipating Herod's comment that 'His langage is lorne!' (190).[88] However, in both *Caiaphas* and *Pilate I*, Christ does speak, albeit a total of only thirty-five lines in a 1,852-line sequence, his whole stanzas contrasting sharply with the disjointed verse described above.[89] During the *Herod* pageant, however, the Saviour is entirely silent, but this is not an invention of the playwright, it is, rather, an adherence to his biblical source. In Luke 23: 8-9, Herod is described as 'exceeding glad' to see Jesus because 'he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracles done by him', questioning him 'with many words; but he answered him nothing'. The other cycle versions of this episode likewise uphold the biblical account, keeping Christ silent while Herod asks question after question, but what separates York's account from the other cycle versions is its playwright's development of Herod's 'many words'; from this one brief reference, the York playwright creates both a distinctive

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[88] *Christ before Annas and Caiaphas*, l. 278.

[89] Alexandra F. Johnston, "His langage is lorne': The Silent Centre of the York Cycle', *Early Theatre*, 3 (2000): 185-95 (185).

character and a theatrical experience which would physically and emotionally affect his audience. The sheer number of words, the erratic metre, the sonic bombardment through row upon row of alliteration, consonance and assonance described above, the severing of verses and lines and the combination of multiple, contrasting voices expands on the initial biblical account, so that not only are there many words, but also many sounds.

As Stevenson points out, throughout the Trial section of the cycle 'although Christ is verbally silent, he is neither dramatically absent nor theatrically silent'.[90] His enigmatic peace and tranquillity contrasts with the audience responses suggested above and, from Herod's own increasingly random questioning, it appears that his indifference begins to undermine the king's control over the performance space. Initially, Herod perceives his interrogation of Christ as a game, but as the scene progresses his frustration begins to show: 'Howe likis þa? Wele, lorde?' he demands, 'Saie. What deyull, neuere a dele?' (238), after which his orders become more unreasonable, expressed in increasingly abrupt, furious sentences. When the Saviour still refuses to respond, the infuriated king resorts to non-verbal articulations: 'Vta! Oy! Oy!' (242), an expression of his own frustration and an attempt to rouse the apparently 'woode' Christ (247). Eventually, Herod is bewildered by his opponent's lack of response declaring: 'What þe deuyll and his dame schall Y now doo?' (246). In denying Herod either the vociferous or submissive reactions he seeks to ensure his audio-spatial dominion, Jesus has diffused the potency of his opponent's power, a power that perpetuates itself in and through his victim's reactions to his incessant noise. Against the powerful

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[90] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory and Devotional Culture*, p. 120.

silence of Jesus, Herod's noise becomes impotent, absurd and, as Alexandra F. Johnston suggests, acts to condemn the king through his own mouth, rendering him ridiculous in comparison with the unceasing, enduring power of Christ.[91] From the corrupt but mighty noise of his opening verse Herod, confronted with the divine Christ, descends into nonsense producing nothing but noise and so completing his characterisation as the exact opposite of the Messiah: earthly, powerless, immoral, corrupt and mad.

The presence of the Messiah would almost certainly have influenced the attitude of the audience. As always, Christ is the paradigm of moral virtue and correct decorum and, therefore, his actions also offer an example of how to combat various worldly evils. On repelling the negative, corrupting effects of another's noise and angry words, *Jacob's Well*, a fifteenth-century manual on the avoidance of bodily sin, argues that 'þe vyolence of a gunne or of an engyne-ston is qwenchyd, whan softe erthe or softe thyng is sett þer-ȝens; ryȝt so, w*yth* myldenes of softe woordys þou schalt qwenchyn angry and boystous woordys of angry folk'.[92] In other words, just as a cannonball causes less destruction to a soft earthen bank than to a resisting stone wall, silence, or at least the use of mild words, absorbs the harmful energy induced through the aggressive sounds of anger; it is, in effect, the fundamental Christian attitude of turning the other cheek. But this approach is not only about being meek, for, like the earthen bank, the act of parrying hostility with humility saps its energy and, therefore, the harmful, corrupting power of the original attack. So, through his lack of an equally aggressive response, Christ neutralises the

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[91] Johnston, 'His langage is lorne': 191.

[92] *Jacob's Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, ed. by Arthur Brandeis, EETS O.S 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1899), p. 267.

source of Herod's vocal power; where such audience reactions as those described by Vives feed Herod's tyrannical reign, the alternative reaction offered by Christ, which is neither a retaliation nor a capitulation, kills it and renders it impotent.

Furthermore, the Messiah's quiet presence in the space would probably have alleviated the pressure on the audience. From being the object of the tyrant's sonic attack they would become witnesses to his aural torture of Christ, their presence virtually forgotten in the light of this new game. During this scene the physical postures of the student audience began to visibly change, becoming more neutral in response to the shifting power structures within the space. Their general demeanour also changed; instead of the nervous laughter they had shared when Herod performed alone, they now displayed grave, sombre expressions. These unconscious outward signs conveyed the emotional impact of Christ's silence on his audience; after the performance the students confirmed that the experience was affective, expressing relief that Herod's focus had been drawn away, pity for their liberator for enduring an attack of such intensity, as well as a sense of gratitude towards the silent figure. The range of emotions reported here suggests that the playwright's deployment of sound as a theatrical device successfully created, at least for the modern audience, an experience of oppression and sin, liberation and salvation, so that in a very literal sense Christ saved them from the aural, earthly and, by association, spiritual oppression enforced by Herod. Even in medieval York, silence in the midst of such audio-spatial chaos would probably have been deeply charismatic, contrasting acutely with Herod's blustering and rampaging, the one intensifying the other through their proximity to provide the 'sounds of

competing powers' battling for control over the bodies and minds of the spectators.[93]

But, where Herod's noise is invasive, Christ's distinct lack of sound is not; it demands nothing of the audience and yet it is intensely enigmatic. According to Stevenson, the power of this lonely figure offers an alternative rhythm to that presented by other characters; although silent, Christ's presence would resonate within the space, his silence paradoxically speaking to the audience more clearly and powerfully than Herod's bellowing cacophony.[94] In an inversion of the earthly king's tyranny, the wordless figure would entice both eyes and ears, inviting the audience to discern its message and purpose, to follow Christ of their own free will. The playwright's opposition between noise and silence capitalises on the affective qualities of sensory perception, to manipulate the audience's emotions via their responses to sound. The stylistic elements of the verse probably combined to generate a disordered, chaotic noise that would almost certainly have prompted certain automatic reactions from the listeners, who then experienced directly the destructiveness of Herod's reign. The presence of Christ, however, would relieve this pressure, drawing the tyrant's attention and inverting his force, causing a discernable power shift within the performance space.

Despite Herod's continued disharmony, his dominance over the audience in York would have dispersed during this final scene, his ability to enforce their subservience or their contribution to his chaotic construction of the space depleted by the divine force of the true king. In his place was a far

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[93] Attali, 'Listening', p. 16.

[94] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 127.

more potent power, one that did not impose his authority over an unwilling audience, but showed by example the way to defeat wickedness and oppose the corruption of their soul by the insidious power of bad sounds. Christ's presence, then, would have had an equally affective impact on the audience despite the fact that it was characterised by silence rather than sound. Indeed, although such silence was not invasive it was perhaps just as deeply penetrating as Herod's noise, if not more so; as with many devotional rituals, perhaps part of the force of the encounter was the audience's sympathy and empathy with the Saviour drawn from their own encounter with the tyrannical, ruthless king. Such was the emotion generated by the modern performance at the University of Nottingham where even a predominantly secular audience felt compassion for the actor playing Christ, despite knowing the fictitious nature of the event. What is more, such an experience seemed to go beyond a merely intellectual understanding of the performance; the event and its impact on the students' senses appears to have struck them more deeply and the meanings produced only surfaced later through thought and questioning. As a consequence, the audience were subtly coerced into a form of devotion. In a similar manner to other devotional media, the playwright of *Christ before Herod*, therefore, created a dramatic experience which capitalised on the emotional and physical potency of the audience's aural perception, so that they came to understand the purpose of Christ's life and sacrifice, not by proxy, but through their direct discovery of its significance to their own spiritual salvation.

# Chapter Three

# Devilish Movement and *The Castle of Perseverance*

The last chapter explored how the noise of York's *Christ before Herod* provoked physical and verbal reactions from the audience so that they too became implicated in the king's worldly sin, cajoled and coerced into contributing to his world order, only to be calmed and saved by the silent presence of Christ. The effectiveness of the contrast between chaos and order, noise and silence in the Litster's pageant of *Christ before Herod* would also require an obvious distinction between the body of Christ and his raging counterpart, mad King Herod, the actors' bodily postures and movements helping to convey the inherent disparity between the true king and the sinful tyrant. But as Shepherd notes, 'theatre is, and has always been, a place which exhibits what a human body is, what it does'; as a medium, drama centres on man's physical being, through both the performing and the perceiving/receiving body, each having an impact on the other, demanding reactions and responses in accordance with dominant rules and conventions.[1] The close proximity between player and audience in medieval drama, the blurred boundaries between performer and spectator, would have made this bodily connection even more palpable than that which we experience in our own conventional performance spaces. Moreover, in a culture and society where the animal body is consistently portrayed as the corrupter of the

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[1] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, p. 1.

immortal soul, an awareness of the body in performance, especially a performance about sin and salvation, may well be heightened for, as Shepherd goes on to explain, 'many ideas about what is good, right, natural and possible are grounded in assumptions about what the body is, what it needs, how it works. Social, moral and political values attach themselves to body shape, size, colour [and] movement'.[2]

Shepherd's point is supported by the bodies and postures that we see represented in both the dramatic and iconographic images of Herod. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the dramatic figure of Herod was famous for his style of performance; Coventry's stage directions record how Herod raged in the street, for example, and most Corpus Christi plays provide him with a sword to swing and thrust threateningly towards the crowd, extending his body towards and into the midst of the gathered spectators. In Towneley's *Magnus Herodus*, Herod the Great tells of his boundless anger that threatens to burst forth from his body along with his twisted guts and bile; he is so incensed at the news of the Magi's escape that he gnashes and grinds his teeth and he beats the soldiers who permitted them to escape.[3] The bodily performance that we see depicted here continues into the early modern period and becomes a familiar dramatic trope: the performance of a man aspiring beyond his natural position, like Tamburlaine, or the player of Hamlet's complaint who saws 'the air too much' and famously out-Herods Herod.[4] And yet it is ironically Hamlet who identifies the very reason behind such actions. As he continues to advise the player on his performance, Hamlet pleads with him: 'Be not too tame [...]

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[2] Ibid.

[3] *Magnus Herodes*, in *Medieval Drama*, ed. by Bevington, ll. 118, 148, 240.

[4] *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, ll. 3, 10.

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action'.[5] Here, Hamlet counsels his player king to ensure a correspondence between what he says and his bodily performance so that the character's inner state is clearly shown externally. Although reflecting different dramatic styles and conventions, this sentiment can equally be applied to the performance of Herod in earlier medieval plays. Where the actions of Hamlet's player must express an emotion or psychological state, the actor playing Herod must make his gestures, postures and movements reflect the corrupted moral state of his soul and the clamorous verse that also advertises his corrupt nature; similarly, the actor playing Christ would need to cultivate a more measured, serene bodily performance to match his inherent divinity, acting as the counterpoint to Herod's riotous rampaging.

Of course, such a performance would be informed and limited by the iconography of the body and certain conventions that determine its presentation. Herod had a long history of representation in the arts and material culture of the Middle Ages and was often represented in a very particular pose. Penelope Doob observes that Herod was frequently depicted cross-legged and contorted, his body reflecting the destructive power of his rage.[6] The early fourteenth-century *Queen Mary Psalter* shows Herod in just such a position (plates 3 and 4), one virtually identical to that of the possessed King Saul illustrated in the same document (plates 5 and 6); both figures sit with the right arm raised so that the elbow is almost level with, if not higher than, the shoulder, and one leg is likewise raised to cross over the top of the other leg.

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[5] Ibid., ll. 16-18.

[6] Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, pp. 108-9.

**Plate 3** 'The Magi before Herod', *Queen Mary Psalter*. London, British Library MS Royal 2 B. VII, f. 131

**Plate 4** 'Massacre of the Innocents'. *Queen Mary Psalter*. London, British Library MS Royal 2 B. VII, f. 132r

**Plate 5** 'David playing to King Saul', *Queen Mary Psalter*. London, British Library, MS Royal 2 B. VII, f. 51v (detail).



**Plate 6** 'Saul killing Abimelech', *Queen Mary Psalter*. London, British Library, MS Royal 2 B. VII, f. 52 (detail)

A similar pose is seen on an early sixteenth-century ceiling boss in the north transept of Norwich Cathedral in which the enraged king (standing this time) has both arms raised above shoulder height as his hands tug violently on his beard; the right leg is again raised, so that the upper half is almost at a right angle, while his ankle rests on a slightly bent left leg, making the figure look like he is hopping (plate 7). There is obviously a convention of madness, possession and anger here, postures that, as we will go on to see later in this chapter, are connected to those of devils and personified sin.[7] These are also conventions which are still familiar to us; we talk of being hopping mad, of tearing out our hair in frustration and we often see the angry man in films and television jumping up and down, arms and legs flying, and the gnashing teeth of a Brian Blessed villain. Indeed, modern finishing schools still encourage their demure young ladies to sit without crossing their legs.

What is suggested then is a necessary correspondence and link between the body's exterior state and the emotions, passions and moral condition of the soul which the human body harbours. As Jean-Claude Schmitt has highlighted, the Middle Ages saw the human being as:

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[7] In the medieval period, all non-believers were thought to be suffering from a type of madness. See Victor I. Scherb, 'The Earthly and Divine Physicians: *Christus Medicus* in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', in *The Body and the Text: Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Wendell Aycock (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1990), pp. 161-71.
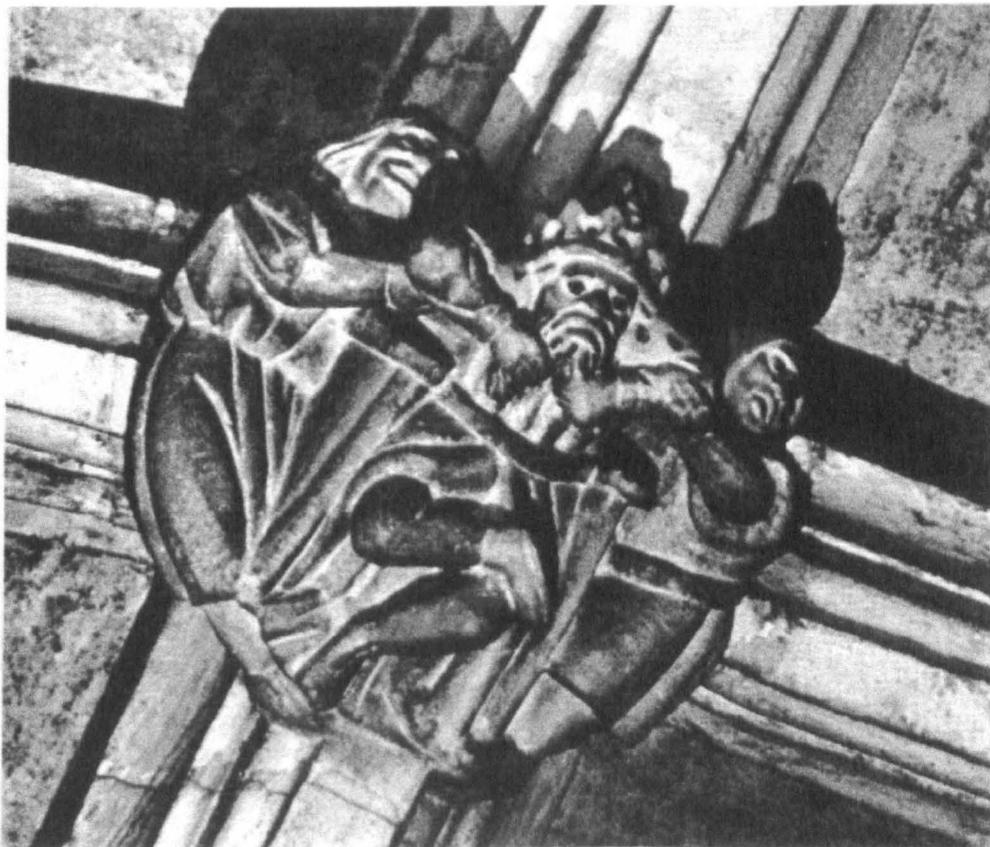
**Plate 7** King Herod roof boss, north transept, Norwich Cathedral. Photograph: National Monuments Record, London.

double, consisting of a soul and a body, an invisible *inside* and a visible *outside* linked by a dynamic relationship. Such a relationship was a fundamental feature of all the medieval ideas about mankind, space, social order, and cosmos. Gestures figured, or better, *embodied* the dialectic between *intus* and *foris* since they were supposed to express without the 'secret movements' of the soul within.[8]

It is well known that physiognomy was thought of as a means of knowing the true, inner nature of an individual and so, an ugly woman was wicked or lascivious, a leper was being punished for the blackness of his soul; but gesture, posture, movement and expression were also means through which a man's hidden condition was made material and, therefore, readable to the outside world. Accordingly, a good and virtuous soul would portray a very specific body type as would the evil and vice-ridden soul, as we have seen in the depictions of Herod previously discussed. This chapter is, then, an exploration of the body in medieval drama and, because of the nature of performance as a corporeal interaction between actor and audience, it will also consider the possible effects that medieval conventions of movement, posture and gesture would have on an audience's own physicality during a performance.

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[8] Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'The Rationale of Gestures in the West', p. 60.

**Case Study: *The Castle of Perseverance***

**Performance Space**

As with sound in the previous chapter, we first need to place the body within a spatial context. Given its detailed stage directions and accompanying diagram, it is perhaps surprising that the performance space of *The Castle of Perseverance* has received relatively little attention in comparison with other surviving play texts, such as the Corpus Christi plays. Over fifty years ago, Richard Southern published what is still the most extensive study of the play and its structures. There have been essays and papers dedicated to the play and some have questioned or re-examined Southern's arrangement of the space, but these often base their analysis on little more than what was physically constructed and where specific features were placed.[9] Since the publication of Southern's *Medieval Theatre in the Round* there has been an advance in the way in which we think about and analyse space. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, performance space is now seen as more than the sum of its physical parts, its stage and, where appropriate, scenery; it is instead a combination of, but not exclusively, structures, bodies, movement, materials and sound that, working together, produce what performance space really is: an experience. As such, as David Wiles explains, 'the play-as-event belongs to the space, and makes the space perform as much as it makes the actors perform' and it is in this capacity that the space of *The Castle of Perseverance*

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[9] See for example, Natalie Crohn Schmitt, 'Was There a Medieval Theatre in the Round? A Re-Examination of the Evidence', in *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*, ed. by Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), pp. 292-315.

still needs to be analysed, an undertaking which Southern's work will aid but ultimately cannot itself fully encompass.[10]

The diagram which accompanies the play in the manuscript is central to our understanding of the performance space, although it is by no means absolutely clear; it is, for example, silent, or at least ambiguous, on the precise positioning of the spectators, the size of the performance area and whether the ditch encircles the Castle or the entire arena. I will not, however, enter fully into the controversies concerning the details of how the stage plan could be realised, except to suggest some demands made by the script for the proximities between actors and audience. Instead, this brief discussion of the structure of the performance space will limit itself to what the diagram and text can in fact communicate to us.

The stage plan in Folger MS. V. a. 354, f.191v (plate 8) identifies, through a combination of written and graphic information, six distinct scaffolds; five arranged in circular formation around the central sixth, the eponymous Castle of Perseverance, the only scaffold to be identified pictorially. Sketched around the outside of the Castle, between this central feature and the other structures is a ring ditch. For Southern, the ditch was designed to encapsulate the playing space and act as a barrier to prevent any unpaid spectators entering the site; he imagines it to have been of some considerable depth and that the earth that was excavated from it was then used

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[10] David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.

**Plate 8** *The Castle of Perseverance* stage plan. Folger MS.V. A.354, f.191v.

to construct a perimeter around the open place and forming a convenient bank upon which the audience also sat.[11] But not everyone has agreed with Southern's reading of the diagram. In a review from 1958 P.M. Ryan objected to this interpretation on the basis that the task of creating such a vast embankment would have required an equally vast labour force and was, therefore, an unfeasible and impractical task for a professional travelling company (such as Southern imagines the players of *The Castle* to have been) to perform.[12] Natalie Crohn Schmitt follows Ryan's point and suggests that the ditch drawn in the diagram was intended not as a barrier surrounding the entire performance area but as a moat encircling and protecting the Castle. She notes that in the manuscript image the five scaffolds of God, World, Flesch, Belyal and Coveytyse are depicted on the outside of the circle and suggests that, in addition to the practical application of preventing spectators entering the central place, the ditch had an important thematic significance. Citing other literary examples of symbolic castles, Crohn Schmitt argues that the ditch around the Castle of Perseverance and the water therein symbolised the ritual purification and cleansing performed in the sacrament of baptism and, consequently, in the process of the play, the moat was a physical representation of the spiritual defence against temptation.[13] Although the exact placement and symbolic meaning of the ditch is a debate beyond the remit of the current chapter, its relevance to the position of the audience and their relationship to

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[11] Richard Southern, *The Medieval Theatre in the Round: a Study of the Staging of* The Castle of Perseverance *and Related Matters*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 54-6.

[12] P.M. Ryan, Review of Southern's *Medieval Theatre in the Round*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 44 (1958): 186-201.

[13] Crohn Schmitt, 'Was there a Medieval Theatre in the Round?', pp. 297-303.

the performers is important to consider here, especially because neither the diagram nor the written legend indicates explicitly where the audience is to be positioned. Southern's construction of the space suggests a large open, semi-permanent structure that encourages in part a static seated audience, although he also makes a case for the players and audience to have 'been together in the circular place'.[14] However, William Tydeman has disputed such a claim, arguing that 'the rubric [*but lete no man sytte þer, for lettynge of syt for þer schal be þe best of all*] may mean that nobody is to occupy any portion of the *platea* whatever, since it will impede the view of those outside the arena' as well as the view of the performers within it.[15] Following Crohn Schmitt, I also read the *Castle of Perseverance* diagram as a set design rather than a depiction of a theatre in the round and advocate on logistical grounds a more intimate performance space than that suggested by Southern.[16] I similarly agree with Tydeman that it is unlikely that the audience occupied the central portion of the *platea*, that is, the area closest to the Castle, because, as he argues, a reasonable amount of open, clear playing space would be necessary for the famous battle at the foot of the Castle, as well as the stage directions that specifically call for Belyal and Flesch to beat their servants around the place (sd. 1777, '*Et

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[14] Southern, *Medieval Theatre in the Round*, p. 56.

[15] Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre*, p. 83. Robert Weimann first popularised the use of the terms *locus* and *platea* in reference to medieval methods of staging, of which place and scaffold staging is a primary example. He defines them as a fixed, symbolic location and a non-representational open space respectively. See his *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. by Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 73-84.

[16] Crohn Schmitt, 'Was There a Medieval Theatre in the Round?', p. 304.

*verberabit eos super terram*').[17] However, evidence from the text does suggest that at least some of the spectators were in close proximity with the players, as we see in the *PLS* production of 1979 which maintained a clear *platea*, seating the audience in between the outer scaffolds on 'terraces' (Tydeman's phrase) or cross-legged at ground level.[18] This would benefit scenes where characters directly address the audience, as when Lust-lykyng and Foly descend from World's scaffold to seek him 'a seruaunt dynge and dere' (483) from amongst the crowd of spectators. 'Late se', Lust-lykynge says, 'whoso wyl vs knowe' (521) and who 'wyl be ryche and in gret aray' (493). For this scene to be effective, for the threat of being corrupted into the World's service to be credible, the actors playing Lust-lykynge and Foly must have been relatively close to their prey. Similarly, when Bacbytere introduces himself and declares that 'Wyth euery wyth I walke and wende' (660) to 'schape ȝone boyis to schame and schonde' (677), his threat would have been heightened if he was seen to prowl the edge of the audience, being literally with 'euery wyth' as 'I hunte / For to spye a preuy pley' (690). Therefore, I will imagine the audience as positioned between the five outer scaffolds, either sitting or standing at ground level on the periphery of the open playing space.

The rubric of the diagram clearly identifies the owners of each of the outer scaffolds, as well as their specific compass locations. So, God's scaffold is in the East and the World's in the West, while the remaining two traditional Enemies of Man, the Devil (Belyal) and the Flesch are positioned in the North

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[17] All quotations from *The Castle of Perseverance*, in *The Macro Plays*, ed. by Mark Eccles, EETS no. 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). Line numbers given in parenthesis.
[18] An aerial photograph of the *PLS* performance site can be found at <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~plspls/capanor.jpg> [accessed 11 January 2011].

and South of the space respectively. The fifth scaffold in the circle, and arguably the most significant, is positioned in the North-East of the space, exactly half-way between God and Belyal. As Richard Southern points out, the owner of the fifth scaffold, Coveytyse:

> comes neither from the scaffold of the Devil nor of the Flesch – nor even that of World. Neither does he come from any of the four cardinal points of the compass where the chief scaffolds are, but he comes, unaccompanied and secure in his own unaided power, from his own scaffold and his own unique point of the compass.[19]

Providing Coveytyse with a scaffold of his own, the playwright grants him equal standing with the traditional Enemies of Man and immediately marks him out as a major power in the corruption of Mankynde.

The positioning of the scaffolds in this manner, as previous scholars have already noted, is symbolically significant. The location of the four main scaffolds is connected with traditional ideological notions, or what Catherine Belsey terms 'emblematic geography', which place God, for example, in the symbolic East.[20] The structure of the space in this way would create a 'visual network of meanings' that conveyed to the audience the nature of the human condition and the spiritual and moral choices available to Mankynde.[21]

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[19] Southern, *The Medieval Theatre in the Round*, pp. 11-12.

[20] Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 21.

[21] Ibid., p. 22.

However, the circular formation of the space has dramatic as well as thematic significance. Positioned in the centre of the circular space, the Castle would have been of equal distance from all of the surrounding scaffolds, no closer to God than to the scaffolds of the three Enemies of Man. It is also visible to all of the audience regardless of their location around the playing area; so if you were standing next to, say, Flesch, your view of the Castle would be just as clear as that of the audience around Belyal's scaffold and you would also be of equal distance from it. In terms of the moral message of the play, the meaning created through the circular staging would have been two-fold. Firstly, the audience's proximity to any one of the evil scaffolds would place them emblematically in a position of sin; in other words, it provides them with a dramatic perspective of, say, having succumbed to the sin of avarice and, from this perspective, the spiritual routes available were laid out spatially before them. So, even if they cannot see God and Heaven they can at least see the Castle, the path to salvation, and for both the spectator and Mankynde there is quite literally no sin which cannot be repented, no sin from which the Castle, and consequently heaven, cannot be reached. It is achievable by all. Secondly, although both Mankynde (once he has entered the Castle) and those audience members seated next to God in the East are in a spiritually superior location, they remain in a precarious, vulnerable position. Being of equal distance from God and the Devil, the World and the Flesch, the Castle, for example, only offers sanctuary as far as Mankynde is willing, and it is as easy to fall back into sin from this position as it is to achieve heaven. Similarly, positioned in the *platea* and flanked by Coveytyse and Belyal on one side and Flesch on the other, the audience at God's scaffold would remain susceptible to the Seven

Deadly Sins as they perform in the open place; even from this space associated with moral and spiritual superiority, the audience remain exposed to the temptation of sin.

Given the centrality of the Castle and its equal proximity to the scaffolds of both good and evil, it is tempting to argue that, without its accompanying rubrics the diagram of *The Castle of Perseverance* presented a predominantly symmetrical, balanced space. David Bevington writes that symmetry in the medieval and early modern period 'was perceived to be an expression of harmony, beauty, and goodness. The basic visual sign in God's great hieroglyph was considered to be order itself, in the cosmos and in society'.[22] But the *Castle's* performance space is not symmetrical. Even in the two-dimensional diagram Coveytyse's stage breaks the symmetry of the other five, and the fact that four out of the six scaffolds are those of evil prevents equilibrium from being established between the two powers, unbalancing the image and overturning any prospect of harmony, beauty or goodness in the space and so, symbolically, in the world. Mankynde is, then, enclosed on three sides by evil and sin, making the East literally his only escape, connecting it with 'hope and life just as the West is associated with despair and death'.[23] The mere presence of Belyal, the devil, indicates an imbalance in the space; evil and wickedness are inherently oppositional, asymmetrical and disordered and, therefore, disrupt symmetry and order simply by existing.

As readers, we first learn of Coveytyse's scaffold from Bacbytere who guides Mankynde's eyes to 'his stage' (783), before leading him across the

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[22] David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 8-9.

[23] Davidson, *Visualizing the Moral Life*, p. 52.

place to his first encounter with the Seven Deadly Sins. This would not, however, be the first instance in which the audience were aware of the scaffold's presence. On entering the space and waiting for the performance to begin, it is likely that most of the audience would have noticed the arrangement of the scaffolds and would, therefore, have noticed that the fifth stage of the circle, whether they recognised it as Coveytyse or not, was situated between God and the Devil, and so broke the pattern of the space, although at this stage in the performance, they may not have fully comprehended its significance. Moreover, with the scaffolds decorated in accordance with the occupier's character and role, this inherent imbalance would be emphasised. The spectators would presumably have recognised the iconography of the structures and their inhabitants, perhaps familiar to them from stained-glass windows or carved alters and fonts. So Belyal, if he were visible at this point and not hidden behind drawn curtains, would immediately be recognisable as a demon, the actor's human features hidden by an ugly, beastly mask and a costume of dark leather skins, hairy pelt, or feathers, his scaffold resembling the Hell Mouth, black and menacing with flames licking its sides.[24] The World and Flesch would similarly be marked by their extravagant finery; for instance, Flesch is 'florchyd in flowrys' and his towers built with 'tapytys of tafata' (237, 239). T.W. Craik has highlighted the associations between extravagant clothes and debauchery, a recurring theme throughout the corpus of medieval drama with characters from Curiosity, the gallant in *Mary Magdalene*, to Cornelius in Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres* betraying their corrupted souls

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[24] Although there is no explicit mention of curtains being used in the text, records show that they were frequently used in performance to conceal a performer until the moment of his 'discovery'. For further discussion see, Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre*, p. 86-9.

through their adoption of wanton finery.[25] In contrast, as Craik goes on to observe, the 'evident prosperity of the virtuous man is different from the reckless self-adornment of the gallant'; and so, where the righteous and divine are represented by their simplicity, either through the black clerical robes worn by characters like Mercy in *Mankind* or through the richness in colour and quality of the costumes worn by Wisdom, those corrupted by pride, covetousness and sloth cavort in the reckless excess of fashionable superfluities.[26] In *The Castle of Perseverance*, for example, the Four Daughters of God are given very specific costumes, the colours of which symbolise their nature; they are all to be dressed in mantles, Mercy in white, Rytwysnes in red, Trewthe in dark green, and Pes in black.[27] With the scaffolds and players decorated in accordance with their role, the audience would be visually aware of the predominance of sin and wickedness in this representation of human experience, their spatial dominance foretelling the struggle and relentless temptation that Mankynde will have to face and, again, emphasising the asymmetrical design of the space.

The dominance of evil in *The Castle*'s performance space goes beyond the scaffolds, extending down into the open *platea* which surrounds the eponymous central structure. During the course of the play all sixteen characters of evil and sin descend and play in the place. Initially, most remain

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[25] T.W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude: Stage, Costume, and Acting* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1967), p. 59.

[26] Ibid., pp. 50, 59. See also Ann Eljenholm Nichols, 'Costume in the Moralities: The Evidence of East Anglian Art', in *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*. Second Series, ed. by Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1991), pp. 280-9.

[27] Folger MS.V.a. 354, f.191v.

on their respective scaffolds but gradually, as the Bad Angel begins to work his charm and temptation takes hold of Mankynde, the main characters of evil become more prevalent in the open playing place. Once the Bad Angel has convinced Mankynde to 'foster and fede' his flesh 'Tyl þou be sexty wyntyr hold' (414-17) the threat made to the soul of Mankynde, and by association, the audience, needs to be physically represented in the space. And so, as Mankynde and his Bad Angel cross to World's scaffold, Lust-lykyng and Foly descend into the *platea* (sd. 490, *Tunc descendit in placeam pariter*) to see 'Whoso wyl wyth foly rewlyd be [and] Whoso wyl be fals and covetouse' (484-7). Once in the place, Lust-lykyng, instead of immediately finding Mankynde, addresses the spectators, searching for those who 'wyl be ryche and in gret aray [...] Whoso wyl be fals al þat he may [...] And lyuyn in lustys nyth and day' (493-7). Similarly, although it is not clear from the text exactly where he emerges, Bacbytere's menacing presence would likewise be reinforced by a close proximity to his prey. Upon his entrance, for example, the World's messenger declares: 'I wyl þat ʒe wetyn, all þo þat ben here, / For I am knowyn fer and nere' (656-7) and makes it clear that 'Wyth euery wyth I walke and wende / And euery man now louyth me wele' (660-1). To truly be with every man, it would make sense for Bacbytere to be present in the place, the space with the greatest connection to the audience, rather than positioned on one of the scaffolds and so elevated above those that he brags about corrupting. Prowling around the borders of the playing space, his boast that 'Þorwe þe werld, be downe and dalys, / All abowtyn I brewe balys' (682-3) would take on greater potency and relevance, especially as he is awaiting Mankyde's re-entry to 'techyn hym þe wey' across the place to Coveytyse and the other Deadly

Sins (693-4). So, where initially temptation was present in the space, but relatively distant from the audience, Mankynde's decision to choose his Bad Angel over his Good has invited the Sins into the place and, therefore, into direct contact with the audience, underlining their representation in the central protagonist and making the consequences of his actions relate directly to them. Mankynde's actions then open the floodgate to immorality and sin.

Following these interactions, each member of the four scaffolds of evil descends to play in the place. Once introduced to Mankynde, Coveytyse calls on the services of the remaining Deadly Sins, drawing 'þe Deuelys chyldryn þre' (894), Pryde, Wrathe and Envye, from Belyal's scaffold, and Lecchery, Slawth and Glotonye from their luxury in Flesch's decorated tower (891-905). The Sins descend individually but cross the place in two groups of three to congregate at Coveytyse's scaffold; however, when Mankynde is won back to his Virtues by Penitence and Confession, their masters join them to wreak havoc in the *platea*. The Bad Angel calls on Bacbytere to inform the Three Enemies of Man of Mankynde's return to his Virtues and, upon hearing the news each Enemy calls their respective Sins to return to their scaffolds, only to descend into the place themselves and beat their servants around the open space (sd.1777, *Et verberabit eos super terram*; sd. 1822, *Tunc uerberabit eos in placeam*), all, that is, except World. There is no clear indication in the stage directions that World descends, as Flesh and Belyal do, into the *platea*; all that is stipulated is that he must beat Coveytyse (sd. 1863, *Tunc verberabit eum*) and so it would seem, for the moment at least, that the World and Coveytyse remain on World's stage. It is, however, the World who calls the Enemies of Man to war, who orders the greatest gathering of evil within the place, 'þe

Castel of Vertu for to spyll' (1896) and who leads one of the greatest spectacles in medieval drama. Under World's banner, the Three Enemies of Man march to war and descend upon the Castle of Perseverance where the great battle for the soul of Mankynde begins.

These examples show, moreover, that Evil is not a solitary presence but tends to occupy the place *en masse*. For instance, Lust-lykyng and Foly in their search for a candidate for World's service (490-525) conspire together with the Bad Angel seemingly apart from Mankynde or, in a smaller space, perhaps "shouldering" him by turning their backs to signify their separation, until they call him to join them with promises of fine clothes and riches for evermore (526-61). This situation recurs when Coveytyse plans Mankynde's downfall with the other six Deadly Sins (1019-46). This time it is Pryde who brings Mankynde into the fold and encourages him to invite the Seven Deadly Sins onto Coveytyse's stage (1046-70). The moment when each of the Sins crosses the *platea* in groups of three (Pryde, Wrathe and Envye, and Glotony, Slawth and Lecherye), the scenes in which Belayal and Flesch beat their respective servants around the place and the siege of Mankynde and his Virtues (1899-2556) are further obvious examples. The corrupters of Man seem, then, to form a demonic coalition against Mankynde and his hopes of salvation, working actively together to tempt him and damn his once innocent soul. On a more practical level, it also means that evil, sin and temptation seem to fully occupy *The Castle*'s performance space; not only is Good outnumbered by the physical structures belonging to its opponents, the bodily presence of evil is also literally everywhere, surrounding Mankynde and constantly present to the

spectators, within their sight on the other side of the space if not immediately adjacent to them.

In contrast, very few Good characters inhabit the *platea*. For the first 1,297 lines the Good Angel is the only virtuous character to interact with Mankynde, either on the raised stages or in the open place. When he is finally aided by Schryfte and Penitencia the exchange is brief and seems less active and more restrained than their sinful equivalents (1298-1401). The Seven Virtues are restricted for the entirety of the play to their Castle stronghold and, although the Four Daughters of God are directed to 'play in the place altogether till they bring up the soul' (diagram legend, f.191), they have no direct part in the action until Mankynde cries for mercy on his deathbed (3129).[28] Furthermore, where each of the other five scaffolds has constant movement either between or on them, God's stage is not only silent but motionless with neither Good nor Evil stepping foot on the platform until the Four Daughters ascend to plead Mankynde's case (sd. 3228, *Tunc ascendent ad PATREM omnes pariter*). Although the characters of Schryfte, Penitencia and Dethe are sent forth from God and, therefore, could probably appear from his scaffold, they, unlike the Four Daughters, do not have any direct verbal exchange with the Creator; they are of course his agents, but like the Good Angel they seem to act, if not independently of him, then without his obvious intervention.

With so much of the action performed by temptation and sin, both Mankynde and the audience cannot help but attend to their antics rather than to

[28] Natalie Crohn Schmitt argues that the Virtues probably descended to the ground immediately surrounding the Castle, but were defended by the ditch which she suggests encircled the Castle. See 'Was there a Medieval Theatre in the Round?', pp. 300-3.

the silent, static East. The vocal absence of God for the majority of the play further underlines the dominance of Evil within *The Castle*'s performance space and the audience's attention. At no point, prior to the Four Daughters' appeal, does God intervene in the Fall of Mankynde or make his presence known to either Mankynde or the audience. At the beginning of the play, the World, the Devil and the Flesch make their 'boasts', projecting their voices and intentions into the space, making themselves known to the earth and its inhabitants, their presence unquestioned, unchallenged and palpable (157-274). However, the Creator is significantly silent and remains so until the close of the play. The presence of the divine in *The Castle of Perseverance* could, therefore, be seen as troublingly weak and passive; in contrast to the silent power of Christ in *Christ before Herod*, the Eastern scaffold here is the focus of neither the characters' nor the audience's attention and is, consequently, side-lined for the more flamboyantly verbal and active performance of Mankynde and the Sins. Christ in the York Play perhaps appears more potent than God in *The Castle* because of his focal role in the course of the play; God, however, remains on the periphery of the action and so, to some extent is forgotten.

But, for some critics, God's silence and the lack of physical action involving his scaffold in the East remains a significant theatrical oversight. William Tydeman, for instance, writes that, without curtains to conceal the deity, 'the actor [playing God] would be forced to sit exposed in majesty for some 3200 lines before joining the action' and, because 'no activity has occurred in the region of the eastern scaffold for most of the play [...] one is tempted to bring it into focus whenever possible'. But this misses the point

and underestimates the dramatic subtlety of the *The Castle*'s playwright.[29] The fourteenth-century *Book of Vices and Virtues* explains to its laymen readers the value of knowing God, but also the intense challenge of attaining such knowledge:

> Now schalt þou wel vnderstonde þat þer nys no þing þat a man may bettere kunne þan þat God is, but þer nis no þing so hard to kunne þan whi & what þing God is And þerfore we rede þat þou studie not moche to wite ne enquere. For þou myȝt liȝtliche faile and go amys; it suffiseþ to þe [to] seie, 'Faire swete fadre, þat art in heuene.' Soþ is þat he is ouer al present, in erþe, in þe scee, and in helle, as he is in heuene.[30]

Knowledge of God is, then, no mean feat; despite his omnipresence throughout human experience, 'in erþe' and 'þe scee' as well as in heaven, there remains 'no þing so hard to kunne þan whi & what þinge God is', a belief realised in the performance of *The Castle of Perseverance*. The dominant presence of evil and sin in both space and action, as argued above, absorbs the attention of the audience, occupying their view and drawing their interest away from God in the silent, static East. The activity and liveliness of sin make it increasingly difficult for both Mankynde and the audience to see and know God; the further they are drawn in by the boisterous entertainment of the Sins, who actively seek out victims from those present in the place, the more

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[29] Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre*, pp. 89, 98.
[30] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p.103, ll. 4-15.

susceptible Mankynde and the audience are to distraction from their primary spiritual goal: God and heaven. This does not mean, however, that God must, as Tydeman suggests, remain hidden until he speaks at line 3245. Indeed, such a device would detract from a theologically important point: God is constant, he exists in all things, he is everywhere and in everything, he and The Castle of Perseverance are constantly present, but not necessarily always easy to see. The Devil and his agents actively seek to corrupt Mankynde, but God and Christ must be sought and obeyed through Man's own free will. And so, when the Good Angel begs the Virtues to 'Helpyth to kepe here Mankynne' (2545) Mekenes replies:

> Good Aungyl, what may I do þerto?
>
> Hymselfe may hys sowle spylle.
>
> Mankynd to don what he wyl do,
>
> God hath ȝouyn hym a fre wylle.
>
> Þou he drenche and hys sowle slo,
>
> Certys we may not do þeretylle.   (2557-62)

It is, therefore, up to Mankynde and the audience to seek out God for themselves, to notice his silent, enduring presence in a space enveloped and devoured by evil and sin.

**Devilish Movement**

This, then, is the space in which the body performs. It is a space dominated by the presence of evil and temptation, a presence that is both seen in the physical structures of the space and felt in the bodily presence of the actors in the *platea*, which, at its busiest point (the battle for Mankynde's allegiance), contains at least twelve individual characters (1899-2608). But it is not just the presence of evil that is important here; the way in which the actors move and occupy the place, what their bodies do during the performance, will have a significant impact on the audience's experience of the play and the transference of its meaning. And so it is to the specific movements, gestures and postures of the body that we now turn.

The characters' dialogue provides significant information about how they occupy the performance space. For example, after he has emerged from beneath the Castle, Mankynde describes to the audience how he has come into the world and the condition that he finds himself in. He describes how 'Þis nyth I was of my modyr born / Fro my modyr I walke, I wende', that he is 'Ful feynt and febyl I fare ȝou beforn / I am nakyd of lym and lende' and that 'For schame I stonde and schende' (275-83). Having only his 'sely crysme' (294), the cloth wrapped around the head of a baptised child, Mankynde has nothing else to protect him from the world; as he is naked in body, so his naive newborn soul has no knowledge of the dangers that await him and, therefore, no armour to protect him. His nakedness expresses a newborn's vulnerability and we can see the lost, forlorn and frightened attitude in the performance that is described. Mankynde, 'ful feynt and febyl' wanders away from his mother

(who is not present on stage) not knowing whether 'to gon ne to lende' (281), to go or remain, his wavering indecision resulting in merely standing in one spot, confused and perplexed ('schende','stodye') by his situation and the paths that are laid before him (275-300). The actor's body, then, must match the description of Mankynde's condition; his bodily attitude must be frail and feeble, he must express his fear and uncertainty of the world into which he is born, perhaps hunching his shoulders, pulling his arms around his body in a show of self-comfort and looking around him as if everything is new and terrifying, deliberately walking in one direction before turning back to the exact place that he began.

But Mankynde is not alone in the place; he is accompanied by two angels, one good and one bad, who are to be his constant companions through the course of the play. He tells the audience:

> To aungels bene asynyd to me:
>
> Þe ton techyth me to goode;
>
> On my ryth syde ȝe may hym se;
>
> He cam fro Criste þat deyed on rode.
>
> Anoþer is ordeynyd her to be
>
> Þat is my foo, be fen and flode;
>
> He is about in euery degre
>
> To drawe me to þo dewylys wode
>
> Þat in helle ben thycke. (301-9)

This passage identifies for the audience the Good Angel and the Bad Angel (although they were probably quite easily recognized by their costumes), but it also tells us something of their occupation of the space. The Good Angel is very specifically on Mankynde's right side; the Bad Angel, however, is not located on Mankynde's left, as perhaps could be expected, but is 'about in euery degre'. This is, of course, a reference to the constant threat of temptation in everyday life, but it could be translated literally into the performance of the Bad Angel. The specificity with which Mankynde refers to these two characters seems to indicate that the Good Angel is restricted in his movement and has, at this point at least, a very specific position in relation to Mankynde. In contrast, the Bad Angel 'is about in euery degre' and we can imagine this implies that, whereas the Good Angel remains on Mankynde's right-hand side, the Bad Angel circles him, occupying the space surrounding his victim by appearing at each and every compass point (at every degree) so, wherever Mankynde turns, his Bad Angel is present.

The freedom granted to the Bad Angel is echoed in the speeches of other devilish servants. For example, World's messenger, Bacbytere, as we have already seen, brags: 'Wyth euery wyth I walke and wende,' that he is 'lyth of lopys þorwe euery londe' so he can run throughout the world brewing conflict and strife (660-83). Again, we get the sense that he is, or at least can be, everywhere, but, perhaps more significantly, that his errands as World's messenger require him to be 'lyth', that is nimble. Bacbytere, then, would likely show that nimbleness in his bodily performance through speed and agility, so that the audience can see his specific type of sin in the energy that is suggested by his opening speech. This manner of moving around the space

corresponds with what Richard Rastall terms 'undirected energy' in his discussion of devilish noise.[31] Just as cacophony, indecent language and nonsense signify devilish allegiance, so a character's excessive energy and multiplicity of direction in movement mark him or her as a servant of evil and wickedness. So, Pryde proclaims: 'Bon [born] I am to braggyn and buskyn abowt, / Rapely and redyly on rowte for to renne' (910-11) and Envye is similarly 'flet as a fox and folwyth on faste' (932-3). Their movements and gestures during these lines, and probably throughout the play, would complement their descriptions of the abrupt, brash and hasty mannerisms indicated. The less explicitly aggressive sins also display this ungoverned and unrestrained bodily attitude. World states that 'I trotte and tremle in my trew trone / As a hawke I hoppe in my hende hale' (457-8) showing again a kind of agitated impatience that finds outlet through hopping like a hawk in its cage, a similar motion to Bacbytere's leaping, Pryde's hasty running and Herod's hopping posture in the Norwich Cathedral roof boss. Even the bloated Glotony says: 'I stampe and I styrte and stynt upon stounde' (960), that is, he can agilely leap ('styrte') and stamp, but is still able to stop at a moment's notice ('stynt upon stounde').[32]

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[31] Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, vol. 1, p. 206.

[32] For more on the representation of devils on the early English stage see: John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in Early English Drama, 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John D. Cox, 'Devils and Vices in English Non-Cycle Plays: Sacrament and Social Body', *Comparative Drama*, 30:2 (1996): 188-219; and Max Harris, 'Flesh and Spirits: the Battle Between Virtues and Vices in Medieval Drama Reassessed', *Medium Ævum*, 57 (1988): 56-64.

As with many visual aspects of medieval drama, this method of representation derives from iconographic depictions of evil and sinfulness, the bodily postures of devils and personified sins in the visual arts implying the careless and aggressive movements performed by their counterparts in the drama. The Mouth of Hell depicted in f.168v of the Guennol volume of the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* is an excellent example (plate 9). In and around the yawning, red hell-mouth the beast-like demons drag some unfortunate souls to their doom. The activeness with which they do this vividly portrays the glee and relish with which the devils go about their business; on the central battlement of the blackened demonic castle a small green devil grins and dances with glee, one arm and one leg raised in a typical devil's dance, while at the bottom right we see another green devil, beaked and with wings, his arms raised above his head and one leg, again, raised. The amount of activity in this image is overwhelming and, although focus is drawn to the gaping yellow hell mouth, the viewer's eye is distracted by the vigour of the swarming devils, their mere number seeming to threaten mankind's salvation. But the postures of their bodies are deliberately unordered and unrestrained, contributing just as much to the representation of hell as their number and torturous activities. The extension of their limbs into open space creates the impression of spatial consumption, of frantic haste and frenzied action. Movement in this image is chaotic, ungoverned, uncontrolled and uncivilised.

There was, then, significant meaning attached to movement in medieval English plays, meaning that we see continued through into the early modern period. Both *Wisdom* and *Mankind*, the other plays of Folger MS. V. a. 354, use dance and movement as part of their representation of sin. For example,

**Plate 9** 'The Mouth of Hell'. *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Guennol Volume, Guennol Collection, New York, f.168v.

when Mynde, Wyll and Wndyrstondynge succumb to sin 'orderly behaviour is exchanged for unruly dancing': 'Þis ys þe Deullys dance' cries Mynde encouraging the 'six dysgysyde [...] with rede berdys, and lyouns rampaunt on here crestys' to 'daunce, ye laddys! yowr hertys be lyght'.[33] Later, Wndyrstondynge similarly tells how Wronge and Sleyght, Doubullnes and Falsnes, Raveyn and Dyscheyit 'daunce all þe londe hydyr and thedyr'.[34] The famous New Gyse, Nowadays and Nought similarly enter into the plot of *Mankind* in a flurry of noise and movement. Nowadays orders Nought to 'Leppe about lyuely!' despite Nought's concerns that he will 'breke my neke to schew yow sporte'.[35] After more goading from his comrades, Nought defiantly yells 'I beschrew ye all!' before the direction indicates that 'þei daunce'.[36] Over one hundred and forty years later, Ben Jonson uses similar means to characterise the witches of his *Masque of Queens*. Described in the 1609 edition of the masque as: 'a Spectacle of strangenes, producing a multiplicitie of gesture', the Witches' 'Magical Dance' was designed to be 'full of praeposterous change, and gesticulation', their movements typically 'contrary to the custome of Men', making circles with their arms and dancing back to back and hip to hip, rolling their heads and bodies in 'strange *phantastique* motions'.[37]

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[33] Davidson, *Visualizing the Moral Life*, p. 95; *Wisdom*, in *The Macro Plays* (see *The Castle of Perseverance*, above), l. 700, sd. 692, l. 708.

[34] *Wisdom*, ll. 725-34.

[35] *Mankind*, ll. 76, 78.

[36] Ibid., l. 80, sd. 81.

[37] Ben Jonson, *Masque of Queens* (London, 1609), *EEBO*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgthumbs.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=9 9844873&FILE=../session/1294762985_3290&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&SEARCHC

There is a sense, then, in all of these examples, of dangerously unbridled energy and freedom of movement, much like that expressed by Bacbytere, Pryde, Envye and the Bad Angel in *The Castle*. From the iconography of devils to the depiction of witches and the Sins of *The Castle*, excessive movement, gesture and posture are directly opposed to the dominant conventions of bodily decorum and restraint, and so overtly challenge the idea of bodily control and abstinence. Frenzied, wild, animated and uninhibited: these are the Devil's movements.

But this lively and energetic action is not *The Castle*'s only means of depicting sinful excess; Lechery, although also declaring that she is 'lovyd in iche a lond', drowsily explains that 'Wyth my sokelys [flowers] of swetnesse I sytte and I slepe' (972) therefore indicating a performance that would seem to be the exact opposite of the chaotic energy apparent elsewhere. The spiritual dangers of torpor and indolence figure strongly in many other medieval texts, like *Piers Plowman*, where Will must justify to Reason and Conscience his dubious contribution to society, and the lazy labourers force Piers to call in Hunger to goad them back into work.[38] *Mankind* too depicts the moment when the eponymous protagonist is tricked into lethargy by the devil, Tityvillus, and, in the early Tudor period, John Redford's *Wit and Science* similarly depicts the corruption of Wit by Idleness.[39] Lechery's indolent posture, therefore,

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ONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=AUTHOR> [accessed 11 January 2011], images 3 of 21 and 13 of 21.

[38] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), Passus V, ll. 1-108; Passus VIII, ll. 128-352.

[39] *Mankind*, ll. 521-606; John Redford, *Wit and Science*, in *Tudor Interludes*, ed. by Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), ll. 330-588.

indicates her advocacy of fleshly pleasure just as surely as Bacbytere, Pride, Envye and World display their sinful excess though their vigorous bodily performances. However, although not as frenetic and unruly as her fellow Sins, Lechery maintains evil's kinetic characteristics. In describing the sin of Lechery, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* reminds readers that it is not simply 'þe foule dede' which constitutes this Deadly Sin:

> To þat synne longen alle þynges þat a mannes flesch is meued
> to, and desireþ fleschly lustes, as ben outrageous etynges and
> drynkynges and esy beddynges and delicious and softe schertes
> and smokkes and swote robes of scarlet, and alle oþere eses of
> þe body þat is more þan nede is.[40]

So, to be lecherous is not only to succumb to sexual desire; it also entails a desire to consume all that is above and beyond the body's basic necessities, a characteristic which is also built into *The Castle*'s representation of Evil as a whole. The movement of Lechery is, therefore, concurrent with that of the other more physically active Sins through this idea of excess. Just as Lechery's indolence is wasteful and so sinful, the trotting, leaping hastiness of Pryde, Envye, Bacbytere and the World are extravagant and careless, their movements either far more or far less than is required, unproductive, self-defeating and ultimately destructive.

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[40] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p. 44, ll. 14-19.

**Text and Body**

These examples are explicitly stated in the dialogue, but it is also possible to make some claims about the impact that the text itself will have on the actor's body. Shepherd offers a convincing explanation as to how the play text prepares and shapes an actor's bodily attitude. Knowledge of the dramatic genre will, he proposes, begin this process before the script has even been read, bringing with it specific expectations of the demands that the play as comedy, for example, will make on the performer's body. The script will also control the actor's breathing patterns, not only through its punctuation, but through the burden of, among other things, verse, rhyme, meter, phonology, syllable length and number, beats and pauses, dialogue exchange and line length, all of which call for a whole bodily effort, in addition to the labour of the vocal muscles. In this way, the text 'links voice to gesture', ensuring a correspondence between the player's speech and his body, matching, as Hamlet says, the action to the word, the word to the action.[41] The play text will, then, establish a character's bodily attitude, and therefore the actor's muscular organisation, but it will also, more generally, indicate the:

> mode of performance, [the] performance register. In so far as the words invoke such things as genre or intertextual reference or parodic quotation, they indicate a register of movement (like a register of language), suggesting how it is done.[42]

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[41] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, p. 11.

[42] Ibid., p. 36.

Shepherd has already shown the strength of this approach, applying it to early modern, eighteenth- and twentieth-century drama, and it is the premise of this chapter that the same methodology can illuminate much about the performance of *The Castle of Perseverance* and, indeed, about the experience of medieval theatre as a whole.

The most notable feature of *The Castle* text is its abundant use of alliteration. As Mark Eccles noted in his introduction to the text, 'the World, Belial, Flesh, and the Seven Sins alliterate nearly all their lines'.[43] The alliterative device has often been associated with devils and the character of the Vice. As I argued in Chapter Two, alliteration was a significant contribution to Herod's chaotic reign and perhaps, therefore, it had similar effects in the speeches of *The Castle*'s villains. World opens the play with a profusion of /w/ sounds: 'Worthy wytys in al þis werd [world] wyde, / Be wylde wode wonys and euery weye-went' (157-8), followed by an equally voluminous number of plosive /p/, 'Precyous prinse, prekyd in pride, / Þorwe þis propyr pleyn place in pes be 3e bent!' (159-60).[44] World's alliteration coincides with the rhythmic beat of the metre and, in such a large, open space this would, as at York, undoubtedly have helped the audience to hear and follow World's speech by emphasising the most important words. If the size and outdoor location of the space posed such a serious question about the play's audibility, then it would also be important for the playwright, and the actor, to establish character and

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[43] Mark Eccles, 'Introduction', in *The Macro Plays*, pp. xvi-xvii.

[44] For more on the verse of *The Castle of Perseverance*, see Avril Henry, 'The Dramatic Function of Rhyme and Stanza Patterns in *The Castle of Perseverance*', in *Individuality and Achievement in Middle English Poetry*, ed. by Oliver Pickering (Oxford: D.S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 147-83.

role as soon as possible. It is, therefore, important to understand the type of sounds that are uttered in each of the opening boasts of the Three Enemies of Man. Unlike Herod, who opens the Litster's pageant with an aggressive explosion of sound intended to dominate the audience's auditory field, World begins *The Castle* on a smoother, less forceful note, 'Worthy wytys', the /w/ sound here easing and inviting the audience to listen carefully to World's boast. It also, of course, matches his own name and so, in the opening two sentences of the play, the audience, although they have not been told explicitly that this is World, may unconsciously understand the kind of persona who is talking, the sounds that they hear corresponding with his character and role. A similar observation can be made of the opening lines of both Belyal and Flesch, the former's repetitive /s/, for example, producing his characteristically insidious and wicked hissing noise (196).

But I think that there is more to this, certainly in terms of what it can tell us about the actors' physical performances. Firstly, the bodily effort needed to sustain both the rhythm and the alliteration demands virtuoso performances from World, Belyal and Flesch; the first significant pause for World, for example, would appear to be after four lines during which time he must alliterate the /w/ sound nine times and /p/ eight times, each landing in quick succession on the tetrameter beat.[45] This requires a certain breathing pattern from the player, his deep breaths providing enough air to hold the rhythm and the pace of the lines, as well as bellow his words out towards those

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[45] Although the scribe has not used punctuation in the manuscript, the sense and pattern of World's lines would seem to suggest a pause after 'in pes be ȝe bent' (160). For a facsimile edition of the text see *The Macro Plays*, ed. by David Bevington (New York: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1972).

on the opposite side of the space. Moreover, the repeated alliteration forces the performer to clearly enunciate each syllable; if he does not, it is very easy to trip over, for example, 'Be wylde wode wonys and euery weye-went' and run one word into the next in a jumble of nonsensical sounds. Just like modern tongue twisters, the actor's posture would influence the success of this very important opening speech. It is very difficult to pronounce World's first four lines in a slouching position, with the chin tucked into the chest; so, for World to project his voice and maintain both the rhythm and clarity of his verse, he would need to adopt an upright posture, bold and proud, which also agrees with his character and the content of his words. Much of World's boast also tends to encompass 'þis werd [world] wyde' (157), frequently referring to 'þis propyr pleyn place'(160), 'Al þe world' (165), 'In euery cost' (167) and other such sweeping formulations, and so an open, confident and stately posture would not be incongruous, but would rather aid the establishment of his character, role and intention in the performance.[46]

Belyal's verse offers similar insights into the type of bodily attitude required to enact the prince of devils. As already mentioned, the repeated /s/ sound of his first line corresponds with Belyal's role; but it is perhaps the later alliteration that defines his physical performance. Like many stage devils, Belyal talks of gnashing his jaws and teeth, 'I champe and I chafe, I chocke on my chynne' (198), but the sounds produced by his alliteration here, and elsewhere in his introductory speech, offer the chance to actually perform this action as well as recount it for those who cannot see. Once again, the placement of the affricate /tʃ/ in the line lends emphasis to the sound, but the

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[46] Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, p. 21.

tetrameter rhythm is much more clearly delineated than in World's verse, producing a rocking, stamping rhythm that would facilitate a similar motion even while sitting, as Belyal tells us he is. Moreover, the sounds that he produces are much more akin to Herod's aggression than World's easy temptation; the /tʃ/ of line 198 above, the /b/ of 'boystows and bold' (199), the /g/ of 'grope', 'gapyn' and 'grenne' (200) and /k/ of 'Carlylle', 'Kent' and 'carpynge' all encourage the player to forcefully spit his words, but they also suggest a particular bodily attitude. Where World's verse evokes an upright, proud and bold manner, Belyal's verse, and particularly his alliteration, portrays something quite different. The affricate of 'champe', 'chafe', 'chocke' and 'chynne' gives the impression of a gnashing, gnawing grimace, but the manner in which the sound is produced actually forces the player, to some degree at least, to bare his teeth. A parallel facial expression would be produced by 'grenne', 'brenne', 'wenne' and 'denne' (200-8), the long vowel /e/ here widening the player's mouth to again bare his teeth. Most of the players in *The Castle of Perseverance* probably wore masks covering at least half, if not all, of the face. Contemporary records from around the country frequently show payments for masks for both good and bad characters; in York, for instance, the Mercers' accounts show payments for three 'visors' for three devils and a receipt from Heybridge in Essex records the sale of a 'Deuylls head'.[47] Nevertheless, even if the actor's face could not be seen

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[47] See Ian Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), citation 1560 (59), p. 296 and citation 772, p. 154. Further records for the use of masks can be found in most of the records published by *REED* and the Malone Society Collections, but are especially prevalent in the Corpus

because of a mask the act of producing these sounds would promote the specific muscular bodily tension that accompanies such an aggressive and animalistic expression, as well as the angry, wrathful content of his speech. Perhaps the effort required to propel the sounds beyond the confines of the mask would have in fact helped with this process. We can, therefore, imagine a hunched, tense posture for Belyal, one that speaks of enraged hostility but also hints towards the animal hunter ready to pounce on his unsuspecting prey.

Flesch offers an additional alternative to World's posture. As the symbol of sensual indulgence and pleasure, Flesch will need to display bodily excess and licence in his own physical posture, which he himself suggests in his introductory lines. He says: 'I byde as a brod brustun-gutte abouyn on þese tourys' and states that he is 'florchyd in flowrys' (235-7) and we can already begin to imagine the static, rotund and expansive figure who lounges among his soft furnishings and exotic flowers, a cross between Bosch's Lechery and Gluttony in his depiction of The Seven Deadly Sins (plates 10 and 11). Furthermore, Flesch's verse seems more burdensome than either World's or Belyal's and this cumbersome, arduous verse would probably have encouraged and aided the indulgent bodily attitude that his words express. It is difficult to ascertain the exact device that gives Flesch's speech this quality. However, if the first four lines of each speech are taken individually, Flesch is required to utter far more syllables than World, fifteen in line 235 as compared with nine in line 157, for example. Although this may appear a very slight variation in the overall picture, in terms of performance it would probably have had a

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Christi Play records from York and Chester. See *REED: York*; and *REED: Chester*, ed. by Lawrence M. Clopper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979).

**Plate 10** Hieronymus Bosch. 'Lechery'. *Tabletop of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*. Madrid, Museo del Prado. Oil on panel (detail).

**Plate 11** Hieronymus Bosch. 'Gluttony'. *Tabletop of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things.* Madrid, Museo del Prado . Oil on panel (detail).

profound effect on the player's approach to his lines. Where the likes of Herod with his profusion of single syllables can rattle through a speech at high speed, the combination of the repeated /fl/ and /tʃ/ with the multi-syllable iterations of his opening lines would promote a far slower delivery of Flesch's speech, encouraging the player to take his time and savour his gluttonous lines; also, quite simply, it takes longer to pronounce the many syllables. The alliteration given to him here would also contribute thematically to this rather lethargic and torpid speech. It does, as with the other Enemies of Man, both emphasise the most important words in the sentence and suggest an indolent bodily expression which typifies the role of Mankynde's Flesch. The /br/ cluster along with the /ʌ/ vowel and guttural /g/ in 'brustun-gutte' make for quite a thick flow of sound, which would seem to come from the very depths of the body and so they could, perhaps, be said to be more bodily than those produced by either World or Belyal, once again underlining Flesch's sinfully indulgent nature; even his words indulge his body. A similar effect can be seen in the sounds produced by the word 'florchyd,' the separate phonetic units, particularly /fl/ and /tʃ/ clusters, suggesting a flaccid posture to accompany these unctuous sounds.

The script of *The Castle of Perseverance* shows how active and important kinetic performance was to the presentation of evil and sin. World was probably portrayed as an arrogant prince 'prekyd in pride' (159), his haughty posture owning the space through its physical presence, offering a direct challenge to the true king, God, on the opposite side of the space. Belyal 'þe blake' (199) is more beastly and aggressive, his attitude etched into every aspect of his performance; along with his animalistic costume and hell mouth

scaffold, his words gnash and snap at the audience as his muscles and sinews tense in response to his fiendish verse. And Flesch, bloated and indulgent, chews over his words, their phonetic essence reflecting his florid, languorous presence. These three do not perform the same frantic kinesis as the Bad Angel and Bacbytere, nor do they, at least at this point, seem to display the same energy as we see in the devils of *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Nevertheless, they do still maintain the excessiveness which characterises the presentation of evil and sin. It is their exaggerated gesticulations, their 'demonic '*gesticulatio*'' that, as with Lechery, mark them as corrupt and damned.[48]

A miniature from a French translation of Valerius Maximus' *The Memorable Deeds and Sayings of the Romans* translates this devilish movement into human posture to illustrate the bodies of those corrupted by temptation. *The Temperate and Intemperate* by the Master of the Dresden Prayer Book, currently held in the John Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (MS. 43), shows the distinction between moral and immoral Man through the postural opposition of its figures (plate 12). To the left can be seen Valerius himself instructing the Emperor Tiberius to whom the book is dedicated; at the front of the image, carouse a group of seven individuals, five men and two women, all shown in various raucously expressive postures. The woman to the right holds a bowl up above her head in a drinking salute, while her other arm bawdily lifts up her overskirt; the other woman bends to help a young man who is sprawled on the floor, his hat tipped over his eyes and his unstable legs, significantly, crossed before him. The individual seated above him holds one

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[48] Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'The Rationale of Gestures', pp. 66-7.

**Plate 12** The Master of the Dresden Prayer Book. 'The Temperate and Intemperate'. Miniature from *Fait et dits mémorables des romains*, by Valerius Maximus (1475-80). Los Angeles, John Paul Getty Museum, MS. 43

hand above his head in acknowledgement of the salute from the woman opposite, while the companion to his left pours another beer, his elbow also tilted upwards in line with his shoulder. The posture of each of these characters is different from the next, no two match each other exactly and they all seem to express different preoccupations. Although these figures appear to be quite static, that is they are not dancing, leaping or running, they do share the common kinetic conventions of the diabolic. Like the devils discussed above, most have their arms raised either level with or above the shoulder; two out of the seven have their legs crossed, like Herod and Saul of the *Queen Mary Psalter*, and none of them show the tall, upright posture that is even today associated with propriety and decorum. Instead, they are in various stages of slouching, crouching and lying, their debauchery and sin indicated in the chaos and disorder of their limbs and so, though this is a still image, their movements seem strangely palpable. Furthermore, like the devils of *The Hours*, the free and indecorous postures of the Intemperates seem to consume a much larger portion of the picture frame than the sedate group receding at the back of the image, the Temperates. This, of course, is partly to do with their position at the front of the image, but if taken as individuals the Intemperates do occupy a far broader section of the space around them than their temperate counterparts. Like the devils, their limbs extend out away from their torsos to occupy the space in front and to the side. Those who do not have their arms raised instead spread forward onto the table, their forearms supporting the rest of their bodies. The upper body is also significant here. As mentioned above, none of the Intemperates stand or sit erect, but are either bent or hunched in varying manners to give a curve to their postures. This, again, suggests a

greater occupation of the space around them as they occupy horizontal as well as vertical space, devouring the area around them as they consume the beer they drink.

The images of devils and sins in the iconography discussed above all show the excess that is typically associated with the forces of evil, but they also offer alternative means of expressing that intemperance to suit specific performance spaces. Characters like Bacbytere, Pryde, Envye and the Bad Angel, for example, cross the place in the same energetic, frenzied manner of iconographic devils, whereas, the Three Enemies of Man (when they are on their scaffolds) show far less active, but equally uninhibited, bodily attitudes, perhaps similar to those that we see in the Dresden Intemperates and Bosch's Lechery and Gluttony. Perhaps what we have here, then, are two ways of depicting devilish bodies that can be tailored and refined depending upon character and the space that they occupy. The first could be a way of showing a demonic allegiance through the body in motion or in the act of transit from one point in space to another; it uses speed and haste, leaping and stamping, trotting and running, and, therefore, could only really be enacted fully in the open space of the *platea*. The second has more to do with gesticulation and posture, and consequently is probably intended for those figures that remain static or are constrained by the space that they occupy, such as the scaffolds of the Three Enemies of Man. These individuals cannot show their corruption through leaping or running, and so instead they must portray it through their indecorous bodies; the wild gesticulations that take their arms up and away from the core of the body, the crossed legs or raised knees, the bent bodies and curved spines, all mark them as allies of the devil. World does, however, talk

of hopping 'As a hawke [...] in my hende hale' (458), but this is quite different from the leaping of Bacbytere; leaping tends to involve a forward motion in addition to an upward thrust, whereas hopping is a purely vertical action, the doer remaining in one spot with limited momentum in any other direction. Once again, this implies two means of presenting demonic kinesis according to the type of performance space in which it occurs.

In performance these wild, disorderly movements and gestures would contribute to the overall impression of the performance space. The demonic bodies and their actions demand attention, both from Mankynde and from the audience. The dominance of evil in the space is established by the scaffolds and the layout of the performance area, but it also extends to the bodies and actions that are performed within it. Evil and sin are dominant numerically in the *platea* and so they quite literally occupy more of the space; but they also individually consume a greater portion of the area around them by the gestures and movements that they make. Furthermore, these actions make them the overriding presence in the audience's visual field, their movements lively and energetic, engaging and entertaining, and they therefore distract the attention of both Mankynde and the watching audience away from the silent, peaceful East. Mankynde and the spectators are, then, being tricked into following temptation, seduced, even if only by their eyes, by the lively activity of temptation.

## Audience and Kinaesthetic Empathy

From the earliest stages of medieval theatre scholarship the energy and charisma displayed by devils and Vices has been observed and their engaging and entertaining nature broadly acknowledged. Some suggestions have been made about the reasons for their dramatic allure, including the liveliness of their verse, their fun-loving personas and the mischievousness of their activities. Undoubtedly, part of the Vice's appeal is his humour and the carnival release that his witty word-play and subversion of normative etiquette would probably permit, but what previous studies have not fully accounted for is the physical, bodily engagement offered by diabolic characters. Basing her argument on an aspect of film theory that proposes viewers' proficiency in 'negotiating complex and seemingly conflicting patterns of identification', Claire Sponsler argues that medieval audiences might also 'have felt an affinity not just for Mercy, Charity, and other representatives of obviously virtuous behaviour who were supposed to be the plays' most virtuous and hence sympathetic characters, but also for Mischief [and] Riot'.[49] However, because Sponsler's suggestion is influenced by film theory and is, therefore, based on a specific kind of relationship between performer and spectator, one founded on the visual and aural observation of a physically absent actor, it cannot adequately account for the seductive charisma of a spatially present player who embodies a supernatural, non-human character in front of a live audience.[50]

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[49] Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, pp. 102-3.

[50] Ibid., p. 103.

Indeed, it is this corporeal co-presence that makes the experience of live dramatic performance so very different from watching a film or television drama. As Matthew Reason has lately pointed out, there is something ineffable about the experience of live performance; it can 'express something beyond that which could be said with language', something that originates in our sensual, somatic perception of the event.[51] Although he is specifically referring here to nonverbal art forms the same can be said of the performance of plays where verbal and nonverbal communication combine to engage both body and mind. Bernard Beckerman has argued from a similar position, writing that:

[a]lthough theater response seems to derive principally from visual and aural perception, in reality it relies upon a totality of perception that could be better termed kinaesthetic. We are aware of a performance through varying degrees of concentration and relaxation within our bodies. From actual experience performers can sense whether or not a 'house' is with them, principally because the degree of muscular tension in the audience telegraphs, before any overt sign, its level of attention. We might very well say that an audience does not see

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[51] Matthew Reason, 'Watching Dance, Drawing the Experience and Visual Knowledge', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* (2010), <http://fmls.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2010/09/13/fmls.cqq014.full.pdf+html> [accessed 4 January 2011], page 2 of 24.

with its eyes but with its lungs, does not hear with its ears but with its skin.[52]

So, for example, as I argued in Chapter Two, the effect of sound in performance is not limited to the audience's aural experience but contributes to a 'totality of perception' in which they perceive sound through the entire body as well as their ears. The same can perhaps be said of the effects produced by the performing body in medieval drama. An actor's posture and kinesis do not convey meaning through visual signs alone; of course, it is possible to read the physical signs presented by a performer as one would read the visual signs of a painting, but those signs could also influence the spectator's own musculature because, as Beckerman puts it, '[w]e are aware of a performance through varying degrees of concentration and relaxation within our bodies'. Similarly, even the simple act of materially sharing a space with other bodies, with the bodies of the performer and other audience members, as Shepherd has suggested, is likely to have an impact on the spectator. In 'bypassing the intellect', he writes, the effects of the live dramatic event will be 'felt in the body and [will] work powerfully to shape the spectator's sense of the performance'.[53]

The role of the body in performance is, then, as much about the perceiving as the performing body and it is the interaction between the two, the impact that one has on the other, that makes each dramatic performance such a unique experience. The very particular scripting of bodies and their occupation

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[52] Bernard Beckerman, *The Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 74.

[53] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, pp. 36-7.

of space in *The Castle of Perseverance* is obviously closely connected with traditional and iconographic representations of the diabolic, but perhaps it was also intended to utilise this defining characteristic of the dramatic medium. As already suggested, the performance area of *The Castle of Perseverance* can be separated broadly into two types of playing space: the limited region of the raised scaffold and the open, expansive *platea*. These two very different spaces probably permitted alternative manifestations of Evil's characteristic excess to be performed; so, the actors performing on the scaffolds would have been restricted in their movements by the limitations of space, whereas those in the open place would have had greater kinetic freedom and mobility and, therefore, probably displayed the more active and appealing bodily activity. Significantly, it is these latter characters, characters like Bacbytere, who would interact and engage with the audience. The Three Enemies of Man, instead of themselves descending into the place, send their temptations into the world to entice and lead Mankind to their company. With such an immediate and lively physical presence before them perhaps the audience of *The Castle of Perseverance* experienced what Jill Stevenson has termed a Vice's 'engaging and attractive body rhythms'.[54] The audience would see the Sins' movements, which would probably have corresponded with the strong rhythms heard in their verse, but perhaps they would also have experienced these through their bodies, through a kinaesthetic empathy with Bacbytere and his fellows as they ran, leaped and stalked around the place.

The notion of kinaesthetic empathy is still controversial but theatre and performance research is beginning to focus more intently upon this ephemeral,

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[54] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 138.

corporeal element of watching live performance. The *Watching Dance* project, for example, mentioned earlier in Chapter One of this thesis (pp. 14-15), combines audience research with neuroscience to explore how spectators respond to dance. Their proposal is that dance audiences can experience the 'physical and imaginative effects of movement without actually moving their bodies; that is, spectators can react in certain respects as if they were moving, or preparing to move'.[55] Although these claims are still contentious, there is both scientific and anecdotal evidence in support of the existence of kinaesthetic empathy. As the *Watching Dance* team state: '[n]europhysiological research using these techniques (including our 2007 pilot study) has shown that kinaesthetic response is more likely to be activated if viewers have themselves acquired the necessary skills to execute the observed action'; so, those who have themselves danced show a propensity to have a heightened kinaesthetic response to a dance performance.[56] However, evidence from our everyday encounters suggests that this is not necessarily an experience restricted to those who have previous practice of the actions they are watching. Spectators of boxing, for example, have rarely had either boxing training or fighting experience of their own and yet they punch and jab their way through the match as if they too were in the ring, and we can easily find similar examples from other sports, even those that would appear to be less energetic. Other social occasions can also provide evidence of kinaesthetic empathy in action. Even if an individual is not part of, say, a *ceilidh*, they will quite often tap their foot or clap along to the beat of the dance, smiling as they

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[55] <http://www.watchingdance.org/about_us/> [accessed 1 March 2010].
[56] Ibid.

watch the dancers perform the Eightsome Reel or Strip the Willow, even if they have never performed those dances before.

Cognitive theorists believe that kinaesthetic empathy occurs when the brain's mirror neurons are activated by the perception of movement in others. As I.G. Hagendoorn explains, 'one of the brain regions where mirror neurons have been found has also been associated with perceptual anticipation', meaning that when we watch a live activity such as dance or football 'the brain is submerged in motor imagery'.[57] Very simply, when, say, the live movement (as opposed to the mediated experience of watching movement on film) is perceived the brain of the perceiver reenacts the experience of moving without the body itself going into motion, so that 'during a performance an actor's actions and reactions onstage are perhaps, to some degree, literally reenacted within the spectator'.[58] Performers like Adesola Akinleye, a dancer and choreographer, recognise this effect in audiences, observing that although the 'person who watches dancing does none of the physical work themselves [...] in perceiving the performance they experience the rhythm of it as though it were in their own body'.[59]

The majority of research done on kinaesthetic empathy, as evidenced here, focuses specifically on dance; as a medium in which rhythm and

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[57] I.G. Hagendoorn, 'Some Speculative Hypotheses about the Nature and Perception of Dance and Choreography', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 11 (2004): 79-110 (80-95).

[58] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 24. For more on the notion of liveness and a discussion of the differences between film and theatre performance see Matthew Reason, 'Theatre Audiences and Perceptions of 'Liveness' in Performance', *Participations*, 1.2 (2004) <http://www.participations.org/volume%201/iss%202/1_02_reason_article.htm>[accessed13 May 2011].

[59] Adesola Akinleye, 'Geography of the Body', *Dance UK News*, 70 (2008): 21.

movement are central and, therefore, obvious and often emphatic it offers a very clear source for kinaesthetic response.[60] But, as other drama scholars and theatre historians are beginning to acknowledge, plays can also produce a kinaesthetic experience, especially those that, like medieval and early modern drama, employ strongly rhythmic verse. Dramatic texts like *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Mankind* provide a very strong, clear sense of rhythm through their verse and often script the energetic bodies that are typically thought to generate a kinaesthetic response, in the case of *Mankind* an actual dance. *The Castle of Perseverance*, in addition to individual performances by the likes of Bacbytere, Lust-lykyng and Foly which show a clear rhythmic beat in the verse, also incorporates some unscripted but nonetheless chaotic, frenetic scenes, like the descent of the Seven Deadly Sins into the *platea* or the moment when they are beaten around the open place by their masters. Where the activities of the characters in other scenes are embedded in their speeches, both these scenes are only briefly described in the stage directions, '*Tunc ibunt [...] ad AUARICIAM*' (sd. 1010, 'Then [the Seven Sins] go to Avarice') and '*Tunc uerberabit eos in placeam*' (sd. 1822, 'Then he [Flesch] will beat them in the place'), for example. Despite the lack of any clear statement about the activities here, the nature and previous posturing of the Sins and their masters would suggest that equally chaotic movements were employed. For instance, as each Sin is called upon by Coveytyse he or she describes, and probably performed, their characteristic movements and postures before continuing that typically chaotic, frantic manner epitomised by the devils of the Hell Mouth

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[60] See, for example, L. Macfarlane, Irena Kulka and Frank E. Pollick, 'The Representation of Affect Revealed by Butoh Dance', *Psychologia*, 47.2 (2004): 96-103.

while crossing the place in their groups of three. The beating scenes would similarly offer the opportunity for the Sins to perform such a heightened physicality. These latter scenes were undoubtedly engaging because they were intentionally comic, but perhaps they were also appealing because they involved the speedy, well-timed, exaggerated movement which typically absorbs an audience. As with pantomime slapstick, perhaps part of the joy in watching Belyal chase and beat Pryde, Wrathe and Enveye was the physical, if unconscious, effect felt in the body of the perceiver.

The space in which these scenes occurred would have helped to create such an effect. As with Bacbytere, the greater proximity between player and spectator in the place along with its more fluid, ambiguous boundaries probably encouraged a kinaesthetic response to the characters' activities. The bodily energy produced by the players would not have been contained by a bounded performance space, but instead would have felt immediate and palpable, especially to those in greater proximity to the action. Furthermore, the presence of many equally frenetic bodies in the place all simultaneously performing their errant kinesis would probably have multiplied that energy and the probability of the audience responding kinaesthetically to the physical action before them.

However, although the action in the *platea* presents a more obviously successful environment for kinaesthetic empathy, those spectators seated on the terraces (if there were indeed terraces erected) would probably also have experienced a kinaesthetic empathy with the diabolic characters cavorting in the *platea*. Drawing on the similarities between modern cognitive science and medieval theories of sensory perception, Jill Stevenson has argued that simply

seeing movement could have produced a kinaesthetic response in the medieval spectator, highlighting the contemporary belief that 'a quality inherent in the object of perception entered and altered the perceiving subject's body both physically and mentally'.[61] As she points out, late medieval theorists, such as Roger Bacon, proposed that when we perceive something, whether through sight, smell, hearing, taste or touch, that object enters our bodies and becomes a part of us, engaging the soul as well as the body.[62] In the performance of *The Castle of Perseverance*, then, the postures and gestures of the characters in the place could be equally engaging and infectious for the seated audience who perceive their activities visually from a distance.

Although the modern term kinaesthetic empathy was unknown to medieval writers, the corporeal impact of performance was certainly recognised and appears to have been a major concern of moralists and anti-theatrical authors. Stevenson suggests, for example, that Augustine observed such an effect in Roman theatre. As she summarises, he 'implies that theatre's crime is not simply moving the emotions, but indulging the body'.[63] The much later author of *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*, an early fifteenth-century tract on the immorality of religious plays, similarly bases his argument against 'miraclis pleyinge' on the observation that it is 'of oure fleyss, of oure lustis, and of oure five wittis' and, therefore, it stirs men 'to leccherie and debatis [quarrels] as aftir most bodily mirthe comen moste debatis, as siche mirthe more undisposith a man to paciencie [patience] and ablith [prepares the way] to

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[61] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 26.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., p.32.

glotonye and to othere vicis'.[64] The *Tretise* author, then, seems to understand that performance as a process appeals first to the 'five wittis' and, as a consequence, play performances encourage spectators to love 'more the liking of theire body and of prosperite of the world than likinge in God and prosperite of vertu in the soule'.[65] The *Tretise*'s emphasis and concern about the corrupting effect that performance can have on the audience through their bodies shows a sophisticated awareness of the corporeal nature and potential of drama. This is displayed again further on when the author debates the reasons why he believes that watching a religious play is so much more dangerous to the viewer than looking at still images of the same story. Advocates of miracle playing, he says, would argue that if it is permissible to depict in paint the miracles of God then the playing of them is also justified, especially because plays are more memorable than paintings, 'for this [the picture] is a deed bok, the tother a quick'.[66] In this statement it is the liveness of the embodied actor, moving in real time and space that makes the miracles so memorable; but, for the *Tretise* author, the embodiment and re-enactment of God's work entails more ethical and spiritual issues than its supporters would wish to recognise. For him, the difference between a painting of, say, the Resurrection and the performance of it is as follows:

> And to the laste reson we seyn that peinture, yif it be verry
>
> withoute menging of lesingis and not to curious, to myche
>
> fedinge mennis wittis, and not occasion of maumetrie to the

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[64] *A Tretise*, p. p. 94, ll. 59-60; p. 96, ll. 120-3.

[65] Ibid., p. 94, ll. 57-60; p. 102, ll. 318-20.

[66] Ibid., p. 98, ll. 179-85.

puple, they ben but as nakyd lettris to a clerk to riden the treuthe. But so ben not miraclis pleyinge that ben made more to deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men. And therfore yif they ben quike bookis, they ben quike bookis to shrewidenesse more than to godeness.[67]

By equating the painting of miracle scenes with letters and reading the author of the *Tretise* implies that, providing that such images do not mix their lessons ('menging of lesingis'), are not too flamboyant or extravagant ('to curious') and consequently do not feed men's senses, paintings can speak directly to the intellect of the viewer, his reason, his soul. In contrast, miracle playing, because it is a quick book, alive and of the flesh, addresses the spectator's body and senses before his intellect and reason. As a result the flesh hurts the spirit 'as in suche pleyinge the fleysh is most meintenyd and the spirite lasse'.[68]

Although neither Augustine nor the *Tretise* author had the medical, scientific or theoretical tools to fully understand how drama engages the body, their comments emphasise the experiential basis of medieval dramatic performance and, more importantly, both their concerns centre on the immediate and irrepressible physical responses that the plays provoked: as the *Tretise* author says, the playing of miracles 'reversith dissipline'.[69] Shepherd suggests something very similar where the 'physical contagion' of an actor's kinesis can potentially work to 'undo the normal behaviour of a 'civilized'

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[67] Ibid., p. 104, ll. 373-80.

[68] Ibid., p. 107, ll. 492-3.

[69] Ibid., p. 95, l. 76.

body, which has learned to defer or repress involuntary body movements'.[70]

Perhaps, then, the wild, energetic and ungoverned bodies of devils, sins and Vices in morality plays like *The Castle of Perseverance* worked on the bodies of the watching audience so that they became kinaesthetically immersed in the same patterns and rhythms, their brains dangerously reconstructing the immoral bodily attitudes in their own musculature. This is not to say that such an audience would have actually started to move like the Sins, only that the actions may have been felt and experienced as if the spectators too were participating in the movements they observed and consequently experiencing the related feelings and ideas of mischief, excitement and activity free from the confines of moral judgment.[71]

The innate attractiveness of demons, Sins and Vices in morality plays and their influence over the audience have been a constant source of concern for modern critics as well as medieval moralists, who perceive their charismatic presence as undermining the moral, didactic purposes of the plays (perhaps with good reason). Sponsler, for instance, claims that the pleasure of watching the seductive Vices would seem to negate any attempt made by the moralities 'to bring misbehaviour to a halt', so much so that such attempts 'look highly unsatisfactory and incomplete'.[72] Although I agree that the potential release arising from the kinaesthetic experience of bodily inhibition was undoubtedly pleasurable, unlike Sponsler, I would argue that the seductiveness of such an engagement actually aided rather than undermined the

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[70] Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, pp. 74, 81.

[71] <http://www.watchingdance.org/research/kinaesthetic_empathy/index.php> [accessed 1March 2010].

[72] Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance*, p. 83.

moral lessons of the plays. From the outset of *The Castle of Perseverance*, it is sin that is most visible to the audience; the space is dominated by devilish figures in both its structures and the bodies who occupy the place; the movement of the characters continues this trend as each Sin explodes into the *platea*, drawing the audience's attention through their exaggerated movements. Each of these elements potentially contributed to the message that sin and temptation exist all around us, that it constantly invades our awareness, distracting us from our true goal and end with God. Evil in this play also makes it very easy to engage with its followers; not only is it pleasurable, it is an effortless and perhaps subconscious engagement. The Sins' 'body rhythms' perhaps capitalised on the innate responses of the audience's bodies to physical movement so that they unconsciously succumbed to their tempting charisma. The message is, then, that sin is the simplest path and that, if unmindful of the temptations present, it is easy to be seduced by their charms. But this is neither the final nor the enduring message of the play for, although Mankynde succumbs to sin for a second time and is taken to hell, his final plea for mercy is answered. And so, he and the audience are saved from the clutches of hell and brought back to order, restraint and a sense of distance from the pleasure offered by the Sins. As the final chapter will go on to explore, through a combination of changes to performance space, register and the actor-audience relationship medieval plays did not abandon their audiences to temptation, as the *Tretise* author seems to suggest, but instructed and guided them in the bodily and spiritual process of repentance, and, via this experience, created meanings that lived on as the audience returned to their daily existence.

# Chapter Four

# The Performing Audience in *The Play of the Sacrament*


So far, this thesis has explored the impact of space, sound and body on an audience's corporeal experience of late medieval drama, showing how certain forces within the performance space, specifically the actor's use of voice and movement, may have prompted an affective corporeal response in the bodies of the perceiving audience. Both medieval and modern theories of sensory perception, however, propose that these physical experiences have a direct influence over the inner self or soul of an individual. Some of the medieval theories and devotional practices outlined in Chapter One, for example, show that bodily experience in the late medieval period was perceived as fundamental to the formation and growth of man's identity, the moral condition of his soul and his increased understanding of God, a position roughly echoed in the existential and phenomenological philosophies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this two-way relationship between body and soul, voice, movement, gesture and posture all indicate the internal state of the individual and, further, affect the bodies of those who perceive its sound and motion; but they also have the potential to connect with and thus alter the emotional, psychological and spiritual state of both the perceiver and the performer. The body's potential to psychologically change the perceiver has already been hinted at in the previous chapters; in *Christ before Herod* the contrast between Herod's noise and Christ's silence was shown to have the

ability to elicit emotional as well as physical responses in the audience and thus illustrate via this experience the innate authority of the Son of God; the powerful temptation of the Sins in *The Castle of Perseverance* was probably rooted in the audience's kinaesthetic empathy with the unrestricted, indecorous bodies of the performers, producing feelings of joyful pleasure, release and energy making it easier for them to engage with the raucous Vices than with the demure, restrained Virtues.

Moreover, both of these plays, along with many contemporary play texts, continue to use the influential force of the actor's performance to return order to the performance space; in hearing the silence of Christ or the measured verse of God and feeling the stillness and restraint of both divine characters, the bodies, hearts and minds of the audiences probably began to replicate the atmosphere and attitude generated by the performers as they were guided back towards the virtuous path. However, in other plays the correlation between the spectator's body and their emotions is more directly channelled. Instead of being moved by their unconscious bodily reactions to the external forces of another's sound and movement, the audience are encouraged to become the "doers", to move from their role as audience and actively participate in the process of the play as "performers". In doing so, it is their own activities, their singing, prayers, movements and gestures, rather than the actors', which would dominate their experience of performance.

The close proximity between player and spectator is generally characteristic of medieval drama and a number of plays seem to utilise this to blur the boundary between the roles of actor and audience. *Mankind*, for instance, requests that the audience join with the Three Ns, Newgyse,

Nowadays and Nought, to sing a song, which turns out to be both scatological and near blasphemous, tricking them into the Vices' sinful ways before they realize the danger.[1] More frequently, plays end their performances with a communal prayer or a hymn, often expressly asking the audience to join in the praise of God; *The Conversion of Saint Paul, Mary Magdalene* and many of the Corpus Christi Plays end in this manner. Although all of these examples acknowledge and to some degree involve the audience there is a limit to how far they can be said to be participants; these forms of engagement do not quite fall under the label of what we would now term immersive theatre, but instead exist elsewhere along the spectator-participant continuum; acknowledging, implicating and including the audience through their verbal contributions, these plays, nonetheless, never fully incorporate them into the action and process of the play.

At the extreme end of the continuum are events like mummings, disguisings and ritual processions, like the Scottish harvest home festival discussed briefly by John McGavin, who highlights the remarkable similarity between this celebratory procession and the more destructive performance of the charivari.[2] In each of these events those who were witnesses frequently became a part of the performance, perhaps led by others but still very much immersed in the occasion, its actions and aims. For modern theatre companies like Punchdrunk, The Squat Collective and Sound and Fury, this level of participation is an important source of inspiration and has produced some highly acclaimed, innovative and thought provoking performances.

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[1] *Mankind,* ll. 331-43.

[2] John J. McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 75.

Punchdrunk are the pioneers of the modern manifestation of immersive theatre and their manifesto clearly states their intention to reject 'the passive obedience usually expected of audiences'.[3] The Squat Collective similarly declare their aim to 'break down boundaries between performers and audience', while Peut-être Theatre, whose work is aimed at young audiences, want to create a dramatic encounter that provides 'a complete sensual experience, inviting audiences' bodies and minds to participate in the event'.[4] Although these companies do endeavour to subsume the audience within the play world, spectators are often still limited in their contribution. Discussing Punchdrunk's recent production, *Sleep No More*, a physical theatre performance in which the masked audience were free to roam around the performance space and observe the performers in action, one reviewer remarks that, although the effect was:

> acutely different from the experience of watching a play that seeks to bestow upon the audience a particular narrative [...] I did wonder [...] about how these individually constructed narratives could be better facilitated − for example, if the audience had been more actively involved in the world of the piece.[5]

Very few medieval English play texts appear to incorporate this degree of involvement either. The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, however, is one of

[3] <http://www.punchdrunk.org.uk> [accessed 7 May 2011].

[4] <http://www.squatcolelctive.com> [accessed 7 May 2011].

<http://www.peutetretheatre.co.uk> [accessed 7 May 2011].

[5] Meara Sharma, '*Sleep No More*: Review', The College Hill Independent, 25 March 2011 <http://students.brown.edu/college_Hill_Independent/?p=4586> [accessed 7 May 2011].

the few surviving texts that do seem to explicitly script total audience participation, where the spectator is active (or at least is allowed to understand themselves as such) in pushing forward the narrative and in making meaning through performance. The way that the play constructs and then alters and shifts the performance space to achieve this level of audience participation is remarkable, as is its deployment of the power of ritual over the human body. The ritual aspects of *The Play of the Sacrament* and their capacity to bind a community have already been widely acknowledged, but there is still much to explore in this complicated and unusual play. For example, how does the performance create a space in which the audience feel that they can cross the boundary from spectators to participants? How does it then help the actors to remain in control of the action, so that the all important meaning is not lost in the activity? In what way does the first half of the play, the spectacular and bloody desecration of the Host, contribute to and confirm the doctrinal message? And what kinds of effects are produced in the audience who bodily and vocally contribute to the restoration of the community?

The complexity of this unique play could probably consume the pages of an entire monograph and, undoubtedly, it warrants such an extensive examination. However, with the space that remains here, this chapter will explore some of the questions above to see how an immersive experience could potentially generate profound physical and emotional effects on an audience and how, in turn, their active participation contributed towards the overall message of the play, a message that is imbued with notions of community, religious identity and solidarity. Because many of the devices used to generate a sense of disorder at the outset of the play are very similar to those discussed

in previous chapters, and the remarkable scenes of sacramental desecration have been widely commented on by previous scholarship, the discussion will not linger on the details of the Jews' torture of the Host. It is, of course, necessary to establish how chaos is created for a full discussion of the re-instatement of order and community to be undertaken, so the key elements in this initial part of the performance will be reviewed. The real concern for this chapter is, however, to focus on the transitionary stages in the play as it gradually moves the audience from spectators to active participants.

**Case Study: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament***

**From "Viewers" to "Doers"**

Near the end of *The Play of the Sacrament*, Jonathas the Jew leaves his comrades kneeling before an image of Christ that has miraculously emerged from the oven into which they had cast the holy Eucharist; he then crosses the playing area to seek the Bishop. Once there, Jonathas asks the 'father of grace' to return with him to the Jews' scaffold and see for himself that 'swemfull syght' (798-800).[6] The Bishop agrees but he does not go alone; instead he calls for:

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[6] All quotations from *The Play of the Sacrament*, in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. by Norman Davis, EETS S.T. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). Line numbers are given in parenthesis.

[...] all my pepull, with me ye dresse

For to goo see that swymfull syght.

Now, all ye peple that here are,

I commande yow, euery man,

On yowr feet for to goo, bare,

In the devoutest wyse that ye can. (808-13)

This is the moment that the audience become performers. Although from the outset (as this chapter will go on to discuss) they have been directly addressed, included, engaged and involved, the Bishop here is not only speaking directly to them but seems to be making an explicit request of them: that they leave their places, and their position as audience, and follow him to the Jews' scaffold. The stage directions do not expressly state that it is the audience whom the Bishop addresses here, but, given that most of the nine players necessary to produce the play are already occupied, it is probably the spectators who at this point constitute 'all ye peple that here are' (810).[7] This is, however, not a simple task, for to do as the Bishop asks requires the audience to stand (if they had been sitting) and to remove their shoes ready 'to goo, bare', that is barefoot as penitents. Such an activity would take some time to complete, followed by even more time as they arranged themselves according to some spoken or unspoken order; perhaps there were 'stytelerys', or

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[7] At the very end of the text, the manuscript states that 'IX may play yt ast ease'. See Davis' edition, p. 89. Also, Dublin, Trinity College MS F.4.20, in *Non-Cycle Plays and the Winchester Dialogues: Facsimiles of Plays and Fragments in Various Manuscripts and the Dialogues in Winchester College MS 33*, introduced and transcribed by Norman Davis, Leeds Texts and Monographs: Medieval Drama Facsimiles V., gen. eds. A.C. Cawley and Stanley Ellis (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1979), f. 356r.

stewards, as there were in *The Castle of Perseverance* to usher the audience along or arrange them into some kind of order, or maybe they arranged themselves through a more organic process like that which structures a tourist group as they dutifully follow their guide between sights.[8]

Regardless of how this transition actually occurred, the Bishop's words testify to a real commitment on behalf of the audience; for them, it is not simply a case of following the Bishop as the tourists do their guide, but involves an active change, something that they themselves must do (removing their shoes, standing up, going to the Bishop), a small but significant alteration in the role that they must play. It also brings into focus the relationship between actors and spectators, performance space and audience space and the question of what spatial, dramatic and performance conditions were present that allowed the audience to feel able to cross that boundary, to enter into the performance and become a part of it. This kind of transition would not occur easily in the standard actor-audience relationship established by a modern indoor, proscenium arch theatre where the entire audience is separated off from the stage, seated in the dark in rows of single seats. Indeed, in a recent production of *The Mountaintop* at the Derby Guildhall theatre the actors encountered this exact problem as the play shifted performance mode. For the majority of the performance, the action had unfolded behind the proscenium arch, emphasised by a black surround to give it the impression of an oversized television screen. However, towards the end of the performance, the actor playing Martin Luther King came forward beyond the bounds of the proscenium arch onto a thrust stage reaching into the auditorium. He then

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[8] *The Castle of Perseverance* stage plan, f. 191.

directly addressed the audience as if they were his congregation or part of the crowds who had originally listened to his many inspirational speeches. But when he asked for an 'Amen', the audience did not respond, even when asked for a second time; the transition for them had been too quick, too jarring, too unexpected and they were not prepared for what was being asked of them.[9] Presumably, the distinction between player and spectator in *The Play of the Sacrament* would not have been as harsh, but at the beginning of the performance (as will be discussed below) the audience are most definitely cast as spectators and so the question remains: how was this play able to successfully transform spectators to performers without disrupting the theatrical frame? And what was its aim in doing so?

## Religious, Social and Spatial Contexts

To begin to answer these questions, the performance first needs to be placed in context. Ostensibly, *The Play of the Sacrament* is about the desecration of the Eucharist by five Jews, who seek to disprove the existence of the real presence of Christ in the sacramental wafer. The Banns to the play tell us that this particular story occurred in Heraclea in 1461, and there are many contemporary analogues that similarly relate tales of Jewish antagonism against their Christian neighbours. Most of these accounts are continental, although there are some English equivalents; Chaucer's Prioress, for example, recounts the legend of a Christian child, barely 'seven yeer of age', who was murdered by

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[9] *The Mountaintop*, by Katori Hall, directed by Tom Attenborough, Guildhall Theatre, Derby, 24 March 2011.

Jews as he walked home from school, singing 'Ful murily' the hymn *O Alma redemptoris* (Gracious Mother of the Redeemer).[10] Chaucer's version of the tale is reminiscent of the martyrdom of Saint Hugh of Lincoln and also the East Anglian Saint William of Norwich. This latter story dates back to 1144 when the young apprentice William was purportedly the innocent victim of a ritual murder conducted by certain Norwich Jews. According to legend, the Jews subjected William to a mock Passion, following which William's body performed many miracles and developed a cult following that saw a popular resurgence in the fourteenth century.[11]

However, many scholars have also seen the Croxton play as a piece of anti-Lollard propaganda. In 1944 Cecilia Cutts constructed a persuasive argument for this interpretation of the play, pointing out the various resonant connections between the actions of the disbelieving Jews, the process by which they are converted and the controversies surrounding the heretic beliefs of the Lollard reformers. Much of the Lollards' polemic, which questioned some of the Church's key doctrines as well as its statutes, wealth and privileges, centred on the doctrine of the Eucharist, refuting the real presence of Christ in the consecrated wafer, and, therefore, the priest's authority in its summoning. The denial of spiritual hierarchy and ecclesiastical superiority was a major concern for the Lollard reformers who advocated a more immediate personal

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[10] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Prioress's Tale', *The Riverside Chaucer*, ll. 503, 553-4. For further discussion on the continental variations of the story see Davis, *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, pp. lxxiii-lxxiv.

[11] See further Victor Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), p. 79. A translation of Thomas of Monmouth's contemporary account, *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, can be found at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1173williamnorwich.html> [accessed 23 November 2010].

relationship with God rather than one mediated by a third-party priest and, as a consequence, rejected the Church's pivotal role in both the spiritual and carnal life of men. According to Cutts, in comparison with its continental equivalents that tend to subordinate doctrine for anti-Semitic and 'relic aspects', *The Play of the Sacrament* 'gives all its emphasis to pure doctrine and expands its teaching to include not only transubstantiation but also baptism, confession, penance, pilgrimage, respect for images [...] and the superior power and authority of a Bishop'.[12] The potency of such pro-clerical, strongly orthodox themes would perhaps have been especially strong in East Anglia, the region of the play's origin, where a particularly fervent strain of traditional lay devotion existed alongside an active Lollard faction.[13] According to Cutts' reading then, Jonathas and his men would become representative of the Lollard heretics and all other non-believers and opponents of Church doctrine, a typical role for the Jew in the medieval West, for, 'whether present or absent, actual or imagined, [the Jew was] a necessary reservoir of unbelief in the efficacy of the Christian sacrament'.[14]

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[12] Cecilia Cutts, 'The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 5 (1944): 45-60 (47). See also, Anne Eljenholm Nichols, 'Lollard Language in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', *Notes and Queries*, 36.1 (1989): 23-5.

[13] John C. Coldewey, 'The Non-Cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (1994), pp. 189-210 (p. 192); Cutts, 'The Croxton Play': 60. See also Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 21-3. For more on East Anglian drama and devotion see also Penny Granger, *The N-Town Play: Drama and Liturgy in Medieval East Anglia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), and Scherb, *Staging Faith*.

[14] Paul Strohm, 'The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*: Commemoration and Repetition in Late Medieval Culture', in *Performances of the Sacred in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by Susanne Rupp and Tobias Döring (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 33-44 (p. 40).

If Cutts' theory is correct, then the play can be firmly associated with the ecclesiastical crusade against Lollardy, in which texts like Nicholas Love's early fifteenth-century *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* performed a key role. Michael G. Sargent suggests in his introduction to *The Mirror* that its composition was not only intended 'to supply a set of devout meditations in the vernacular', but to play 'a major role in Archbishop Arundel's campaign against Wycliffite heresy'.[15] A major part of this campaign, as translated by Sargent from Arundel's original Latin preface, was 'the edification of the faithful and confutation of heretics and lollards', a concern which testifies to the potency and popularity of the movement, probably aided by the increased literacy of certain groups in lay society.[16] In addition to the educated clergy and aristocracy, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the rise of an educated middle-class, the literary tastes of whom tended towards service books and works of lay devotion, such as saints' lives, Psalters and mystical treatises, and, increasingly, works in English rather than the conventional Latin.[17] This meant that a literate individual could potentially take more control over their own personal spiritual life and relationship with God by interpreting the scripture for themselves rather than having it mediated and translated by a priest. As Gail Gibson explores in her study of East Anglian devotional practices, many wills from the region bequeathed specifically English Bibles to their benefactors, despite the continuing threat of heresy

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[15] Michael G. Sargen, 'Introduction', in *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, p. xv.

[16] Ibid.. Sargent's translation of the Latin memorandum attached to copies of *The Mirror*. For the original Latin text see *The Mirror*, above, p. 7.

[17] Paul Strohm, 'The Social and Literary Scene in England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-19 (pp. 7-8).

charges drawn against anyone who owned one.[18] With its trade connections to the Low Countries, astonishing wealth and an increasingly literate, intensely devout middle class, East Anglia appears to have been a fertile region for Lollard reform, and so, perhaps, *The Play of the Sacrament* would have had a particular resonance with its East Anglian audience.

Although linguistic data points to a first performance sometime in the late fifteenth century, palaeographic evidence suggests that the sole surviving copy of *The Play of the Sacrament* was produced during the sixteenth century, possibly as late as the 1540s.[19] As Michael Jones has suggested, the play's 'obviously Catholic intent' could clearly also be used as propaganda for the Old Faith during the religious upheaval of the Reformation, fulfilling much the same objective as its original deployment as an anti-Lollard play.[20] Embedded in the doctrinal aims of *The Play of the Sacrament* is the notion of community, and it is this element that is arguably the most compelling and powerful tool in the success of its message. Early in the history of the Christian church, as O.B. Hardison explains, the body of Christ was adopted as a symbol of Christian unity and so the sacramental wafer, the bread that, according to orthodox doctrine, literally became the body of Christ, also invoked the ideological

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[18] Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, p. 30.

[19] Norman Davis in his introduction to the text suggests a transcription in the 1540s. See *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, pp. lxx-lxxxv. Tamara Atkin has more recently also argued for a later date for the manuscript and highlights the tendency of scholars to conflate 'the circumstances in which the play was originally performed with those which may have dictated its later transcription'. See Tamara Atkin, 'Playbooks and Printed Drama: A Reassessment of the Date and Layout of the Manuscript of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 60 (2008): 194-205.

[20] Michael Jones, 'Theatrical History in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', *English Literary History*, 66 (1999): 223-60 (249).

notion of a universal Christian community.[21]    Sarah Beckwith similarly explains that the image of Christ's body was central to a more concrete 'political construction of a Christian culture imagined as a unity' and how, in its form as the Eucharist, the Saviour's body represented 'the integrity of an entire culture' in which the 'belief in transubstantiation could literally define bona fide membership of that "imagined community"'.[22] This notion is at the heart of the play's narrative, and the Jews' actions, therefore, become more than a straightforward assault on orthodox Catholic doctrine; instead, they take on both social and political resonance as they become a clear declaration of non-membership and a direct threat to the community itself.

That sense of community, both local and universally Christian, was probably also a central element in the performance space.  The Banns at the beginning of *The Play of the Sacrament* clearly state that the play was to be performed 'At Croxston on Monday' (74) and most scholars agree that this is probably a reference to the East Anglian village of Croxton, near Thetford, about twelve miles north of Bury St. Edmunds.  Unlike the centrally located urban guilds who produced the great Corpus Christi Plays, those producing East Anglian dramas were part of a large network of wealthy but rural villages and towns; these small communities would probably have joined with their neighbours to produce the performances as part of a wider fund-raising project by the local parish.  Moreover, such cooperative enterprises, where one town or village would host a play with support from up to twenty surrounding communities, tended to devote whatever profits were made by the event to

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[21] O.B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 35-42.

[22] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 3.  See also Scherb, *Staging Faith*, pp. 44-5.

local causes, such as repairs to the parish church, for example. The entire endeavour was, therefore, community centred; it was held within parish boundaries, paid for by the village councils or guilds and performed for a local audience in aid of a local project.[23]

Taking the Croxton reference at face value, William Tydeman proposes the churchyard of All Saints in the village of Croxton as a potential performance site for the 'major portion' of the play, with players and audience then moving inside the church for the final baptism sequence. The small bank on the southern side of the churchyard, he suggests, would form a convenient spot for spectators to sit, with All Saints conspicuously present in the background.[24] Other critics have, however, advocated alternative performance sites. Gail Gibson, for example, argues for an original performance in Bury St. Edmunds by the town's Corpus Christi guild and a later performance at Croxton closer to the date of the text's transcription. As evidence, Gibson cites the internal reference to Babwell Mill, a location near the North Gate tollhouse and St. Saviour's Hospital in Bury, a spot which would require local knowledge to fully appreciate the humour in its connection with the quack doctor Brundyche. Based on this, she goes on to propose a performance in Bury's market square at Angel Hill, 'just in front of the parish church of St. James, which could have served as the church setting for the Episcopus scenes'.[25]

In either scenario, the dominant element in the space is the parish church, All Saints in Croxton and St. James' in Bury, itself a symbol of the

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[23] Coldewey, 'The Non-Cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition', pp. 202-4.

[24] Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre*, pp. 53-9.

[25] Gibson, *Theatre of Devotion*, pp. 37-41.

community, the emblem of the common beliefs that (in theory at least) united one Christian with another. As Pamela Graves explains, the church in the medieval period was 'implicated in a multitude of discourses through which a community [made] itself' because, in addition to being the central institution around which both everyday and festival life was organised, the parish church 'was the unit through which the authority of the Church operated and gained sanction locally'.[26] This was probably particularly the case in the wealthy counties of Norfolk and Suffolk where many of the rich cloth merchants built the now famous wool churches, the idiosyncratic buildings particular to that region, built in abundance during the fifteenth century on the back of the wealth from the booming cloth industry, and in the interests of a spiritually independent merchant class.

As an emblem of and primary focus for the local community, the parish church was often a visually dominant structure within a settlement and so would be an ideal location for the performance of *The Play of the Sacrament* with its multiple messages of orthodox doctrine, clerical authority and Christian unity.[27] The performance space would, therefore, have played an important part in the creation of a feeling of community, at both a local level and in the broader concept of Christendom. It would have acted as a constant reminder of what was under threat by the activity of the Jews (and by association the Lollards), that is, the social and spiritual order, the very fabric of the community's life, and, with the local references, would have emphasised the real and present threat to the local community.

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[26] C. Pamela Graves, 'Social Space in the Medieval Parish Church', *Economy and Society*, 18.3 (1989): 297-322 (301).

[27] Ibid.: 311.

In addition to the presence and possible later use of the church itself (perhaps as a final destination for the procession towards the end of the play), the performance would require at least three other structures: a *locus* for each of the merchants, Jonathas and Aristorius, and one to represent the church (perhaps simply a font and alter) from which the Host is stolen.[28] Although it is possible that Aristorius steals the Host from the actual church, it is unlikely that this was the case; such activity at this point in the play would take too long and be too cumbersome in guiding the audience from Aristorius's scaffold to the church and back again to be plausible. Like many East Anglian dramas, including *The Castle of Perseverance*, *The Play of the Sacrament* uses the place-and-scaffold method of staging with the three static structures contrasting with the open space of the *platea*. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, this area of the space was particularly conducive to the performance of lively activity, such as the running and leaping activities of personified sins and Vices in the morality plays. In *The Play of the Sacrament* we see similar types of movements occurring in this space as, for instance, when four of the Jews chase Jonathas as he runs mad around the *platea* and, later, the same characters beat the quack doctor Brundyche and his servant, Colle, away from the Jews' scaffold, then out of the space entirely. The scenes in which the Jews desecrate the Host probably also occurred in this area. The one exception is perhaps when Jonathas orders his men to go 'Into the forsayd parlowr', which was presumably a part of his scaffold, and 'Sprede a clothe on the tabyll' (390-1). However, the initial act of stabbing the Host for which the table is being prepared does not require the same amount of space as the other activities and,

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[28] Tydeman, *English Medieval Theatre*, p. 58.

therefore, could comfortably be performed in the limited space of Jonathas' scaffold.

The presence of these three contrasting stages (which presumably would have been identified by appropriate emblematic items, like a crucifix, weights and scales or the pejorative Phrygian cap), would probably have divided the space, splitting it between the church with its potent messages of community and faith, the pull of wealth and status through the presence of the greedy Christian merchant, Aristorius, and the threat from the outsider Jew, Jonathas. So, from the outset, the performance space is communicating division and conflict, and not just because of the Jewish merchant Jonathas, but also, as becomes apparent at the opening of the play, because of the greedy nature of the covetous Aristorius, a member of the Christian community.

Furthermore, the use of place-and-scaffold staging at this initial point in the performance would permit the audience some objective sense of distance from the characters and, therefore, from the divisions presented. Probably standing or sitting either in or on the edges of the open *platea* the audience would be spatially separated from both Jonathas and Aristorius as they make their opening boasts. Victor Scherb has already observed that Jonathas' delivery of his first address from the raised, dominant position of his scaffold probably distanced him from the audience, and the same can be said of Aristorius.[29] The presence of the scaffolds would most obviously place a literal, physical barrier between the players and the audience in addition to the spatial one created by the presence of the *platea*, but the raised level of the stage would, in addition, force the audience to look up at the characters. Iain

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[29] Scherb, *Staging Faith*, pp. 76-7.

Mackintosh in his *Architecture, Actor and Audience* suggests that such a dominant physical position puts the actor in control, making it easier for him to manage the audience; they were, therefore, if not completely passive, not yet equally part of the performance either.[30] This distant relationship between performers and audience, fostered through the construction of space, would place the latter firmly as spectators rather than as participants. Although presumably engaged in the activity, the audience are not yet a part of it, instead remaining firmly, for the moment, as theatrical spectators.

The two merchants confirm this position as they deliver their boasts, speeches designed to show the bragging, swaggering corruption of the named character. Traditionally, the boast is associated with Lucifer and typically prideful earthly kings, like Herod, Pilate and The King of Life, and it is perhaps not surprising that Jonathas the Jew provides a similar speech. However, the play does not open with a boast from the Jew but instead begins with Aristorius. Despite his status as a Christian, Aristorius' address employs many of the distinctive features that define the boast as a type of dramatic speech and, therefore, also labels the corrupt character to whom it usually belongs. In accordance, both merchants' monologues display the usual tropes, the bragging of fame, power, prowess and wealth, for example. The style of both speeches is also compatible with the spatial relations between actors and audience described above; as is customary in traditional boasts, the merchants adopt a declamatory style of address suitable for speaking to a large crowd from a raised platform, as opposed to the more intimate, immediate and conspiratorial style adopted later by Colle. In itself, such a style presumes a

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[30] Iain Mackintosh, *Architecture, Actor and Audience* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 135.

specific performer-spectator relationship, one that does not encourage the kind of interaction seen later in the text and in other plays of the period.

## Flexing the Player-Spectator Boundary

Despite the potential visual signs that would distinguish Christian from Jew, in other respects the two merchants are remarkably similar to one another, as exemplified in the resemblance between their introductory boasts. A number of scholars have already noted such a similarity between Aristorius and his Jewish counterpart, Jonathas, who does not make his opening speech until after the audience have seen Aristorius interact with both his Priest and his Clerk. Such 'a careful disjunction established between what each of the merchants here says and his accounted racial and religious status', as André Lascombes suggests, was perhaps intended to deliberately 'estrange the audience from the greedy Christian materialist', just as they were presumably already alienated from the unfamiliar Jew.[31] The parallels between the two men would, therefore, probably not only estrange the audience from both characters, but lead to a deliberate ambiguity in the moral status of each merchant, intentionally leaving the audience confused as to where their moral allegiances should lie: the former is simultaneously both friend and foe, the latter both foreign and familiar.

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[31] André Lascombes, 'Revisiting the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', in *European Medieval Drama 2 (1998) Papers from the Second International Conference on European Medieval Drama, Camerino, 4-6 July 1997*, ed. by Sydney Higgins (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1998), pp. 261-75 (p. 267).

This very first section of the play, then, is already, to some degree, building on the sense of division initiated by the performance space. It would perhaps plant the seed of doubt within the audience themselves, the 'ambivalent feeling of attraction to and repulsion from' both Jonathas and Aristorius blurring the clear distinction between a supposed threat and a stalwart ally.[32] From their spectatorial perspective, the audience is presented with an ideologically contradictory situation in which Aristorius, a character who is meant to be a citizen of Christendom, one of 'us' as opposed to one of 'them', verbally displays the characteristics of a tyrant, and Jonathas, although a non-believer, shows rather less of those typical verbal characteristics that alienate the Christian from his fellows in the audience.

Already in these initial speeches some very familiar devices are used, such as alliteration and varied metre, and, moreover, as the play moves forward into its next stage these devices appear with greater frequency to produce very similar effects to those discussed in Chapters Two and Three. As in *Christ before Herod*, for instance, the verse of the five Jews becomes increasingly anarchic, with the increased use of alliteration and the quickening pace aided by the brief sentences that often constitute the Jews' lines. For instance, after the bleeding of the Eucharist a terrified Jonathas shouts 'Ah! owt! owt! harrow! what deuyll ys thys? / Of thys wyrk I am in were' (481-2) to which Jason responds with an equally fractured 'A fyre! a fyre! and that in hast! / Anoon a cawdron full of oyle!' (485-6). As with Herod's frustrated howls, the line has been split, broken into urgent repetitive phrases and the same pattern appears again after each of the sacramental miracles (500; 504; 516; 673; 677; 713). In

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[32] Ibid.

a similar manner to *Christ before Herod* and *Play of the Crucifixion*, these verse elements serve to both verbally illustrate and recreate spiritual chaos, as well as the fear and awe of the Jews.

The previous chapters have already suggested that the arrival of a noisy, rapid verse would probably have been accompanied by an uncontrolled bodily performance, like those described in Chapter Three. In one of the most memorable scenes of the play, for example, the Host miraculously sticks to Jonathas' hand and in sheer terror he loses his composure, shouting 'Out! Out! yt werketh me wrake!', declaring that 'in woodness I gynne to wake! / I renne, I lepe ouer þis lond' (499-503), while the stage directions confirm that '*Her he renneth wood with þe Ost in hys hond*' (sd. 503). Understanding the need to restrain his master, Jason instructs his comrades to run after him and try to dislodge the Host from his hand (504-7). Jonathas' explicit running and leaping actions are typically reminiscent of Bacbytere's characteristic activity in *The Castle of Perseverance*, and both of the chase scenes in *The Play of the Sacrament* would probably have produced a set of actions very similar to those of the beating scenes in the earlier play, where Belyal and Flesch pursue and strike their servants around the *platea*. Although there are no stage directions to suggest exactly what happens after Jonathas runs mad, we can imagine a scene in which the four remaining Jews chase their master as he runs mad around the *platea*, a foreshadowing of the moment only a little later in the play when they beat Doctor Brundyche and Colle away from their scaffold (sd. 652).

The tale of the disbelieving Jew, a story dramatically portrayed in the N-Town *Assumption* play, can perhaps offer an indication of how the leaping

Jonathas was created in performance, as well as offering a further correlation

with the mad King Herod.[33] The apocryphal story describes how the hands of

a disbelieving Jew, often a soldier, became stuck to the Virgin's coffin as he

attempted to stop its procession, and were only released when he declared his

faith in Christ.[34] This tale is also depicted in a small detail of the *Taymouth*

*Hours* (plate 13), an English book of hours produced in the mid-fourteenth

century, where the disbelieving Jew is shown in a very similar attitude to King

Herod in the *Queen Mary Psalter* (plates 3 and 4) and the Norwich ceiling boss

(plate 7). The activities of both Herod and Jonathas are likewise linked with

the activities of stage devils, as I have already briefly implied above. Ruth

Mellinkoff and Debra Higgs Strickland have identified an entrenched

correspondence in medieval Christian culture between the Devil and the Jews;

"From a medieval Christian viewpoint", writes Mellinkoff, "all enemies of the

Faith – pagans, Saracens, Jews and others – were closely allied with the world

of hell", but, as Strickland notes, the Jews in particular were believed to be

agents of the Devil.[35] This pejorative correlation can be clearly seen in a detail

from the *Luttrell Psalter* (plate 14) in which the tormentors of Christ (and

particularly the one on the left) are rendered in a typical 'pictorial code of

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[33] *The Assumption of Mary, The N-Town Play*, ed. by Stephen Spector, EETS S.S. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), ll. 410-48.

[34] This event is also depicted in 'The Funeral Procession of the Virgin' in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, Morgan Volume, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, P157, and in a fifteenth-century wall painting in the parish church of Pickering, Yorkshire.

[35] Ruth Mellinkoff, 'Demonic Winged Headgear', *Viato*, 16 (1985): 289-306 (375). Quoted in Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, p. 122. See also Strickland, p. 127.
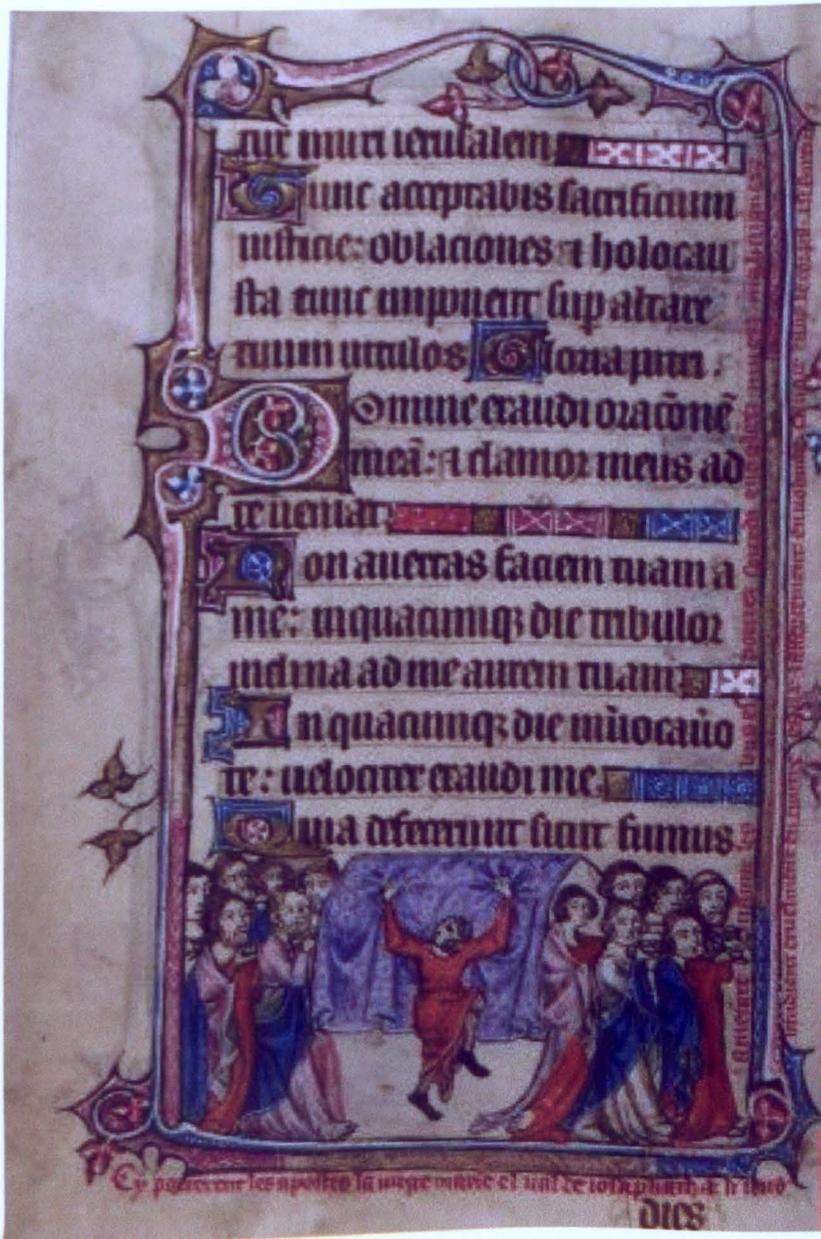
**Plate 13** 'The Death of the Virgin'. *Taymouth Hours.* London, *British Library* MS Yates Thompson 13, f. 133v.
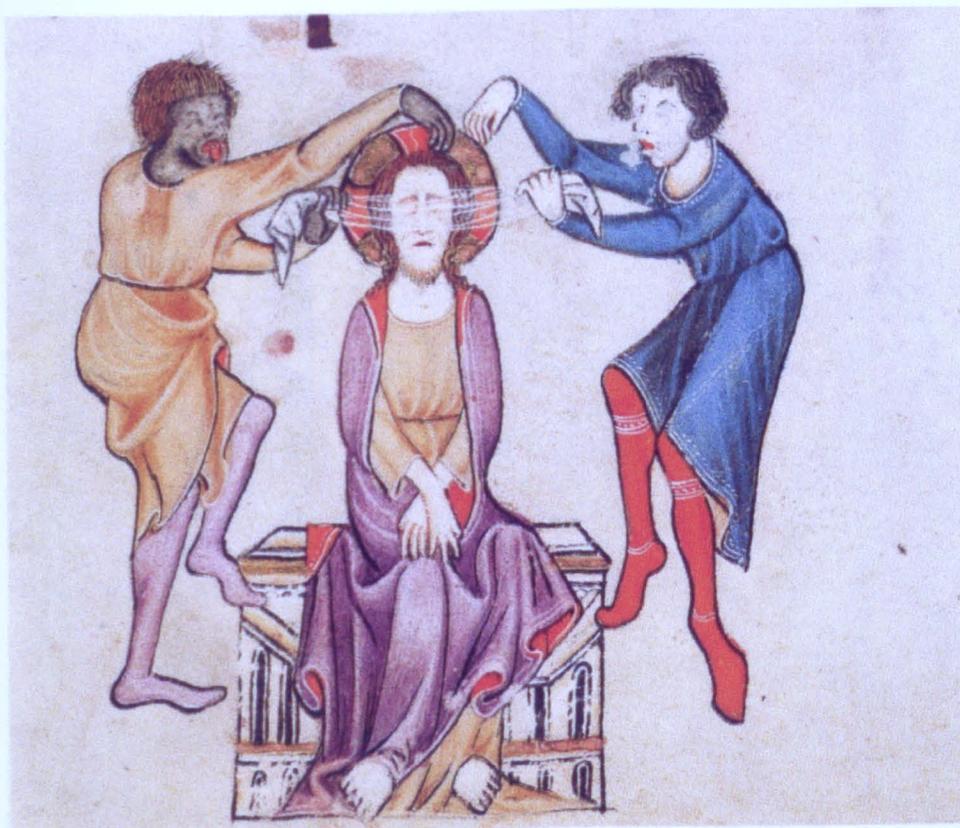
**Plate 14** 'The Mocking of Christ'. the *Luttrell Psalter*. London, British Library MS Add. 42130, f. 92 r (detail).

rejection', in which their physical features and postures resemble those of devils.[36] Moreover, as Strickland asserts (and plates 14, 17 and 18 show), it is in representations of the Passion that a demonic-Jewish alliance is most frequently inferred; therefore, these central scenes where the Jews desecrate the Host, effectively subjecting Jesus to 'a new passyoun' (Banns, 38), are the most likely to show the greatest resemblance between the two types.[37]

As with the two previous case studies, the verbal and physical activity of these scenes would have literally brought the world into disarray; the Jews' sinful, sacrilegious activities would disrupt speech and space, and as such would probably also begin to colour the audience's experience of the performance. Like the devils in morality plays, the Jews' performance would probably have become more immediate and engaging during the torture sequences because of the greater proximity between them and the audience. From an initially distant position, separated from their Christian audience by open space and a raised scaffold, all five Jews probably performed the torture scenes within the open *platea*. This would have been the only space large enough to harbour their frenzied actions and, on an equal level with the spectators, had the potential for greater physical proximity as well.

Psychologically and spatially closer to the audience, the 'spiritual chaos hitherto largely confined to the locus of Jonathas and the Jews', as Scherb writes, now 'extends out into the place near to where the audience stands or sits', their moral contagion spreading through the physical effects of their noise

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[36] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, p. 8. See also, Bettina Bildhauer, 'Blood, Jews, and Monsters in Medieval Culture', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 75-96.

[37] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, p. 134.

and manic action, as well as the increased physical immediacy.[38] Via the 'fundamental physical "bridge"' that connects the emotions of one person with those of the perceiver through a shared bodily understanding, the spectator would not only begin to experience the physical tension of kinaesthetic empathy, but instinctively feel the emotional excitement and crazed frenzy of the Jews through that physical connection.[39] Moreover, the allure of the performance would perhaps override the audience's abhorrence at the crimes being performed in front of them. As I briefly mentioned in Chapter Two (p.74), Jill Stevenson has described a parallel effect during the York *Play of the Crucifixion*, in which the sounds and rhythms of the dialogue probably 'entrained spectators, placing them into a closer empathetic relationship with the soldiers' actions, emotions, and pain' than with those of the suffering Christ, who, until quite late in the play, remains horizontal, stretched on the lowered cross at the soldiers' feet.[40] Through the devices described above, it is possible that the torture scenes of *The Play of the Sacrament* also entrained its audience, their attention drawn to the energetic and anarchic activity of the five Jews, rather than the Eucharist, a static object subsumed beneath the physicality and presence of the torturers. Through their kinaesthetic empathy

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[38] Scherb, *Staging Faith*, p. 76. Christopher Woolgar suggests that both spiritual and bodily disease could be spread by physical proximity as well as direct contact. See his *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, p. 61.

[39] See, for example, V. Gallese, 'Intentional Attunement: The Mirror Neuron System and Its Role in Interpersonal Relations', *Interdisciplines: What Do Mirror Neurons Mean?: Minor Systems, Social Understanding and Social Cognition*, <http://www.interdisciplines.org/medias/confs/archives/archive_8.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2011]; C. Keysers and G. Rizzolatti, 'A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 8.9 (Sept 2004): 395-403; and, in relation to performance, Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action*, p. 107.

[40] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 146.

with these activities, perhaps the audience also caught the infectious, feverish excitement and anticipation rooted in the action, edging them that little bit closer to the blasphemous torture of the Host.

These *platea* scenes of heightened physical action probably drew spectators and players into greater physical and emotional proximity, allowing the former to be implicated in the Jews' actions; however, the audience at this point remain within their designated roles and the conditions for the complete immersion of the audience at the Bishop's request have yet to be established. The appearance of Master Brundyche, the quack physician, and his serving boy Colle, however, further loosens the boundaries that distinguish the role of the actor and that of the audience. Colle enters the place completely unconnected with, and apparently oblivious to, the previous action, addressing the audience as if he has just stumbled across them ('Aha! here ys a fayre felawshyppe' (525)) before going on to intimately discuss his master, Brundyche, 'a man off all syence, / But off thryffte' (529-30). Colle's address here is a sudden break in the action and tone of the play, as well as a clear shift in the established relationship between performers and spectators. Colle is not associated with any of the scaffolds; as the stage directions indicate he comes '*into þe place*' (sd. 524), rather than appearing from within it, from one of the scaffolds, say, as the other characters have done. And, where the audience was rather formally addressed in the merchants' boasts, here Colle not only speaks to them directly, but intimately includes them in his mockery of his master and asks them for assistance in locating the charlatan doctor (562-72). In doing so, Colle also refers to the locally known Babwell Mill and, consequently, situates both himself and his master firmly in the audience's spatial reality.

Colle's intimate address here seems to suggest a very different kind of engagement than that offered by either the merchants' boasts or the previous torture sequence, as well as a greater sense of proximity between the player and the spectators, inviting a shared experience. Richard Schechner suggests that such modulations in the patterns of performance are an intrinsic part of producing great theatre, that 'the increasing and decreasing density of events temporally, spatially, emotionally and kinesthetically', such as that produced by the introduction of Colle and Brundyche, are 'woven into a complicated yet apparently inevitable' pattern that keeps the audience stimulated and engaged.[41] However, there is a sense that something more is going on here, a further purpose to this seemingly random addition to the play. After Colle has made his proclamation advertising the skills of Brundyche, the master asks his servant 'Knoest any abut þis plase?' to which Colle replies 'Ye, þat I do mastre, so haue [I] grase; / Here ys a Jewe, hyght Jonathas, / Hath lost hys ryght hond' (626-9). What is interesting here is that Colle claims to 'know' Jonathas, not as part of a play, a character of make-believe, but as a 'real' person (or at least as real as Colle), who is, therefore, a suitable candidate for Brundyche's services, much as Cornelius can become B's master in *Fulgens and Lucres*. But, unlike Martin Luther King's address to the spectators in *The Mountaintop*, the audience of *The Play of the Sacrament* are not expected to accept, or even necessarily reply to, the pair's offer; in fact the joke relies upon their continued observance of their given roles in the performance.

As the audience are obviously unlikely to call on the doctor's expertise, the duo go over to Jonathas' scaffold and offer to cure the Jew of his ailment

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[41] Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 11.

(630-7).[42] At this point the pair cross from the audience's space, in which they have intimately interacted with and involved the spectators, to the Jews' scaffold, clearly located in the designated performance area declared as the fictional Heraclea. That move would further begin to loosen the restrictions that had limited the audience's participation in the drama during the previous action. Like the two clowns A and B in *Fulgens and Lucres*, perhaps Colle and Brundyche can be understood as a device that unites "play world" with "real world", and thus also the pertinence of the themes to the spectator's own life. As with A and B, their liminal status as both players and audience permits Colle and Brundyche to make this initial connection; but where only A and B can successfully move from audience to participant, in *The Play of the Sacrament* the work done by Colle and Brundyche begins to make those distinctions less stable and more flexible and, so, begin to construct the spatial conditions that will later permit the audience to become a key part of the play's narrative process.

Unfortunately for Brundyche, Jonathas refuses him entry onto the scaffold, ordering his men to 'Brushe them hens bothe and that anon!' (651), a significant action that circumscribes the extent to which the two "worlds" can be amalgamated and the limit of the space that the audience can occupy in future scenes. Once Colle and Brundyche have been chased from the place, the torture of the Eucharist begins once again, this time with a less sturdy conceptual boundary between audience and performers. This is vital to the

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[42] The reliance on an audience's understanding of their role is used in a number of late medieval and early Tudor plays. See, for example, Meg Twycross, 'The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (1994), pp. 37-84 (p. 72).

efficacy of the second torture sequence, a scene which increases the gory spectacle of each miracle and builds to an explosive crescendo. Jonathas is now so bewildered due to his injuries and near mad (655) that he directs the other Jews from his scaffold and the verse returns to the rhythms of the previous torture scene as the four Jews 'pluck owt the naylys and shake þe hond into þe cawdron' (sd. 660). Immersed in the simmering oil, the Host performs another miracle as the liquid within the cauldron begins to bubble, 'apperyng to be as blood' (sd. 672). The Jews then kindle a fire beneath the oven with straw and 'thornys kene' (693), building the heat and the tension until, in a desperate final attempt to still the power of the Host, Jason casts it into the red-hot oven.

This second torture sequence in particular calls for spectacular special effects and is the most difficult section of the play to reconcile with its devotional agenda. The 'grotesque allure', as it is described by Tydeman, is especially strong in this second sequence and appears to be at odds with the genuine adoration and awe that the play is trying to reinforce.[43] As Janette Dillon has pointed out, both scenes depicting the torture of the Host 'excite and satisfy the audience in and for their own sake, as images of piercing and bleeding still do', each bloody act building and intensifying that excitement to encourage an 'appetite for the spectacular'.[44] This is perhaps further emphasised by the foregrounding of action and the body, as signalled in the characters' spoken dialogue, which often repeats the instructions provided in

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[43] William Tydeman, 'An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, (1994), pp. 1-36 (p. 32).

[44] Janette Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 187-8.

the stage directions.[45] For example, each violent act that is inflicted on the Host is accompanied by the perpetrator's narration of his own activities, and these prolonged moments when action is simultaneously done and described would work to build the tension in the performance space, to double the chaos and double the excitement. They are the pause before the spectacle of sacramental torture and miracles, feeding the chaos and the audience's enjoyment until the astonishing, remarkable climax.

As soon as Jasdon closes its doors the oven, in an impressive display of special effects, splits apart with blood seeping '*owt at þe cranys*' (sd. 712). We can imagine here the blood that by this point must have saturated the scene; the blood on Jonathas from his severed hand, the excess blood that trickled down and boiled over from the cauldron and now seeps from cracks in the oven. The ripping apart of the oven itself must also have been accompanied by a loud noise, a sound of thunder as the solid structure was destroyed by the power of the sacrament, as well as the cries of fear from the Jews. From the tumult and chaos '*an image appere*[s] [...] *with woundys bledyng*' (sd. 712), and the tortured Christ rises from the commotion, his appearance simultaneously adding to the spectacle and bringing it to a harsh and abrupt close.

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[45] Janette Dillon, "What Sacrament': Excess, Taboo and Truth in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* and Twentieth-Century Body Art', in *European Medieval Drama 4*, ed. by André Lascombes and Sydney Higgins (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001), pp. 169-79 (pp. 171-2).

## The Performing Audience

Amidst the busy activity of this scene the explicit reference to an 'image' in the stage directions is especially significant. According to the *MED* the term 'image' explicitly denotes (a) 'a piece of statuary, effigy, figure; also, a crucifix'; (b) 'a representation made by painting, engraving, stamping, weaving, etc., on a surface [often difficult to discriminate from (a)]; a figure in stained glass, a picture' and (c) 'an image to be worshipped, an idol'.[46] Such a particular term clearly indicates the use of a static image and, therefore, probably rules out the use of an actor, an option often chosen by modern companies, like the Medieval Players who performed the play in 1981. The use of a static, non-human image would offer a sharp contrast to the physical, lively, embodied activity of the previous scenes, instantly contrasting with both the Jews and the audience merely by being an image rather than a fleshly body, immobile rather than a blinking, breathing human. Although a masked actor may have come close to the effects produced by an image and would have had a different impact than an un-masked player, his body would still be palpably present and alive and, therefore, felt; a strong contrast to the cold, inert form of an image or statue. That sharp distinction would, moreover, bring the feverish atmosphere and spiritual danger of the previous scenes into harsh relief. Many theatrical threads have been woven together to build up to this point, each one intended to lure the audience with the 'bodily mirthe', as the *Tretise* author terms it, induced by the closer physical and conceptual proximity, heightened

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[46] *MED: I-L*, ed. by Sherman M. Kuhn (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1965), pp. 78-80.

activity, noise and visual spectacle.[47] Colle and Brundyche opened up the space, slackening the distinctions between player and spectator so that, although the Jews still do not directly address the audience, the latter are nevertheless brought notionally that little bit closer to the action. Working with the fascinating allure of blood, the astonishing special effects and the greater proximity of the audience, the emphasis on the live, embodied action would appear to deliberately indulge the audience's senses and build dramatic tension. The efficacy of placing the audience in such a position relies, as it does in *Fulgens and Lucres*, on the nature of the dramatic event, on the audience's understanding that this is just a play, but also on their willingness to be drawn in and engage with its power to entertain and involve. All of the different elements, then, combine to work powerfully on the audience, enticing them further into complicity with the heretical actions of the Jews, and it is at the climax of this engagement, the point at which the action and spectacle peak, that the full impact and realisation of what they have been participating in is suddenly revealed.

Furthermore, because the image, unlike the living actor, would have been inextricably bound to its devotional use, the appearance of an image of Christ would probably also have initiated an alternative performance mode.[48] Victor Scherb has already suggested that the sudden presence of the devotional image probably 'had an iconic function, stimulating the devout attention of the audience', and so beginning the transition from the 'howling antics' and

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[47] *A Tretise*, p. 96, ll. 120-1.

[48] Cf. the Medieval Players 1981 production of *The Play of the Sacrament* where actor Carl Heap bursts out of the oven. Photograph by Tessa Musgrave reproduced in Meg Twycross, 'Beyond the Picture Theory: Image and Activity in Medieval Drama': 602.

'clownish treatment of the Host' to a tone of sombre 'thanksgiving and praise'.[49] However, in doing so, the image of Christ not only changed the atmosphere of the play, it probably also altered the way that the audience engaged with it and the reformed performance that followed. Having been lulled into the Jews' dramatic rhythm, where the panoply of movement, sound and spectacle overshadowed the actuality of the desecration of the sacred Eucharist, the audience are now faced with the reality. As in *The Play of the Crucifixion* when Christ is finally raised on the cross to form the familiar, potent iconographical picture, the sudden transformation of the bread into an image of Jesus instantly drowns the clamour and chaos. In York, the niggling moans of the soldiers that were initially so engaging would now have seemed peripheral to the suffering yet serene Christ; at Croxton, the emerging image would probably have both dwarfed the previous action and emphasised its implicit crime, re-focussing the audience's attention on the real presence in the Host to cause an 'abrupt aesthetic and rhythmic shift', a change in the register of the performance and the type of engagement required.[50]

The more sober register initiated by the presence of the image is verbally marked by the use of Latin and a move to a formal, aureate, devotional verse form. First used by the image, it is then echoed by the Jews who, like the Shepherds in the Towenely *Second Shepherds' Play*, begin to use the ritual language of Latin. Jonathas, for example, replies to Christ's address with: '*Tu es protector vite mee; a quo trepidabo?*' and then translates the first phrase into the English 'O thu, Lord, whyche art my defendowr' (741-2). Each of the four

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[49] Scherb, *Staging Faith*, pp. 42-3; John C. Coldewey, 'The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. by John C. Coldewey (New York: Garland, 1993), p. 275.

[50] Stevenson, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture*, p. 146.

remaining Jews likewise adopt Latin idiom while their English verse also becomes more solemn and liturgical in tone. Like the Shepherds, the use of Latin here by those who were previously ignorant of Christ's power is an aural means of signifying the shift from non-believer to Christian; being the language of religious authority, Latin instantly gives weight to the Jews' words adding a note of authenticity and truth, as well as indicating their entry into the Christian system of worship. Regardless of whether the audience could understand the Latin, its sudden presence in the dialogue would, therefore, immediately evoke the familiar authority of the Church, appearing 'quite simply more intensely luminous' than even the most Latinate of English verse.[51] Indeed, as Dillon argues, the 'obscurity of Latin to laypeople' may have in fact been an integral part of its power so that, although the 'expository voice may participate in the brighter light of God's presence [...] Latin directly represents it'.[52] The Latin, then, signifies the presence of God and with it changes the atmosphere within the performance space. The power and sanctity of the language in itself would move the play instantly towards a more serious, ritualistic performance mode recalling the deferential engagement and worshipful attitudes demanded by the liturgy.

The change in linguistic and performance register is accompanied by a marked contrast in the Jews' occupation of the space, their frantic, hasty movements now replaced by a more moderate and controlled attitude as they 'knele down all on ther kneys' (sd. 745). In the prose treatise *Dives and Pauper*, Pauper explains that a key part of showing devotion to the divine is through 'tokenys of þe body', including 'knelyngge, loutyngge [bowing],

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[51] Dillon, *Language and Stage*, p. 37.

[52] Ibid., pp. 4, 37.

lyftyngge vp of hondys' and, further, that 'qhanne we knelyn to God [...] we knowlechyn þat we moun nought stondyn in vertue ne in goodnesse ne in wele but only be hym'.[53]   Kneeling, as J.A. Burrow explains, was a particularly powerful bodily sign in the Middle Ages; it is, of course, a deferential movement that in this context acknowledges the superiority of the image of Christ, but it could also be a movement that was specific to the worship of God.[54]   Pauper goes on to advise his pupil Dives that 'to God meen shuldyn knelyn wyt bothe knees in tokene þat in hym is al oure princepal helpe', whereas before a king or another mortal superior it is only appropriate to kneel 'wyt þe to [the one] kne'.[55]   So, in kneeling before the image of Christ (presumably on both knees), the Jews are not simply deferring to the awesome power of the miracles, they are acknowledging that all their 'principal helpe', all the knowledge, health, wealth and goodness that they can achieve, lies in his sacrifice and, therefore, commit to the belief in the Eucharist and the Truth of the Christian faith.   Furthermore, as in *Everyman*, the contrast in the occupation of the performance space between the feverish, futile movement of the torture sequence and the static, solid and reverential act of kneeling before the Lord also signifies the beginning of the resolution; where the Jews' earlier actions only led them to greater fear and pain their acceptance of the truth of the sacrament, exemplified through their penitent comportment and speech, begins the process of healing and their assimilation into the Christian community.

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[53] *Dives and Pauper*, vol. 1, part. 1, Commandment I xii, ll. 5-12 (pp. 104-5).  All subsequent references to this text are from this volume and part.  Specific references will be hereafter written thus: I xii, ll. 5-12.

[54] Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*, p.1 9.

[55] *Dives and Pauper*, I xii, ll. 38-40.

The sudden presence of a devotional image and the shift in the language and occupation of the space that it prompts, probably would have awakened within the spectator an appropriately respectful (if initially somewhat surprised) response. As the play continues, this reaction would have become more firmly established, informed by the changed physical performance of the actors, but also by the audience's own previous experience of appropriate liturgical conduct. The manner in which the spectator related to this marked shift would almost certainly have been influenced by contemporary beliefs about the correct devotional attitude and behaviour. As Anne Eljenholm Nichols explains, for example, looking and seeing were 'psychologically central to the act of spiritual communion' and figure 'prominently in vernacular directions for how one should behave at the elevation [of the Host]'.[56] This suggests that, although many texts advocate sensory contact with the divine, with authorities like Saint Bernard promoting a corporeal approach to accessing divine truth, sight and visual engagement remained primary. As I discussed in Chapter One (p. 16), the senses were generally structured to form a perceptual hierarchy with sight placed foremost amongst the five senses. Associated with reason, truth and light, seeing was perceived as the purest of the senses and that most resilient to corruption. This is perhaps reflected in the *Tretise*'s distinction between the paintings of God and the saints and 'miraclis pleyinge'; the first, the author states, are 'as nakyd lettris to a clerk to riden treuthe' (that is, as long as the images are not 'to curious [elaborate], to myche fedinge mennis wittis, and not occasion of maumetrie

[56] Anne Eljenholm Nichols, 'The Bread of Heaven: Foretaste or Foresight?', in *The Iconography of Heaven*, ed. by Clifford Davidson, *Early Drama, Art and Music Monograph Series* 21 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), pp. 40-68 (p. 49).

[idolatry] to the puple') whereas the second, without qualification, 'deliten men bodily'.[57] This statement appears to implicitly suggest that the correct kind of image and seeing does not indulge the body, as the spectacles of *The Play of the Sacrament* do, but instead appeals directly to reason, the mind and the soul, and so also limits the extent and type of corporeal engagement and interaction with an external object. The appearance of the devotional image, then, would initiate the correct type of seeing, the appropriate correlative attitude and bodily posture following this more controlled, reserved and less indulgent visual engagement.

And so both space and spectator are now ready for the transition from "viewer" to "doer". The play appears at this point to explicitly reinforce the need to adopt this more reverential attitude, as the Bishop's direct request shows. Although they have already been addressed by both merchants and Colle and Brundyche, the audience has not yet had any active involvement in the action, remaining spectators despite their interaction with the characters and their sensory and emotional engagement with the spectacle. But now, with the Bishop's appeal, their participation is not only requested but commanded as an essential part of the restorative process: 'I commande yow, euery man', says the Bishop, 'On yowr feet for for to goo, bare, / In the devoutest wyse that ye can' (811-13). Although clearly an actor, the figure of the Bishop holds a kind of moral authority; in other medieval dramatic texts the expositor appears, usually at the beginning or end of the performance, to clarify the play's meaning or teaching and is usually a figure of theologically superior status, a

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[57] *A Tretise*, p. 104, ll. 372-8. See also, Heather Hill-Vasquez, "The Precious body of christ that they tretyn in ther handis': "Miraclis Pleyinge" and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*', *Early Theatre*, 4 (2001): 53-72 (64-5).

Scholar, Priest or, as here, a Bishop.[58] Within this role, the actor can guide an audience towards a play's conclusion as well as explain its didactic message, but he is usually also a character who appears distinct from the action, separated from both the audience and the play's central narrative. Up to this point the Bishop has not been seen in the action and so appears almost as an expository figure who will now guide the repentant Jews and the audience through the process of rehabilitation. However, unlike his counterparts, the Doctors in the Chester Plays and *Everyman*, Contemplation in the N-Town Plays and Mercy in *Mankind*, the Bishop does not tell the audience how they should understand the lesson and instead fulfills his authoritative role by guiding them through a spiritual process, beginning with the adoption of a very specific bodily attitude.

After asking them to stand, the next thing the Bishop demands of the spectators is that they walk to the scaffold in bare feet ('On yowr feet for to goo, bare'). In medieval society to walk barefoot, as was often demanded during penitential processions where the head would also be veiled or covered in ashes, was a clear sign of the repentant sinner.[59] Commanding the audience to proceed in this way implicitly acknowledges their guilt of sin in everyday life, but also in their participation and pleasure in the spectacle of the torture of the Host. Walking in bare feet is, therefore, a more emphatic cue for the

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[58] For more on the roles of the expositor character, see the contributions to *The Narrator, the Expositor, and the Prompter in European Medieval Theatre*, ed. by Philip Butterworth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

[59] C. Clifford Flannigan, 'The Moving Subject: Medieval Liturgical Processions in Semiotic and Cultural Perspective', in *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 35-51 (p. 36).

audience to adopt a reverent, submissive bodily attitude, and the type of conduct that will be expected from here on in. As they follow the Bishop into and across the open place, the participants (as now they are) are told to carry themselves in the 'devoutest wyse that ye can' (813), and so again something very specific is being required of them, actions that fit with the solemn, devotional register that the play has now adopted.

The body in the late Middle Ages was not always seen as an enemy of the soul. As Medwall's *Nature* dramatises, if well governed the body could be man's route to spiritual enlightenment and salvation, but a body governed by reason displayed a very particular comportment which exemplified its harmonious relationship with the spirit it harboured. Hugh of Saint Victor wrote of this fellowship, describing it as a music, a 'natural friendship by which the soul is leagued to the body', a music that consists of the individual 'loving one's flesh, but one's spirit more; in cherishing one's body, but not in destroying one's virtue'.[60] Hugh, along with other writers, also suggested the means through which this might be achieved. In his *De institutione noviciorum*, for example, Hugh advises young novices to avoid moving their "members", presumably the extremities of arms and legs, in a "disordered, or immodest or extravagant fashion", and neither should they "diminish the peaceful nature" of their speeches by winking or drastically changing their facial expressions.[61] On a similar note Saint Bernard advises the newly appointed pope to:

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[60] Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalicon*, p. 69.

[61] Hugh of Saint Victor, quoted in Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'The Ethics of Gesture', p. 139.

Stand firm in yourself. Do not fall lower, do not rise higher. Do not proceed to greater length; do not stretch out to greater width. Hold to the middle if you do not want to lose the mean. The middle ground is safe. The middle is the seat of the mean, and the mean is virtue.[62]

The picture created by both Hugh of Saint Victor and Saint Bernard is of a body that holds to its central core, a body that maintains a delicate poise and restricts its extension into the surrounding space. It seems very much to be about containment and consistency, modesty and constraint, the exact opposite of the uncontrolled and excessive activities of the devils explored in the previous chapter.

As exemplars of the virtuous-body paradigm, the 'Trinity Enthroned' in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* (plate 15), shows many of the rules for ideal comportment suggested by Hugh of Saint Victor and Saint Bernard. All three figures face the viewer, each with sombre, serene expressions. As Bernard describes, they seem to emanate from a point within, rigidly attached to that central core, each occupying the least space possible. Furthermore, although two of the figures (the Son and the Holy Ghost) are seen to raise one arm, both only permit the forearm to be elevated and so keep the upper part of the arm below the level of the shoulder. Note also that the forearm in both cases is positioned in front of the body and not out to the side, therefore, again, limiting the amount of space in use. The overall impression is of moderation and

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[62] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Five Books on Consideration*, Book 2, Chapter 19, p. 72.

**Plate 15** 'The Trinity Enthroned'. *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Guennol Volume. New York, Guennol Collection, f. 82.

containment, the latter compounded by the enclosure of the three bodies by the heavy robes worn by each, which cover the wearer from shoulder to floor.

Although Bernard and Hugh provide their advice for the edification of young novices and clergymen, the ideals for the devout body, displayed in images of the divine and the holy, do filter down to the lower, lay levels of society. The author of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, for example, advises his daughters to be 'softe / humble / Rype / stedfast of estate and of manere / of lytel speche to answere curtoisly and not to be ouer wyld to sprynge ne lepe'; but he also tells them, 'be ye not like ne semblable the tortuse ne to the Crane which torne their visage and the heede aboue their sholders / and wynde their hede here and there as a vane'.[63] Instead, he says:

> Alwey see that ye be stedfast in lokyng playnly to fore you And yf ye wylle loke a syde / torne youre vysage & youre body to geder / And so shalle ye hold you in youre estate more ferme & sure.[64]

The humble attitude that the Knight recommends can also be seen in the depiction of many divine and virtuous figures. It is, for example, present in the holy figures discussed above, and his request that his daughters never be 'ouer wyld to sprynge ne lepe', an appeal which advocates a static pose, firmly routed to the ground is in evidence in the Dresden Master's Temperates (plate 12), as well as most of the saints represented in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves*. Both poses have as their underlying notion the restriction of the body's

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[63] *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, p. 28, ll. 11-13; p. 25, ll. 5-8.

[64] Ibid., pp. 25, ll. 11-13

occupation of the surrounding space. The idea that the head and body should remain aligned even when changing the direction of the gaze is, moreover, similarly present, although perhaps not as obvious. In practice, to sustain the strict alignment of head and shoulders has an impact on the posture and movement of the entire body; it forces an upright stance and a rigidity in the spine, which likewise seems to influence the movement of the upper arm, restricting its range so that any gesture of the arms resembles that shown in the images discussed above.

Rhonda Blair argues that the adoption of such physical behaviour and bodily state 'can lead [to] or at least affect emotion and feeling', that there is 'measurable neurological evidence that emotion and feeling sometimes follow "doing"'.[65] Many modern actors would attest to a connection between physical performance and emotion, a phenomenon utilised in the acting theory of Stanislavski, and it certainly seems to be implied in the Knight's corporeal advice to his daughters which, if followed correctly, will 'hold you in youre estate more ferme & sure'. So, although the image of Christ would probably have had quite a striking impact on the audience's engagement with *The Play of the Sacrament*, beginning to move and act in a more overtly penitential manner would also have begun to change their emotional reactions, thoughts and feelings. By carrying their bodies in the ways described above, and as directed (and probably exemplified) by the Bishop, restraining movements and posture to appear outwardly more reverent, composed and modest, the audience would probably begin to feel calmer, to contain and quell the

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[65] Rhonda Blair, 'Image and Action: Cognitive Neuroscience and Actor Training', in *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, ed. by Bruce McConachie (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 167-85 (p. 176).

excitement and tension within themselves and begin to contemplate the implications of the strongly visceral activity of which they have been a part.

When the audience and the Bishop arrive at Jonathas' house, the ceremonial mode implied by the Bishop is fully realised as the image of Christ returns to the form of a sacramental wafer. During this reversal of the elevation ritual, the audience's role probably altered from that of penitents to the part of congregation, witnesses to the Truth and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Bishop encompasses those surrounding him by repeatedly referring to 'owr errowr', 'owr rygore' and 'owr lamentable hartys' (822-5). The sense of ceremony would perhaps have been even more firmly established by the positioning of the image-Host and Bishop on the raised scaffold of the Jews' stage, so that the audience-congregation must look up at the action, recreating the spatial dynamic of the real Mass and elevation.

After an address of praise to the 'largyfluent Lord' (826) the Bishop once again asks those gathered around to follow him, this time in a 'sole[m]pne processyon' (837) as he returns the holy sacrament to the church. From spectators to penitents and congregation, the audience are now recast as celebrants in a formal procession. In processions, secular as well as religious, correct decorum in each individual was of paramount importance and so, again, the contained, respectful attitude would have been expected. But it was also important that, in addition to maintaining correct individual attitudes, each celebrant had to sustain a specific relationship with the rest of the procession, so that the carefully ordered hierarchy and the sense of unity that it projected were preserved.[66] This sense of bodily and social order is expressed in a detail

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[66] Scherb, *Staging Faith*, p. 83.

from the *Farnese Hours*, a mid-sixteenth-century book of hours created in Rome for the Cardinal Allessandro Farnese (plate 16). In this image, the long procession is shown winding to and up the steps of the church, the garments of the celebrants clearly distinguishing each stage in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The figures are also very precisely placed in pairs, each pair evenly spaced from the one in front and behind; on either side of the procession march the guards, one positioned at even intervals along its length, and to the left of the clerical group an assembly of laymen process, again in pairs, forming a precise and ordered line flanking the ecclesiastical event.

Echoing the theories of Blair, most studies on processions suggest that they not only represent the values of the community, but also actively produce those ideas in each participating individual; as Kathleen Ashley has pointed out, just moving together conveys a 'shared commitment to the same goal' and perhaps also generates a sense of togetherness, of binding one person to another.[67] Both Ashley and C. Clifford Flannigan, for example, have argued the case, suggesting that processional movement creates communal 'relations and commitments' through performance, 'instilling in [the] actors' minds beliefs about meaning, coherence and values'.[68]

In Chapter Three, I discussed the varying postures of the Intemperates by the Master of the Dresden Prayer Book, the group of seven individuals whose comportment and gestures were in marked contrast to their Temperate counterparts at the back of the image (pp. 155-7). In this picture, each of the Intemperates forms very individual and distinct attitudes, each one different

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[67] Kathleen Ashley, 'Introduction: The Moving Subjects of Processional Performance' in *Moving Subjects* (See Flannigan, above), pp. 7-34 (p. 14).

[68] Ashley, 'Introduction', p. 15; Flannigan, 'The Moving Subject', p. 35.
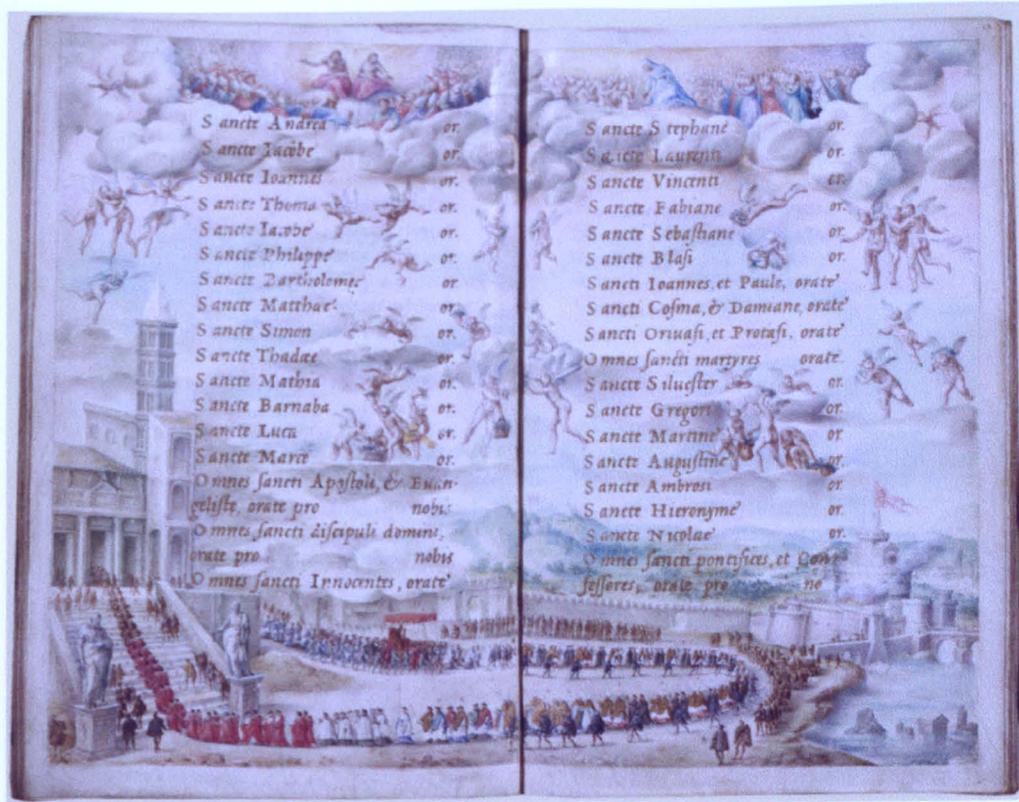
**Plate 16** Guilio Clovio, A Corpus Christ Procession, *The Farnese Hours.*
New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS. M. 69, ff. 72v-73r.

from the next and none complementing, at least in a beneficial manner, that of the others. The same can be said of the devils in *The Hours of Catherine of Cleves* and the persecutors of Christ in the *Fitzwarin Psalter*, shown here in plates 17and 18. The implication, then, is that, in contrast to the harmony and unity of the virtuous and divine, the immorality of the sinful and demonic not only distorts their own bodies and minds but fractures and splinters their relationship with others, warping the community as well as the individual soul. The author of the *Tretise* has a similar concern with regard to miracle play performances; he suggests that, although the playing of miracles can convert men, 'as it is sinne it is fer more occasion of perverting of men, not onely of oon singuler persone but of al an hool comynte'.[69] Perhaps, then, the audience's intense engagement in the torture scenes of *The Play of the Sacrament*, and their implication in the crime thereby, has infected their relations with one another. Engrossed in the spectacle before them (the desecration of the symbol of both their faith and community) perhaps the audience's awareness of the others around them diminished as their awareness of the real implications of the Jews' actions were subsumed beneath the pleasure of the spectacle, each spectator absorbed in his or her own interaction with the play, cut-off, out of sync and with little regard to other audience members.

Presumably, then, following the recognition and repentance of their part in the torture of the Host, the act of moving together in procession towards a common goal finally begins the process of rehabilitating both individual and community, reuniting them and reasserting the bonds that bind them together

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[69] *A Tretise,* p. 100, ll. 237-40.

**Plate 17** 'The Mocking of Christ'. *Fitzwarin Psalter*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Bibl. Nat. lat. 765, f. 10r (detail).
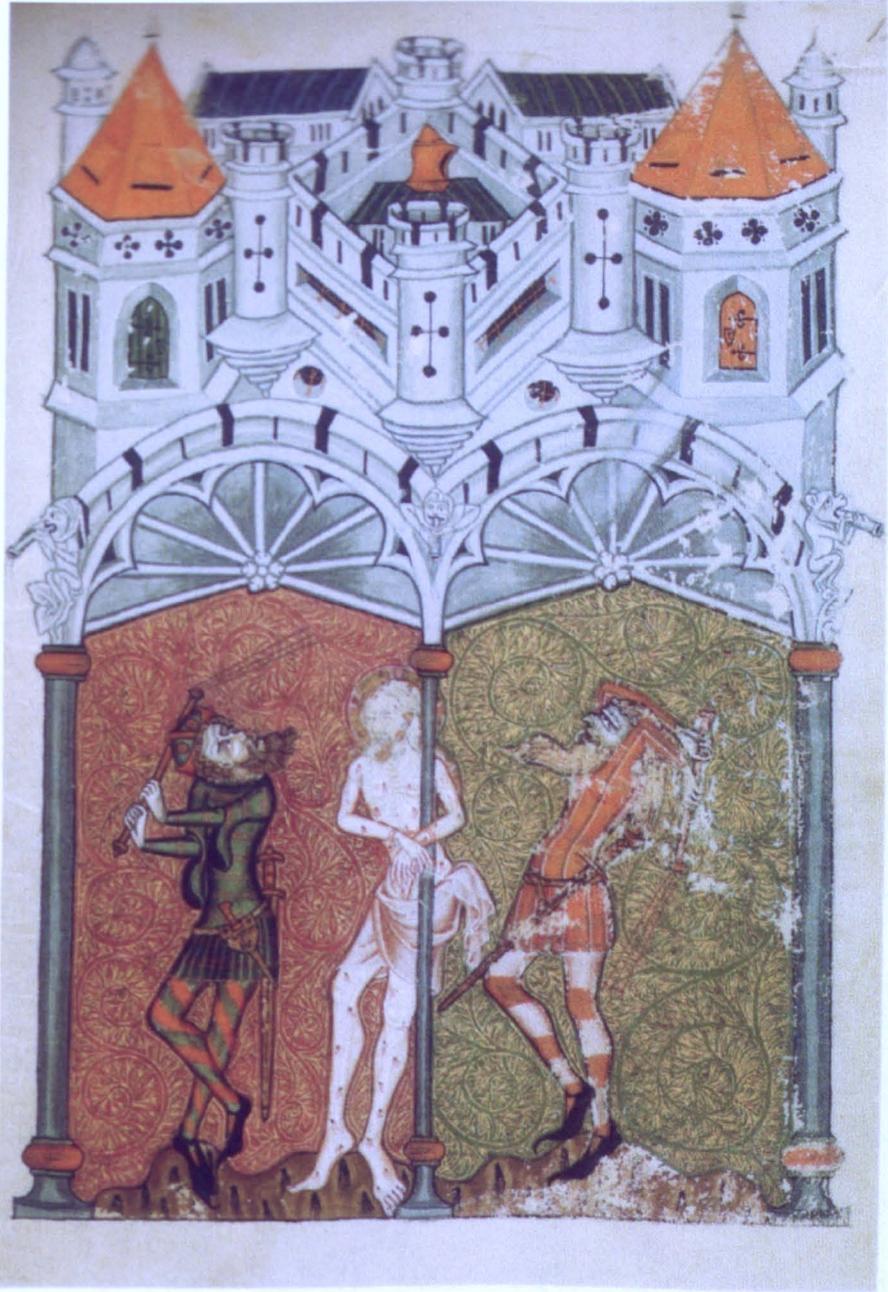
**Plate 18** 'The Flagellation of Christ'. *Fitzwarin Psalter*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Bibl. Nat. lat. 765, f. 12r.

as a unit. The awareness of other bodies in space and having to work together to maintain the balance required for a solemn procession perhaps, as Ashley and Flannigan suggest, actively re-instilled the sense of commonality and shared values that may have been forgotten in the tumultuous chaos of previous scenes. Such an intention certainly appears to be implicit in the Bishop's second address to the audience:

> Now wyll I take thys Holy Sacrament
>
> With humble hart and gret devocion,
>
> And all we wyll gon with on consent
>
> And beare yt to chyrche with sole[m]pne processyon (834-7).

'Consent' here literally can mean 'agreement in sentiment', that is we all agree to follow the Bishop to the church, but could also connote 'harmony' and a 'resemblance between things'.[70] Furthermore, the Bishop's request for the audience and actors to go as one, in unity and harmony is again invoked as the Bishop invites 'all tho that bene here, both more and lesse' to sing: 'Thys holy song, *O sacrum Conuiuium*, / Lett vs syng all with grett swetnesse' (839-41). Richard Rastall writes that the term 'harmony' in the period implied a specific and appropriate relationship between musical notes, 'so that the implication of 'sweet' is both wider and more specifically technical than it would be now'.[71] The term is contrasted with 'hack', familiar from Mak and Gill's singing in the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play*, which Rastall defines as a breaking or splitting of sound. So, to hack a song is to split it open, divide it into parts and

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[70] *MED: C-D*, ed. by Hans Kurath (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 531.

[71] Rastall, *The Heaven Singing*, vol. 1, p. 36.

so destroy *its sweetness, the delicate relationship between the individual* parts that make the song harmonious. There is also a clear link here with Hugh of Saint Victor's notion of the musical and harmonious friendship between body and soul, the balance that constrains and orders the body.

The Bishop, then, in asking the audience to move with one consent and to sing sweetly, is also asking them to work together to keep the hymn and the procession united, whole and complete. These actions would perhaps evoke a sense of unity through co-operation, working together to heal and, as the performance will go on to do, expand the Christian community. From the moment when the image of Christ emerged from the oven, the performance has been gradually moving the audience towards this point, little by little edging them towards complete participation in an activity that reduces their sense of individuality, since, as Guilio Clovio's depiction of the corpus Christi procession shows, 'every member must be a part of the moving group and direct his or her own body in terms of the rhythms set by the group'.[72]

It is likely, then, that encouraging the audience to move in a devout fashion promoted a more devout attitude within them, but perhaps a more powerful process also occurred via this experience, what Victor Turner might call 'flow'. Turner's notion arises from the anthropological study of ritual performances where total involvement in an activity results in a state where:

> action follows action according to an inner logic which seems to
> need no conscious intervention on our part; we experience it as
> a unified flowing from one moment to the next [...] in which

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[72] Flannigan, 'The Moving Subject', p. 39.

there is little distinction between self and environment, between

stimulus and response, or between past, present and future.[73]

During the procession towards the end of the *Play of the Sacrament* perhaps

the distinctions between individual and community, between theatre and ritual,

actor and spectator, became less distinct through the experience of 'flow' in the

act of procession.[74] Each individual audience member now must contribute to

the moving procession, working with their fellows, in a fashion familiar to both

body and mind from previous ritual performances, to maintain the structure and

correct order demanded by the ritual, following the person in front, their

neighbours and friends, to the same destination and moving in the same

rhythm. It is easy to see how Turner's flow might be experienced within such

a context, how the actions of the participants follow an 'inner logic', how the

boundaries that distinguish self from community might blur at this moment, as

well as those that separate play and audience reality.

At the procession's final destination, presumably either the real or

fictional church, the celebrants once again become the congregation as the

Bishop and the Host ascend the scaffold or dais in preparation for the baptism

scene. Because of the ritual aspects of the spatial dynamic here, the baptism of

the Jews has the potential to revert the audience to the status of spectators;

however, the way in which the scene is written suggests that it in fact confirms

their central function in the play, allowing them to perceive themselves as more

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[73] Victor Turner, 'Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality', in
*Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Michel Bernamou and Charles Carramello,
Theories of Contemporary Culture, vol.1 (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, 1977), pp. 33-55
(p. 47).

[74] Cf. Flannigan, 'The Moving Subject', pp. 39-45.

active in the performance, as still having a distinct role to play in the progression of the narrative. Scholars have already noted the importance of the audience's involvement in *The Play of the Sacrament*, which 'physically and collectively enacts acceptance of the play's [...] spiritual demands' and we have already seen that by accepting the Bishop's invitation to join the procession, the audience is both agreeing to the theological ideas presented to them and helping to restore a sense of community.[75] But when Jonathas asks for absolution for himself and his men, he does not only seek clemency from God and the Bishop, but from all of 'Crystendom with great devocion' (928-30). In the context of the play and its level of audience participation this is significant; in doing so he is expressly asking for the community's permission to be baptized, for their forgiveness and willingness to accept the repentant Jews into the Christian faith. Previously, the audience had little direct influence over the play's progress; although they have participated to differing degrees, they are now actively involved in the restoration and expansion of the Christian community, not only through participating in the unifying experience of a procession, but through contributing to the play's conclusion by not denying Jonathas' request.

Or at least, so it would seem because, of course, as with the interactions with Colle and Brundyche, the audience are still unlikely to actually refuse. Despite their absorption into the performance and its shifting modes, they would undoubtedly have maintained an awareness of the fictitious nature of the performance, even during the procession, and, although they are participants, the performance hierarchy nevertheless remains necessarily intact. Reviewers

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[75] Dillon, 'What Sacrament?', p. 177.

of and commentators on modern immersive theatre have similarly noted the necessity behind restricting the extent to which audiences can influence the outcome of a performance and the preservation of the boundary between fiction and reality. Matt Trueman, for example, writing on the markedly political wing of immersive theatre, highlights the fact that drama unavoidably entails:

> an imaginative leap and where too much is asked of us [the audience], resistance is inevitable. Where theatre admits its own status as such, it cannot make us fear for our lives; any production that stubbornly refuses to accept this is bound to fail.[76]

What is suggested, then, and what audiences instinctively understand, is that once theatre and performance become too real, once the boundaries between roles and realities have completely dissolved, the element of play disappears and with it the opportunity to digest and reflect on the experience. For a clear and coherent message to be successfully communicated and accepted, it must remain, to some extent, a borrowed experience which simulates emotions, actions and events, but never permits a state of reality to exist in which that replicated emotion evolves into an all too personal actuality. This was, as McGavin intimates, part of the issue with the charivari, which he describes as lying 'on the borderline between play and non-play [and] raised questions for spectators or even other participants, as to whether [it] might

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[76] Matt Trueman, 'Immersive Theatre: Take Us to the Edge, but Don't Throw Us In', Guardian Theatre Blog, 7 April 2010, <http://guardian.ac.uk./stage/theatreblog/2010/apr/07/immersive-theatre-terrifying-experience> [accessed 7 May 2011].

safely be regarded as playful or whether [it] needed a more serious response'.[77]

This is also perhaps reflected in the many legislations that ban mummings, or any activity relating to them, such as the civic proclamation in December of 1387, that forbade any citizen of London 'going about as a '"mummer" or playing any game with a mask or other strange guise".[78] Inclusive performances like *The Play of the Sacrament* and modern immersive drama can, of course, be highly affective experiences, as Trueman shows in his appraisal of Sound and Fury's 2010 portrayal of the Kursk submarine disaster, and, as his article highlights, this can be part of their power. Trueman describes how he was 'momentarily convinced that the Young Vic lurched on its axis as the sub dived. I could swear that I felt the air tighten in my lungs as the pressure increased', but the performance did not attempt to convince the audience of the reality of the situation; instead, the experience was replicated 'without actually having to invest in sharing [the submariners'] deadly predicament'.[79]

This raises an important point about the relationship and balance between game and serious matter in *The Play of the Sacrament* and how it is possible that such an overtly theatrical, spectacular performance can produce an affective, serious message about the threat of heresy and the truth of orthodox doctrine. Much of this, I would argue, is down to the way in which the changing modes of the play's drama remain within the theatrical frame established at the very beginning of the play, if not before when the Vexillators advertise its performance in the Banns. Within this frame, as Richard

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[77] McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative*, p. 3.

[78] Lancashire, *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain*, citation 904 (p. 176).

[79] Trueman, 'Immersive Theatre'.

Schechner explains, the audience can 'enjoy deep feelings without feeling compelled to either intervene or to avoid witnessing the actions that arouse those feelings', or to avoid participating in them.[80]   It is this that perhaps allowed the Christian audience of *The Play of The Sacrament* to tolerate the heinous activities of the Jews and eventually to enjoy the performance that was created.  But, as Schechner points out, that frame does not make the activities or the feelings aroused by them any less real, only "differently real" from that which happens in everyday life; indeed, for theatre to be effective it must 'maintain its double or incomplete presence, as a *here-and-now-performance-of-the-there-and-then* events'.[81]

Although there is no explicit evidence in the text to prove that the medieval audience understood that the action remained as play (and perhaps some audience members did misinterpret its intent), it seems unlikely that they approached it as reality and not play.  As Meg Twycross points out, it is difficult not to assume that 'everyone except the very naive' must have known that the performance, including its spectacular miracles, was only 'a bit of stage-conjuring'.[82]   It is almost impossible to ascertain how an audience over five hundred years ago would have known that the play was not an actual event; nevertheless, *The Play of the Sacrament*'s continued use of rhymed verse with its distinctive metre and the way in which the act of performing necessarily alters the body and voice of a performer, would perhaps have kept the play, particularly in its later scenes, noticeably separate from events in the

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[80] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 190.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Twycross, 'Beyond the Picture Theory': 601.

audience's everyday existence.[83] So, although the play moves from one type of performance (in which the performer-spectator binary holds) to another form that more closely resembles the ceremonial performance of ritual in which all are participants and actually contribute to the whole ceremony, the play remains understood as a play, a "playing with", to borrow Schechner's terms, rather than a real "doing of". In this way it walks a delicate line between providing the audience with a tangible experience which produces real effects and emotions, whilst avoiding the slip into the blasphemous mimicry of a miracle.

Therefore, what the audience feel as they engage with the torture of the Host, as they see the image of their Saviour emerge from the smouldering oven, as they then perform the actions demanded by the Bishop and in the procession, those experiences are just as real as if they had felt them as part of the everyday world. Within the theatrical frame, the audience members really did perform those actions and feel those emotions and so, perhaps, were genuinely moved by the story of the conversion of Jonathas the Jew. However, they have done so within the safety of the performance space, the reactions and consequences of their experiences controlled and contained by the players whose lead they follow and whose performances move the boundaries of the space and permit the audience to become bodily involved in the action. Indeed, rather than contradicting itself with the use of spectacular special effects, the allure of the play's ostentatious theatricality makes the next stage of

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[83] See Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 15.

the performance even more powerful, to restore and reinforce a sense of community and belief in the tenets and authority of the Church.

# Chapter Five

# Conclusion: Sound, Body and Space

In her discussion of the thirteenth-century 'Fall of the Rebel Angels' in the *De Brailes Psalter,* Debra Higgs Strickland notes certain '[p]ictorial principles of opposition' constituting the medieval visual code that distinguished good from evil and angel from demon. Central to this code was:

> the contrast between the darkness of the demons and fully-fallen
> angels with the lightness of the angels and God; the
> symmetrical, orderly arrangement of the angels and God in
> heaven above with the wild disorder of the demons and the
> damned below; and the closed circle of heaven with the open
> maw of the hellmouth.[1]

These oppositional visual elements were also a key part of the representation of the forces of good and evil in medieval, and later, drama. All of the case studies examined in this thesis, for example, incorporate such contrasts into their representation of these two primary oppositional forces; even if light and dark are not explicitly used, the concepts of asymmetry and symmetry, open and closed, cacophony and harmony, chaos and order permeate all three texts, not only their spatial and visual elements but, as this study has shown, the

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[1] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, p. 71.

players' physical and vocal performances. In each of the plays discussed in the preceding chapters, good and evil, virtue and vice were not only expressed through what a character said and did, but were inscribed into his bodily performance, into the manner in which he moved and occupied space, his posture and voice: in *Christ before Herod*, for example, instead of emphasising a contrast between dark and light (although perhaps there was also some visual contrast) the playwright created the conflict between noise and silence; the performance space of *The Castle of Perseverance* was not a balanced space of opposition, but one asymmetrically dominated by the presence of evil and sin, the 'wild disorder' of the demonic body filling the *platea* and detracting from the orderly, peaceful East; in *The Play of the Sacrament* the chaos caused by heresy was quelled by the 'closed' bodily attitude requested by the Bishop that not only outwardly declared the audience's devotion, but also probably smothered their excitement and lust for the spectacular stirred by the chaotic action of the previous scenes.

As Richard Schechner observes, 'performances do not have an independent life: they are related to the audience that hears them, the spectators who see them. The force of the performance is in the very specific relationship between performers and those-for-whom-the-performance-exists'.[2] Consequently, the devilishly chaotic and divinely ordered performances in medieval drama need to be seen in relation to the audiences who experienced them and their interaction with the players. By foregrounding the relationship and exchange between actors and audiences, and the corporeal nature of that interaction, this thesis has shown how late medieval drama could have

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[2] Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, pp. 6-7.

communicated with its audience beyond linguistic and visual signs, via a more immediately visceral means. Building on the work of performance theorists and medieval drama scholars, my research has acknowledged that medieval audiences did not only read the visual and verbal elements of a play but also grasped and developed notions, ideas and attitudes to a play because of their corporeal experience of performance. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, such an emphasis on the bodily engagement between player and audience has underscored the importance of the experiential to the making of meaning in medieval drama and, further, the centrality of the audience in that process.

Although my emphasis here on the corporeal elements of medieval theatre has been inspired and guided by modern theories of performance and cognition, the case for applying these theories to medieval drama has been rooted in a close consideration of the art, literature and theory of the medieval period. The correlation between modern and medieval conceptualisations of the body-mind-soul complex to some extent bridges the temporal gap that prevents us from accessing some of the more ephemeral aspects of medieval drama; however, it has also highlighted the need to maintain an awareness of that distance and the cultural differences that necessarily shape the interpretation of sensory experiences. This thesis has not, therefore, been an attempt to universalise the medieval dramatic event, but instead an effort to explore the primary means through which it communicated with its audience in its own time and space.

To that end, Chapter Two focussed specifically on sound in medieval drama and, in particular, the actor's voice. Using *Christ before Herod* as a

case study, this chapter analysed the literary devices of the text as spoken, embodied elements that would have had a significant influence on the audience's experience of and reaction to the performance. Working with the principle that sound is absorbed into the body and has a profound impact on the physiology and psychology of the listener, the volatility and aggression expressed in Herod's verse was seen as a powerful tool in his coercion of the audience. The erratic metre and alliteration and the splintering of lines and stanzas, it was argued, contributed to a disordered performance space, one already imbued with the noise and activity of the city of York, working to produce a simulated environment in which the audience could literally experience Herod's oppression. Moreover, the impact on the audience's bodies could have provoked reactions and verbal responses from them, such as those recorded by Vives, which in turn would have contributed to the increased disorder of the space and chaotic experience. The full force of building such a dramatic encounter would, however, have been felt with the arrival of Christ to the court of King Herod. His silence and stillness amongst such chaos was in sharp contrast to Herod, the bustle of York and the audience's own probable interjections and would have instantly changed both the spatial and experiential dynamics of the performance. The audience, as a consequence, were not only able to observe and recognise the opposition between noise and silence, corrupt and divine, but could palpably experience each force, both negative and positive, that experience itself both clarifying and illustrating the play's meaning.

Chapter Three explored how literary devices similar to those considered in Chapter Two, such as rhythm, alliteration, syllable number and line length,

may also have prescribed specific bodily attitudes, movements and gestures in performance. Working with the premise that scripted dialogue can provide an insight into the staged body, Chapter Three explored the impact of the text on the player's performing body. Concentrating specifically on the Seven Deadly Sins, the Three Enemies of Man and their servants in *The Castle of Perseverance* this chapter demonstrated how the indecorous, flamboyant, devilish body would have dominated the performance space and the audience's experience of the play. Supported by evidence from contemporary images and texts, the uncivilised and open bodies of the Sins were shown not only to consume more of the performance space, but, like sound, to affect the audience at a fundamental level. Through what we now term kinaesthetic empathy, a phenomenon made apparent through the technology and research of cognitive neuroscience, the feverish and frenetic activities of the devils in *The Castle* were perhaps literally felt, reproduced even, within the bodies of the audience members. The energy and vitality of another's moving body, theorists propose, trigger responses in the same section of the brain that is activated when the perceiver himself moves; when we watch live performance, then, we to some degree experience the physical activities of the performers as if they were our own, and this is especially potent where the movement is strongly rhythmic and the performer close to the audience. Both of these conditions were present in *The Castle of Perseverance* and, so, perhaps the audience, like Mankynde, were lured by the appeal of the Sins' engaging rhythms, the energy of which was physically felt and enjoyed. In effect, the play provided an environment where the audience did not simply watch or follow Mankynde on his journey,

but were, through an individual corporeal engagement with the Seven Deadly Sins' kinesis, taken on a personal spiritual journey of their own.

Rather than attending to how the player affected a spectator's experience of performance, Chapter Four concentrated on the audience members themselves as a source of change in dramatic experience. Where the other two chapters examined how an audience's experience of and response to a performer could have produced meaning, this chapter looked to their actions at the moment they enter a performance as participants. *The Play of the Sacrament* is a complex and multifaceted play that appears deliberately to labour for the alteration of the spectator's perspective and conceptual proximity to its themes. The audience, initially placed as spectators to the action, are gradually brought conceptually and physically closer until they come to cohabit the performance space with the actors, performing the roles of witnesses, congregation and, finally, celebrants in a formal procession. Although it could be argued that even as celebrants the audience are not fully performers, in terms of their bodily and psychological conception of the performance, they would probably have felt at the heart of the transformative process, that through their actions and the correct performance of the procession they were significantly contributing to the process of the play. The distinction in terms of experience can perhaps be conceptualised as the difference between being a passenger and being a driver; where the former can have a degree of input into the experience it is the latter who controls the journey, decides on the speed, the road taken and the ultimate destination. That more active role, where they no longer simply receive an experience produced by the actors but are an active part of the reordering of the space would almost certainly have changed the

audience's emotional and psychological connection with the narrative; from watching the engrossing torture of the Host, without becoming directly involved, the uniting of player and audience space gives the latter what would perhaps appear as agency, the opportunity for them to perform and act within that space, to participate fully in the penitential, devotional and ritual activities to which the play turns. However, this transition, I argued, could only occur because of the scripted work of the performers; through a combination of changes in register, the actor-audience interactions and the use of performance space, the relationship between and borders around player and audience roles flexed to allow the individual spectator-participant to feel as if they too could enter the performance without causing it to slip into an altogether different event.

## Implications: Post-Performance and Concepts of Space

The audience's willingness to engage with and respond to the performers in the various ways suggested in this thesis, and the demands made on a spectator's body by the drama, often formed an integral part in conveying the didactic message of a play. Through the inherent link between human physiological and psychological states, the performing body on the medieval stage is likely to have had a profound impact on those who experienced its activity. As Rhonda Blair notes, the emotions of others are frequently 'constituted, experienced and therefore directly understood by means of an embodied simulation, producing a

shared direct experiential understanding'.[3] In other words, the noise of Herod or the frenetic kinesis of Bacbytere, for instance, would probably have affected the bodies and emotions of the audiences and enhanced their understanding of a play's significance through their own direct phenomenological experience.

Existing documents confirm the efficacy of medieval drama and its ability to profoundly affect an audience. The Chester plays, for instance, were maintained 'not only for the Augmentacion & incresse of the holy and catholyk ffaith of our sauyour cryst Iesu', but 'to exhort the myndes of the comen peple to gud deuocion and holsom doctryne'.[4] Similarly, the York Pater Noster Guild's play on 'the usefulness of the Lord's Prayer' had:

> so great an appeal that very many said: Would that this play were established in this city, for the salvation of souls and the solace of the citizens and neighbours. Wherefore, the whole and complete cause of the foundation and association of the brothers of the same fraternity was that that play be managed at future times for the health and reformation of the souls, both of those in the play and those hearing it.[5]

As these records imply, the effects of the encounters explored in this thesis would not necessarily have ended with the performance but were powerful

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[3] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action*, p. 107.

[4] Early Banns (1539-40), British Library MS Harley 2150, ff. 85v-8v*, reproduced in *REED: Chester*, ed. by Lawrence M. Clopper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 33, ll. 13-15.

[5] Pater Noster Guild Return, 1388-9, reproduced and translated from the Latin in *REED: York*, vol. 2, p. 862.

enough to have stayed with a spectator as he or she returned to, and then acted in, the everyday world. What this study has underscored, however, is the potential reasons for the drama's apparent affectivity.

Modern pedagogical theory often encourages associative learning, a method of teaching and study that 'links emotions with feelings, thoughts, and body into a multivalent network'; in other words, an approach to learning based on bodily experience which builds up and connects senses, ideas and emotions to form a system of inter-sensory memories.[6] Once associations are established, a bodily sensation, a thought or gesture can initiate a whole sequence of experiences and help to recall the specific piece of knowledge, memory or psychological attitude connected with that trigger.[7] This assertion was also familiar to theorists during the Middle Ages. Hugh of Saint Victor, for example, observes that:

> such beings as possess sense perceptions not only apprehend the forms of things that affect them while the sensible body [the perceived object] is present, but even after the sense perception has ceased and the sensible objects are removed, they retain images of the sense-perceived forms and build up memory of them.[8]

The 'swet and delectable' melody heard by Margery Kempe one night as she lay in bed beside her husband provides an excellent example of this theory in

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[6] Blair, 'Image and Action', p. 176.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Hugh of Saint Victor, *The Didascalion*, p. 49.

action. For Margery, the single initial experience of hearing that melody was so intense that, thereafter, 'this creatur whan sche herd ony myrth or melodye [wept] ful plentyuows and habundawnt teerys of hy devocyon'.[9] Accordingly, whatever was perceived by the senses during a performance probably persisted in the embodied memory of the spectator and perhaps then continued to influence him or her in the real world. Perhaps, then, the recollection of the bodily experiences of, say, *The Play of the Sacrament*, similarly resurrected the sombre, contemplative or devotional feelings that may have been experienced during the play.

This also highlights that, although the dramatic event itself necessarily remained within the realm of "play" (a simulation of events or spiritual journeys that had occurred or had the potential to occur in the everyday world), the audience's actual experiences during that event, their emotions, physical sensations, attitudes and responses were literally real, actually felt and, therefore, could be carried forward with them as they returned to their everyday existence. I do not want to suggest that medieval audiences necessarily believed that the action they were witnessing was in any way real, only that their experience of and reactions to the play were genuine enough, as were the possible emotions or other psychological states that were fostered by the performance in which they were involved.

This raises further questions about the nature of the medieval dramatic event and the relationship between play and reality. Often in the case studies examined, the spatial dialogue between what is now frequently termed "play world" and "real world" seems to have been in a state of constant flux, the

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[9] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Chapter 3, ll. 241-7 (p. 26).

borders shifting, dissolving and reforming according to the way that space was used and understood. The flexibility of these boundaries has been widely discussed in medieval drama scholarship and Robert Weimann's groundbreaking work into *locus* and *platea* staging fundamentally altered the way in which scholars perceived and analysed medieval performance space. Although the popularity and benefits of using Weimann's formula remains influential, the phenomenological approach adopted here perhaps invites further scrutiny of these terms, what they denote and whether they sufficiently represent the full diversity of ways in which medieval drama (and its audiences) viewed and manipulated performance space.

There has already been some criticism of Weimann's theory, centring specifically on his concept of the *locus* as a space of illusion and representation, a space which is geographically and temporally separate from that of the audience and the non-representational *platea*.[10] Erika T. Lin, for example, argues that 'such an imaginary reconstruction is based on our own visual paradigm and conception of theatre' and, therefore, Weimann actually reinscribes 'the barrier which separates actors and playgoers even as he is arguing for its permeability'.[11] Based on the evidence gleaned from a phenomenological approach to the case studies in this work, I am inclined to agree with Lin that Weimann's definitions of *locus* and *platea* are essentially informed by modern (naturalistic) concerns for the representational, illusionistic side of theatre, which tend to detach the theatrical event from the real world.

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[10] See Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, pp. 73-84.

[11] Erika T. Lin, 'Performance Practice and Theatrical Privilege: Rethinking Weimann's Concepts of *Locus* and *Platea*', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 22:3 (2006), 284-98 (287).

However, Lin's own reformulation of the theory, intended for the study of early modern drama, does not align with earlier medieval performances either. Her alternative definitions of *locus* and *platea*, where an actor constructs an imaginary space by describing it through words, continues to presume that there was, indeed, a separate time and world to which the audience needed to be transported or connected, as is often the case in early modern theatre. But what the emphasis on the phenomenological experience of medieval drama has highlighted is the immediacy of that so-called "play world". In many medieval plays, as highlighted in the previous chapters, the sense of a distinct geo-temporal place, separate both spatially and conceptually from the *platea* and the audience's space was unlikely to have been part of the actual experience of the event. Therefore, although the terms *locus* and *platea*, and the way they interact with one another, remain useful as a means of analysing medieval methods of structuring performance space, the outcomes of this thesis perhaps stress the need to re-evaluate their definition and reach: how far do their current definitions actually represent the relationship between play and reality, player and spectator in medieval drama? Can they adequately represent the full spectrum of that dialogue? Is it appropriate to conceptualise medieval performance space as a generic "play world" or is a more nuanced, less rigid theory needed? Do we need to differentiate *locus* and *platea* as a method of staging from the relationship between play and reality?

These questions cannot be given sufficient attention in the space that remains here, except to give some brief suggestions and possibilities for further discussion. What I propose, and what I think the results of this study point towards, is a performance space which does not distinguish between the world

of the play and the world of the audience, but instead constructs them as one and the same spatio-temporal location. The case studies examined in this thesis frequently seem not only to merge the play world with the audience's reality, but actually to embed one within the other, so that the time and location of the play was, or became, identical to that of the audience's.

This is particularly prominent in *Christ before Herod* and *The Castle of Perseverance*, where (although working very differently) both plays would be experienced as immediate and present; in the first, the proximity with the actors (and the audience's possible acquaintance with them), the intimacy of the space and the constant presence of the city itself (its sounds and smells as well as its sights) all would have rooted the York Play within the audience's spatio-temporal reality, preventing the pageant wagon *locus* from assuming a separate spatial identity. *The Castle* offers an alternative construction of space, but similarly does not exhibit the usual symptomatic signs of a distinct fictional realm of which the audience are not a part. Where *Christ before Herod* appeared implanted in the city of York and the audience's everyday reality, *The Castle*, through the placement of structures around a circular playing area, carved out a space from the everyday and yet there is no sense, once the audience were within that space, of a tension between 'the illusion of a representational action and the theatrical convention of nonrepresentational dramaturgy'.[12] That is not to say, that there was no distinction between the *locus* and *platea* whatsoever only that this was not a difference of geographical space and time. *The Play of the Sacrament* uses space and locality, again, very differently from the other two plays; although the church would have been a

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[12] Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, p. 76.

constant presence in the background of the performance, there is a sense at the beginning of the play of a separate time and location being created. However, the distance established at the start is gradually reduced until the two locations merge and are identified finally as one. It is important, then, to point out that, as with the beginning of the Croxton play, not all medieval plays desired the kind of spatio-temporal unity with their audiences that I have been describing in the plays above; plays like *Mary Magdalene*, for example, can perhaps be said to create a greater sense of a distinct fictional location, while other plays vary the extent to which they create and then deconstruct fictional spaces.

In spaces where the distinction between performer and audience is diminished (such as those of the case studies described above), the staged activity becomes far more immediate in its relationship to the body than those where physical or conceptual barriers separate actor from spectator (proscenium arch theatres, for example). As a result, within such spaces we experience time as equally immediate because, as Lefebvre points out, 'space implies time and vice versa'.[13] To a medieval audience, then, the spatial immediacy of an actor and/or his stage perhaps implicitly suggested that he was also temporally present, that there was no separate play world reality as conceived in later theatrical tradition. *Fulgens and Lucres* (a play that trades on the interplay between the fictional location of Rome and the great hall in which the play was performed) is a prime example of how the corporeal co-presence of an actor might also imply a shared spatio-temporal location with his audience. Although the characters in *Fulgens and Lucres* talk of a separate reality (Rome) in which they act and converse with one another beyond the

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[13] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 118.

view of the audience, they also frequently refer to objects and people within the great hall itself; indeed, two of the characters, the infamous A and B, join the action from an initial position as 'audience' members. Moreover, in addition to these factors the characters' presence in the midst of the great hall where they shared both light and space with their audience (whom they also directly address), would locate them firmly in the immediate spatial reality of the performance. In effect, the great hall is experienced as the play world and the spatio-temporal location of the play is the same as that of the audience for the moment of performance, all of which is achieved without a sense of disruption to a dramatic illusion, the breaking of a theatrical frame or the need for an actor to traverse or straddle the border between play and audience locations.[14]

There was, however, evidently still a conceptual boundary between player and audience that prevented the spectators in *Fulgens and Lucres* from offering to join the play as servants to Cornelius, one that also needed to be tempered through the actors' endeavours in *The Play of the Sacrament* so that the audience could finally become participants in the procession. But, perhaps this frontier, a division necessary for theatre to occur in the first instance, was, in medieval drama, not based on the opposition between reality and fiction (although in some cases this played a part), but was instead arranged around the tacit understanding of the relationship between player and audience. When B suggests that the two actor-servants enrol in the performance of *Fulgens and*

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[14] Hans-Jürgen Diller proposes 'straddling', a dramatic device in which 'speakers appear to belong now to the dramatic, now to the ordinary world', as one of three basic techniques for maintaining actor-audience relationships in early drama. See his 'Theatrical Pragmatics: the Actor-Audience Relationship from the Mystery Cycles to the Tudor Comedies', in *Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, Second Series, ed. by Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1991), pp. 321-30 (p. 323).

*Lucres*, A exclaims: 'Pece, let be! / Be God, thou wyll distroy all the play!' and his concern is clearly that B will break some unspoken theatrical rule that, if breached, would fundamentally alter the performance.[15] To create a separate play world within the space of the great hall would be challenging and somewhat counterintuitive because, as Richard Southern points out, 'it would be very difficult for the players on the floor to ignore [the] distraction' of the audience as they ate, drank and perhaps chatted through the performance.[16] A more subtle threat to the performative roles of actor and audience, however, would obviously remain regardless of the conditions of performance. Moreover, many of the jokes in this play and in others are based on such a game, as Meg Twycross terms it, and rely, as it does in *The Play of the Sacrament*, on the audience knowing their position and what is expected of them.[17] This way of structuring theatrical borders and boundaries is far more flexible than that of the binary relationship between fiction and reality implied by Weimann's definition of *locus* and *platea*; as we have seen in the preceding chapters, this more malleable border between actor and audience, play and reality allows the audience to contribute to performances and actors to directly address the spectators without breaking the rules of performance, as well as permitting the players to alter and shift the scope of that border.

The distinctions that I am suggesting here are not too dissimilar from Weimann's original proposal and I do not want to suggest a complete

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[15] Henry Medwall, *Fulgens and Lucres*, in *The Plays of Henry Medwall: A Critical Edition*, ed. by M.E. Moeslein (New York: Garland, 1981), ll. 366-7.

[16] Richard Southern, 'The Technique of Play Presentation', in *The Revels History of Drama in English, vol. II, 1500-1576*, ed. by Norman Sanders, Richard Southern, T. W. Craik and Luis Potter (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 69-99 (p. 75).

[17] Meg Twycross, 'The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays', p. 72.

reassessment of how we understand and analyse medieval performance space. Instead, the evidence presented here highlights the need to rethink how *locus* and *platea* are conceived and defined, because the terms and the fixed and open spaces that they denote respectively are not in themselves problematic; but our understanding of their function in relation to the way time and space was perceived during performance needs to be reconsidered.

## Impact: Medieval Drama and Beyond

Contrary to Weimann's evaluative judgments regarding the tension between an 'illusion of representational action and the theatrical convention of nonrepresentational dramaturgy', which he labels as 'very clumsy and naive', the case studies and the analyses of them undertaken in this thesis exemplify the potential sophistication of medieval playwrights.[18] Although perhaps not as poetically artful or psychologically deep as other Western theatrical traditions, many of the plays produced in this period could be both dramatically complex and, as I have suggested, physically and emotionally affective. The analyses offered in the course of this study have indicated the playwrights' acute awareness of the potential of the dramatic medium, its ability to profoundly move an audience and continue to influence their behaviour and thoughts long after the end of the performance. This is perhaps not a complete surprise given that many of the playwrights were probably members of the clergy and would have understood the power of performance, words and action

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[18] Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, pp. 80-1.

in a devotional context. Certainly, these plays would seem naive and unwieldy if their only aim was to entertain an audience with a representational illusion of an event or character: but this was not their main aim. Of course, entertainment was not out of the question and it often formed a major role in the performance; but the primary purpose of most medieval plays was didactic. The aim was to change the audience by enhancing their knowledge of morality and religion, delivering new teachings or by compounding or providing a new perspective on spiritual lessons already learned. And in this, as the preceding chapters have shown, medieval playwrights excelled.

In the process of exploring the phenomenological experience of medieval drama, the professionalism required of many medieval performers has also been highlighted. The skills necessary to successfully pronounce Herod's or World's tongue-twisting alliteration, to perform the Sins' energetic and frenetic kinesis and project the voice and body around the often expansive performance spaces, shows that, far from the bumbling Mechanicals of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, medieval players, although often amateur, were also frequently required to produce virtuoso performances. Non-professional does not always equate to amateurish skill; indeed, as Schechner points out, 'a connection to a community may deepen all aspects of [the player's] art'.[19]

All of these outcomes, including the alternative view of performance space proposed above and the acknowledgement of the experiential impact of medieval drama more generally, could potentially influence modern productions of medieval plays. More and more frequently, scholars of early drama are turning to live performance in an effort to explore the impact of

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[19] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, p. 185.

space and live action on extant texts. In addition to performances during academic conferences (extracts from both *Fulgens and Lucres* and *Magnyfycence* have been performed at the *METh* annual conference, for example), pre-Shakespearean drama is also being presented to a more general, public audience.[20] In 2010, for instance, the York and Chester plays were taken into the streets of York and Toronto respectively, *Mankind* was performed at the University of Hull and John Heywood's *The Play of the Weather* was played to both public and scholarly audiences in the great hall at Hampton Court Palace.[21] Often, however, the affective potential of these plays eludes modern audiences because actors and directors, more familiar with the texts of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, approach the earlier plays from a similar perspective and, therefore, find it difficult to translate and embody medieval and Tudor plays in performance. Even though both actors and directors broadly understand the often didactic purpose of early English drama, many appear to struggle to balance the moralistic with the entertaining, seeming to work against rather than with the structure and rhythms present in the texts. Allowing them to speak for themselves as inherently performative, as play texts already imbued with the devices necessary to inform an actor's bodily and vocal performance will perhaps shift the focus from what the actor is verbally communicating to the kind of experience he is creating for an

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[20] *Fulgens and Lucrece*, by Henry Medwall, Thynke Byggly, University of Bristol, 29 March 2008. *Magnyfycence*, by John Skelton, Thynke Byggly, University of Sheffield, 31March 2007.

[21] *The Chester Cycle*, Victoria College, Toronto, 22-24 May 2010; The York Play, brought Forth by the Guilds of York, June 2010; *Mankind*, Donald Roy Theatre, Gulbenkian Centre, Hull Campus,10-13 February 2010; *The Play of the Weather*, by John Heywood, Historic Royal Palaces, Oxford Brookes and Edinburgh University, at Hampton Court Palace, 4 August 2009 and 6 March 2010.

audience. This shift may be a subtle one, but it could help the modern actor and director to further understand how meaning is to be communicated, how effective the techniques can be and to appreciate the dramatic subtlety of medieval plays.

There are also potential implications for research into medieval literature more broadly. Chapter Two's reading of the erratic alliterative, metrical and structural patterns of *Christ before Herod*, for example, could contribute to studies in oral history and the nature of reading in the Middle Ages. If most poems of the period were experienced by many as aural texts, with one person reading or reciting written verse to a gathered audience, then perhaps their literary devices, like the alliteration, rhyme and metre of *Christ before Herod*, similarly had a physical effect on the listeners. The alliteration in texts like Laȝamon's *Brut*, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, for example, could, when embodied in speech, have affected the listeners in body and mind, as well as more overtly marking changes in scene, character or tone. However, an in-depth look at how medieval poetry experientially engaged with a listener would require the combination of this phenomenological perspective with a more thoroughly linguistic approach to the dialects of both texts and listeners. Each Middle English dialect not only produced or emphasised different sounds from its neighbours, but also perhaps produced alternative patterns and rhythms because of its phonetic and grammatical variations. So, depending on the dialect of the speaker, the patterns and sounds of, say, *Sir Gawain*, would perhaps have had distinct sounds for different groups of listeners, and, therefore, would have produced alternative effects and associations for them.

## Potential Limitations

The work done in this thesis, I hope, goes some way towards broadening our understanding of the actor-audience relationship in medieval drama, as well offering some alternative perspectives on the medieval dramatic event as a whole. However, the scope of the research in its current form has certain limitations and, in most respects presents only a sample of the project's potential. What is proposed in the pages of this thesis needs further and more extensive inquiry to clarify and confirm the suspicions raised by its outcomes; the three case studies used, for example, need to be compared with the evidence from other contemporary plays and a more thorough assessment of player-audience exchange undertaken. Furthermore, an audience's understanding of the performance space, their relationship with the actors and the extent of their role in the performance would have been influenced considerably by the wider context of the performance, which would need to be taken into account more fully were this study to be extended. As Susan Bennett argues, 'theatre audiences bring to any performance a horizon of cultural and ideological expectations', constituted of factors like geographical and seasonal context, familiarity with the dramatic medium, the actors and the space, how far they had to travel, whether the performance was part of a wider festival or stood alone, the spectator's own position in society and where they were positioned in relation to the players as a consequence, the status and purpose of the space itself, and so on.[22] While some of these factors have been highlighted in the course of this thesis, in particular the predominant features of

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[22] Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, p. 98.

performance space, more specific details and analysis would perhaps uncover

further influences to reveal the idiosyncrasies of a particular performance

event.

However, as with any study in early theatre, there are inevitable and

understandable limitations because of the relative paucity of surviving

information. Nevertheless, with the ever increasing volumes of *REED* some

extant playtexts may yet be examined within the broader context of the outer

frame of performance, and the inclusion of a more detailed analysis of the sites

of performance could enhance the research. As Lefebvre writes, many 'social

spaces are given rhythm by the gestures which are produced within them, and

which produce them' and, therefore, any event or experience occurring within

the precincts of, say, a market place or a church will be informed by the

activities for which the space was designed.[23] As a result, an audience of a

play within that space will have certain corporeal expectations, physical and

mental behaviours appropriate to the usual activities that occur within it.

Discussing the practical functions attached to the designs of Armenian

churches, for example, Christina Maranci describes how they shaped the rituals

that occurred within and governed the bodily experience of the participants:

'Animated by sound, images, movement, and fragrance, punctuated by light

and shadow, the early medieval churches of Armenia were venues for the

performance of memory [and] identity', their exteriors appear to 'bear traces of

ceremonial movement and [...] may have functioned as cues for rites of

consecration and commemoration' and, therefore, 'seem particularly to invite

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[23] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 216-17.

human movement'.[24] As Maranci's article suggests, spaces come with their own gestural codes as well as ideological connotations and any full study of the experiential side of medieval performance space would need to take into account these gestural codes and their influence, interaction or conflict with the bodily experiences produced by performance.

Similarly, the work done here on the performing body could be augmented by combining it with existing and future studies on the impact of masks and costume on the player's performance and audience reception. Chapter Three, in particular, has scope for further research in this area and *The Castle of Perseverance* is especially valuable, given the profusion of masked characters and the variety of costumes that were undoubtedly used to portray the personifications. In addition to existing enquiries into masks and costume in medieval performance, such as Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter's excellent book *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England*, there are perhaps also useful avenues in the study of aesthetics and visual theory.[25]

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[24]Christina Maranci, 'Performance and Church Exterior in Medieval Armenia', in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 17-32 (pp. 17, 18, 29).

[25] Meg Twycross and Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot: Ashgate: 2002).

**Concluding Remarks**

In this thesis I have argued for the powerful affectivity of late medieval English drama, cultivated through the potent energy of corporeal presence. The fundamental relationship between actor and audience viewed from a phenomenological standpoint confirms how central it was to the production and conveyance of meaning and the moral message of these plays. It has also shown that the relationship was based on bodily exchange, interaction and experience and that the latter in particular could significantly alter an audience's understanding of a play's core message. Moreover, I hope to have shown the potential of combining medieval drama scholarship with current work in the expanding field of theatre and performance studies, especially the new intersections being forged between performance studies, phenomenology and cognitive neuroscience, all of which offer new perspectives on an audience's interaction with players.

Although there is still work needed to assess more completely the arguments put forward in this thesis, the conclusions made here, I believe, invite further consideration of corporeal experience in medieval drama and its affectivity, as well as associated matters, such as: the reassessment of how we think about and approach medieval performance in general; the provision of a basic methodology for the study of audiences and bodies on the medieval stage; the appraisal of how far the adoption of the audience's perspective can illuminate a play's connection with the community or group for whom it caters; the consideration of the extent to which drama, religion, literature and art were interconnected via an individual's experience of each; the investigation into

how a person's immediate, bodily experience of a play interacted with what it literally communicated through symbolism and speech, and how these different ways of receiving a play related to, influenced, complemented or contrasted with one another. All of these questions are implied in the proposals made by this thesis and all have the potential to continue and expand the study of medieval drama as a live, embodied medium, one that was dramatically, experientially and spiritually effective. The drama of the medieval period was, as the records testify, eminently powerful and potentially transformative, using tools and techniques that modern practitioners are, once again, looking to to involve, move and deeply affect audiences and to generate experiences that last beyond the end of a performance, ones that will endure in the corporeal and emotional memories of the audience as they return to the everyday. The legacy of medieval drama, then, goes beyond poetry and realism, and lies instead in the potency and efficacy of a cleverly engineered bodily experience.

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